



# The Picture of Snow White

By Ida Krøgholt

As reality theater *The Picture of Snow White* (1994) demonstrates how certain fragments of reality can function as the material of the performance, and at first glance *The Picture of Snow White* resembles the readymade's approach to form. The readymade exhibits a material (like Duchamp's urinal) in the Art Museum, and by this, the art institution constitutes, the work of art. The special feature of reality theater is that the spectator becomes part of a game with reality, form and perception. Through the work's assembly of various materials, the spectator might be stimulated to switch instantly between different levels of observation. Through mythos – the fairy tale of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* – the audience is offered a position to experience the performance from. The performance presents non-acting performers, i.e. that each performer acts 'as himself', under his own name, and all actors are casted to fill in a role in the tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: eight dwarfs perform 'the dwarfs', a pair of twins perform the queen and her mirror, two soldiers are hunters, a slender dark-haired woman is Snow White and an opera singer is the prince. The reality dimension is further constructed through the performers' own stories, which have been created through interviews with the director and are told into her framework and recorded on a track that clearly is 'spoken' by the performers. The audience is initiated into the performers' particular life problems. You listen to the track on which the performers are telling personal stuff, while at the same time you see them act as impersonal figures. Snow White is presented in a tableau with open dress and bare breasts and turns slowly on-site. The dwarfs exercise and perform physical actions: the dwarf girl who has won gold at the Dwarfs' World Championship is running, the watchmaker waters some garden dwarfs, two boys are dancing hiphop, one plays air guitar and two of them take part in the soldiers' dwarf-throwing. The prince is singing and his voice echoes through a glass funnel. The queen and her mirror move synchronously, carrying flaming gas burners and always accompanied by a sharp buzzing sound, like insects that swarm. In this way, the performance creates tension between the visual presentation of the actors and their life stories. This complicates the spectator's reading.

The use of mirrors underlines the identity theme as a predominant scenographic element. On the floor there are quantities of ellipsoidal mirrors that reflect the performers as they move across the stage. The end wall is adorned with a large elliptical projection, and in addition to portraying Snow White it 'mirrors' different female figures. In addition, the dwarfs carry smaller mirrors and scrutinize themselves in them. Through these reflections as reality fragments and as characters in a fairytale the performers mirror each other and mutually distort and disturb the spectator's observations. The mirror is the medium through which you can seek answers to the question: *Spieglein, Spieglein an der Wand, wer ist der schönste im ganzen Land?* People are formed through the mirror, as it constitutes the image of them and their identities. An example of how this understanding of mirroring is undermined is the way the performance reinforces the twins' similarity, and you are unable

*The Picture of Snow White 1994 (Roberto Fortuna)*

to distinguish who is the queen and who is her mirror. This happens while the twin, Sara, emphasizes her and her sister's difference: "I find it hard to see that we are similar." With these mirror image themes the performance relates itself to the sense of sight as a dominant and superior organ. But simultaneously the distortions of the images sew doubt that realities like beauty and identity can be observed through reflections in a mirror, i.e. in the image of a work of art. It is this exploration of identity and reality the performance communicates: what appears to be similar turns out to be different. The mirrors' representation of reality fails, but the quirky performers give form to a great beauty.



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