The Other Eye #1

Germany versus Norway: interchanging theatrical strategies. Articles from the seminar.

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Performing Arts Hub Norway (Oslo), The National Theatre/The Ibsen festival (Oslo) and BIT Teatergarasjen (Bergen), arranged the first of four seminars addressing the theme *Germany versus Norway: interchanging theatrical strategies.* German theatre featured heavily at The Ibsen Festival 2012. At the same time, Ibsen is heavily represented in the German theatre. We asked our panel of experts about the dynamics between German and Norwegian theatre.

The seminar was initiated by the Norwegian Embassy in Berlin, due to their observation of an increasing artistic dialogue and collaboration between artists and representatives from the vibrating performing art sectors in both countries.

Location and time for the first seminar was: The main stage at The National Theatre (Oslo), Saturday 25th of August 2012, at.11 am-15.30 pm.

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German Theatre in Norway: **Reciprocated influences or one way traffic?**

BY ANETTE THERESE PETTERSEN

The German influence on Norwegian theatre is no novelty; for several years now, it has been widely and thoroughly discussed, documented and referenced. Keld Hyldig begins his article on Ibsen and the Ibsen Festival (2010) with a 1990 quote by reviewer Jan E. Hansen: «Norway may be on the verge of discovering Ibsen»[1]. The article, which contains a historical overview of both the festival and key features of the Norwegian theatre scene and its development over the past fifty years, focuses on the rediscovery of Ibsen and the different approaches to staging his plays. Hyldig considers how the goal of the festival was «not just to survey all the world's Ibsen productions, but also to examine Ibsen's drama with new theatrical eyes, break conventions and use Ibsen to develop new theatre»[2]. How about the other way around? Is Norway only an importer of theatrical impulses, never an exporter?

A series of four seminars, led by Performing Arts Hub Norway in collaboration with the Norwegian Embassy in Berlin, have been placing the relationship between Norwegian and German theatre under the microscope. The seminars offer an opportunity for a number of Norwegian and German theatre practitioners to delve deeper into this intercultural contemporary theatre discourse, taking place at different locations and featuring a range of collaborators. The first took place during the Ibsen Festival in Oslo on the 25th August 2012, in collaboration with The National Theatre and BIT Teatergarasjen.

Norway vs Germany – on the exchange of theatre strategies

The seminar was held at the main stage of The National Theatre, the first part dedicated to the Norwegian influence on Germany and German director's theatre. Ragnhild Gjefsen, a recent theatre studies masters graduate exploring new director's theatre in Norway, began the seminar with an introductory speech referencing both German and Norwegian theatre traditions. Gjefsen located three main points of historical interaction between Norwegian and German theatre, also outlined in her essay *German-Norwegian Theatrical Interactions*. Gjefsen was followed by the German theatre critic Thomas Irmer, whose work I will not detail in these pages as his essay *On the collapse of the middle-class* also can be read in this publication. German theatre company Rimini Protokoll presented their production *An Enemy of the People in Oslo*, followed by the Other Eye herself – Shannon Jackson, Professor at the University of California, who brought an external perspective to the discussion on Norwegian and German theatre. The concluding panel also featured director Herbert Fritsch, invited with his performance *Nora oder*

ein Puppenhaus, as well as theatre critic and editor of Norsk Shakespeare- og Teatertidsskrift, Therese Bjørneboe.

The second part of the seminar focused on the influence of German theatre on the Norwegian theatre scene, and featured one speaker, Tore Vagn Lid, Artistic Director of Transiteatret-Bergen. Lid focused on the changes in Norwegian theatre during the last years; his essay *German or post-dramatic vein of expression? The provincial as an opportunity,* the foundation for his speech, can be read in its entirety in this publication. The speech was followed by a panel discussion, with the addition of Thomas Irmer, Therese Bjørneboe , theatre Professor Knut Ove Arntzen and Director Eirik Stubø. The first part of the seminar was led by Karoline Skuseth, Project Manager and Curator of the academic program at BIT- Teatergarasjen, followed by Ragnhild Gjefsen in the second part.

A Short Historical Overview by Ragnhild Gjefsen

Gjefsen provided the seminar participants with a brief historical overview of the main points of interaction of Norwegian and German theatre traditions. The first took place in the early nineteen hundreds, mainly dominated by Max Reinhart and Johanne Dybwad, whilst the second emerged earlier in the sixties, as a result of German director Bertholt Brecth's work with the Berliner Ensemble in the fifties. Kurt Hübner, then Artistic Director of the Bremen Theatre, invited talented directors Peter Zadek and Peter Stein to work at the theatre, providing them with room for experimentation; a collaboration that saw the development of new ways of staging work. This resulted in some of the most significant productions of the period. Not long after Hübner began his collective, Erik Pierstorff, Artistic Director at Trøndelag Teater in Trondheim, decided to invest in newly educated directors – such as Stein Winge and Kjetil Bang-Hansen.

Project-led Theatres emerged throughout the next decades in both countries, marking the third period of interaction. Germany and Norway were both receptive to the new current of post-dramatic work, and, for the first time, a clear influence from a Norwegian group could be perceived in the German milieu; Baktruppen served as a great inspiration to the project-led groups emerging out of the University of Giessen. Later in the seminar, graduates of Giessen Rimini Protokoll elaborated on this period of time with reference to a specific performance by Baktruppen: *Peer, du lügst. Ja!*. This third period of interaction in the late eighties and nineties emerged as a theme for several other presentations across the seminar, discussing the impact of directors such as Frank Castorf, Thomas Ostermeier and Armin Petras, as well as the foundation of the Ibsen Festival in Norway in 1990. As Gjefsen also pointed out, the current, contemporary landscape can also be considered within this narrative as a forth period of interaction, exemplified through the work of Norwegian-German director/scenographer-team Vegard Vinge and Ida Müller at its center.

Ibsen and the German Directors Theatre

Thomas Irmer followed Gjefsen's historical overview with an introduction to radical approaches to Ibsen's plays from the most notable German directors, the same mentioned by Gjefsen in her speech. If we are to consider Ibsen's prominent position in the repertoire, Irmer commented, then we might as well consider him to be as German as he is Norwegian. Directors such as Peter Zadek, Frank Castorf and Thomas Ostermeier, have each, with their distinctive approaches, influenced the ways in which Ibsen is staged in Germany; Zadek by focusing on hidden desires rather than social politics, Castorf by approaching Ibsen's plays as if they were contemporary, and Ostermeier, who initially wanted to dedicate Schaubühne's repertoire to contemporary playwrights, by translating his plays «into the conditions of the young middle-class of post-unification Germany»[3]. (An article regarding reading and staging Ibsen, written by Ostermeier, is also available on Schaubühne's own website). Irmer's speech ended with a discussion about Müller and Vinge, two mergers of Norwegian and German traditions. Vinge/Müller have staged Ibsen in both Norway and Germany; most recently, they premiered *John Gabriel Borkman* at Prater, Volksbühne's stage in Berlin. Given the mixed reception to their lengthy productions, Irmer engaged in a discussion of the aesthetics and the social aspects of their performances.

Enemy of the People – 100% Oslo

German theatre company Rimini Protokoll, represented by directors Helgard Haug and Daniel Wetzel, had the honour of opening this year's Ibsen Festival with an adaption of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. For the seminar, they presented their production *An Enemy of the People in Oslo*. Haug

and Wetzel founded Rimini Protokoll together with Stefan Kaegi; the company quickly established itself as a leading voice in the 'reality trend'- the performing arts' new documentary wave. The three graduates of Institut für Angewandte Theaterwissenschaft in Giessen (usually referred to as 'Giessen'), place of origin for companies such as Gob Squad, Showcase Beat Le Mot and She She Pop, to name but a few, touched upon a topic that kept returning throughout the seminar- education; Giessen was repeatedly referred to as a centre for the exchange of theatrical ideas. Haug, Wetzel and Kaegi have collaborated on numerous performances, exhibitions and radio plays since the mid nineties; as part of the panel discussion, they referenced artists such as René Pollesch and The Wooster Group as sources of inspiration in their work. Yet Baktruppen was cited as the most significant influence for «their work *on* the text, as a group», in particular, their performance *Peer, du lügst. Ja!*. It quickly became apparent to the group that Baktruppen do not fight a text, merely ask «what is important to us?» and perform according to the answer.

Rimini Protokoll's *An Enemy of the People in Oslo* is loosely structured around Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People*, and informed by the company's 100% series of performances. The production is an attempt to represent a place, taking interviews with citizens of Oslo on a range of topics, including Ibsen's text, as its backbone; the performers come together as a group in their representations of Oslo, but are also viewed by the audience as individuals with distinct backgrounds and opinions. Perhaps this is why Haug and Wetzel have called their performance a «performer with one hundred heads». The production process was made up of a few workshops, without training, followed by a period of rehearsals. Rimini Protokoll deploy a game structure to gel together the performance, placing diversity and range of opinion centre stage.

The National Theatre commissioned the company to develop their theatrical technique, inviting one hundred people to collectively represent a city; this is how *Enemy of the People in Oslo* was born. Haug and Wetzel collaborated with two Norwegian dramaturges, as well as a group of researchers and a casting team in the process. Dramaturg Siri Forberg was one of the two; in March 2012 she arranged the seminar/festival *Monsters of Reality* at Dramatikkens Hus in Oslo, for which Rimini Protokoll were invited to present their adaption of the Athens-based performance project, *Prometheus in Athens*.

The Other Eye in person: Shannon Jackson

Another participant to *Monsters of Reality*, Shannon Jackson, Director of the Arts Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley, USA, and Professor of Rhetoric, Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, also introduced the seminar. Jackson underlined her presence as «an Other Eye», the only non-German/Norwegian participant in the seminar. Her speech focused on both Rimini Protokoll and Ibsen. The German company is a significant focus in her work, present both in her speech as part of *Monsters of Reality,* as well as her most recent book, *Social Works- Performing Art, Supporting Publics*.

Seen from across the pond, both Norwegian and German theatre cultures tend to fall under the label of 'European'. Jackson spoke of the American view that don't characterise Norwegian theatre as dramatic, with particular reference to Ibsen, or German theatre as post-dramatic, with reference to Hans-Thies Lehmann, but which rather characterise both as European. She went on to look at the ways in which Rimini Protokoll undo this binary through their engagement with a local context and, at the same time, their appropriation of Ibsen.

Jackson analysed the social structures of the performance, focusing on the aesthetic decisions made in the process of organising the participants; these, in turn, provide new questions on the ways in which people ultimately organise themselves. Referring to the performance series as «an exercise in democratic experimentation», Jackson outlined its significance not only as a conversation between Norway and Germany, but also one of wider cultural resonance.

Panel discussion: text as material for performance

The panel discussion revolved around post-dramatic strategies of text usage in performance. Irmer compared the different approaches of artists such as Heiner Müller, with his reduction of text (take, for example *Hamletmachine*) and Frank Castorf, with his textual additions to performances. As Bjørneboe added, post-dramatic theatre is not necessarily focused on extricating text, but rather concerns itself with drama and dialogue as engines of conflict. The concept of 'being true to a text' only dates back to the twentieth century (at least in

Norway); Bjørneboe pointed out that neither actors nor directors in Norway are as thorough, or have the same in depth understanding of textual working methodologies as artists in Germany. The difference in approaches to theatre making across the two countries, both for audiences and artists, was another recurring topic in the discussion.

In a comment in the Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten (in connection with the Ibsen Festival) Bjørneboe raised the question of Ibsen being too much for Norwegian directors, pointing out that a significant majority of the directors participating in *Ibsen Festival 2012* are foreign. During the seminar, she added that the most notable Ibsen productions from abroad have been brought to the festival at some point in time, whilst few respective Norwegian productions have been shown outside the country. This could be another symptom of why one tends to be more aware of the theatrical impulses imported to the Norwegian theatre landscape; nevertheless, one ought to be asking what are those impulses being exported? Despite this part of the seminar being dedicated to the Norwegian impact on German theatre, very few relevant artists, both independent and institutionalised, were mentioned, aside from Baktruppen and Vinge/Müller. It would seem that Ibsen still remains Norway's most notable theatre export; and with Irmer's words in mind, Ibsen becomes equally German, European and Norwegian. This impression of Norway as a country that only receives theatrical influences without giving anything in return was later challenged by director Tore Vagn Lid.

GERMAN THEATRE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE NORWEGIAN THEATRE SCENE

German or post-dramatic vein of expression?

The second part of the seminar focused on the influence of German theatre on the Norwegian theatre scene, with an introduction by artistic director of Transiteatret-Bergen, Tore Vagn Lid, whose speech was concerned with the changes in Norwegian theatre during the last few years.

Over the last ten to fifteen years, the main theatre institutions in Norway have turned their attention from Britain to Germany. In his speech, Lid inquired on the ways in which these changes in the Norwegian theatre landscape correlate with a wider shift towards German theatre. Is Norwegian theatre now accepting what is perceived and recognized to be «the so-called German director's theatre? »[4]. Lid considers Ibsen to be «a catalyst for the new generation of German dramatists and directors in the 1880-90s»[5], articulating constant shifts of two-way influences, displacing the centrality of German theatre. Taking a critical stance on our perception of Ibsen, Lid pointed out that what is considered to be aesthetic for Germans quickly became a national cultural policy for Norwegians. Lid went on to point out some of the factors that make up Germany's strong and confident theatre landscape, making reference to how strategies within the field have changed over the years, linking together the aesthetic and the sociological.

The shift in the role of a director not only as that of an instructor, but also a co-producer, is one of the effects of a cultural tendency for a more post-dramatic theatre. As Lid points out, it is a «post-dramatic freedom or ability to alter attitudes that has come to characterise German theatre, as opposed to Anglo-American theatre that is still far more faithful to the writer and his text»[6]. To put it differently, there is the implication of a revolt towards a static, hierarchical theatre system that lays the ground for Ibsen as material or point of departure rather than untouchable sovereign.

Post-dramatic elements

Arntzen, who has been working close to the Norwegian performing arts field for several years, referred to an incident in the nineties when he and Sven Åge Birkeland, Artistic Director of Bergen International Theatre – Teatergarasjen, were in Brussels; asked if there were any post-dramatic developments taking place in the Norwegian performing arts landscape, they simply replied: «Maybe. You have to come and see». This was the beginning of a significant cultural exchange that saw Scandinavian theatre companies and artists, most notably Baktruppen, coming to Brussels. This has a significant impact on the current conversation regarding strategies for new ways of making theatre. Take, for example, Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Post-dramatic Theatre*, which has at its basis performances occurring during this time, including those of companies such as Baktruppen.

Making reference to a lecture he held at the Nordwind Festival in November 2011 on the post-dramatic paradox and the theatrical machine, Arntzen distinguished between post-dramatic theatre and its constituent elements. Even for German

directors, theatre is still very much based on text, but has been heavily influenced by post-dramatic elements, some of which can now be observed in Norwegian theatre as a result of cultural exchange. The distinction between the field of theatre as a whole and director's theatre in particular is an important question, also the subject of an audience-led debate towards the end of the seminar.

From aesthetic provinces to the mainstream

Irmer located these post-dramatic elements as having arisen out of what he termed to be aesthetic provinces, occurring parallel to the rise of theatre studies in the academy, a shift which also influenced their development. Today the strategies of the post-dramatic have been institutionally appropriated, emerging in the mainstream. The strong presence of Norwegian playwrights such as Jon Fosse in Germany, became another topic in the conversation. This glorification occurring across Germany and Scandinavia works, according to Irmer, in two ways. Firstly, the avant-garde qualities of German theatre may have been overrated, but this has more to do with the selection of practitioners invited to direct in Norway than a wider symptom of German theatre. Secondly, this process also works in the other direction, stemming from the interest in a radicalization emerging from Scandinavian societies, manifested with artists such as Vegard Vinge and Matias Faldbakken.

The shift from England to Germany

The 'German turn' doesn't necessarily coincide with the introduction of post-dramatic theatre in Norway, Arntzen stressed, but rather with the emergence of a type of director's theatre that holds some elements of that practice. Scandinavian companies that have already cultivated these post-dramatic influences have, in Arntzen's view, pointed at a more urgent need for Norway to re-establish contact with the German speaking world. This gap is evidenced particularly after the Second World War, when there was a distinct and almost complete lack of German plays being performed in Norway.

As the Artistic Director of the National Theatre in the early nineties, Eirik Stubø took it upon himself to introduce Norwegian theatre and audiences to contemporary German theatre practice through the invitation of guest performers and directors. In the late nineties, Stubø was part of 'Young Directors of Europe', where he met contemporaries like Ostermeier and Korsunovas. At that point in time, Ostermeier was in charge of Die Baracke at Deutsches Theatre (before he became theatre director at Schaubühne), and Jon Fosse presented a more significant connection between the two practitioners than Ibsen. Stubø began his collaboration with the Schaubühne, which led to dialogue and interaction over new writing policies and practices. As Arntzen had already stated, Norwegian theatre of the time was mostly dominated by British plays. Stubø located his preference for German plays as stemming from personal taste, informed by his background in philosophy and German literature. What later became a great structural change in the field started out as a set of individual decisions based on personal taste.

Resisting a tendency to look out for such connections, Bjørneboe stressed that the best directors are not only influenced by others, but also hold a strong personal approach and an individual, original style. Despite Ostermeier's success in Norway, he is less popular within German theatre circles. Still, Bjørneboe added, his performance of *A Doll's House* might be the most significant Ibsen adaptation of the last ten years. The production has had a huge impact on approaches to staging the play. Bjørneboe also highlighted Lid's contributions, referencing his connection to Giessen, his work with Brecht, as well as his interest in 'new biology'. In 2010, the Norwegian TV presenter and comedian Harald Eia produced a series for Norwegian broadcasting (NRK) called *Brainwash* (*Hjernevask*) exploring the impact of inheritance and environment on human development; the series caused controversy in Norwegian media. In his productions, notably *Elephant Stories* and *Ressentiment – Pavane for a Dead Princess*, Lid anticipated the discussion that was about to take place in Norway. Bjørneboe underlines how this is exemplary of theatre's capacity to act as site for discussion, an aspect more established in Germany. She concluded by pointing out the need for Norwegian theatre to confront contemporary issues to a much larger extent than its current attempts.

Theory and practice

The seminar saw several shifts in focus, yet a dominant and recurring topic was education, both in regards to theatre studies and art academies; in particular, locating the Norwegian tradition of theatre studies as stemming from a German model. Making reference to the possible closure of

the theatre studies department at the University of Oslo, Arntzen reminded the audience of the impact and fruitfulness of this model of aesthetic studies in a Norwegian context, placing emphasis on the role of such studies within the academy.

The conversation shifted towards distinctions between German and Norwegian societies, with Gjefsen pointing out how audience reactions across the two countries differ. Norway is a young nation, and its patronage over Ibsen might have more to do with an innate need for a national poet rather than the playwright's attributes, Stubø pointed out. Ibsen's darkness and complexity have been overlooked in many productions, and it was abroad that Stubø discovered the potential of Ibsen's plays. According to Stubø', Ibsen was 'saved' by foreign theatre directors, and in this context, the *Ibsen Festival*, with its international guest performances, has held significant importance. This discussion emerged at different points throughout the seminar, with Stubø pointing out the ways in which the Festival exposed Norway to a range of approaches to staging Ibsen. This wasn't solely making a case for the health of a theatre culture, but also for something that provides opportunities to work more freely, something that has manifested through more diversity in approaches to Ibsen within contemporary Norwegian culture.

National heroes

The tradition of a national playwright as emblematic is a national phenomenon, Arntzen pointed out, despite Norway not being the only country confirming its national identity in this manner. The National Theatre was not established in Britain until 1968, though its place was, at least temporarily and unofficially, occupied by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Netherlands still doesn't have a National theatre, yet this was necessary for Germany and the Scandinavian countries who have based their theatrical infrastructure on a French model of the 1680s; the Parisian Comédie-*Française* was the place that people attended to study traditional adaptations of Molière. With the emergence of national houses in Scandinavia, the same conservative tradition quickly followed.

Following this brief historical overview, the conversation turned towards Germany and the question of a national playwright or writer with the same emblematic position as Ibsen. Arntzen compared the playwright to Goethe, whilst Irmer argued that Germany's theatre system is more decentralized, made up of a horizontal structure dominated by a plurality of writers. Along with Goethe, Schiller is considered to be of equal national significance, yet the status of both focuses on their work as writers rather than playwrights. Germany's revolt against fascism in the sixties also coincided with a cultural resistance to staging classics. In this sense, Irmer stated, one could feasibly further understand individual views of the world in accordance with a particular preference of national writers. If one prefers balance, Goethe or Schiller seem like obvious choices, whereas Kleist sits at the opposite end. This is why Germany's national portrait is made up of three classics instead of one.

This plurality was also located in regards to classics, critics and politics in general. As Bjørneboe noted, plurality easily becomes a problem in Norway, recalling how Norwegian playwright Helge Krog once stated that Ibsen had done it all, so all that remains for contemporary playwrights to do is the polishing. Krog is seldomly staged in Norway, yet whilst a lot of Norwegian writers have developed a radicality of content, they remain formally conservative. Hence the question of repertoires and plays becomes one of decisions; Norwegian theatre relies more on a British commercial infrastructure than Germany's repertoire system.

Audience participation

Once the conversation was opened to audience questions, the emergent topics focused on the distinctions between the post-dramatic and the 'German turn' in Norwegian theatre. Elisabeth Leinslie asked the panel on their view of Heiner Goebbels' influence on the local theatre landscape, whose work has been rarely shown in Norway before the Festival. In response, Bjørneboe mentioned both Tore Vagn Lid and Verdensteatret as examples of local artists working under his influence, whilst Arntzen added Heine Avdal and Hooman Sharifi to the list, underlining once more the importance of festivals such as Nordwind.

Three different modes of interaction

Norway is a small country, a characteristic made visible through the workings of a theatre field in which a few people can have a significant impact on infrastructure and development, as the seminar made apparent. The interactions and exchanges of theatre strategies and working methodologies between Germany and Norway over the last ten to twenty years relies, in part, on the work of three

practitioners with three distinct approaches: theatre director Eirik Stubø, professor Knut Ove Arntzen and theatre critic and editor Therese Bjørneboe. Additionally, one might cite a long list of artists contemporary to the already mentioned Baktruppen and Tore Vagn Lid.

Artistic Direction

Stubø's work for the duration of his position as Artistic Director of the National Theatre, selected according to what he deems to be personal taste, has resulted in significant and important guest performances from German artists and companies, both at the Ibsen and the Contemporary Festivals, the latter founded by Stubø in 2001, only to become the performance series ICON in 2011. Hyldig writes in his article that «the 2004 Ibsen Festival was the most comprehensive and possibly also the most artistically significant in its history. The festival became a manifestation of new regietheater, and the connection between Norwegian and German theatre was particularly emphasized.»[7]

During his time as Artistic Director, Stubø also invited German directors such as Sebastian Hartmann and Armin Petras to stage performances at the theatre. This has had a significant impact on the directorial approach to Ibsen's plays in Norway, as the seminar made apparent.

Critical awareness

The cultural shift wasn't simply a result of these guest performances brought to Norway; theatre critic and editor Therese Bjørneboe received the Willy Brandt Award in 2011 for her contribution to making German theatre known to a Norwegian audience. This was achieved both in her own writing, as well as her editorship of Norsk Shakespeare- og Teatertidsskrift. The magazine is an important source of cultural contextualization. Ragnhild Gjefsen also stressed the importance of Bjørneboe and the magazine in her own speech at the seminar.

The academic approach: when theory meets practice

Professor Knut Ove Arntzen also plays a very vital role in this development. When Arntzen turned sixty in 2010, a group of collaborators published a festive publication ('Festskrift') featuring articles by a range of academics and artists. In the publication's foreword, the editors wrote that «the most significant contribution of Knut Ove's oeuvre lies at the intersection between theory and practice».[8] German theoretician Hans-Thies Lehmann and editor/critic Arnd Wesemann are among the contributing writers; and in an article on performative theatre, Josette Feral writes extensively about Heiner Goebbels' performance *Eraritjaritjaka* – two years before the same performance is invited to the Ibsen Festival.

As articulated by Arntzen at several points during the seminar, the changes we now notice in the wider Norwegian theatrical institutions, referred to as a German turn in the theatre landscape, have already occurred outside of these institutions. This exchange of artists has locked Norway and Germany in dialogue. Despite the Norwegian theatre landscape's microscopic size, it was well represented throughout the seminar; however one could notice the absence of several significant cultural voices. With Rimini Protokoll's participation as part of the first panel, Baktruppen's shadow lingered in the room. Although they no longer exist as a company, Baktruppen have been a significant cultural presence for both Norwegian and German theatre artists, its members still active.

Monsters of Reality, the already mentioned festival/seminar, has a dual meaning in this context, standing in as both a symbol of the small size of the local theatre landscape, but also a testament to the urgent need for this kind of merging of theory and practice. Within this narrative, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* became a central point in the seminar in more ways than one. The famous line from the play which states that «the compact majority is never right» seemed to lure in the background throughout the discussion. In his speech, Tore Vagn Lid referred to the periphery and the centre, quoting the Norwegian poet and performance artist Georg Johannessen: «nothing can be international without first being regional»[9]; or, with reference to Jackson, themes that often become main topics of a discourse are rarely as binary as they seem.

Structural revolving points

The exchange of theatre strategies has been the central topic of this discussion, *The Other Eye*. Taking Ibsen as its starting point, the seminar moved across history, from the Norwegian tradition of 'listening' to Ibsen's work and the orthodox staging of his plays according the playwright's original intent, to a post-dramatic approach, in which Ibsen becomes merely a starting point, text a mere material to be moulded by the director. In some ways, the seminar was inconclusive, yet this was beyond its

scope. With three more seminars still to come, the aim was to open up a longer-term conversation.

As was the tradition of his own time, Ibsen staged quite a substantial amount of his own plays, taking the role of playwright, director and instructor; this was followed by brief, radical shifts displacing and changing the relationship to text within theatre which this seminar dealt with, their occurrence resulting in the rise of German director's theatre that without them, would have never developed. The conversation will continue in Berlin in the spring of 2013.

NOTES

1 Hyldig, Keld: «Twenty Years of The International Ibsen Festival», from the Ibsen Festival 2010 Catalogue, Nationaltheatret, Oslo, 2010, p.56
2 Ibid, p. 61
3 Irmer, Thomas: *On the collapsing middle-class*
4 Lid, Tore Vagn: *German or post-dramatic vein of expression?*, 2012
5 Ibid
6 Ibid
7 Hyldig, Keld: «Twenty Years of The International Ibsen Festival», from the Ibsen Festival 2010 Catalogue, Nationaltheatret, Oslo, 2010, p.59
8 Fieldseth/Klemsdal/Seltun/Velure; *Når teori og praksis likestilles: Festskrift til Knut Ove Arntzen*, KOA60, Oslo 2010, p.13
9 Lid, Tore Vagn: *German or post-dramatic vein of expression?*, 2012

German-Norwegian Theatrical Interactions: A Brief Historical Overview

BY RAGNHILD GJEFSEN

There has been a long tradition of exchanging theatrical strategies between Norwegian and German theatre over the years. How did these encounters develop over this period of time? We know the ways in which the German tradition has influenced Norwegian theatre, but is it possible to locate a mutual exchange? In this article, I wish to present a brief historical account of this interaction with a particular focus on Modern Directors Theatre. Taking the early 20th century as a starting point, it is possible to locate certain periods in which the encounter between the two traditions has been particularly strong: during the re-theatricalisation marking the onset of the century, the Directors Theatre inspired by Bertholt Brecht in the late sixties and seventies, and the Project centric theatre movement that was to start some years later.

German Influences

The first interaction between the two countries was marked by the work of the innovative German director Max Reinhardt. Reinhardt was one of the first directors to regard each theatre production a unique event, always starting from scratch, never re-using existing scenography or deploying traditional acting styles. In Norway, he played an important role for actress-director Johanne Dybwad, one of the most influential national theatre figures at the time. Having spent more of her career working at the Nationaltheatret since its opening in 1899, Dybwad enacted significant political influence through theatre. In 1907, Dybwad toured Germany with a set of Ibsen plays together with actors from Nationaltheatret. Viewed in the narrative of German naturalism, the productions were seen to lack psychological depth and, as a result, Dybwad's work was not well received in Germany. Reinhardt however, then part of the re-theatricalisation movement, recognised their potential [1].

Dybwad later found greater inspiration in the recognised director, staging more successful productions during the 1920s in which she deployed a mixture of impressionistic and realistic styles, not to mention stage lighting that resembled Reinhardt's own. Johanne Dybwad thus became a significant player in Reinhardt's reception in Norway, whose impact might be indicative of some of our own national approaches to staging Ibsen and their development as a result of this German influence. Where German directors held a freer approach to Ibsen, the Norwegian tradition has always been more conservative, inkeeping with a monumental realism established in the first part of the 20th century.

Brecht as a common ground

It was the 1960s that marked the second encounter between Norwegian and German traditions as a

result of German director Bertholt Brecth's work with the Berliner Ensemble earlier in the fifties. Brecht spent his last living years creating iconic template productions for his own plays, innovative for their time. It was however only a few years after his death that the Berliner Ensemble turned into a museum of Brecht's work [2, 3].

After the Second World War, Western Germany mainly focused on reclaiming the classics of German theatre from the Nazi regime. Eventually, Brechtian influences began to emerge, giving rise to an interesting development in 1960s Bremen. Then Artistic Director of the Bremen theatre Kurt Hübner gathered talented directors to collaborate with him, providing them with space to experiment and exploring new ways of staging that resulted in some of the most significant productions of the period. The «Bremen generation» developed a personal spontaneity, staging productions with a mix of intellect and amusement. What became typical of this period was a focus on the visual elements of theatre [4].

Amongst this generation of Bremen directors was Peter Zadek whose work focused on breaking existing traditions. He searched for a new theatrical form, giving more focus to imagination and visuality than text [5]. Peter Stein, another contemporary to Zadek, developed a radical and more naturalistic approach to staging. His focus was more on text than Zadek, approaching stories from different angles without abandoning the playwright's original intentions [6].

A few years after Hübner started his collective, a similar development occurred in Norway at Trøndelag Teater in Trondheim. Artistic Director Erik Pierstorff decided to invest in newly educated directors, such as Stein Winge and Kjetil Bang-Hansen. As was the case in Bremen, ensemble theatre was the focus, together with an exploration of theatrical space [7]. It's interesting to note that the Norwegian and German traditions seem to display a parallel development. The Pierstoff generation were aware of their contemporaries in Bremen, with whom they shared a common interest in Brecht, yet there was no direct collaboration between the two.

Brecht gained important followers in East Germany, most notably director Alexander Lang, the Langhoff family and playwright – director Heiner Müller. This post-Brechtian theatre worked mainly with the classical cannon, focusing on visual elements of the theatre. They were concerned with the idea of the ensemble and the ways in which political aspects of the work could by-pass state censorship [8]. This focus on visual dramaturgy marked the beginning of what would later develop into Post-dramatic Theatre.

Project Theatre and Post-dramatic Strategies

The political aspect of Director Theatre had disappeared by the 1980s, replaced by a focus on poetics and aesthetics. Project Theatres emerged throughout the next decades in both countries as a result of the ensemble trend, this time taking inspiration from The Netherlands and Belgium [9]. This marks a third period of interaction in which Germany and Norway both picked up on the new post-dramatic development. For the first time, one could see a clear influence from a Norwegian group into the German theatrical milieu. Baktruppen, a collective based in Bergen, served as great inspiration for project ensembles emerged out of the University of Giessen. It was an encounter focused on visual dramaturgy and ambient strategies developed through the creation of a shared atmosphere between performers and audience [10].

After the reunion of Germany in 1989-90, a new German Directors theatre emerges, a fusion between the Western Bremen generation and the post-Brechtian East. This new Directors Theatre also absorbed some of the post-dramatic strategies of the Project Theatre movement, growing from the visuality oriented theatre of the eighties to more conceptual work and a mixture of styles in the nineties. In Berlin Mitte, director Frank Castorf invited important theatre companies to Volksbühne, developing a club within the theatre institution [11]. Playwright and director at the Schaubühne, Thomas Ostermeier, another important figure at the time, did not take the same deconstructive approach to the classics as Castorf, presenting in his productions a radical and shocking realism. Despite these movements within Berlin and the German Directors Theatre in the nineties, the Norwegian cultural landscape maintained its focus towards Project theatre.

The Ibsen Festival was founded in 1990, ensuring a particular link to European and international theatre via guest performances. Towards the turn of the decade, Norway once more turned to Germany, finding inspiration in the work of directors such as Castorf, Ostermeier and Armin Petras. Through her own work for the theatre journal *Norsk Shakespeare- og teatertidsskrift*, editor Therese

Bjørneboe aimed to draw closer connections between the two theatrical traditions, whilst Artistic Director Eirik Stubø invited guest performances from directors such as Sebastian Hartmann to the National Theatre and the Ibsen Festival in the decade following 2000 [12]. The arrival of this wave of work, together with a rising interest for Nordic theatre in Germany, drew the two theatrical traditions closer than ever. We could go as far as calling this a fourth period of interaction still in progress.

What becomes apparent in this brief analysis of significant historical encounters is a shift in the relationship and discourse between the two theatrical traditions from the one way influence of Germany towards Norway, to a more balanced and dynamic interaction.

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On the collapse of the middle-class A short history of Ibsen on the German stage from the 1960s to the present

BY THOMAS IRMER

As far as his position in the German repertoire is concerned, calling Ibsen a German playwright is not an exaggeration; a significant body of the playwright's work has formed the backbone of German theatre practice, exemplified by plays such as *Ghosts*, *A Doll's House, An Enemy of the People*, *Peer Gynt* and *The Wild Duck*, rarer productions like *Little Eyolf*, *When We Dead Awaken* and *The Lady from the Sea* and finally, hidden gems such as his early work *Brand*. I remember hearing Friedrich Dürrenmatt's famous joke: «Do you know Ibsen? – No. How do you do it?» as a kid for the first time, as if Ibsen was some popular game. It was only later I understood that the joke concealed several layers of meaning – you can never really know Ibsen, and even if you do, he might be difficult to stage. There is a widespread prejudice that the world within his plays is bound to the late 19th century living room or salon; yet I recall the opening to the Ibsen chapter in one of the most popular and significant German theatre guides, still in print and occupying the bookshelves of many households, that references Georg Hensel's formula: Greek tragedy on a couch; a saying that echoes this prejudice whilst paying homage to the artist.

The more serious point is that we can regard Ibsen's work to be central to the careers of several outstanding directors. This centrality occurs both historically and in contemporary work, testament to a range of innovations in explorations of Ibsen's oeuvre. For this essay, I have chosen three of them, though one could easily sketch out a history of German theatre over the past forty-five years through their work. In discussing their work, I would like to demonstrate and explore their respective interests and interpretive approaches to Ibsen in wider contexts.

Peter Zadek

Peter Zadek (1926 – 2009) began directing Ibsen with *A Doll's House* in 1967, dedicating a significant part of his career to the whole canon of the playwright's work, ending with *Rosmersholm* (Burgtheater Wien, 2000) and *Peer Gynt* (Berliner Ensemble, 2004). Ibsen was, alongside Shakespeare and Chekhov, the third great playwright for Zadek, whose work he wanted to explore on a large scale.

In a long conversation in 2007 with Klaus Dermutz (for a book by Alexander Verlag), Zadek reflected on his life-long working relationship with Ibsen, noting that his encounter with a particular

play wasn't a result of a topical interest, but rather emerged due to finding the right cast to perform and make visible the inner worlds, desires and fantasies of its characters. Rather typically, he found *The Master Builder* a great play about the relationship of an older man to a young woman, whilst he dismissed *A Doll's House* to be a bad play. For Zadek, Ibsen's fantasy spoke more of hidden desires than social issues. His directorial intent was to notice and bring out the dynamics between his actors and their own fantasies, playing characters full of inhibitions and hidden desires, exemplified by his directorial take on *Rosmersholm* with Angela Winkler and Gert Voss. If we take Zadek at his word when he speaks of his desires with Ibsen – and there are several books that detail this extensively – then we should be surprised of his relationship to the playwright being based on these relationships rather than on the big social issues thrown onstage to illicit controversial reactions in the audience. Quite typically, Zadek was far more interested in *Hedda Gabler* and Hilde in *The Master Builder*, than in directing *An Enemy of the People* or *Borkman*.

Given the enormous impact Zadek has had on German theatre since the mid sixties, it's remarkable to notice that his great Ibsen performances are remembered for the casting, their subtlety of dialogue and atmosphere, rather than radical solutions and interpretations. Appropriately, critics have coined a term for this type of Zadekian theatre, demarcating a difference from 'Regietheater'; the term 'Menschentheater' spoke of real characters rather than a director's conceptual system.

Frank Castorf

Frank Castorf's (1951 –) history with Ibsen is of course very different from Zadek's, perhaps not as well known or remembered. Yet the director's early career was heavily reliant on Ibsen adaptations, through which he refined and made visible his specific aesthetics, more so than with any other playwright aside from Heiner Müller.

In *A Doll's House* (Anklam 1984) and *An Enemy of the People* (Karl-Marx-Stadt 1987), Castorf found the perfect plays for representing the stifled atmosphere of the final years of the East German state. Castorf was less interested in Nora's emancipation in *A Doll's House,* more keen on its representation of a nuthouse for all its characters, struggling with their petty-bourgeois lives, making visible a madness unseen until that point. It was as if Zadek's idea of inner fantasies was being played out in a hysterical style which later became Castorf's trademark. By comparison, *An Enemy of the People* was far more political, its central conflict obvious at the time: a single person stands out against the majority who, as we all know, is never right. Castorf's directorial approach turned the play into a five hour performance with elements of the grotesque, keeping the political conflict at its core. There was no need to enact the play's stifling atmosphere; a single line, such as «it is high time to air out the whole thing here», contained its signature message. The strange humour was mesmerising and adorning the stage was a figure hovering above all, impersonated by an extra and holding a keen resemblance to Ibsen, looking down on this world for hours on end. Incarcerated in a bunker below the stage, shouting to a live camera transmitting to a black and white TV on the large empty stage, Stockmann was pushed to his edges, the irresolvable conflict made apparent. This could be said to have signalled the advent of the use of live video in German theatre.

Castorf approached Ibsen's *Enemy* like a contemporary play, and the lack of alteration to the original text became a convincing achievement. The audience doubted the authenticity of lines like «I would rather go to America than to put up with this here any longer», casting them off as directorial inserts due to a scepticism towards the ease with which the play fitted to its contemporary context. Castorf demonstrated that this stock material, with its psychological realism, was the best dramaturgy to work into his grotesque style.

Castorf also directed an aggressive and furious *Borkman* at Deutsches Theater, getting to the core conflict of Germany's socio-political condition at its reunification in 1990/91, as well as opened his season at the Volksbühne in 1992 with *The Lady From the Sea*. Both productions were provocatively relevant in their artistic significance. When Borkman (Horst Lebinsky) dies of a stroke at the end of the play, the director played a song from the 1930s movie *Goodbye Johnny*, featuring Hans Albers, a multilayered reference so typical of Castorf's theatre given Hanns Eisler, East Germany's anthem composer, making a hidden allusion to this song during the process of its composition. This became a recurring joke in theatrical and intellectual circles, but in the context of Ibsen's play, it associated Borkman's bankruptcy with the East German state and its cessation from existence.

Castorf had thus shown in this early period of his work, how the aforementioned metaphor of Ibsen's couch could be productively exploded, taking Ibsen's technique and style in a different direction. In my opinion, this was far more influential than Zadek's own take on Ibsen's plays; in this year's Theatertreffen, Lukas Langhoff's production of *Enemy of the People* took visible inspiration from Castorf's work.

Thomas Ostermeier

Thomas Ostermeier's (1968 –) first Ibsen staging at the Schaubühne in 2002 of *A Doll's House,* marked not only a turning point in his career, but also a remarkable shift in the whole programmatic attitude the director's theatre had stood for until then. Following Peter Stein and Andrea Breth, Ostermeier began his tutelage of the Schaubühne with the conviction that new, relevant theatre could only be achieved through the staging of new, relevant plays. *A Doll's House* marked a return to repertory stock, a shift away from Ostermeier's commitment to playwrights like Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, Richard Dresser and Marius von Mayenburg. If we are to look back for a linear narrative, one could say this interest emerged out of that of his predecessors, in particular Zadek and Castorf. From Zadek, Ostermeier learnt that one can chose Ibsen with a great actor as resource to allow for the intended direction, and from Castorf, the reminder that immediate, in-depth analyses of contemporary society can be done through the playwright's work. The link with the new writing programme can be seen in Mayenburg's own development of ideas for this new Ibsen; Mayenburg later translated *Borkmann* for what was to become a whole series. So Ostermeier's cosmos became Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Borkmann* and most recently *An Enemy of the People*.

Principal to Ostermeier's approach to Ibsen was the translation of plays into representations and analyses of the conditions of the young middle class of post-unification Germany. The specific term 'Neue Mitte' would combine the emergence of this insecure and somewhat immature youth bohemia seeking to build careers, with the typicality of the neighbourhoods they preferred to live in. This coincided with a 'propaganda lifestyle' that declared this social strata seminal to a Germany presided over by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in the early 2000s. Despite the gilded age and concealed anxieties, the idea amalgamated with Ibsen, and blended well with Jan Pappelbaum's designs; super chic townhouses that no one under thirty could ever afford informed and made visible the idea of a world characterised by chic and loomed by loss. Ibsen's plays stood for broken promises to people whose aim of constant achievement stopped them from realising the real price they'd have to pay, as Ostermeier found in *Borkmann*.

Ostermeier occupied a different world from these early productions. His Ibsen series marked the beginning of research into a world he wanted to keep at bay. What he offered to German theatre, distinct from Zadek's hidden desires and Castorf's social deconstruction, was an approach that related Ibsen to contemporary values and losses. As part of that, characterised by his decidedly contemporary style and cinematic realism, Ostermeier reformulated Ibsen in his own way. Aspects of this style might be passed off as easy correlations, such as a lost manuscript becoming a laptop, or the writer in *A Doll's House* who will most likely die of AIDS; but this field of anxieties stemming from the want to climb up the social ladder in a world promising more than can be kept in one's personal environment is wonderfully translated to our own times, even at a time when we doubt the very existence of the 'Neue Mitte'.

With *Borkman*, whose issues of age and economics are distinctly different from those explored with characters such as Nora or Hedda, Ostermeier tackled the problem of corrupt bankers with perfect timing. Again, Ibsen proved a contemporary playwright in the same way in which Heiner Müller spoke of Shakespeare, and here one can recall Pappelbaum's excellent design of the luxurious interior of the Rentheim house.

Ida Müller / Vegard Vinge

On 19th May 2012, Vegard Vinge and Ida Müller's *Borkman* closed after its 25th performance at Volksbühne's Prater, marking their last show as part of Theatertreffen. It was five o'clock in the morning when one of the Devils performed *The Song of Lifelie* in endless repetitions; everyone in the room was aware that this was to mark its entrance into theatre history. Half a year before Vinge/Müller opened the fourth part of their Ibsen saga, they were on the brink of becoming legends. Two reporters from Germany's highest grossing tabloid, 'BILD Zeitung', had been sent to the premiere, tasked with writing an unusually comprehensive

review under the headline 'Berlin's most perverted Ibsen classic, and we're paying for it'. They made a list of everything they considered to be obscene, like a complete inventory ready for the district attorney. This couldn't have been a better service to the entire enterprise.

Not long before, the duo had shown their adaptation of *The Wild Duck* in Berlin as a diorama window display, with a duration of 360 hours that included some breaks for rest. In addition, *A Doll's House* was invited to take part in the first edition of the Nordwind Festival at HAU. Yet these two productions went largely unnoticed; *The Wild Duck* suffered from an occasional audience of passers-by to the venue, observing without any guidance or information.

At the onset, the premiere of *Borkman* in Berlin was marked by its lack of publicity – no interviews or public statements were issued on behalf of its creators. Information on the artistic and conceptual approach was scarce, and so the production remained subject to speculation. Despite mostly positive reviews from the usual Berlin newspapers, it was the digital publication Nachtkritik that ended up housing the most comprehensive debate. As Vinge had decided to change the scenic modules of the show and reconfigured its structure every night, people, in their discussions of their own take of the performance, spoke of this difference. Reviewers were irritated by two elements; on the one hand, most had not been able to see the whole twelve hours of the show, and on the other, they were aware that it was going to be different every night, and so considered that a standard review of the production might not be able to do it justice on the whole.

This lack of authoritative information on behalf of both artists and critics opened up the field of discussion outside of standard framework, either by word of mouth or the semi-public Nachtkritik. The show had become the talk of the town in theatre circles, bringing more and more people to the weekend showings leading up to Christmas, and twenty more shows in the New Year. What was remarkable in this was the programme leaflet, listing all the show's participants without their specific professional role – a list of names where director, designer, actors, extras, technicians, sound engineers, video operators, stage hands and dramaturg were equally important; a bit like a gesture of masking referencing what was happening to the characters onstage.

Much of the discussion hinged on the durational aspects of the performance, and what was often perceived to be the scandalous impromptu interventions from Vegard Vinge, master of ceremonies. A list of topics would have included: audience participation and interaction, references to art and performance history (including the Swedish children's book *Pettersson and Findus),* duration as competition, musical identification, and to what extent the production constituted a new interpretation of Ibsen's play in relation to traditions established by Castorf at the Volksbühne.

The shift from an extensive dramaturgical treatment of Borkman's past and the Gunhild-Ella conflict to Erhard's world and his escape, marked Vinge/Müller's fundamental re-interpretation of Ibsen's *Borkman*. In her contribution to Theatre Heute, Therese Bjørneboe pointed out that this interest in the younger characters forms the most remarkable aspect of the production in the context of Ibsen's reception history. If these kids are never innocent in their inhabitation of their horrible world, then one could certainly argue that this re-interpretation can be seen as too complex in its treatment of Norwegian-German theatre relations, Ibsen scholarship, fantasies of militaristic and violent empowerment and, visibly, the special relationship between Vinge/Müller and the Volksbühne.

The latter is of great importance. Firstly, it was certainly the largest long term experiment ever to position new artists in this theatre, known for its long history of failures with newcomers, alongside Castorf, Marthaler and Schlingensief. One must take into consideration that Vinge/Müller took over the entire Prater venue for half a year, with the extension of the performance during the following Theatertreffen. Prater had been used before for such conceptual projects that stretched over a whole season, with, for example, the Shakespeare chronicles of 1999, several performances by different directors in a film set designed by Bert Neumann or René Pollesch`s series of plays with guests of his choosing. It was the context of the Volksbühne that was seen as productive ground for the work of Vinge/Müller; as one rather naive spectator remarked; «Such things can only happen here».

Theatertreffen provided the context for five additional performances. The invitation came as a surprise, as supposedly no member of the jury had actually seen any of the performances in their entire length, as Eva Behrendt stated in her other-

wise excellent review of the Nordwind Festival for Theater Heute. *Borkman* had become the hottest ticket for international visitors, with waiting lists and tiresome negotiations. It seemed as if Vegard Vinge wanted to decrease accessibility to *Borkman* for this special audience, starting with at least two shows in which Hinkel counts for hours and hours from one to thousands. Though BILD Zeitung mentioned them again, they never came back to review the show or return to their famous judgment of the most perverted theatre production.

The audience attention picked up remarkably, not so much in the sense of all shows being sold out from the onset for a theatre with seats for about 140 people, but all the more so for the question of how long people were willing to stay; many would pay for late night admission as soon as others would leave. Whilst at the onset, the audience consisted of a group of thirty odd enthusiasts counting the hours past midnight, the last shows were packed; nobody left, especially during the last performance also attended by Thomas Ostermeier, who was already in rehearsals with *Enemy of the People*, and seemed rather impressed by what the duo could do with Ibsen.

Here we return to the question of what it all meant for Ibsen in Germany. No doubt that the production had marked a new chapter, and its consequences are yet to be determined. I want to attempt to trace just what might have been achieved with this new chapter in the long narrative of Ibsen in Germany.

Firstly, to put it very simple, though not easily acknowledgeable, Ibsen can provide a fruitful resource for experimental theatre that surpasses well known interpretations in German Regietheater, even in such a radicalisation of subject matter as was the case with *Borkman* and its off-stage spheres.

Secondly, what I would call an alienation system of all the techniques deployed by Vinge/Müller, ruptured Ibsen away from the tradition of psychological realism. Even Castorf's versions were still based on fragments of psychological realism, but here the artificial make up together with the theatricality of pre-recorded lines in modules left almost everything of that tradition behind, creating a cartoonish Grand Guignol of poetry and perversion.

Thirdly, dramaturgically speaking, this exploration of the play's off-stage characters and their background stories had never been so comprehensively played out before. In a way, this incursion into the plays behind a classic was a novelty. One could consider Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* to be such a model, but here there was a constant motion of an ever-changing behind-the-classic play.

Fourthly, the performance added a theatrical mode to the two aspects of the term 'performance' holds in German. On the one side, the 'Aufführung' of play, which follows the rules and concepts of a director, and on the other, the meaning of performance as singular event as noted by English and American art histories, consolidated performance as a genuine category. The constant rearrangement of given parts and their interplay with live performance were also new, not solely within the context of Ibsen narratives.

Finally, the whole issue of audience participation ought to be considered in a new light. The show contained at least two scenes in which the audience eagerly responded, seemingly unsolicited, throwing boxes or making wind. There was however a different side to Vinge 's smashing of the seating; he also threw mineral water and bags of chips out to the audience, promising them a better or more exciting scene, or giving away paintings of his ass. There was no clarity in his audience relationship, even when he looked like he was seeking it, and this ambivalence should come into consideration.

In the end, I noticed during my fourth night, that people seemed happy to have encountered something unusual for which they had to put effort in finding a vested, personal interest. If that means this had little to do with Ibsen's *Borkman* as a play, we cannot know. Yet if we could see it bearing *Borkman* in mind, it's certainly a new type of theatre or, on all accounts, a new experience of theatre.

German or post-dramatic vein of expression? The provincial as an opportunity

BY TORE VAGN LID

Symptoms

Something very significant happened to Norwegian theatre in the 2000s. What was considered obvious in 1998 no longer applied in 2008. These changes occurred gradually, but were quite pronounced.

Some of the most noticeable symptoms were:

- A (new) political awareness displaced the irony of the '90s.
- The border between independent and institutional theatre, between out(side) and in(side) was dissolving among actors and managers/directors/curators.
- Concepts such as post-dramatic, devising and performativity were no longer ridiculed as intellectual domination techniques but found their place on a par with expressions like process pauses, character cores, the good story and strong female characters.
- The educational monopoly was broken, and recruitment into theatre was challenged by Norwegian and foreign theatre schools and universities.
- Expressions that were previously considered avant-garde were finding their place in the media and being accepted by audiences.
- The idea of correct acting techniques was being challenged – even among the actors themselves.
- Documentary strategies once again became current.
- The visuality and musicality of the dramatic arts were highlighted to a larger extent, with composer Heiner Goebbels winning the International Ibsen Award as a prime example.

Diagnosis

In view of the approaching festival, future seminars and depictions in the media, the question arises: In what ways do the symptoms described above relate to a significant change towards a more German style? Is this process of change – such as has been asserted – happening because Norwegian theatre is now accepting the so-called German director's theatre? Because Germany (the centre) has inundated Norway (the periphery)? I believe that the real cause of this process is far more complex; a complexity that in the long run may come to benefit both Norway and Germany. A look at history may help us predict the future:

Ibsen in Germany and Ibsen in Norway: revolution and reaction?

It may be true that Ibsen is the prism through which Norwegian theatre is destined to see itself. The question of how German (director's) theatre has influenced Norwegian theatre finds an interesting parallel in the question of what importance Ibsen had for the development of German director's theatre at the outset.

Ibsen's role as a catalyst for the new generation of German dramatists and directors in the 1880-90s can hardly be overestimated. Few if any names appear more often than Ibsen's in dramaturgic dialectics when the disputed field between German realists and naturalists is being discussed. But this Norwegian's progressive significance for German theatre is due far more to ambivalence and critical dialogue than to admiration and passive adaptation. Arno Holz and Gerhart Hauptmann, two major proponents of the naturalists, discovered quite early on that in Ibsen's theatre, reaction is always hiding behind revolution. For radical German naturalists, Ibsen only did half the job. He was aiming to the left, so to speak, but he ended up in the middle. From there he could simply and easily be absorbed by a conservative middle class who were making the rules. And even if Hauptmann's naturalistic breakthrough *Before Dawn* (1889) would have been impossible without Ibsen's *Ghosts*, we see how Hauptmann created theatre history by not only being inspired by Ibsen but also essentially by deviating from him as well.

For young Bertolt Brecht – half a generation later – it is in Ibsen as adversary that he finds his true productive force. Where August Strindberg was still able to appear revolutionary, for Brecht Ibsen became a guardian of tradition and stagnation. Brecht saw Ibsen's illusionistic dramaturgy (essentially a mutation of Realism and Naturalism) as the magic mirror that held humans captive in their «bourgeois individualism». Political theatre in the new inter-war period focused on escaping from the overbearing tradition of Ibsen that existed in German drama at the time. 70 years before Hans-Thies Lehmann's book *Postdramatic Theatre* (1998), Brecht created a programme that in itself could have been a seminar entitled «the origins of German director›s theatre». He writes that the goal should be *«to utilize the old works from the old theatre exclusively as material to be processed. Ignore the style, forget the writer.»*

If we take a critical look at Ibsen›s role in Norwegian theatre we may be able to see things from an interesting vantage point:

- When Ibsen changed German theatre he did so as a renewer, only later becoming a productive catalyst through criticism from equals (such as Bertolt Brecht).
- But where the «German Ibsen» only amounted to one of many essential contributors, his function in Norwegian theatre is that of a unique founding father.

What for the Germans remained an aesthetic, quickly became a national cultural policy for the Norwegians. Ibsen's way of thinking, and of creating theatre, became part of the greater nation-building process (side by side with the polar explorer mentality, sports and the children's parade on the Norwegian Constitution Day.) In this process, Ibsen's contribution goes from being one of many aesthetic choices to becoming a standardised foundation of what would be known after the war as the institutionalisation of Norwegian theatre. Aesthetics were overridden by cultural politics; the art form became an organizational form – far beyond Ibsen's intentions.

Preconditions for the German Director's Theatre

Discussing aesthetics without considering its sociological aspects would be misleading. Fashion trends can easily be fleeting superficial phenomena that do not take root in the system into which they appear. It is easy to be inspired by a visiting foreign performance, but it is difficult to define the sociological aspects behind the performance that made it possible. In our situation: What are the conditions that made the German director's theatre possible? The answer would require an article in itself, but some variables can still be explained:

- Strong German urban cultures with a large, cultivated and influential middle-class audience not only brought theatres large audiences and long-term financing, it also acted as a catalyst for class distinctions (aristocracy versus middle class and middle class versus working class); conflicts that always play an important role in the art of theatre,
- the productive tension between numerous cities of similar size and complexity counteracts standardization and stimulates contrasts and conflicting opinions within theatre,
- a large language area that includes Switzerland and Austria provided good soil for plurality and dialectics,
- a geography and a well-developed infrastructure which has made relocating easier and, consequently, broadened critical perspectives and invited the exchange of information,
- a well-developed educational ideal closely related to the Humboldtian university model has for hundreds of years created a culture of reflection and critical thinking that has been beneficial for the world of theatre,

- a wide range of quality newspapers with strong regional roots and competent critics have provided a polyphonic and dynamic audience,
- important and accomplished theatre experts with experience in theory and practice have set precedents for intellectual discussion and reflection (I am thinking in particular about people like Lessing, Schiller, Piscator and Brecht, but also about newer voices like Müller, Jelinek, Schleef and Goebbels).

A German vein of expression or a Post-dramatic vein?

I think that which we now see as a turn towards a German vein of expression within Norwegian theatre does not have so much to do with Germany as such, but rather with the fact that German-language theatre has for many years been positive to post-dramatic ideas and working methods. Post-dramatic in this context means a confrontation with theatre across the entire range of theatre crafts on stage and behind the scenes, understood as organized in an ordered hierarchy within the dramatic text and where everything and everyone is measured against its/their relationship to this autocratic sovereign. The instructor (the one who was to ensure that everything and everyone was subordinate to the text) became the director when theatrical sovereignty collapsed, which by and large occurred in Germany. The director then becomes not only an instructor, somebody who acts as an intermediate for channeling other people's thoughts; he or she also becomes responsible as a co-producer of the theatrical piece as a whole.

Because such a confrontation with the dramatic text will also of necessity mean a confrontation with key playwrights like Henrik Ibsen, we can see an important precondition for breaking with Ibsen and his dramaturgic magical formula which was able to dictate conditions within Norwegian theatre for such a long time. This may be the reason why we time and time again return to the German vein of expression to revitalise the radical impulses in the Ibsenian material: Not Ibsen as untouchable sovereign, but (as Brecht was the first to call it) as the material or point of departure.

It is this post-dramatic freedom or ability to alter attitudes that has come to characterise German theatre, as opposed to Anglo-American theatre that is still far more faithful to the writer and his text. And it is this process, which has become the rule and not the exception, that has lasted far too long to simply be considered fashionable or avant-garde. To be sure, bloody battles are still being fought in Germany over director's theatre versus text-based theatre, but the battles are not asymmetric; post-dramatic ways of thinking and ways of working have taken over the largest theatrical institutions quite some time ago. If we connect this process to Germany's love of its own and other classic dramas (far more than is found in other countries such as in Flemish theatre) I believe we can begin to understand how German theatre has become a productive door-opener for Norwegian theatre in general and for the Norwegian interpretation of Ibsen's works in particular.

I believe in a theatre with sufficient self-awareness to be able to look at itself from a broader perspective than that of awards, theatre sightseeing, rehearsals or scandals; a theatre that is able to understand that it is impossible to explain (or create) profound changes within Norwegian theatre based on inspiration, impulsiveness and creativity alone; a theatre that has not forgotten that behind many a thumb-up or thumb-down of a production lies undisclosed business interests. Heraclitus once said that we cannot step into the same river twice. This applies both geographically and historically! Oslo was (and still is) not Berlin; nor is 1992 the same as 2012.

Proactive postludium: Distinguishing provincial from provincialism

In conclusion: There is a serious difference between provincial and provincialism: Provincial means belonging to a specific geographic area or having a geographical point of origin; provincialism occurs the moment a place or environment loses faith in itself. Provincialism is not geographical or based on population or regional accent; it is defined by the degree a culture makes a fetish of its own centre. That implies an idea of a centre that (always and already) is better than oneself. The Norwegian poet Georg Johannesen saw the constructive opportunities inherent in this when he asserted that «nothing can be international without first being regional.» The same applies today as it did for a certain young man from a town called Skien who had unusually long muttonchops. Brecht's concept of Verfremdung (alienation) was able to harvest productivity by looking at things from a distance. So it was once for Ibsen and for German theatre: Don't lose sight of the provincial. This is where our opportunities lie. Forward march!

THE OTHER EYE #1

The first in a series of four seminars organised by Performing Arts Hub Norway (PAHN) and The Norwegian Embassy in Berlin.

The Other Eye #1 was organised in collaboration with BIT Teatergarasjen Bergen and The National Theatre Oslo.

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