
Quoting the radio journalist Rolf Hemke’s dictum that ‘The future of theatre will be Canadian’ (p.11), Julia Pfahl’s book puts forward a highly interesting and timely proposition with regard to a model of theatre making in line with the spirit of the times. The book does that by discussing a particular strand of contemporary performance practice in Quebec characterized by a range of diverse and innovative approaches towards mise-en-scene, stunning aesthetics and a quintessential medial hybridity accomplished within the framing medium of theatre. To attain her goal, Pfahl starts by developing a well articulated theoretical frameset rooted in theatre and media studies, with a swiftly integrated cultural studies perspective, which provides a critical model that will be, in the second part of the book, applied to that strand of the francophone theatre scene of Quebec, known as the theatre of research ('Québécois théâtre de recherche'), i.e. theatrical works by Robert Lepage, Giles Maheu, Marie Brassard and Denis Marleau. The main theoretical hypothesis of the book – as substantiated throughout chapters 1 to 4 (pp.11 to 126) is that cultural hybridity provokes medial hybridity, which leads to the development of an explicitly intermedial theatre praxis. The constant tensions within the Quebecois culture – situated for centuries under the colonizing influence of American, British and French cultures – lead, after the state’s emancipation, to the development of a fertile creative socio-cultural space characterized by cultural instability, hybridity, and a constant need for external and internal validation, which became the ideal ground for fruitful intermedial experiments and the aesthetic development of new spectacular forms and theatrical models. To demonstrate the application of this theoretical proposition, Julia Pfahl undergoes a series of effective case studies, elaborated with scientific precision and accuracy.

The most extensive attention is dedicated to the solo work of well known Quebecois theatre-maker Robert Lepage, known to have been the one to bring the recurring question of the Quebecois identity, oscillating constantly between diverse cultural influences, between specificity and otherness, nationalism and globalising tendencies to the forefront of international attention (via his widely acclaimed theatre productions). The question of the unstable Quebecois identity is transferred on stage – as it is discussed in details in the chapter “Le medium sera le message” (pp. 127–215) – via a rich and innovative visual vocabulary that surpasses linguistic barriers and favours intercultural reception and is connected to the integration of various media (ranging from film, to video, internet, graphic design, use of subtitles, projections, body language, etc.) within the frame of theatre. Specific to Lepage’s intermedial approach towards theatre making is a constant play with subverting theatrical as well as cultural conventions and stereotypes and an unsettling of spectatorial habitudes and expectations. The chapter discusses in-depth only the solo original work of the Quebecois theatre maker, letting aside other major (ensemble) productions that deal more explicitly and/or extensively with notions of interculturality (i.e. The Trilogy of the Dragons, 7 Streams of the River Ota) and does so in search of the particular, yet constantly evolving model of theatre making that connects intercultural issues and the hybrid Quebecois identity to the most innovative spectacular solutions, of intermedial nature. The work analyzed spans over a period of three decades. Vinci (1986), Les Aiguiilles et L’Opium (1991), Elsinore (1997), La Face cachée de la lune (2000) and Le projet Andersen (2005) are each discussed in detail in search for the above described model of theatre making, with its specifics and developing elements from one solo to the other.

The second case study – the work of director, scenographer, author, actor and choreographer...
Gilles Maheu and his company *Carbonne 14* focuses on what formally constitutes the signature mark of Maheu’s theatre praxis: the explorative/experimental nature of bodywork mixed with technical/visual media images, which are situated in contrast with the physical presence of the performer. The Chapter “Der Körper als Medium” (pp. 217–262) discusses the ways in which the fusionist tendencies and the aesthetic developments of this particular type of theatre – that mixes not only text and live actors, but also multimedia and interdisciplinary ‘performers’ and is conceptually sourced in post-dramatic text, dance, acrobatics, pantomime, and mediated image in all forms – results in a striking polyphonic physical expression on stage, intrinsically connected to the explored notions of cultural hybridity. The works discussed in-depth – *Rivage à l’abandon* (1990) and *Peau, chair et os* (1991) – are part of a trilogy based on Heiner Müller texts, that proposes a mythical voyage and confrontation with cultures, via an intermedial spectacle that results in a hyper-physical and highly visual style of theatre, highly engaging for a contemporary audience.

Marie Brassard’s recent theatre work constitutes the third case study for Julia Pfahl’s book. Brassard, a former long-term collaborator of Robert Lepage, is a performer, playwright and more recently a theatre director which gained international attention with a series of amazing solos in which she promotes an innovative visual theatre, using mime, dance, music, lighting and most importantly the mediated synthetic reproduction, in real-time, of voice in live performance, as ways of dislocating linear narrative and creating a surprising alienation effect that enhances the audience’s perception. The chapter “Die Stimme als ‘Extension of Men’” (pp. 263–311) looks at the three solos – *Jimmy, créature du rêve* (2001), *Darkness* (2003) and *Peepshow* (2005) – that turned Brassard into an internationally acclaimed theatre maker, and focuses on the innovative potential that the synthetic transformations/manipulations of the voice in real-time, during performance, have upon the formal development of another type of intermedial theatre practice. Needles to say that the subjects of each solo are connected, through the topics chosen as well as through a particular use of conventions and stereotypes, to the typically Quebecois ongoing issues of cultural hybridity and unstable identity as well as to the ways in which the intermedial approach towards performance making, turns the performance space into a sound-space with highly visual qualities.

The last case study proposed by the book looks at the theatre practice of Denis Marleau and his company *Theatre Ubu*. Secondly most recognized world-wide after Robert Lepage, Marleau puts forward an intermedial conception of theatre making somewhat similar to Lepage’s, but with the formal difference that here the utilisation of video technology becomes a substantial part of the live performance, and with the conceptual difference that the dramatic and/or literary text is the initial source of inspiration, leading to a highly conceptual as well as diversely spectacular theatrical reflection. The Chapter “Penser le théâtre plutôt que d’y jouer” (pp. 313–358) analyzes *Les trois derniers jours de Fernando Pessoa* (1997) an adaptation of Antonio Tabucchi’s novel with the same name (1994) and *Les Aveugles: une fantasмагorie technologique* (2002) a contemporary staging of Maurice Maeterlink’s pre-surrealist theatre play (1890). Marleau’s search for the ‘total theatre’ translates in a highly stylised and intellectual spectacle, where the written word is the source of a complex artistic universe, formally characterized by vocal virtuosity, physical precision and a stunning artistic imagery realised with multi-medial as well as intermedial means, which aims to provoke disturbance and bewilderment first and only then engagement for the audience.

As the book aptly demonstrates, all four case studies in discussion are examples of post-dramatic artistic phenomena capable of opening a new field of research in theatre studies as well as providing a new model of theatre making, relevant for the future. If all media are seen as mediating between the inside and the outside, between reality and perception, then a potential way forward for theatre practice – as suggested by the book – is in the exploration of those particular medial features that can take further structurally and functionally the cultural landscape of the new millennium and reflect them in meaningful and effective ways.

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