

IFTR

The New Space of Authenticity

Prague 17-18-19 June 2007

As a contribution to the discussion of “New Space of Authenticity” I propose a consideration of the 2006 production of the Wagner’s Ring Cycle by the Canadian Opera Company. This first production of the Cycle in Canada approached the tetralogy with a specific emphasis on the scenography – Michael Levine was the production designer for the complete cycle and made his debut as director of *Das Rheingold*.

Levine’s approach to the scenography is a productive intervention into “authenticity” in the world of globalizing forces. This production design boldly emphasized a human presence throughout the tetralogy. Silent choreographic ‘choruses,’ both of persons and of objects, populated the stage and shaped the visual narrative of the performance by addressing its thematic magnitude and the deployment of individual identity within it. Design of these choruses reinforced significant narrational shifts in the visual text and moreover, established them spatially – as for example by the conceptualization of each giant as a gang of workers from the thirties comprised of 7 persons, or by the choice of white cotton ‘pajamas’ for all the characters and the chorus in *Siegfried*, the latter of whom become an ephemeral screen denoting the ring of fire the end of this opera. Concomitantly, Levine choose to use material elements which have their specific individual properties – such as fire and billowing silk with the effect that the experience of qualities and textures became integral.

The reference to the stage as volumetric was crucial and unmistakable as Levine brought the machinery into the forefront of the consciousness of the spectators – literally altering the shape of the space. The extensive use of the flies articulated the vertical axis of the stage, at times rotating the horizontal perspective through a 90degree angle, while in other sequences traps in the stage floor became crucial for locating the very humanness within certain interactions. Throughout the Cycle the spectacularity of Wagner’s operas were conceptualized by Levine as negotiations narrated through human-scaled filters and renegotiated the relationship between humans and objects with insight.

Bio

Natalie Rewa is the author of *Scenography in Canada: Selected Designers* (University of Toronto Press, 2004). She is the co-curator of the Canadian delegation to the Prague Quadrennial 07. Her current research focuses on the scenographic design for opera by Michael Levine. She is Professor of Drama at Queen’s University in Canada.

NB. Please note that the National Day for Canada is June 18th and I will not be able to give my full attention to the meetings that day... since there is activity at the kiosque and I will be presenting a lecture on the delegation in the afternoon. I would very much appreciate a time in the conference proceedings on the other two days. Thank you for your consideration.