

Abstract DRHA Conference

**Digital Matters – Designing / Performing Agency for the Anthropocene, 5.-7. September 2021**

Going to the Theatre in Pandemic Times – From “Zurüstung” to Digital Foyers

The quite uncommon German word ‘Zurüstung’ translates to ‘setting up’ or ‘preparation’. The term derives from armor; thus, ‘Zurüstung’ is a process of arming oneself, highlighting a process of an active theatrical preparation of the audience. That routine of arming oneself grounds in a repetition of specific patterns. Both occasional and regular theatre goers will have their own individual process of getting ready. That ‘Zurüstung’ allows them to turn themselves into a spectator, ready to experience performing arts. Theatre scholar Robin Nelson proposes the term “experienter” to describe “a more immersive engagement in which the principles of composition of the piece create an environment designed to elicit a broadly visceral, sensual encounter” (Nelson 2010: 45). He regards the ‘experienter’ as a specific audience in immersive and intermedial performance. Contrary to his argument that it is the mode of performance that turns a person either into a spectator or into an ‘experienter’, we argue that it can be the audience members who turn themselves into ‘experienters.’ And they achieve that by following a process of ‘Zurüstung’ that enables them to not just sit back but to make themselves ready to become part of an experience. However, theatre in pandemic times has turned virtual and our trusted ways of preparation for a night (or day) out at the theatre had to change. The homepage usually is the first and sometimes last encounter with a performance. Theatre websites serve a myriad of functions from establishing the corporate design to displaying information about productions, the institution, its employees, current productions, its history, sponsorship, press material., etc. Additionally, theatres have started to play around with offering audiences virtual foyer experiences, letting them choose avatars to explore digital representations of known theatre buildings or creating opportunities to meet fellow audience members via spontaneous audio-visual encounters.

In our presentation, we offer three individual 10-minute provocations on the theme of ‘Zurüstung’: in physical locations (pre-pandemic), through the portal of websites and through the relatively new format of digital foyers. We will ask: How have our rituals of getting ready changed and what new forms of relationality and engagement have emerged?

Nelson, R. (2010) *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

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