

Sophy Rickett

AUDITORIUM

Theatre is a place of multiple concealments: backstage from stage; orchestra from stage; audience from stage. In each of these pairs the stage may be seen as a space of revelation that at the same time implies a concealed other.

In western epistemology that which is revealed, brought to light, is assumed to be inherently truer than that which is concealed; the metaphor of knowledge as enlightenment, of seeing as understanding, is a commonplace. And in western aesthetics, from Aristotle to Heidegger, art is also about revelation: the bringing of that which is not immediately evident to us into the light of presence.

Sophy's Rickett's film *AUDITORIUM* leads us through the stage, backstage and auditorium of the Glyndebourne opera house in a series of such revealings: veils lifted, light cast, dark spaces made visible. In the opening sequence, on the left-hand screen, bars of light ascend from the stage floor to the top of the proscenium to illuminate (we assume), on the right-hand screen, the dome of the auditorium. At the end of the film a series of flimsy curtains are raised to expose not, as we expect, the stage, but, for the first time, the complete auditorium as seen from the stage, miraculously filled with glowing light.

And yet: surely the stage is a place of illusion and make believe; not a place of truth? Indeed, in western metaphysics theatre has often served as a metaphor for illusion and deceit; Plato's cave, in which the audience is entranced by the shadows cast on the screen and fail to recognise that they are *only* shadows, is a founding image for the long history of anti-theatrical prejudice. In western metaphysics (as opposed to western epistemology) that which is concealed from us is implicitly more certain than that which is visible to us; what is within is truer than what we can see on the surface. Never trust

appearances, we learn. Behind the tinsel illusion of the stage lies the hard and unglamorous reality of the backstage machinery and the labouring stage hands who operate it. In the auditorium the viewers may temporarily suspend disbelief, but, Plato notwithstanding, they are never truly deceived, and they bring the judgement of the real world to bear on what they witness.

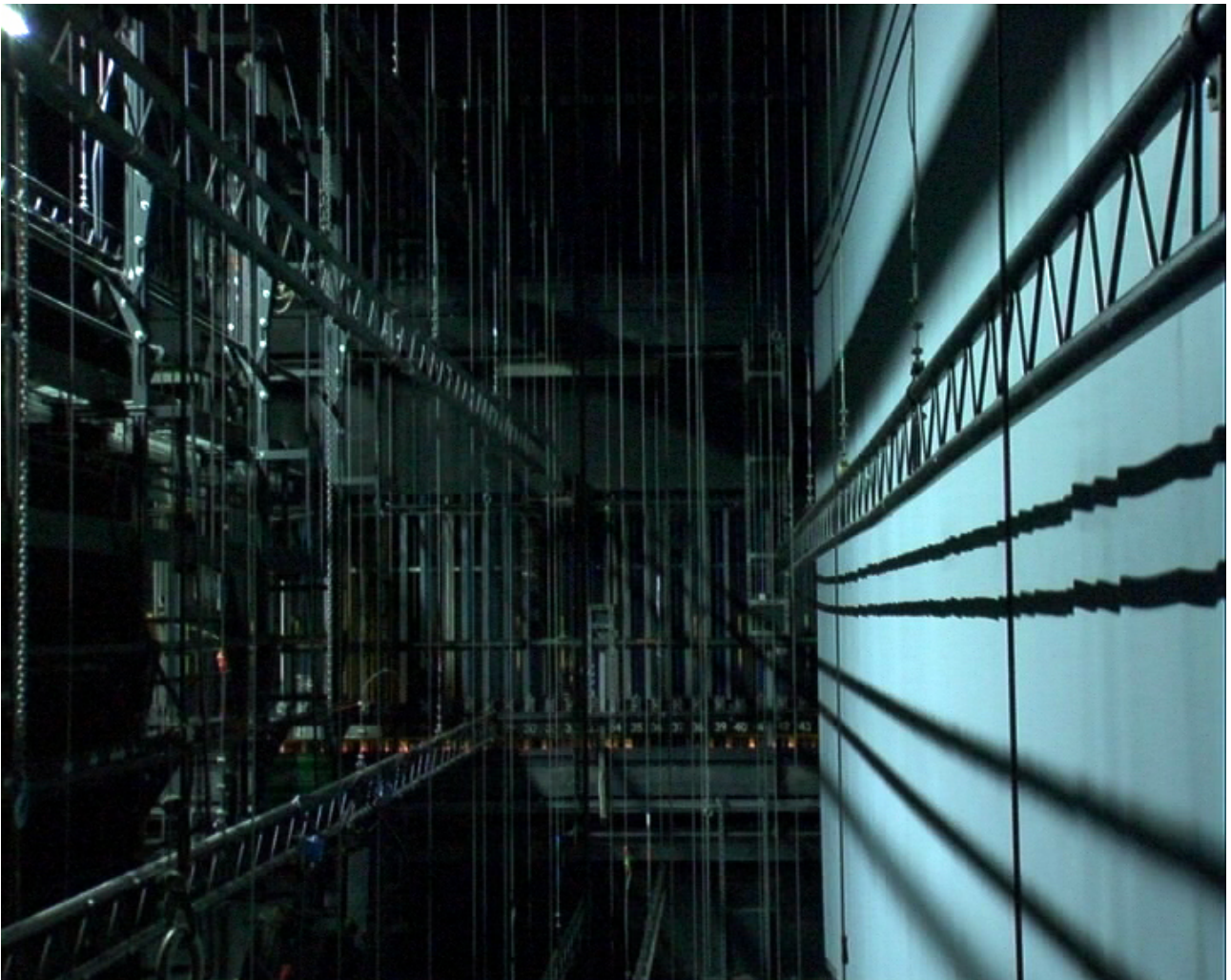
AUDITORIUM turns the stage, backstage and auditorium of Glyndebourne into a play of deferred revelations that implicitly acknowledge the tensions and contradictions between those two core theatrical metaphors of truth and knowledge. At times her film is impassively formal, offering an austere image of truth as geometry. At other times it turns the functional modernist spaces of the Glyndebourne opera house into a baroque fantasy; a joyful play of illusory spaces.

Human presence is banished from the theatre, save for a solitary fly-man, whom we glimpse twice, hauling on the ropes that raise and lower her bars of light, her curtains, and indeed her camera. It is a *Wizard of Oz* moment. We have been led to believe that this modern theatre is a feat of technological omnipotence. But behind even that imposing structure is, no, not God (who is, indeed, the hidden stage-manager in the theatre of Goethe's *Faust*), but a fly-man. This is the *mise-en-abyme* of theatrical metaphysics, and perhaps of all metaphysics: at the heart of the machine, after the play of deferred revelations, there is nothing more than the modest fly-man. In the end, all the film can reveal is a procession of absences: the absent drama on stage; the absent orchestra; and finally, the absent audience in the empty auditorium.

text by Nicholas Till



Sophy Rickett, *Auditorium* (a film by Sophy Rickett with music by Ed Hughes), Screening at Glyndebourne Opera House, Sussex, November 2007, Image courtesy Richard Rowland



Sophy Rickett, stills from *Auditorium* (a film by Sophy Rickett with music by Ed Hughes), Image courtesy Sophy Rickett



Sophy Rickett, *Auditorium 1*, 2007, courtesy the artist and Alberto Peola Arte Contemporanea



Sophy Rickett, *Auditorium 3*, 2007, courtesy the artist and Alberto Peola Arte Contemporanea

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Selected Individual Exhibitions

- 2007 *Auditorium*; De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill on Sea, UK
2005 Emily Tsingou Gallery, London
2004 Alberto Peola, Turin, Italy
2003 Nichido contemporary art, Tokyo, Japan
'Viva Roma' – A special commission of the British Council, Rome, Italy.
Centre pour l'image contemporain Saint-Gervais, Geneva, Switzerland
Emily Tsingou Gallery, London, UK
2002 Alberto Peola, Turin, Italy
RENN Art Gallery, Paris, France
Emily Tsingou Gallery, London, UK
DCA, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee, UK

Publications

- 2005 Sophy Rickett (monograph), Steidl / Photoworks ISBN 3-86521088-0
2001 Sophy Rickett: Photographs, (monograph) Emily Tsingou Gallery, London

Selected Group Exhibitions (* = catalogue produced)

- 2007 Les Peintres de la Vie Moderne, Pompidou Centre, Paris, France *
2006 *La Donna Oggetto*, Castello Sforzesco, Vigevano, Italy *
Contempor'art, Piccolo Miglio in Castello, Biennale Internazionale de Fotografia di Brescia, Italy *
Responding to Rome, Estorick Collection, London, UK *
2005 *Autowerke*, Museum of Fine Arts, Leipzig, Germany
2004 *Everything's Gone Green: Photography and the Garden*, National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford, UK
2003 *Order & Chaos*, Fotomuseum Winterthur (cur. Urs Stahel), Winterthur, Switzerland *
2001 *Where Are We?*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
A Night on Earth, (cur. R. Christofori) Kunsthalle Münster, Münster, Germany
The Fantastic Recurrence of Certain Situations, Canal de Isabel II, Madrid, Spain*

Awards and Commissions

- 2007 Research Grant from AHRC
2006/7 Commission from Glyndebourne Opera/ Photoworks, hosted by Glyndebourne Opera
2004 recipient of Individual Artists Award, Arts Council of England

2002 recipient of Individual Artists Award, Arts Council of England
2002 Arts Council of England, Helen Chadwick Fellowship, hosted by
The British School at Rome, Italy/ Ruskin School of Drawing,
Oxford University, UK

Selected Reviews and Articles

2006 Andrew Wilson, *Sophy Rickett*, FotoMuseum Antwerp magazine
2005 Darien Leader, *Sophy Rickett*, Portfolio, June
M. Herbert, *Sophy Rickett*, Time Out, June
2003 Rob Tufnell, *Rickett*, Boiler, No. 2
Barry Schwabsky, *Review*, Artforum, May
Katie Kitamura, *Review*, Contemporary, no. 4
Clare Manchester, *Review*, Art Monthly, March
Sophy Rickett, The Times, February 8
Stefano Ricci, *Review*, Tema Celeste, March - June
Olga Gambari, *Review*, Arte e Critica, April –September
Piu che la luce spiccaa il buio, La Stampa, March 22
2001 Izi Glover, *Sophy Rickett*, DCA Review, Frieze, July
Oral History of British Photography, interview with Martin
Barnes, The British Library, November
Roy Exley, *Review*, Flash Art, July- September
Rob Tufnell, *Sophy Rickett*, *Yellow Tree*, Portfolio, June
Sophy Rickett, *Review*, The Independent on Sunday, April 1
Giles Sutherland, *Around the Galleries, Dundee*, The Times,
February 22
Neil Cameron, *Telling Tales in the Dark*, The Scotsman,
February 13