

Pawn had a business meeting today, which entailed remembering just what his business really is, after all, and much other preparation. X took advantage of this to laze about for once before heading off to the National Galleries for the Picasso retrospective there.

Pawn's meeting went well, and dwelt on longer than expected, eating up the entire afternoon. Back home, then, to rendezvous with X and dinner, which consisted of some yummy broccoli and a chicken and asparagus pie, followed by biscuits and grapes. Then off to the Arcola Theatre production *Monsters* up at Arcola's creatively [green theatre](#) in Hackney. This show has generated its fair share of controversy in the press, for a variety of reasons. The basic idea of the show, by Swedish playwright Niklas Rådström (translated by Gabriella Berggren), is to examine the events which lead to the death of 2 year old James Bulger, in 1993, at the hands of a pair of 10 year old boys. How could this happen? How could so many people witness these events and not intervene? How could so many CCTV cameras record this, and nothing was done to stop it?

It is difficult subject matter, to be sure, and while I am not sure that the best approach was used in all instances I can attest that the show is masterful and quite effective in making the audience squirm and find defect in their own behaviour. I, for one, was made to think of how many times I may have been complicit, though my own lack of action, in crimes which while less heinous still crimes. The show opens with the four actors, two men and two women, asking a series of questions, almost as Greek chorus. These questions are academic, rhetorical, but probing:

I don't know

I don't know why you came here

I don't know what you expect from a performance about two children who kill a third

I don't know what you expect to hear

You probably want to know why

Why did that which soon will happen here already happen?

How could such a thing happen: children killing children, brutally, ruthlessly, planlessly destructively?

That situation must surely be so from anything I know that it would never happen anywhere near me.

Someone must tell me why, so that I need never think about it.

And on in that vein. The actors eventually break out of chorus and into a series of 33 scenes, punctuated by flashes of fluorescent lighting and loud bursts of static. There are video monitors suspended from the ceiling of the performance space, a space which itself is a rectangle delineated by a thin line, and with seating on all sides. There are video cameras which the cast members periodically re-aim and refocus these cameras on other cast members, the audience, etc.

The action alternates between direct exposition on the sequence of events, re-enactment of the police interviews, statements by the parents, and more of these probing questions. The actors take turns playing the roles of the 10 year olds, their parents, the police, the victim's mother. All the while we see video from CNN, the BBC, films (*Lord of the flies* is prominent at one point) and other sources on the video screens.

Despite the frequent references in the script to "that which soon will happen here" or "that which has just happened here" there is no effort to actually re-enact the crime itself, just the interrogations. This leads to an oddity in the script, as throughout the show we are being questioned as to whether we would have gotten involved, should the authorities have done so, etc. At the end we are nearly chastised for not having done so:

CHORUS: How can any of the responsibility be ours?

We weren't even there.

CHORUS LEADER: We are here.

It has also just happened right here.

CHORUS: This was just an enactment.
When it happened it was for real.

...
CHORUS LEADER: We are all guilty of what we did
or didn't do.
Where there is evil
it thrives on indifference, contempt,
self complacency, arrogance...
Human beings kill other human beings
Children kill another child
The conclusion or moral to be found in this
cannot undo that it is, was and has been happening
CHORUS: Is, was, has been, happening
Is, was, has been, happening
CHORUS LEADER: And it has happened,
without any of us being able to prevent it
I'm not saying that makes us responsible for this
I'm saying it makes this part of our fate.

Had they in fact enacted the grisly event, no doubt there would have been no end of protest,
but then to carry on as though we had just witnessed this even seems duplicitous.
No matter, I guess. The show, as I've stated, was powerful and effective. The use of the space
and video and sound technologies was wonderful. The cast: Lucy Ellinson, Sandy Grierson,
Jeremy Killick and Victoria Pratt were all brilliant.
All in all a good and effective piece of social criticism wrapped up into an impressive play. Oh,
and this bears mentioning: The program for *Monsters* includes the full script (which explains,
for those of you wondering, how I've been able to quote so extensively). For a play which
aims to educate and inspire thoughtful reflection and discussion, this is a wonderful thing.