

# Staging Gender

A PROJECT CENTERED ON GENDER  
PERSPECTIVES IN ACTOR TRAINING

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In 2011 a New Artistic Academy will be born in Stockholm and at the same time the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts will close down. You will find information on the new academy, which will be administratively responsible for *Staging Gender*, at the website [www.nyhogskola.se](http://www.nyhogskola.se)

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*Staging Gender* is a project centered on gender perspectives in actor training, from the point of view of artistic as well as pedagogical development, undertaken in 2007–09 by Sweden's programs in higher education in acting, mime, and musical theatre. Its collaborating partners are the Academy of Music and Drama at the University of Gothenburg, Malmö Academy of Theatre at Lund University, the Theatre Academy at Luleå University and the Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts. The project concluded with internal as well as open seminars at the Theatre Biennial in Borås, 3–7 June, 2009, and at the conference *Challenging Education* at Uppsala University, 14–17 June, 2009. Additionally, the project report *Staging Gender. Stories about dramatic arts, power and conscious choices*, was published on 20 November, 2009.

## OBJECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

In the final stage of the project, the group of student and faculty chairs formulated a number of objectives for the future, based on the steering committee's articulation of goals for the project's implementation phase. First off, the project's two overarching objectives concerning the desired learning outcomes of participating students and instructors, are as follows:

*Students will be educated toward making active and conscious creative choices, in regard to gender perspectives. Students will develop their ability to describe these choices verbally, as well as reflect critically upon their own and others' artistic choices.*

*Instructors shall develop their ability to make active and conscious teaching choices. These choices shall serve to establish an educational context of equal opportunity and full integrity for male and female students alike. Instructors will also develop their ability to describe these choices verbally, as well as reflect critically upon their own and others' teaching choices, from a perspective of gender and gender equality.*

Additionally, the following goals have been established:

*Our day-to-day operations will be characterized by students' and instructors' mutual respect for each other's integrity.*

*We will intensify our active work toward equal treatment, such that all co-workers will know how to take responsibility for allocating educational resources equally among students.*

*All those active in our respective educational settings shall have the ability and opportunity to initiate and handle a discussion of gender perspectives and other critical perspectives, for example concerning questions of artistic and pedagogical norms and terms of power.*

*In our educational setting, teaching shall be characterized by a problematization of the norms and values that exist in the traditions of dramatic text, performance, arts education, and the theatre industry.*

*Our instructors and students shall continue to work to develop ways to use gender perspectives and other critical perspectives as tools and practical methods in their performance work.*

*We will work actively to acquire current knowledge and provide encounters for our co-workers and students with experts in the fields of gender and other critical perspectives relevant to our areas of teaching and research.*

*Our instructors and students shall continue to acquire and establish terms and concepts such that a common language may be established in the area of gender perspectives and other critical perspectives.*

*We will give our students an opportunity to acquire a basic orientation in the fields of gender and other critical theory.*

*We will offer our students and instructors a wide repertoire of dramatic texts, lyrics and poetry in the context of teaching and stage productions.*

*Our admissions processes will be carried out by committees able to make active and conscious choices in the selection process, from a gender perspective as well as other critical perspectives.*

*In the immediate future we will prioritize sharing with the theatre industry our experiences and acquired knowledge in the area of arts pedagogy, especially concerning gender perspectives and other critical perspectives.*

*Our teaching institutions will prioritize initiating and supporting change and development in our artistic and pedagogical practices from the point of view of these objectives, and, along with such change, rewrite and develop our educational documents and directives.*

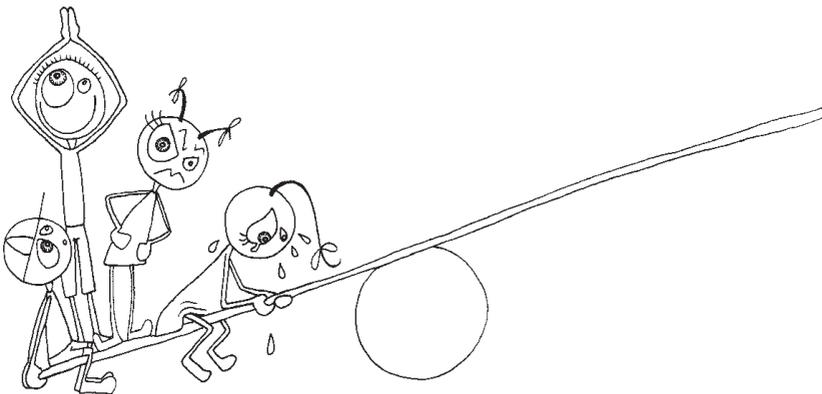
*In order to attain these objectives, students, faculty and administrative co-workers at our institutions shall be given the opportunity to collaborate in matters of gender perspectives as well as other critical perspectives.*

## Strategies for the future

Based on the project plan, a number of strategies for the future have also been formulated. These center on some focus areas from the implementation phase of the project. Firstly, the establishment of shared terms and concepts will continue to be an important aspect of implementing the project's goals in the day-to-day operations of the participating institutions. These terms and concepts involve artistic development as well as pedagogical and equal opportunity work.

Secondly, learning reflection and methodological development will remain important for the participating institutions' ability to discuss and analyze their own pedagogical and organizational operations, as well as the structured implementation of the project's overarching goals. Thirdly, a main strategy for developing the structure and contents of the institutions' various educational settings, will be to further systematize the selection processes that affect admissions and recruitment of personnel, as well as the choice of materials put to use in the educational context.

Finally, a long-term integration of the project's objectives into the artistic and pedagogical activities of the participating institutions will be insured by the inclusion of project goals and objectives in institutional documents and directives concerning equal treatment and opportunity. The aims of the project were always intended to reach beyond the two years comprising the implementation phase, and the above listed objectives for the future are one important result produced during this active phase.



## The report *Staging Gender. Stories about dramatic arts, power and conscious choices*

The work undertaken in the course of the project has been process oriented. In our experience, »quick fixes« in the form of general rules around admissions processes, repertoire, or performance interpretation rarely work. Instead, the project is about complexity and paradox, alternating between the specific (the here and now) and the general (patterns we see in the performing arts and in society at large) in our analysis as well as our performance practice.

In a similar manner, the results presented in the report *Staging Gender. Stories about dramatic arts, power and conscious choices* are not to be considered as final. Instead, the reader is given insight into an ongoing process. The work with this report has been a part of the learning generated within the project. All students and co-workers have been invited to participate and share their experiences. The editors have received invaluable assistance from the editorial board, consisting of students and instructors who have brought ideas for texts and encouraged their peers and colleagues to write. We also cite documentation and evaluations of various activities undertaken during these two years. Several texts build upon transcriptions from the seminars we held in conjunction with the project conclusion at the Theatre Biennial in Borås. We have also engaged a freelance journalist to provide an external perspective on the »open letter« written by two students half-way through the project's completion, and which received a certain amount of attention from the Swedish theatre industry.

The stories assembled in the report paint a picture of the way the project worked on a practical level: acquiring a language, conversing, testing, reflecting, asserting something, testing again, and perhaps asserting the opposite. At this point the work continues, the project objectives live on and have been reformula-

ted for the future. The cooperation between the four participating institutions will continue to deepen, and we aspire to continue sharing our work with the theatre industry and its audience.

Thus, the report is not the »final word« on *Staging Gender* or the work that we continue to do in the area of gender perspectives or the critique of other norms. We are convinced that students and co-workers will have more and other stories to tell in various forms and contexts for a long time to come – in interviews, seminars, articles and in the artistic research of the future. A generation of actors will bring tools from this project, which will make a difference in the performances our audiences will encounter, although it is too early to say in what ways.

In particular, we look forward with anticipation to partaking in the results of the research undertaken by our external research partner, cultural sociologist Anna Lund. Anna has collected materials by participating in the project, as well as interviewing and interacting with students and co-workers, and we have been privileged to have had her be a part of the project. In the report, Anna writes about students' encounters with the industry, but her ongoing research will continue to provide narratives of change and development in our organizations, stemming from the project.

We hope that the many stories in *Staging Gender. Stories about dramatic arts, power and conscious choices* will inspire those working in theatrical performance and/or arts education to initiate and lead developmental work with gender perspectives.

The report is published in Swedish; due to a lack of funding it has not been possible to translate it into English. However, we welcome inquiries from our English-speaking colleagues.

## The project – some facts

*Staging Gender* has been led by a committee comprised of the heads of the participating institutions, as well as representatives from the faculty and student body. This committee authored a project plan with specific goals, presided over the project's budget, and created a priority of activities and areas of operation. The collaborating partners took turns at chairing the project; at all times the project was led by one student chairperson and one faculty chairperson. Each educational institution has had a reference group in which the members of the steering committee could prepare and gain support for decisions, from their perspective as head of institution, faculty member, or student.

We began to shape the project in the academic year 2006–07. As this is the first ever collaboration between the four educational institutions, we needed a shared start-up period. This preparatory phase was supported by the Swedish Arts Council and the Swedish Agency for Networks and Cooperation in Higher Education. During this phase we shaped our project plan and budget needs, and applied for funding for the implementation phase of the project.

The project was launched on May 25, 2007 at the Theatre Biennial in Örebro. It was carried out during the academic years of 2007–08 and 2008–09. The implementation phase was supported by The Foundation for the Culture of the Future, who provided SEK 1 million toward artistic development, and the Swedish Agency for Networks and Cooperation in Higher Education, who provided SEK 2 million toward pedagogical development and networking. The total budget for the implementation of the project was thus SEK 3 million.

The objectives of the project have been pursued in four areas of implementation: stage performance; drama, poetry and musical theatre; gender awareness in pedagogy; and the theatre industry. Each area of implementation has contained project events such as courses, lectures and seminars. Some of these have been common events undertaken in collaboration between the different educational institutions, and others have been organized locally. At every stage, our ambition has been for these objectives to permeate the day-to-day workings of the institutions involved.