

Anya & Saul
To the Music of the Spheres

I've just reached a place
Where the willow don't bend
There's not much more to be said
It's the top of the end
I'm going
I'm going
I'm gone
(Bob Dylan, Planet Waves)

According to the theory of the so-called “Butterfly Effect”, the slight beating of tiny wings can become a catalyst precipitating a long chain of actions and reactions that culminate in cataclysmic events. Slumbering within every seemingly insignificant occurrence is always a potential of eventualities, variations and efficacies. It seems as if Eva Wal's intention with the “Planet Machine” is to visualize some obscure, not yet perceived threads and links, motions, processes, parallelisms and congruities. Consistent with the metaphor of distant trajectories in outer space, Eva Wal reaches far beyond our earthly limitations, fusing the laws of physics with mythology, word with image and finally, ne plus ultra, the empirical knowledge of one's own limitations with the potential of unlimited metamorphosis.

Within the red wooden frame of the “Planet Machine” (2006), wheels of different sizes are securely mounted and connected by belts, enabling them to be turned by hand from a single crank handle. A delicate system of gears, whose elegance is the product of its precision and its multiple handmade components, sets an autonomous cosmos in motion. Simultaneously simple and intricate, each wheel turns the next at a speed proportional to its diameter. Movement in opposing directions does not create a hindrance, but on the contrary, it is the very essence of the interplay of rotating cogs in perpetual motion, of revolving planets in orbit. The centre of the “Planet Machine” is comprised of two larger horizontal disks positioned on top of the frame, each of which supports a video beamer. A smaller vertical disk positioned between the two beamer-disks has contact with both of them, transferring the rotation equally to each and thus guaranteeing that the projected video images move at the same speed towards each other along a three-dimensional installation.

Parallel to the film projection, one hears a string quartet, a choir and a narrator. As the two video projections move towards each other, finally meet and overlap to inevitably separate again, a cosmos unfolds before our eyes, in our ears and minds. It is a world beyond familiar and rigidly definable elements, above and below water, full of yearning, metamorphoses, fortunate coincidences and catastrophes. Much remains unexplainable, the superimposition of image-music-narrative creates a unique poetry that submerges us in a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – and we immediately become part of the cosmic clockwork. We attempt to follow its course, electrified, captivated, yet in the end, we remain unable to assimilate it in its entirety, unable to observe the different planets at all times, unable to comprehend the occurrences in their overwhelming simultaneous vehemence.

In the Film-Opera “Anya & Saul” (2007) von Eva Wal, the audience is literally in the centre of the action: They sit in a relatively small, therefore intimate area directly in front of the “Planet Machine” and its human motor. Before them (and around them) is the semicircular planet stage. Two “images” glide across the surface of this projection screen suspended in the space, moving towards each other and then away again. The “images” are two films that have been cropped by a round template, which therefore display their sequences and stills as circular planet-like orbs. Over the course of 50 minutes, the tale of “Anya & Saul” unfolds, in a crescendo building to the point of superimposition, the eclipse, when both films are projected onto the exact same point. It is an encounter and a union that is, at the same time, the inevitable prelude to their subsequent parting. An “I Spy...” puzzle appears before us in which planets go about their courses, or perhaps they are circular windows through which we catch glimpses of a world existing beyond the surface of the planet stage.

We see silhouettes of the story’s actors and landscapes, volcanoes, videos of smouldering fire and streaming water, all interwoven in the continuing process of appearing and disappearing. There is no attempt to disguise contradictions in technique, where state-of-the-art inscrutable video effects are mixed with images of shadow puppets, obviously handmade and hand-controlled. Figures of animals on the end of sticks or suspended by strings are moved across landscapes conjure by video projections.

Eva Wal leaves us in the twilight between illusion and disillusion. She keeps nothing from us, does not deceive us in any way, we clearly see that the video images are water or fire, but yet, the whole remains a mystery.

When the narrator speaks of “glistening green grass”, we do not necessarily see a simultaneous flash of green in the video image. At this moment, our thoughts have hurriedly run ahead of the film, but at other moments, we realize that our thoughts have lagged behind, and that we are unable to keep up with the images.

The story develops into a flood of pictures, movement, colour, narration, song and music, a tidal wave of sensory information that leaves us no time to explore and sort out the many levels.

Music and Sound Design is the work of the (US) American composer Barry L. Roshto. He created a soundtrack for “Anya & Saul” that is a blend of classical string quartet, ethnic vocalizes and atmospheric electronic soundscapes. Eight speakers are positioned behind the planet stage, facilitating the orchestration of a dynamic acoustical space that is constantly changing with the position of the video projections.

Dreams and reality are not mutually exclusive in the world of “Anya & Saul”. Catastrophes appear in nightmares, but dreams also point out the way to happiness and new encounters. Arrangements that appear to be eternal can be suddenly modified or eradicated. Dreams preserve the memories of past happiness and affection.

“But, when he (Saul) awoke the following morning he had forgotten the image in his dream...” But, Anya cannot avoid the visions of her ravaged bliss nor retaliation, night or day, whether asleep or awake.

Anya, the whale-water creature, and Saul, the elephant-land creature, queen and king of different realms and elements, follow their destinies and their passions. And even though Anya and Saul transcend their respective limits, break through Magic Circles, become the liberators and protectors of the stories of the creation of the world, although they experience eminent happiness and fulfilment, in the end, the poison, the reticence, the anger and their very destinies drive them apart. What is this poison – administered by the sea serpent Nygta -, that enslaves Anya and compels

her to continually return to the Seashell Palace? “I can’t come with you, Saul, I can’t...”

“Why not?”, Saul asked coolly. “I can’t” Anya said softly (...)

“Is it because of Nygta’s poison?”

What is the difference between the paralyzing dependency brought on by Nygta’s poison and that of love and desire? Why does the poison bring hopelessness and ruin to Anya, but new-found life and deliverance to Saul? And finally: why must it remain hidden from Anya?

The planet images follow their courses. Nothing stands still. The story is constantly in motion, nothing can stop it, it remains unpredictable, irreversible, and its trajectories, unchangeable: An eternal dance to the music of the spheres...

Sabina Leßmann

English Translation by Barry L. Roshto