

LENA MÜLLER - THESIS IN PROGRESS

THE NATURAL ROOM - A RESEARCH ON STAGING SCENERY

ON THE BASIS OF A SET DESIGN FOR THE PLAY *LITTLE EYOLF* BY HENRIK IBSEN

ABSTRACT

My thesis will take the shape of a project report. It concentrates on the set and video design for a theatre production of Henrik Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* (1894), (premiere on 3 May 2012 at Het Nationale Toneel in The Hague).

My research assesses how in live performance, digital video technology influences the perception of space. My starting point was to create a room that represents a state of mind; actors were to be vague figures in an apparently endless landscape of fog and air. With the help of projections, scrims, and artificial fog, I established the impression of a scene set outside, yet paradoxically also on location within a human mind rather than inside a theatre.

My aim was to create a three dimensional space for images, combining layers of projection within an amorphous substance like fog. Rather than a conventional flat screen, I sought the illusion of depth and perspective on a nebulous body. The audience experience the tension between the scale of the human frame and the scale of the space around them.

The collaboration intrinsic to theatre is essential to my working practice. Therefore my research entails analysing the results of the cooperation between different professions such as stage design, sound design, light design, directing, and acting. As this particular theatre production aimed at bringing natural and universal powers on stage, I was especially interested to see how all crafts combine together to create one entity.

Like cinema, live performance takes place in an empty black space; my fascination with this fact forms the subject matter of my designs. Looking back on the other theatre designs I made during the Master Course at Piet Zwart Institute, I will show how my research into cinematic language influences my approach as a designer.

STRUCTURE

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1. OPENING SCENE

The theatre audience find themselves seated in front of a framed dark space, with nothing visible except for a boy sitting on a white rocking horse at the centre of the stage. For the first six minutes of the performance, the boy moving on the wooden horse, and the sound that is produced by the movement, are the only thing happening in the room. Slowly, the eyes of the spectator get used to the darkness, and they start to make out what could be the depth of the space. Then, all of a sudden, big white letters appear on a gauze situated between the audience and the stage with the word *AARDE (EARTH)*, accompanied by the ticking noise of a what could be a film projector. The projected letters fall through the gauze on the floor and walls behind it, and on the rocking child. After 20 seconds, the word disappears, and the image goes back to the boy/man on the rocking horse. Then, one by one, two women and two men appear from the sides of the stage and become visible as they stop and stand spread around the boy. Again, projected letters interrupts the image, this time together with a total blackout on stage. The words *DE THUISKOMST (HOMECOMING)*, introduce the first scene of the play: Eyolf's father Allmers comes home from a walking trip in the mountains, to his wife Rita, to his sister Asta, and to his son Eyolf. But instead of moving towards each other and greet each other, the actors remain on their spots, each of them on a separate island, surrounded by a dark undefined space. When they finally speak, their voices sound as if they were played by an ancient gramophone. This first scene marks the opening of a row of 52 short scenes, always introduced in a similar way by projected titles and blackouts.

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