

Rethinking R.U.R. by Karel Čapek Nowadays: A Practical Case Study of Adaptation in Rotondi and Bar-Amotz

Abstract

This paper presents a contemporary adaptation of R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots) by Karel Čapek, developed by artists Guy Bar-Amotz and Armando Rotondi as an interdisciplinary, site-specific performance work. Originally written in 1920, R.U.R. introduced the term "robot" and inaugurated a new cultural imagination around mechanisation, synthetic life, and industrial modernity. Bar-Amotz and Rotondi's version revisits Čapek's dystopian vision through the lens of contemporary concerns: automatism and freedom, participation in civil society, and the concept of "social sculpture" as an expanded field of artistic practice. Integrating living sculpture, spatial sound design, son-et-lumière stagecraft, interactive programming, and performers wearing mechanimated robotic masks, the project proposes an adaptive and collaborative model of performance. Conceived as engaging and site-responsive, the work invites local partners and communities to co-produce the artistic experience, thus transforming the theatre event into a participatory civic platform. Adapting R.U.R. poses substantial dramaturgical challenges. Čapek's original text unfolds in four acts, populated by numerous allegorical characters—Domin (dominus), Helena Glory, Alquist (the alchemist)—whose dialogues articulate philosophical, social, religious, and economic tensions of early industrial modernity. Despite the radical innovation of its themes—comparable to works such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* or Ruggero Vasari's *L'agonia delle macchine*—the play's conventional dramatic structure complicates reduction and contemporary staging.

Keywords: Robot, contemporary theatre, Adaptation