

SKEPTIMENTALITY: *THE SQUARE* AND THE AESTHETICS OF COMPLICITY

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I offer the notion of “skeptimentality” as a framework for thinking about the strikingly transmuted character of the noble moral sentiments (sympathy, empathy, benevolence, compassion, care, and pity) in the privilege-sensitive public culture of contemporary Scandinavia. Skeptimentality is my term for the sense that there is something morally embarrassing about the moral sentiments. I bring into play insights from feminist studies of sentimental sympathy as mediating factor in gender, race, and class-relations in order to highlight the extent to which skeptimentality differs from sentimentality and the aesthetic of sympathy we associate with it. The latter part of the essay develops further the notion of skeptimentality through an analysis of Swedish director Ruben Östlund’s award-winning feature film *The Square* (2017). As an aesthetic mode, skeptimentality has its own tropes, which often take an explicitly critical position on sentimental ones; it is, I submit, an aesthetic not of sympathy, but of complicity.

KEYWORDS

Privilege, Sentimentality, Moral Sentiments, Östlund, *The Square*

To experience one's global privilege as a problem typically hinges on a perception of distributive injustice and forms of transnational power asymmetries. In Scandinavian public discourse, this perception only rarely surfaces as explicitly political matters of concern; it emerges, rather, as so many variants of the same fundamental question: "Is this okay?" Is it okay, for instance, to go on holiday to Greece in the middle of a refugee crisis? Is it better to go to Germany instead? Is it okay to buy fair trade products? Is it okay, or is it hypocritical, to support a humanitarian organization with 100 Norwegian kroner a month? Is it okay to hire a Romanian cleaning help? Is my compassion for poor populations elsewhere okay, or is it a sign of my sense of superiority? Is it okay to donate your old clothes, or are you then just using the global South as the "garbage bin for the bad conscience of the rich countries," as suggested by the Ghanaian beach monitor Joe Ayesu?¹ Is it even okay to ask questions like these, or is it, rather, indulgent navel-gazing?

Diffuse, distracted, or disavowed, a sense of benefitting from profound global inequality is key to what I call "the predicament of privilege."² As I have argued elsewhere, considering one's privilege to be a problem thus implies intuiting an exploitative global infrastructure with complex histories and lasting effects. We may use various labels for this historically sedimented infrastructure: capitalism, imperialism, racism, neocolonial violence, the capitalocene, neoliberal hegemony, white supremacy, or simply "the global maldistribution of symbolic and material resources."³ In Scandinavian public culture, however, this historical-political infrastructure figures not so much as a clearly demarcated political regime, but, rather, as a conglomerate of diffuse and unfinished histories of injustice. While a sensibility of privilege is certainly not confined to the Scandinavian region alone, it has gained relevance in twenty-first-century Scandinavian societies where the postwar Nordic model of the welfare state has fostered a popular egalitarian imaginary according to which socio-economic privilege is not perfectly okay.

In this essay, I will be describing a structure of feeling and an aesthetic mode central to the Scandinavian sensibility of privilege.⁴ The predicament of privilege is always an emotional predicament too, entailing anxious reflection on, or dispute about, the value of the noble, moral sentiments—what the philosopher Robert C. Solomon refers to as "the family of fine sentiment": sympathy, empathy, benevolence, compassion, care, and pity.⁵ In contemporary

Scandinavian societies, I suggest, mistrust of these virtuous sentiments has become an emotional habit: they are typically perceived and represented as morally embarrassing. This does not mean that all Scandinavians will exhibit identical emotional patterns. Nor does it mean that all Scandinavians are, or see themselves as being, weighed down with privileges. It does mean, however, that moral sentiments are susceptible to change sign and become indicative of something *immoral* in the feeling subject, be this subject an individual or a collective. The sensibility of privilege I am identifying is a register of how we relate to global inequality and to our own place and part in this unequal world. Central to this sensibility is a structure of feeling in which conventionally good feelings might turn ugly while, conversely, conventionally ugly feelings can turn out to be useful and legitimate.⁶

Let us consider an example of the former. In the Danish author Kirsten Hamman's novel *En dråbe i havet* (A Drop in the Ocean, 2008) the portrait of the female protagonist is a depiction also of the predicament of privilege as an emotional predicament.⁷ The novel is about an author, Mette Mæt (Mette Satiated), who wants to change the world by writing a touching novel on the topic of the global South. Media images of emaciated children make Mette angry: "Enough is damn well enough! Just redistribute the world's wealth so everyone can have a share!", and she regularly asks herself and her world: "Why, exactly, should people fortunate to be born on the rich soil be allowed to stay living there?"⁸ But alongside this desire to cast off her privileges, Mette is quick to ridicule her own moral indignation and the actions into which it leads her. So when she makes a personal attempt to create a drop of equality in the world by moving an Ethiopian family into her apartment in Copenhagen, while she and her daughter sleep on an Indian garbage dump, the third-person narrator voicing Mette's self-critical evaluation can but conclude: "She knows it's ridiculous and just an attempt to buy absolution, but, even so, it was important for her to prove to herself that she would match words with deeds."⁹ This, then, is a central element in the sensibility of privilege: something seems morally important while simultaneously appearing morally embarrassing and ridiculous.

I use the term "skeptimentality" to identify this structure of ambivalent feeling and its attendant aesthetics.¹⁰ Skeptimentality differs from sentimentality, often described as an aesthetic mode and structure of feeling in which a positive "basic feeling" gives rise to a

positive meta-response that says, for example: “It’s so life-affirming that I feel empathy with people who are less fortunate than me.”¹¹ This twofold charitable response is one reason for the frequently negative assessment of sentimentality as emotional and aesthetic mode: We commonly interpret sentimental emotional response as self-satisfied, because in the sentimental mode charity seems to be, in part, self-charity. In his book *In Defense of Sentimentality*, Solomon (2004) refers to the writer Milan Kundera as representative of the prevalent negative evaluations of sentimental constellations of feeling and their aesthetic. In Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), sentimentality is designated “kitsch.” Sentimentality and kitsch are both aesthetic-affective registers indicating nostalgia, cheap conventionality, melodrama, and links between bad art and bad morality. As Solomon points out, to Kundera “kitsch” is a term for the aesthetic and emotional profile of a totalitarian politics; yet even without this explicitly political element, the novel’s description of the logic of kitsch is valid as an example of the general understanding of the sentimental logic of moral sentiments I wish to feature here: “Kitsch,” the narrator explains, “causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.”¹² If we substitute “sentimentality” for “kitsch,” we could say that it is the self-perpetuating, reflexive moment that makes the sentimental mode sentimental.

In the case of the skeptimental mode, the moral sentiments are fundamentally ambivalent inasmuch as in this mode a “positive” feeling of benevolence generally incites a “negative” meta-response. In scenarios and experiences characterized by skeptimentality, the reflexive moment in the experience of a touching object does not manifest itself as a warming tear but rather as a frisson of suspiciousness. This frisson is perhaps asking: “Why do I fall for this object’s cheap convention?” Or: “Why am I moved by my own impulse to goodness?” Or, more hesitantly: “I’m not sure I like the implications of this object in front of me, but I nonetheless feel moved by it.” Unlike the “positive” meta-response we associate with the sentimental mode, in skeptimentality the reflexive meta-response is basically saying: “Actually, it’s morally embarrassing that I [you, they] feel morally good.” In this manner, the skeptimental is a critical mutation in the sentimental logic of moral sentiments and their aesthetics.

Sianne Ngai's study of "ugly feelings" (2005) and their non-cathartic aesthetic is instructive for the further pinning-down of the skeptical structure of feeling I am describing. Examining the cultural work done by negative emotions, Ngai tracks a range of petty, morally tainted feelings such as envy, irritation, and anxiety, which, she shows, register situations of suspended agency. The "morally degraded and seemingly unjustifiable status" of these ugly feelings, Ngai argues, "tends to produce an unpleasurable feeling *about* the feeling (a reflexive response taking the form of 'I feel ashamed about feeling envious' or 'I feel anxious about my enviousness')." ¹³ The skeptical structure of feeling that I am identifying shares such uglifying meta-responses with the negative feelings in Ngai's inventory. Yet, the "negative" aspect of skepticism is a response to a "positive" feeling, rather than an "ugly" one, as is the case with Ngai's repertoire. So, while Ngai considers the noble moral feelings to *be* in fact ennobling and potentially beatific (she contrasts the ugly feelings with the moral feelings and their sentimental aesthetic of sympathy), I focus instead on the ugly mutations, caused by the predicament of privilege, *in* the virtuous sentiments. Hence, the skeptical mutation in the sentimental politics of moral sentiments gives rise to reflexive responses taking the form of: "I feel embarrassed about my compassion."

Thus, it is important to note that the negative meta-response pivotal to skepticism is a function of the subject's embodied awareness of being somehow positively involved in the affecting object in front of her. The negative evaluation does not cancel the positive attachment. Rather, in the skeptical mode, the moral feelings move restlessly between something the subject experiences as morally proper and something she experiences as morally improper. ¹⁴ This profound uncertainty also concerns exactly *what* it is the subject is so hesitantly passing judgment on: Is it the touching object itself (a humanitarian appeal, for instance) or the subject's own moved response to it? It is also important to note that this predisposition for critically evaluating something that, on the face of it, seems morally good is not a disposition reserved for intellectuals or academics. Paul Gilroy, arguing for the need for sympathy and compassion at a historical moment where Europe is haunted by new forms of racism and fascism, suggests that the current "hostility to sympathy" among "radicals and what is left of the Left" is a trend that "seems to be particularly evident among academics." ¹⁵ Looking to the Scandinavian publics, however, it is evident that the distrust of moral sentiments and their cultural forms—what I call

skeptimentality—is not predominantly a radical leftist or academic phenomenon. On the contrary, skeptimentality is utterly ordinary. The impression that the moral sentiments are complicit in a system of domination, whatever we think of as the system, is a commonplace across the political spectrum.

In other words, as in the case of the sentimental, there is something distinctly communal and commonplace about skeptimental scenarios, even though skeptimentality is, of course, not a term we use. Yet, identifying a collective sensibility, as I do, is not to postulate that everyone feels the same in relation to global economic inequality and entitlement to privilege (they do not). Rather, it implies the identification of a recurrent pattern of articulations, including aesthetic ones, in the ongoing cultural interpretation of the issue of global privilege. As an aesthetic mode, the skeptimental has its own tropes, which often take an explicitly critical position on sentimental ones. Skeptimental aesthetic is, I argue, an aesthetic not of sympathy but of complicity.

Skeptimentality, then, is my term for the sense that there is something morally embarrassing about the moral sentiments and the sentimental aesthetic we associate with them. Exactly *what* is taken to be morally embarrassing about the moral feelings may vary significantly. Generally speaking, however, the immorality perceived by the feeling subject is linked to an impression of either guilt or shame, or a combination of the two. I can, for instance, evaluate my compassion for poor people in the global South as being morally embarrassing, because a part of me is also feeling guilty about the object of my compassion: that is, their poverty. Or I can evaluate my compassion for poor people as being morally embarrassing because part of me simultaneously regards compassion as a sign of self-righteous and syrupy humanism, and that part is consequently ashamed of my self-righteous and syrupy humanistic sensorium.¹⁶ And, finally, moral sentiments are regularly thought to be most embarrassing when expressed by others. In this manner, the skeptimental encompasses quite diverse ideological positions and political attitudes. The skeptimental structure of feeling could be said to display elements of the Nordic “Law of Jante” and Protestantism alike.¹⁷ I suggest, however, that skeptimentality is a better interpretative framework, because this concept links, as I use it, more directly to our contemporary concern about privilege and the aesthetic-cultural forms assumed by its predicament.

Certainly, experiencing one's structural privilege as a disturbing sign of injustice is not an experience reserved for Scandinavians. Importantly, I offer the term "skeptimentality" *not* to suggest that the sensibility named by it is uniquely Scandinavian, but to propose that the predicament of privilege takes on a remarkably urgent character in contemporary Scandinavian societies. Why is that so? Because, in short, Nordic self-understandings rely, very broadly speaking, on two central narratives in which privileges are interpreted in conflicting ways. Firstly, a discourse of benevolent internationalism according to which Nordic privileges are beneficial to the world and thus, in a sense, *unproblematic*.¹⁸ Secondly, the discourse of a Nordic welfare state model according to which socioeconomic privilege is in fact *problematic*.¹⁹ While in the latter half of the twentieth century, we seemed to witness a collaboration between the two frameworks for imagining Nordic privilege, in the twenty-first century they clash more loudly.

In what follows, I suggest the notion of "skeptimental publics" as a framework for thinking about the transmuted character of the moral sentiments in Scandinavian public culture. I bring into play insights from the study of sentimental sympathy as a mediating factor in gender, race, and class-relations, a field of study thriving especially in the feminist Americanist tradition; this scholarship is particularly precise when it comes not only to the Romantic period and its literature of sensibility, but also to relating the legacies of this period to present day sentimental politics.²⁰ In the latter part of the essay, I develop further the notion of skeptimentality through an analysis of the Swedish director Ruben Östlund's award-winning feature film *The Square* (2017). This work is deeply concerned with skeptimental publics, and registers the diffuse distrust of humanitarian feelings distinguishing these publics. Who needs help and sympathy, really? What does an act of helping actually mean? Who can in truth provide help? Can "we" be helpers and not merely exploiters? Rather than as uncomplicated ethical imperatives, the film casts sympathy, benevolence, aid, and moral goodness as cultural *problems*. It also points up that what may seem to be privately uglified moral sentiments are, in fact, matters of mass public culture.

The wager of the larger study of privilege sensibility of which this article forms part is that to Nordic publics, humanitarianism is no longer a satisfying framework for imagining and contributing to a better world.²¹ To be sure, the resistance in Scandinavian publics to humanitarian reason is at times triggered by nationalism, security,

domestic class conflict, and joblessness, but humanitarian reason has come under pressure not solely from nationalism and its politics of security, but also, I submit, from the common sensation of being in fact not, or not merely, the humanitarian benefactors of “the global poor” but, rather, the beneficiaries of global structural inequality. The now familiar suspicion of living at the expense of others is, I suggest, part of what today disturbs the fantasies of shared humanity, progress, charity, and the equal value of human lives that buttress humanitarian interpretations of the world and its future. In both critical humanitarianism studies and the study of sentimental culture it is generally assumed that the moral sentiments so decisive to humanitarianism and sentimentalism alike—the noble feelings of sympathy, care, and compassion for the plight of others—operate according to a sentimental logic. This is the case with landmark studies such as Didier Fassin’s *Humanitarian Reason* (2012), Miriam Ticktin’s *Casualties of Care* (2011) and Lynn Festa’s *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (2006), but it is true also for more positive assessments of humanitarian sensibility such as Lynn Hunt’s *The Invention of Human Rights* (2007) and Liisa Malkki’s *The Need to Help* (2015). By contrast, I argue that in privilege-sensitive publics such as the Nordics, moral sentiments operate instead according to a skeptimental logic and that privilege sensibility—as a felt, encountered, and countered imperative to consider the causes and effects of real and imagined global privilege—is thus rendering the sentimental humanitarian culture of feeling if not obsolete, then increasingly untrustworthy to Scandinavian constituencies.

SENTIMENTAL POLITICS

In sentimental cultural texts, moral philosophers and reform-minded intellectuals have found a source for the moral improvement of people and the political change of societies owing to the sympathy and compassion that these texts produce in a reading public. Since the 1990s, however, scholars of sentimentalism have, in agreement with the literature on humanitarianism, focused on the asymmetrical power relations that sentimental politics simultaneously presupposes and renders acceptable. The principal relation of sentimentalism is the one between “sympathizers” and “sufferers,” which is mediated by sentimental cultural texts and characterized by sympathizers identifying sympathetically with the sufferers in question.²² Sentimental identification, however, also permits the consolidation of differences. For instance, literary historian Lynn Festa’s history of the eighteenth-century origins of humanitarian

sensibility demonstrates how, in the colonial encounter, the trope of sentimental identification allowed metropolitan readers

to carve out communal identities based on the distinction between the community of feeling subjects and shared, but excluded, sentimental objects: the poor, the wretched, the old, and the enslaved, who furnished a seemingly infinite supply of emotional fodder for the mode.²³

Lauren Berlant's work on sentimental publics is particularly relevant to my conceptualization of the politics of skeptimentality. In *The Female Complaint* (2008), which forms part of Berlant's national sentimentality trilogy, Berlant explored the politics of sentimentality in an American national culture held together by the capacity of citizens, chiefly the classically privileged, to hold moral feelings for subordinate social groups and the sufferings endured by these populations.²⁴ This national culture is sentimental to the extent that it considers good, authentic feeling to be the core of a just society. In the archives of sentimental national culture, Berlant argues, sympathy and compassion for subaltern characters function as "great equalizers," which produce *a sense of* equality and universality, even though such an equality is in reality materially non-existent. This argument that a distinct sentimental culture of feeling confirms the unity of society in the face of its structural disparities, while also authenticating the morality and goodness of those benefitting from the disparities in question, is a core argument against contemporary humanitarianism's culture of feeling as well.

Like other scholars in this tradition, Berlant considers Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) an urtext of American sentimentalism. In Berlant's pinning-down of national modes of sentimentality, Stowe's novel constitutes a form of original text to which the American public habitually returns when wanting to comment on the political and aesthetic optimism for which the novel stands: the belief that unjust social institutions can indeed be overturned if the privileged would just identify strongly enough with the underprivileged, and the belief that art and literature can facilitate exactly that kind of sympathetic identification. In studying US-American culture's many literary and cinematic versions of Stowe-style sentimentality, Berlant finds that such renderings—in ways similar to the urtext itself—make it possible for characters, readers, and viewers alike to identify *contrary to* their own privileged position, that is, downwards in the social hierarchies.²⁵

Sentimental tropes give form to socially marginalized suffering, and the sympathetic identification with this suffering imperceptibly dissolves, through the power of warming tears, the feeling subject's own privileged position. In the land of the emotions, everyone can be equal.

For Berlant, then, sentimentality is a form of intimacy: sentimental rhetoric and the sentimental aesthetic generate affinities and identifications where, mostly, material differences pertain. In sentimental publics, an emotional universalism prevails in which the individual's subjectivity feels general, and in which people have a feeling-generated sense of community. Indeed, sentimental national culture *has* had a transformative and inclusive impact throughout the history of the nation, Berlant confirms. Yet, while sentimental politics have been vital to the experience of belonging to, or at least of being, in time, able to belong to, a national middle class, the humanizing strategies of sentimentality have simultaneously protected the privileged classes, for whom the sentimental claim has primarily been to *feel* right.²⁶ In this sense, a sentimentalist is someone who focuses on the emotional, rather than the economic, costs of injustice.

In *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, Kyla Schuller (2018) develops a deeper analysis of the link between sentimentality and race distinction already implied in Berlant's work.²⁷ According to Schuller, emotional responses awakened by sentimental literature and visual art in nineteenth-century North America contributed to the molding of a white middle-class sensibility, given that the projection of an ennobling virtue onto subaltern characters played a role in the construction of a shared affective register for identification and compassion in an emergent middle-class public. The crucial point, as identified by Schuller, is that white sensibility was generated in the light of an idea of black people's lack of that sensibility.²⁸ In this sense, sentimentalism is a multi-branched biopolitical discourse on emotional flexibility and sensory suppleness, and, in more concrete terms: on the emotional mobility of some sections of the population and the emotional inertia of other communities. Sentimentalism thus contributed, according to Schuller and other scholars, to the nineteenth-century concept of racial difference.

SKEPTIMENTAL PUBLICS

We do not yet have a genealogy of Scandinavian sentimentality in line with the one Americanists have mapped out for the

nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States. To what extent, we could ask, has sentimental rhetoric contributed to the political and cultural discourses in which Nordic welfare states have historically found legitimation? Which tropes are recurrent and perhaps specific to Nordic sentimentality? Which urtexts would we identify? What, for instance, is the relationship between worker sentimentality and the strong foothold of social democracy in the region? And to what extent is the Nordic colonial aesthetic a sentimental one? Undoubtedly, social sympathy has been essential both to the foundation of the Nordic welfare states and to their later self-image as humanitarian superpowers: to feel sympathy with the homeless, the single mother, the unemployed, vulnerable children, and impoverished populations elsewhere in the world. Conversely, the discourses and policies of the Nordic welfare model and its egalitarian ways have also worked to throw suspicion on the politics of sentimentality and its feeling-based distribution of public goodwill.

I am suggesting that we regard contemporary Scandinavian publics as operating primarily according to a skeptimental rather than sentimental politics. A skeptimental public is a public that suspects that inequality is a prerequisite for the sentimental sense of equality. Among other things, this means that Scandinavians will typically perceive expressions of moral feeling as elements in asymmetrical power relations, and such expressions therefore appear as problematic elements to an egalitarian imagination preoccupied with the assessment of privilege. In general, a skeptimental public responds to an expression of moral feeling with variations on a negative response, fundamentally saying: “How very morally embarrassing that you should present yourself as morally good.”

What I identify as the sensibility of privilege is one explanation as to why moral sentiments can hardly be seen as “great equalizers” in Nordic societies. However, skeptimentality, like the sentimental itself, has widely varying historical and political inlets, including topical anti-humanitarian currents. Public criticism of what Sylvi Listhaug, then a minister for the Norwegian far-right Progress Party, called the “goodness tyranny” of self-righteousness, and of those seen by critics as mobilizing their sense of guilt to at least *feel* politically relevant, is fairly mainstream.²⁹ I want therefore to emphasize that in “the skeptimental” we should also hear *the scandalous*: there is often the smack of something socially impermissible, in other words, in this resistance to the sentimental. For instance, the Danish pastor Søren Krarup’s criticism of a sentimental “benevolence

industry” was once scandalous.³⁰ It is, however, now closer to being straightforwardly skeptical, by which I mean that it has slipped into the general sensibility of privilege as one among several components of the skeptical collective meta-response to morally good feelings that I call skeptimentality.

A CRY FOR HELP

On a public square in Stockholm, a *chugger*—someone who approaches people on the street asking for donations or subscriptions to a specific cause—is asking the busy crowds if they would want to save a human life. No one is paying her, or her appeal, any attention. This urbane Swedish public is not, we gather, a sentimental humanitarian public. The crowd does not respond to the humanitarian imperative *par excellence*: save life, relieve suffering, help. This is one of the first scenes in the film *The Square* (2017), in which the Swedish director Ruben Östlund—“possibly the foremost chronicler of social unease and moral precarity in Scandinavian cinema”³¹—is particularly concerned with the issue of help, inequality, and the sensibility of privilege in the Scandinavian welfare state.³²

In 2014, Sweden’s then-prime minister, representing the Moderata Samlingsparti (the Moderate Party), Fredrik Reinfeldt, described his country as a “humanitarian superpower.”³³ The *chugger* in *The Square* is, however, confronted with something quite different: a Swedish public that raises not so much as an eyebrow at the prospect of being able to help or save a human life. No humanitarian interpellation occurs, no one turns around in recognition that he or she is a humanitarian subject: this is not a public convinced that their conscience and morality could in fact change the world. When a desperate cry for help resounds across the public square, this same public again turns a deaf ear. Except, that is, for the central character in the film, Christian (Claes Bang), who turns towards the desperately shouting woman and tries to help her. But he should not have done so. The cry for help is a scam, Christian is robbed of his cell phone and has to see himself transformed into one of those people who ask for help: Excuse me, may I borrow your phone? The film then rolls out the sequence of events triggered by Christian’s arrogantly high-spirited vigilantism, ending up with him losing his job as chief curator of a contemporary art museum in a fictitiously post-monarchical Swedish capital.

In an interview, Ruben Östlund spoke of the effect of witnessing inequality:

I think that we, as a species, are very upset when we see an imbalance. When we see inequality; when we see poverty. We really get provoked by that. So I still think that we are definitely caring about each other, but it's also not how we're building cities. The main idea with cities today is, 'go to this place; consume.'³⁴

Taken as an introductory statement to *The Square*, this is an equally obvious and surprising observation. Obvious, because with this film Östlund himself makes a considerable visual investment in questions of inequality; surprising, because, as already mentioned, the characters in the film are not remotely provoked by witnessing inequality. The Swedish urban life depicted in the film is full of inequality, poverty, and imbalance that seems not to excite any concern among the city dwellers. Beggars, homeless people, and people making unanswered requests for help are fixtures of this Stockholm cityscape. Östlund's camera lingers on them, as if they were urban ornament, but otherwise they garner little attention. The film makes it its business to present a Scandinavian public in which you leave well alone, mind your own business, whether it be from convenience, habit, discomfort, or fear. On a formal level, the film's approach to these "imbalances" is to display them as privilege montages in which images of the haves are juxtaposed with images of the have-nots. Why are we refraining from helping people in need? Why do we remain bystanders? Rarely are these questions posed with such insistence as they are in Östlund's film.³⁵

The Square itself would seem to be divided. In a scene late in the film, Christian is tormented by a ghostly voice crying for help. Who precisely is asking for help? Can Christian help, and will he? Has he even got the right to believe that he can help, and if so, does it help anything or anyone? Are the cries for help ringing purely inside the heads of the privileged? The film does not know. On the one hand, *The Square* seems to call for a public that acts upon the moral feelings of sympathy and compassion; on the other, we quickly sense that the sentimental public and its cultural forms are not the solution to the inequalities emphasized by the film. Thus, the film provides no language for the morality it is, simultaneously, seeking out. Rather, it examines a public that has no shared affective-moral grammar for addressing social inequalities. Christian cannot save the variously vulnerable characters with whom he is confronted: homeless people, beggars, an ill-treated child. Nor does the film allow its audience to feel warm-heartedness and benevolence for these characters; on the contrary, it satirizes such ways of producing a mere *sense* of equality. This schism is a skeptical trait.

My description of *The Square* as a film in the skeptical mode is based, firstly, on its depiction of a society in which benevolent, moral feelings have no resonance chamber, unlike in sentimental publics. Secondly, the film takes a critically detached stance vis-à-vis central elements of the sentimental aesthetic of sympathy, including its depiction of socially and racially marginalized characters. As an example of the former, the film's portrait of a skeptical public, I shall highlight two sequences. Each of them reflects the basic structure of skepticism: that something which seems morally good, touching, and proper, turns into or is revealed as something morally improper.

The first sequence is the aforementioned good deed undertaken by the central character Christian when he hears a cry for help, and the subsequent corruption of this good deed into a possibly immoral threat of revenge, which is directed at all the residents of a housing project, a "ghetto." Unless they return Christian's cell phone and wallet the residents will be hunted down, as he and his co-conspirator colleague tell the residents in a threatening letter. He does not simply react with annoyance over the incident and report it to the police: one key point of *The Square* is, exactly, the reversal of a "moral good" into something "immoral." First, Christian's impulse to offer help is occasioned by deception—the cry for help was a confidence trick—and then the impulse altogether degenerates into an immoral readiness to deal out collective punishment to an underprivileged social group in the shape of the residents of a housing project. If the name "Christian" suggests a Christian morality of benevolent acts, the crux of the film is a demonstration of the crumbling of this morality: Christian cannot save himself by saving others; on the contrary, he becomes an avenger. My point here is not, however, that Christian's emotions are represented as skeptical, but, rather, that the skeptical structure of feeling operates as a matrix for the film's central storylines.

The other sequence I shall highlight as exemplifying the film's portrait of a skeptical public revolves around the art piece of the film's title, "The Square," the thinking behind and fate of which can be interpreted as an allegory of the political concept of "folkhemmet," the people's home, introduced in 1928 by the Swedish Social Democratic Party, and of the Nordic welfare model more generally. A statue of a historical military commander in front of the fictitious X-Royal art museum in Stockholm is dismantled to make space for a square-shaped installation of light and cobblestone, this being

“The Square,” an art piece with an accompanying plaque promising that the luminescent square will performatively constitute an equality-generating and benign social form: “The Square is a sanctuary of trust and caring. Within it we all share equal rights and obligations.” Unlike the statue and so much public art, the luminescent square will not pay tribute to violence. Rather, it promises to be a good, solicitous, social-aesthetic form to the benefit of all. But the skeptical sensibility taken up by the film cannot simply accept this as a matter of course. To have moral and commercial relevance—the two criteria here prove to be identical—this sympathetic art form has to mutate.

In his role as curator at the museum of contemporary art, Christian has hired an advertising agency to promote “The Square.” The advertising agency decides that the sympathetic values the piece professes are all well and good, but far too vague to support a marketing campaign. Hence, in a skepticalizing gesture, they change the moral signature of the work, from the morally virtuous to the immoral: for the accompanying video campaign, they decide to pull a visual trigger on the promises offered in the art piece by including footage of a very young, presumably homeless, (white) child entering the square—and being blown up in there.

With this storyline, the film is suggesting two important points about skeptical sensibility. Firstly, that the skeptical mutation of the sentimental, here in the shape of skeptical scandal, does not necessarily register an aversion to the commercial, to consumption, to spectacle. In the age of the universal advertisement already diagnosed by Adorno and Horkheimer, the skeptical mode is of course no less consumer-friendly than the mode of sentimentality. The advertising agency’s campaign might indeed trigger a media storm, but bad press is, as the adage goes, better than no press. As Elizabeth Ezra points out in her reading of the function of this campaign in the film: “Thinking outside the box results in a bigger box within which formerly unacceptable thoughts become acceptable.”³⁶ Secondly, we can understand the fate of this morally good art piece as one of the film’s many comments on the idea of art as transformative event and terrain for affective, moral, and political reform, which is so key to the sentimental tradition that we could designate, along with Berlant, the *Uncle Tom* tradition. If the art piece “The Square” is sentimental by inviting the art participant to experience a good and charitable world, which does not yet exist, then *The Square* is, by contrast, preoccupied with the skeptical public in whose hands this sentimental potential detonates.

THE AESTHETIC OF COMPLICITY

Kyla Schuller points out that today the sentimental repertoire of feeling is upheld in particular by cinematic clichés, which reestablish a preexisting relationship between a familiar trope and the viewer's repository of emotional response. "Sentimental visual tropes such as a dying child, a pretty girl in love, or an affluent woman dedicating herself to *helping the less fortunate* train the affective and corporeal dimensions of the body for particular repertoires of feeling," Schuller writes.³⁷ The skeptimental repertoire of feeling is trained culturally too. Just as what Berlant calls sentimental publics are mediated by cultural objects such as novels, magazines, and cinema employing a repertoire of sentimental visual and narrative tropes, skeptimental publics are mediated by skeptimental cultural objects. While we associate sentimentality with an aesthetic of sympathy, skeptimentality is, conversely, characterized by a skeptimental mutation in the aesthetic of sympathy. I suggest we recognize the resulting modified aesthetic to be an aesthetic of complicity. Skeptimental tropes will typically appear as mutations of sentimental motifs, themes, and tonalities, generating a range of tropes inviting our affective response to images of "the less fortunate," but simultaneously, en route, sabotaging the moral and affective uplift of the sentimental response and contributing instead to the sedimentation of a skeptimental culture of feeling.

In a famous essay on the sentimental American protest novel, James Baldwin (1963 [1949]) described the "self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality" in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—"a very bad novel"—as a result of Stowe's utter consistency in purifying her black characters of all the evil and sin that they represented according to the "medieval morality" of Stowe and her world.³⁸ Uncle Tom is humble and "phenomenally forbearing," Baldwin wrote; "he has to be; he is black; only through this forbearance can he survive or triumph."³⁹ The god-fearing will to embrace the gentle, pure, and unadulterated in the black characters—to "robe them in white"—was, according to Baldwin, Stowe's means to deliver the salvation of the sentimental reader and author alike. In *The Square*, Östlund does what he can so as not to air the repertoire of sentimental tropes and the clichés of suffering, innocent, humble, and forbearing brown or black characters from which this repertoire and its feeling-based racial hierarchies continue to draw sustenance. Yet, while the non-white characters in Östlund's film are not your typical objects of sentimental sympathy, they remain, nonetheless, objects, around which the transactions of a white affective economy play out: Östlund's interest

is primarily the privileged white emotional life and its qualms at being just that. Skepticismality in *The Square* is, therefore, no less a white aesthetic and structure of feeling than the sentimental, when we consider the latter's position in the history of sympathy and sentimental culture.

Let us take a brief look at two examples of the film's skeptical depiction of socially subordinate characters, who are racialized as non-white: a woman and a boy. On several occasions, Christian meets a presumably homeless woman (Sofica Ciuraru) who sits near a 7-Eleven asking people for money. The woman is possibly Romani. The first time they meet, Christian either will not or cannot give the woman money, but he will gladly give her a ciabatta sandwich from the shop. I regard this scene as a skeptical one, especially because the woman's expected expression of gratitude—expected, that is, from the vantage point of the repertoire of sentimental tropes and tonalities—fails to materialize. Not only is she not grateful, she is utterly unimpressed by Christian's gesture of sympathy and, moreover, displeased that there are onions in her ciabatta sandwich. The woman is not presented as an object of the viewers' sympathy but, rather, perhaps, of Christian's puzzlement.

The plotline that finally renders *The Square* a skeptical tragedy follows from Christian's confrontation with a boy (Eliandro Edouard) who lives in the housing project targeted by Christian's letter accusing tenants of being thieves and threatening reprisals. Although the boy, possibly from a North African background, is not the thief, Christian's threatening note leads his parents to suspect that he is, and so they ban him from playing on his PlayStation. The boy now writes a note to Christian in which he threatens to bring chaos to *his* life unless he apologizes to him and his parents. On the one hand, we have here a familiar sentimental trope: an innocent, non-white, and socially marginalized child treated unjustly by a white man. On the other hand, Östlund has rid the boy not of all sin but of all sentimentality. The boy might well be innocent in the eyes of the law, but that does not make him a typical object of sentimental sympathy: he is not humble or patient, he does not hold back in demanding his rights, and his innocence is not a sign of pure-hearted primitivity—the boy is not innocent in the sense of being unaffected by the corrupting influences of late capitalism. If he is affronted, it is mostly because he wants his PlayStation back: He does not want sympathy, but he does demand an apology.

Danish writer Theis Ørntoft criticized *The Square* for presenting a politically irrelevant sensorium, namely the existential problems of the 45-year-old privileged welfare-state citizen. In a sense, Ørntoft's criticism is a privilege-sensitive criticism of a privilege-sensitive film. He says:

The beggars who surround the main character try in vain to call out to the privileged world, but they are never really brought into the space of action. *The Square* pretends [...] to be morally indignant. But in reality it is hyper-narcissistic in its focus on what it means to be a postmodernist, post-ironic 45-year-old person.⁴⁰

My own sense is that in staying within the interpretative framework of evaluating an object or a subject to be hypocritical, to be, that is, only *pretending* to be virtuously inclined, as does Ørntoft here, we risk to be merely reiterating rather than subjecting to analysis the skeptical logic of the moral sentiments. Therefore, I would like to alter Ørntoft's hypothesis slightly and suggest that *The Square* examines those publics, in which the morally and emotionally proper—to Ørntoft this would perhaps be a more genuine kind of indignation—always risk coming across as sentimental and hence morally unsustainable. Thus, bringing “the others” into a space of action is a fairly common privilege-sensitive cultural strategy for responding to the paradoxes of the predicament of privilege; how to do it without being either sentimental or paternalistic is one of the open-ended questions raised by the skeptical objects mediating skeptical publics.

It is surely a question raised by *The Square*. One of Östlund's earlier films, *Play* (2011), was criticized for its stereotypical depiction of non-white Swedish teenage boys as unlikeable, emotionally impervious, criminal types: “immigrant youths.”⁴¹ This stereotype is the flipside of the innocent brown or black child; the two images are like the heads and tails of sentimentality. In my understanding of *The Square*, the film attempts to wrench itself away from the visual conventions of sentimentality, including this specific image-couple's evocation of, respectively, fear-contempt and sympathy-compassion. However, as the film itself contemplates, for instance with the art piece “The Square,” the rhetoric of skepticism has a built-in tendency to risk immoral stereotypes rather than morally “good” ones.



Fig. 1 (above) and Fig. 2 (below)
Stills from *The Square*, written and directed by Ruben Östlund.
Photographer: Fredrik Wenzel. Copyright Plattform Production.

I mentioned earlier that, on a formal level, the film's approach to hierarchies of race and class is to display them as what I call "privilege montage." As a visual and discursive technique for juxtaposing and integrating images signifying poverty, vulnerability, violence, war, and disaster with images signifying Nordic welfare ordinariness, privilege montage is a simple, and in contemporary Scandinavian culture ubiquitous, genre for conveying some sort of knowledge about the radically different and yet interconnected conditions of life in "the safe world" and "the unsafe world" respectively. The "interplay of opposites" at the crux of privilege montage may at times appear belonging to a repertoire of sentimental tropes asking the privileged subject to feel right, to cultivate sympathetic emotions for *the less fortunate*, and to dedicate himself to *helping* these less fortunate by, say, donating or consuming compassionately.⁴² Yet more often than not, privilege montage plays out in a skeptical key, calling forth emotional ambivalence and an experience of complicity.

As a way of winding up my discussion of skeptical culture and its aesthetics of complicity, let us look at one of many privilege montages in Östlund's film. Consider, therefore, the scene in which Christian starts out sitting on a bench in a large department store, his purchases in expensive branded bags at his side. A poor-looking Muslim man (Copos Pardaliam) asks him for money, Christian shakes his head (Fig. 1). Christian then needs to find his daughters in the large store. He now has to ask the man for help: Will he keep an eye on Christian's shopping while he looks for his daughters? The man is indeed willing to do so (Fig. 2).

This scene is a typical privilege montage—albeit global inequality is here figured in a domestic form in the shape of an immigrant beggar. *The Square* is interested in the issue of reciprocity and, especially, reciprocal vulnerability: It is not only "the others" who have to ask for help, the film submits; so does the privileged white man. However, as a privilege-sensitive film in the skeptical mode, *The Square* must necessarily have an ironic take on reciprocity and vulnerability as social facts. Thus, the film pictures for us the way in which the sentimental notion of the "universally human" is simultaneously true, Christian and the man both need help, and false—but mostly false and exploitative, so the scandalous-skeptical shot of the man now guarding the expensive shopping bags would seem to suggest. There is, again, the skeptical schism: on the one hand, subscribing to an emotional universalism—we all suffer, we

all need help and care—and, on the other, a sense of something sham and unreasonable in this universalism and its semblance of equality and shared humanity. This split operates as a formal matrix for a number of scenes in *The Square*, including this one.

Summing up, we could say that if sentimentality is marked historically by its whiteness, so is skepticism, although the latter tends to grapple somewhat less optimistically with this fact. The skeptical aesthetic of complicity, and the skeptical logic of moral sentiments that gives rise to it, *cannot not* denote privilege, hierarchies, and asymmetrical power relations, the recognition of which the skeptical mutation is, precisely, registering. And for *The Square*, privilege montage in the skeptical mode is a favored vehicle for its open-ended posing and tentative answering of the fundamental question of Scandinavian privilege sensibility: Is this okay?

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, translations are mine. Christina Nordvang Jensen, "I Ghana hedder det 'Orboni Wawu': Den døde, hvide mands tøj. Og der kommer stadig mere af det," *Information*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.information.dk/udland/2023/04/ghana-hedder-obroni-wawu-doeede-hvide-mands-toej-kommer-stadig-mere>.
- 2 An early version of my argument in this article appeared (in Danish) as Devika Sharma, "Skandimentalitet. Moral og amoral i skandinavisk privilegiesensibilitet og i *The Square*," *K&K* 132 (2021). The article develops further my work on Scandinavian privilege sensibility; for earlier conceptualizations of "the predicament of privilege," see Devika Sharma, "Privileged, Hypocritical, and Complicit: Contemporary Scandinavian Literature and the Egalitarian Imagination," *Comparative Literature Studies* 56, no. 4 (2019): 711-730; Devika Sharma "Doing Good, Feeling Bad: Humanitarian Emotion in Crisis," *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 9, no. 1 (2017); Devika Sharma, "The Predicament of Spectatorship: Renzo Martens and the Humanitarian Image," in *Discursive Framings of Human Rights: Negotiating Agency and Victimhood*, eds. Karen-Margrethe Simonsen and Jonas R. Kjærgård (Abingdon and New York: Birkbeck Law Press, 2017). My book *The Predicament of Privilege* is forthcoming with the University of Washington Press.
- 3 Stuart Hall quoted in Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Transcript: In conversation with Ruth Wilson Gilmore," UCL, Sara Parker Remond Centre, Podcast June 7, 2020, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/racism-racialisation/transcript-conversation-ruth-wilson-gilmore>.
- 4 I employ Raymond Williams's term "structure of feeling," because, like Williams, I wish to bring into focus aspects of emotionality that should be understood as "social experience, rather than as 'personal' experience," see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1977), 131. Other aspects of Williams's definition are less important to my discussion of skeptimentality, including his emphasis that structures of feeling are social formations that are not yet articulate or manifest, see page 132 and 134.
- 5 Robert C. Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 52. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2004. DOI:10.1093/019514550X.001.0001.
- 6 Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge og London: Harvard UP, 2005).
- 7 In Sharma, "Privileged, Hypocritical, and Complicit," I discuss Hammann's work as exemplary of what I call Scandinavian hypocrisy fiction.
- 8 Kirsten Hammann, *En dråbe i havet* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2008), 35, 22.
- 9 Hammann, *En dråbe i havet*, 305.
- 10 In Sharma, "Skandimentalitet" (in Danish), I employed the term "skandimentalitet" to address this sensibility. However, "skeptimentality" is a better term, considering the cultural exclusiveness suggested by "skandimentalitet." While it does come in a particularly Scandinavian configuration, the predicament of privilege is not an exclusively Scandinavian phenomenon.
- 11 I have learned to think about affective meta-response in this way from Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*.
- 12 Kundera quoted in Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality*, 12.
- 13 Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 10.
- 14 One could argue that this kind of ambivalence is present already in the judgment of an object as being a sentimental one. As an instance of *judgment*, sentimentality seems to hinge on a reflexive relay between feeling moved by the object before us and then feeling, mildly or resolutely, repelled or manipulated by the now recognizably sentimental convention that caused the movement in the first place. See June Howard, "What Is Sentimentality?" *American Literary History* 11, no. 1 (1999): 63-81.
- 15 Paul Gilroy, "Agonistic Belonging: The Banality of Good, the 'Alt Right' and the Need for Sympathy," *Open Cultural Studies* 3 (2019): 1-14.
- 16 I do not mean to imply that the subject necessarily experiences a sharp pang of guilt or a sting of shame; I mean, rather, that the subject has a sense of being in a guilty relation to something. This sense of guilty relationality might well feel like guilt, and often does, but it can also feel like indignation, triumph, sadness, cleverness, irritation or embarrassment.
- 17 The Law of Jante was devised by the Danish-Norwegian author Axel Sandemose in his 1933 novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (*A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*).
- 18 For perspectives on this benevolent internationalism, see Kristian Bjørkdahl and Antoine de Bengy Puyvallée, eds., *Do-Gooders at the end of Aid: Scandinavian Humanitarianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Terje Tvedt, *Verdensbilder og selvbilder. En humanitær stormakts intellektuelle historie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002).
- 19 For perspectives on the "Nordic welfare model" and equality, see Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); Stephen Graubard, ed., *Norden: The Passion for Equality* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1986); Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, *The Swedish Theory of Love: Individualism and Social Trust in Modern Sweden*, trans. Stephen Donovan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022).
- 20 I am thinking here of (Anglo-)Americanists such as June Howard, Julie Ellison, Saidiya Hartman, Laura Wexler, Dana Luciano, Elizabeth Freeman, Lauren Berlant and Kyla Schuller.
- 21 For elaboration, see Sharma, "Doing Good, Feeling Bad," and Sharma, "Privileged, Hypocritical, and Complicit."
- 22 Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
- 23 Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

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- 24 The trilogy includes also *The Anatomy of National Fantasy* (1991) and *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997). Elsewhere, I discuss (in Danish) the concept of “intimate publics” advanced by Berlant in the trilogy; see Devika Sharma, “Ny Feminisme I. Affekt og følelser,” in *Ny kulturteori*, eds. Birgit Eriksson og Bjørn Schiermer Andersen (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2019).
- 25 Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 43.
- 26 Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 35.
- 27 Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).
- 28 See also Elizabeth Freeman, *Beside You in Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), and Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, Chapter 2.
- 29 See the NRK interview with Listhaug, Siv Sandvik, “Frp-Listhaug: – Godhetsstyraniet rir Norge som en mare,” *NRK*, November 3, 2015, https://www.nrk.no/norge/frp-listhaug_-_godhetsstyraniet-rir-norge-som-en-mare-1.12633044.
- 30 Krarup—a former leading member of the Tidehverv movement and Member of Parliament for Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People’s Party)—cautioned against prioritizing human rights and humanitarianism on the assumption that these phenomena distort Christian charity by cultivating a programed global benevolence at the expense of the local neighbor, who exists within the parameters of the nation. See, for instance, Søren Krarup, “Søren Krarup svarer læserne,” *Religion.dk*, February 2, 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210304141751/https://www.religion.dk/sp%C3%B8rg-om-kristendom/sren-krarup-svarer-lserne>.
- 31 Asbjørn Grønstad, “Conditional Vulnerability in the Films of Ruben Östlund,” in *Vulnerability in Scandinavian Art and Culture*, eds., Adriana Margareta Dancus, Mats Hyvönen and Maria Karlsson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 20.
- 32 Ruben Östlund, *The Square*, director and writer (Göteborg: Plattform Produktion, 2017).
- 33 He did so in his much-discussed “open your hearts” speech (“öppna era hjärtan”); see, for example, the editorial in *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper, August 17, 2014 (in Swedish).
- 34 Östlund quoted in Joe Utichi, “Meet Ruben Östlund,” *Deadline.com*, May 29, 2017, <https://deadline.com/2017/05/ruben-ostlund-director-interview-square-palme-dor-cannes-1202103984/>.
- 35 These fundamental questions also inform the notorious scene in which a performance artist imitating an ape harasses guests at a gala dinner held for the Swedish cultural aristocracy—a scene that will not, however, play a role in my analysis of the film.
- 36 Elizabeth Ezra, “Out of Bounds: The Spatial Politics of Civility in *The Square* (Östlund, 2017) and *Happy End* (Haneke, 2017),” *Northern Lights* 18 (2020): 107.
- 37 Kyla Schuller, “Avatar and the Movements of Neocolonial Sentimental Cinema,” *Discourse* 35, no. 2 (2013): 181, my emphasis.
- 38 James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” in *Notes of a Native Son* (New York: The Dial Press, 1963 [1949]): 486-487.
- 39 Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” 487.
- 40 Ørntoft quoted in Anna Raaby Ravn, “Hvis vor tids modkultur bliver ansvar og forpligtelser, så har 68’erne fået noget at tænke over,” *Dagbladet Information*, March 23, 2018.
- 41 See, for instance, Jonas Hassen Khemeri, “47 anledningar till att jag grät när jag såg Ruben Östlunds film *Play*,” *Dagens Nyheter*, November 18, 2011; Stefan Jonsson, “*Play* missar de andras perspektiv,” *Dagens Nyheter*, December 5, 2011; Elisabeth Stubberud and Priscilla Ringrose, “Speaking Images, Race-less Words: *Play* and the Absence of Race in Contemporary Scandinavia,” *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema* 4, no. 1 (2014): 61-76; and Helena Karlsson, “Ruben Östlund’s *Play* (2011): Race and Segregation in ‘Good’ Liberal Sweden,” *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema* 4, no. 1 (2014): 43-60.
- 42 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 27.
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