

Bilaga 1. Reflektion kring Här skulle vi leva, tillsammans

Våren 2017 regisserade jag urpremiären av Kristian Hallbergs pjäs Här skulle vi leva, tillsammans, på uppdrag av Folkteatern i Göteborg. Pjäsen utgör del två i en trilogi som Folkteatern beställt av Hallberg, utifrån Göteborgs Stadsmuseums utställning Vi är romer. Följande reflektionstext är på engelska; den utgör grunden för en kritiskt reflekterande essä kring den konstnärliga processen, som jag planerar att färdigställa och publicera under 2018.

Texten bygger delvis på tankar jag formulerade under en forskningsworkshop kring feminism och visuella studier på Stockholms universitet i december 2016, inför repetitionsstarten. Dessa tankar reflekteras också delvis i en konferenspresentation, "Feminist Visuality and Theatrical Space", som jag gjorde på Vetenskapsrådets symposium kring konstnärlig forskning, vid Stockholms konstnärliga högskola, i november 2017.

* * * * *

Set in contemporary Sweden, *We were to live here, together* pivots on the conflicted intimacy of heterosexual coupledness, subtly bringing the private sphere of a married, middle-class, white couple into a confrontation with social precarity and exclusion. While engaging with the politics of class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, however, this is no agit prop piece but an understated relational drama about a (white, heterosexual) couple in their sixties whose hitherto unproblematic normativity is thrown into crisis by a series of events preceding and unfolding in the course of the play. The plot revolves around their decision to offer Brna, a begging, homeless, implicitly Roma woman, work doing domestic chores in their home. This gesture, and the way the presence of the young woman affects their relationship and self-perception in certain ways, exposes the manner in which their self-image as benevolent and moderately socially responsible people inevitably is founded in the structural racism that permeates and is yet, somehow, perceived as being at odds with, Swedish national identity. Critiquing white privilege in its ubiquitous social presence, the play forces a recognition of the intersectional operations of ethnicity, class, and sexuality, while simultaneously portraying the (white) main characters as sympathetic, believable, complex and relatable protagonists.

For my mise-en-scène, furthering a directorial approach I had begun to explore while directing August Strindberg's *Miss Julie* a few years previously, I decided to explore critically the convergence of embodied theatrical performance, notions of visibility, and a feminist perspective on the material at hand.¹ In this earlier production I was compelled by theatre scholar Freddie Rokem's discussion, founded in the argument that notions of the visual shaped Strindberg's modernist theatrical aesthetic, of *Miss Julie* in terms of cinematic techniques. Rokem suggests that Strindberg "orchestrated the visual experience of his potential audiences" through a "visual 'score'" that was written into the text, foregrounding in particular scenic design, the performance and movements of the actors, and the communicative relationship between the world of the stage and its audience.² Situating this reading in Jonathan Crary's discussion of the transformation of vision in the 19th century Rokem suggests that Strindberg used theatrical performance to explore inner and subjective vision, making a connection between the theatrical realism for which *Miss Julie* is known and Strindberg's later dream play aesthetic.³ The idea of combining, or juxtaposing, onstage realism with a more expressionist visual aesthetic and mode of vision appealed to me in my attempt to conceptualize and interpret *Miss Julie* in terms of a feminist performance practice. In this project I used the notion of the visual score as a dramaturgical and scenic device, incorporating a full video "score" (alongside a musical score) into the performance, and attempting in various ways to frame the play in terms of visibility. By incorporating questions of visibility and acts of looking as active performance components, introducing the possibility of a double (or multiple) perspective on the play at hand, I could invite my audience to engage with *Miss Julie* using a critical perspective in regard to gender at the intersection of class and sexuality, framing the play differently than would most traditional realist renditions. As such, I perceived the incorporation of a cinematic language, as well as visibility as a directorial principle, as a way to "augment" onstage realism, to present a drama that would feel psychologically "truthful" to the audience while simultaneously complicating realism's purportedly objective rendition of the world of the play, as well as the audience's reading of power relations and gender normativity as structuring components of that world.

¹ See Kristina Hagström-Ståhl, "Picturing *Miss Julie*: Gender and Visibility in Performance Practice", in *August Strindberg and Visual Culture*, eds. Anna Westerståhl Stenport et al, forthcoming from Bloomsbury Press, 2018.

² Freddie Rokem, *Strindberg's Secret Codes* (Norwich: Norvik Press, 2005) 11.

³ Rokem 12-14. See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

Part of the efficacy of working this way with a visual dramaturgy, however, was the canonical or “classical” status of the play and with it the audience’s presumed familiarity with the characters and plot at hand (and perhaps even the play’s performance history). In directing a piece of new writing, problematizing its visual world while considering the potential of incorporating similar dramaturgical and directorial principles as in the *Miss Julie* project, I attempted to formulate some central questions and strategies through which to research and investigate methods for developing a feminist visuality for new writing.

We Were to Live Here, Together largely embraces the conventions of stage realism in its plot and dialogue; however, simultaneously and subtly, it questions these conventions through its dramaturgical structure, employing an episodic rather than sequential narrative form (in the shape of short scenes that transition through cinematic “cuts”). I ended up integrating a rather far-reaching cinematic perspective into the live performance, using the set design as a projection surface for images and video sequences, which film director Hanna Andersson produced at a parallel with the on-stage rehearsal process. However, in tandem with and yet beyond the introduction of the camera perspective and the camera eye, I also pondered how, as a director, I could affect the meaning-making acts of vision that occur in the spectator’s encounter with the embodied actions and speech acts of the actors in their rendition of the characters. I strongly believe that this play “needs” to be presented with a double vision pertaining to the reality or the “reality-producing dimension” (to use Dorothea von Hantelmann’s phrase⁴) of the performance as a whole. While the drama problematizes white privilege, and along with it the intersection of ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality, its critique of white privilege also re-enacts white privilege, exposing racism by, in a sense, enacting racism. Similarly, it attempts to expose homophobia by staging homophobia. It is a play which to a certain extent sets its performance up to fail – the basic choices are either to “perform the problem” and risk perpetuating rather than remedying the problem at hand, or to attempt to provide a solution to the problem, a strategy that would however negate the social critique implicit in the play’s plot.

⁴ Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How To Do Things With Art: What Performativity Means in Art*. Dijon: JRP|Ringier & Les Presses du Reel, 2010, p. 8.

In *We were to live here, together*, the consideration of visibility in the theatrical space has to do with a tacit and unmarked dominant gaze – the white, middle class heteronormative patriarchal gaze – which regulates how “we” (a potential majority culture audience) see women like Brna not only in the theatre but in public spaces, how we perceive the codes of their clothing, their movement patterns, their occupation. In response, we used the projection surface to reveal something about the inner lives of the characters, but also as a way to visualize a second perspective on the story at hand – that of the outside world and simultaneously that of Brna, who is otherwise mostly incorporated into the play as a projection surface for the white couple, Olof and Gurli.

As a counterstrategy I ended up attempting to incorporate a notion of “subjective vision”, which both co-exists and interferes with the stage/audience divide created by the visible or invisible proscenium, as well as the presumed objectivity that comes with the audience being positioned outside the play. While interpellating the viewer, asking the spectator to engage with images that contrast either in perspective or scale with the onstage action, this “other” perspective also looks back at the viewer, potentially staging acts of vision as multiple and internally differentiated. I saw in both the necessity of creating an other *gaze*, perhaps a counter-gaze – although I hesitate to call it that, I prefer opening up to other acts of vision and other codes of visibility, that is to say meaning-making through vision and seeing, where perspective becomes important as it situates the spectator and the action not as separate or discrete entities, but as connected through the workings of scopic regimes which are both specific to the particularities of *this* performance encountering *this* spectator, but simultaneously structurally affected by larger operations of culturally determined seeing and engendering.