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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

This thesis will take the shape of a project report. It concentrates on the theatre design for the performance of Henrik Ibsen's *Little Eyolf* (1894), which took place in May to June 2012 at Het Nationale Toneel Den Haag, by director Susanne Kennedy.

It assesses how in life performance, the perception of space can be influenced through the use of digital video technology and demonstrates how the switch of perspective from an outside world into the inner world of the protagonist's imagination calls for an intermedial approach.

The question that initiated my research is how can I as theatre designer create the experience of an outside space within the theatre room. I wanted to create a wide, open space, which extends beyond any visible walls.

In representing landscape and 'nature' on stage, modern theatre practice, including my own, seeks to elude or deny the romanticised version of those things or thoughts – however, we cannot do so!

Looking back on the last two theatre designs I made during the Master Course at Piet Zwart Institute, I will show how my research in cinematic language has influenced the approach of my designs.

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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.