

Towards Coprolalia
Iggy Lond Malmborg

Towards Coprolalia by Iggy Lond Malmberg is a commissioned text based on the lecture he gave at the seminar *Unveiling the dark corners* in the frame of Oslo Internasjonale Teaterfestival 2019.

Iggy Lond Malmberg is a freelance actor and performance maker based in Malmö, Sweden. He trained at the Theatre Academy in Malmö, and has since created pieces that span a wide range of aesthetics and styles, both solo performances and collaborative work. Malmberg's main artistic interest is to use the performance itself as a model where the discourse of the piece can be applied directly. In doing so, he sheds light on the politics of theatre and its hierarchy and patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

Lond Malmberg has presented his pieces *boner* and *Physics and Phantasma* at Black Box teater.

Physics and Phantasma – the piece shown next to the lecture the following text is based upon – is a kind of game of associations. Or, perhaps more correctly it is – following the core of the theatre medium – a game of manipulation, but its method is stemming from association. In this piece I attempt to describe the situation we are in, our past, present and, at some point, an imagined future. It's an interweaving of stories that are interrupted and repeated, with minor changes:

You are sitting down. Your eyes are moving from left to right.

AGAIN

You are holding a book, your eyes are moving over the text on one of its pages

AGAIN

You are holding a book that you got from Black Box Teater in Oslo, you are reading one of its pages. You are sitting down. The text you are reading is italic.

AGAIN

You are standing close to a bookshelf. You are reading a book. You try to keep focused on the words that you are reading, but your mind is wandering. Wandering back to last time in Dortmund, when you were reading a orange book, in the same format

and so on.

When producing material, alone in the rehearsal studios of Tallinn and Malmö, I found myself with a need to utter brutal associations. It was as if I could look at our cultural taboos as a black hole within my consciousness, and recognise my constant avoidance of it, an anti matter that all other phantasies were formed around and in relation to. A place where I don't want to go. Thoughts that I didn't ever want to have and much less describe to others. As my interest with the work as a whole was to map the production of phantasy and the structure of the verb, to fantasize, I had to consider that coprolalial impulse rather seriously.

But how? Is it ever justifiable to describe violent, sexist, or horrific phantasies on stage? Is it even legal?¹ Thinking about these questions meant that I needed to dive into the discourse of censorship and explore the almost 40 years old conflict between the so called sex- positive and -negative feminism, which would later take up quite some stage time in *Physics and Phantasma*. Without going too deeply into a balanced introduction of the different discursive positions (and with the

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1 Simultaneously with the final rehearsal period in Tallinn, the Estonian writer Kaur Kender was facing legal charges with the possibility of up to 3 years in prison for his short novel Untitled 12 describing violent acts on children. He was later found not guilty (of producing child pornography). Similar cases are of course familiar in most countries throughout history.

tranquil greed that you will come and see the piece instead), one can say that the agitators for censorship claim that representation of violent phantasies in themselves are injurious actions; its audience will internalize the images and inevitably turn them into objects of desire.

This viewpoint carries an immanent belief in a consciousness that is pure and innocent. A clean place in which theatre, literature, drawings and movies can flood with – previously absent – dark phantasies. This is an approach that I look at wearing my most sceptical glasses. I am rather of the idea that these unwanted phantasies are constantly present in the hidden corners of our consciousness, playing a dialectical key role in our entire production of language, thoughts and phantasies. Socialization is primarily a process of suppressing unacceptable impulses.

However, the question of whether it is ever justifiable – by artistic means – to drag them into the light remains unresolved.

Whilst working on the piece, I knew for a fact, that if I wanted to approach this discourse or think about these matters at all, if I wanted to create a space where we can think about it together – *I had to do it*. This meant I had to expose my audience to material that touched or transgressed the boundaries of what is ethically acceptable.

So, The show contains a scene that tries to do just that. It exists entirely within language; words are said in a certain order, telling the story of a child,

a pale little boy being raped by an adult. It's told in first person, though – as all phantasy scenes are constructed, according to Judith Butler – it is hard to tell if the subject speaking identifies with the child, or the rapist. The story ends with the boy feeling an ambiguous form of pleasure. He wants and enjoys the trauma.

For the reader who does not know me personally it might be important at this stage of our exploration to point out that I am a very neurotic, anxious and scared little man. Terrified of violence in all its shapes. I am not drawn to this material and stage it with a jittery feeling of excitement. I seek to avoid it, being the person who always looks behind me on the street. I know though that something else, apart from murderers, gay-bashers and rapists, scares me.

Jacques Lacan frames this dubiety in a rather elegant way: phantasy works, in his thinking, as a defence mechanism. The world out there is traumatic, filled with horror, inconsistency and cracks. Phantasy functions as a kind of veil, or a screen that produces a place of apparent safety and consistency. A diabolical mechanism, as the very screen of phantasy will, in the end, be transformed into a playground of horror. If we are exposed to trauma, phantasy is there to obfuscate, to block it out. But, later, it will be the same screen onto which the trauma is repeated again and again, against the conscious will of the subject. It repeats endlessly within us, in a way impossible to hide from.

Furthermore, phantasy constructs its own traumatic scenes and it is the place where I am not only empathise with victims but, against my own judgement and better thinking, can be struck by my ability to identify with the perpetrator. It is a space even worse, even more traumatic than that which it tries to obfuscate.

And this function is evident in my own private fearfulness. When I am throwing that paranoid gaze over my shoulder, the one thing that scares me the most, and that I am trying to hide from (but without success), is the monster within. On the artistic trajectory I was walking, I of course had to face it.

This brings us back to the question of censorship².

The well known classical rhetoric figure of the anti-pornography movement states: "*porn is the theory and rape is the practice.*"

The question is, to whom is this censorship addressed? I can bet my left arm and every precarious artist cent I own that the agitators for censorship do not claim that they themselves are at risk from such exposure. That they, in hearing a certain story, or seeing a certain film, will transform their

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2 In order to protect myself from major misunderstandings, I should probably say that when speaking about censorship I am always referring to material based on phantasy or fictional representation. Child pornography, for example, must be banned and actively fought - as it is a documentation of an actual abuse, with real victims.

desire structure according to its misogynic ideology and thereby go and rape and kill a child thereafter. No, it is directed towards an imaginary other, a weak, primitive group. And it's exactly in the nature of this argumentation where these rhetorics collapse.

Representations, in all mediums, run the risk of producing a culture, in this case a rape culture. But here I think the supporters of censorship and 'obscenity laws' get it totally wrong. I would suggest that what creates rape culture is not the explicit depiction of violence, but the implicit one. Mainstream media, commercials, theatre etc that are built around a heteronormative tension between the sexes, obviously using objectification of women and children as a tool (and portraying the cis-male as a can of testosterone, liberated from any form of emotion or weakness) – they are producing desire based upon power and violent ownership. And that is dangerous.

This is an old discourse, well known to most of us, but it cannot be emphasized strongly enough; this sublimated hatred against women and children, performed through the implicit celebration of sexist violence has an actual fatal effect. I believe that explicit depictions, diving into the fleshy, traumatic aspect of violence does something else. Not always something good, i.e something that could be read instrumentally as producing wealth or enlightenment for the masses, nor are they per se artistically interesting. Perhaps they are only there as antagonism. A response to the never-ending white noise of images of models with

drugged eyes, slightly open mouths, spread legs, thin limbs suggesting a body that has been locked up and owned *im keller* for years. Or of laughing well-washed babies in endless white spaces, stuck in print like prizes in a neo-liberal parenting competition or trophies from hunt – a reaction and attempt to unveil the subtext, to let the stink of blood and excrement steam out of the billboards, magazines and televisions. I do not know, but want to claim with a foolish hint of certainty, that the nature of detailed descriptions of brutality are not celebratory.

One aspect of exposure to violence on stage is that it can have the ability to exorcise. Or even a kind of *Lehrstück* quality. If we lack the experience of torture, war, rape etc how could we ever feel empathy for its victims without a fictional representation to rely upon?

"If we want to grasp sexual violence, we have to be choked, traumatized even by it [...] it is only the taste by the thing itself that efficiently vaccinates us against it," the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek says and snuffles.

Violent phantasies also play a part in an (allow me to call it) symbolic class struggle. Our human – the lingual beings – ability to imagine an attack from below. In a state of oppression and humiliation we can, as a minimal form of survival, bash back, rape back, humiliate back, in our minds.

Whilst writing this, I'm sitting in a yard in Nõmme, Estonia. Behind the fence of the neighbouring garden, a beautiful white German Shepherd

is howling, barking and screaming its desire to get laid (I am told that it's mating season). Its attention is not restricted to genitals on the other side of the fence, but also to cars and kids on kick bikes as possible competitors. Dogs pass by on their leash, fully dominated by their owners, not making a single sound. My neighbouring animal is struggling to its full capacity, but suddenly it collapses down to the ground, silently crawling up into a pile in the shadows; exhausted, humiliated and depressed.

I cannot help but remember Walter Benjamin saying that there is a certain silent sadness in nature. "*If it could speak, she would be mourning.*" Maybe it's exactly the impossibility to put these dark corners, inappropriate thoughts or extreme emotions into language that produces this melancholy.

Animals and plants have no phantasmatic way to handle the horror of being stuck in the killing machine that is nature; they cannot deal with their drives in any other way than forcing their teeth into flesh, are devoured or hide away in shame. They lack the ability to put their dark, unwanted desires into words – to write them down somewhere or even say them out loud on stage.

Certainly the cause of some of our unwanted desires and the humiliation of the oppressed classes are partly to blame on our linguistic ability.

But such is the dialectical being of our language-virus. It is its own symptom and remedy. Few artists are better at working, specifically and concretely, with phantasmatic resistance than the Swedish poet, Johan Jönson, my good friend

and (one of the³) dramaturge(s) of *Physics and Phantasma*, with whom I developed the scene which is the subject of this text.

In 2012, Jönson read a poem at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, in which we follow a worker whose job is to carry stones (just like Sisyfos) for a paving company. He is working in the private gardens of the richest suburbs in Stockholm, and, of course, met by arrogance and superiority by the bourgeoisie families and their kids. At the end of a working day our protagonist uses the toilet in one of the mansions. In there, he ends his visit by rubbing his herpes-infected cock against the family's towels, and the children's towels too.

Symbolic rebellion (without actual effect) is represented at all levels, first of all as the action is purely phantasmatic, just ink on paper or words read out on the National Stage, but also within the story (herpes cannot be transmitted via fabric).

After the reading, an article by the critic Jens Liljestrand was published and a debate blossomed. His claim was that hatred, in any form, can never be celebrated or perhaps even published. His view was that there is too much of that in the world already. (I read the claim as if) The intelligentsia has to stand

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3 Together with Maike Lond Malmborg and Erik Berg; without them I would never have been able to make the piece.

above and never reduce itself to the level of the rabble. Art and culture should act as a role model. A slightly shocking but not uncommon attitude.

In my practice, I generally try to do the opposite; to find aesthetic strategies to identify with the dark side, with the symptom and thereby inject some negativity into this feedback loop.

The dilemma, I would say, for artistic expression that attempts to be a role model, to fully identify with a humanist message, or maybe even to present a cure for the evil, is that they tend to patronize the weak.

The abused, the humiliated, the sick, the poor, the fleeing, the bullied, the mistreated and misunderstood are unceasingly portrayed as something angelic, reduced to something eternally good and thereby dehumanized. It might be that the one whose rights are being violated is actually a dangerous monster with a truly problematic world-view, which does not mean that the person should not be defended.

Moreover, works of this style function foremost as a narcissistic, reactionary machine. When we, myself included, see a performance with a good, empathic message, we like it. It is impossible not to. But what we like is not the good message – we fall in love with ourselves, liking such a piece.

Here we collide with a historic problem of the left. The movement has a tendency to look at itself as fully good; engaging in a cause that provides good for the many reflects back on the

individual and makes the single activist perceive him or herself, his or herself's persona as morally superior, neglecting the fact that we all carry the poison we fight against. This tendency has rapidly accelerated with the emergence of social media. The means of struggle for a better world is reduced to promoting an ethical lifestyle, which means designing one's own profile as the role model; a sin-free, close to holy persona with a pure consciousness freed of destructive drives. The means of creating this character seems to me to go beyond hash-tagging ethically correct commodities; the best way is to find and mark flaws in others and condemn them, thereby raising its own avatar to the next level. This trend of course transgresses the left and is more of an omnipresent belief system. We always have to ask, what does one pointing out the wrongs in someone else's behaviour have to gain, what profit is won in the act of pointing? Is the main objective of condemnation even to fight a behavioural pattern, or rather to gain social capital? Perhaps we should also remember Rainer Werner Fassbinder's claim that: *"Every successful rebellion must start with stabbing one self in the back."*

Continuing in this sphere of thought, I do have to acknowledge hate-speech. Especially online hate-speech. In times of abstract turbo capitalism, where the oppressor is impossible to name, it's not an unreasonable suggestion that online hate-speech is just a substitute for upwards attacks.

A misdirected aggression towards minorities and not rarely towards art spaces. But this is not enough. We have to ask what hate-speech does. What it does to the victim, I think we have either experienced or can imagine. But what is the effect on the speaker?

In one section⁴ of *Physics and Phantasma* I have tried to explore the depths of this phenomenon. The basic idea is to appropriate the gesture of the right-wing and throw it back. Knowing the kind of theatres where the work is presented I assume that the supporters of the right-wing to whom the text is addressed are absent. Which means that, both from stage and the audience are required to imagine an addressee to which they can direct their hate. Quite a lot like how the internet is constructed.

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**IN ORDER FOR THE SHOW TO START
WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT
THERE IS A WAVE OF PEOPLE OUT
THERE WHO HATE US / WHO HATE
THAT WE ARE SITTING HERE RIGHT
NOW / THAT WILL DO ANYTHING
TO DESTROY US / IN ORDER FOR
THE SHOW TO START WE HAVE TO
KNOW THAT THERE ARE FORCES
OUT THERE BANGING ON OUR
DOOR WANTING TO STOP THIS
SHOW / THAT WANT TO TAKE ALL
OUR SUBSIDIES FOR THEMSELVES /
THAT WANT TO CUT DOWN OUR
FUNDS / THERE ARE MASSES OF
PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO HATE
THAT WE ARE AN ELITE SITTING IN
HERE RIGHT NOW INDULGING /
WE DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHO
THEY ARE / BUT WE KNOW THAT
THEY ARE HERE TO DESTROY
EVERYTHING THAT WE HAVE BUILT
UP / THEY HATE OUR EQUALITY /
OUR DRIVE FOR EQUALITY
BETWEEN THE SEXES / GAY RIGHTS /
OUR ATTEMPT TO HELP THE WEAK /
THEY ARE HERE TO TEAR ALL OF**

THAT DOWN / AND THEY
ARE SLOWLY TAKING OVER / FROM
UNDERNEATH TO UP/ THERE ARE
JUST MORE AND MORE OF THESE
PEOPLE / THEY HAVE ELECTED A
MAD MAN FOR PRESIDENT / THEY
ARE EVERYWHERE / THEY ARE
LIKE LAVA PRESSING UP THROUGH
THE GROUND OR A MASSIVE WAVE
DESTROYING EVERYTHING IN
ITS WAY / THEY ARE BIG-NOSED
UNEDUCATED LOUD MISOGYNIC
MORONS / THEY ARE WITHOUT
STYLE / THEY HAVE SPEAKING
DISORDERS / THEY ARE ANGRY /
FAT / WITH BAD SKIN AND TEETH /
THEY STINK / THEY WEAR THE
CHEAPEST PERFUME ON THE
MARKET AND FAKE BRAND
CLOTHES / THEY HAVE NEVER
READ A SINGLE BOOK / THEY
GATHER ALL THEIR INFORMATION
FROM THE INTERNET / THEY
NEVER GO OUT / THEY ARE
SOCIALY HANDICAPPED /
BUT THERE ARE THOUSANDS /
MILLIONS / MAYBE BILLIONS OF

THESE PEOPLE / THEY ARE FORTY
YEARS OLD AND THEY STILL
LIVE WITH THEIR MOMS / THEIR
OWN CHILDREN ARE FAT AND CALL
THEIR MOTHERS WHORES / THEY
HAVE A COMPLETE LACK OF
RESPECT / THEY HAVE NEVER
FELT LOVE / THEY ARE STUCK
IN PATTERNS AND AFRAID OF
ANYTHING THAT COMES FROM
OUTSIDE THEIR COMFORT ZONE /
THEY ARE NARROW MINDED AND
THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE
AND THEY ARE ARMED / THEY
WRITE HATE LETTERS TO US
SAYING THAT THEY WILL RAPE AND
KILL US AND THEY WILL / THEY
WILL / IN ORDER FOR THE SHOW TO
START WE HAVE TO STAND STRONG
AGAINST THEM / IN ORDER FOR
THE SHOW TO START WE HAVE TO
BE UPRIGHT OUR IDEALS / IN ORDER
FOR THE SHOW TO START WE HAVE
TO SIT PROUDLY THROUGHOUT THE
ENTIRE PIECE / WE HAVE TO CLEAN
OUT ALL THE DIRT BEFORE THE
SHOW CAN START

The original reason for this segment was purely intuitive. I have had enough of rational argument with the alt-right and had an urge to respond to the recent conservative wave with bullying, aggression and phantasmatic violence. Whilst writing the text and performing it on stage I have found a certain *jouissance*. A *jouissance* that I – in the performance situation – think I have shared with others, but that is completely symbolic enjoyment, of course.

I am not trying to cut online-haters some slack. This specific hate-speech has an absent referent. But I wonder, is there a correlation between the literary protagonist and the online alias, and *moreso*, what is the relationship between hatred and enjoyment? I leave these two questions unanswered. Simply because I don't know. And for me, that is the perfect start of a process. An excellent reason to try it.

One consistently re-visited aspect of both Liljestränd's view (let him, perhaps unfairly, be the metonym), and that of those in favour of censorship, is an exaggerated assignment of performativity to language. The idea that there is always a certain amount of reality included in the realm of phantasy. It's both causing the imaginary image which, by representation, will inevitably produce new desires and justify action. Thus the real is an instance placed both before and after the very depiction or representation.

This thinking works strictly under – what Jönson would call – a liberalistic metaphysics; what is said will, by itself, become real. This completely

rejects the context of the speech act, and even more, the privileges of the speaker, as it presumes the usage of an instrumental liberalistic language within a liberalistic discourse or framework (in which some utterances may be realized). But it is restricted, exclusive and utterly mediocre. For those invited inside of this discursive universe, it will appear as a world without end and without outside. The existent speech though is merely an ideological ventriloquism and speakers just puppets, with no idea that there are languages that function in radically different ways. In absolute most situations, language is purely a phantasmatic vehicle.

There seems to have been a misunderstanding of J.L Austin's concept of the performative; his claim is that certain words, under certain circumstances, can produce reality – which is definitely true. A priest can, with the right words, said in the right moment, marry a couple; a judge can sentence an accused. But this ability does not apply to all words in all contexts. It does not include the powerless and certainly does not apply to the theatre, a space I love (maybe in the style of the Stockholm syndrome), and as you have collected your copy of this text from exactly that context, I will assume that you do too.

Words on stage are – as Austin himself quite beautifully puts it – a parasitic use of language. Whatever we say in that space does not, in fact, change anything in the world outside the temporality of the theatre-situation. As every word (no matter the genre) will create reasonable doubt. It haunts the theatre. Aiming to break this spell gives

rise to tremendous aesthetics, yet the soil of the theatre world is and remains temporal. It can appear (and often feels) nightmarish. But here lies the entire strength of our work.

Claiming that there should be no hatred and no violent phantasies is fundamentally an arrogant expression of privilege. The theatre is a space where language has a special ability to function without injury. A place where we can try things out and put thoughts into play, in conflict with each other, but where they, under most circumstances, do not change anything at all. A space where negativity and expressions of frustration and hatred can be brought into the light, where it can be tried out. It even has the possibility to produce violence that is bigger than life, too extreme to exist in the world. Not as a ventilation or empowerment or aspiration for catharsis, just a frame to face it, analyse it and try to understand its deeply complicated functions. The function of phantasy and production of language that takes us in all directions, which means the process of becoming and being a subject. It demands us to unveil the unwanted, drag our worst parts into light and not, in an act of bourgeois moralism, close our eyes and remain silent.

And here ends this meditation on the usage of inappropriate material on stage. Another way could have been to not write down any perspectives at all and just begin and end with the sentence: "If not here, where?"