

**independent
performing
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in
norway**

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 THE NORWEGIAN ASSOCIATION FOR PERFORMING ARTS
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NORWEGIAN MINISTRY
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introduction

The Norwegian Association of Performing Arts/NAPA (1977), the documentation, information and competence centre, was established to support and identify the interests, needs and ambitions of the independent professional companies in Norway. It was a main goal also to work as an advocacy body on a political level to improve and strengthen the creative conditions and tools for the independent performing arts. About thirty years on, the artistic and social context has changed. Initiatives then defined as «fringes and periphery», we now recognize as going into the main core of the Norwegian contemporary performing art sector. The need of documentation,

competence support, political advocacy and reflecting is just as relevant today as it was before. This gives us the key of understanding of how the performing arts evolve and where the strong and weak parts lie. This enables both the field itself and the politicians to make the priorities for a healthy situation for the performing arts. This is a perspective that will never reach its final conclusions; we need to go on and on.

Hence NAPA still is dedicated to the independent performing arts in Norway, organised as a network organisation with 93 participating companies, representing a diversity of artistic expressions; theatre, dance, puppetry, physical theatre, visual theatre, music theatre, modern opera, circus, interdisciplinary expressions and more. The independent field reflects contemporary strategies, innovation and artistic research. Through these initiatives and activities, the sector of independent performing arts, always has been part of the vibrating and dynamic international landscape of contemporary performing arts. International orientation and activities have

always been strong aspects of the independent performing arts. NAPA's main objectives today is to inform, document, reflect and connect creators, organisers and artists on a national as well as on an international level. And to merge this sector and the companies into the cultural ecosystem of the arts in Norway, in which political advocacy will be a core objective.

Since 2003 we have administrated the travel funds on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to support the international mobility in the field of independent performing arts. This is done by NAPA as a result of a long-term strategy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, defined as "open diplomacy". This strategy makes the Ministry able to work closely with the civil society and opens a dynamic «bridge of communication» between the cultural field and the Ministry. Other organisations in this system are for instance Norwegian Hand Craft, Office for Contemporary Art (OCA), Music Information Centre (MIC).

NAPA is supported by Arts Council Nor-

way and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Due to this NAPA also has an official mandate of fortifying the theatre and dance as art expressions and to stimulate the growth of a new audience as well as a mandate given by the independent professional companies.

We are now (2010) launching our documentation and information site; sceneweb.no. This site intends to be your guide and navigator into both the history and the current activities of the independent performing arts.

Since 2001 we have edited scenekunst.no together with The Association of Norwegian Theatres and Orchestras (the organisation focusing on the theatre institutions). The website emphasises news, debate and reviews concerning the whole field of performing arts in Norway, including both the independent companies and the institutions.

Due to the high international mobility of

The independent field reflects contemporary strategies, innovation and artistic research.

Norwegian contemporary companies and artists, we saw the need of creating an informative booklet telling the short story of the independent field, as well as connect you to what is going on today.

This booklet hopes to give you the information needed to investigate the Norwegian Independent Performing arts field.

As we started to work with the idea of this booklet, the Japanese Professor Emeritus Mitsuya Mori, Seijo University/director of the International Ibsen Festival in Tokyo, initiated publishing an anthology of Contemporary Performing Arts in Nordic Countries for this years' festival. Knut Ove Arntzen, associated Professor in Theatre studies, University of Bergen, and adviser in NAPA and Elisabeth Leinslie, Master in Theatre studies from the University of Oslo, were asked to write the Norwegian contribution on dance and theatre. Thanks to Professor Mori's initiative, we were allowed to use the texts from his publication, slightly adjusted to this new context. Due to the live dynamics and artistic changes of the independent per-

forming arts, this booklet will have to refer the reader to the main websites for further investigation and information. Please take this opportunity for a guideline into the field of Norwegian contemporary performing art landscape.

Oslo, October 2010-09-28

TOVE BRATTEN

Director of Danse-og teatersentrum/the Norwegian Association of Performing Arts, Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Norway.



norwegian avant-garde theatre

BY ELISABETH LEINSLIE

The Norwegian theatre landscape is vast and heterogeneous; as different as the cultures and the geographies of this long-stretched country. It is impossible to produce a fair image of it all in one single article, and I will not make an attempt to do so. I will concentrate on the independent companies, or more specifically the part of the field of independent performing arts emphasising the progressive contemporary theatre we find among avant-garde artists. In other words; the artists who break the norms and the rules and innovatively investigate within their artistic field. These are the artists who open for new ways of thinking of and creating theatre, new ways to tell a narrative, new ways to win the audiences' attention. From time to time this theatre has revolutionised the art of theatre, its expression and content. Sometimes the change has lasted only for a moment, other events have left deep and continuous traces in Norwegian theatre history.

The avant-garde theatre always has opposed the conformist theatre expressions – criticism and challenge of theatre conven-

tions and institutions are part of the nature of the avant-garde. These artists have discussed the correlation between artistic experiment, technologic innovation and societal changes, and the relationship between artist, artwork and spectator. Art-internal criticism indirectly also includes an element of consensus formulation, due to the fact that artists can make

Criticism and challenge of theatre conventions and institutions are part of the nature of the avant-garde.

clear what is central to the dominating theatre practice: What theatre is, what the social situation in the theatre is, which functions it has, which aesthetic and dramaturgic sets of rules dominate and

which kinds of opinion-making rule. In the Norwegian context the dominating tradition has been the psychological-realist bourgeois theatre, and Norwegian theatre avant-garde from an early time demonstrated its wish to distance itself from it in choice of expression and context.

During the past 10 years we have seen a

diversity of theatre genres differing from the classical psychological-realism in Norwegian institutions. We have seen visually oriented, fragmented, collage-like and interdisciplinary performances reminding of the deconstruction of the avant-garde theatre in the 1980es and the 1990es. We encounter hybrid expressions inside as well as outside institutions today. Theatre expressions arising through exploration by smaller independent groups are in other words often adapted by the institutions. But it has to be underlined that still it is first and foremost within the circles outside the large institutions exploration is leading art into new cutting-edge expressions and statements.

A theatre project taking place outside of national or regional institutions will always, in economic terms, be an impoverished theatre. Unpredictable working conditions (economically, structurally and organisationally) always has characterised reality for artists choosing to work outside the institutions. This article will discuss parts of the national ecosystem theatre outside institutions has

worked and still works in. In Norway we use the terms independent companies and independent performing arts about this part of the theatrical landscape. These terms have existed in Norway since the 1960es. That was the time where we could first see the sprouts of this avant-garde theatre beginning to grow. During the 1960es the Norwegian theatre landscape mainly consisted of large institutions staging classical theatre for the bourgeois. The underground was marginal, but it existed.

The 1960es

In 1964 Italian Eugenio Barba established the company *Odin Teatret* in Oslo. He had arrived in Norway after several years' work at Jerzy Grotowski's theatre laboratory in Poland. Barba had visited Norway earlier¹, and Norway was where he wanted to be.

In the beginning of the 1960es Norway was an impoverished culture nation. We were still hanging back in the fifties – one of the most conform and conventional decade the country has experienced. The cultural circles

were characterised by parochialism, closed-mindedness and anxiety for the unknown. Due to war and post-war rationing Norway had been secluded from international currents. Most of what came from abroad was regarded with scepticism, including Norwegian theatre artists with international education and practice. The conditions were provincial and those who dared to attempt innovation were often opposed and ridiculed.

Into this cultural community came an Italian trained in the Polish physical, plastic and visually oriented theatre. The theatrical tradition broke with the conform institutions dominating our theatre landscape at the time. Barba was not well received, even though he only used Norwegian co-workers – actors not accepted by The National Academy of Theatre. *Odin Teatret's* stay in Norway was short-lived. In 1965 the company opened its first production *Ornitofilene*, based on Jens Bjørneboe's² *The Bird Lovers*. After this they got no governmental support to continue their work. However, the company had toured the Nordic countries with *Ornitofilene*. They had



been well received everywhere, in particular in Denmark, and the city of Holstebro invited them to create a theatre laboratory there. Hence Odin Teatret moved to Holstebro in 1966, a town threatened by depopulation. Holstebro invited Odin Teatret as a city planning initiative, and it turned out to be smart strategy. Odin Teatret still is located in Holstebro, where its presence has contributed to reviving the town.

Norwegian theatre lost a rich resource when Odin Teatret emigrated. This is how Jens Bjørneboe described it in an essay in 1970: «The fact is, that the only Scandinavian avant-garde theatre achieving European reputation, to really has had significance in professional international basis; that theatre was founded and developed in Oslo, and unfortunately, further fact is that young Norwegian actors and directors never bothered to go to watch it. The only innovative avant-garde theatre arose in Oslo, but it went almost unnoticed by.»³

Another avant-garde theatre, not to go unnoticed by, but rather living for almost two

decades, was Scene 7 in Oslo. Scene 7 was started in 1966 as a subsection of Club 7⁴. It was a small, open theatre with a breath of international air. The theatre manager Sossen Krohg phrased the experimental theatre's profile as an open theatre; open to new theatre genres, new drama and new actors.⁵ The political radicalisation of the sixties was marching into Norway, even though the culturally conservative still dominated, and for those hungry for avant-garde theatre and international impulses, Scene 7/Club 7 was the place to go.

Most of what came from abroad was regarded with scepticism.

In the symbolic year of 1968 a new art centre opened, which along with Club 7 contributed to the capital's countercultural art environment; The Henie Onstad Art Centre (HOK) in Høvikodden in Bærum (neighbouring municipality to Oslo). The scepticism of the new art centre was widespread among young artists, due to it being private persons, very rich private persons, who were sponsor-

ing the party.⁶ But the young artists' initial scepticism was soon shamed. HOK rapidly became a central venue for contemporary art and culture. The building was filled with the most advanced technology for its time and youth, rock, punk and other countercultural expressions were welcomed. In a time where modernism (now history in the rest of Europe) still represented something new and unknown to the general Norwegian public, more radical artists and audience could experience experimental international visiting plays and workshops in HOK. The outside impulses included the radical shift towards the performative in the arts seen in Europe and USA during the last half of the 1960es. Interdisciplinary aesthetic was established as a norm in avant-garde art. Norwegian arts were brought in contact with important international trends – in a time where outside impulses were still a rarity in Norway. Hence HOK gave new inspiration to and became an oasis for free experimentation for the avant-garde of the Norwegian art circles.

Despite the optimism among cultural

radicals of Eastern Norway, the general Norwegian cultural community still was characterised by provincial narrow-mindedness and conservatism. For a long time these attitudes were to prove they were deeply rooted in Norwegian mentality. Jan Erik Vold, one of Norway's contemporary poets, explains it the following way: «Høvikodden, along with Club 7, contributed to the countercultural golden age of the capital, a golden age bit for bit blown up when market liberalism, plutocracy, vulgar mentality, a tabloid public and social-democratic politicians devoid of vision set the tone for Oily Norway the last 15 years of the previous century [...] During the 1960es, 70es and 80es, Høvikodden was the institution from the neighbouring municipality which, along with Club 7 in the capital, made Oslo a fully up-to-date city for international modernism and avant-garde. The lead the other Scandinavian capitals previously had held was now closed in on. After the municipality of Oslo struck Club 7 dead in 1985 Høvikodden for a long time stood alone in maintaining this tradition.»⁷

The 1970es

Norway entered the 1970es backed by the political changes of the 1960es. The country experienced significant shifts in cultural policy during the early 1970es. Among other things, the nation started emphasising the periphery, and some decentralisation of performing arts began. This was a necessity, the politicians

The independent companies represented a large share of the theatre activity in the periphery.

thought, considering that most of the field of performing arts was located in Oslo and partly Bergen. For now it went: Performing arts for as many people as possible, from all layers of society. Decentralisa-

tion within cultural politics during this time emphasised strengthening the regional and the local culture on its own terms.⁸ Regional theatres were built, touring systems developed and outreaching theatre was a priority. The independent companies represented a large share of the theatre activity in the periphery the years to come. It was also mainly the inde-

pendent groups who made sure that the children were allowed to experience theatre.

The cultural field in Norway still was small and narrow, with conventional institutions on one side and strong political movements (with the communist party AKP-ML at a pinnacle) on the other. The political movements created internal theatre-political opposites, tension built and in 1978 it ended in two fractions among the actors; the freelancers and those wishing to protect steady employment.⁹ At the time 155 freelance actors were registered in Norway, and it was almost impossible for them to find work.

The growth and development of independent performing arts scene during the 1970es were closely connected to the political radicalisation of Norway. Many artists sought new ideals and were inspired to work with theatre in new and alternative ways. They wanted to create their own professional tradition; to create and convey theatre in other ways than was done within the traditional institutional theatre. The anti-institutionalism in the 1970es generation of artists presented in the



ways they specialised and renewed theatre. It presented in new working methods, new communication methods and new aesthetics.

The working methods often revolved around a collective process principle. The organisation of the artistic work was democratised – the ideal was a flat organisational structure in which the artists of the group worked under equal conditions. Everyone was to take part in the artistic process as well as other parts of the process. They personally did all; they were drivers, riggers, they washed and cleaned.

By experimenting with and researching new theatrical expressions the independent groups wanted a break from traditional theatre expressions. It resulted first and foremost with a break with psychological realism and the fourth wall. It resulted in theatre marked by three main directions; political theatre inspired by revue/variety, agitation theatre inspired by Brecht and physical theatre inspired by Grotowski and Artaud among others.¹⁰

This exploration of alternative theatre languages, as seen in the 1970es, played a large

part in the examination of the social aspect of theatre. As mentioned above, the independent theatre companies were touring and reaching out to its audiences to a larger degree than the institutions. One of the main reasons was that the artists wanted to break down social and cultural barriers and to renew the stage-floor correlation. They wanted to blow their way out of the bourgeois venue and to examine the social aspect of theatre. They did by reaching out to new audience groups through alternative presentation policies, by producing theatre for new target groups and by emphasising societal criticism in the performances' content.¹¹

One of the target groups for which the independent theatre groups made a large job was children. The independent companies' significance for theatre for children was large at the time and still is today. In other words a significant effort was made to create innovative theatre for children and youth as early as during the 1970es. One of the theatre companies central in this early work was named Musidra. Musidra was established in 1971

and is said to be the oldest independent theatre group in Norway. The company worked on experimenting 'with new musical drama expressions for children and youth, touring with its productions.

Perleporten Teatergruppe also produced performances for children (but mainly for adults). For the «first» time Norwegian children and their parents were exposed to theatre raising difficult subjects, for instance child abuse. Perleporten was established in Oslo in March 1975 by Karl Hoff, Birgit Christensen and Catrine Telle. They defined as socialists and anarchists and wanted to work with political theatre. They displayed significant involvement in community through their treatment of subjects such as the core family, the estranged human being, the bourgeois, weapon industry, capitalism, war, atom power and women's liberation. The company was characterised by sharp texts and a mix of acting styles. Perleporten survived for nine years, shutting down deciding that it was irresponsible to run a theatre under the economic and practical conditions they were left with.¹²

Perleporten shared this destiny with other central companies, including Tramteatret and Saltkompagniet.

While the members of Perleporten defined as socialists and anarchists Tramteatret was associated with the Marxist-Leninists. Tramteatret was founded in 1976 in Oslo and the 11 members voted always to be on the side of the weak and the suppressed, in reaching out to the full citizenry of Norway. This is how the company introduced itself in 1978: «Our starting point is that we regard Norway as a class-divided society and we wish to use the theatre working for the suppressed classes. We believe that political theatre can contribute to creating discussion and criticism and perhaps trace to political action. We are pro socialist Norway, against all imperialism, and we work for a popular, progressive theatre springing out from cooperation with the people and the communities we try to describe.»¹³ Tramteatret made political theatre within

They wanted to blow their way out of the bourgeois venue.

the expression of revue, emphasising music. However, they were soon performing in one of the large rental venues in Oslo, Chat Noir, and on TV and became object to criticism by colleagues for selling out, despite the fact that they mainly made the same kind of theatre they always had.

Grenland Friteater was founded in the mid 70es, and their ideal and starting point was Brecht.¹⁴ In other words, the priority was to develop new artistic expressions and to create its own distinct theatre tradition. Grenland Friteater was established in 1976 and quickly wrote itself into the physical theatre tradition inspired by Grotowski, Barba, Meyerhold og Ingemar Lindh's theatre work, among others, later also theatre anthropologic inspirations. Grenland Friteater has been described both as extremely outré in its expression and extremely popular, due to its theatrical work having been marked by two different directions; 1) performances for adults, being innovative, narrow and experimental and 2) market-oriented, popular, physical and comical performances.¹⁵

Grenland Friteater was one of the very few theatre companies established during the 1970es to survive the 1980es (the company still exists). The willingness to produce commercial productions bringing income may have been a reason, but as can insisting on maintaining the particular project, a project growing by the years. Since 1980 he company has been responsible for the most important part of Porsgrunn's theatre offering, in terms of own productions and Norwegian and international visiting plays. Grenland Friteater has gone from being considered innovative and different to being an example of a theatre historical tradition. Today the company represents something basically different from the institutions and from the avant-garde. The same development the company shared and shares with other companies, like for instance Stella Polaris (1985-ongoing) and Saltkompagniet (1977-1984).

Towards the end of the 1970es the number of companies was still modest and activity still low, compared to the latter decades. Part of the reason was that the unemployment



among actors was very low at the time. During the 1970es The National Academy of Theatre was the only education option within performing arts in Norway, and the academy educated the exact number of actors to cover the needs of the institutions. Few actors were educated abroad for later to return to Norway. Several of the groups established during the 1970es sprang out from amateur and student theatres, and many artists were without formal theatre education. This led to the field being involuntarily branded as amateurs, a stigma taking a long time to shake off.

In 1977 the approximately 16 independent theatre and dance companies existing at the time gathered. They had several wishes and needs in common; awareness and increased status of the field of independent performing arts, presentation of performances, collaboration across companies and fortifying of the economy. In February 1977 Teatersentrum was established (later it changed its name to Danse- og teatersentrum and got its official English name: The Norwegian Association of Performing Arts/NAPA) – an interest or-

organisation for independent theatre and ballet companies in Norway. Including other things, Teatersentrum was to work for a governmental support system for the independent companies in particular. The organisational model was inspired by corresponding organisations in Sweden and Denmark. Among the companies behind Teatersentrum were Collage Dansekompani, Danseloftet, Duketeaterverkstedet, Filiokus Teatret, Fri Ballett (Free Ballet), Grenland Friteater, Hovik Ballet, Musidra, Perleporten Teatergruppe, Saltkompagniet, Teater 4, Teater Rundt-Omkring, Thesbiteatret (The Thesbi Theatre) and Tramteatret.¹⁶ The same summer the companies arranged the first theatre festival for independent companies in Norway.¹⁷

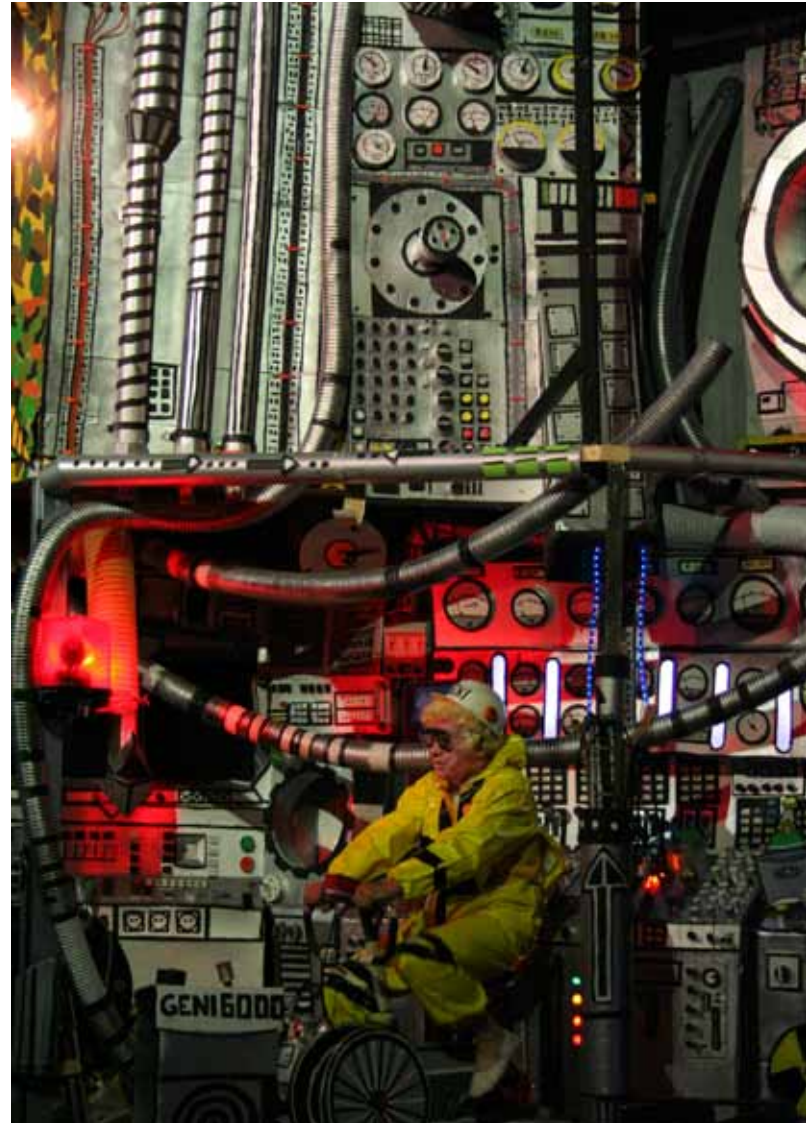
In February 1977
Teatersentrum
was established.

The 1980es

During the 1980es the number of independent performing artists increased significantly. This is connected to the fact that independent performing groups were accepted into the na-

tional budget in 1982, with support to management and production. In 1988 the system was changed into a three-part system divided between three-year and one-year management support, plus singular projects support. Another element was initiated in 1988; the quality of the artistic work of the companies was to be considered.

During the 1980es we could see a significant shift from company organisation towards project organisation. Several of the predominant companies established during the 1970es shut down (as described above). Some of the artists, however, continued their work through singular projects. Alas, the project theatre increased its importance towards the end of the decade (project theatre is defined as persons gathering for the purpose of one project). With the project theatre director's theatre also grew within Norwegian experimental theatre. We also saw another working method growing – one reminding of the flat structure held as an ideal during the 1970es. Now, however, not just theatre artists and musicians gathered



to make a theatre or musical theatre production, now visual artists as well as sound artists, video artists, literature artists and performing artists came together to produce works in which the interdisciplinary was the very idea. Formal experiments across media and artistic genres made the focal point of this theatre work. Inspiration was clearly

The avant-garde theatre was led into postdramatic dramaturgy.

found in performance art, conceptual art and minimalism. In other words the sprout of the inter-aesthetic shift in Norwegian theatre, beginning to grow in the

Henie Onstad Art Centre avant-garde during the 1960es, grew stronger during the 1980es.

The postmodernist ideas of deconstruction had only reached a marginal theatre field in Norway. The ideals within deconstruction consisted of dissolving hierarchies; process hierarchies (a tendency in reality seen since the first groups' democratisation of the work process) and opinion hierarchies (within theatre this led to breaking down the rule of the

text) plus hierarchies come to effects. Hence the avant-garde theatre was led into post-dramatic dramaturgy – a way to consider theatre being significant to parts of the field of independent performing arts in Norway until today.

Other dramaturgies

In Norway, the term *likestilt dramaturgi*, meaning equivalent dramaturgy, is used referring to postdramatic theatre, in which all means of expression are put on equal footing. Regularly the term is criticised for being utopian and near useless in the field of practice. This criticism is founded in a misunderstanding; the term does not mean that all means of expression has to be equivalent in practically every production, all productions will emphasise some elements more than others. Rather the term refers to an equivalent *mindset* based in an interdisciplinary approach (as described above). Under this approach it is not given that the text rules the theatre work and theatre expression, any element can be ruling. In other words, the equal status reflects a kind of

democratisation of the theatre work – also reflected in laboratory-based working methods and organisational models.

Aesthetically the term equivalent refers to a dramaturgic structure in which the elements are connected under an equal-status mindset. It is no longer so that the visual, corporal, technological or audible elements are to cede for the dramatic text. Rather the theatre work and the textual work enter a synthesis in which development goes parallel. Postdramatic theatre has broken away from the dramatic narration and the epic drama, meaning that it rejects the linear story structure being the fundament of our classical theatre. In other words this theatre challenges the text-based theatre tradition, not in terms of assassinating the theatre text, rather in terms of expanding the understanding of the text. *Text collage* may be the most precise term. This kind of theatre text is not solely based on dialogue, but mixes all kinds of texts: monologues, dialogues, poetry, theoretical arguments and text fragments from a diversity of fiction and non-fiction genres.

The avant-garde theatre of the 1980es often was strongly visually oriented (despite emphasising the inter-aesthetics); the pictorial effect as such being the central effect, which led to experimenting with the frontality of the space, or two-dimensionality. One wished to present the performance space as a two-dimensional image rather than a three-dimensional space. A consequence of treating the room as two-dimensional was that the dimension of time was expanded. The relatively limited movement in different space dimensions opened for an expanded movement in different time dimensions. Due to this emphasis of the visual in the work the term visual dramaturgy¹⁸ arose towards the end of the 1980es.¹⁹

New arenas

In the 80es, Oslo International Theatre Festival provided important artistic influences to the independent performing arts scene in Oslo/Norway. In Bergen, in the middle of the 1980es, there was a very fruitful artistic and academic cultural environment of large sig-



nificance for the development and innovation within Norwegian contemporary theatre. Artists and academics contributed to pioneering in the establishment of Bergen International Theatre Festival in 1983; an annual festival programming Norwegian and international performing arts. In 1990 BIT became a full-year venue; BIT Teatergarasjen. Like Black Box Teater²⁰ in Oslo and Avant Garden²¹ in Trondheim, BIT has for a number of years been responsible for co-producing and presenting high-quality visiting performances by Norwegian and international productions and companies. The foundation of the three venues led to more and better performing options for independent companies and project theatres.

Front guards

The company Baktruppen grew out of the cultural circles in Bergen during the mid-1980es. Some people claim it all began with Baktruppen.²² Baktruppen was established in Bergen in 1986. The name indicated the opposite of avant-garde, meaning the rear

guard. The name was ironic – as an attempt to recycle the classic avant-garde in a post-modernist perspective. In other words, Baktruppen was among the first companies to introduce a post-modernist mindset in Norwegian theatre. The company worked following an equal-footing mindset, in process and aesthetics. Baktruppen developed performances through spontaneous games with the text material and used text in new and experimental manners. The company is known for working with irony and playing with recycling the avant-garde approaches to theatre and performance art. Baktruppen mixes acting styles and has among other things developed an acting consciousness regarding imperfection, dilettantism and no-point theatre²³. The self-inflicted «amateurism» questions what is «correct» theatre, commenting the assumptions and the practices seen in the theatre's conventional craft tradition. Baktruppen's

They are among the best examples of interdisciplinary work within Norwegian theatre.

theatre left the assumptions of what is popular and what is high-brow dead. In other words, Baktruppen's work contained discussion of the traditional craft theatre – criticism the group contributed to introducing to Norway, still seen in its work today.

When the aesthetic quality of the experience as such is no longer the core of the issue, but the conceptual quality of the experience, we arrive to question what theatre is meant to be. The opposition between theatre as a meeting between people and theatre as purely cultivated aesthetic perfection becomes a central issue. Alas, Baktruppen does not work under an ideal of aesthetic perfection, but rather a mindset emphasising the social meeting between work and spectator – in which the idea of theatre as situation is a fundamental principle.

Baktruppen is one of several Norwegian companies whose international activity level is high, through visiting performances and workshops (as early as 1990 the company was based in Berlin). *Germania Tod in Berlin* (1988) was the international breakthrough

of Baktruppen. The production opened in Henie Onstad Art Centre the spring of 1988, later touring in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland.²⁴

Baktruppen took interest in Norway's drama canon Henrik Ibsen from an early stage. But obviously they didn't stage his dramas in the traditional way: In 1988 Baktruppen used *Brand* as a foundation for the production *Everything* in which Brand's conflict was manifested in a 5,5 meter tall tower of steel. In 1990 the company performed *When we dead awaken*, based on Ibsen's drama. In the latter they attempted to stage it in a manner not requiring understanding of Norwegian. The text was structured in sequences, movement patterns and sound. The same year Baktruppen arranged a theatrical football match between Ibsen's women and Strindberg's men in Treptower Park in Berlin. Baktruppen's early Ibsen work is now regarded as an introduction on how to interpret Ibsen anew.²⁵

Another front guard working at an international level, springing out from the Bergen

circles from the 1980es is Verdensteatret (established by Lisbeth Bodd and Asle Nilsen in 1986). Bodd and Nilsen had experience from theatre science and visual arts respectively, and they still are artistic directors for the company. Verdensteatret defines as an artist collective rather than a theatre company, and is among the best examples of interdisciplinary work within Norway's theatre avant-garde. Verdensteatret got its breakthrough when beginning to purely cultivate an interdisciplinary expression in combination with a distinct work in using and developing new technology. This particular work broke through to the audience with the production *Concert for Greenland* in 2004 (which they got the Bessie Award for in 2006), but we had seen the initiation of it already in 2000 and 2001 in the productions *Régla* and *TSALAL*. Mixing the interdisciplinary and new technology has been a trademark of the work ever since, and today Verdensteatret is at the pinnacle of this expression internationally.²⁶

New Norwegian drama and text-based theatre

The independent theatre companies have at all times been champions for developing new texts for the theatre, through staging contemporary drama and through developing texts in the process of production. Anne-May Nilsen was a burning soul in this for many years. Among other things, she started the workshop project Det Åpne Teater (The Open Theatre) in 1983. Nilsen wanted to create a counterpoint to the inflexible attitudes concerning use of drama on Norwegian stages. At the time the theatres mainly staged Ibsen and international classics, plus international contemporary drama already succeeding abroad. The workshop model provided an option for the playwrights to test and discuss their plays (including plays already refused by other theatres) in workshops and open readings with actors and directors. Det Åpne Teater was the first and for long the only workshop theatre in the Nordic countries for new drama.²⁷ In 1986 the three-year project was remade a foundation, and in 2010 Det Åpne Teater

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transformed into Dramatikkens Hus (literally: The House of Drama); a national competence and development centre for stage texts.

In 1985 Foreningen Norsk Samtidsdramatik (The Association for Norwegian Contemporary Drama) started The Norwegian Drama Festival (NDF) to stimulate production of new Norwegian drama. To begin with, NDF is a one-act competition for Norwegian playwrights. The winners have their plays staged or presented during The Norwegian Drama Festival²⁸. Another effort is Den Unge Scenen (DUS, a new platform for youth and drama, literally: The Young Stage). DUS was established in 2004 to increase the level of theatre for youth in Norway. DUS commissions and develops drama written for youth by professional playwrights. The texts are performed by youth in regional festivals and a national festival.²⁹

Despite the above-mentioned efforts (NDF and DUS) it is within the independent theatre companies we have seen the largest degree of development and staging of new texts. Perleporten Teatergruppe, Tramteatret, Grenland

Friteater, Baktruppen and Verdensteatret all either created their own texts, processed text collage, staged new drama or developed texts through process work. In Northern Norway (Tromsø) a company was founded in 1983 with working for creating new drama as one of its purposes. The company was Totalteatret, acknowledged already after its first production. In 2001 Totalteatret ceased to exist, but the company's two most central and stable artists (Kristin Eriksen Bjørn and Bernt Bjørn) started a new company with a vision to premiere contemporary playwrights; Ferske Scener, in 2003. On its webpage the company describes its work: «Ferske Scener is a text-based contemporary company. Our productions are developed in close cooperation with the writers. We examine what a stage text is, or can be, and work with epic as well as reasoning texts.»³⁰

Within this field we have seen the largest degree of development and staging of new texts.

The periphery blossoms

Surviving as a small theatre company in the institutionalised and conformist Theatre-Oslo was not easy at the time. We have seen that several of the groups establishing during the 1970es ceased to exist during the mid-1980es, this despite the fact that supporting systems went their way. In 1988 a small female-dominated company, Sampo Teater³¹, moved from Oslo to Tromsø. Anitta Suikkari explained it like this: «We had reached the point when we had to leave Oslo, get away from the suppressing power mechanics, the ruling culture perspective and the silence about to make us paranoid. Through several visiting performance (...) we knew that there was a Northern Norway audience not yet having lost its ability to experience, be delighted and think independently.»³²

Strong centres for performing arts and culture established in the periphery the latter half of the 1980es – in Bergen, Tromsø, Trondheim and Porsgrunn. These are contemporary art centres remaining today. Often artists were geographically and culturally anchored in

these centres, but they also contained powerful international shifts – as seen for instance at Bergen International Theatre.

The 1990es

During the 1990es individualism flowed over Norway. Artistically and organisatorically the collective mindset fell apart – now the individual was to realize him/herself. This spread to the theatre as well; individual artists' ideas, visions and creativity became the central part of developing performances.

In 1998 the field of independent performing arts again experienced political reform regarding governmental culture funds. Arts Council Norway's support to manage companies ceased and all funds were assigned to singular projects. The following criteria had to be met to be assigned support: high artistic quality and artistic potential. Whether the project could signify potentially innovative work also had to be considered. The project theatre model had grown within the field of independent performing arts during the 1980es and 1990es, parallel to the increased

number of artists within the field, and this was one of the reasons funding systems were changed. At the same time the reform led to the project model becoming the working model of priority after 1998. The new system sought for artistry to a larger degree than before. The model also reflected the public view of the field; it consisted of actors and production units popping out and disappearing. This was later to be disproved by the companies, and the Ministry of Culture added that artists should be allowed to apply for project support over years.

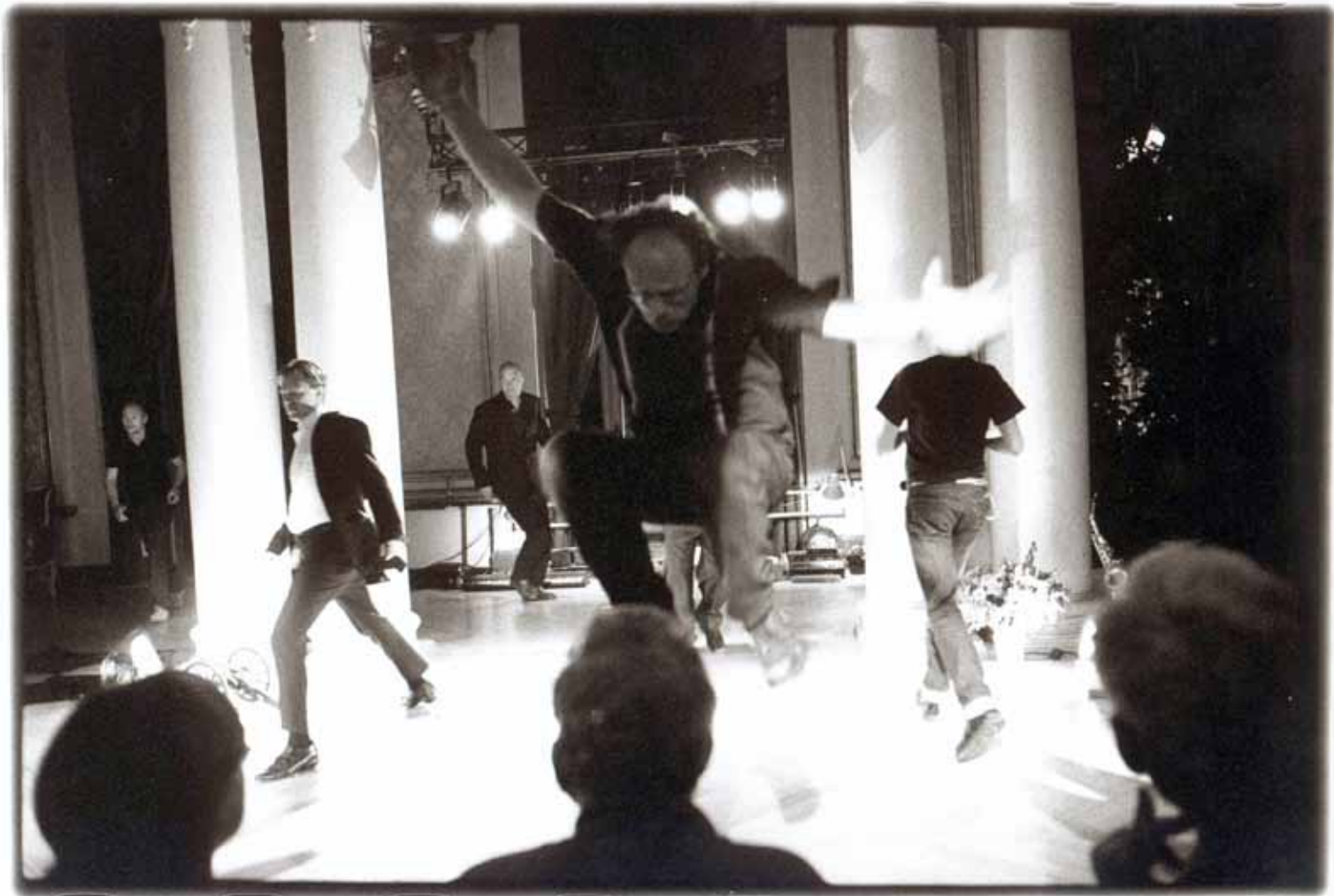
The artists mastering recycling were tradition-conscious and rich in knowledge.

The arrival of post-modernism in Norwegian contemporary theatre

During the 1980es and 90es the artists began to realize the significance of globalisation. To a larger degree they opened to a world outside of Norway, by travelling more and by reflecting other cultures and new information/communication channels in art. The growth

of new festivals and project theatre nationally and abroad was a reason to as well as a consequence of the increasing internationalisation in Norwegian performing arts during the 1990es.

Post-modernism reached Norwegian avant-garde theatre widely during the 1990es. As a consequence artists reflected deconstruction and recycling in working models and aesthetics. Deconstruction we had encountered in a smaller number of artists and companies during the 1970es and 80es. During the 1990es, however, deconstruction was directed towards reconstruction. The artist deconstructed the classic, modernist and avant-garde theatre and their means of expression, to put them together (reconstructing) in new manners (making new compositions). We here refer to the traditional effects being given a return through new connections and compositions – a consequence of artists' fundamentally carefree attitude to art tradition. Strategies, expressions and content from the rich reservoir of art tradition were shopped, processed and sampled. These strategies maintained the



heritage and served it a generous helping of challenges.³³

Theatre art develops in correlation to former art expressions, and being in dialogue with the contemporary age is among other things about understanding the past. This was what artists reflected in their works through recycling historic material. The artists mastering recycling were, in other words, tradition-conscious and rich in knowledge. There are long series of productions using recycling as artistic strategy, but I will here jump to 2004 – when the Norwegian audience was introduced to a work blowing the ground out of former recycling attempts. The production was *Concert for Greenland* by Verdensteatret. In *Concert for Greenland* we were met by a series of references to the art traditions of the previous century. In particular we found elements from avant-garde tendencies: the piano (standing onstage throughout the performance) was a clear reference to Cage and his prepared piano. The piano in *Concert for Greenland* was not just equipped with objects; it also had electric cords attached to

the strings, transforming the sound. The image backdrop created when the figures on the platform were moved by the actors reminded of noise music. As with the piano, Verdensteatret used the tradition's means of expression in a somewhat changed manner – in which the technology was mainly what stood for the transformation of the image backdrop. Further we encountered references to the musical tradition's minimalism, including Steve Reich's phase compositions and Brian Eno's ambient music/soundscapes. The work also took use of a shadow theatre of sorts, reminiscent of Asian shadow theatres (Java, Bali and the like). The expression was yet again transformed; the stage was turned and the figures were placed fully visible in front of the shadows.

This way artistic inheritance is revived through intertextual strategies. The consequence is a game of past and presence. Processing and re-contextualisation of old art elements lead in other words to the old being presented as a presence in the new. Such a siding of historic expressions as seen in the pro-

duction of Verdensteatret illuminates the idea that art traditions are connected in a network of groups, attaching to and interacting with one another.

In *Concert for Greenland* an intertextual game was created, a game which could from time to time be considered as an attempt to surpass tradition, in the regard that in this work's intertextual game the references were transformed to such a degree they no longer referred to the original expression. An example of the opposite, that the references are close to copied, but still recontextualised, we encountered in *Iphigeneia* by Verk Produksjoner (written by Finn Iunker, opening in 2006). In this work many of the references were openly laid out. The artists picked fragments from other artists and put them directly into their work. We found unprocessed scenes from the movies *Contempt* (original title: *Le Mépris*) (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963) and *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) and in the program texts about the artists inspiring the ensemble in the work of the production were printed.

The consequence of art references having explicit resonance in the work is that the spectator does not have to wonder where the elements originate, and can let him/her be moved associatively and emotionally to a larger degree. Of course, this depends on the spectator's knowledge of the subject. Recontextualisation still contains a meta-perspective by putting the old elements in play with the content of the new work. For instance the *Apocalypse Now* sequence (presented in the very beginning, before the actors have entered the stage) is from a party sequence from the military base. If regarded in the context of the action onstage, where there is also a drinking party in a base, the movie sequence gives a forewarning on what will happen later in the play.

Artistic inheritance is revived through intertextual strategies.

The theatre production *Iphigeneia* was fragmented, detached from time and room and it avoided conventions such as realistic role interpretations, classic dramatic structure



and a concluding end. In this regard it worked as criticism of the so-called well-shaped play, criticism latent in Iunker's text. In the text Iunker critically views the madness of war. Its motives and the individuals' failing idea fundamental are questioned and put in a timeless context. Verk Produksjoner chose to follow and to fortify these aspects of Iunker's text in the performance. They demonstrated how an age-old problem repeats throughout a series of references to war in our contemporary age and close history. In addition to film sequences and music from *Apocalypse Now*, it included images of Rambo and George Bush (on the hat of Achilles) – a man from our very near past seemingly delighted in justifying mad war actions having lost their motive. The production also referred to powerful Norwegian men. Images of His Royal Highness Haakon and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg were glued to the panties of the choir. In the stage design were images from Guantánamo. There was made parallels from all this to the Hollywood industry, often going easy in its treatment of war and war heroes.

Verk Produksjoner put the modern references in play with the age-old, but rewritten story about Agamemnon and his army. Hence the modern references also included archaic layers, connected to earlier traditions. The spectator was invited into a tradition, or several traditions, and was offered a way to read the work's depth and roots. By moving between different geographic spheres, ages and realities in this manner Verk commented on the repetitive in the *Iphigeneia* situation. In other words the composition opened for free association to similar events in past and presence. History repeats itself, and the characters are stuck in their ambitions, conflicts and situations.³⁴

Post-dramatic theatre

Even though the term post-dramatic theatre did not reach Norway widely before the millennium in retrospect we see that a large share of the contemporary theatre explored in particular during the 1990es was post-dramatic theatre. The term was established late in the 1990es by the German theatre scholar

Hans-Thies Lehmann³⁵, and is in many ways descriptive of large parts of the stage practices we still see in contemporary theatre in Norway today. Lehmann draws lines between the European contemporary theatre and the American neo-avant-garde's aesthetic and socio-political experiments for then to connect this to a larger theoretic discourse without leaving the theatre. Hence he establishes a platform to describe a wide range of today's performing arts, and the genres of dance, theatre and performance can all be described with basis in the term.

Lehmann emphasises how the theatre's history differs from the drama's history throughout the performative shift of the 1960es, while his focus is on the here and now of the theatre's situation. In addition he describes how a new kind of dramaturgy has grown, founded in the avant-garde's experiments, and how detachment from the text as the fundament of theatre, globalisation, the growth of the media society and the entrance of media technology in the field of art all are central characteristics.

Rather than regarding the post-dramatic as opposed to theatre based in drama, Lehmann underlines that it is about visualising the performing arts' many meetings between theatre and performance art via positives – as a natural development of theatre tradition. Use of text is not excluded, but the text is included in new dramaturgic constellations. In most kinds of post-dramatic theatre there is no story in the classic Aristotelian manner. Plot is rejected, and instead we encounter a dramaturgic concept basically fragmental, cultivating a multi-perspective come to forming opinions, expression and historicity.

It demands a contemplating ability breaking with the dramatic and the epic-logic perception.

Further Lehmann considers performativity post-dramatic theatre's most important element. Within this context it means that the theatre situation and the context are regarded as part of the dramaturgy, to be prioritised prior to dramatic fiction. This wandering from a dramatic structure to a situational and

contextual structure signifies that the work's focal point for communication can be shifted. Post-dramatic theatre is based as much on the spectator's own experiences and references for interpretation, as on the opinions stated by the work.

The multi-structure of post-dramatic theatre demands a contemplating ability breaking with the dramatic and the epic-logic perception. In other words the works encourage the spectator to change perception from a linear/successive manner to a contemporary and multi-perspective manner. Accepting breaks with and holes in the narrative and the meaning production of the work is encouraged, as is accepting that the current aspect of the works hinders one regime of understanding in the works. Hence this theatre art can't deliver final answers, but it can open a more freely associating room for cognition and action.³⁶

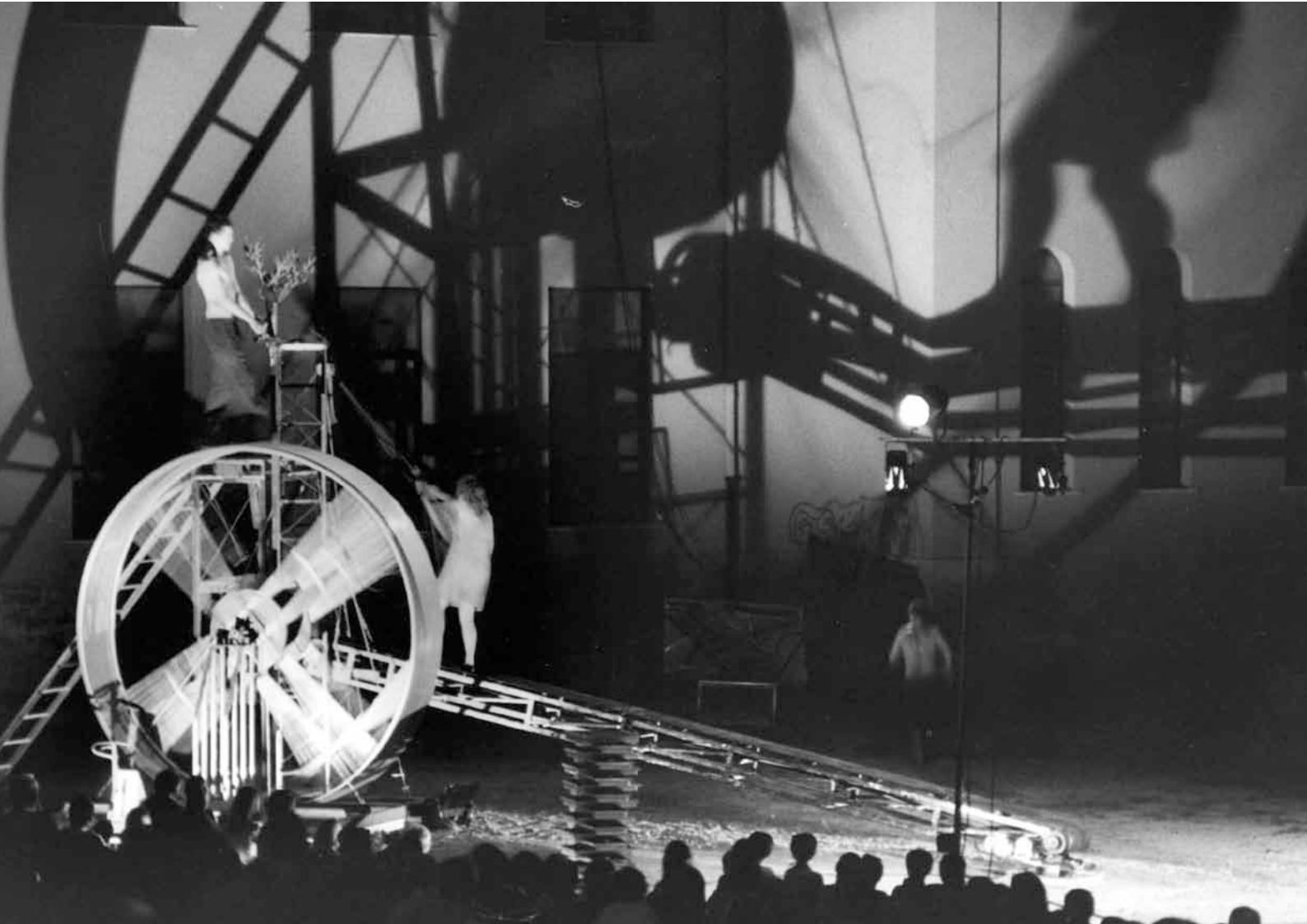
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Innovative modernism?

Early in the 1990s two distinct companies were founded, The Theatre of Cruelty and Lofoten Teater (later Teater NOR)³⁷. In a time where most predominant artists moved in the theatre landscape described above, The Theatre of Cruelty and Lofoten Teater/Teater NOR established their enterprises rooted in respectively French Antonin Artaud and Polish Jerzy Grotowski and Gardzience. In the (Norwegian) golden age of post-modernism, where the great narratives had fallen and the grand visions were banned from the art stage, the two companies started their modernist avant-garde projects. With a fundamental view seemingly (for many) belonging in the 1950s/60s; with its orientation towards the great narratives we can say that these championed a resurrection of the great narratives. Whether this was a reaction to the rest of the contemporary theatre landscape of the time is uncertain, but that the companies represented re-orientation towards modernism and some of its content: challenging the meaninglessness through art, is certain.³⁸ We have only now,



in 2010, come so far past post-modernism in Norway we are able to say without shame that this kind of contemporary theatre also belongs in the landscape. The great narratives have won back a place in Norwegian contemporary theatre, if on equal footing with the fragmented stories.

Innovative performing arts for children and youth

Already in the 1970es the independent companies were the largest provider of theatre for children and youth, in particular of other theatre expressions than the psychological-realist and/or classics for children. The production of theatre for children and youth increased with the number of theatre artists within the independent field. As of today the independent companies still make most production for children and youth and they also tour the most.

A lot of time and resources have been spent in the companies to convey productions. Already when establishing Teatersentrum in 1977 the independent companies had stated

a wish to improve and adjust the presentation methods for its work. The stronger and larger the independent field grew, the clearer became the need for someone to take responsibility for the situation. In 1995, backed by the field of independent arts, The Norwegian Association of Performing Arts started The National Touring Network for the Performing Arts (NTNPA) – a test project with the following purposes: 1) to stimulate the interest for and to reflect the range of performing arts produced outside the institutions and 2) to discover different models for presentation, anchored in local needs and wishes. The model included a refund system, meaning that the arrangers could take risks in selection of productions. The aim was among other things that the arrangers could present avant-garde theatre without fearing to lose income. Hence NTNPA had a two-part aim. The project was to contribute to improving the conditions for presenting independent performing arts, in quality and quantity, and it was supposed to increase the competence in and interest for independent performing artists on a local level,

on the terms of the local community.³⁹ NTNPA became a success and was accepted into the national budget already in 1999.

Today NTNPA introduces itself in the following way: «NTNPA is the largest national promotion system for the performing arts in the age group 0-20 years. NTNPA also acts as the national mediator between performing arts productions and The Cultural Rucksack. NTNPA watches and considers the quality of productions in cooperation with the artistic council, and in dialogue with the networks in the county. Artistic quality is emphasised, as is diversity of expressions and formats in the repertoire. From 2009 the management of The Cultural Rucksack's production means to performing arts for children and youth has been moved from Arts Council Norway to NTNPA.»⁴⁰

NTNPA has no aesthetic profile, no demands come to innovation, but considers the quality of every production applying to take part in the system. In this regard the theatre companies working on experimenting with new expressions in theatre for children has no

priority, but they do have an expanded option to present their productions. However, a new funding body for artists working on innovative art for children was established in 2008, when Arts Council Norway established the three-year project Kunstløftet, offering project support to art projects which among other things have the ability to add new perspectives to the field.

2000-2010

The project funding system established in Arts Council Norway in 1997 demanded the artist's work rather than the companies' work. However it turned out to be difficult to divide singular artists and companies like this. Today it is common to see ensembles stay together over years, often with a stable core of a few artists hiring others when required. At the beginning of the century a need among several of these (well-established) artists and companies to plan ahead related to artistic work,

Several theatre companies choose a nomadic working process.

collaboration partners, company members and international visiting performances. In 2006 Arts Council Norway introduced a new funding system for independent performing arts; Basisfinansieringen or the basic funding. Under funding scheme independent performing arts companies can apply for funding over years to cover the need for more stable financing in regard to management, production, networking and presenting. Five companies have been accepted within the scheme today, a small number compared to the demand.

Cultural nomads – a working method

Several companies have developed a workshop-like working method in which artists from different fields and communities come together to work across professional borders. In other words they work in the intersection between different disciplines and often the works become distinctly interdisciplinary. These working processes are often characterised by a non-hierarchical collective mindset – which we recognise from the first theatre companies during the 1970es. The director, or

the artistic leader, is not a superior person in the process, rather a coach carrying the final artistic responsibility. Other companies work under more hierarchic models – in which for instance the artistic leader of the company enters the role of the auteur.

Today we observe that several theatre companies choose a nomadic working process. They seek inspiration and artistic material in different cultures and geographic sites. Teater NOR in Stamsund in Lofoten has always worked with a social anthropological approach to art. The company has travelled along the coast, gathering old instruments, myths, legends, true stories and music, conversations, objects and rituals. This has been processed to be returned to the audiences through the performance. In this regard the finished work can be considered as a response to the working process as well as the artistic material. The method can be compared to Verdensteatret's approach in *TSALAL, Concert for Greenland* and *louder*.

While working with these productions the ensemble started its working process with



travels to Eastern Europe, Greenland and Vietnam respectively – where the members gathered material; sound and video recordings, souvenirs, natural objects, moods, myths, stories and conversations with the locals. In other words the social, political, historical, geographical and cultural realities in these countries functioned as nutrition for

Stage design
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the process and the work. Further the material was put together with a large amount of other potentially useful artistic material. The material then when through a digestion and excretion process; it

was broken down, transformed, recycled and put together in new ways in new compositions.

To travel across cultures, geographies, ages and identities successively or contemporary is more and more common for the general public, whether physically or cognitively assisted by technologies and media. Teater NOR's and Verdensteatret's working pro-

cesses illuminate and discuss this by working as nomads in field studies, incorporating the research within new areas of the work. It is about always examining new phenomena and places, near and far. Everything the artist relates to underway is potential artistic material.

Stage design

During the 1980es we experienced the consolidation of visual theatre in Norwegian avant-garde theatre. This was visually oriented theatre in two-dimensional regard. During the 1990es the visual theatre developed in a more spatial direction, and during the 2000es we have observed several examples of how the stage design has surpassed the 1980es and 90es by entering the stage as an element of its own in shape of an installation. We here refer to stage design working on its own terms, almost as large poetic machines operated by actors or technology. This kind of design is both part of the work and a force transforming the work.

In *Concert for Greenland* such an installa-

tion was part of the work. Mid-stage stood an electro-mechanic construction functioning as an audio visual machine. By taking use of new technology, robotics and human power the machine was started. The machine can be said to be a meeting between rusty mechanics and new technology – where the technology was well hidden behind a «primitive» wood and metal construction. When this poetic rattling machine was put into play by computers and actors, figures and objects started moving and images, video and sound was sent into the room. The installation stage design in *Concert for Greenland* became a success, and in 2005 the company made a work of its own out of it; *The Telling Orchestra* – an installation run by computers only. The installation has been presented in several museums all over the world. Verdensteatret carried on this stage design working method in the productions *louder* (2007) and *And All the Question-marks Started to Sing* (2010). In the latter, the company's newest composition, the opposite chronology was chosen; the installation was produced first and the performance last.

Another theatre company working with large constructions onstage through several productions is Teater NOR. The company's performance *Biomechanics* (2001) was a demonstration of Meyerhold's scenic principles combined with inspiration from Russian constructivism (we have also seen inspiration from constructivism in the mentioned works by Verdensteatret). The production was a tribute to the machine and the human giving it life. Three persons build a large machine of steel and iron, while showing the audience what it can do – a way to recycle the constructivist aesthetic of the 1920es (retro futurism). In its previous production *H₂O* (2009) Teater NOR also raised a kind of installation in the room. The company recreated the cycle of water by making its own ecosystem onstage; a lake, pouring rain and clouds on the sky.

When writing about innovative stage design in Norway, one can't get past an artist couple who has since 2006 (in Norway) blown the boundaries for what stage design is and what it can be used for; Vegard Vinge

and Ida Müller. Particularly in their last production *The Wild Duck part 2 – Director's Cut* (2010, based in Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* from 1884) the stage design developed in direction of an installation with a character and a power formerly unknown in Norwegian theatre. The stage design transformed from a two-floor building with six rooms (the home of Werle) to another home (of Ekdal), now with three rooms, to a revolving stage installation growing to an organism of its own. The stage design's distinction of being a condition of its own and a force within the work made it function as a totally integrated part of the work as well as a force transforming it. It was framed by the work and framing the work.

Pop culture and the media society

In the post-dramatic theatre a key perspective is contextual transformation. In particular globalisation and the growth of the multimedia world are emphasised. Increased cultural complexity, movement across country borders, limitless information flow, mass

media, new technology, popular culture and hybridisation have created a new context for the field of art. These elements also have, within a short span of time, gotten great significance in daily life and entertainment, and they can be said to be the backdrop for a new experience reality.

The media society's new experience realities effect and develop the spectator's perception. Through TV zapping and web surfing we have adjusted to quick changes of scene, breaks and jumps in time, room and mood. We easily relate to several media at the time; it is common to sit with the laptop in one's lap while the TV is on and the newspaper is open in the sofa. The vast flow of information we are daily exposed to has developed our abilities to efficiently process several layers and kinds of information at the same time.

Several artists discuss our navigation through the media society by reflecting the strategies for navigation in the artwork. Among other places we have seen this in the satires made by the duo Sons of Liberty⁴¹.



Sons of Liberty creates collages of material mainly found in popular cultural phenomena such as Satan movies, games, cartoons, children's toys and Hollywood musicals. In the production *God Hates Scandinavia: Sons of Liberty III* (2006) pop cultural references like these were put together with help of dramaturgic strategies found in other media. The company eagerly cut and sampled, singular moments were rarely dwelled upon, rather the artists zapped between different stories, subjects, ages, rooms and moods. This pop cultural sampling of a performance took use of a series of well-known dramaturgic and aesthetic strategies from reality. We were bombarded with headlines and apparent simplification – and hence an efficient imitation of the mass media's strategies grew forth. But under all the effects the work offered an alternative basis for cognition, contrasting the unnuanced presentations of the world the way we often encounter it in popular culture and media society. Sons of Liberty's alternative was critical to this very development. With its terror cabaret the

company called for cultural consciousness and socio-politic awakening.

Vegard Vinge and Ida Müller's *A Doll's House* (2006, based on Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* from 1879) also is a good example of a work loaded with pop cultural references: Coca Cola, Superman, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Toralv Maurstad, Wenche Foss, hara-kiri, Ibsen, Liv Ullmann and The Dynasty. These are just some of the many references included in the artists' parasite-like transformation. The elements were made theatrical, twisted and turned and put into new contexts. Hence the artists also produced new and commenting opinions out of old recycled material. In *A Doll's House* brand names were staged as part of the characters' identity. In particular the use of Coca Cola pointed itself out: the brand was put in a context the concern most likely would not like to be identified with – a world filled with murder, violence, abuse and suicide. In other words this was no tribute to the concern and its success in implementing its brand names into society.

Rebirth of the political theatre

Context is an important factor in which stories the artists choose to tell. Context often is connected to a sphere or historic reality. Today we live in the wake of post-modernism – an age in which fragmenting, diversity and instability blossomed. The world is not necessarily any more discernible

The art field is opening for discussion and reflection regarding our contemporary age.

today, but we sense and relate critically to the consequences of the local, national and global changes we experienced during the 1980es and 90es. This also presents itself in

Norwegian avant-garde theatre. Through profound and misanthropic criticism of societal mechanisms and the consequences of such the Norwegian avant-garde theatre of today presents motivation to explore connections and create more stable identities.

In other words the structurally experimental and meaning-dissolving art experienced during the 1980es and 90es is about to yield

for a stronger emphasis on meaning production. Phenomena such as new technology, media and entertainment culture, individualisation and globalisation no longer is uncritically embraced, but has been assigned a new function in the theatre – as tools and objects for critical reflection and communication of meaning. In other words we observe that the art field to a large degree is opening for discussion and reflection regarding our contemporary age, but also – still – theatre art. We can refer to it as a politicisation of the theatre presented through expression and content.

Hence we experience revitalisation of the socially and politically oriented theatre. It is not about a resurrection of the political and pedagogic program art of the 1960es and 70es. Since then we have experienced post-modernism, a period in which avant-garde theatre was characterised by diverse and from time to time self-centred structural experiments, dissolving of meaning and genre transgressions. Because these strategies practically dominated the experimental theatre field in Norway during the 1980es and 90es,

post-modernism led many into scepticism concerning the critical potential of art. Today it seems as if aesthetic and critical reality examinations have a central position in the art field – in which societal subjects are presented metaphorically, widely understandable or agitating. The new involvement for critically commenting and telling stories about the age we live in contributes to revitalising the perception of art's potential to break down widely accepted assumptions and discourses, to open for nuanced thinking.

Except for Brecht's Lehrstück aesthetic, or epic drama, political theatre is still understood as theatre asking the audience to adapt a specific attitude. This understanding is built on the purely content-oriented illusion theatre, in which the political attitudes and actions are played out in a unified drama producing catharsis in Aristotelian regard – again with the purpose to generate satisfaction in the spectator. This reflects an art view resting on the idea that the spectator's identification with the ethical actions and attitudes reflected onstage is enough in itself. But such a perspective on

art's critical potential soon leads into a superficial consensus-oriented mindset. In other words it doesn't maintain the thinking spectator's own reflection and potential for action, and it limits the opportunity her attitudes will survive the journey from the theatre venue to real life.

The traditional understanding of political theatre is limiting in regard to avant-garde theatre. Here the emphasis is on theatre expressions avoiding the kind of illusion we find in the psychological-realist theatre. These works surpass and expand the traditional understanding of theatre communication, based on sending a message to a recipient. In this context communication must be regarded as dynamic, open and process-oriented *opportunities* for dialogue, relation building and exchange of opinions. In other words, theatre creating a room for ambiguous options and interpretations. The central is how a work produces *alternative perceptions* of the world and its many different institutions. Rather than repeating existing perceptions, being only apparently political art. In other words



it is central that the work presents (with all effects) another world. Criticising consensus with a consensus-aesthetic only leads us into affirmative criticism.

«Change the theatre, it needs it!»⁴² says the front page of Tore Vagn Lid/Transiteatret-Bergen's webpage. Since the foundation in 2001 the company has worked ambitiously with contemporary, critically experimental theatre. The company has revived Brecht's Lehrstück dialectic. Norwegian institutional theatre has long been inspired by Brecht, one can say as a parallel tradition the psychological-realist tradition mentioned earlier. But even though Brecht is part of Norwegian theatre tradition, it is more often an archaic tribute to Brecht than theatre in the spirit of Brecht. When Tore Vagn Lid brings Brecht's Lehrstück dialectic into Norwegian theatre, he brings in Brecht in a new way. By taking the dialectic dimension seriously, among other things, Transiteatret-Bergen creates political theatre with real ambitions to discuss the subjects. Lid underlines this dimension by personally debating and writing. On the webpage he phrases the am-

bition of the theatre company the following way: «The idea that the stage arts is like a monad, a particular and self-supplied universe of art production and art communication, is a widespread but yet dangerous (for the theatre) self-understanding deeply rooted in Norwegian theatre. The fear of the untimely academic, the intellectual, the prosaic and the unfamiliar to art is an attitude having – however much it can be understood and defended – over time brought Norwegian stage arts to the border zone of the governing public. Rarely – very rarely – does the theatre set the premises for an ethical, esthetical or political discussion. As rarely the theatre takes an equal-footed dialogue role in such ongoing discussions, or works as an impulse initiating sociological, psychological or philosophical (fundamental) research. (As a theatre artist one can see oneself more often than not standing with the back to the

The traditional understanding of political theatre is limiting in regard to avant-garde theatre.

parentheses the theatre has created around itself.) A curious situation arises when such a shielded (and shielding) stage art yet again after decades of ironic exile will join society in debate and play an important political role. The society of knowledge is now more open than ever. The development of media arts and communication has long ago broken down the artistic cognitive monopolies of the singular high-brow art forms; stage arts are not important, not significant – a priori. Relevance, whether scientific or politically societal – can no longer be claimed or demanded, but has to be proved, step by step, performance after performance.»⁴³

Two other theatre artists working with dialectic political theatre are Pia Maria Roll & Marius Kolbenstvedt – last seen in *Over Ævne III* (2010, based in Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *Beyond Human Power II* from 1895). In the work with the production Roll and Kolbenstvedt found documentary parallels to Bjørnson's characters in our age, revitalising the political force of one of our national skalds. Roll was the only professional actor

in the production, the others were «real persons»; a corruption hunter, a radical priest, a whistleblower, an executive director, a revolutionary art activist, a meta-physician and Polish building workers. The actors were invited to the theatre to convey their experiences in regard to power and weakness – which the actor also did by staging conflicts between the independent field of performing arts and the theatre institutions. The whole thing happened as a dialogic challenging appeal, in which conflicts often denied in the consensus society were brought to the surface.

Ibsen revitalised

Ibsen was a theatre avant-gardist, and several of his works was, in his time, controversial salon dramas dealing with cultural and socio-political taboos. Today his theatre revolt has turned into tradition, cemented institutionally in a bourgeois manner, and the dramas have lost their provocative powers. But the artistic partners Vinge and Müller have brought his power to provoke back to life. In their work with *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *The Wild*

Duck they have no less than revised the receptionist history of Ibsen. They consider the individual's psychology, daily life and the ideological, societal and socio- and cultural political structures governing today. Among other things, it is about violence, war, abuse of power, suppression, folly, the Ibsen tradition in theatre art, entertainment culture, turbo

By taking hold of the consequences they have rediscovered the provocative powers of Ibsen's works.

capitalism, destruction, individualism, divorce, fragmenting and how the above touch and effect our lives. Their productions are overloaded with themes and commentaries.

Ibsen's stories are just starting points, they present some reasons. But they don't mention the consequences for the involved. Perhaps this is where Ibsen's drama loses much of its contemporary relevance in today's Norway. The adults and perhaps in particular the young adults in today's Norway are generations having grown up in the ruins of the adult issues Ibsen raises,

in the consequences. Actualisation of these issues has to lead the stories further - to illumination of the consequences – the way Vinge and Müller do in their works. Perhaps it is exactly by taking hold of the consequences Vinge and Müller has rediscovered the provocative powers of these works.

The performances of Vinge and Müller are cold and misanthropic just as much as they are warm and poetical. The effects are about critically examining, commenting, making metaphors, parodying and challenging individuals, our Western contemporary reality, Ibsen's works and the strong realism and text tradition hanging over the Norwegian theatre. The cursed conventional inheritance is eating us. The social inheritance, the cultural inheritance, theatre inheritance, family inheritance – all is infested and all is impossible to flee. By staging these subjects Vinge and Müller elevate them to public discourse. In other words they place themselves and their work in connection with the development in the surrounding culture, enforcing the art's ties to the context surrounding it. They also invade

the audience, insisting to touch the spectator. They take us into some kind of meditation penetrating the skin and eating its way to the roots of the nerves – insisting that the spectator shall bring the thoughts from the theatre venue to life. Vinge and Müller's theatre work resonates in the avant-garde traditions. By trying to liberate from and visualise authoritarian forms for experience avant-garde has always used art as a room for rational criticism and criticism of power structures.

Conclusion

Artists working to understand and stand critical to development in society in many ways are insiders and outsiders at the same time. They become experts in discovering the outer limits of culture and to cross them. They take on the role of cultural nomads. Nomads wandering across geographical, social, political and cultural fields. They tie to the large underlying structures binding the world together, examining, surpassing, interpreting, redefining, connecting and inter-relating this complex, expansive web of realities and aesthet-

ics. They communicate from more than one perspective, to more than one homogeneous group, about more than one reality and with many different aesthetics.

In art it is possible to put together expressions and reflections in ways we rarely see in other social, cultural or political contexts in which classical logic dominates. By expansive use of different kinds of symbolic logic and representation artists can function as intercultural translators, achieving freedom to read and reflect far beyond what we encounter elsewhere in society.

Anno 2010 I still encounter many spectators of different character regarding the avant-garde theatre as incomprehensive experimentation and/or pubertal agitation. This bears witness to conservatism and lack of knowledge. True enough we do find these categories in the theatre, but they are far from dominant. Avant-gardist performing arts of today rather carry identities surpassing the one-sided emphasis on art as aesthetic experiment. A consequence of what we see within Norwegian avant-garde theatre today is that

art can function as a factor affecting the spectator's perspectives on the world. At the same time it can give us new experiences by challenging our perceptions and communicating something essential about us, our history and our contemporary age. Not that the art has great political powers and creates revolution. But it has authority in force of the symbolic capital gained through all of the 20th century through modernist, post-modernist and avant-garde currents. A closer examination of the new (and old) strategies can be worth the trouble for any spectator interested in the theatre.

Translated by Lillian Bikset

Notes

- ¹ Eugenio Barba ended a beginning career in the military and in 1954 he emigrated to Norway to work as a welder and a sailor. Meanwhile he studied French, Norwegian literature and religion history at The University of Oslo. For more on Barba and Odin Teatret: www.odinteatret.dk
- ² Eugenio Barba and Jens Bjørneboe had been in touch for many years prior to this, during Barba's former stay in Norway as well as the years he was working with Grotowski in Poland. Neither of them was accepted within Norwegian theatre. Bjørneboe fought a hard battle to have his dramatic works performed by the large institutions – without much result.
- ³ Jens Bjørneboe, 1996 (1976/1970):59. Originally published in Dagbladet June 19th 1970, later re-published in the essay collection «Om teater» (On theatre).
- ⁴ Club 7: Established in 1963 as an interdisciplinary venue and bar. It went bankrupt in 1985.
- ⁵ Tor Egil Førland 1998
- ⁶ Sonja Henie and Niels Onstad
- ⁷ Jan Erik Vold in: Ugelstad, 2007:245-247
- ⁸ Ellen K. Aslaksen 2000
- ⁹ Anne-May Nilsen 2009:69
- ¹⁰ Anne-Britt Gran in: Inger Buresund and Anne-Britt Gran (ed.) 1996
- ¹¹ Bergsgard and Røyseng 2001:16
- ¹² Karl Hoff 2009
- ¹³ The sale catalogue of Teatersentrum (The Norwegian Association for Performing Arts) 1978:14
- ¹⁴ Ursin and Vik 1990

¹⁵ Vik and Ursin 1997
¹⁶ Karl Hoff 2009
¹⁷ Camilla Tostrup 2007
¹⁸ On visual dramaturgy, consult: Knut Ove Arntzen
«Visual Performance: Workshops and pictorial orientation» in a special issue of the journal *Spillerom* Nr. 1(0) 1990, s.1-9
¹⁹ Elisabeth Leinslie 2004
²⁰ Established by NAPA in 1985
²¹ Established by the theatre companies Magna Vox (formerly: Det lille musikkteater), Petrujska Teater and Studio Teater in 1984.
²² Knut Ove Arntzen in: Baktruppen going beyond aesthetics toward a space for living. An essay on Baktruppen's first decade 1986-1996/97, in *Performance Art by Baktruppen, First Part*, Kontur Publishing, edited by Knut Ove Arntzen and Camilla Eeg-Tverbakk 2009
²³ Knut Ove Arntzen in: Arntzen and Eeg 2009
²⁴ Arntzen and Eeg 2009
²⁵ Knut Ove Arntzen in: Arntzen and Eeg 2009
²⁶ Verdensteatret regularly tours Europe, America and Asia. In 2006 the company got the prestigious American Bessie Award, New York Dance and Performance Awards, for *Concert for Greenland*, in the category of Performance, Installation and New Media.
²⁷ Anne-May Nilsen 2009
²⁸ For more on Norwegian Drama Festival: www.dramatikfestivalen.no
²⁹ For more on Den Unge Scenen: www.dus.as
³⁰ http://www.ferskescener.no/om_oss . The excerpt only exists in Norwegian and is translated by Lillian Bikset for this article.

³¹ The core members of Sampo Teater were Mette Brantzeg and Anitta Suikkari.
³² Anitta Suikkari in *Eilertsen* 2005:254
³³ Elisabeth Leinslie 2004
³⁴ Elisabeth Leinslie in: Berg, Høyland and Leinslie 2007
³⁵ Hans-Thies Lehmann 2006
³⁶ Elisabeth Leinslie in: Berg, Høyland and Leinslie 2007
³⁷ The Theatre of Cruelty was established in 1992. Lofoten Teater was established in 1990, and in 1997 the company split when Teater NOR broke out.
³⁸ Jon Refsdal Moe in: Gabrielsen 2002
³⁹ Ellen K. Aslaksen 2000
⁴⁰ scenekunstbruket.no, 20.09.2010, <http://www.scenekunstbruket.no/pub/nskb/omscenekunstbruket/?&mid=34>. The excerpt quoted is only written in Norwegian on the webpage, and is translated by Lillian Bikset for this article.
⁴¹ The company Sons of Liberty consists of the artists Stina Kajaso and Lisa Charlotte Baudouin Lie.
⁴² transiteatret.com, 29.09.2010, www.transiteatret.com
⁴³ [transiteatret.com](http://www.transiteatret.com), 20.09.2010, <http://www.transiteatret.com/Relevans.html>, the quoted excerpt is only written in Norwegian on the webpage and has been translated for this article by Lillian Bikset.



an historical outline of dance in norway

with a comment on
postmodern
choreography and
the notion of
«contemporary
dance»

BY KNUT OVE ARNTZEN

1. Historical background for dance in Norway

Norway has like the other Scandinavian countries a folklore tradition of dance going back to the middle ages. However, the Norwegian ballet tradition is not so old. It goes back to the Swedish choreographer Augusta Johannesén at Christiania Theatre in the 1890es, and after the opening of the National Theatre (in Norwegian: Nationaltheatret) in Kristiania/Oslo (Kristiania was renamed Oslo in 1924). Augusta Johannesén worked with the Opera Comique boulevard theatre. Another professional choreographer of this period was Tora Hals Olsen who worked with the National Theatre as well as Centralteatret (literally: The Central Theatre) in Kristiania. However, the interest in dance goes further back.

There were already dance instructors to serve amateur interest, working in different Norwegian towns since the end of the 18th Century. One of whom was Johan Ludvig Strømberg, a Swede by whose initiative Christiania Teater (the public theatre of Kristiania) was founded in 1827. This theatre soon be-

came dominated by Danish Actors coming to Norway from Copenhagen, a situation ending in 1863. And one eager visitor to Norway in the first half of the 19th century was the founder of Danish romantic ballet Auguste Bournonville. However it is difficult to tell whether he left traces. Later on there certainly were visiting productions to Norway from the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen where the Frenchman Bournonville had created his famous school.

A proper Norwegian ballet tradition in the strict sense was not founded until the Opera and the Opera ballet was established in 1958, catching up the heritage from the company New Norwegian Ballet (*Ny Norsk Ballett*) founded in 1948, based in a company founded by Gerd Kjølås and British choreographer Louise Brown in 1945. When Louise Brown left Norway in 1950, Gerd Kjølås started a co-operation with the Swedish dancer and choreographer Ivo Cramér who also made some productions for the revue theatres. After the Norwegian Touring Theatre Company (in Norwegian: *Riksteatret*) had been founded in

1949, productions from the New Norwegian Ballet were included in their touring network.

This way professional dance could be seen outside the urban centres in Norway since shortly after the Second World War, a fact which may have contributed to a certain interest in opera and ballet in smaller Norwegian cities and towns.

The Norwegian Ballet (in Norwegian: *Den norske ballet*) became the new name of the New Norwegian Ballet in 1954, and soon Fokine's *Les Sylphides* opened to become one of its largest artistic successes.

Professional dance could be seen outside the urban centres in Norway since shortly after the Second World War.

An ongoing exchange was established first with the Stockholm Opera and then with The Birgit Cullberg Company, visiting Norway on a very regular basis. Historically there was a tradition of a shared Danish-Norwegian cultural heritage, which gradually became replaced by a very active Norwegian-Swedish relationship. But to understand some of the greatest successes of the Opera Ballet in Oslo

since the 1960es, we have to examine the growth of a professional modern dance milieu in Norway, dating back to Gyda Christensen who became a professional dancer in Berlin, being periodically engaged by Max Reinhardt's theatre in Berlin. Christensen took over the position as house choreographer at the National Theatre in 1910, establishing an in-theatre school taking inspiration from visiting pedagogues like Danish Emilie Walbom. Through her friendship with Fokine she got to know Diaghilev and Les Ballets Russe in Monte Carlo, and through these connections Ivan Tarasov was engaged as a pedagogue in Gyda Christensen's school for modern dance.

As a pedagogue German-Norwegian Inga Jacobi contributed significantly to introducing modern dance in Oslo in the 1920es, and through her some influences from German expressionist dance seeped in. She was by the way also inspired by Jacques-Dalcroze and his rhythmic dance.

Another school of modern dance opened in 1937 in Oslo under the direction of Rita Tori, and all together this contributed to a

rich beginning of a modern tradition combining classical ballet and modern dance, as we also know it from the narrative dance choreographies by Birgit Cullberg, who as I have already mentioned visited Norway regularly; Oslo but also and not least the Bergen Festival, until the 1970es. All these tendencies would be included in the Norwegian Opera Ballet (*Den Norske Opera og Ballett*) under the direction of Joan Harris from 1961 to 1965, significantly increasing the technical level of the dancers. Hence the company which was led by Ane Borg in the periods of 1971-77 and 1983-88 became a company of high esteem, domestically and internationally. A very original and highly regarded production at the Norwegian Ballet was Glen Tetley's *The Tempest* after Shakespeare in 1979, with new music by electronic composer Arne Nordheim, produced during the period of Brenda Last as an artistic director. She was succeeded by Jens Graff, 1980-83, and from 1980 Danish Dinna Bjørn led the company for quite some time. The present day the artistic director is Espen Giljane, whose artistic

background is from New York's vital dance community.

By the 1980es and early 1990es, a new generation of independent dance companies had come about, profiting from the possibility of governmental support at least for some years at the time, like the case with Ingun Bjørnsgaard, Ina Christel Johannessen and

The company profited from a generation of postmodern young choreographers.

Jo Strømgren of the late 1990es and early 2000s. Choreographers rising from this milieu in the 1980es were Kari Blakstad, Lise Nordahl, Merete Engebretsen and Kjersti Alveberg

among others, all of them to be defined within the aesthetic context of modern dance. Very significant was the foundation of a fixed company for modern dance, fully state supported, established in Bergen in 1988, based in a jazz dance company and later on taking the name of New Carte Blanche (*Nye Carte Blanche*) until yet again renaming it Carte Blanche. Among its artistic directors can be mentioned

Anne Borg, Jens Graff, Jessica Iwanson and Karen Foss, and later on Arne Fagerholt and at present Belgian Bruno Heynderickx. The company would profit from a generation of postmodern young choreographers, all of whom originated from the independent dance scene in Norway. Some of them had in the 1980es been studying at the Martha Graham School in New York, like for instance Ingun Bjørnsgaard who slightly grew into a neo-classical style. Some, like Jo Strømgren and Ina Christel Johannessen, were educated at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, formerly The National Academy of Ballet School. Many of them have toured abroad with success, upon which they have been invited to create original choreographies for Carte Blanche in Bergen.

The Bergen milieu also profited from having an audience whose level of orientation is high from having been exposed to international visiting dance productions presented by the Bergen Festival since the 1950es, and especially during the late 1970es and early 1980es. At the time German Ausdrucks Tanz by



Susanne Linke alongside with American post-modern dance by Trisha Brown were presented. Since 1983 a significant source of inspiration for young dance in Norway has been Bergen International Theatre, with an extensive international network. BIT, also referred to as BIT Teatergarasjen, went into all-year programming in the famed venue Teatergarasjen (literally: The Theatre Garage) in Bergen, a venue which has unfortunately recently been pulled down. The BIT organisation has had to use different rental venues, including sharing the rehearsal site and performance venue of Carte Blanche, Studio Bergen, with Carte Blanche. BIT organises an October biennial, The October Dance Festival.

In Oslo a more mainstream Dance Festival has been established in the Coda festival and recently, in 2009, Dansens Hus (*literally: The House of Dance*) opened as a major venue for modern and postmodern dance. Independent dance also is presented in Black Box Teater in Oslo, run by The Norwegian Association of Performing Arts, the association of independent theatre and dance companies.

2. New influences in modern and post-modern dance

Japanese Butoh Dance was also introduced in Norway in the 1980s, due to productions visiting Scandinavia, including Carlotta Ikeda and workshops by the Butoh dancer Min Tanaka, inspiring the Nordic milieu of young dancers, such as Norwegians Monica Emilie Herstad, Runa Rebne and Øyvind Jørgensen. A distinct element of Butoh can be seen in the work of Herstad in which she has applied Butoh technique related to monodramatic dance portraits of female Ibsen drama figures.

An exile community of young Norwegian dance artists and choreographers exists, among them the punk-inspired Eva Cecilie Richardsen, who has been invited to make choreographic works for the Bergen Festival at several occasions (including 2003 and 2006), and Heine Avdal, who for many years lived and worked in Brussels, working conceptually in his choreographies.

To deal with contemporary dance in Norway on a more analytical level requires knowledge to some aesthetic terms, like the

above explained visual kind of dramaturgy incorporated in new dance and theatre since the 1980es and 1990es, and one could also add ambient or more atmospheric ways of working, including the audience in some kind of shared space, which is very much the particular quality of the quite famous young and very conceptual choreographer Hooman Sharifi who came to Norway from Iran as a teenager. He was accepted by The National Academy of Ballet in Oslo. He also has been aiming towards strictly-formalised conceptual art, as has Mia Habib.

Visual performance had its outspring in the performance art wave beginning in the late 1960es, anticipating a visual kind of dramaturgy connected to what was called a «Theatre of Images». It indicated a development in dramaturgy in which the expression in the aesthetic sense of the word was drawn towards visuality while the visual and textual elements were put on equal footing. This development stood close to conceptual art, minimalism and multimedia and the workshop way of organising work. This was not least the case

in the work of American Robert Wilson in the 1970es and 1980es.

I would say that a visual kind of dramaturgy could be described as if means of expressions such as space, frontality, textuality and frontality no longer were organised in hierarchic systems but have been, as indicated above, put on an equal footing. In Scandinavia project groups like Billedstofteater, Remote Control Productions, Hotel Pro Forma and Baktruppen have worked on different aspects of visual performance and a visual kind of dramaturgy, also using features from dance. It is astonishing how many examples can be found in the Nordic countries. This can to some extent be explained by the fact of governmental funding of independent groups made possible through Arts Council Norway.

The fact that new international impulses came about, was very much due to Bergen International Theatre, The Bergen Festival

Visual performance had its outspring in the performance art wave beginning in the late 1960es.

and later on Black Box Teater and the Coda Festival. A visual kind of dramaturgy with the means of expression put on an equal footing can be seen alongside postmodern deconstructionist theories, pulling down the hierarchies of traditional narration. These were replaced by dance marked by theatrical expressions of new images and energies, breaking ground for dance in recycling different styles and in finding new ways of telling the world. In reflecting upon arbitrariness, it is interesting to remark that the non-hierarchic working process has been corresponding fully to what has been observed in recent postmodern Norwegian dance, like in already mentioned work by Ingun Bjørnsgaard and Jo Strømgren, as well as Ina Christel Johannessen. In her company the dancers often have worked in a playful way, being given the opportunity to develop their parts according to personal material.

It also corresponds to a general search for ways to develop the energies of individual and cultural identities characterised by the drive towards emancipation and breaking away from hierarchical dominance, comparable to

getting away from the supremacy of linear dramaturgy or the traditional narratives.

I would now like to draw attention to image and memory as allegorical as well as metaphorical concepts, which can be valuable in describing dramaturgical processes in new dance work. Imagery is formal, referring to frontal versus spatial organisation of tableaux effects to be seen in the mix of spatial and frontal images. Memory can be understood as something individual and collective at the same time. If we put together image and memory, we have a possible analytical tool to approach some of the choreographic work of Bjørnsgaard, Johannessen as well as Strømgren. The latter is especially famous for his special use of language referred to as «gibberish», a nonsense language based on the tonality of existing languages.

3. Memory to neurotic experiences: IBP to Jo Strømgren

Ingun Bjørnsgaard Project (IBP) was founded in 1992, and has played an active part in putting Norwegian and Scandinavian postmod-



ern dance on the map. After choreographer Ingun Bjørnsgaard won the Nordic Choreography prize in 1992 her artistic work has been increasing. Together with her company she established a new way of delineating dance. Ingun Bjørnsgaard has been operating within a neo-epic ironic dramaturgy, instead of the classical narrative or epic structure used by modern dance. In this rearranged dramaturgy, narrative structures are commented and paraphrased through clichés from classical and romantic representation. These have been transformed into, as well as used in, what could be called a characteristic artistic landscape, a world of references closely related to mythological Nordic landscapes. *Virgins in Norwegian Landscapes* from 1992 was a clear example of these strategies.

In later work she has developed her visual dramaturgy in a direction deconstructing or fragmenting formal and processual elements in her choreographic language. The transformed dramaturgy creates additional choreographic clichés transgressing the consummate and perfect postmodern

expression, while responding to improvisation and personal private material with its ostensibly floating quality. This is established through the use of deconstructed fragments put together in new and unexpected modes within the choreographic composition. The dramaturgy is constructed from the personal anecdotes generally related to a larger theme, or macro-dramaturgy. Consequently personal experiences and expressions from within the dancers become part of the composition. The dancers are enacting themselves in a kind of freewheeling game with postmodernity. A recycling effect emerges when a game of circulated elements from the modern and the postmodern is given a new and imperfect, or even arbitrary, expression.

The formal language developing from these strategies requires multi-layered personal input from the dancers, who have to provide parts of a personal realm to stabilise an insecure and floating performance field. The choreographer is letting the dancers loose in an unfamiliar landscape. In this sense the development which has taken place within

the aesthetics is closely connected to accomplishments in theatre, fine arts and music. The setting also plays a part in creating the scenic context, actively involving personal assignments. Accordingly the choreographer's vocation includes compositional processing of the impulsive realm of a contemporary artistic landscape, a landscape created from a mutual liaison between identity, geography and recycling of aesthetic elements. This awareness signifies change of atmosphere, which is magic. It necessitates personal commitment and requires the curious eye of a choreographer such as Ingun Bjørnsgaard, as in her *The Solitary Shame Announced by a Piano* (1997). The work contained many ironic layers presented by dancers recycling classical ballet as well as mime gestures.

In her choreographic work Ina Christel Johannessen and her company Zero Visibility has had an approach to dance more like performance art than Ingun Bjørnsgaard has had. Johannessen has mixed elements from performance art and installation work with strong elements of house music, as seen in the

production by the name *Except That I Would Like to Get Rid of It* (1997). The dancers were to some extent moving in the real time of performance art. This production was based upon mixed, recycled styles from the 1980es and 1990es in direction of the ambient expression of sharing the atmosphere with the audience. The hybrid character of mixed dance, performance art and theatrical effects in her work is striking. This way she has been corresponding to the image and memory-reflections. In the more recent work *White Wall/Black Hole* Johannessen emphasised faces and expressions - white skin and black eyes with a very ironic effect.

Jo Strømgren originally worked mostly as a solo dancer, before starting a company more of the theatrical kind. Before that, however, on a personal level he would develop stand up techniques and entertainment oriented approaches, as when he and his company did a production on football. In Schizzo

The choreographer is letting the dancers loose in an unfamiliar landscape.

Stories (1995) while dealing with neurotic experiences he was standing exactly mid-way between dance and theatre, even using textual elements. In this late monodramatic performance he kept up a dialogue with the toilet cistern and doing situationist gags in a standup comedian manner. He used his body in a theatrical deconstructed manner, in place

He used his body in a theatrical deconstructed manner.

of the more floating energetic movements of dance choreography. This way Norwegian postmodern dance of the 1990es and onwards was researching new marginal areas, related to genre but also in regard of the identity question. Who is the dancing body? Hence

Norwegian dance developed from catching up internationally in the 1950es to the 1960es, stabilising itself and getting more independent from the 1970es to the 1980es, becoming real innovative since the 1990es.

Another aspect of Norwegian contemporary dance is, as mentioned, the site-specific or dance connected to landscape in open air

settings, the way the company Dansdesign (established 1978), under the direction of Anne Grete Eriksen and Leif Hernes, has been producing it at many occasions. One of the most watched productions of Norwegian dance may have been the opening ceremony for the Olympic Winter Games at Lillehammer in 1994, broadcasted on TV all over the world. Dansdesign produced their open air or landscape-based production by connecting different artists from project to project. Another company sometimes also working under open air is Stellaris Dance Theatre (in Norwegian: Stellaris Dans Teater, est. 1980), probably the northernmost dance company in the world, based in Hammerfest, which is labelled the northernmost city in the world. There also are dance productions made by choreographers from the Norwegian minority population The Sami, in different parts of Northern Norway. But it remains yet to be seen a distinct company being established, except for the fact that there is a Sami dance group connected to Sydsamisk Teater (literally: The Southern Sami Theatre) in the county of Nordland.



4. Commenting on the most present situation

In an article in the Oslo newspaper Aftenposten (April 29th 2010), Ine Therese Berg and Randi Urdal, consultant and administrative director for Dance Information Norway respectively, jointly commented on the celebration of the International Day of Dance in Norway on April 29th. In this article they stated that in 1997 there were 30 dance companies in Norway presenting 62 productions in a total of 503 performances. By 2008 the numbers had grown significantly: There were 123 companies performing 197 productions in a total of 1324 performances. At the same time the number of Norwegian productions performed abroad has multiplied more than tenfold, from 26 productions performed abroad 1997 to 276 being the same in 2008. Berg and Urdal explain the international result by referring to the networking the Bergen International Theatre has been at the pinnacle of. Both of them underline names of choreographers touring extensively, emphasizing choreographers like Jo Strømngren, Ina Christel Johannessen, Ingun Bjørnsgaard

and Hooman Sharifi. The paradox lies in the fact that they perform more abroad than domestically. All the mentioned choreographers receive their basic financial founding from Arts Council Norway, meaning that they are artistically recognised on the highest artistic level. This may be referred to as production for exportation. Not much is being done to reach a larger Norwegian audience, caused by there being few venues for dance in Norway. This is partly due to the young tradition in Norway, quite different from the case of theatre. Dansens Hus (literally: House of Dance) in Oslo opened in 2009, after being formally established as a project in 2003 with support from The Norwegian Ministry of Culture. The intention was to increase the focus on dance in Norway.

Postmodern Norwegian dance has continued into the new millennium, and many of the mentioned names from the 1990es stay centrally positioned in the making of dance in

The number of Norwegian productions performed abroad has multiplied more than tenfold.

Norway today. Of course there are also new people entering, perhaps after graduating from the Faculty of Performing Arts in The National Academy of the Arts in Oslo, into which the National Academy of Ballet established in 1979 was merged. This education was established by Henny Mürer (1925 – 1997), a most famous Norwegian choreographer and dancer of her time. Since the 1990es the classical and contemporary dance study has contained four directions, for becoming a professional dancer in classical ballet or modern/contemporary dance, for becoming a professional choreographer and for becoming a dance pedagogue. The notion of contemporary dance is much debated, since one could say that any time has its contemporaneity.

However, modern dance is in the tradition of Isadora Duncan, and since then postmodern dance has changed into merging with new directions like folk and ethnic elements. This is an ongoing process, not least marked by the widespread impressions created by the folklore dance company Frikar, known to all of Europe after the performance accompanying Alexan-

der Rybak in the Eurovison Song Context in Moscow in 2009. I started this presentation by mentioning long folk traditions and now folk traditions are merging into the concept of contemporary dance. I will conclude by stating that a short history of dance sometimes can create new energy. This is clearly the case with Norwegian postmodern dance, which I hope this article has managed to show some highlights of, in addition to the general historical outline.

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Historical outlines and smaller biographies about Norwegian dance are also to be found in the Norwegian National Encyclopedia; Store Norske leksikon, which can be searched on the net: www.snl.no.



Presentation of the writers

Knut Ove Arntzen is an associate professor in theatre studies at the University of Bergen, and he is a member of the Norwegian Critics Association. He has participated widely in international conferences, published books and many articles internationally, and he gives workshops in postmodern theatre.

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Norwegian performing arts organisations

Arts council Norway (Oslo) kulturrad.no
Association of Norwegian Theatres and Orchestras (Oslo) nto.no
Dance Information Norway (Oslo) dance.no
Norwegian Association for Performing Arts (Oslo) danseogteatersentrum.no
Norwegian Stage Designers' Association (Oslo) scenograf.no
Proscen (Bergen) proscen.no
RadArt (Tromsø) radart.ning.com
The National Touring Network for the Performing Arts (Oslo) scenekunstbruket.no
The Norwegian Actors' Equity Association (Oslo) skuespillerforbund.no

The Union of Norwegian Dance Artists (Oslo) norskedansekunstnere.no
The Norwegian Union of Stage Directors (Oslo) nscf.no
Writers' Guild of Norway (Oslo) dramatiker.no

Programming theatres in Norway

BIT Teatergarasjen (Bergen) www.bit-teatergarasjen.no
Black Box Teater (Oslo) www.blackbox.no
Dansens Hus (Oslo) www.dansenshus.com
Dramatikkens hus/The house of drama (Oslo) www.dramatikkenshus.no
Grusomhetens Teater (Oslo) www.grusomhetensteater.no
Rådstua Teaterhus (Tromsø) www.raadstua.no
Teaterhuset Avant Garden (Trondheim) www.avantgarden.no
Tou Scene (Stavanger) www.touscene.com

Festivals in Norway

Arts Festival of North Norway
Festival for music, theatre, dance, visual arts, and performances for children. <http://festspillnn.no/>
Bastard
Festival for performing arts.
www.avantgarden.no/index.php?parent=0&groupid=497
Bergen International Festival
Music, theatre, dans and artfestival in Bergen.
www.fib.no

CODA Oslo International Dance Festival
International biennale on contemporary dance.
www.codadancefest.no

Ibsen Festival/ The Contemporary Stage Festival
International biennales in Oslo.
www.nationaltheatret.no

Marstrand
Festival for contemporary performing arts.
www.blackbox.no/

METEOR
International biennale on contemporary theatre in
Bergen. www.bit-teatergarasjen.no

Oktoberdans
International biennale on contemporary dance in Bergen.
www.bit-teatergarasjen.no

Porsgrunn International Theatre Festival
International theatre festival in Porsgrunn.
www.pit.no

Showbox
Festival for performing arts for youths and children.
www.scenekunstbruket.no

Stamsund International Theatre Festival
International theatre- and dancefestival in Stamsund/
Lofoten. www.stamsund-internasjonale.no

The Circus Village
Contemporary Circus Festival.
<http://www.cirkusxanti.no/en/sirkuslandsby/>

The International Puppet Theatre Festival
International festival for puppet theatre.
www.agderteater.no

Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival
Contemporary music and performing art festival in Oslo.
www.ultima.no

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