Making the Scene Together: Mai Zetterling's Flikorna/The Girls (1968) and Aristophanes' Lysistrata

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When *Flikorna* was completed in 1968, it was the fourth feature film released in four years by its rising star Swedish director, Mai Zetterling (1925-1994). Initial showings of it in Stockholm were poorly received, and Zetterling's next production was canceled. It was a "flop," according to the filmmaker, because people did not understand its ironical view (Zetterling 204). In fact, her passionate full-throttle commentary in *Flikorna* on the subject of women abruptly stalled her career, and she never recuperated the same ability to make films. According to a reviewer at the time of *Flikorna*'s belated international release in 1974, it was too avant-garde for most spectators in 1968, and not appreciated by the few critics who saw it (Lennard 27, Oukrate 108).

*Flikorna* was one of the first feature films to attempt a broad based description of white middle class women's condition, and uniquely accompanied it with a catalog of contemporary feminist ideas. In combining characters with instincts towards liberation and a narrative liberated from conventional realism, it derives its effectiveness from a complex amalgam of real, imagined, and theatrical space intersecting with the present, the past, anxiety provoked dream, and wishful reverie.

Lucy Fischer provides the primary scholarly commentary on *Flikorna*, and contrasts the concrete, materialist description of women in it with the failed mothers and duplicitous women of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (80-88). She effectively shows that while both films are structured around shifts among the present, past, thoughts, and fantasies, they produce different results. Madness and neurosis in *Persona*, is contrasted with the "sane perspective on a sexist world" of *Flikorna* (81). Fischer also sees Zetterling's protagonist as someone who wishes to be known for more than her sexuality, someone who wants to become a public political figure. While Fischer appreciates the film's -- and the character's -- aspiration to change the world, she criticizes Zetterling for failing to offer specific solutions. Also, she wonders if an "ancient drama like *Lysistrata* can really stand as a model for action today" since it is the denial of sexual favors that power the women to political success (86).

This essay responds to these questions by focusing on the relationship of *Flikorna* to the ideology of Aristophanes' play, and on the contrasting conclusions of the film and the play. Far from summarizing or providing closure, the final segment of *Flikorna* instead opens up new story ideas, and, on first viewing, new visual motifs. In the end, Zetterling does not so much espouse political action as expose its complicity in maintaining the status quo. The political activism of *Flikorna* is a fantastic hoot, just as the women's actions in *Lysistrata* were to Aristophanes' audience, not only because the speech by the main character in the film is amateurish, but because she humorously abuses her power as the "star" of the production. Further, the film clearly indicates that women do not easily bind into political solidarity, while the play makes much of Lysistrata's autocratic ways and success in uniting the women into a powerful force. In the modern context of
Flikorna, the women are not capable of making world peace, but are instead shown to have only the option of seizing their own individual destinies, and in the process, risking conflict.

By taking a close look at the film’s relationship to Aristophanes, and to the play's narrative structure, we can see that the solution suddenly offered at the film's end is a micro one to an individual, not a political, problem. At the same time, it is a solution that articulates the concept of "the personal as political" by making the public sphere a witness to the decision and resulting personal "war."

Production Context
Mai Zetterling, who became a stage actress and screen star in the 1940s, was the only daughter of a working class woman and a bourgeois man who abandoned them at the time of the birth. From her autobiography, All Those Tomorrows, we know that she read, aside from classic literature, many of the important authors of the postwar period like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as the related psychology and philosophy of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche. The ideas she gained from the political and sociological literature of the time coincided powerfully with her personal experience of class discrimination, which dated from her days of wandering by the local French school to watch how the wealthy girls walked, talked and dressed (29). Given her passion for Par Lagerkvist and Agnes von Krusenstjerna, whose novels and life she adopted for the screen, it is clear that she had a great affinity for the formal aspects of modernism, as well as its social and political themes. Finally, she was closely involved in Swedish cinema during the 1940s and 1950s when it was known for introducing into movie theaters "philosophical" subject matter, and "neurosis was considered the exclusive territory" of that country's cinema (Elley 31).

In the late 1960s, Flikorna's political strategy was somewhat at odds with the dominant feminist account of the time, articulated by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex. Beauvoir's philosophy, based in liberal individualism, defined sexism as the objectification of women in a world constructed by men, and suggested equal opportunity in education and participation in the "real" world as a solution. By contrast, Zetterling's thinking was focused on subjective and multiple realities, which suggested a more anarchic view of a world "gone mad" in which women were trapped by primarily complicit options. Zetterling stood distinctly separate from these thinkers in her assessment of women as being part of the problem, and was more influenced by the international "art" cinema, at the time overflowing with varied and broad critiques of realism. In fact, her favorite directors were Luis Buñuel and Federico Fellini (Zetterling 204), an influence readily seen in her irreverent tone and winking obscurities. She was ahead of her time, and much of the densely intelligent imagery of Flikorna -- focused on the expression of desire and on countering the cinematic production of women as objects -- even today remains emblematic of the confrontational feminist visual arsenal: women stepping forward in lock step, stripping off underwear, getting angry with harassers, and booing a movie screen.
Zetterling’s political stance was also influenced by her sensitivity to border politics, which can be seen in Flikorna when Liz describes herself as a "foreigner" in northern Sweden. In terms of cinematic strategy, this awareness was honed during her apprentice period in the 1950s when she made documentaries on Swedish immigrants in Lapland, Romanian gypsies, and Icelanders. By repeatedly analyzing discrimination in her documentary shorts, the form of her cinematic analysis in relation to it became assured and strong. Her politics was strengthened by her documentary work, which was, in turn, strengthened by her expertise in precise and powerful expression acquired as an actress. Through this dual fascination, with modes of discrimination and modes of expression, she forged, in the years before 1968, a critical cinematic method focused on the liberation of space/time and the criss-crossing of content boundaries. Her first feature film, Loving Couples, plays extensively with a flashback structure over the life of each of three women who are in a hospital ward waiting to give birth. Using one set, Night Games moves back and forth in time between the life of the child and the grown man. Though incorporating a level of the grotesque and the surreal, these films remain firmly rooted in a conventional narrative space. However, in Flikorna content is strikingly diversified, incorporating reverie on various topics, the repetition of an abstracted whitened screen, and a buildup of narrative fragments, unconnected to the narrative as story, which take on an essay form.

**Flikorna’s Narrative and Story Source, Lysistrata**

Flikorna’s story covers a tour through Sweden of a Stockholm theatrical company performing Lysistrata, the fifth century B.C. play by Aristophanes, which tells of Greek women abstaining from sex in order to force their husbands to stop making war. The films' three main characters – played by some of the most famous Swedish actresses of the day, Bibi Anderson (Liz/Lysistrata), Gunnel Lindblom (Gunilla/Kalonike), Harriet Anderson (Marianne/Myrrhine) – loosely parallel the play's characters. Twenty segments, between two and eight minutes long, can be discerned in the film, each marked by increasingly radical shifts of mise-en-scène and tone.

Steeped in the literary style and theatrical staging of Aristophanes' time, more than one third of the film's dialog is directly from the play. The script reprises four sections in near completeness, which wind through the film either from the stage or from off screen dialog. They are: 1) Lysistrata's call and the women's resistance to the idea of abstinence, 2) her persistent baiting of them until they agree to join her boycott, 3) the taking by force of the treasury by the older women, and 4) a lengthy scene of seduction and refusal that illustrates the women's strategy. The play dialog maintained in the film emphasizes the men's dependence on force, the women's fear of it, physical fights, the conflicts between Lysistrata and the women, and Lysistrata's conflict with the Magistrate. Noteworthy omissions are the repeated assertions of the importance of unity in gaining power. Even when not quoting the play, the film imitates Aristophanes' "topsy-turvy" comic style (Boardman 168). Surreal props appear in natural locations, past anxieties turn into slapstick adventure, reflection becomes action, female striptease and male chauvinist speeches are taken equally seriously, and serious discussions turn into frenzied dance. An additional part of the play chosen to be omitted from the film is that of the Spartans, whom Aristophanes included to heighten the absurdity of the plot and further deflect his
audience away from the failures of the current regime. While reigning political figures were Aristophanes' usual target, the persistence of military defeat no longer made them easy laughs, so Aristophanes' choice of women characters further shifted the focus towards the less controversial "humorous excesses of male chauvinism" (Spatz 33).

Because of this protective attitude towards the status quo, and contrary to the play's reputation as a feminist tract, it is today thought by scholars to be a profoundly conservative document "that highlights the inauthenticity of women and reasserts the power of masculinity" (Taffe 73). To counter this conclusion, Zetterling replaces the scenes of the Spartan "enemy" women, with scenes of the actresses facing the contemporary challenges of their relationships with their own "enemy," men. None of the actresses is any happier with the status quo regarding their domestic relations than the Athenians were with their defeat by the Spartans, but in the film their displeasure is a central focus. More to the point, Zetterling herself is not committed to the maintenance of the ideological status quo as was Aristophanes. While Aristophanes is focused on diverting his audience from the failures of the current regime, Zetterling is focused on putting them "in your face."

Unlike Aristophanes' ideology, his "topsy-turvy" stylistics are more in Zetterling's interest. In his long view of literary history, Mikhail Bakhtin places Aristophanes and the serio-comic in direct connection through Petronius and Rabelais with the "authentic spirit" of the novel, in opposition to the totalizing genres of high culture, such as the epic (22). Aristophanes' comedies, in their incorporation of themes of everyday life -- food, drink, sexuality, parody, and the laughter provoked by such "coarse realities," -- provide the main foundation of this "authentic spirit," which, in turn, becomes the essential aesthetic approach to understanding mortality and imagining new life (Bakhtin 219). In Flikorna, Aristophanes' bawdy stage language is intertwined with parodies of an actress's life, from being chased by teen age boys, to the mocking of a television interviewer (he remains impervious to their humor), to a slapstick chase through the woods, and the "unpacking" of mistresses. The apex of the presentation of everyday life is Liz's striptease, which is followed by her ritualized death in an elaborate funeral with cortege and speeches. For the remainder of the film, she slowly wakes to a new life.

Three High Points of the Narrative

While there are many arcs in Flikorna's narrative, there are three particularly important culminating segments for the purpose of this essay.

The first is Liz's impromptu speech from the stage, in which she bemoans complacent people and their disinclination to change. The conflict engendered by the speech rises from Liz's great desire to bring about change in others, in spite of her woeful lack of experience in effecting it her self. Her mistakes are laughable: she springs her action on the other actors, not thinking to get any of them behind her; she antagonizes the audience by not allowing them to leave ("the cloak room won't open for at least 10 minutes, I've seen to that"); and, completely unprepared for failure, she acts like a child and becomes shrill, tightening her body and quite nearly stamping her feet. Not only does she humiliate herself, she embarrasses her fellow actors. This scene is the clearest statement
of the film's persistent observation of the pervasive abuse of power. Such abuse may have a well-intentioned end, in this case to plead for dialog about the state of the world, but the fact remains that Liz uses her "star" position to seize center stage and berate the audience. Despite Liz's weakness, she is a determined and quick learner, and later, when she meets the press in her leopard coat, she has begun the necessary work of attempting to change her self. The act of speaking, however failed, has also allowed her and the film to face down the female demon "fear of inexpressiveness" (Moi 179-80). When she is misunderstood at the press conference, and again has difficulties explaining herself, she strips off her clothes. When all the women in the room strip, it is a mass baptism into fearless expression, and a triumphant fantasy for Liz.

The second high point is an elaborate commentary on the economics of sexism that is one of the longest segments in the film. The following scenes are incorporated and intercut:

1) At a peaceful marina, Liz walks with Olle, a friend who has been sent by Liz's husband, Carl. Olle speaks to her about the excessive amount of time she spends away from home, and the importance of Carl's work as opposed to hers.

2) On stage, the tour and the play's dialogue almost over, Lysistrata is castigating the men for not following through with the women's pleas for peace and landing themselves in the unfortunate situation of having to take orders from women.

3) At the "big board" of the commodity exchange in Stockholm, Carl occasionally types at a tiny mechanical keyboard, but mostly looks anxious and yells out his bids.

By the end of the segment, the exchange floor has been merged with the Greek columns and stage set of Lysistrata on one side, where the actors perform alongside the brokers. Following is a sampling of the ironic dialogue that flows over the montage of the three scenes:

Olle: "Why do you have to fight each other all the time?"
Lysistrata: "All through this long war, we were somehow able to put up with what you men were doing. We didn't approve, but we understood you."
Carl: "Buying ball-bearings!"
Lysistrata: "And smiling to hide our sadness we'd quietly ask: "Did you decide anything about peace in today's assembly, my love?" And you'd reply "What's that to you? This is serious business. Shut up! And we would shut up."
Man at board: "Selling L.M. Ericsson!"
Olle: "I think you're being unfair to him, Liz. He gets very involved in his work. Honestly, is your work as important?"
Carl: "Selling 89.50!"
Lysistrata: "And you'd reply: "Mind your own business or I'll give you something to complain about! War is men's business! . . .Now you have to listen to us. It's our turn to talk and yours to shut up."
Olle: "He thinks you want him to fail."

The mixture of the scenes mocks the world of men and business. The parts of the segment involving women -- fantastical criticism of war by women on a stage, and an outdoor discussion with Liz about her shirking her wifely duties are played very
seriously. These two scenes are stitched together with the third, the exchange floor filled with men, who look comically wild-eyed and feverishly call out numbers. This segment, where the recurring gag is the business of investment and return, poses questions about what is important in life: peace or war, business or art, duty or free will. The twist at the end – Olle's final plea to Liz, "He thinks you want him to fail"-- is recognized for the emotional blackmail that it is and provokes anger in Liz. His appeal for the abstract good of the couple is a selfish attempt to control her, and leaves Liz more aware of her condition. The segment's theme precisely conveys the privileging and arrogance of the male sphere, which becomes a detriment to art as well as the independence of women.

The third climactic segment, where each of the "girls" makes a political speech, is also one of the longest. The speeches follow Gunilla's and Marianne's abandonment of Liz (after her failed speech from the stage), and subsequent bonding with her as they come to realize that her vulnerable condition is their own. They too want change – their mates think it's quite a joke -- and they realize that that means seeking a redistribution of power.

The two respond in different ways to the challenge.
Gunilla carefully focuses on what she knows best, the home:

"There must be a million women in this country, united [we would] scare our rulers stiff... What, nothing to complain about? Well, we have to any way... What about our maids, when will we be allowed to deduct them from our taxes? ...and housewife's pay... It's the principles that count. They're much more important than private life... But we haven't created them yet. Too many nappies to change, but the woman of the future will do it for us."

Marianne's speech follows and expresses her viewpoint of what course to pursue. Being the one not married, and therefore having the least power, she bitterly preaches acceptance:

"Let us try to live as miserably as we can, so that in all our dealings with men we have someone to blame... It wouldn't matter how loud we screamed because no one would listen to us anyway... Let us compromise in our hearts. And finally let us always be sure to do our duty as mothers, mistresses and wives, by going down in history as the sex which in all human circumstances cried yes, yes, yes, when the answer was no, no, no!"

Neither of these speeches pleases Liz, who prefers what she sees as the brutal truth.

"What are we so scared of? We have just as much responsibility as men for what happens in the world. But if we don't take action, we should at least know why we haven't taken it... It's because we're frightened, and stupid, and afraid to lose the security that we are sure to lose anyway..."

Marianne interrupts her, "Come down here, I want a word with you," and the scene erupts in a flurry of fists and shoving.

This segment comprises the deepest level of the analysis of power politics in the film. It reveals Liz's desire for power — the Lysistrata fantasy of leading women to the defeat of
men -- as she puffs up with pride at her friends' activist speeches, then shrugs her disappointment in their diverging opinions. Fischer writes that Zetterling "undercuts" a call for feminist movement by having the women fight, but questioning the concept of unity is one of Zetterling's most persistent observations (Fischer 86). In this, Zetterling presages later feminist writers, such as Judith Butler, who believes that the assumption of women's solidarity impedes frank expression and fails to recognize the diverse conditions in which women exist, much the same way patriarchy does. Via the scene of the brawl and the speeches that precede it, Zetterling presents an analysis of hierarchy and power. She takes care to show that what provokes the conflict is unhappiness with Liz's patronizing hectoring from "up there," to which Marianne objects by commanding her "down here." On the other side, confused by Liz's plea to be "honest," the frustrated Gunilla cries out "Just tell us what to do!"

In their speeches, the "girls" exhibit possible poles of the nascent feminist thinking of the time. Gunilla posits the ideal of an organized community, developing an improved woman of the future, with less "nappies to change" and more time to solve political problems. Marianne espouses a more anarchic revolutionary route, saying refusal and negation are the only possible positions of integrity. Liz, the realist, just sees women as "ignorant and lazy and easily scared and conservative." Liz is the only one who engages in a calculated hiding of her agenda (to be in charge), and therefore the one who recognizes the importance of secrecy, as she imagines the men laughing over their agenda (to stay in charge): "I don't think that women ever existed. At least, we've always behaved as if they didn't!"

This joke and the highly organized pageantry that follows it are in marked contrast with the segment of the women's speeches. Here, at Liz's funeral, there is only one speaker, Hugo, and he is uniformly applauded and cheered as he appeals to the men's shared history of dominance over women, and refers to the "long time" it has taken them to respond to the "corruption" of "their nagging interfering ways." His speech is demagogic, and the men are eager to respect and obey his leadership. The commanding style of power is conventional and well understood; there is no competition for the dais, as there is when the women make their speeches. The segment with the women's speeches comments on hierarchy, not only literally within the speeches, but also in the settings – each woman has her own monumental stone building from which to speak. In this way, it also reveals the informal workings of power and the "girls'" attraction and internalization of it, as they compete in grabbing the stage, in disparaging the efforts of others, in frustrated venting, and in the creation of a scene of physical violence.

Aristophanes' incorporation of the Spartan enemy into his absurd plot has another parallel in Flikorna in the press corps that reports on the touring production. Emphasis in the film on the public sphere of the press critiques the power the press has over the stereotyping of women by exploiting titillating "bits," while at the same time seeking to condemn the behavior. This sphere, so important to the theater world, actually becomes the "battleground" of confrontation, and an ally of the men when Liz rebels against them. It is to the press that Carl appeals for justice when his wife removes her clothes. And the press is the group that is stared down by the women when they join her in protest.
Zetterling’s earlier montage of the "sweet" mates in "polyphoto" takes on the appearance of a newsreel, which also includes the most despised dictators of the past, as well as contemporary world leaders, and finally, their armies. In this way, the chronology of the "show," from husbands to politicians to followers, becomes not merely an anti-male tirade, but a straightforward explication of the personal as political.

Cinematic Strategies
Aside from imitating the style of Aristophanes, Zetterling utilizes a variety of other strategies to critique the traditional view of women, and suggest their interest in another kind of life. Through acting, she problematizes spectator identification. Through careful composition, she creates flat, discrete, still environments (there is little moving camera), using only natural locations, and predominantly white compositions. Through editing, she mixes up time, space, dialog, music, and sound. A brief elaboration of these strategies is necessary to understand fully the end of the film.

Identification with the characters is initiated, then contradicted by unattractive behavior (anger, impatience, boredom), and interrupted by glimpses of relationships that remain narratively underdeveloped. For example, in the first scene, the camera is positioned behind some large frame-sized candlesticks, reframing and separating the actresses as they read the play. As the segment continues, the "girls" are, in turn, torn away from the action of the scene by their mate's appeals (each one arriving from another time or place) at the same time they reveal their own distinct desires (to work uninterrupted, to get out of an affair, to have a faithful husband). At the end of this scene, identification is cut off when Liz taps impatiently on the leg of someone we do not see, waves her unlit cigarette, and nods a quick thank you for the light. The spectator is taken aback by the sharp utility of the exchange, and disinclined from romantic involvement with the beautiful star, who has lost her allure.

Another critical strategy is the settings, which are most always public, either indoors or out. The indoor public sphere is dominated by men, and defined in the film by the press, mostly disdainful reporters, and theater colleagues, mostly supercilious males. The "girls" themselves have no private space of their own, except in hotels and dressing rooms, which they share. Their homes are briefly glimpsed and in no way signify refuge. The apartments of Gunilla and Liz are clearly "owned" by their mates, and Marianne is desperate to have a larger apartment furnished by her lover. On the other hand, Marianne and Gunilla appear quite comfortable outdoors; when they dream of escaping from the public embarrassment that Liz has brought them, they imagine themselves canoeing and motor biking. Being both ambitious and industrious, Liz is not as easily distracted by nature. She is outdoors only for short walks with a clear purpose; even then she is never really comfortable. On her walk home with her dog, she stops in her tracks at the sound of a rotary telephone, and listens to her husband, somewhere up in an office high rise, making dates with his mistresses.

This particular shot of Liz is the first of many shots of one or more of the "girls" surrounded by stark whiteness. Whole scenes are so brightly photographed, in the snow or in front of white backdrops that mimic it, that they have virtually no gray tones, and
leave an impression of an etched plate: Marianne and the doctor on their chase through the woods, Gunilla's walk to find the radiated child, the hotel room where Carl unpacks his mistresses, and the play's seduction scene, all have this quality. Within the terms of the film, the outdoors clearly supplies a measure of pleasure and peace, which is then typically disrupted by responsibility for work, home, or husband. The scenes just mentioned involve fantasy elements, and foreground the tension between the women and their mates, which then boils over into anger and/or shame. They are abstracted scenes for the spectator, beginning or ending with momentary emptiness, but light bulb experiences for the characters, moments of realization that are grasped briefly, and then buried.

Kaja Silverman writes of the appearance of authorial desire in a film as a repeated "nodal point" (218). The periodic whiteness of Flikorna, often presenting a moment of abstraction, is certainly in this category, having no particular narrative functioning. It represents a blank slate, indicating a desire for the ideal new beginning that that phrase suggests. Pondering the frequent appearance in Flikorna of this blank slate nodal point it is possible to understand more clearly the philosophical impulses behind Zetterling's cinematic method. Through the completely fluid yet absolutely precise ordering of time and space, and frequent whiting out of background data, she creates an abstracted, theatrical *mise-en scene* that counters the realist illusion of the story, effectively separating the "girls" from the patriarchal ideology that threatens them daily. Their unhappiness is always there under the surface, and the screen isolation that cues their realization of it is as disturbing to them as it is disorienting to as the spectator.

All this unconventional activity – Flikorna begins to stratify at the point of Liz's speech, and never stops reeling out related, new, ideas – prepares a path towards the end of the film, but hardly a clear-cut one. The whole parallels Bakhtin's view of the novel's structure, which denies "organic unity" and avoids common "deep structures" in favor of an "encyclopedic and abstract comprehensiveness" (4-5). Instead of the "idealization of the past," we get the nitty-gritty Present (Bakhtin 20). Indeed, prior abrupt events, Marianne's tears, the spanking of Gunilla, the brawl, only serve to emphasize more the end's abruptness, as we seek to reconsider what has come before and its relationship to the end.

**The End**

Before proceeding, the final segment must be more fully described.

Liz and Carl enter a large party hall, accompanied by voice over lines from the play:

"Lysistrata! This is your great moment. You must not compromise. Show your wisdom, for you hold the politicians in your power. We entrust you with our destiny. It is for you to settle, for all time, every quarrel."

Carl announces to Liz, "Now you're coming home to me." Liz does not reply, but hears lines from the play talking to her: "How can we bear to fight and quarrel and hurt? Make peace. Say yes!" A man passes by and tells Liz she was "fantastic" on television. She boasts "I'm always fantastic," and Carl retorts, "You should see her in bed. And in the kitchen!" They are called away to sit down for dinner. As guests enjoy the meal, Liz is introduced and stands to speak: "There's such a lot I'd like to say and do. To begin with,
I'm getting a divorce!” Suddenly everyone is outfitted with party hats and whistles, and the room breaks out in pandemonium. Liz herself is bedecked with an elaborate feathered white headpiece. Carl, now in a dunce cap, cries "What on earth's come over her?" Gunilla and Marianne blow whistles at him, "It's because you're blind and selfish, idiotic and irresponsible, impossible and uninvolved." But he has the last words: "I'll fight it. This means war!" Everyone rises to dance to contemporary music. They move in front of fun-house mirrors where their bouncing is distorted, and finally, becomes abstracted dark and light streaks.

Liz's sudden decision to announce publicly her intention of getting a divorce, while unexpected, is not so strange, given the humiliating banter from Carl that precedes it, and given her predilection for blending her personal and public life. Within the terms of the film, the divorce announcement appears to be a "real" event, in contrast to the cheering response by the crowd suddenly outfitted with celebratory party gear that follows it – the costume change takes place within a jump cut. This fantasy of happy approval willfully counters the fear of social ostracism that has been repeatedly invoked in the film, the fear of losing income, status, and even friends, that to this day may be provoked by a woman who objects. In this case, the social ostracism would most likely be worse even than what Liz has already endured after her speech from the stage. Liz's decision to divorce speaks to the reality of disparate thinking among women concerning infidelity by their mates. Just as the imagined political speeches of the "girls" detail divergent philosophies among this relatively homogenous group of heterosexual white Swedish actresses, so divorce and its consequences entail a continuum from easy acceptance to abhorrence.

The concluding dance in the film mimics the traditional non sequitur "happy ending," at the same time that it distorts and ironizes it. This final statement explains the many "illogical" views expressed in the film by women caught between their need to be part of a community and their desire to be independent.

In summary, though Flikorna is heavily influenced by Aristophanes' stylistics, it is in sharp contrast to his ideology. In fact, the sections of Lysistrata selected to be in the film have a cumulative effect very different from the play, just as the film itself concludes in a fashion opposite to the play. The play's final peace accord is, in the film, quickly followed by Carl's insult, Liz's decision to divorce, and the declaration from Carl, the final words of the film, "I'll fight it! This means war!"

Upon initial viewing, it is likely that most spectators are taken aback at this rapid series of exchanges, and the final shot of the Flikorna cast dancing in fun-house mirrors, finding it at odds with what has come before, and perhaps even a "cop out." The end of Aristophanes' Lysistrata was nonsense with a purpose – to reinforce the men's sense of identity by shoring up the clear boundary between them and the women, who, absurdly, make peace (Blundell 180). Flikorna, however, has an alternative goal in mind, not to reinforce traditional sex roles, or reverse them, but to begin to transform them. After announcing her intention of getting a divorce, Liz imagines her friends gaily supporting her, a vengeful husband declaring war, and an ending scene of everyone dancing in front of fun-house mirrors. Thus the community of women who find power in unity and make peace in the play becomes, in the film, a community that accepts the need for conflict.
For the last seconds of Flikorna, we are in an alternative reality, where the "war" of the sexes has begun and everyone celebrates the first blow, an announcement of divorce. Still, the celebration is distorted in the mirrors. Liz's desire to lead and be supported by her friends is a fantasy, her own desire not yet fulfilled. In this, Flikorna's end emphasizes another difference from Aristophanes' play, which ends as well with a celebratory dance. Lysistrata is about the eponymous lone woman, and her success, by autocratic means, in uniting all women and making them powerful enough to broker peace. But Flikorna takes its title from the group of "girls," and makes the two supporting roles larger. While Liz's ambitions are similar to Lysistrata's, she finds during the course of the film that women are not likely to find "power in unity" just because they are women, and that "settling for all time, every quarrel" by imitating masculine bullying is not what she herself is capable of or wants. Instead, Zetterling puts Liz in the position of making public her personal struggles for a "new life" in hopes that such modeling will create a space for differing views. She then ends her film with an expression of her own view that this "new life" is a fantastic dream. The totalizing forces of drama, which she knows well from classic theater, are not vaulted into role reversal, but put down into a lightweight schema of fun-house mirrors.

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WORKS CITED


