

New Media - A Discourse of Expression, A Mirror of Reality

Book Review: Cristina Rusiecki, *Un click și...1000 de realități - New Media în Teatrul Românesc / 1 click and... 1000 realities - New Media in Romanian Theatre* (București: Asociația ENTHEOS, 2020)



There are moments and messages which cannot be transmitted only through conventional scenography, where New Media can have an important role in illustrating the internal struggles, in being a mirror of introspection or in showing points of view which cannot be seen only with naked eyes on stage. In times when discussing theatre shows involving technology and new media in Romania has been needed for a while, Cristina Rusiecki publishes *1 click and... 1000 realities - New Media in Romanian Theatre*, a remarkable initiative on explaining the phenomenon and its evolution. Having a strong background in journalism and theatre criticism, Cristina Rusiecki manages to lead us to the path of technology's evolution and awareness of its presence in Romanian theatre. Together with actors, directors, scenographers, she deciphers fluidly for the reader the significance and the role of new media in each performance described in the book.

The opening pages tackle the subject of theatre being the history or journal of a sensitivity that must embody the reality for the spectator. Taking in consideration that the present consists of constantly evolving visual stimuli and media, the author introduces the idea that in order to address the contemporary spectator, New Media could be the means for expressing our current reality.

Divided in seven chapters, each focused on different methods and concepts of using new media from the first live performances up to the online ones in days of pandemic, the selection of the theatre performances offers continuous and pleasant surprises: the critical discourse tries to awake the reader the same feeling one should get while watching each of these performances live. Therefore, this gives a better understanding of why and when new media has been necessary to fulfill the artistic act. On a personal note, while reading this book I went into a journey of feelings that has taken me back and forth from years of adolescence, when I first encountered some of these performances that had a strong impact on me, to the present days, when I have a better understanding of what is happening on the scene.

Even if, while reading, one can feel a subjective point of view from time to time, the passion of storytelling and the personal participation that comes from empathizing with the movement and the concept of the shows represent the key to engaging with every concept, every story told, and makes the reader want to discover more.

Cristina Rusiecki brings into discussion the imaginary worlds of different artists, sometimes returning to them in different contexts. The pages become alive when describing the universes of artists such as Andu Dumitrescu, honest and transparent; Bobi Pricop, always sensitive and immersive; Adrian Damian, calculated still surprising; Ioana Păun and her social dimensioned works, or Carmen Lidia Vidu, whose theatrical interventions were conceived starting from new media, and whose work would belong to the concept of *mediaturgy*, if that would even exist in Romania. To those mentioned, the author is adding pioneers like Theo Marton and Andi Gherghe; and more surprises come along as Rusiecki is researching various perspectives on working with new media in theatre.

Even if sometimes they may seem tough, the artists' explanations truly encompass sincerity and transparency in regards to what new media means in a theatre performance. For actors, confronting it represents a challenge and surely not always comfortable – and that seems perfectly understandable; yet, I bet the process is fascinating: one can see how each one reacts when facing this situation, and how they let go or not.

The shows presented don't use new media just to simply embellish the stage setting, or to switch the audience's attention to something pretty but superficial. They have earned their place within these pages as their creators use new media with a definite purpose, meant to enrich the theatrical experience, to support the actor's performing skills and to push the spectacle's formula up to the point where it becomes necessary on stage.

The author's experience in journalism is obvious as well as her theatrical knowledge. The elegant way Rusiecki introduces artistic ideas and the cleverness she uses when describing the atmosphere and feelings created during the performances almost makes you regret not having the chance to participate directly.

The book encompasses shows that are site specific like *Sado-Maso Blues Bar*¹, where the scenography was created by Andu Dumitrescu, or will take the form of an installation just as *Și liniștea are puls*² does with a surprising medium signed by Romulus Boicu. Among the performances described, we can find ones that will use only light in relation with the space of the stage, but still reveal so many layers of understanding, as Adrian Damian designed in *Iarna*³, while others might simply make the distance between audience and stage disappear as exemplified in *Pisica Verde*⁴, where the scenography belongs to Irina Moscu. In every case, multimedia becomes organic in relation with the content. In addition to this, a strong point of this research is the frankness of the discussions over technology and new media, the meaning of it, the risk of failing and losing the audience when not done properly, or when used abusively.

Noticeably, there is a common wish of using new media as means of expression with the purpose of immersing the spectator in the theatrical moment, switching his state from passive to active. These works are clearly meticulously calculated. The importance of discipline is emphasized, along with the impossibility for an actor to improvise

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1. Gianina Cărbunariu director, *Sado-Maso Blues Bar* by Maria Manolescu, Teatrul Foarte Mic, Bucharest, premiered in 2007.
 2. Horia Suru director, *Și liniștea are puls* by Brad Birch, Teatrul Andrei Mureșanu, Sfântu Gheorghe, premiered on March 6, 2019.
 3. Mihai Măniuțiu director, *Iarna* by Jon Fosse, Teatrul Nottara, Bucharest, premiered on October 13, 2016.
 4. Bobi Pricop director, *Pisica Verde* by Elise Wilk, Teatrul pentru Copii și Tineret Luceafărul, Iași, premiered on October 3, 2015.

anymore without repercussions. Virtual interaction in today's reality modifies the relationships between humans, and it interferes with audience communication as well. Artists will constantly overcome their work just as technology is evolving, in order to remain valid, up to date and significant for the audience.

Rusiecki is persistent in the idea that New Media in theatre must be seen as a different version than what we are used to; for reaching the audience and provoking it, we must not forget that theatre has always managed to keep up by embedding contemporary technical elements.

Thanks to the huge research, the wonderful illustration, the impressive photo archive and the engaging writing *1 click and... 1000 realities - New Media in Romanian Theatre* is an explosion of color, technology and meaning, a safe space where New Media is perfectly understood and described as means of expression.

ANA-BIANCA TUDORICĂ

PhD Candidate, Faculty of Theatre and Film,
Babeş-Bolyai University
ana.tudorica@ubbcluj.ro

