

evangelicalism and political conservatism, Stevenson reflects in the “Coda” on connections that can be drawn between the dramaturgy of the evangelical performances analyzed and the performative promotion of the Tea Party movement as a means of creating resonance for Americans seeking to reexperience a particular historical narrative.

Each text merits praise for its respective author’s extensive research and personal fieldwork. In addition to providing comprehensive notes, bibliographies, and indexes, both books are complemented by the inclusion of black and white photographs depicting elements of evangelical performances and spaces. The books stand in dialogue to present scholars and students of performance theory and religious studies a proactively objective view of evangelical practice, performance, and spectacle in an increasingly secular society. The authors are successful in their conscious efforts to maintain scholarly objectivity while retaining what Fletcher terms a “critically generous” (10) perspective toward the audiences and performances they observed personally.

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**Audience Participation in Theatre: Aesthetics of the Invitation.** By Gareth White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; pp. vii + 224; \$95 cloth, \$29 paper, \$29 e-book.

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Reviewed by Becky K. Becker, *Columbus State University*

Gareth White’s *Audience Participation in Theatre* joins an ongoing conversation exploring theories of audience in contemporary theatre. As such, it is a thoughtful addition alongside such works as Susan Bennett’s *Theatre Audiences* (1997) and Bruce McConachie’s *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (2008), among others. White’s contribution to the dialogue is painstakingly focused, yet “epistemologically promiscuous” (116) in its effort to identify and describe the aesthetics of audience participation. Although audience participation may appear to be an inevitable quality within live performance, White defines it more narrowly as “the participation of an audience, or an audience member, in the action of a performance” (4). White’s pointed focus on action is significant. As theatre practitioners continue to explore the boundaries and boundlessness of live performance in contrast to canned performance forms, White’s project is of significant value.

Employing support ranging from Erving Goffman’s anthropological work to Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology, White carefully outlines the processes utilized by the “procedural author” (31) to invite audience members successfully into the action, as well as the risks associated with spontaneous, albeit prestructured, performances. Even as White underscores the need for a thoughtful approach to shaping audience participation, he notes its unpredictability within “horizons of participation” (55). He argues that these horizons “Are not set by the procedural author, but arrived at through the interaction of all the contributing elements of

the process as a perception of the audience participant. Just as physical horizons change as we move through a landscape, the horizon of participation changes as we interact and perform, moving with us and inviting us to advance further” (59). According to White’s aesthetics, audience members also shape performance conditions through their own subjectivity and ability to make choices. The result is a capricious encounter affecting both spectators and performers.

Particularly useful within White’s meditation on the aesthetics of audience participation is his attention to human embodiment. Part of White’s project in acknowledging the role of embodiment in a participant’s thought processes and decision making is to reintegrate the body as central to audience engagement without erasing the importance of the mind. White successfully locates the mind in the body through his discussion of intersubjectivity and bodily responses that tend to occur within audience groups. Punctuating these theoretical assertions are White’s detailed descriptions of uniquely immersive performances, including *Villa Villa* by Brazilian company De La Guarda, and in a later chapter, *Sleep No More* by the Scottish company Punchdrunk—which he erroneously entitles “*Speak No More*” (178), presumably a typographical error.

Over the course of the book, White’s attention to the details of constructing an invitation to the audience is both overwhelming and at times exhilarating in its specificity. Although the reader sometimes becomes entangled in the details of theoretical argument, as each element of theory is applied to contemporary performance practice, White’s layered narrative aligns, providing practical insight. For example, following his complex theoretical discussions of rational and irrational action in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively, White’s description of agency in Chapter 4 feels simultaneously potent and effortless. It is the intricacy of the discussion preceding White’s emphasis on agency that gives it such useful resonance, particularly in his assertion that through participatory performance “Audience members are given a prominent role in the dramaturgy” (191).

In the end, White’s overarching objective is to take the audience seriously, recognizing performances that privilege audience participation as especially worthy of artistic merit. Despite the rising popularity of action-oriented audience participation in theatre, I would argue that the continued struggle to recognize its artistic merit is symptomatic of the theatre’s ever-present love–hate relationship with the audience, and simultaneous desire and repugnance to please them. Although White’s project is not about pleasing, necessarily, it is concerned with understanding the audience’s experience as central to aesthetic creation. In identifying and theorizing a potential aesthetics of audience participation, White effectively demonstrates the artistic nuance and commitment not only of the procedural author, but also of audience members who invest their subjectivity in a participatory work.

Among White’s most notable contributions to an ongoing discussion of audience participation is his acknowledgment of audience members as “material” (196) within the performance process. This materiality is emblematic of the need for care and consideration in formulating participatory experiences to share with an audience. Participation risks our materiality, both as spectators and practitioners, particularly since it sacrifices control, a longstanding aspect of Western

theatre. Despite the inherent risk, performing the self, as White points out, is a constant in our daily lives. Audience participation allows individuals another space for performing the self and for risk taking in a determinedly safe environment. In his closing chapter, White asserts that perhaps more than simply fulfilling a daily ritual or routine, audience participation fulfills a greater biological need for our species to engage in art making. He introduces this idea with little exploration of its implications, yet it lingers like the resulting shadow of White's thorough analysis. Delineating an audience-focused aesthetic serves to deepen empathy that practitioners and scholars have for audiences of all theatre productions—not just those that are particularly participation-oriented. White's is a worthwhile project indeed.

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**Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance.**

By Josephine Machon. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; pp. xix + 344. \$105 cloth, \$32 paper, \$30 e-book.

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Reviewed by Deirdre O'Leary, *Manhattan College*

Josephine Machon concedes, in the preface to *Immersive Theatres*, that she has set herself a formidable challenge in attempting to offer a nuanced, complex meditation on what defines immersive theatre practice, while acknowledging that immersive theatre is impossible to define as a performative genre “with fixed and determinate codes and conventions, because *it is not one*” (xvi; italics hers). Admitting that her study “embraces the fuzziness around the edges in engaging in the debate about what immersive theatre is” (xvii), Machon offers a clearly articulated, wide-ranging survey of the history, theories, and practices of immersive theatre in Great Britain from the 1980s to the present. Although immersive theatre cannot and arguably should not be reduced to a series of set definitions and shared performance constraints, Machon's interdisciplinary approach—drawing upon game theory, anthropology, architecture, performance studies, philosophy, visual art, and her own work on (syn)aesthetics—proposes a critical discourse by which we might better understand and study this vibrant, contemporary theatre practice.

*Immersive Theatres* is organized into two parts. The first charts the historical development and theoretical foundations of immersive theatre, identifying potential (and varied) origins of current practice, and theorizing the codes and conventions applicable and consistent across a broad range of productions and performances. The theories introduced and explained in Part I are illustrated through discussions of performance and production in Part II, which is a valuable collection of original interviews with leading directors, designers, and performers whose work consistently engages audience members in immersive practice: Michael Morris (Artangel), Felix Barrett (Punchdrunk), Bruce Gladwin (Back to Back Theatre), Christer Lundahl and Martina Seidl (Lundahl & Seidl), Silvia