

Abstract

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The present dissertation applies a gender perspective to the practice and methods of Swedish director Suzanne Osten. Its purpose is to study how Osten strives to set gender-specific patterns and conventions in motion within the theatre. In doing so, particular questions are posed about female identity and subjection as they are treated by the director. Taking the actor as the focal point of the director's interest, it delves further into the development of Osten's work in concentrating on the role interpretation of female actors by closely analyzing three of her productions.

Chapter One defines feminist-oriented theatre research along the lines suggested by the gestic critique of Elin Diamond. Furthermore, mimetic identity is discussed with reference to the phenomenological discussions of corporality expressed in the works of the philosopher Sara Heinämaa.

Chapter Two provides Osten's general biographical background and insights into her early work with the free theatre group "Fickteatern". A determined attitude toward a particular, defined audience lent the group's ideological critique a unique dramatic form. By the time Osten arrived at the Stockholm Municipal Theatre in 1971, her involvement in the women's movement contributed to the fact that she paid particular attention to the interpretive efforts of female actors.

In Chapter Three, the production *Jösses flickor! Befrielsen är nära* (1974) is analyzed. By employing the grotesque and the burlesque she exposed fractures in the dramaturgy of the production, whereby the female characters were given free reign to act out their own impulses within the narrative.

The play *I lusthuset* (1988) is analyzed in Chapter Four, where Osten's interest focused on role formation and the social implications of her characters through gender-focused gestic elements. Cross-dressing as a method of direction connected with prescribed elements in the social roles women and men are expected to play and which they do indeed play.

The fifth chapter is based on field studies conducted during the rehearsals of *Besvärliga människor* (1998/99). The analysis reveals an intensified problematization of the gender question, integrated into the staging of the production and interpretive processes of the actors. In her workshops, Osten set identity politics in motion within each individual character and in relation to both the actors and their audience.

In conclusion, this dissertation makes visible the way in which Suzanne Osten works with the entire representational apparatus of the theatre – in relationship to the concrete theatrical machinery and what is being played out on the stage, and in relationship to the more inaccessible and indefinable social and ideological conditions existing between the narrative, the stage and the audience.

Keywords: Suzanne Osten, theatre direction, feminism, gestic criticism, mimesis, power structures, body, meta-fiction, gender, *Jösses flickor! Befrielsen är nära* (*Gosh, girls! Liberation is at hand*), *I lusthuset* (*In the summerhouse*), *Besvärliga människor* (*Difficult people*).