

Points of No Return

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YLIOPISTO**

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I den här magisteruppsatsen, vars huvudsakliga språk är Engelska, undersöker jag o/synlighet i relation till vithet och black boxen. Jag beskriver försöket att förkroppsliga detta i mitt konstnärliga slutarbete *utan titel** november 2025 i Teaterhögskolans teatersal, mot bakgrund av min analys av våra samtida kriser och diskurser samt den historia som leder fram till dessa. Analysen har sin grund i Critical Race Theory och Critical Whiteness Studies. Genom detta definierar jag ett dramaturgisk och skådespelarteknisk förhållningsätt samt utvecklingen av en metod för att skapa material för scenen med utgångspunkt i de optiska och intima dilemman som teaterfältet står inför. Vilka jag hävdar är, både trots och och på grund av sina transcendentala dimensioner är lokalt förankrade på scenen genom skådespelarens kropp.

Ämnesord: Actor, Optics, Whiteness, Race, Black Box, Invisibility, Dilemma, Colorblindness, Point of No Return, Embodiment, Resistance, Criticality, Gaze, Solidarity, Dramaturgy



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1. Introduction: Inside the Fourth Wall

The artistic work that this thesis uses as its material is my MA thesis work titled *utan titel**. This work stemmed from my desire to speak out against the escalating and unfathomable injustices we see in the world today, which has to do with and directed me further towards the dilemma of how to embody whiteness in a blackbox theatre. The piece explores the variables of perceptions and optics operating within the site of the theatre, in this case the black box, claiming that its specificity, localities and history matter. It recognises that the stage is a place which deals with optics through representation both affected by and affecting the reality outside its walls and its contemporary discourse, making it a place of translation and transformation of power with the potential to conceal as well as reveal, to re-establish as well as imagine beyond its own boundaries.

Through the performance, which was primary focus was to be a practise, I shape a methodology of dramaturgy which takes as its starting point the place and those present rather than a scripted play, and reaches towards a contextual understanding of how to work with the stage and its relations. This all has to do with exploring the potential of using the Point of No Return as a means to travel between the stage and the contexts that surround it. Thus making the Point of No Return into the condition in which the actor acts.

I will treat this white page as my stage in a similar way and, in order to go beyond my own points of no return, I weave together analysis, memory and thick description of my thesis performance. The purpose of this plurality is to frame what guides my choices and motivates my artistic practice, which aims to understand and approach performance/ing in a relational way. It does so by paying attention to what and who is already present, filling the gaps and deepening relationships by adding rather than denying. While showing the dramaturgical methodology which has sprung from my years at TeaK, I try to understand and situate the stage and the work of an actor, in thought and practice.

*utan titel** was a solo performance that premiered on the 26th of November 2025 in TeaK, Teatersalen. The piece was 45 minutes long. The work was supervised by actor and lector Tom Rejström. Shaghayegh Ansari performed the lights. Katika helped me with the programming. Technical support from TeaK's TTP team, Outside Eyes: H Ouramo, Monia, Nappu. Oo Condit for all the help along the way. My peers and all the teachers for these five years of studies together. Aune Kallinen, for the continuous support to remain critical.

The analysis of the artistic process is one of the voices in this text. In addition to it, throughout this text descriptions of scenes and characters from the performance will appear in orange, in the same order as they happened on stage, to give the reader a sense of how I staged in *utan titel** the thoughts that I am presenting in the analysis. The material that you will encounter in *italics* are memories. The purpose of this text has to do with how the actor can understand and learn to perceive their own body as an intersection between personal and professional, local and transcendental. Especially to enable informed choices in relation to embodying whiteness and privilege on stage.

Now I will begin. It will begin. Now. It begins. Let me tell you a memory about the theatre.

The theatre is a house, with at least three or four rooms/insides: one for the guests, the audience, its holiness is like that of the sea. One is backstage, which is a secret place, it is for the workers (and the makers), it has a special kind of holiness, a labour kind, a pride kind, a humble kind, an invisible kind. Then there is the stage, the blackbox. It is for the actors' bodies and the director's gaze. Everybody's gaze and the director's judgement. The scenographers' and costume, light and sound designers' task is to look at their own work in relation to each others. The stage's holiness is of a magical kind, revealing, transforming, radiating, exposing, unraveling. It is also exclusive, out of reach, contradictory, hiding in plain sight, it is real and it is not at the same time. Because the theater is not good or bad in itself, it has all of the same things that the

world outside has, some seem to want to make it feel like it's not like that, but it is. But what the theatre does with all this that it has can be very interesting. Perhaps the actors' bodies could also be understood as places, different from but interdependent (or codependent) with the stage itself and all of the things that meet there. And inside the actors' bodies there are also real people. You can sometimes see them, especially in premieres, when the curtain drops, the lights go out, the last note fades. And the sea (publikhavet) lets the resonance out. Like rain, like wind, like storm, like thunder, like crusts of waves. Like when the first gusts of wind hit the water in the morning when the clouds are dark on the horizon. And the tiny waves shiver in bright silver. Especially if the wind is warm, especially if the sea beneath is deep blue turning towards green. Especially then when the actors return to the stage, their chests heaving with their breath differently. Their gazes soften. As a child I loved this moment. I was full of desire, sometimes almost unbearably so. The energies that had been in the room filled me so much I had to roam afterwards, run with my heart through the sea of people pouring out of the theatre. A swift performance of appearance and disappearance. Like any child I wanted to be seen. I wanted them to see what I had experienced, I wanted their gazes to make me, me? Real? Part of it? Like a little fish performing in a salmon migration. As the actors became people again, my piggybacking performances left my shoal of not-any-more-audiences little more than startled and confused.

My mother belonged to the backstage occasionally. She was a freelancer, respected and appreciated for her craft as a färgare, tryckare och patinerare, this was in the 90s in Sweden when culture still had enough resources to employ freelance specialists. There were almost as many people in my mother's profession in Sweden at the time as there were big state-supported institutions, which meant a couple more than a handful. She had plenty of work for ten years or so until budgets were cut and outside hires for costume became a rarity. She started working in daycares when I was in my early teens. Taking odd jobs, big productions with big budgets - some costume designers and scenographers wanted to keep her on.

On those occasions I could sometimes stay inside the empty theatre, and during rehearsals sometimes be there even almost alone. Sometimes we crossed the stage, and I would soak in the heightened moment of seeing it all from the other direction. The actual size of the blackbox, the rig and all the stuff, the props and scenography, the changing stations. The stage-workers and technicians, with their headphones always only on one ear and their tool belts and huge sets of keys. The whole secret machinery. To find what that floor felt like - surprisingly sometimes the whole thing was tilting - and to learn what sounds it made. The sounds of the whole space were different. The room was the same but in every sense it appeared completely different. The heat from the lights. And for a fleeting moment I anchored my feet on the stage. I had slipped through the fourth wall and nobody had noticed, and suddenly the child of the backstage and the audience stood facing a dimly lit full house ghost-audience and performed something which is difficult to name, but was secretly and bravely performed nevertheless. Behind them was the mundane landscape of scattered conversations and movements of the people who worked with the real theatre play, in front of them row after row of deep red velvet seats rising through the horizon. And here and there someone taking notes of something other than the performance that was unfolding. They didn't recognise that the child was an actor hiding the depth of the real piece by performing a child. And the actor didn't know that they were as much a director and that in fact they were not standing on the stage at all but rather they had arrived at a place inside of the fourth wall.

Not seeing, seeing, invisible and visible at the same time. Hiding and revealing, pretending the truth. Imagining the real, and performing the imaginary into reality.

Everybody is kind to a child that knows how to listen. But how does a quiet child learn how to speak?

Färgeriet och ateljén, pigmenten, maskinerna, två stora industrivättmaskiner i rostfritt stål, en centrifug, och en gigantisk torktumlare, tryckramarna, tryckbordet, biblioteket med provbitarna — dvs böckerna med färgningsrecept och färgprover för alla olika textila material. Biblioteket med kostymteckningarna. Färgkartorna. Symaskinerna.

Den halvstora svarta plasttunnan med salt för fixeringen som hade en liten stabil ställning med hjul på som man också kunde ta loss och köra runt med. Provdockorna — de var tre och en halv. En hette Benny och en hade tappat ett öga och hade hår som var gjutet i bakelit och såg ut som spagetti. Den hade stått på NK på 20-talet och hade hon lyckats få tag på den från deras vindsförråd, säkert bara genom att fråga, någongång i början på 80-talet när det fortfarande fanns rivningskontrakt i Stockholm, och hon flyttade dit från Sundsvall för den 1-åriga utbildningen på Tillskärarakademien. Strykjärnen (ibland hade hon brännmärken på händerna och underarmarna), tvättställningarna som man kunde fira upp och ner från taket. Knappnålarna, trådrullarna, pincetterna, sprättarna, sandpappret, kirurgknivarna. De enorma och stela skyddshandskarna av tjockt svart gummi. Tygerna och kostymerna som passerade förbi oss där bland dofterna, ljuden, ångan, genom hennes rörelser, lätta starka koncentrerade metodiska vana. I bakgrunden var radion alltid på, P1 eller P2.

I cannot tell you necessarily what the black box theatre is, but I can tell you what it is not. It is not neutral and it's not a blank page. Ironically if anything it's a white page filled with relations. It's also one of many sites where historically whiteness as privilege has been constructed through it's in/visibilities both through the process of defining whiteness *is not*, and by *not* defining what whiteness *is*.

2. The Black Box Theatre (history, complications): A crisis of neutrality, optics and subject

Up until the invention of the black box theatre, a more or less collective effort by the modernist theatrical avant-garde in Europe around the turn of the last century, the architecture of the theatre houses had been an integral part of defining the characteristics of theatre performances themselves. We can think of the amphitheater, the proscenium arch and the Globe as places in which place and play appear inseparable (Hannah 2003). The place and play have developed hand in hand through different eras. However, the avant-garde revolved around ideas of the dynamic aspects of the theatre, light, sound and the actors movements, and more or less found the architecture of the theatre space to be in the way. So the black box came to be through stage technical advancements especially in theatre lighting and also in the rejection of architecture to enhance the performance of these other performative elements. As Dorita Hannah references in the paper “(I M) M A T E R (I A L I T Y) and the Black-Box Theatre as an ‘Empty Space’ of Re-production” one of the co-creators of the black box theatre, the English Edward Gordon Craig, formulates the concept of a vast “empty space” a “nothing” from which “life shall come” that “casts no shadows” (Hannah 2003, 25). The consequences of the rejection of localities through the invention of the black box eventually came to define the theatre as such during the 20th century, even if these inventions were not called or formulated as a singular kind of black box theatre until later. This way of organising theatre space quickly spread because of its inherently low spatial requirements and functionalities. You can kind of turn any space into a black box and, thus, into a theatre. .

In their article on the black box, Hannah points out that “the black box became the major spatial paradigm for twentieth century theatre. Yet very little has been written on it in either theatrical or architectural discourse. Such a paucity of visible features does not necessarily imply an absence of substance. Rather it challenges our ways of

discussing phenomena that are not always visually (or indeed perceptually) marked” (2003, 23).

Hannah continues in the direction of the void, as womb, in line with Craig’s formulation, but calls for a rethinking of the womb as a material space. Unfortunately in the case of the black box, the space as a womb has been formulated poorly by people without wombs of their own. Thus the black box as a place has been predominantly understood as the place where performance appears or is created rather than where the performance is created *from* and *in connection with* something, which would be more similar to how actual babymaking works.

Further more, the black box theatre has gathered its present shape during a period in time that parallelly underwent a crisis of optics and a philosophical paradigm shift (in western thought construct) of the position of the subject in relation to the universal, through Freud’s influential thoughts of a plurality of subjectivity that challenges the hegemony of the (white) eye. That also results in a collision of the language available and what it now needs to describe. (Hannah 2003, 26) This crisis they describe as having to do with the then unprecedented scale of destruction humanity was capable of. Both through the trauma of war itself, and also through the first exposure of imagery of it, Hannah writes: “This fin-de-siecle dilemma in perception was accompanied by a crisis in vision where people ‘no longer believed their eyes’. [...] As the century advanced technological warfare allowed mass destruction to occur on a scale that was hitherto unperceivable, furthering the crisis of body, language and visibility.” (2003, 26). Since the boom of the black box is parallel to this and also is a place where both collective grief and the “inherently human” is dealt with, what happens when this crisis enters the stage and enhances the white subject with the basic technology of the black box? Could it be that white subjectivity, although more or less consciously, strengthens its position of neutrality and remains blue-eyed at the top of this hegemony.

The crisis of our time is neither that different from nor unrelated to the crisis of the last century. We are still dealing with pluralities and differences and how to use language, we are witnessing multiple genocides and ecocides, we cannot trust the optics, the whiteness that is blatantly visible, but still somehow gets away with it.

The stage has the power to practice optics - the theatre is a tool to meet a crisis of optics - so how do I as a, soon to be unemployed, white actor in Helsinki work with this?

For the topic of this thesis, and in order to look at what a “Point of No Return” could be, it has been necessary for me to note the way that the black box theatre has a crisis with its invisibility resonates with the way whiteness has a crisis with its invisibility, and that these processes are historically parallel. They have also been parallel for me as an actor, in the sense that the visuality I have experienced onstage has always felt excessive, meaning that there is so much to work with but also that I am working with references and representations of whiteness that I don't myself know. As Hannah pointed out in the quote above, “such a paucity of visible features does not necessarily imply an absence of substance. Rather it challenges our ways of discussing phenomena that are not always visually (or indeed perceptually) marked” (03, 23).

How do we work with these challenges? And how to repair a history so that we recognise what we are actually working with?

2.1. Points of No Return

År 2014 gör Athena Farrokhzad ett sommarprat* i Sveriges Radio P1. Där hon i samtal med en lång rad poeters meningar beskriver motståndets nödvändighet mot orättvisa. Hon pratar om träd utan att prata om träd, hon pratar om rasism och systerskap. Hon leder lyssnaren genom den strukturella rasismen i det svenska klassamhället, mot

bakgrund av historien av de som har insisterat på att en annan värld är möjlig. Hon säger rakt ut att fascismen måste bekämpas, och spelar en version av Ebba Gröns låt "Beväpna er". Sommarpratet blir anmält till granskningsnämnden 17 gånger. I en ledarartikel med titeln "Det goda hatet från vänstern" i Dagens Nyheter, Sveriges största dagstidning, benämner Håkan Boström Farrokhzad som en "radikal våldsbejakande vänsterextremist" (Boström, 25.7.2014). Sommarpratet får hård offentlig kritik av en rad borgliga politiker och makthavare, som blir kränkta av texten i Ebba Gröns låt. Och det hävdas bland annat sommarpratet "visar hur liberalismen har förlorat en hel generation i kampen för frihet och öppenhet" (Svensson 24.7.2014). 12 år senare förnekar samma borgerlighet folkmordet i Palestina och har drivit igenom lagstiftning som gör det möjligt för migrationsverket att fatta beslut om att utvisa ensamma spädbarn till Iran. Där det enbart månader senare regnar olja över huvudstaden staden Teheran med 10 miljoner invånare i frihetens och öppenhetens namn. I Sverige träder nu lagar i kraft som gör det möjligt att sätta trettonåringar i fängelse för att bekämpa gängkriminalitet i förorterna. Ett resultat av en retorik och propaganda som är skrämmande lik den som den Amerikanska och Zionistiska fascismen öppet uttalar för berättigandet av massförstörelse.

Att de som gör motstånd mot förtryck och orättvisa utmålas som det politiskt farliga av de som faktiskt är politiskt farliga är ingen nyhet. (Andreassen et al. 2023, 3-4) Att kalla försvaret av de rättigheter som utgör grunden för att politik skulle kunna vara politik och inte förtryck, för vänsterextremism för att kunna fängsla demonstranter. Förbjuda ord, avverka skog, avfinansiera välfärd, forskning och kultur, är inte omedvetna strategier.

När jag lyssnar på det här sommarpratet nu, inser jag igen, det jag redan visste när jag hörde det första gången. Farrokhzad använder det här utrymmet för att skapa kontakt och sammanhang och skriver tillsammans med många andras ord en vändpunkt som vill resonera i kroppen.

Därför har jag transkriberat en del av dessa ord:

“Eftersom vi lever i avståndet mellan revolutionens dröm och verkligheten måste jag prata med er om ansvar. Som ni har hört har jag hittills vidrört många saker, allt från cypresser till systrar. Jag har inte sagt något om de 870 miljoner människor som svälter i världen samtidigt som femtio procent av all mat som produceras slängs för att hålla priserna uppe. Det är med den amerikanska poetens Rosemary Waldrups ord: “omöjligt att beskriva det faktum som överensstämmer med denna mening utan att helt enkelt upprepa meningen”. 870 miljoner människor svälter i världen samtidigt som femtio procent av all mat som produceras slängs. Jag har inte sagt nånting om världshandelsavtal, klimatkatastrofer eller svensk vapenexport eller att människor dör av sjukdomar som sedan länge är utrotade här. Jag skulle kunna prata länge om allt detta men det viktigaste jag vill säga är egentligen bara en enda sak. Om en annan värld ska vara möjlig är det vårt ansvar att förverkliga den. Ingen kommer att göra det åt oss. Vi behöver inte ha det såhär. Vi behöver inte vara såhär otrygga och ensamma. Vi behöver inte förgäves ignorera varandras ofrihet för att själva försöka vara fria. Vi behöver inte bygga våra liv på ruiner av andras. Det kan finnas ett samhälle organiserat efter andra principer. Det som återstår är inte att odla vår trädgård. Vi lever inte i den bästa av möjliga världar. De som talar om för oss att det är så är de som själva tjänar på att vi ska tro det. De som säger att lidandet är nödvändigt, vill att vår rädsla för att förlora den lilla lycka som vi mödosamt skrapat ihop ska hålla oss från att kämpa för att lidandet ska upphöra. Här räcker inte mina ord till för att formulera avståndet mellan det som är och det som skulle kunna vara.

Som så många gånger förr är det poesin som pekar ut riktningar i det jag ännu knappt kan förnimma. Den svenska poeten Johan Jönsson skriver: “Jag fantiserar om en omfattande rättvisa men jag kan inte definiera ordet.” Inger Christensen svarar: ”Det viktiga är inte det vi är, men det vi skulle kunna vara, kan vara, inte kan vara ännu men kan och ska bli en gång. Vara en gång vara rädda men inte vara rädda för att vara rädda.” Den svenska poeten Anja Delun svarar: ”Men om jag fylls med mod, om jag varje dag intalar mig själv att jag fylls med mod, om mina ögon inte är tomma, om jag

förstår det jag här inte riktigt förstår.” Den svenska poeten Ann Hallström svarar: “Ta ifrån mig det som är mitt. Ingen människa är en ö.” Den amerikanska poeten Claudia Rankin svarar: ” Definiera ensamhet, ja, det är vad vi inte kan göra för varandra, vad betyder för varandra? Vad betyder ett liv? Varför är vi här om vi inte är här för varandra?” Den svenska poeten Jenny Tunedal svarar: “Om vi inte finns till för varandra. Om inte allt jag ser är till för dig. Om inte jag ska få ge dig allt. Varför finns vi då i denna ensamhet.” (Claeson och af Klintberg, “Athena Farrokhzad 2014”, 21 juli 2014)

I chose this text as my monologue for the admissions exams to this programme five years ago. I remember I worried about how my position as a white person saying these words would be perceived. I chose to say them anyway, I remember, or realise now, because they were my point of no return. And if I ever were to speak any text on any stage, -however small, like through a laptop on a stack of chairs in my bedroom to a handful of people in facemasks in the theatre university a few blocks away, this text had a weight in itself and these words were written to be heard. So even if they would drop me after this first round, I would have done something with my time in the limelight - to echo these words was something I could live with. But they didn't drop me, and now five years later, I remain stubbornly at my commitment to the point of no return of Athena Farrokhzad's speech in its entirety. And the successions of points of no return that predated and followed it.

I don't anymore want to worry about how my pronouncing words of hope and resistance will be perceived. And in order to do that I need to actually know the place from which I'm saying them. Which leads me to this thesis work in this institution. As a final practice to my studies I gave myself the seemingly impossible task of staging a revolution true to what I believe in, as a site specific performance with one white actor in the largest black box of the theatre academy, with two weeks of construction and rehearsal time divided between three productions, and only myself in the working group. I realise this sounds fairly self-destructive, (which is something I do not often recommend) and I can't say that it wasn't. It put me in the position where I had to work

on the floor with the ways in which the in/visible power structures manifested in myself as well as through myself in the theatre. I will refer to the contradictions this led me to face in the next part of this thesis as dramaturgical dilemmas.

2.2. utan titel*

I will now make a rough sketch of the piece in the form of a list of inventory and (thick) descriptions of each scene in order to open up how I scripted the performance *utan titel** as a series of dramaturgical dilemmas. In chapter 3, I will return to what I call the impersonations of whiteness and their relations to the stage in more depth.

I write the inventory and the scenes in a way where the description of the space and the dilemmas are interlaced, especially in the first couple of scenes since that's where I needed to break and establish the most.

Inventory:

- black box, floor measuring 18x12 meters, ceiling height at around nine meters.
Rigging, lights and trusses starting at around seven meters.
- black Molton curtains, rails running around one meter from each wall and horizontally through the centerstage.
- One white actor, myself
- white "marble" pillar, measuring around five meters, in five pieces of various sizes hollow, material; plywood, styrofoam, paint.
- ripped off roll of white milk carton paper 2x5m
- White enamel washing bowl with water

- nine wooden beach chairs with prints of characteristic antic greek/roman sculptures
- platform with two flights of stairs
- 15 different kinds of living room lamps
- inflatable planet (Mars) with led light inside around 1,7 meters in diameter
- metal grid shoppingcart
- 15 orange pingpong balls
- table tennis racket
- minimalistic armchair, wood and lightbrown leather
- small coffeetable, funnel shaped foot, reflective tabletop
- white tarp, around 5m²
- two big oval mirrors, self-standing and adjustable mounting structure
- high quality backstage make-up table with mirror and lights
- laptop
- in one performance I played more roles than there were people in the audience.

Scene 1, *prologue, overtones*

The audience enters, dim lights on their seating. On the front left stage there is a fallen white marble pillar, in five pieces of varying size. The pillar's size is humble compared to Olympos, but still substantial in a blackbox. It is realistic looking but placed in a way that one can see, or ignore, that it is made from plywood and styrofoam. Next to it is a roll of milk carton white paper, two meters wide. In front to the right of the stage is a white enamel washing bowl holding a bit of water. Black molton curtains cover both the side walls and a couple of them also partially cover the back half of the stage, which is lit by a number of living room floor and table lamps. In the back left corner, through the gaps in the curtains one can glimpse a pile

of sun chairs with pictures of ancient Greek and Roman sculptures printed on their fabric. They are lit from the floor by an old theatre lamp with a 3000W light bulb. In the middle, against the wall, is a flight of stairs, of the same characteristics as the audience podiums. In the back right corner is an inflatable version of Mars, around two meters in diameter, lit from the inside. Behind the curtains there is also something we cannot yet see.

When the audience is seated and starts to quiet down we begin to hear how a voice from the stage attempts, occasionally quite successfully, to sing overtones. We start to understand that they are inside of the big paper roll. Then most of the theatre lights in the ceiling light up the stage in a sweeping motion from the back to the front as if “*it begins now!*”. But the motion doesn’t stop until the lights are turned all the way away from the floor and instead light up the structures in the ceiling. The voice suddenly asks: “Can you hear them?” Then they come out from the paper roll. They have an odd costume, a tall white head piece, white plateau shoes, a turquoise baroque (or something) collar. They ask again if we could hear them, the over tones? They seem like they want to have an answer, but when they get one, they sort of leave it at that. Then they take off the costumey parts of their costume and leave them by the pillar.

The dramaturgical reason for this was to summon and break expectations, drawing attention to the fictional and the actual and the black box itself. Clearly and vaguely hinting towards the realms where we are going. At this moment the broken “marble” pillar is clearly the main element of scenography.

Note, overtone singing is an indigenous practice, with plenty cultural and geographical variations of technique and meaning.

Scene 2, *pulling curtains*

A new beginning, the actor now starts revealing the stage, pulling as much as possible the curtains away, only the one in the middle remains creating a slice of backstage,

they make some adjustments to the props and turn on the lamps that were not already on. Through the speakers we hear a sort of poem read by a digitally distorted voice.

“The most beautiful thing I have ever heard is the voice message you recorded. Your eyes carefully tracing the line. The sound of the dishwasher. The ticking of the clock. The ebb and the sway. I thought I heard distant thunder. Two times three. Words of multiplication mean nothing without matter. “Beavers don’t recognise the perceptual barriers and boundaries that humans often use to divide, order and classify.” Beavers start construction by diverting the stream to lessen the water's flow pressure.

Branches and logs are then driven into the mud of the stream bed to form a base.

Always there ready to be noticed. The beaver’s dam, the heavy boots, the binocular vision, the grasping-hand, flat teeth, reverie, grief, mourning, string, the capacity of psychological violence, opposable thumbs. Clear Vision. Clear vision in the normal eye results from light rays passing through the cornea, pupil and lens, and focusing directly on the retina. Myopia (nearsightedness). Hyperopia (farsightedness).

Astigmatism. The surface of the cornea or lens is not spherical, causing your eyes to focus at two separate points instead of one. This can cause eye strain, discomfort, headaches, blurred/distorted eyesight, night vision problems and more. We can easily treat astigmatism with proper contacts or eyewear. I hope there is a lot of contact otherwise this might all just be a wet dream, a bright light, warm tender heartedness.

There are four types of shadow regions: umbra (U), inner penumbra (P2), outer penumbra (P1), full light (L). Humans control lack of clarity by giving it names. Umbra, fog of war, defence, we couldn’t have known, "the state of ignorance in which commanders frequently find themselves as regards the real strength and position, not only of their foes, but also of their friends”. A common shaking, a common vision, myopic, hyperopic, astigmatic, the strength of friends.”

From behind the slice of the remaining curtain (which is lit in a way that large shadows of the actor is cast on the wall when they pass or inhabit that space) they throw out a number of pingpong balls across the stage. A bit like a lame firework. The balls bounce around until they settle. The landscape that has appeared now has too many main elements, each one with potentially clear but also very different proposals as to what fictional realm this stage is suggesting. It’s hard to read time

and place. The text is quite beautiful but similarly hard to follow. When the poem ends, the actor is behind the curtain.

My aim in this scene was to further establish the idea of optics, perception and position, while also at the same time shake a “common” way of reading the theatre. Most of the different elements of the scenography do reference whiteness, some more than others, and also on different scales and in different temporalities. Since I was setting the stage for the revolution, I had arrived at the conclusion that the only revolution I could attempt from my position was the unraveling of the whiteness which performs in the black box and the whiteness which performs through me. This meant a warp of perception and embodiment. While it was my main objective to achieve this in myself, it is a relational task so I wanted to make it accessible (although I knew it would be nearly impossible to follow). I wanted to appreciate the audience’s presence and attention. I needed them but I didn't want to use them. I wanted to be able to keep them with me. In order to do that I had to invite them to surrender the desire to make sense in a way, while holding on to their curiosity and ability to resonate. This is part of the reason why I felt like I didn't want to make just one clear gesture to the topic. The other reason was that that is not how in/visibility and optics of whiteness work. Rather I had to make it confusing, since the temporality I was working with is never and always and also right now and, the place is nowhere, everywhere and also right here.

I was still holding on to a traditional dramaturgy in a way that this is the moment that we get the information we need to enter the performance. The gesture to pull away the curtains was an attempt to stick to familiar theatre, and to start building the trust that although I was pulling out the carpet, I knew what I was doing, I knew this place and I was going to be there for it.

Scene 3, *small talk*

The comic relief, finally! Suddenly it's theatre, something safe, a surprising but recognizable character enters, the actor is acting, some definition of the fictional situation, buying marble, bad jokes, good vibes.

But something is increasing off about this, after a while we kind of just need them to leave. And they do, sort of fade their way out.

Dramaturgical dilemma: We are coming from something quite unclear, maybe it is nice, maybe it's annoying. Up until now the Actor has been present but the room has been the centre of (their) attention. So we need a clear shift. Yes. We are still and also in the theatre. I got you. Stay with me. But let's see through it. I write more about CARBONARA in the third chapter.

Scene 4, *the end of the postmodern*

So now what? From the shadows we understand there is a change of costume. Okay, a new beginning. A person with a faux blue fur hat enters holding a white tarp. They start moving with the tarp, into the tarp onto the floor. It's an abstract material performance, they get frustrated, they get angry. They try to say some lines, it doesn't work, they give up, they try again. They roll around in this. But finally with a huge effort they manage to deliver the entire line "*VAR OCH EN STÅR ENSAM PÅ JORDENS HJÄRTA, GENOMBORRAD AV EN SOLSTRÅLE, OCH PLÖTSLIGT ÄR DET AFTON!*" This doesn't really go anywhere either. The actor finds a way out of the hat and the tarp leaves them as the character on the floor.

Dramaturgical dilemmas: We are beginning to create a rhythm. Where these characters appear in succession on the same stage but treat it like they would be in a different performance. There is a proposal but it's not taking root. Something is wrong. That seems to be the point. The actor's way in and out of the characters is increasingly visible, and they are more of a steady presence. Other than that, the only thing that seems reliable is that nothing is reliable.

Scene 5, *light and reflections*

Spotlights appear on the floor. The actor(?) uses the mirrors and the water to reflect the light in different ways across the room.

Dramaturgical dilemmas: The room is still important. We are working through perspective, materialities, touch and attention.

Scene 6, *point of no return*

After a while they are ready and they start to speak to the audience, they have little cards in their pocket to help them through a quite disorganised speech. This speech was not scripted, some of these things, marked in () were not clearly spoken on stage, some things were spoken that are not in this text. i have edited the notes from the cards here to somewhat a readable form. The main points are underlined.

So, I want to talk about points of no return. I hadn't actually thought about this before writing this speech, but this terminology comes from military history, and aviation. It is like the moment when the airplane has flown so far that the fuel in the tank won't be enough to come back anymore. So it's like half way.

I realised that there are actually plenty of expressions that refer to the military, like in common language, burning bridges etc. impossible, unsafe or impractical to return. In a dramaturgical sense it is the moment right when the protagonist arrives in a position from which a choice has to be made. Often a commitment to a right or a wrong.

Rather than thinking about military strategy, I thought about falling in love. Like hearing resonance in the heart. A cellular choice about letting something or someone close, something that will change life as you feel or understand it or the moment you realise that regardless of the choice one makes it defines your position to the world. To learn something. To let something close. To meet with an unknown self.

It's about that right? To love is to change? Change as a phenomenon is inevitable. Love as a phenomenon is inevitable too. Love is also a choice. Of gaze, of perspective, in order to have a stance, a gaze, a position, a perspective one needs to have a body. (The actor is a porous dreambody. A sum of projections and performativities directly and indirectly acting within and upon the skin.)

Pivotal

Tipping points

Time matters here I imagine

Indifference would be an opposition to recognising points of no return.

It is like the normative state to be within a range of general indifference, only so upset or excited that it can be fixed with a smoothie or a protein shake depending on what bathroom you're not allowed in.

But what happens if you're indifferent to the normative?

The whole concept of norm is a generalisation, categorising according to some criteria. In order to accumulate power. This practice is, as we are well aware of by now, historically and ongoingly white imperialism.

The category of norm however is strangely undefined, it is defined rather by what it is not than what it is.

But could it be that the norm is that what can afford/can hide behind or linger in indifference. (Those who have time to make an argument to avoid responsibility while the house is on fire. But I think by now everyone who identifies with and wants to understand themselves as a protagonist is on that map. It creates a tear, coredeep in those who until now have enjoyed the privilege of opacity. An existential need to take a stand and hold your ground, perhaps.)

Dramaturgical dilemmas: This speech does mainly two things, one of which has to do with the way it's delivered. Because I drop it here, the acting. I am trying to speak from inside the stage directly to the audience, as myself, an actual person som förvisso har skapat situationen, som iklätt sig rollen som regissör, koreograf, scentekniker, dramaturg, scenograf, ljud-, ljus-, kostymdesigner och skådespelare. Det vill säga som den som är ansvarig för allt detta. Trying to think an unfinished thought together. As a proposal, it's convinced and full of doubt at the same time.

This speech and that choice of stage is right in the middle of the performance and becomes in itself a point of no return, or a key hole, big enough to pass through, as the landscape of the fourth wall is allowed to expand and become the theatre. Or a closet to come out of, or to enter a fable of peace and war.

If we think of gazes and perceptions as light, this scene is as messy in terms of that as the reflections in the mirror nobody is looking at.

My dad was in the audience in one of the performances and told me afterwards how uncanny and heart wrenching it had been for him to watch this scene. I was a bit surprised by this reaction, but he explained that he had seen his child in front of him, struggling with a thought and that he had wanted to help me. To think it through with me, which, I mean, I kind of wish he would have, but he didn't say anything. The frustration came from a sense of held back desire to enter the stage, and in that desire, the relationships between performer and audience collided with my dad's and my specific relationship as both people and parent and child, and as this comes into play, it partly defines the landscape of the fourth wall. It also points to the fact that what it means to act or perform is rather an assembly of cultural and historical attachments to the stage and to the situation of the black box rather than to the performance itself.

Scene 7, *table tennis commentary*

Towards the end they start to dress up in the costume of the first character we saw. This character then starts playing a quite reckless game of table tennis with themselves against the walls and scenography, while also playing with the words from the speech; tipping point, tippy toes, pivoting. They end and take their costume off in the far back of the stage on the staircase that does not lead to anywhere.

Purpose: Repetition, Retrospection.

Scene 8, *white fragility's respiratory failure*

The actor very sternly gathers a rather ugly hat in the shape of a white cloud and a pair of white converse shoes, storms back across the stage to the armchair by the table with the laptop. They get dressed, tie their shoes. The character gives the audience one demanding look before they turn to the screen and read a very angry letter.

Dramaturgical dilemmas: Exorcism. But because of the rhythm which is now established with the changes of characters, we don't need to worry that it will go on forever. And we can expect the next thing to balance out the energy. Still it is possibly quite painful to witness. It has to do with the Aristotelian thought construct.

For a while during my twenties, when I was at a loss of what to do with my life, I began to study philosophy at a university in Stockholm. The whole first semester, which I ended prematurely, was dedicated to the Aristotelian formula of valid arguments. The placement of this in the curriculum suggests that the ground for thinking further is a specific system of logic. As Haraway famously quotes "It matters what thoughts we think thoughts with" (see for example Haraway 2016). Systems which have proven effective to use in order to gain and maintain power and in extension have both generated and been generated through the white imperialist, patriarchal, capitalist western thought construct. Throughout the centuries it has become so deeply embedded in the understanding and hence creation of worlds that it is hard to distinguish it as the construct that it actually is. But what Aristotle did and what the institutionalising of the thinking and language that has stemmed from it still does is classifying knowledge. "Hard facts" are superior to intuitive, empirical, emotional, relational knowledge. In fact knowledge itself is subordinate to the way it is proposed. The power of truth lies in the argument and not necessarily in the true.

Not everything which is known can be proven. Or even explained. But does that make it less known? And as the planet increasingly suffers at the hands of people who have

managed to gain and wield extraordinary and devastating power, with no regard whatsoever to the fundamental dependencies and entanglements of sustainable life or for any living thing, they've accessed this position through centuries through this system of “logic”. What that shows is the deep structural flaw of this framework for thought, is that it takes life for granted and does not recognise care as central for its continuation. It is essentially a system without inherent values, claiming independence in an interdependent environment. This understandable but misplaced desire for separation creates a structure especially vulnerable to violent ideologies. This thinking premieres individual excellence above collective knowledge and well-being.

Scene 9, *surrender and get up, get up and surrender*

The actor puts the laptop down, undresses and takes a moment. They get off the chair and flip the table over. They make the way to the water in the bowl. They wash their face. They lay down. They start to get up through some kind of movement material. It becomes a little dance, they stomp their feet on the ground, a song starts playing half way through, the actor starts turning off all the lights in the room and spinning the table around itself on the floor.

Dramaturgical dilemmas: Realisation and resilience. Grief and hope. We are at the end only to find ourselves at the beginning.

Scene 10, *the end and the beginning*

A spotlight appears on the floor in the orbit of the spinning table, the actor leaves. The song is still playing, the spinning table reflects the light across the otherwise very dark room in waves.

Dramaturgical clarity: After many hours, after many days, after many weeks, after many months.

The final scene of *utan titel** is a small round coffee table. The tabletop is an MDF board with some kind of stainless steel surface which has been polished in small and

round overlapping shapes in a familiar bar table pattern; it's kind of an optical illusion and highly reflective. The foot is a cone shaped in metal, attached to the table top in the middle and ending in the circular shape, which the table then stands on. The diameter of the bottom circle is smaller than the diameter of the table top. Which means that when the table is tipped over it's like a smaller and a bigger wheel on a tilted axle. Which sets the table to orbit itself when put in motion. So I put the table to spin like that. And turn off all the lights on the stage. Then a single spotlight appears on the table's orbit. So once every lap the table washes the stage with light. Like waves. Throwing shadows and memories through the black box.

I wanted to make it sing, the room itself, and the things in it.

Why want things to be out of reach or beyond my control? At some moments rehearsing in the blackbox, wandering and wondering, I thought to myself that I'm inside a giant toolbox. I like toolboxes. But I'm more of a fixer than a maker. How do I fix theater? What's wrong?

There are two main objectives, or potentials: to change theatre and to change through theatre. Is it possible to do these things simultaneously? Is it possible to give transparency and access to the functions of the black box (its system) and maintain its touch, to partly undo its power while emphasising its hidden powers (publikhavet), is it possible to openly share the choices of transformation with the audience? To propose a deepened gaze?

2.3. Potentials of the Black Box and the Performing Body - how layering of material frameworks (or material realms) creates the possibility to warp perception through dramaturgy, in order to set the stage for the embodied performance of a white actor

The term 'black box' like 'point of no return' also has a military reference, the term emerging around different kinds of radio and radar technology during the second world war.

In systems theory the black box is considered fundamental in open system theories. What the black box theory proposes is a system which is best described by the reliable relationship between the input and the outputs, and where the internal functions of the system remain unknown. For a toddler or a cat we could think about a door as a black box system. Applying pressure in a specific way (input) opens the door or closes it (output), our first interactions with doors and learning how to operate them has everything to do with what they do and not how they do it. AI is another great example. (Petrick 2020)

What could be claimed here is that every system is a black box system, since it is impossible to have absolute knowledge about how anything works. But what is perhaps more interesting to think about is what part the observer plays in all this. And what changes with the question and how does the question change depending on who is asking it? It might be just anecdotal how these terms correlate in this way, but still there is definitely something that resonates also with the understanding stage.

A closed system with clear boundaries. A translation, a transition, a transformation, (a lot of trans). In this operation what is the role of the actor? Are they a membrane, is the process like osmosis, what are the directions of the input and the output really and who gives it? Every piece has its logic and its audience contract.

Which lead me to representations and the naming of things:

To make something appear or transform on a stage one simply has to name it. If you for example claim that a paper cup is gay, then that paper cup is gay, and what happens with it or around it, in relation to it will also in the audience's mind happen to the audience's personal reference to what or whom is gay. And partly it will be true that the papercup is gay even though it's simultaneously true that papercups don't have sexual preferences. One part of the silent contract of theatre is that the audience give what is claimed on the stage the benefit of the doubt, and allow themselves to enter into an imaginary realm.

The spectator paints the stage with their eyes, it smoothens or fills in the gaps, it's also sensitive to glitches or disruptions, since its working, in fact simultaneously with making the piece.

The work of making a performance revolves to a great extent about directing the focus of the gaze. How to be gentle and generous in this endeavour?

Though there is a hegemony of the eye, and also about logic and comprehension at which levels of body and perception does the dramaturgy play out? In *utan titel**, which was like a collage or a poem, a fragmented totality that did not provide the comfort of predictable linearity, as every scene introduced a new character or aspect, and the piece was an investigation of dimensions of the space, I was working with at least three different dramaturgies (or rhythms) on top of each other. I held this stack of potential dramaturgies against the backdrop of my intuitive imagination of the most generic/neutral/normative audience contract, basically like beginning: introduction, establishment; middle-complication, transformation; end: resolution.

Because I wanted to make a piece where the audience would be able to be lost and not lost at the same time I imagined it like this; I wanted to create the condition for the audience to be comfortably lost in the overall connection of things, by easily being able

to answer the question, what is happening right now? at any given moment of the performance.

This meant that when I broke something in this imagined “neutral” audience contract, I had to try to propose to replace it with another material or gesture. I took away some things and I owed some things. The impersonations of invisible whiteness that appeared on the stage was a result of this commitment to:

- make the black box appear as a material space
- be transparent about how it operates with and through, perception, from the assumption of its position as neutrality/void
- not over nor underestimate my position
- stay in connection to myself and to the audience
- negotiate the dramaturgy as described above.

AND (let’s not forget the actual point of no return here):

- follow through with the task of resolving the ways in which my own internalised whiteness kept me from embodying myself. In order to practice solidarity, and resistance through connection.

Which I will now, in depth, proceed to explore in the next chapter.

3. Whiteness and the loss of body - whiteness and invisibility

If we assume the lingering presence of the common notion of the black box as a place that could be anywhere and the white body as a body that can be anything, how do I work with that as a white performer?

One of the major biases of an imperialistic framework of being is that the white body is the primary source (of experience?) granted the rights of observer, the right to neutrality as well as judgment. Although and most likely to some extent due to the negative (as in reversed) definition of whiteness, emphasis has historically gone into wrongfully defining “the other”, ultimately to instill the multidimensional fear that the governance of capitalism relies on. “Whiteness thus becomes particularly visible to those who are not part of it, that is, to people radicalised as non-white. Or, as Audre Lorde (1984) phrases it, the production of whiteness works by assigning race and ethnicity to others, and those ‘others’ become aware of whiteness as well as their own otherness’..”

(Andreassen et al 2023, 10)

I grew up in a white nuclear family the 90’s in Stockholm in a context of well educated and kind people who always voted left, considered themselves humanists and good people who believed in equal rights and solidarity. They were artists, cultural workers, teachers, architects, graphic designers, doctors. It wasn’t about economic capital as much as cultural. Although there was generational access to Sweden in form of properties. If it hadn’t been for my grandmother, who fled the dictatorship in Argentina and met my grandfather just around the time I was born, and her children, my aunt and uncles who became an integral part of our family and were very important to me, there wouldn’t have been very many people around me at that time who didn’t have the privilege of opacity. I grew up with lots of good values, and first hand stories, from the people whom I loved, and chose to raise me. The different consequences of various oppressions are in some form lived realities at every branch of my family. Perhaps

because of my place of belonging and closeness to this group, as their pain and love and resilience resonated through me profoundly, made me also oblivious to the fact that my experience of what it means to be human should and could neither then or now be considered a universal experience. My upbringing as a white kid in Stockholm in the 90's is full of contradictions and gaps.

In the introduction of *The Routledge International Handbook of New Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* which is titled "Introduction: Writing a Handbook on critical race and whiteness theory in the time of Black Lives Matter and anti-racism backlash" the authors Rikke Andreassen, Suvi Keskinen, Catrin Lundström and Shirley Anne Tate:

Many countries in continental Europe, for example Sweden, Germany and France, embrace color blindness in the sense that "race has no 'meaning'" to these countries anymore (Beaman and Petts 2019, 4). Color-blindness is here "a cherished ideal—something aspirational and worth actively claiming as a central part of one's identity and politics" (Burke 2017, 859). Many countries in continental Europe are thus both anti-racial, by rejecting the use of the word race, and "non-racial" in the sense that they deny "the reality of race" (Beaman and Petts 2019, 4). "We will not tolerate racism' [...] quickly becomes 'We cannot speak the language of race'. This is a coded way of saying 'We cannot speak of race'" (Goldberg 2006, 362). In Sweden and Finland, for example, there are no official statistics available beyond country of birth, meaning that the situation for non-white minorities is not covered or identified, thus maintaining racial ignorance and reproducing the idea that racial and ethnic categories have no implications for society (Hübinette & Lundström 2011, Hübinette & Mählek 2015)." (2023, 18)

This lack of language in the nordics further has to do with the Swedish involvement in eugenics and taxonomy. "François Bernier was the first to present an idea of different races already in the 1680s. Yet, it was the Swedish botanist, zoologist, and physician, Carl von Linnæus' racial taxonomy that had the greatest impact for the idea of different races, as they continue to have an impact for the present." (Andreassen et al 2023, 5)

Here follows an extensive quote from this handbook because I believe it provides the contextual description of the society in which members of my own family understood themselves and made their choices. This matters because I know I come from a lineage of solidarity so I need to understand how my elders' choices of goodness belonged in their time and place. Because my choices of goodness rests on the foundations of the goodness they taught me. And this perspective reveals how I need to understand the glitches in that goodness:

Researchers have shown how racists and antiracists share meanings of race that reproduce hegemonic whiteness in terms of white perspectives and white privileges, as part of the white majority population (Hughey 2012). Hübinette and Lundström (2014) argue that the period of “white solidarity” in Sweden – involving the construction of the Swedish nation as the most tolerant, anti-racist and progressive in the world – was not fundamentally different from the previous period of “white purity”, which was built on eugenics and scientific race thinking. This makes it possible to talk about a shift from one whiteness regime to another type of hegemonic whiteness. The argument by Hübinette and Lundström is shared by Gloria Wekker's in her study of Dutch whiteness and the disidentification with the image of the Netherlands as an old colonial power. In her book *White innocence: paradoxes of colonialism and race* (2016), Wekker identifies a form of white innocence that she believes characterises Dutch whiteness – an innocence that strives to liberate itself from a colonial past. This interpretation can be extended to cover also the Swedish case, and its moving from the former period of race science and eugenics to a national self-image as antiracist and tolerant country.

These arguments are built on the idea that there are interconnections between the “good” (anti-racist) whiteness and the pure (“racist”) whiteness despite their diametrically different expressions - in that they emanate from a similar superior position of whiteness. Shannon Sullivan (2014) argues that such disidentification with and distancing from the morally ‘bad’ white racists is a core part of the construction of the good, white (middle-class) anti-racist. (Andreassen et al 2023, 19-20)

The writers of the handbook claim that In this regard, critical studies on race and whiteness provide the language of what has been silenced in official color-blind discourses. (Andreassen et al 2023, 19) As the scholars of CRT and critical whiteness studies suggest “that in order to move beyond white supremacy and innocence, Sullivan (2014, 162) argues that white middle class people have to clean up their “unhealthy crap” and move away from “the abjection of white trash, the othering of white ancestors, the distancing strategy of color-blindness, and the dominance of white guilt, shame, and betrayal”, and instead develop “a critical form of self-love that helps transform whiteness”. (Andreassen et al 2023, 20)

3.1. Retrospective colour blindness

I went to high school in a segregated area in the outskirts of Stockholm, at the end of the red metroline. It is, and was, the only high school in Sweden with circus training as part of the curriculum. We spent half of the time in Cirkus Cirkör’s training space in Alby. The high school itself was in Hallunda, a short bus ride away. I would estimate that at least around 80% of the students in the school, which for the most part was an underfunded ordinary high school, were people of colour, first or second generation immigrants. The school also had a few specialized programmes: circus, stage technique, and horseback riding (all collaborations with local organisations that provided the facilities and teaching), and in these classes the same number was at most 5%. Very few, if any, were from the neighbourhood. Alby and Hallunda and most of the stops past Midsommarkransen on the red metroline, were built more or less all at once during the 60s and 70s as part of Stockholm City’s housing project “the million program”.

We were a bubble of white kids in a predominantly brown neighbourhood. Cirkus Cirkör had their facilities and headquarters in Alby most likely for economic and practical reasons. A big part of their operations was weekly training for kids. But even then there were next to no local kids in the groups. Neither in the highschool programme, nor in Cirkuspiloterna (later DOCH). All of us shared the same space. What I mean to say is that Cirkör pulled a lot of people to Alby from elsewhere, and

many also made their homes there. It was a peaceful and polite arrangement but still a separated coexistence. It was as if we were part of the same local society but at the same time we didn't really have access to each other.

The high school had made an arrangement for accommodation for those of the students who had to move from elsewhere to attend the circus programme. There were a handful of 4-5 room apartments that housed more or less trashy communities of teens. We had parties almost every weekend. We did take a lot of care. But from the outside it probably didn't look that way. We must have been louder than we thought we were, and when a neighbour came knocking on the door, it was almost always a white older person. Not the parents from brown families with small children.

During my five years of more or less daily life in Alby, I had only one openly hostile encounter.

Me and many of my peers commuted from other parts of Stockholm. It was around 50 minutes on the metro from where I got on the train. During rush hour it was often packed. When we were many on the same train we had the habit of sitting on the floor in the accordion part. As a pack of white teens we were sometimes loud and oblivious and took a lot of space, but we were weirdos and I think not particularly intimidating, our culture was also to be friendly and helpful to people. In our minds we were giving up seats by sitting on the floor. This early Friday evening. A small group of racialised teens, our own age, walked in between us. My best friend, who sat next to me, tried to pull her leg out of the way. Then one of the girls suddenly bent down with a fierce look on her face at what felt like an inch from ours. She called us out, I can't remember exactly what she said or how much sense it made but she made it perfectly clear that sitting on the floor was the wrong thing to do. We all got more or less startled and apologised and meant it, although we didn't understand exactly what we had done. I think maybe she was surprised by the way we responded, or maybe not, but she raised her hand as if to slap my friend in the face. But my friend is fierce too and stronger than most. And I could feel her body instantaneously get charged and tense. Jaws clenched, eyes darkened, but the message she conveyed was defiance; you can do it, but I won't. I can but I won't. They stared each other straight in the eyes in this position. Then for a

flicker of a second something else moved through this girl's eyes, and somehow they let go of the contact and the girls kept moving through the train, her friends laughing. The stare is a heightened moment in my memory.

What actually happened there? Of course I neither can nor want to make any presumptions of this person's intentions or reasons for doing what she did in my memory. I have no way of saying. It could be about how people perceived us, me and my friends, from the outside during those years. But what I do know is that we as a group grew up in Alby because that was where the circus happened to be, and within the seclusion of that space, with the intimacy of that as our common, we created norms and culture and social codes that people outside of that space didn't have access to. We were minding our own business and did our best to take care of each other. We did see and understand the inequalities of our immediate surroundings to quite a good extent. But as a body of a group we didn't understand how to be in contact with that. We behaved as if it was our right to be "as we were". No one's parents lived in Alby. We roamed around someone else's parents' backyard. We had lots of privilege, and little to lose. And people in Alby also let us be what we were. At a distance, I had very few relationships or longer or deeper interactions with people outside of the circus community.

This young girl on the train was the only one, who I remember, that clearly told us no. And we behaved as if we were nice and innocent, and we were, but we were also ignorant and disrespectful, walking evidence of an unjust societal situation, protected by the invisible shield of white privilege, and with the underserved right to the narrative.

In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed explains what was happening. "Whiteness is only invisible to those who inhabit it. To those who don't, the power of whiteness is maintained by being seen; we see it everywhere, in the casualness of white bodies in spaces, crowded in parks, meetings, in white bodies that are displayed in films and advertisements, in white laws that talk about white experiences, in ideas of the family made up of clean white bodies. I see those bodies as white, not human." (Ahmed 2004, 14)

Her story is missing from this page. It's in the loud silence of the words I never heard her speak. In their absence I'm writing mine but not as a testimony of what happened in the situation. It is for a different reason. I want to talk about how to listen and how to hear.

They are the little moments throughout my life of felt friction, where my whiteness has been visible to an external gaze but not to my own. When oppression has worked through my body, without me realising it. When I have acted from assumed equality without understanding the context. When I was right and/but fundamentally wrong at the same time. So I'm looking for a deeper thing than understanding power and oppression cognitively, I'm looking for an embodied understanding of myself also because my body is an integral part of my profession. The politics and performativity of my body changes in relation to the context and is never just one thing. Sometimes I'm not in a position of power, but I'm always white. To identify with oppression can cause a kind of paralysis. As Alfred J. López puts it, white guilt has further “been the prevalent condition blocking postcolonial studies from any careful examination of precisely *how* whiteness has managed all the damage it has inflicted on its others and what other forms a postcolonial whiteness might take” (referenced in Andreassen, Keskinen, and Tate, 2003, 20, italics in original).

So I need to know that oppressive powers can operate through my body, and still identify with my body. Whiteness, as an oppressive power that can continue to define who and what cannot be considered the norm or human in order to justify injustice, can do that partly because of its own vagueness and opacity. But people are actually neither vague nor opaque regardless of their proximity to whiteness. They are specific, they have local belonging, and whiteness (as part of it undoing?) can be defined and understood as something specific. This process of taking shape needs to be precise about the fact that making oneself visible to oneself is not the same thing as undoing one's privilege of opacity. In order to get this shape even remotely close to the real thing white people can never define whiteness alone.

The notion of whiteness as an ‘invisible’ norm that constantly defines difference, explains why the history of race and whiteness and critical studies of these are intertwined, and further the importance to examine this normative structure from the perspective of those who have experiences of being excluded from it, as “not” being. To not be white “is to inhabit the negative: it is to be ‘not’ . The pressure of this ‘not’ is another way of describing the social and existential realities of racism.” (Ahmed 2007, 161; see also Lorde 1984). (Andreassen et al 2023, 10)

However it is a first step to get to know yourself through the reflection of others. Distinction and recognition of difference within this bizarre category has the potential to cognitively undo some of its power, and change the outlook to shift positions, enable responsibility and agency.

Please note that the memory I’ve shared here is a recollection from a certain perspective. In order to tell about my own neglect or inability to understand myself in relation to my context, as well as a personal and collective tendency to fabricate innocence as a consequence of internalised and structural racism, and colorblindness. It’s a personal rather than factual account. It contains estimations and assumptions and fragments of potential fiction, in order to paint a picture.

In no way am I here looking to criticise Cirkus Cirkörs work in Alby, neither the work of my high school. It is very likely that the adults in the responsible positions representing those two places at time, were both frustrated with and actively engaged in supporting our collective behaviour towards a more connected place. Further more, although I talk about a ‘we’ it is a ‘we’ from my perspective. A ‘we’ which can not be described as homogenous group. I’m certain that we all had different ranges of awarenesses and capacities, reflections and experiences in regards to this. Also I myself could talk about this time in a range of ways. The reason for this narrative is that I’m

returning to and exploring a dissonance in my perception that I at the time didn't have the ability or resources to deal with, only to notice.

Every institution and context can be criticised, and should be evaluated especially in regards to these topics. I am not looking to do that here in relation to the (very transnational and diverse) contemporary circus community, on the contrary I am very grateful to have it as a part of my history, and especially for all the ways in which it keeps practicing community. If anything it is my own body that represents the institution in this chapter. And it is painful to revisit these things like this, of course it is, it is bound to be. From a position of whiteness this pain could be considered optional, this is precisely one of the ways in which whiteness as opacity is a privilege.

In regards to the story on the train. The keys for me to understand it has been to pay attention to how the powers that operated around us and through us directed what happened. It has been helpful to think about it as a scene with multidimensional and simultaneous "stages". To keep in mind the audience, - all the people around us, their relationships to us, their gazes, their judgements. Who was a person, who was representation? Who stood to lose something? What choices were made? Who made them? And that in the middle of all of this it was in this little destiny of brief but very real contact, that negotiated all of this and it was also the place where it was resolved.

3.2. Glitches in Goodness

I believe it's safe to say that the optics of racism has caused incredible damage to perception and therefore cognition on a massive scale. Thus the white performer's undisputed presence in the place where they're expected to be, the black box, by extension creates an invisible othering that extends beyond the black box, and this othering of people is exactly the thing that justifies oppression.

A universal gaze is, apart from being physically impossible for any one human being to be in possession of, a hollowing gaze. It renders the observed to its surface and it by definition separates the observer from their own body. This is not a place of interaction but of projection. Especially when this one-sided outlook on the world is gatekeeping and defining norms. Connections and the need for contact, whether we deny it or not, no matter where in the scale of existence we look, cells or stars, and especially if we look at ourselves, is central on every level of our being. It requires a leveled relationship of one's body to its surroundings. This is impossible from a superior position. Looking from above can never amount to being truly part of. No matter how good the intentions. The reality of whiteness is an echo chamber, a solitary confinement. A void where something is supposed to be. The false pretence of neutrality is dangerous because neutrality requires a position of superiority and superiority makes it impossible to be in contact because it forces a gaze that looks down on a situation without the recognition of its own dynamic.

I talk about these things of perception and cognition and self-recognition, which are highflying concepts of thinking, in generalised terms. It is in no way to be compared to the actual physical and psychological violence afflicted on people and the earth by colonialism, white supremacy and structural racism.

A point of no return is about learning something that puts you in a position to alter course. It's the knowledge that you will live with the outcomes regardless of the choice, so you have to make one. A point of no return is listening to something so that through hearing it you face the situation of a conscious choice. To not choose is also a choice. It is the realisation of responsibility, of agency or the lack of it, and it calls to reason and judgement. However, I also believe, and maybe more importantly so, it calls to a deeper felt inner knowledge that has to do with continuum, connectedness, dependencies, and meaning. Reason and judgment have no value in itself. They are concepts that govern western thought through a presumed neutrality, invisible whiteness. They serve on a larger scale to maintain power in a system of oppression and injustice. This is a deception which can be more than felt and seen in outspoken fascist politics. This

system of power does not need to take responsibility because of its tremendous machinery of gaslighting. So the point of no return is this: to allow the deception, to waver, or to decide to recognise it.

THERE ARE MANY MEMORIES OF BEING SPARED OF SOMEONE'S PAIN AS A CHILD

I COULD TELL MY SORROWS BUT THEY COULDN'T ME TELL THEIRS

In order to make conscious choices in relation to any material I need to learn specifically about myself as a white body. I have to look retrospectively at the very fundamentals of my idea of self, my inability to know in an embodied way what being white means, what this has done to me personally. The point is not to center white perspective or experience in a general discussion about injustice. But for me personally it is central because I am white, and in order for me to make work that resonates towards real justice and real peace, from this moment in time I, but I also really mean we, as white actor(s) need to be able to embody whiteness as visibility to our own perception of self. And understand that this means something more than a cognitive understanding of power structures and representations on or off stage.

Through this process I found that it is possible to make practises and methods for the theatre that generate: material for the stage, materiality for the black box, embodiment integrity and agency for the actor, visibility for whiteness, training for perception, access for the audience, play for the dramaturg, pleasure, pain and self-reflection for the director. From the terrifying, but also straight forward gesture of committing to with and through an intimately impossible dilemma. And here we are at the beginning of the im/possibility of the in/visibility.

I encourage especially visibly white makers to try and fail at this task. And make your own ways through it. Because it seems from this point right now, that the only thing that's missing now in order to begin the historical repairs of the stage in order to set it for a future, that will need us to resonate this now, is the collective commitment of those who have a choice to make. However small. We need to be this solidarity. We need to put our bodies in the right places. We need to learn what that means, we need to practice how to do that.

3.3. Impersonations of whiteness

In *utan titel** I set out to investigate whiteness, from the painful places in me where my awareness of my whiteness disembodies me. I eventually arrived at a set of impersonations and perceptions that could be described as symptomatic of whiteness, each unbearable in their own way. In my mind their suffering stems from their shared a temporal reality past the point of no return which they all deal with in a different way. My prompt as direction for this was this note to myself, “The characters are breaking because they reached the point of no return and they missed it.” Next, I will describe in detail each of these characters. Next to their performative relationship to the fourth wall.

CARBONARA performs in a selectively fictional realm and speaks directly to the audience as part of the fiction. He acknowledges the audience's presence as people and the situation of meeting them, but denies the landscape of the stage and the silent contracts of the theatre, which creates a specific awkwardness around his presence.

CARBONARA, the tourist, “the only good vibes white”, comfortably enjoying his privilege. A well meaning entertainer with nothing important to say, he does not want to be involved in anything but his immediate context. He has a tendency to slip provocative jokes or statements in order to create a map with which he then safely can navigate around responsibility. Carbonara lacks integrity and though he would never

admit it, he wants to be deceived and swallows almost whatever lets him perceive himself and make others perceive him as innocent, which unfortunately gives him the potential of accidentally getting involved in extremism. In a way he has a healthy idea of the range of his capacity. He likes it best in shallow waters. Life was easier before. He has a good heart, but instinctively avoids looking at what he knows is there. The splinter in his soul is increasingly filling him with a silent panic.

SOPAN, “the struggle with self-pity white”, succumbs to and is consumed by the incompatibility of their desired material and their position. Afflicted by self-awareness they hopelessly insist on trying to embody a glacier and deliver the most beautiful words of a poem. But as it becomes clear (at least for themselves) that their connotations crumble, their language turns to ashes in their mouth. SOPAN intends to perform a contemporary dance score of transforming with a white tarp into a requiem for a glacier. However, it quickly dawns on them that they are a suffering white actor rolling around in the only available shelter after the endless bombing of someone else's ancestral land.

Desperate and with no way out, not able to make any sense, they swing unhinged between performance and the dissociating breakdown of a self-aware martyr. Their relation to the stage is destruction and remorse. They let everybody have it as the fourth wall disintegrates around them and implodes inside them turning SOPAN into a place of conflicting gazes.

THE MAKER: the appearance of THE MAKER was a different kind of experiment in terms of the stage. I tried to speak directly as my personal self to the audience as the people they were, taking our personal relationships or non-existent relationships into account. I acted from the stage but fully in the nonfictional dimensions of the situation. Not unsurprisingly, this led to a wide range of interpretations of what was going on according to the personal accounts that I heard afterwards. Interestingly it also seemed the fourth wall appeared inside of the audience, which created a performer out of me regardless. I could feel it and I allowed it to happen. This became an interesting state of

in/visibility as I insisted on the choice of not performing but just trying to communicate unfinished, but important thoughts.

TIPPY TOES might be the sad clown of the performance (or white history unravelling). They work as an outside gaze from within the performance. I thought about TIPPY TOES as visiting from a distant future far enough from all of this in order to fuck around with it and reflect some things back. For example, they tiptoe around SOPAN, who remains on the stage represented by the tarp, and comment on their presence with THE MAKER's words. They give little diffuse clues to the piece. They first appear in the prologue of the piece singing overtones while hiding in a roll of paper. They ask the audience if they could hear the overtones but leave it at that. They then reappear after THE MAKER, echoing the words "tipping point", "tippy toes", while pivoting and playing a very precarious game of table tennis against the scenography with the scattered ping pong balls. A certain loneliness surrounds them. In terms of the stage and the fourth wall, I am not sure where they reside. It is almost like they have no sense of self or are beyond it.

ANGRY LETTER: "second wave liberal feminist all lives matter whiteness" dressed in a cloud hat and white converse shoes, holding up a laptop to her face, she reads an excruciatingly long letter, in one and the same utterly uncomfortable pitch of demonstrative suffering, expressing how unfairly she is being treated and how unacceptable that is. She tells about how she does everything and gets nothing. She demands justice. The sentences hold and the arguments are intact but everything is general and abstract and it is impossible to say what she is actually talking about. The beginning of the letter suggests she is talking about this very performance, but quite soon the story derails. The language refers to recognisable claims of speaking truth to power. However, the way it is organised suggests that this is someone who is speaking from a position of significant power but is more comfortable with identifying as a victim. This is the type of white which is oblivious to itself, and refuses introspection. They are specialised in unintentionally causing serious damage and when confronted use their privileges to get away with it.

In terms of the stage, she is sat on the stage but in the very front corner, almost in line with the first row, facing towards the stage. She takes one stern look at the audience, after which she directs her face towards the screen for the rest of the scene.

The Dance of The Worker

The Worker is a silent role that repeatedly appears and arranges the elements on stage in between scenes. They don't speak, but relate through labour. They are codependent to this disaster. Their commentary performs in material gesture and composition. They operate through touch and attention. They know the room and everything in it. They know where the spotlights will appear by reading the scratches in the floor. They know more than anyone knows. They know there is knowledge in the overlooked and neglected and the forgotten. They know transformation is a repeated choice. They know that the invisible gesture also makes a difference.

After undressing the costume of the angry letter, they decisively flip the little round coffee table she was sitting at onto its side and proceed to wash their face in a small tub of water close by. Then they yield to gravity and lay down on the floor facing the ceiling. Then they need to continue and the dance is born from struggling to find the power to get up from the floor. Dropping limbs turn to defiant stomping and a song starts playing from the speakers. The dancing fades out as the worker sets the table spinning around itself and turns off all the lights on the stage one by one until only one tiny spotlight appears in the path of the spinning table. As it passes, it throws the light across the room. The worker has disappeared and the performance ends in the music and the steadily dying motion of the table and the waves of light.

I'm not out to judge these impersonations but to understand them, to make them appear and become tangible, at least to me. Lösryckta, sårbara och inkapabla eller oförmögna att skapa vare sig värld eller mening varken för sig själva eller sin omgivning i deras nuvarande form, där de fladdrar runt på scenen i ruiner av den tomma vitheten.



*Image 1: Sopan.
Photographer: Roosa
Oksaharju.*

My work here, and on the stage, is not to judge because my work is transformation. Judgement creates separation, but transformation requires contact.



Image 2: The Maker.

Image 3: Carbonara.

Image 4. Angry Letter.

Image 5: The Worker.

Photographer: Roosa Oksaharju.



4. End Chapter, thank you for insisting, words of resistance

I keep here revolving around meaning. Or purpose. As austerity politics is effectively defunding (while simultaneously capitalising on) the workforce of marginalised people across the welfare sector and on culture, especially on culture which provides alternatives or criticism. Which ultimately serves to the rise of far-right and fascist ideology. And with full-blown climate collapse, genocide, enormous gaps in wealth and power, the unveiling of the complete fiasco of international law. In the midst of a paradigm shift of journalism and information.

Because next to this are all the people who insist on solidarity and equality and reparations, care and rights for their communities, environments. Who insist on kindness, who insist on peace. Who keep their gaze full of love even though. Who refuse numbness. Those who choose to love. Those who refuse to play the game and win at the expense of others, those who want to rewrite the rules so that winning means that no one loses. Those who play with open cards. Those who insist on respect and trust. Those who try, and keep trying. To speak for and defend those who have less of a voice.

In my peers and myself I have at times observed a wish for right and wrong when it comes to performance. This wish for a binary scale is understandable, especially in times where scarce opportunities face us as we enter the professional field. But the question is then, what are we doing here? Is it art or simply reproduction of commercial interest? Is it creative, is it free? Creativity has to do with disobedience, as I see it the right and wrong has to do with commitment to the practice as if the form would be stable. And when that question is posed I believe the underlying questions are ‘do i have permission?’ and ‘do i belong?’. But who’s permission? And how does one learn to give oneself permission?

I believe the underlying urge is connection. In a world which is turning increasingly disconnected, ironically while becoming more “connected” through technology. This desire is both healthy and relevant. But dependency is layered in shame. Because the governing systems of power are built on the denial of the fact that what humans are is just that, dependent. Shame is a very powerful tool. But it is also true that power profits from the middle class being dysregulated, worried, separated, disconnected, fearful and ashamed. While the problems we are facing are clearly structural and organisational, the disastrous playground of neo liberal market economy is shifting the responsibility onto the individual, regardless whether it's climate change or fitness and personal success. The answer to the question of artistic freedom, in the light of all of this is simply NO. We are not free.

Of course this is especially painfully clear for people of the margins, who insist on or have no other choice but to keep practising freedom, and community through values of care. In my despair I'm tempted to think that our world is built on oppression, the very fabric of every crisis we face, be it austerity politics or whatever is oppressive, but it would be a lie because continuously throughout history there has been resistance, the lineage of those who fight to defend something, is breathtaking. And the power of their lives is transcendent. It is potential, it is hope, its in the embrace of death, in the push of birth, in grief's surrender, in love ecstasy, in the heavenly ordinary, it's in the touch of hands and sounds of voices. It's in the need and desire to share it, to pass it on, remember it, translate it.

Why am I writing this, I'm supposed to write about theatre and acting but. I honestly don't know. Maybe because I need it to be known. That this happened, I saw the beauty and felt the love which is sometimes underneath something else and chose to trust it when it felt impossible. It's a defence speech, a defiance speech, it's the uncompromising insistence. Of the gesture of staying open. At least I tried. Maybe I was just fighting myself. But still I think it was worth it.

Imagine a world where belonging is a given.

4.1 One last repetition

Whiteness is not the only in/visibility that surrounds my body. And I know a thing or two about transformation and ga(y)zes as a gender non-comforming, non-binary person, this knowledge and experience has supported and guided me immensely through this process and I owe it to the stunning thinkers and artists and poets and writers and and all of the communities of people who lived who died who shared their labor their food their meanings and sorrows and knowledge and mistakes despite, in spite of this history of oppression. Some of you, I have the honor of knowing and loving. I know I don't even know a fraction of who the rest of you are or, who you were. Thank you. For intentionally or un intentionally giving me the chance to hear, at least your echo. I tried my best to follow the traces of resonance and friction that you have left in my body. Thank you for letting your love be so loud that it is impossible to ignore. This resonance is what makes a point of no return possible. I believe it is what makes the impossible possible.

I set out to find a way towards you. To find a way to listen through what we have in common while remembering and respecting our differences.

I feel like I increasingly witness how scattered identity politics shooting everywhere with corruptions of the words minorities created and died for, now gains the potential to divide and conquer us. Let us not turn against each other like this. Let's not eat from their hands. Boundaries are good but only if the real work is connection.

Accountability and solidarity is an embodied practice which requires us to look at the ways in which we have agency, however contextual, in order to take responsibility moving forward rather than to be consumed by guilt from the things that have passed.

The Actors profession at the intersections of this vulnerable but powerful; choices are necessary now and informed choices need people who are not afraid to see their own reflection in someone else.

Only as communities will we be able to organise to resist and create alternatives to this abstract aggression. It is the only way. I don't believe our generation can afford to have an opinion about that. This leads me to a very important point. This is not a moral commitment, even if morals can be useful. But they center around the individual and also serve to create superiority. This commitment is towards making oneself ready to work as a community.

Neither is this something i'm claiming that I know how to actually do. At this I fail way more than I succeed. Neither am I looking for the credit that these are not my own thoughts. These are the thoughts I'm not able to properly reference because they come from the lineage of countless people and communities who insist that we are the ones who have to make an impossible world possible.

My gesture here is to find a way to put my body in the right place. Make this responsibility local. And put this paper in the archive of this bloody white institution, full of good people. As so many of you have done before me.

As Sonya Lindfors insists in the lineage of Afro-Futurism, the stage is a place for speculative dreaming. In order for me to be a justified part of my own dream of a future. And the work it takes to get there. The work that needs to happen is to find ground in the present. Specifically for those who are perceived as white the stage might not be the place of dreaming just yet.

I say this to myself: If you find yourself at a position of undeserved structural privilege at the expense of another, when the other chooses to speak you listen, and you listen seriously. And if they don't speak, you listen to the silence. You read between the lines. And let it resonate. And look carefully for your own reflection. But that's only where the work begins. The work is not done until you can feel that they can feel that you hear them. Do what it takes to fill that gap.

Let there be no doubt that I owe this work to those face oppression, and those who've dared to choose.

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