



UDK 792.02 (481)

DOI 10.51937/Amfiteater-2025-1/58-76

Abstract

In Norwegian theatre, the avant-garde may be less visible due to the very strong Ibsen tradition in stage directing marked by realism, which is the main tradition throughout Norwegian theatre history. However, there were attempts to create a Norwegian theatre avant-garde in the period between the 1920s and 1960s, which the author addresses in this article as a historical avant-garde perspective of beauty and monstrosity. The article focuses on the break from or cracking of the Ibsen tradition in stage directing, which indicates a break from traditional representational ways of playing Ibsen on stage, marked by the predominant realist stage directing and acting ideals, first during Ibsen's own life and then during the decades after. The article also indicates the neo-avant-garde transition into the post-avant-garde from the 1960s to the 1980s and how Situationism came to influence it.

Keywords: historical avant-garde, neo-avant-garde, post-avant-garde, Norwegian Ibsen tradition, grotesque, folklore, beauty and monstrosity, stage directing

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Poetic to Popular, Beauty and Monstrosity in the Norwegian Avant-Garde Theatre

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During modernism, as well as in the international avant-garde, the grotesque folklore was important both as a visual effect and as a theatre style of its own and a part of a general lineage of avant-garde deviating from classical norms of harmony. However, harmony in the arts has often been something in between beauty and monstrosity (Kokiou and Malakasioti 1–13). This dichotomy is also noticeable in the Norwegian theatre avant-garde from the 1920s to the 1960s and, later, indicating the arrival of the post-avant-garde in the 1980s. It emphasises how popular art or folk culture has been a source of inspiration for avant-garde movements not only in the 20th century but also in earlier historical periods: “Folk dance and songs inspired famous composers of the Romantic era and early modernism, such as Edvard Grieg and Bela Bartok” (Arntzen, *Anthropogarde of Stage* 99–109, 101).

As a term, the word “grotesque” is derived from the word “grotto”, meaning “cave”, which reflects subterranean associations to something alien, strange or *unheimlich*. According to the Renaissance and Baroque tradition of the pastoral, a monster or dragon was living in the cave. In the European theatrical avant-garde, re-theatricalisation had its impact on the first decades of the 20th century. The inspiration came from marketplace fiestas and folklore with features from folklore grotesques that are retraceable in folk fairy tales. The idea behind it was that the theatre is supposed to be theatrical, that is, a visual theatre, as opposed to being visually created illusions of reality on stage. Theatre avant-garde and the grotesque as a dramatic genre emerged from the background of the market theatre – a travelling pantomime theatre performing on the marketplaces and Tivoli parks of cities and villages. These travelling pantomime theatres worked in connection with Italian or English pantomime companies that were later known as Christmas Pantomimes.

There was a development towards expressionism in drama and theatre, which was influenced by the extreme use of grotesque effects in line with revue theatre, vaudeville and cabaret dramaturgy (Leirvåg 19). When it comes to traditions, Norwegian theatre researcher and historian Keld Hyldig has published two volumes on the general history

of Ibsen's tradition, which is seen against the background of Norwegian theatre history regarding the historical context and the Danish heritage of the 19th-century theatre (Hyldeg, *Del 1 og Del 2*). In the following, I will look at how the popular, burlesque and grotesque contributed to a break with the realistic Ibsen tradition in Norwegian theatre.

Johanne Dybwad and Agnes Mowinckel: A Poetic-Theatrical and Political Avant-Garde

In the first part of the 1900s, Johanne Dybwad (1867–1950) was the chief actress and stage director at Nationaltheatret in Kristiania (Oslo). She aimed to create a fusion of realism and stylisation. That was not avant-garde, but Dybwad still represented an initiative towards the avant-garde through her use of a Craig-inspired monumental-realistic directing style. It was she who introduced the political documentary theatre, such as in her production of Ernst Toller's *Hoppla wir leben* (*Hoppla vi lever – Hurra We Are Alive*) at the Nationaltheatret in Kristiania in 1927. In Norway, this production was described as "literary expressionism" (Nygaard og Eide 75–76).

Combining monumentality in scenography and realism had already been established as a Norwegian stage directing style of the Ibsen tradition of the Nationaltheatret. The Dybwad tradition reflected some of the avant-garde tendencies, such as European re-theatricalisation that changed conventional theatre to a more stylised kind of theatre. Reality-imitating theatre was no longer in focus, and it was substituted by a partly neo-classicist monumental style. The development was a result of a multitude of impulses, not the least from Gordon Craig's idea of the actor as an inanimate figure or Übermarionette (Craig 9–14).

Agnes Mowinckel (1875–1963) was a stage director at Det Norske Teatret in Oslo. During her term of employment, there was indeed an actual theatre avant-garde in the European sense of the word. She presented stage productions of German expressionist plays (1923–1935). Prior to that, she presented Frank Wedekind's youth drama *Spring Awakening* (*Frühlingserwachen*) at Intimteatret (The Intimate Theatre) in 1922. Agnes Mowinckel was inspired by the intimate scene movement, something which was totally in line with the tradition instigated by the Théâtre Libre in Paris since 1887. She established her own intimate theatre called Balkongen in Oslo (The Balcony, 1927–1928), while she continuously kept in touch with avant-garde painters such as Per Krohg and Willie Middelfart.

In other words, the central focus of Mowinckel's productions was the visual expression on stage. She traced important plays by contemporary authors, such as the surrealist grotesque *The Magnificent Cuckold* (*Den storartede hanrei*) by Belgian

surrealist playwright Ferdinand Crommelynck, which she produced at Det Frie Teater in 1924. In 1928, she even presented the Play *Dybbuk* by Shalom An-Ski, a playwright who wrote all his plays in Yiddish. This was a folkloric and poetic fairy-tale play that Yevgeny Vakhtangov had produced in Moscow in 1922. Agnes Mowinckel directed it in a theatrical, stylised manner contrary to psychological realism. In addition, she engaged artists from the Russian avant-garde theatre who came to Norway as refugees, such as Alexey Zaitzow and Grigory Danilovich.

Agnes Mowinckel's productions could be poetical, political and social. Her primary source of inspiration, however, came from the French poetic theatre style that Jacques Copeau had established at his Vieux Colombier in Paris. This French theatre was very much inspired by the Italian Commedia dell'Arte. Like other small theatres in Paris at the time, such as Théâtre du Atelier, it absorbed a lot of surrealistic features.

Stein Bugge: The First Cracking of the Ibsen Tradition

During the interwar period, Stein Bugge (1896–1961) was important in Norwegian theatre circles as a theatre visionary. His importance grew in the post-war period from 1945 to the 1950s. He was, like Agnes Mowinckel, oriented towards the theatrical and poetical inheritance from Jacques Copeau and Le Cartel.

Copeau had wished to establish a folk theatre (people's theatre) based on comedy, the grotesque and monstrosity in accordance with stylistic ideals of re-theatricalisation, folklore and stylising. Copeau's inspiration came from the Italian Commedia dell'Arte tradition and some similar traditions. Copeau's theatre wanted a more playful and physical form of theatre that would abandon the aim of producing realistic or naturalistic mimesis on stage. Bugge made himself unpopular when he broke with the dominant Ibsen tradition to the advantage of the style of Ludvig Holberg, a Danish-Norwegian comedy writer. It seems that Bugge considered Holberg's comedies grotesque plays and, especially, Holberg's *Jeppe on the Mountain* (*Jeppe på Bjerget*). The modern grotesque was a genre blossoming in early Soviet theatre and drama, like with Meyerhold, Mayakovsky, Yevgeny Schwartz and Daniil Kharms, with roots in strange stories from E. T. A. Hoffman to Nikolai Gogol.

Unfortunately, Stein Bugge's comedy productions ceased to become economically successful. They were rarely produced by the Norwegian theatres of his time or later. So, Bugge never had his breakthrough as an avant-garde playwright. However, as a poetical and rhythmical stage director, he had a significant influence on the avant-garde in Norwegian theatre. In an article, he pronounced his view on what was essential for creating the artistic impression of theatre, that is, what he would consider to be "the pure

theatre". Bugge was preoccupied with the thought that theatre had to be disconnected from the literary text to create a "pure theatre" – a theatre style with origins from the stylised theatre forms of earlier times. The intention of this "pure theatre" was to create a free flow of imagination on stage. To put it in his own words: "The pure theatre – such as it has been formed by a whole row of shining geniuses from modern theatre history – has disconnected stage arts from the literary analysis and from mimetic realism" (Bugge 294).

In Brussels in 1928, Bugge's Belgian publisher printed his artistic manifesto, *The Ideal Theatre* (*Det ideale teater*) in Norwegian, which was then edited in Norwegian in Oslo in 1947. His manifesto was based on the opposition to naturalism, which was instigated by Belgian symbolistic playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. Bugge comprehended the position that Ibsen's dramatic realism had attained, yet he simultaneously opposed this same position. Seen from this perspective, we may regard theatre avant-garde as connected to a break with naturalism and realism. This idea is especially relevant to a Norwegian context regarding the dominant Ibsen tradition of the Norwegian theatre. According to Stein Bugge, Ibsen represented a view on theatre that would have to be trespassed totally in line with other avant-garde directions within the arts. Bugge looked for inspiration in the pre-bourgeois theatre traditions of the past (Bugge 17–33).

To Stein Bugge, the theatre of ancient Greece and Rome and of the Medieval Ages represented the best theatrical ideal since these theatre forms represented an experience of theatrical totality where actors and spectators were united in their belonging to a religious dimension. According to Norwegian theatre researcher Trine Næss, Stein Bugge's most important theory is his holistic view of theatre and his idea about the meaning and function of theatre. Næss claims that the implication of this view is that in theatre, the religious and sociological aspect are interconnected (Næss 98). This, I suppose, will have to be comprehended in relation to Bugge's strong commitment to folklore and, through this again, to a religious dimension that historically has been characteristic of folk culture. The development of new stage forms was intended to fit into this theatre perspective.

Stein Bugge felt compelled to derive inspiration from theatre forms of preceding historical periods that had made use of the platform stage and of popular stylised acting forms, such as the Commedia dell'Arte and juggler traditions. Again, theatre sprang out of the traditions and styles of the people. To Bugge, a stage arrangement functioned as a regularly constructed image of the whole spiritual world of the play. It was a contemporary complex and eternally shifting expression of the dramatic conflict of a play. He saw the importance of space and how to use the scorebook to establish a relationship between text and space. To quote Bugge again:

A stage arrangement, then, is not merely a fitting grouping of acting actors around decoratively lined up pieces of furniture in stage interiors. A stage arrangement is rather the fixed determination of fictive people's predetermined imagined role

holders' predetermined courses within the cubical space of the stage. (Bugge 279)

Bugge's use of the term "cubical" applies to an idea of his orientation towards modernism, that is, if we see the analogy to the painting style known as cubism. His aim was really something far more than just a monumental and stylised expression. In his mind, the stage room had to make space for the words on which you had to think to fully comprehend the drama. The focus is on the living human beings, and the actors are requested never to forget what their respective characters are doing on stage. In this way, Bugge contributed further to developing a monumental tradition in Norwegian theatre that stage director Johanne Dybwad had initiated earlier in the century. Also, she was very inspired by the inventive German stage director Max Reinhardt.

Stein Bugge's stage directing of Nikolai Gogol's *The Auditor (Revisoren)* at Det Norske Teatret in Oslo in 1936 was typical of this orientation. It was a production that he repeated later at Den Nationale Scene in Bergen in 1947. The expressionistic stage image of this production had a twisted perspective in which the actors appeared in stylised poses (Fig. 1). When Ludvig Holberg's play *Mascarade* was produced at Nationaltheatret in Oslo in 1945, Bugge's stage directing presented the play on a pastoral, playful rococo stage (Fig. 2). Productions of this kind were typical of Bugge's poetic and rhythmical commedia grotesque style. This tells us of theatre's disconnection from representational drama and transmission over to grotesques, cabarets and revue theatre. This production clearly took on more of an expressionistic and poetic character.



Fig. 1: *Revisoren*, Den Nationale Scene, 1947, Bergen. From *Det ideale teater*, p. 305.

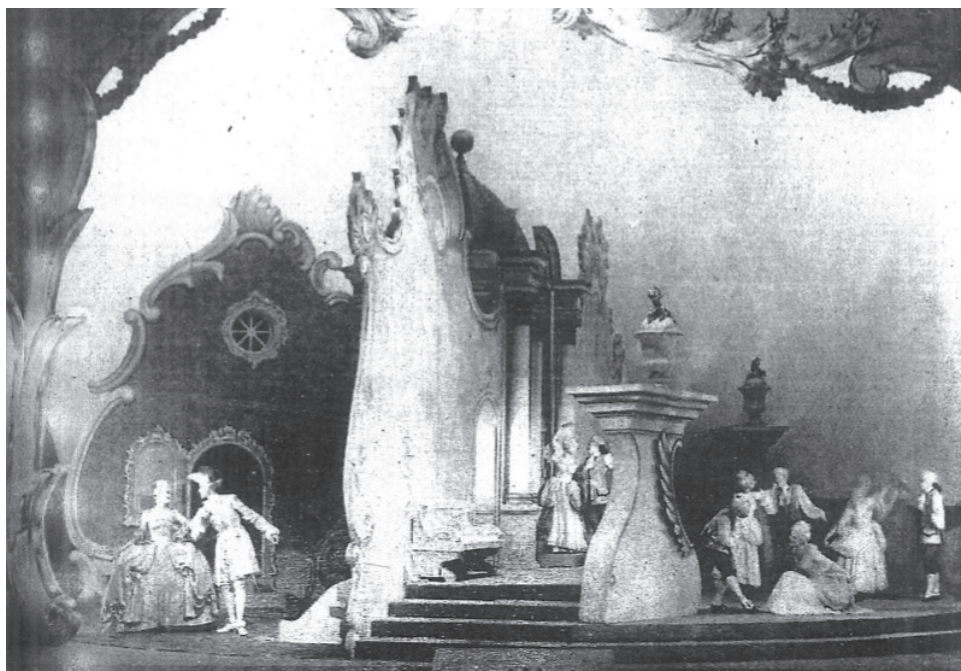


Fig. 2: *Mascarade*, Nationaltheatret, 1945, Oslo. From *Det ideale teater*, p. 272.

Hans Jacob Nilsen's Stage Directing Style and *Peer Gynt*

Hans Jacob Nilsen (1897–1957) was an educated engineer who became an actor and stage director. Nilsen's production of *Peer Gynt* at Det Norske Teatret in 1948 was with music composed by Norwegian composer Harald Sæverud (1897–1992) as an attempt to break with the Romantic tradition. In that tradition, Edvard Grieg's music was predominant, although Ibsen himself was all but satisfied with it (Nilsen 16). Breaking with the Ibsen tradition meant making use of a directing style that dared to be unfaithful to the theatre conventions of the time, even though psychological realism also stood firm in the stage directing of contemporary Ibsen plays. Ibsen himself had, in fact, contributed to this in his score books or staging manual, and in fact, many directors felt tied to their instructions.

Hans Jacob Nielsen, then, was presenting *Peer Gynt* as a non-Romantic drama and turning this type of production into reality. He claimed that concerning *Peer Gynt*, Ibsen acted as a non-Romantic playwright in the sense that, from his hand, the play was intended as a satire (Nilsen 16). But there is an inherent paradox in the fact that the satire had strong roots in Classical German Romanticism, so the plays of German Romanticism may indeed be as satirical and bitter as they could be sweetly tuned. Nilsen, however, wanted to break free from the national Romantic acting traditions,

not from the ironic or satiric dimensions of the play itself. This meant that the new music for *Peer Gynt* had to break with everything imitating and euphemistic. Harald Sæverud proved to be willing to compose a music score that had precisely that effect (Sæverud 39–43).

This production succeeded his engagement as managing and artistic director in Bergen (1934–1939, and the years he had spent in Sweden during the German occupation of Norway, where he had acted on stage in a production of *Peer Gynt* directed by Swedish Per Lindberg. After World War II, Nilsen was engaged as artistic and managing director at Det Norske Teatret in Oslo, 1946–1950. This is where his *Peer Gynt* in 1948 became one of his major productions. It was characterised by folkloric and grotesque elements. It is quite a paradox that he labelled his directing style as ethical realism, that is, a style in which dreams and poems were made equal (Midbøe 52). Harald Sæverud composed the music for this production and the two shared views in their comprehension of the importance of folklore. Seen from this angle, they both represented a contemporary trend in the direction of the folkloric-grotesque avant-garde. A convergence was then taking place between inspiration from folk art and the grotesque in music and in stage arts and what this production is concerned with. The context is the will to present an anti-Romantic interpretation of Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* in 1948.

Scenographer Arne Walentin (1915–2006) created a technologically modern and updated stage image with newly available light and sound reproductions that had great avant-garde potential, something that this *Peer Gynt* production really proved. A lot of the sensation by it lay precisely in the technical, the stage sounds and the bodies' free rhythmical movement that had become almost an aim of its own. Sæverud's stage music contributed significantly to this effect.

The focus on the bodily figurative is well documented by a contemporary Dutch critical review that described the production as "ballet-like" (Midbøe 164). The elements of satire and folkloric grotesque also took on a physical or bodily character. The music contributed to the experience of the play as something almost tactile. Dramaturgically, Nilsen confirmed the avant-garde-ish using episodes of action as the dramaturgical basis for his stage directing. Arne Walentin's use of picture projections on the rounded horizon of the revolving scene brilliantly realised this effect. Despite a scanty use of decorations, there was no Puritan simplification taking place on stage. Yet, the stage solution came to present the whole spectrum of new technical acquisitions. Thirty-two stage images were presented, all of which were picture projections by Arne Walentin projected on the backdrop from painted glass plates. The transition between them was simplified using the revolving scene (Midbøe 62).

The Roughness and Wildness of Folklore: *Peer Gynt* and the Aesthetics of Grotesque

Hans Jacob Nilsen wanted brutal music for his *Peer Gynt* production, a music designed to “tear and burn” to create anxiety and discomfort. For this purpose, he regarded Sæverud as the perfect choice of composer since he appeared to have “the musical temper of appropriate force and sorcery” (URL Siljustøl museum). Nilsen describes Sæverud as sufficiently rough and wild in his musical access to *Peer Gynt*.

The 1948 production of *Peer Gynt* came to reflect all of this, and Nilsen's choice of composer played a crucial part in creating this effect. The stage directing, as well as the choice of music, made use of rhythm, stylising and the folkloric grotesque; Sæverud's source of inspiration came from Norwegian folk music. If we interpret the production from a historical avant-garde theatre perspective, we can see that the characteristic elements are present. There is a focus on stage stylising and the grotesque, as well as on the choice of acting style and on the tableau- and landscape-based scenography of Arne Walentin. Besides, this production was characterised by a dramatic tempo hitherto unknown (Midbøe 69–70).

Norwegian literary researcher Knut Brynhildsvoll reviewed the dramatic text of *Peer Gynt* from a folkloric grotesque perspective, or the identity crisis of Peer Gynt as seen in a grotesque-aesthetic perspective (161–173). Here, we touch on the dichotomy in between beauty and monstrosity, mentioned in the introduction of my article. Brynhildsvoll maintains that the acting on stage appears with a subversive discourse in which the characters are talking past each other in a way that contributes to making the dialogues burlesque and quirky (161).

It is *Peer Gynt* as theatre text Brynhildsvoll reviews in his article, with no direct mention of Nilsen – except for the point concerning in which way it is implicated that the 1948 Nilsen production of the play was anti-Romantic. One possible answer to this is, of course, that it broke with the Romantic music of Edvard Grieg and the Norwegian National Romantic tradition of stage reception. However, Brynhildsvoll is questioning the thought of it being anti-Romantic when we look at the play from the perspective of the grotesque since the tradition of the grotesque, in fact, was created during the era of Classical Romanticism (Brynhildsvoll 164).

The grotesque is a reference that Hans Midbøe makes ample use of in his monograph about Nilsen's 1948 *Peer Gynt* production. He emphasises the grotesque in between beauty and monstrosity. To Nilsen as well as to Sæverud, it appears to have been an aim to parody the Norwegian farmer through the use of the grotesque. It is confirmed mainly through many of the critical reviews, such as in a comment to Gerd Kjølaas' stage choreography, where we read that she “has choreographed the dancing steps

totally in correspondence with the original idea behind the production, graciously-grotesque, expressive and humorous" (Midbøe 69). This play is also "about the ogish within us and about folk music" (49–52), and he states that "the Norwegian satire is grotesque by nature". On Lydia Opøien as "the woman dressed in green", he says that "she [Opøien] is sparkling and grotesque in her vitality" (Midbøe 111). On the Anitra character in Sossen Scheldrup's guise, he says that "she was naughty and wild, came on stage with a vivid physical presentation and a grotesque attire" (111). He also points to the music reviewer Elinor Behrens, who writes that Sæverud's music makes use of tough intervals, something which contributes to "liberate" *Peer Gynt* from the sentimentality of Romanticism and makes the play more vernacular (Midbøe 168–170).

Hans Midbøe often refers to interpretations of the *Peer Gynt* character in his monograph, like when he mentions a description in Hans Heiberg's theatre review in the newspaper *Verdens Gang*, which says: "This Peer is a completely egoistical, work-shirking, lying man, disloyal to everything and everybody, bragging whenever he can, but humble whenever he needs to be" (Heiberg, *critical review*). What Heiberg says in his article corresponds at large to Nilsen's own idea of his directing style, namely that the tragedy of the egoist is what must be addressed where ethical realism is concerned (Midbøe 116).

The theatre avant-garde in Norway ranged from symbolist drama to social engagement-drama and poetical theatre and had its roots in the European movement of re-theatricalisation as well as taking on a folklorist grotesque dimension. This is expressed in Stein Bugge's comedies as well as in Hans Jacob Nilsen's *Peer Gynt* production of 1948. Nilsen's production was intended as a riot against National Romanticism and the original Romantic reception of Ibsen's play. This implied that the focus shifts to a focus on Peer as an opportunistic war monger rather than on Peer as a Romantic outlaw. With his production, Nilsen finally broke through or cracked the national-Romantic Peer, accompanied by the music of Edvard Grieg. In 1948, the Peer figure or character was played by Nilsen himself in a psychologically realistic manner. But, considered as a whole, it appears that the grotesque was the protruding element. It seems that the production, to some degree, has been connected to the idea of the Norwegian landscape in a new or more expressionistic way. In the conception of the play, *Peer Gynt* is grotesque. The expressive style that grew out of this conception was partly produced through folklore and parody, and, indeed, it represented a revolt against the traditional romantic way of performing *Peer Gynt*, shifting from focusing on the poetic beauty to the monstrosity of the grotesque.

The Succeeding Development of the Norwegian Theatre Avant-Garde

In the 1950s, the Norwegian theatre avant-garde was succeeded by a theatre in which authors like Tarjei Vesaas and Georg Johannesen were important playwrights. In the 1960s, Jens Bjørneboe (1920–1976) came into the field of theatre with his documentary theatre and revue theatre style. Bjørneboe was an important supporter of Eugenio Barba's Odin Teatret in Oslo from its planning phase and onto its foundation in 1964. Odin Teatret later moved to Holstebro in Denmark. In 1966, Scene 7 at Club 7 in Oslo was, led by the actress Sossen Krogh (1923–2016) and was inspired mainly by French theatre and absurd drama (Brantzeg 4–9).

At Det Norske Teatret in the years 1971–1985, new European drama was conveyed to the spectators through young, internationally renowned directors in an exploratory, theatrical style. In the end, the new performative avant-garde took a foothold in Norway, inspired by the Fluxus movement and the Situationists like Gruppe 66 (Group 66) in Bergen. Gruppe 66 was marked by its own artistic twist to contemporary Norwegian social and political conditions. In this twist, it represented something very new and original that has been described as border-breaking and hybrid-ish through its use of poetry, new music, jazz and films. Gruppe 66 made use of happenings, actions and Co-ritus-events in combination with masks and the use of *Laterna Magica*, characterised by shadow play and the use of marionettes, reminding a bit of Nilsen's directing tools for *Peer Gynt*.

The Co-ritus was a new strategy for understanding art as live-action more than art in the sense of autonomy or being oriented towards the oeuvre as such. In 1966, Danish Situationist artist Jens Jørgen Thorsen (1932–2000) came to Bergen to participate in Gruppe 66's artistic project in the Bergen Art Society (Kunstforeningen), where he presented a series of art films and one pornographic film, and at the same time launching the concept of Co-ritus in a Norwegian context. Co-ritus became a strategy for artists to look upon themselves as progressive, and the concept indicated an artistic investigation into rituals and shared experiences as a way of creating a new relationship between the spectators and the audience in the arts, in the sense that the artistic process is a shared process, as Thorsen expressed to a journalist in the daily newspaper Bergens Arbeiderblad (Thorsen, *Co-ritus*) (Fig. 3).

The social engagement came very strongly about, and facing the late and postindustrial society, it became a question among the progressive artists how they should prevent ordinary people from falling into the hands of those who wanted to exploit ordinary people's newfound leisure time by inviting the audience to take part in the artistic process. Thus, the arts were no longer considered autonomous, something for its own sake and

goals. Jens Jørgen Thorsen expressed that his aim was to connect experience as such and the ritual or ritualistic. Mixing art and life came to expression in the search for practices marked by collectives or group-based work (Thorsen). When Jens Jørgen Thorsen came to Bergen for Gruppe 66 in 1966, it had a tremendous impact. The Norwegian artist action- and performance artist Kjartan Slettemark (1932–2008) worked with artistic strategies involving theatrical means of expression in happenings. In 1967, he presented a happening outside Kunstnernes Hus in Oslo, dressed in a jeans suit painted with rosemaling (folkloristic painting), performing the tarot game seated on a piece of animal skin. The tarot game consisted of 5000 picture images of Mao Tse-tung.



Fig. 3: *Co-ritus* by Gruppe 66 in Bergen Kunstforening in 1966, with Olav Herman-Hansen and Jens Jørgen Thorsen

In Stockholm, the same year, he stayed a long time in bed together with a female assistant, dressed in a nurse's uniform and distributing pills. On a later occasion, he marched through the supermarket/department store Sundt in Bergen, carrying a poster where was written: "Kunst er Sundt" (Roland 95–96), literally meaning "Art is healthy" – corresponding to the fact that "sundt" in Norwegian can also be read as "healthy" in English. Slettemark's happenings, actions and performances have some resemblance to the *Co-ritus* idea (Thorsen). However, they are not stagings with a clear framing of how to include the audience in a *Co-ritus*-like

ritual, but Slettemark presented solo rituals in public spaces and vernissages. He dealt ironically with consumerism.

Neo-avant-garde theatrical performance in Norway is specifically marked by the fact that Odin Teatret was founded by Eugenio Barba (1936–) in Oslo in 1964 but soon moved on to Denmark and the large town of Holstebro in 1966, so laboratory theatre as a central movement of the neo-avant-garde did not take a stronghold in Norway except for some companies of the laboratory, physical training, such as Grenland Friteater established in 1976 and still functioning with a basis in the Porsgrunn/Skien region. Other examples could be mentioned. However, the socially engaged free theatre companies of the 1970s and the performative experiments of the 1980s contributed to the founding of a post-avant-garde within the Norwegian visual and performative arts, with the creation of companies such as Verdensteatret and Baktruppen.

A neo- or post-avant-garde developed in Norway by the 1980s with conceptual performance artist Kurt Johannessen (1960–), as well as with Baktruppen (1986–2009). Baktruppen would define themselves as those who walk behind, thus being an *arrière garde*, which is exactly what the name Baktruppen means in Norwegian. Baktruppen also made a *Peer Gynt* production titled *Super Per* in 1994, in which Per (with one e) admits that he is lying to her mother by ironically answering “yes” when Mother Åse says: “Peer you are lying”, in contradiction to “No, I am not” as in the original play text by Ibsen. Other companies of the 1980s generation, like the conceptual theatre company Verdensteatret (1986–), would introduce a new and more postmodern understanding of what theatre can be. In this case, it was the introduction of theatre as a kind of telling machine, which also inspired the German International Ibsen Award-winner in 2012, Heiner Goebbels (1952–). It also contributed to the growth of a new international programming theatre movement, in which Bergen International Theatre became an important player. They have recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of the first festival in 1984. These new companies also contributed to a new vocabulary of visual dramaturgical kind or means of expressions put on an equal footing, and equally also gave premises to and became references for the concept of the post-dramatic (Arntzen, *Nordic interaction* 182–190). My conclusion is that both in historical avant-garde as well as in neo- and post-avant-garde, we could see the shifting from Romantic and poetic towards the grotesque and folkloric, as in neo- and post-avant-garde coming to expression in conceptual performance interacting with Situationism and Co-ritus corresponding to the dichotomy of beauty and monstrosity.

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