

**From Critique to Creation: *Theory of the Subject's*
Place in Trond Reinholdtsen's Institutionally Critical Oeuvre**

and

***Repetition Exercise: A Play in Three Lectures*
an Original Composition for
Pianist, Performance Artist, and Orator**

by

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University of Pittsburgh, 2024

Trond Reinholdtsen (b. 1972) has fashioned an intricately fantastical music-theatrical world that provokes listeners to ponder the conditions of their own world and dares them to imagine what a different society could look like. Approached from theatrical, musical, and political analytical viewpoints, my dissertation places Reinholdtsen's intermedia piano concerto *Theory of the Subject* (2016; *Theory*) at the inflection point of his institutionally critical oeuvre.

Before *Theory*, Reinholdtsen premiered three works which were essential to the development of music-theatrical techniques for expressing his institutional criticisms. Blending elements of concerto, performance art, art theory, art installation, live video, and political messaging, *Theory* is the culmination of these acquired methods.

As a peculiar artwork of institutional critique, *Theory* levels its critique, not so much at the institution in which the artwork is positioned, but at the world which creates the conditions for the failures of that institution. *Theory's* theatrical narrative is the story of New Music piano soloist Ellen Ugelvik's struggle (and failure) to play truly new and socially transformative music within a neoliberal world.

Through its ridicule by the Facebook group "Sløseriombudsmannen" and its inclusion in Morten Traavik's theater work *Sløserikommisjonen* (2021), *Theory* helped bring Norway into ongoing polarizing (though important) debates about the status and role of public art in Norwegian society. After *Theory*, Reinholdtsen felt he had exhausted institutional critique's usefulness for

his work and decided to focus solely on the creation of his own institution, The Norwegian Opra, and its Ø series (wherein a ragtag group of societal outcasts tries to form a utopian society).

Reinholdtsen's political stance aligns with Berlin's Dadaism yet differentiates itself by embracing sincerity and vulnerability. The power of Reinholdtsen's work resides in how he combines artforms and political, cultural, and scholarly thought to allow others to experience the state of our world through his extraordinary particularity.

My original intermedia music-theatrical composition *Repetition Exercise: A Play in Three Lectures* (2024) for pianist, performance artist, orator, interactive lighting, synced video, and installation enclosure investigates how interactions between text, speech, and music influence socially inflected realities outside (Lecture I), between, (Lecture II), and within (Lecture III) ourselves.

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1.0 Introduction

This dissertation examines the profound role institutional critique plays in Trond Reinholdtsen's work as a composer. Central to this investigation is an analysis of Reinholdtsen's theatrical orchestral work *Theory of the Subject* (2016, hereafter abbreviated to *Theory*) in chapters two and three. The crux of this analysis follows *Theory*'s climax, a striking section of music theater entirely composed of dramatized musical references to artistic and political movements. In this section, *Theory*'s determined protagonist (the piano soloist) heroically strives (and fails) to perform music that has the power to fundamentally alter our world for the better. Throughout, the orchestra overpowers the piano soloist with distorted versions of her playing.

The first chapter zooms into *Theory*'s analysis by sketching the development of Reinholdtsen's unique music-theatrical narrative approach through three significant institutionally critical works, with a shift in tone, beginning with an ideological lecture style and ending with character-driven theatrical narratives. *Theory* is the culmination of the music-theatrical techniques and methods developed in these works.

The final chapter zooms out of *Theory*'s analysis by charting the effect *Theory* had on both Norwegian politics and Reinholdtsen's compositional trajectory. Via Hannah Arendt's and Theodore Adorno's thought, *Theory* can be considered a lamentation at the lack of political space for artistic action caused by neoliberalism's consolidation of capital for the few. In being lampooned by the Norwegian Facebook group "Sløseriombudsmannen" and incorporated into Morten Traavik's theatrical piece *Sløserikommisjonen* (2021), *Theory* played a significant role in sparking ongoing contentious discussions regarding the funding of public art in Norway. Following *Theory*, Reinholdtsen perceived that he had exhausted the efficacy of institutional

critique for his artistic endeavors and consequently shifted his focus entirely towards establishing his own institution, The Norwegian Opra, and its Ø series, which depicts a disparate group of societal outsiders striving to construct a utopian community.

The first section of the conclusion zooms out further by connecting Reinholdtsen's political approach to approaches by the Berlin Dadaists. The conclusion culminates in a defense of Reinholdtsen's conviction that art ought to aim to look beyond the prevailing political ideologies of its era and pave the way for a fresh outlook on the world.

2.0 Chapter I - The Development of Reinholdtsen's New Music Institutional Critique: From Ideological Lectures to Character-Driven Narratives

The aim of this introductory chapter is to give readers a thorough introduction to Reinholdtsen's unique approach to New Music institutional critique as well as trace the evolution of Reinholdtsen's music-theatrical techniques and methods to the way they are employed in the sprawling, complex inner workings of *Theory*. This chapter begins with a general introduction to Reinholdtsen's varied compositional skills and interests. Reinholdtsen's rationale for engaging in institutional critique provides context for this chapter's core: a sketch of the development of Reinholdtsen's institutionally critical style from ideological lectures to character-driven narrative over three significant music-theatrical works. The techniques and methods established through these earlier works find their fullest expression in *Theory*.

2.1 Meeting Reinholdtsen

From late August to early October in 2022, I was in Oslo, Norway with Norwegian composer Trond Reinholdtsen (b. 1972). During our first meeting at a bar in the central Oslo neighborhood of Tøyen, I had a visceral encounter with the expansiveness of Reinholdtsen's mind which, at that point, I had only glimpsed second-hand through videos of his works on YouTube.¹ Our first discussion centered around our shared love for Danish writer/director Lars

¹ Splash page of Reinholdtsen's website wherein one is greeted with a large and intense closeup that radiates his energy: <http://www.thenorwegianopra.no/trondreinholdtsen.html>.

Von Trier's film *Idioterne* (1998) which is about, among many things, finding and managing one's inner idiot.² From there the conversation turned to my speaking in tongues (a religious form of glossolalia) during my upbringing with a father who was a children's pastor in a large Southern American Pentecostal church. Then the conversation turned to the spread of neoliberalism as spearheaded by the U.S. which dovetailed into a sprawling talk about how neoliberalism's representation in Reinholdtsen's 70-minute piano concerto, *Theory*, functions as an institutional critique of New Music³—the central focus of this dissertation.⁴

In his recently published book, *Musik und Wirklichkeit* (Music and Reality, 2023) philosopher Harry Lehmann heralded *Theory* as a work “that normally only appears once in a decade.”⁵ By the end of this first encounter with Reinholdtsen, I began to understand how the myriad interconnections in *Theory* stem from Reinholdtsen's wide-ranging interests and his seemingly insatiable desire to draw connections.

² Trier, Lars V., director. *Idioterne*. Zentropa Entertainments, 1998. 1hr., 55 min. <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the-idiots>.

³ In his article “The Return of ‘The New’ (In New Music)”, Reinholdtsen outlines the birth of what he calls the ‘genre’ of New Music, which he also often capitalizes. Therefore, I also refer to New Music as a genre and am capitalizing it in this dissertation.

⁴ Trond Reinholdtsen, *Theory of the Subject*, (Oslo, Norway: Trond Reinholdtsen, 2016). Video documentation: 00:00:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsT0ZkbwYdg>. Score: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZurXvJeFJtKAtwZF3qJ-OZMhkoutT37Y/view?usp=sharing>.

⁵ Lehmann, Harry. *Musik und Wirklichkeit*. Mainz: Schott Music, 2023. Quoted in the soon-to-be-but-yet-unpublished English edition, 179.

Trond Reinholdtsen is many things: an actor⁶, performance artist⁷, conceptual artist⁸, culture critic⁹, opera director¹⁰, vocalist¹¹, cinephile¹², amateur painter¹³, philosophic bibliophile¹⁴, and “one of the most important and innovative composers of contemporary music of his generation.”¹⁵

Reinholdtsen’s extensively varied skills and interests are represented in the striking interdisciplinarity of the music-theatrical works which emerged when Reinholdtsen entered his self-described “Institutional Critique Middle Reinholdtsen Period”¹⁶ during the beginning of his

⁶ Reinholdtsen (over)acting in his series titled the *Neo-Hippie-Interventionistische-Anti-Internet-Peripherie-Welttournee-Roadshow* (2018): video, 00:00:22, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhc_w1qCrkQ&t=22s.

⁷ Reinholdtsen rubbing fake feces into his face in front of a live audience: video, 00:24:56,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rBc9ROLJr4&t=1496s>; score, *Musik* (2012), p. 53-4,

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aMQAieZOG1-zzNfInKardDD1MSLCTIFK/view?usp=sharing>.

⁸ Reinholdtsen explaining via projected text to the audience why the music they are hearing is conceptual art in *Theory*: video, 00:00:41, op. cit.; score, p. 3 mm. 10, op. cit. This passage is examined more closely in the following chapter.

⁹ Reinholdtsen’s article on the difficulty of New Music to say anything new in our time:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20221203131435/https://www.motoffentlighet.no/single-post/2016/05/29/the-return-of-the-new-in-new-music-av-trond-reinholdtsen-1>. Article referenced later in analysis of *Theory*.

¹⁰ As Reinholdtsen states himself in his forthcoming article on his Norwegian Opra (*not* Opera), he is its director (as well as the composer of all works, the librettist, Heldentenor, scenographer, propaganda minister, web-designer, ticket master, cleaning assistant, conceptual consultant, head of the Worker’s Union, restaurant chief etc.). The Norwegian Opra’s website: <http://www.thenorwegianopra.no/>.

¹¹ New York Times article on a Carnegie Hall performance (at the same time as the Super Bowl in 2014) by the contemporary vocal ensemble the Nordic Voices featuring a photo of Reinholdtsen singing (second from the right): <https://web.archive.org/web/20140201091951/https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/01/nyregion/competing-for-attention-with-the-super-bowl.html>.

¹² While spending a weekend with Reinholdtsen at his Norwegian Opra house in Sweden, I chose a film for us to watch from a closet labeled (in a colorfully and hastily hand-drawn manner) “FILM ARKIV” which contained what I would estimate to be, at least, 500 DVDs.

¹³ Reinholdtsen’s painting featured during *Theory*’s conclusion: video, 01:03:25, op. cit. I saw this painting in person hanging on a wall within the basement of the Norwegian Opra house.

¹⁴ Reinholdtsen’s Opra house contains shelves of philosophical books. The following is a sampling from one of these shelves: a German edition of Immanuel Kant’s *Kritik av det rena förnuftet* (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781), two German editions of Sigmund Freud’s complete works (2006), a Norwegian and German edition of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, originally published in German in 1807), an English edition of Alain Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject* (2009; originally published in French 1982) (after which Reinholdtsen named his piano concerto), a German edition of Max Weber’s *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1905), Jacques Lacan’s *Écrits* (1966), and Baruch Spinoza’s *Ethics* (1677).

¹⁵ Oppebøen, A. (2008, October 20). *Trond Reinholdtsen - Biography*. Listen to Norway. Retrieved April 27, 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20111106130300/http://www.listento.no/mic.nsf/doc/art2008102714563887300984>.

¹⁶ Reinholdtsen, Trond. “MY VIA DELAROSA FROM (IMPOTENT) INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUE TO THE FOUNDING OF MY OWN INSTITUTION, «THE NORWEGIAN OPRA», WITH THE GRADUAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE «FOLLOWERS OF Ø» OPRA-DORF ON A MEADOW IN THE SWEDISH

artistic research fellowship at the Norges musikkhøgskole (NMH) or Norwegian Academy of Music in 2009.¹⁷ The apotheosis of this middle period (and central focus of this dissertation) is his multimedia piano concerto, *Theory*, a prodigious work that is the culmination of the development of Reinholdtsen’s unique approach to music-theatrical narrative as well as the most far-reaching and ambitious form of institutional critique within his oeuvre.

2.2 Reinholdtsen’s Rationale for Engaging in Institutional Critique

Within institutional critique, “artist” and “art” are often viewed as being in opposition to the “institution,” which is seen as co-opting and commodifying once-radical and uninstitutionalized practices.¹⁸ In 2009 while disillusioned with the ongoing exploration of musical “material,” which felt increasingly unconvincing to him as it continued to dominate the mainstream of the music festival scene, particularly so with regards to the constantly expanding yet overused catalog of extended instrumental techniques, Reinholdtsen felt compelled to begin an investigation of “power structures, the relation composer-musician, the festival *dispositif*, conservative structures of the ensemble world, the score, the ritual of the concert[,] and the Commission.”¹⁹

FOREST, THEREBY (MAYBE) SAVING THE AUTONOMY OF ART” (unpublished manuscript, 31 October 2022), typescript, pg. 3)

¹⁷ Reinholdtsen obtained his master’s in composition in 2006 at NMH and would go on to complete his artistic research fellowship there in 2014 as well. NMH’s website: <https://nmh.no/en>.

¹⁸ Fraser, Andrea. “FROM THE CRITIQUE OF INSTITUTIONS TO AN INSTITUTION OF CRITIQUE.” Artforum. Accessed May 7, 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180417125304/https://www.artforum.com/print/200507/from-the-critique-of-institutions-to-an-institution-of-critique-9407>.

¹⁹ Reinholdtsen, “MY VIA DELAROSA...”.

This critical sentiment is by no means new in the wider artworld. Theodore Adorno pointed out that music is “a latecomer among the arts,” and this seems to hold true in relation to works of institutional critique within New Music^{20,21} In his forthcoming article on institutional critique, Reinholdtsen references his work *Musik* (2012) (which premiered at the New Music festival Donaueschingen Musiktage and is discussed in more detail in the following section) wherein a prerecorded trio of digitally manipulated voices sing [as translated to English from German by Reinholdtsen]: “Thank you, dear festival director that we can perform here. It is very good for our careers. This we can use next time we apply for funding from the Cultural Council in Norway.”²² Reinholdtsen then compares that moment to a work by pioneer institutional critic Hans Haacke who gained fame by showcasing meticulously gathered evidence and visual representations that unveiled questionable real estate enterprises carried out by the museum’s trustees in his exhibition, *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971). While Reinholdtsen’s critique occurs decades after Haacke’s and is much more tame, it still managed to cause a small scandal at the festival suggesting that

²⁰ In 1919, the music critic Paul Bekker introduced the term “new music.” Initially, the lowercase ‘n’ in the adjective was used, but this minor spelling mistake was quickly corrected, and the accepted term became “Neue Musik,” which was later translated into English as “contemporary music.” Bekker observed a distinct contrast between the music genre and the visual arts, noting a lack of interest in contemporary works in music. Therefore, he believed it was essential to distinguish between “music” and “new music,” referring to composers like Claude Debussy and Gustav Mahler. Fast forward forty years, Theodor Adorno, in his article “Music and New Music,” discussed how the term ‘new’ enduringly applied to music but not to painting, for example (one might consider terms like “painting” and “new painting”). In music, “new music” represented a significant, abrupt change, primarily related to a shift in the tonal system. Adorno argued that the most notable transformation in music was atonality. This music became fundamentally dissonant and emotionally intense, even though Arnold Schönberg insisted that twelve-tone music could encompass a wide range of emotions, including humor. Schönberg was so confident in the success of his comic opera “Von heute auf Morgen” that he personally managed all publishing rights and commitments, leading to serious financial difficulties. However, it is clear, even without the benefit of hindsight, that this musical language did not readily evoke laughter. Reinholdtsen, Trond. “The Return of ‘The New’ (In New Music).” Internet Archive Wayback Machine. December 1, 2020. <https://web.archive.org/web/20221203131435/https://www.motoffentlighet.no/single-post/2016/05/29/the-return-of-the-new-in-new-music-av-trond-reinholdtsen-1>.

²¹ Adorno, Theodore. 1970. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Christian Lenhardt. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 5.

²² Reinholdtsen, “MY VIA DELAROSA...”.

questioning the prevailing notion of “absolute music” or a form of “pure listening,” and instead redirecting focus towards the comprehensive landscape of music creation and consumption has certain aspects that are considered taboo.²³

For Reinholdtsen, institutional critique’s questioning of traditional aesthetic considerations can carry a profound sense of mourning for the loss of a once-beautiful tradition (despite that loss being arguably necessary and progressive for the institution). Reinholdtsen’s earlier artworks, which referenced institutional art, were, in a sense, tragic pieces and sometimes possessed a tinge of desperation, reflecting the precariousness of the situation. For example, Reinholdtsen feels that there is often a disconnect between listening and theory. New Music works are frequently based upon elaborate, complex systems that Reinholdtsen has found, after a premiere, seldom draw out from his colleagues much in the way of reflection “beyond an appreciation of one certain ‘sound’ (very often one bit of instrumentation), or the remembrance of a certain nice ‘moment’ that stuck out.”²⁴ Moreover, drawing from the energy of its profound sense of mourning, Reinholdtsen’s institutional critiques often become deeply personal, as institutions acquire metaphorical significance and serve as proxies for one’s private psychological struggles (as will be discussed in his work *Inferno* [2013]).²⁵

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

2.3 From Ideological Lectures to Character-Driven Narratives

In the five years prior to *Theory*'s premiere in 2016, Reinholdtsen premiered three works of institutional critique that were vital to the development of the music-theatrical narrative method used in *Theory: Faust, or the Decline of Western Music* (2011) (hereafter abbreviated to *Faust*) for piano, PowerPoint, and theatrical effects²⁶, *Musik* (2012) for the ensemble Asamisimasa etc.²⁷, and *Inferno* (2013) for educated percussionist wearing white shirt, tie, and glasses, 3 MIDI-drums, playback, screen, and 3 tables with white canvas [no audience permitted]²⁸.

The first of these works (*Faust* and *Musik*) are narrative displays framed primarily by ideological lectures on philosophical notions related to music, but, while the philosophical underpinnings remain in the next two works (*Inferno* and *Theory*), Reinholdtsen develops the ability to support these philosophical displays through character-driven narrative, thus giving them a far deeper emotional impact by filtering them through the complexity of lived experience (in the form of theatrical characters' actions).

During this middle period Reinholdtsen's examinations of the state of contemporary music progressively widen in musical scope while progressively narrowing in narrative scope—from solo piano in *Faust* to a piano concerto in *Theory* (a widening of musical scope) and a

²⁶ Trond Reinholdtsen, *Faust, or the Decline of Western Music*, (Oslo, Norway: Trond Reinholdtsen, 2011). Video documentation: 00:00:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UD-HIW4k2Z8>. Score: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t7OQRft2EmZsHfO3Le-y_3tJaxyaAm4_/view?usp=sharing.

²⁷ Trond Reinholdtsen, *Musik*, (Oslo, Norway: Trond Reinholdtsen, 2012). Video documentation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rBc9ROLJr4>; Score: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aMQAieZOG1-zzNfInKardDD1MSLCTIFK/view?usp=sharing>.

²⁸ Trond Reinholdtsen, *Inferno*, (Oslo, Norway: Trond Reinholdtsen, 2013). Video documentation: 00:00:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jSS33ax7mA>: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1taZzOg9exbPgvT8KxSI9Fk2gFj43u-no/view?usp=sharing>.

pianist in *Faust* to the particularity of a concerto pianist as a character with a backstory, a clearly articulated desire, acute anxiety, and a darkly comic end in *Theory* (a narrowing of narrative scope).

2.3.1 *Faust*: The Groundwork for Developing Character-Driven Narratives of Institutional Critique

Faust lays the groundwork for further development of his institutionally critical approach in subsequent compositions of this period (i.e., *Musik*, *Inferno*, and *Theory*). Through *Faust*, Reinholdtsen establishes two key components for creating artworks of New Music institutional critique: 1) a musical form used as the catalyst, backdrop, and/or punching bag for the criticisms embodied by the work (e.g., *Faust*-sonata form, *Musik*-operetta, *Inferno*-etude, and *Theory*-piano concerto) and 2) one central performer upon which the theatrical narrative hinges (e.g., *Faust*-pianist, *Musik*-lecturer/opera founder, *Inferno*-percussionist, and *Theory*-concerto pianist).

Faust (the earliest of the works to be referenced in this period) is a critique of Western modernist music's frequent obsession with minute and hardly perceptible aural changes that the listener is expected to track and perceive as motivic development. Reinholdtsen expands this critique into the broader question of what constitutes meaningful form in music drawing from scholarly writings on a theory of civilizations' natural cycle of growth, heyday and decline by

Oswald Spengler²⁹, relations between theatre and the arts by Michael Fried³⁰, and sonata form by Charles Rosen³¹.

The opening of *Faust* is an audio address wherein Reinholdtsen educates the audience (using an exaggeratedly banal professorial voice interspersed with quirky audio illustrations) on the perception of aural difference which leads to the performance of a sonata as the work's central musical form.³² The crux of Reinholdtsen's critique lies in a real-time analysis of algorithmically-derived motivic transformations of piano notation from within the sonata projected on a screen to the audience as it is being performed.³³ The analysis becomes progressively more absurd as the transformations of the motives become increasingly more tedious, and their accompanying alphanumeric labels climb higher and higher.³⁴ Both are presented at an ever-quickening pace with the aid of arrows that highlight some change in the transformation (e.g., a change in melodic direction). Eventually the piano notation disappears leaving only the arrows as dancing lines with seemingly as much (or as little) meaning as they had when the piano notation accompanied them only moments before. These lines are transformed into Medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment era paintings of animated skeletons representing death (and the decline of Western music).³⁵ Reinholdtsen begins the next section (i.e., the "theatricalization of the piano") with colored balls on fish rods, a picture of Karl Marx,

²⁹ *Faust* references Spengler's book, *The Decline of the West* in two volumes (1918 and 1922): score, p. 2, op. cit. Spengler's book: <https://ia803401.us.archive.org/26/items/declineofwest01spenuoft/declineofwest01spenuoft.pdf>.

³⁰ *Faust* references a quote by art critic Michael Fried: score, p. 2, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t7OQRft2EmZsHfO3Le-y_3tJaxyaAm4_/view?usp=sharing.

³¹ *Faust* references Rosen's book, *Sonata Forms* (1980): score, p. 43, op. cit.

³² Reinholdtsen directly addressing the audience during the opening of *Faust*: video, 00:00:27, <https://youtu.be/UD-HIW4k2Z8?si=79kJQM1KXW3T0YRh&t=27>; score, p. 2, op. cit.

³³ Real-time analysis of the development of the piano sonata in *Faust*: video, 00:12:09, op. cit.; score, p. 2 mm. 6; op. cit.

³⁴ Figure 'Ab' "development" causing much laughter from the audience: video, 00:13:51, <https://youtu.be/UD-HIW4k2Z8?si=X5a72T3upyobq6M9&t=831>; score, p. 5 mm. 32, op. cit.

³⁵ Use of arrows which become paintings of death represented by skeletons: video, 00:20:47, <https://youtu.be/UD-HIW4k2Z8?si=L5frbW4HIJzV1s3G&t=1247>; score, p. 27 mm. 204, op. cit.

and a crumpled mass of colored paper holding the word *kunst* [art] moving up from the body of the piano.³⁶

Faust's central performer (as in *Theory*) is a piano soloist, but in *Faust*, as opposed to *Theory*, the characterization of the pianist is practically non-existent despite Reinholdtsen's articulated intention in the score.³⁷ *Faust* is a music theater work of ideas, but not of ideas embodied within characters (i.e., character-driven narrative). These ideas are communicated in a lecture style through direct addresses³⁸, diagrams, prose, and iconography and are musically (though *not* theatrically) supported by a solo piano performer. Therefore, while the pianist in *Faust* facilitates overtly theatrical acts like steering three small radio cars each fitted with iPods and small loudspeakers through the audience³⁹, there is no indication to the audience that the pianist's bizarre actions are the result of the pianist selling his soul to Mephistopheles whereas in *Theory*, the concerto pianist, after having performed a large portion of the canon of esoteric modernist piano literature while wearing a wig and fake beard, thinks that "New Music feels old somehow"⁴⁰. In *Faust*, the pianist functions as a score reader, not a character with an agency that entails the possibility for emotional responses as in *Theory*. In Reinholdtsen's next works (*Musik* and *Inferno*) *Faust*'s blunt, lecture styled, uncharacterized communication with the audience

³⁶ Rising crumpled mass of colored paper holding the word *kunst* [art]: video, 00:31:03, https://youtu.be/UD-HIW4k2Z8?si=HDar0Y_4m1s5mLv7&t=1863; score, document p. 39 "Theatricalization" mm. 15, op. cit.

³⁷ *Faust* indicating Mark Knoop is Faust: score, p. 5, op. cit.

³⁸ During this middle period Reinholdtsen's method of directly addressing the audience became more performative and complex. In a recent (January 2023) interview conducted by inventor Sandris Murins, Reinholdtsen admits that his pieces can be "very hard for the audience" as he jumps between modernist algorithmic composition, kitsch aesthetics, and extreme performative acts. He goes on to explain that this method of directly addressing the audience allows him to "make the situations extremely clear" by explicitly telling the audience what he would like them to pay attention to or what something means in his work. Murins, Sandris. "Trond Reinholdtsen: Intermedia Methodology for Music." January 16, 2023. Video, 00:17:53, <https://youtu.be/PGZ3KMYuWHI?si=pEO0n0DIC7kbNg3c&t=1073>.

³⁹ Mark Knoop, steering a sound-fitted, radio-controlled monster truck: video, 00:33:33, <https://youtu.be/UD-HIW4k2Z8?si=m1k8yaFegx-O1aB3&t=2013>; score, document p. 40 mm. 25, op. cit.

⁴⁰ *Theory*'s pianist thinking "New Music feels old somehow": video, 00:34:16, op. cit.

gradually fades away as more nuanced communication with the audience through performer characterization gradually fades in.

2.3.2 *Musik*: The Emergence of Performer Characterization within Reinholdtsen’s Lecture Style

In *Musik*, Reinholdtsen begins to develop performer characterization by casting himself as both a lecturer and opera director in order to “confront the art form of contemporary music in its totality.”⁴¹ By acting these roles himself Reinholdtsen is able to viscerally experience and directly control the performer characterization process, which paves the way for directing and writing theatrical characters played by someone else (as in *Inferno* and *Theory*), a skill that benefits from his personal acting experience.

Over two-thirds of *Musik*’s roughly 35-minute length are taken up by Reinholdtsen holding a microphone and, at times, panic-strickenly delivering a lecture that begins with (according to Reinholdtsen’s program note)

a systematic phenomenological investigation of “musical material” in today’s contemporary music, where the human cognitive apparatus and it’s [sic] motor functions, and the limits of aural perception is put to a brutal test in light of the general public’s gradual degeneration and lack of concentration due to limitless access to fast stimuli like pop music, social media[,] and pornography on the internet.⁴²

⁴¹ Reinholdtsen, “MY VIA DELAROSA...”.

⁴² *Musik*, score, document p. 3, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aMQAieZOG1-zzNf1nKardDD1MSLCTIFK/view?usp=sharing>.

Reinholdtsen gives this lecture to his predominantly German audience (as it was premiered at Donaueschinger Musiktage) first in German and then in English by way of a hilarious segue and with the aid of PowerPoint.⁴³ Here Reinholdtsen characterizes himself as the neurotic professor.

The final section of *Musik* is an operetta about Reinholdtsen's desire to start a new form of opera, The Norwegian Opra (*not* Opera), to address the crisis of contemporary music. Reinholdtsen now assumes the role of opera director of the burgeoning Norwegian Opra. The operetta is staged via a pre-recorded 10-minute video (which is preceded by Reinholdtsen rubbing fake feces into his face⁴⁴ and humorously claimed as a livestreamed video via the flashing caption "LIVE FROM BACKSTAGE!"⁴⁵). This final section culminates in an epically orchestrated, prolonged C major tonic (prolonged by movement back and forth to chromatic neighbors D# and Ab). While Reinholdtsen lip-syncs a sample of his voice on a C that is pitch-shifted to a "chipmunk" frequency, he holds a print-out of Conlon Nancarrow's face over his own face proclaiming *die Ideale* [the Idea]⁴⁶ (which, in this work, is The Norwegian Opra) as the all-important notion in the face of the *Krise* [Crisis]⁴⁷ within contemporary music.⁴⁸

While *Faust*'s narrative has no clear characterization, much less a character with a clear desire, *Musik*'s narrative establishes a character (Reinholdtsen as composer lecturer) with a desire (to fix the crisis in contemporary music which Reinholdtsen articulates through his opening lecture). This character (Reinholdtsen) then does something to achieve this desire (start

⁴³ Reinholdtsen's lecture (with the aid of PowerPoint): video, 00:19:54, <https://youtu.be/4rBc9ROLJr4?si=TKcHOTI9VmGyHTSS&t=1194>; score, document p. 49, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Reinholdtsen rubbing fake feces into his face: video, 00:24:56, op. cit.; score, p. 53-4, op. cit.

⁴⁵ "LIVE FROM BACKSTAGE!" caption: video, 00:25:46, op. cit.; score, document p. 55, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Introduction of *die Ideale*: video, 00:32:34, op. cit.

⁴⁷ Reinholdtsen interacting with the *KRISE* [CRISIS] in contemporary music: video, 00:27:26, op. cit.; score, document p. 59, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Prolongation, Conlon Nancarrow print-out, and pitched-up vocal sample: video, 00:33:14, <https://youtu.be/4rBc9ROLJr4?si=oEOZlEfVXj3THxTK&t=1994>.

The Norwegian Opra). But the narrative stops at the climactic moment (i.e., Reinholdtsen as Conlon Nancarrow via a print-out over his face proclaiming *die Ideale* in what is framed as a resounding redemptive act for contemporary music as referenced in the previous paragraph).

What *Musik*'s narrative lacks is a clear and emotionally engaging presentation of what is at stake for the characterized performer if they act or fail to act upon their desire. This is why *Musik* ends at the climax. The stakes for the character are not there, and, therefore, there is no way to show what the character stands to lose and/or gain from the action they chose to achieve their desire. One year later Reinholdtsen writes *Inferno*, a work that does include a clear and emotionally engaging over-the-top presentation of what is at stake for a characterized performer.

2.3.3 *Inferno*: The Prominence of Character-Driven Narrative and the Subtlety of Composer Direct Address

Inferno's theatrical narrative exhibits a significant increase in the complexity of Reinholdtsen's theatrical character-driven narratives when compared to *Musik*'s narrative. In *Inferno*, two parallel narratives and a bonus ending metanarrative contain multiple characters whose actions occur in a concert hall, prehistoric world, and apartment kitchen. Within these new settings, Reinholdtsen employs new theatrical techniques (that are reused in *Theory*) and continues the development of his approach to audience direct address.

2.3.3.1 Summary of *Inferno*'s Character-Driven Theatrical Narrative

Inferno is an institutional critique of New Music through the lens of Reinholdtsen's confrontation with middle age and, consequently, how choosing to continue being a New Music

composer deep into adulthood can entail great loss. Here, Reinholdtsen meets the weighty question, “Is it worthwhile to pursue a life devoted to avant-garde music?”.

This question is an outgrowth of Reinholdtsen’s midlife crisis which is referenced in *Inferno*’s study score. An entire page is devoted to a description of the characteristics of a midlife crisis (see Figure 1). The third checkmark of characteristic feelings of individuals experiencing a midlife crisis strongly implies that Reinholdtsen himself is experiencing a midlife crisis (see Figure 1). The third check reads as follows: “a fear of humiliation among more successful colleagues (such as Johannes Kreidler⁴⁹, Simon Steen-Andersen[,] and Thomas Adés)” (see Figure 1). These colleagues including Reinholdtsen were all born within nine years of each other. Additionally, Reinholdtsen was born in 1972, and *Inferno* premiered in 2013. It is likely that much of *Inferno* was written or at least conceptualized the previous year (2012), the year Reinholdtsen turned 40, an age widely regarded as the entry point into middle age.

Midlife Crisis

p. 11

Characteristics

Individuals experiencing a midlife crisis have some of these feelings:

- ✓ search of an undefined dream or goal
- ✓ a deep sense of remorse for goals not accomplished
- ✓ a fear of humiliation among more successful colleagues (such as Johannes Kreidler, Simon Steen-Andersen and Thomas Adés)
- ✓ desire to achieve a feeling of youthfulness
- ✓ need to spend more time alone or with certain peers

They exhibit some of these behaviors:

- ✓ abuse of alcohol
- ✓ acquisition of unusual or expensive items such as motorbikes, boats, clothing, sports cars, jewelry, gadgets, tattoos, piercings, etc.
- ✓ depression
- ✓ having remorse for one's wrongs.
- ✓ paying special attention to physical appearance such as covering baldness, wearing youthful designer clothes, etc.
- ✓ entering relationships with younger people (whether sexual, professional, parental, etc.)
- ✓ placing overimportance (and possibly a psychologically damaging amount) on their children to excel in areas such as sports, arts, or academics

Figure 1 Reinholdtsen’s Description of a Midlife Crisis

⁴⁹ Kreidler is the primary thinker and advocate of New Conceptualism, a movement in contemporary music of the 21st century. Article written by Kreidler outlining and contextualizing the New Conceptualism movement in New Music: <https://web.archive.org/web/20220125172809/https://mutor-2.github.io/HistoryAndPracticeOfMultimedia/units/07/>.

In *Inferno*'s narrative, Reinholdtsen does not directly center himself as in *Musik. Inferno* centers two versions of one character (i.e., the human percussionist [as a person devoted to a life in pursuit of art and knowledge] and the gorilla/prehistoric human [as the paragon of the human life cycle of an art and knowledge devotee and its instantiations of the feelings of midlife crisis within modern humans]) both played by the percussionist Håkon Stene.

At *Inferno*'s start, the percussionist has already asked the question "Is it worthwhile to pursue a life devoted to avant-garde music?", answered 'yes', and appears to be suffering for it. He begins by striking a MIDI drum, triggering a sample of a very loud and banal static stream of snare drum hits.⁵⁰ Following this, the percussionist slumps his shoulders, puts on a deflated expression, walks to sit down on a comfortable yet sterile-looking loveseat office-styled chair, stares at the audience, then quotes the opening tercets of Dante's *Inferno* via thought bubbles (a technique also employed in *Theory*):

Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

I cannot well repeat how there I entered,
So full was I of slumber at the moment
In which I had abandoned the true way.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Inferno*'s opening in which the percussionist depressingly hits a MIDI drum: video, 00:0:20, <https://youtu.be/5jSS33ax7mA?si=PJqI8AMS7KrWPVf1&t=20>; score, document p. 30, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1taZzOg9exbPgVT8KxSI9Fk2gFj43u-no/view?usp=sharing>.

⁵¹ Dante quotation via thought bubbles: video, 00:15:03, op. cit.; score, document p. 6, op. cit.

After the quote, the camera slowly pulls into an extreme closeup of the percussionist's face which radiates anxiety.⁵² This zoom technique is mimicked in *Theory* where it serves the same dramatic purpose: to highlight the anxiety of the soloist.⁵³

Following the closeup, the narrative shifts focus to the gorilla who discovers music (with the aid of a stick and a couple of animal skulls) and becomes entranced with it when he begins to experiment with musical form.⁵⁴ In the midst of the gorilla's experiments, a screaming baby gorilla (i.e., a small stuffed animal gorilla) is introduced to which the bigger gorilla addresses in frustration, "Daddy's working!".⁵⁵ Accompanied by the prelude to Act I of Richard Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* playing from a 2000s era gray CD boombox on the dining table within a somewhat drab apartment kitchen, the gorilla dutifully and cheerfully answers the call of fatherhood by "cooking" (more like warming over) a dozen eggs at once in a single pan for himself and his hungry stuffed animal gorilla child.⁵⁶

At the moment before the climactic final cadence of the Wagner prelude⁵⁷, Reinholdtsen cuts to silence and a grim scene. Puddles and speckles of blood (i.e., red wine) rest below the stuffed animal gorilla child who is being beaten (i.e., tapped as a percussionist would do to a mounted tambourine in a mezzo-forte orchestral dance passage) by his gorilla father with a stick,

⁵² Camera zooms and linger on percussionist's face: video, 00:15:35,

https://youtu.be/5jSS33ax7mA?si=cn_hhM5gx-cwT5d3&t=935.

⁵³ Camera zooms into concerto pianist's anxiety-ridden stare in *Theory*: video, 00:29:16,

https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=t9ARL_iGjRgrfGzI&t=1756.

⁵⁴ Gorilla experimenting with musical form: video, 00:19:53, op. cit.; score, document p. 86, op. cit.

⁵⁵ Baby gorilla interrupting Daddy's successful chemistry experiment: video, 00:24:13, op. cit.

⁵⁶ Gorilla "cooking" a dozen eggs accompanied by Wagner: video, 00:29:11,

<https://youtu.be/5jSS33ax7mA?si=1Qdk3eF7QvnfLMP9&t=1751>.

⁵⁷ The setting of Wagner is the centerpiece of this scene and greatly expands its hermeneutic window. As the only of Wagner's mature operas to not feature supernatural or magical powers or events, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*'s plot is set within a guild of amateur poets and musicians who are primarily craftsman of various trades. By setting this opera's prelude to a domestic scene in which an erudite gorilla musician and accomplished chemist gladly assumes the time-consuming role of father, Reinholdtsen indicates that the gorilla's scientific and musical pursuits have been, by virtue of his new fatherly duties, reduced to the status of amateur, like that of the amateur poets and musicians who work day jobs within Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

eliciting the sound of a vibraphone strike with each strike.⁵⁸ After two extended rounds of vibraphone drubbings the stuffed animal gorilla child is (presumably) dead and left abandoned by its gorilla father who retires to a nearby couch and reads from Theodore Font's translation of Hector Berlioz and Richard Strauss's *Treatise on Instrumentation* (1991) followed by a Norwegian edition of August Strindberg's *Inferno* (originally published in French in 1897) which results in the gorilla weeping into his hands.⁵⁹ After a few seconds of gorilla-wailing, Reinholdtsen directly addresses the audience through a caption (with a discordant pink rounded font) which reads as follows: "The gorilla will continue crying for a long time. The piece is basically finished so feel free to make more popcorn or gradually direct attention towards your own life."⁶⁰

Naturally, the vague "basically" and the invitation to stop viewing the piece will prompt many viewers to continue watching. Those who do will experience a second, non-linguistic and primarily visual direct address in the form of a wide-angle, elevated shot of the performance setup of *Inferno* wherein the behind-the-scenes aspects of *Inferno* are clearly visible.

Performance materials are strewn haphazardly at the left of the shot. Reinholdtsen himself sits at a table eating a sandwich while watching his computer playing and sending a video of the earlier egg-cooking scene to a projector that is projecting the scene on a projection screen (which showed other videos within earlier more conventionally framed narrative parts of *Inferno*).⁶¹

⁵⁸ Moments before the final climactic cadence leading to the child's beating: video, 00:37:32, https://youtu.be/5jSS33ax7mA?si=k_1PId_s_Q9BC32e&t=2252.

⁵⁹ Gorilla retiring to read on the couch and, after reading, weep: video, 00:38:22, op. cit.

⁶⁰ Pink rounded font captioning the gorilla's wailing: video, 00:39:44, op. cit.

⁶¹ Wide-angle, elevated, meta-framing shot of the performance space: video, 00:40:54, <https://youtu.be/5jSS33ax7mA?si=5JnkShdMPOp9lLJZ&t=2454>.

Despite being non-linguistic, the wide-angle shot is also a direct address. Immediately following the caption prompting the audience to pay attention to their own lives, Reinholdtsen confronts the audience with an unadorned look into his own life—a composer experiencing symptoms of a midlife crisis observing his artwork about confronting middle age. Here Reinholdtsen, prompted by Reinholdtsen, directs attention to Reinholdtsen prompting Reinholdtsen to direct attention to Reinholdtsen and so on and so forth.

An inquisitive spectator might then ask what is Reinholdtsen thinking about himself amid his midlife crisis, and what, if any, conclusions has he drawn? The answer comes in the form of *Inferno*'s final and most direct audience direct address. Reinholdtsen, in a grainy vlog-styled closeup, looks straight into the camera and (in a comically high voice) speaks Norwegian which is captioned in English as “This Morning I reached the high A.” After saying *morges* [morning] Reinholdtsen includes a faint comedic burp and, after finishing the sentence, proceeds by singing AAAHHH in an ear-curdling amateur quality attempt to demonstrate his “high” A.⁶² Despite the trauma of entering middle age, Reinholdtsen awakes the following morning and chooses to continue developing his questionable musical craft.

2.3.3.2 Analysis of *Inferno*'s Character Driven Narrative and Composer Direct Addresses

In *Inferno*, characters' actions have consequences, both positive and negative, unlike in *Musik*. The gorilla father makes a choice to kill his child in order to fulfill his desire for a life fully devoted to the pursuit of art and knowledge. Furthermore, the audience witnesses the effect

⁶² Final audience address in which Reinholdtsen sings with an amateur tone: video, 00:41:24, <https://youtu.be/5jSS33ax7mA?si=rEwBLMCbiItbbvSn&t=2484>.

the character's choice has on him. After the killing, the gorilla has the freedom to pursue a life of the mind, but the magnitude of what he has done and what he has lost brings him to weep.

Inferno's final series of direct addresses tie Reinholdtsen into the work's narrative and create a parallel between the narrative events of the percussionist, gorilla, and the composer himself. Reinholdtsen's integration of himself directly into the work is far more sophisticated and subtle than the monotone (though humorous) professorial address in *Faust* or his crazed lecture in *Musik*. This restraint lends *Inferno* (a work about a deeply emotional and troubling time in many people's lives, i.e., the contemplation of and introduction to middle age) a far deeper personal and emotional context than the blunter direct addresses of Reinholdtsen's previous two works could have.

In *Theory*, Reinholdtsen develops the composer direct address further. Via a live video of the audio mixing room projected into the concert hall, Reinholdtsen directly addresses the audience in a comedic struggle to describe the tension between his practical and creative sides (his split subjectivity) when composing massive works like *Theory*. This tension is theatrically illustrated by a figure dressed in a white bedsheet with *Geist*⁶³ written across their chest (representing Reinholdtsen's impractical creative side) and Reinholdtsen holding a jumble of wires (representing his overly stressed, managing practical side). By the end of the direct address, the *Geist* disregards Reinholdtsen and begins showering in the bathroom that is connected to the audio mixing room.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Geist* is a notoriously difficult German word to translate. In the context of Hegel, it can be roughly translated as the universal 'Spirit' or consciousness of man. It can also be translated as 'Ghost'.

⁶⁴ Reinholdtsen describing tension between creativity and practicality: video, 00:18:58, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=dIW6WIUmT9mgtVfu&t=1138>; score, p. 24 mm. 158, op. cit.

Compared to the direct addresses in the previous works, Reinholdtsen's acting is more nuanced in *Theory*, and again, (as in *Musik*), there is an expertly crafted comedic switch of language mid-address, this time from Norwegian to English and then back to Norwegian. The address serves a subtler role than the direct addresses within *Faust*, *Musik*, and *Inferno*. In *Theory*, the split subjectivity of Reinholdtsen (referenced in his address) functions as a foil (not as a one-to-one stand-in like in *Inferno*) for the splintering subjectivity of the concerto pianist (which is the central theatrical narrative focus of *Theory*).

While *Inferno*'s narrative excels in personal and emotional impact (compared with *Faust* and *Musik*), its institutional critique does not have a scholarly backdrop (as *Faust* and *Musik* do). Instead, literary resources fill that role, which, while working well within the context of *Inferno*'s narrative, makes for weaker institutional critique. On the other hand, *Theory* manages to integrate both angles as a scholarly backdropped institutional critique (i.e., Hal Foster's "mimetic exacerbation") shown through an emotionally impactful character-driven narrative (i.e., a concerto pianist struggling to say something actually new as a New Music pianist).

3.0 Chapter II - An Overview of *Theory*: *Theory*'s Music-Theatrical Narrative

This chapter provides a necessary framing for an analysis of the concerto pianist's (i.e., *Theory*'s protagonist's) struggle (and failure) to say something truly new in New Music in *Theory*'s climactic section. This chapter's first section explains Reinholdtsen's underlying critique of New Music as a neoliberal institution and its application in *Theory*'s opening. The second section outlines the concerto soloist's music-theatrical narrative: the orchestra (as an instantiation of art critic Hal Foster's "mimetic exacerbation") preventing the soloist from performing socially revolutionary music.

As a simultaneously profound and ridiculous work of narrative musical theater that also doubles as an institutional critique of New Music, Reinholdtsen's piano concerto *Theory* is a prime example of his distinctive style, which blends elements of concerto, performance art, art theory, and political messaging. The piece is profoundly self-reflective and liberally sprinkled with musical, historical, and literary allusions throughout. Among other things, Reinholdtsen's approach to composition is characterized by a rejection of traditional boundaries, which are often playfully undermined and satirized. *Theory* seamlessly integrates a formally dressed symphony orchestra and soloist with self-reflexive commentary projected on a screen, live backstage video footage, and clips from performances of early pieces.⁶⁵

In terms of dramatic genre, *Theory* can best be described as black comedy with a slapstick delivery. Reinholdtsen's transitions are often bluntly delineated. Characters' lines are

⁶⁵ Halvorsrød, Hilde. Translated by Ellen Ugelvik. "Selvproletarisering for Klaver." Scenekunst. September 19, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160928132736/https://scenekunst.no/sak/reinholdtsens-klaverteori/>.

delivered via thought bubbles, ‘chipmunk’ vocal frequencies, or direct addresses to the audience. A white bedsheet-clad ghost sings while showering in the concert hall’s green room bathroom. The protagonist resorts to self-mutilation when she realizes the very nature of her artistic subjectivity as a pianist is hopelessly entangled with how the world operates. The dramatization of the self-inflicted severing of two fingers with a knife (i.e., the self-destruction of the concerto pianist’s artistic subjectivity) elicited uproarious laughter from the audience during *Theory*’s performance.

As is often the case with works of black comedy, dark humor deepens the emotional impact of a theme’s exploration by approaching it indirectly. Instead of providing comic relief, dark humor compels the audience to grimace at the grotesque while acknowledging the emotional complexities involved in a given subject matter. Ironically, somber approaches to emotionally weighty thematic material can appear sentimental or melodramatic, undercutting audience impact. Despite this, Reinholdtsen himself describes his institutionally critical works as “tragic.”⁶⁶ Perhaps *Theory*’s black comedy and slapstick antics only serve to hide Reinholdtsen’s tears.

3.1 *Theory*’s Institutional Critique: The Mimetic Exacerbation of the Capitalist Rubbish

Heap

To gain a robust perspective on *Theory*’s foundational theoretical backdrop this section summarizes and discusses Reinholdtsen’s article “The Return of ‘The New’ (In New Music)”⁶⁷,

⁶⁶ Reinholdtsen, “MY VIA DELAROSA...”.

⁶⁷ Reinholdtsen, “The Return of...”.

unpacks the meaning of Foster’s term “mimetic exacerbation,” and analyzes Reinholdtsen’s framing of his critique in *Theory*’s opening.

3.1.1 “Mimetic Exacerbation” in Reinholdtsen’s “The Return of ‘The New’ (In New Music)”

As a companion piece to the installation *Konserthuset* in Oslo University’s square and the performance \emptyset (episode 12) which is mainly set on the island Hovedøya in the Oslo Fjord (both *Konserthuset* and \emptyset are included in *Theory* via video projection [about which more later]), Reinholdtsen’s article “The Return of ‘The New’ (In New Music)” (2015) is a lament for the state of New Music and a prescription for how an artist might overcome it.

3.1.1.1 Reinholdtsen Asks Where is the New in New Music: Adorno, Badiou, Foster, and Groys

According to Reinholdtsen, in its current state (as of 2015), New Music is a mix of “a little new and a little old and a little different”—a stew wherein contemporary compositions, Gregorian chants, pop, jazz, rhythm and blues, sound installations, Japanese gagaku, and Indian morning ragas can seamlessly blend together in the same festival lineup.⁶⁸ The listening experience and social context remain unchanged—typically in an open setting where the audience can choose to stand or sit on a concrete floor, freely move between different small concerts and soundscapes, and where the consumption of alcohol and social networking are integral. Historical references and genre-specific nuances are discarded as relics of the past and

⁶⁸ Ibid.

elitism, with the discourse simplified to individuals' subjective evaluations of whether something sounds good or not.⁶⁹

Drawing from Adorno, Reinholdtsen describes the historical roots of New Music in the diverging paths taken by the visual arts and music in the early twentieth century—non-representational art in the visual arts and the break from tonality in music (a division which ultimately received less general cultural acceptance than non-representational art). Reinholdtsen gives the following entertaining illustration to bolster this claim:

So[,] while Piet Mondrian's geometries ended up in L'Oreal advertising, Suprematist imitations in all color combinations are sold ready-framed at Ikea[,] and Kandinsky's non-figurations fit nicely as the wallpaper in the children's room, an early modernist masterpiece like *Five Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 16* can still only be used as a basis for film scenes containing murder, insanity or, at best, sodomy.

Reinholdtsen continues by admitting that the emergence of the genre called "New Music" represents a significant and distressing moment in history that has been deliberately suppressed and even was, as some argue⁷⁰, a mere parenthesis, a dead-end experiment.⁷¹

The traumatic breaking of tonality and its many various responses has been lost in our postmodern age where, "without the obligation to take part in the New, the way is open for a more free and intense everyday art chatter" and a "happy celebration of the mediocrity of normality—a bit like Facebook really." The ideal artistic philosophy is "I write what I like," and the sole significance of the term 'new' lies in "something different, something that has been

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Henahan, Donal. "CLASSICAL VIEW; And So We Bid Farewell To Atonality." *New York Times*, January 6, 1991. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190704173300/https://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/06/arts/classical-view-and-so-we-bid-farewell-to-atonality.html>.

Ribe, Neil M. "Atonal Music and Its Limits." *Commentary*, November 1, 1987. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230712182545/https://www.commentary.org/articles/neil-ribe/atonal-music-and-its-limits/>.

⁷¹ Reinholdtsen, "The Return of...".

recently reproduced—like a new car.^{72,73} According to Badiou, postmodernism is, for the musician, “a kind of waiting period after the ‘true’ contemporary music project [i.e., the breaking of tonality] has played out.”

How then might an artist react in this postmodern quagmire? Reinholdtsen looks to art critic Hal Foster in his book *Bad New Days* (2015) to help him formulate an answer to this question:

If, in today’s neo-liberal reality, where all the important political decisions seem to be made at some mysterious corporate level beyond actual democratic access, one no longer has any laws (or that it is not possible to understand what the laws really are) this artistic position will assume a pose of “mimetic exacerbation”, which can perhaps be translated as “mimetic deterioration” and understood as a (sometimes) grotesque exaggeration of the status quo...[though m]imetic exacerbation is not unproblematic. It can easily appear as affirmation, or even a celebration of the capitalist rubbish heap.⁷⁴

Within this “celebration of the capitalist rubbish heap,”⁷⁵ Reinholdtsen finds meaning through the “museum taboo”⁷⁶ which prevents the reiteration of the past since the old no longer vanishes but continues to be showcased. Therefore, the absence of a public display of the old, represented by a museum, would make it impossible for the new to emerge. From these statements, Reinholdtsen concludes that “the return of the New can only come like a breath from the grave” and is inspired to make a sort of mock museum in the form of an art installation, *Konserthuset*,

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ While I agree in broad strokes with Reinholdtsen here, I would have taken the analogy a bit further. New cars are at least things people regularly buy and want. New Music is often unmarketable and unwanted by the masses. I would liken New Music to designer crafts in a soon-to-be out-of-business mom-and-pop trinket shop that, for most people, are interesting enough to feign polite examination in the line of sight of its hopeful shopkeeper while on vacation killing time between the beach and dinner but certainly not interesting enough to warrant an engaged critical thought or (as more likely from a shopkeeper’s/egotistical composer’s perspective) not entertaining enough to create a Pavlovian connection to their pockets.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Foster, *Bad New Days*.

⁷⁶ Groys, Boris. 2008. *Art Power*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 27. http://www.ccyte.com/OccuLibrary/Texts-Online/Art_Power_Boris_Groys.pdf.

wherein two pianists “systematically play their way through the utopian, heroic modernist and esoteric piano canon of dead (or at least half-dead) composers.”⁷⁷

Directly proceeding *Konserthuset* is the performance of \emptyset (episode 12) which is *Konserthuset*’s “ultimate ideological counterpoint” in the form of the Oslo fjord island Hovedøya⁷⁸ filled with a cast of characters including Herzeleide, Tiresias, Dionysus, Thomas More, Stalin, Ho Chi Minh, Lenin, Pentheus, and Che Guevara who are singing, reciting, eating, and drinking, all the while envisioning their utopia. Eventually, the revolutionary characters face defeat at the hands of synchronized swimmers⁷⁹, symbolizing capitalist forces, who launch an assault on paradise, arriving by boats from another bay. Meanwhile, an aerial drone whirls above⁸⁰, capturing the spectacle and broadcasting the scene onto a computer monitor positioned on nearby grass for an onlooking audience.⁸¹

That both works are included within *Theory*’s narrative via video projection to the concert audience gives an indication of *Theory*’s immense scope and complexity. The conclusion of \emptyset (episode 12) dovetails into *Theory*’s climactic section which is analyzed in the following chapter. In *Theory*’s narrative, the revolutionary acts of \emptyset (episode 12) deeply affect the concerto pianist and are what leads to their final struggle in the climax.

Both *Konserthuset* and \emptyset (episode 12) are reflections of Reinholdtsen’s artistic persistence in trying to say something truly new despite the difficulty of doing so in a postmodern neoliberal world. Reinholdtsen concludes the article with an Alan Badiou quotation

⁷⁷ Ugelvik playing Henry Cowell before setting out for Hovedøya: video, 00:33:11, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=skP4Z7EQbCg0cQcZ&t=1991>.

⁷⁸ Oslo fjord island Hovedøya: video, 00:38:57, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=SHWP3BG8IB4S0-Qi&t=2337>.

⁷⁹ Synchronized swimmers: video, 00:40:19, op. cit.

⁸⁰ Ariel drone: video, 00:42:41, op. cit.

⁸¹ Ugelvik, Ellen. “The Soloist in Contemporary Piano Concerti.” Research Catalogue: An International Database for Artistic Research. January 1, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190416061139/https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/31172/318328>.

from within Groys's chapter "On the New" from *Art Power* (2008) that sums up the whole of Reinholdtsen's efforts in creating not only *Konserthuset* and \emptyset (episode 12) but *Theory* as well: "I go on, in order to think and push to their paradoxical radiance the reasons that I would have for not going on."⁸²

3.1.1.2 Foster's "Mimetic Exacerbation"

The crux of Reinholdtsen's institutional critique of New Music in *Theory* stems from Foster's term "mimetic exacerbation," a critique of neoliberal inflected art production. As a response to the decline in the popularity of classical liberalism, neoliberalism originated in the 1930s among European liberal scholars who sought to rejuvenate and reintroduce key principles of classical liberalism, which had been overshadowed by a growing inclination to regulate markets due to the Great Depression.⁸³ Neoliberalism is a comprehensive approach to governance and economic management that emphasizes the promotion of private business and aims to shift the authority over economic matters from the government to the private sector.

What results from this system is a world filled with things (mostly produced by megacorporations) for us to consume in exchange for disproportionately larger amounts of our labor, thereby extracting value upwards to those with the capital used to initiate these corporations. A contributing factor enabling neoliberalism is that many governments, instead of protecting their citizens from predatory value extraction by corporations, protect and empower corporations to extract as much value as possible from consumers/citizens. In this scenario, governments' masquerades of of-the-people-for-the-people actions make it very difficult to know

⁸² Reinholdtsen, "The Return of...".

⁸³ Burgin, Angus. *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets Since the Depression*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015, 4. <https://hdl-handle-net.pitt.idm.oclc.org/2027/heb32825.0001.001>. PDF.

(much less understand) what important political decisions are actually being made.⁸⁴ Here, many of the crucial boundaries and real laws of society are created outside the democratic process and behind closed doors through negotiations between corporate and government leaders (e.g., dark money being funneled through super PACs in the U.S.)⁸⁵.

Foster argues that, without public participation in (let alone knowledge of) much important political decision-making, public discourse often circles (*not* the inaccessible innerworkings of these influential decisions but) the (accessible) material outcomes of these decisions—proliferating streams of technologically advancing consumer products that pile higher and higher on the capitalist rubbish heap. Therefore, many artists choose to create works using and highlighting these consumer products. Foster names this aesthetic strategy “mimetic exacerbation.” He also admits that while this strategy can result in artworks that trace, pressure, or activate fractures within the neoliberal order, mimetic exacerbation can also function conversely as a celebration of the neoliberal order.⁸⁶ Furthermore, this functioning as critique or celebration is not always clear.

⁸⁴ The U.S. is, of course, the archetypal example of a neoliberal system with its seemingly never-ending supply of lobbyists, super PACs, and lack of corporate regulation (particularly now in the field of artificial intelligence where the U.S. is allowing Big Tech to foster, control, and disseminate misinformation that can have far-reaching detrimental effects on consumers enroute to their goal of maximizing profit).

⁸⁵ Smith, Melissa M., and Larry. Powell. *Dark Money, Super PACs, and the 2012 Election*. Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2014.

Schatzinger, Henrik M., and Steven E. Martin. *Game Changers: How Dark Money and Super PACs Are Transforming U.S. Campaigns*. Lanham, England: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020.

Cox, Christian. “Dark Money in Congressional House Elections.” *Economics Letters* 216 (2022): 110590–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2022.110590>.

Chand, Daniel E. “Anonymous Money in Campaigns: Is Sunlight the Best Disinfectant?” *The Forum: a Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics* 13, no. 2 (2015): 269–88. <https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2015-0019>.

⁸⁶ Foster, *Bad New Days*. Foster references Jeff Koons’s and Takashi Murakami’s work as examples of celebratory mimetic exacerbation. Article highlighting Koons’s Hulk (a Marvel comic book character) artworks: <https://web.archive.org/web/20141123231952/https://www.scmp.com/magazines/48hrs/article/1643361/jeff-koons-brings-artworks-hong-kong>. Takashi Murakami’s Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/takashipom/>.

In “The Return of ‘The New’ (In New Music)”, Reinholdtsen describes a problem in New Music—the difficulty of creating artworks that say something genuinely new in our neoliberal time. *Theory* is Reinholdtsen’s contemplation of and response to this difficulty. Neoliberalism describes our virtually all-encompassing network of value exchange (a system that is consequently difficult to transcend). In *Theory*, Reinholdtsen uses Foster’s “mimetic exacerbation” to demonstrate the difficulty of art to transcend neoliberalism, and theater is his method for expressing this difficulty.

Theory is nearly entirely composed of New Music reference, pastiche, and quotation (i.e., the once-shiny or still-shiny New Music products of the recent past and present) which are integrated into a theatrical narrative of a New Music pianist desperately searching for a way to make art that says something truly new and meaningful. Despite the soloist’s efforts, all the pianist manages to do in their search is repeat impotent altered forms of the recent past and present (i.e., mimetic exacerbations), reflecting Reinholdtsen’s own frustrations and strivings with the state of New Music and artistic production in general within a neoliberal world.

3.1.2 *Theory*’s Conceptual Opening: John Cage, Madame Mao, and Lang Lang

In *Theory*’s opening Reinholdtsen poetically uses the concepts discussed above (i.e., neoliberalism and mimetic exacerbation) to set the stage for *Theory*’s theatrical narrative. While the orchestra plays a conventionally beautiful tonal passage, Reinholdtsen explains, via projected text to the audience, that the music they are hearing is not “kitchy [sic] music” but conceptual art. It purports to be a valid interpretation of the open graphic score of Cage’s *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* (1958) wherein Reinholdtsen inserted the notes of *Yellow River* (1939), a

piano concerto written during the Cultural Revolution in China.⁸⁷ Via projection, Reinholdtsen contextualizes the Cage by referring to its writing during the “ideological cold war between WESTERN CAPITALISM and EASTERN COMMUNISM,”⁸⁸ it as “Cage’s radical investigation into FREEDOM in Art,”⁸⁹ and it as “a representation of the political ideology of democracy and liberalism, not to say relativism.”⁹⁰ Reinholdtsen also educates the listeners that *Yellow River* was written

by a committee of six composers put together by Madam [sic] Mao. It is a programme music piece in the social realist style ending with a quotation of the Internationale. Political slogans were written into the score and projected onto stage during performance. As pre-compositional preparation the composers spent an obligatory period in the countryside of China as farmers, to better understand the sentiments and living conditions of the proletariat, for whom the concert would be written. After Maos [sic] death the concerto was hardly performed. In 1989 though, it was revised[,] and it gained renewed popularity. Recently Lang Lang⁹¹ has performed it to great acclaim⁹²

in Europe⁹³ and the United States⁹⁴.

Through this opening, Reinholdtsen very cleverly enacts mimetic exacerbation by distorting, reusing, and reproducing past objects (i.e., *Yellow River* as part of Cage’s piano concerto⁹⁵ as part of his own piano concerto). Reinholdtsen complicates the meaning of the Cage by inserting a piece of music popularized during the cultural revolution in China (i.e., *Yellow*

⁸⁷ Projection “kitchy” [sic] music: video, 00:00:37, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=Bh0F1SRdyJUKhfr-&t=37>.

⁸⁸ Projection referring to the period in which Cage’s work was written: video, 00:01:32, op. cit.

⁸⁹ Projection “FREEDOM in Art”: video, 00:01:50, op. cit.

⁹⁰ Projection referring to political ideology: video, 00:02:21, op. cit.

⁹¹ Chinese pianist Lang Lang has performed alongside prominent orchestras in China, North America, Europe, and other parts of the world. With a career spanning from the 1990s to the present, he holds the distinction of being the inaugural Chinese pianist to be invited to perform with esteemed ensembles like the Berlin Philharmonic, the Vienna Philharmonic, and several renowned American orchestras.

⁹² Projection of this block quotation: video, 00:02:59, op. cit.

⁹³ “New Year’s Eve Concert Mariss Jansons and Lang Lang.” Die Ära Mariss Jansons. December 31, 2018. <https://web.archive.org/web/20231228194307/https://mj.brso.de/mariss-jansons/>.

⁹⁴ “Brief on the Festival of China in 2005.” China.Org.Cn. September 21, 2005. <https://web.archive.org/web/20060910064830/http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/Festival/142937.htm>.

⁹⁵ “Example from John Cage’s score” which is shown to the audience: video, 00:01:45, https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=F76JRZtnqW1TAML_&t=105.

River) which, in the eyes of history (i.e., the second Red Scare of the 1950s) stood in opposition to the values represented in the Cage which Reinholdtsen frames as the West's (ostensible) ideals of freedom, liberalism, and democracy. Correspondingly, Reinholdtsen highlights the ideological paradox of Lang Lang's recent performances of *Yellow River* in the West bringing Western bourgeois appreciation to what Madame Mao intended as a commemoration of Eastern communism.

Reinholdtsen concludes this opening section via the following video projection: "It would be unfair to hide the fact that this next section [i.e., what remains of *Theory*] is some kind of programmatic music as it describes, in a brutal but truthful way, THE SYSTEM or if you like, THE STATUS QUO OF TODAY'S WORLD."⁹⁶ In his companion article to *Theory*, Reinholdtsen indicates that he believes the status quo of today's world to be neoliberalism. Considering this, the whole of *Theory* can be understood as a mimetic exacerbation of our neoliberal world in the form of a music-theatrical narrative of an artist (i.e., pianist Ellen Ugelvik as a persona of Reinholdtsen himself) struggling to overcome the cycle of artistic mimetic exacerbation.

3.2 The Piano Soloist's Music-Theatrical Narrative

Theory is the story of New Music piano soloist Ellen Ugelvik's theatrical character; her subjectivity fractures enroute to the failure of her doomed struggle to play truly new and socially transformative music within a neoliberal world filled with mimetic exacerbations of the capitalist

⁹⁶ Introduction to the rest of *Theory* as "some kind of programmatic music": video, 00:05:30, op. cit.

rubbish heap. Reinholdtsen choosing the piano concerto (one of Western classical music's most familiar large-scale genres) as *Theory*'s theatrical setting is at the heart of its narrative tension.

The piano is one of the most well-known and compositionally explored musical instrument in the world. The difficulty of playing/composing something truly new proves to be an insurmountable obstacle to the fulfillment of Ugelvik's desire to play fresh, groundbreaking, and profound music. In striving to overcome this obstacle, Ugelvik's subjectivity as a New Music pianist begins to fracture as tension escalates between the two primary parts of Ugelvik's musical identity—the piano and her as its player. The piano needs its player. And the player needs their piano. Throughout *Theory*, Reinholdtsen uses a slew of theatrical and musical techniques to articulate this rising tension.

3.2.1 The Complex Narrative Role of *Theory*'s Concerto Soloist

Before a summary of the concerto pianist's theatrical narrative can be given, it is necessary to illuminate the relation of Ugelvik (and Reinholdtsen) to *Theory*'s concerto pianist as a theatrical character. *Theory*'s dense and self-referential narrative can be difficult to track in large part due to the complex narrative role of the concerto pianist.

3.2.1.1 The Concerto Pianist as a Theatrical Character

Despite her direct reference by name in *Theory* via projection to the audience in the performance video⁹⁷, Ellen Ugelvik played a fictional version of herself created by Reinholdtsen. Ugelvik was not meant to be Ellen Ugelvik, the pianist, but rather an “actor portraying the

⁹⁷ Ugelvik referenced by name via projection: video, 00:39:10, op. cit.

character of Ellen Ugelvik, the pianist.”⁹⁸ Reinholdtsen instructed her to maintain an apathetic demeanor and refrain from expressing any physical emotions. She comments that her options felt extremely limited by this. Furthermore, as she had not been familiar with the composition as a whole before the premiere and lacked the deep knowledge of philosophy, politics, and art history possessed by Reinholdtsen, she could not contribute much to the composition’s broader artistic aspects.⁹⁹

In contrast, Ugelvik notes that her co-creative role in *Theory* differed from her experiences in other concertos. *Theory*’s challenge was in embracing a different role from that of a pianist, to embody a different character and to believe in the inherent value of this alternative persona. When describing why she decided to take on *Theory* as an artistic project, Ugelvik commented that:

I dared to take such a curious role (which consists of deconstructing the role of the soloist, myself) because I am used to performing pioneering repertoire. I am used to demolishing something in myself to make room to build something new, which at first does feel rather strange.¹⁰⁰

3.2.1.2 The Concerto Soloist as a Stand-In for the Composer

It is clear from articles (written by Reinholdtsen himself)¹⁰¹, interviews of Reinholdtsen¹⁰², and Reinholdtsen’s music theater works¹⁰³ that Reinholdtsen’s works often contain narratives that revolve around his personal relation to his artmaking (and, more broadly,

⁹⁸ Ugelvik, “The Soloist...”.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ “The Return of...” and “MY VIA DELAROSA...”

¹⁰² Lehmann, Harry, Christine Wahl, and Trond Reinholdtsen. “Neue Intendanz!” *Theater Der Zeit*, (2021). Accessed November 12, 2023. <https://archive.org/details/theater-der-zeit-neue-intendanz-an-interview-of-trond-reinholdtsen-about-the-fof/page/n1/mode/2up>.

Murins, video, 00:19:29, <https://youtu.be/PGZ3KMYuWHI?si=XyQAWFEGOOcKX0vf&t=1169>.

¹⁰³ *Musik and Inferno*

the role of the composer to their art). Considering this, it seems reasonable to view Ugelvik's theatrical character as a stand-in for Reinholdtsen himself (and other New Music composers generally).

3.2.2 Establishing Music-Theatrical Tension: Ugelvik's Psycho-Political Backstory

After *Theory*'s unorthodox conceptual opening, one expects the concerto pianist to enter and begin playing. This does not happen. It is not until mm. 279 that Reinholdtsen writes for the piano soloist to begin playing in a way that one might regard as typical. For most of *Theory*, Reinholdtsen harnesses the tension held within the anticipation that the concerto will start (in the conventional sense). Instead, nearly 45 minutes passes before the soloist begins playing more than just one note on the stage piano. During these minutes, *Theory*'s theatrical narrative is the revealing of Ugelvik's belief that the orchestra (and the accompanying concerto conventions it embodies) stand in the way of her ability to perform culturally revolutionary music. Reinholdtsen uses musical quotation, staging, theatrical acting, instrumentation, and flashback to establish this music-theatrical tension between the orchestra and Ugelvik.

The “mainstream contemporary music with a hint of neo-classicism [sic]”¹⁰⁴ that follows the opening begins with a flute quotation of Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben, Op. 40: II. Des Helden Widersacher* [*A Hero's Life, Op. 40: II. The Hero's Adversaries*]. By quoting Strauss, Reinholdtsen characterizes the whole of the orchestra as “The Hero's Adversaries”. Later,

¹⁰⁴ Projection preparing the audience for the music following the opening: video, 00:05:03, op. cit.

Reinholdtsen arguably characterizes the concerto soloist as “The Hero” by quoting a piano reduction of *Der Held* [The Hero], the opening movement of *Ein Heldenleben*.¹⁰⁵

Reinholdtsen uses staging, theatrical acting, and instrumentation to indicate Ugelvik’s performance anxiety and splintering subjectivity as a pianist. During a 2.5-minute highly ironic virtuosic algorithmically-derived player piano solo¹⁰⁶ (in which the upright player piano is unconventionally placed downstage right with its keys directly facing the audience), Ugelvik is introduced to the audience (via video projection) reading¹⁰⁷ a hardback English edition of philosopher Alain Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject* (2009)¹⁰⁸ (which combines ideas from Hegelian dialectics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, French Maoism, and set theory from the field of mathematics to present a systematic analysis of human subjecthood). The piano and its player are introduced as unlinked entities, uninterested in interacting with each other. After playing silent “rehearsal room etudes”¹⁰⁹, Ugelvik retires to the same couch where she was introduced reading *Theory of the Subject* and stares blankly into the camera (a gesture which is reminiscent of the percussionist’s couch-sitting in *Inferno*).¹¹⁰

At the end of Reinholdtsen’s previously referenced audio mixing room speech with the white bedsheet-clad *Geist*, Ugelvik returns to the piano and plays the opening of *Ein Heldenleben*.¹¹¹ While the *Geist* enjoys a shower, Ugelvik stands from the rehearsal piano and

¹⁰⁵ Ugelvik playing *Der Held* [The Hero]: video, 00:22:27, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=wmjZioQA8-aCkMzQ&t=1347>.

¹⁰⁶ Two and half minute player piano solo: video, 00:08:22, <https://youtu.be/Pgz3kMyuWHI?si=XyQAWFEGOQcKX0vf&t=1169>; score, p. 13 mm. 113, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZurXvJeFJtKAtwZF3qJ-OZMhkoutT37Y/view?usp=sharing>.

¹⁰⁷ Pianist introduction via projection reading Badiou’s *Theory of the Subject*: video, 00:10:26, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=8fK1wdcGDgWfGvRT&t=626>; score, p.13 mm. 113, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Badiou, Alain. *Theory of the Subject*. London: Continuum, 2009, 307. Diagram giving a sense of *Theory of the Subject*’s complexity: <https://www.docdroid.net/AxRO4K5/20-badiou-theory-of-the-subject-pdf#page=177>.

¹⁰⁹ Reinholdtsen references these “rehearsal room etudes”: score, p. 13 mm. 113, op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Ugelvik sitting and staring as the section’s energy dissipates: video, 00:17:04, op. cit.

¹¹¹ Ugelvik playing *Der Held* [The Hero]: video, 00:22:27, op. cit.

begins a brisk walk for a flight of stairs. When the projection screen shows Ugelvik briefly looking back to the camera operator, opening the curtains to step onto *Theory*'s concerto stage, and sitting down at the concerto piano, it becomes evident that the projections are shot live.

Here, Reinholdtsen dramatizes the entrance of the concerto soloist which surprisingly results in Ugelvik playing only a single E4 at a mezzo-piano dynamic that is enough to set the orchestra into a densely orchestrated passage of rearticulations and harmonic extensions of Ugelvik's E, following numerous precedents¹¹².¹¹³ One might then expect the concerto to now continue in a more conventional sense. It does not. Instead, Reinholdtsen stretches this tension further. Shortly after playing the E, Ugelvik leaves the stage and returns to sit on the green room's couch. While the orchestra continues playing, the camera zooms to an extreme closeup of Ugelvik's anxiety-ridden face¹¹⁴. Close to the end of the camera zoom, a wind machine emerges from the texture only to die away rather anticlimactically as a video captioned "3 MONTHS EARLIER"¹¹⁵ is shown to the audience.

It is only now, thirty minutes into *Theory*'s performance and via flashback, that Reinholdtsen begins to provide an explanation for Ugelvik's bizarre displays of performance anxiety. For the next fourteen minutes, the orchestra sits silently onstage as the concerto proceeds as a video projection of the previously discussed installation *Konserthuset* and the Oslo fjord island performance Ø (episode 12). At this point in its narrative, *Theory* reveals itself (more clearly) to be a dense philosophical and psychological drama of a concerto pianist. After playing

¹¹² E by the string bass and trombone in Gérard Grisey's *Partiels* (1975): score, mm. 1. F# in Kaija Saariaho's *Lichtbogen* (1986): score, mm. 2. Eb in Wagner's *Das Rheingold* (1869): score, mm. 1. There are many more possible examples.

¹¹³ Ugelvik playing a singular E4: video, 00:25:25, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=UigF5N4Y9fHOR6ty&t=1525>; score, p. 33 mm. 219, op. cit.

¹¹⁴ Camera zooming into the anxiety-ridden stare of Ugelvik: video, 00:29:16, op. cit.; score, p. 38 mm. 257, op. cit.

¹¹⁵ Video caption "3 MONTHS EARLIER": video, 00:29:44, https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=Dk0FYoC8dztQV_F4&t=1784; score, p. 44 mm. 273, op. cit.

a large portion of the canon of modernist piano literature, deciding to join a radical political group's utopian commune, and losing a battle against capitalist forces in Oslo's fjord off the island of Hovedøya, Ugelvik finds herself in an existential crisis as she contemplates performing in one of the more conservative and least radical large-scale genres of Western classical music, the piano concerto. With Ugelvik's psycho-political backstory established, the concerto finally truly begins.

3.2.3 Resolving Music-Theatrical Tension: Ugelvik's Defeat by the Orchestra

While the orchestra sustains a microtonal cluster, Ugelvik (spurred on by Che Guevara's famous quotation "It is not necessary to wait!") plunges palms first into the opening gesture of *Theory's* climactic section: repeatedly pounded clusters spanning the piano's total range.¹¹⁶ In the 10-minute section that follows (which is analyzed in the following chapter) Ugelvik tries and fails to play something new (in New Music), finding herself stuck in the postmodern marsh and the cycle of mimetic exacerbation. Each of Ugelvik's attempts to play something new is shown to be a quotation or pastiche of a moment in twentieth century contemporary music history by the orchestra (particularly by the orchestral pianist playing an upright piano). This music-theatrical conflict ends in Ugelvik's defeat, punctuated spectacularly with the destruction of the upright piano with a Mahler hammer by the orchestral pianist.¹¹⁷

Reinholdtsen sets the aftermath of Ugelvik's failure to muted downward trombone slides and scurrying tonally disconnected gestures in the woodwinds. Ugelvik begins to slowly slink

¹¹⁶ Pounded clusters: video, 00:44:01, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=b1wbbWCgF2bPS16g&t=2641>; score, p. 45 mm. 279, op. cit.

¹¹⁷ Destroying of the upright piano with a Mahler hammer: video, 00:54:09, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=WkSH8Km5TAsVzGnJ&t=3249>; score, p. 63 mm. 453, op. cit.

downward below the piano where she plays its underside with a series of rhythmic taps, crossbeam flicks, and pedal pushes in a hopeless last-ditch attempt to play something new (which falls short again as Helmut Lachenmann's *Musique Concrète Instrumentale* style has been used by many composers for piano pieces¹¹⁸).¹¹⁹

After playing the underside of the piano, Ugelvik crouches in front of and stares directly into the live-streamed camera while lip-syncing to a classic Reinholdtsen "chipmunk" version of the following quotation from Alain Badiou's *Polemics* (2006)¹²⁰:

Our force of resistance and invention demands that we renounce the delights of the margin, of obliqueness, of infinite deconstruction, of the fragment, of the [contemporary music piece] trembling with mortality, of finitude[,] and of the body.¹²¹

In a dramatic renunciation "of the body", Ugelvik mimes cutting off one, then another, of her fingers, prop blood and all¹²² (a disturbing act that Reinholdtsen somehow frames in a way which elicits laughter from many in the audience). Ugelvik then begins lip-syncing to an aria recorded by Reinholdtsen on Vladimir Lenin's famous words celebrating *Vernichtung* [Destruction/Obliteration].¹²³

Before the Destruction aria morphs into a romantic tonal chorale led by brass and synthesized harpsichord backed by the strings, Reinholdtsen informs the audience that "the camera underneath the grand piano will slowly zoom through [Ugelvik's] hair and into the

¹¹⁸ For example, Helmut Lachenmann's *Guero* (1970) and Hildegard Westerkamp's *Like a Memory* (2002).

¹¹⁹ Ugelvik slinking downward and playing the underside of the piano: video, 00:56:00, op. cit.; score, p. 65 mm. 470, op. cit.

¹²⁰ Ugelvik lip-syncing a quotation from Badiou's *Polemics* (2006): video, 00:58:51, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=osIHUQJmUL86wFA&t=3531>; score, p. 67 mm. 499.

¹²¹ Badiou, Alain. "Third Sketch of a Manifesto of Affirmationist [sic] Art". *Polemics*. London: Verso, 2006, 133. <https://thecharnelhouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Alain-Badiou-Polemics.pdf>.

¹²² Ugelvik miming cutting of one, then another, of her fingers: video, 00:59:31, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=NWYhajtvgMMT9Jr&t=3571>; score, p. 67 mm. 499, op. cit.

¹²³ Ugelvik lip-syncing the "destruction" aria: video, 01:00:47, https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=IHE1qz3lgkgkz_cq&t=3647; score, p. 67 mm. 450, op. cit.

brain.”¹²⁴ The chorale’s final refrain is lusciously reharmonized by synthesized organ (with support from the brass) while Ugelvik’s brain teems with wide-ranging literary and musical references¹²⁵, a compositional sketch of numeric transformations (presumably used to compose *Theory*), and a water-stained outline of *Theory*’s theatrical narrative. The camera moves freely over the brain’s set design which includes materials like textile, wire, and particle board generally in muted pastel colors reminiscent of squishy cell matter. Once the shot freezes on Reinholdtsen’s own simple painting of the utopian island Hovedøya in the Oslo fjord, conductor Cathrine Winnes sits down among members of the orchestra while they perform a dense counterpoint of high-pitched sounds via sopranino recorder mouthpieces for four minutes.¹²⁶ The score’s final instruction reads: ‘use telepathy for synchronization.’¹²⁷

3.3 An Interpretation of the Meaning Held Within the Soloist’s Narrative

While a wealth of meanings can be extracted from *Theory*’s rich music-theatrical narrative, I offer the following reading:

¹²⁴ Caption that the camera will zoom into Ugelvik’s brain: video, 01:01:57,

<https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=LKfGqL9MCyZgnqAs&t=3717>; score, p. 68 mm. 501, op. cit.

¹²⁵ Literary and musical references within Ugelvik’s brain in order of appearance: Che Guevara’s *Guerrilla Warfare* (paperback 2007; originally published 1960), Gerald Raunig’s *Art and Revolution* (paperback 2007), a German edition of *Utopia Gesamtkunstwerk* edited by Agness Husslein-Arco (paperback 2012), a German edition of Sigmund Freud’s *Das Ungehegen in der Kultur (The Uneasiness in Culture)*, paperback 2010; originally published 1930), *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (paperback edition unknown), Thomas More’s *Utopia* (paperback 2003; originally published in Latin 1516), a CD recording of Alfred Cortot and the London Philharmonic Orchestra performing Frédéric Chopin’s *Piano Concerto in F minor, Op. 21* (1830) and Robert Schumann’s *Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54* (1845) (recorded 2000), a CD recording of Conlon Nancarrow’s *Studies for Player Piano* (volumes III and IV, 1948-1980) (released 1990), and a CD recording of Iannis Xenakis’s music for keyboard instruments composed for computer (MIDI programming by Daniel Grossmann; released 2008).

¹²⁶ Shot freezing on Hovedøya painting followed by recorder mouthpieces: video, 01:03:25, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=7YizVRZ7Z-AW6lul&t=3805>.

¹²⁷ Reinholdtsen instructs the orchestra to use “telepathy for synchronization”: score, p. 68 mm. 50, op. cit.

In *Theory*, the piano represents the musical paragon of the mimetically exacerbated consumer product, a product which creates within Ugelvik the “delights...of the body” and which Badiou calls for her to reject in a chapter of his *Polemics*. In that same chapter, Badiou also calls for the end of artworks that celebrate individuals’ particularities which are modeled on the West’s ostensibly democratic (re)production of consumer products fitted to all manner of individuals’ tastes¹²⁸ (i.e., the mimetic exacerbation of the capitalist rubbish heap).

By severing her fingers in an act of professional suicide, Ugelvik formally destroys her subjectivity as a New Music pianist, thus ending participation in the creation of artworks that mirror the (re)production of consumer products. Furthermore, Ugelvik then heralds Lenin’s call for the *Vernichtung* [Destruction/Obliteration] of capitalist institutions that steal from the proletariat in the form of profit, though its direct proximity to Ugelvik’s self-mutilation implies that perhaps Lenin’s call for destruction should be expanded to encompass not only capitalist institutions (and by extension the products they produce) but also the target for these products’ use—consumers’ bodily needs and parts upon which these products rely for their consumption (e.g., Ugelvik’s fingers).

Considering the above, the piano in *Theory*’s narrative might be equated to a social media company’s homegrown neural network (perhaps best represented in *Theory*’s algorithmic player piano passages) while Ugelvik might be equated to a social media user of that company. The piano, as a representation of the epitome of Western classical music, could be considered to have outlived its ability to be used to produce truly original and radical musical ideas. Thus, to play the piano is to perform (i.e., mimetically exacerbate) the past. Just as a way to meaningfully contribute to preventing data-collecting by megacorporations is to stop using their platforms, a

¹²⁸ Badiou, “Third Sketch...”, 134-5, 143-5.

way to meaningfully contribute to stopping the piano's proliferations of distorted versions of the past is for Ugelvik to prevent herself from playing the piano.

By freeing herself from her ties to the piano, Ugelvik limits her reception of the piano's hegemonic Western neoliberal infusions of notions as to what contemporary music is. But is the loss of a couple fingers worth that benefit? Similarly, would cutting oneself off from all interaction with megacorporations be worth the ability to more freely interface with reality? Perhaps the most sobering fact is that more and more of reality itself is becoming instantiations of neoliberal megacorporations. The likes of Meta and Google (while seeking to control and manipulate people's actions for the purpose of profit extraction) now increasingly create and control (with astonishing precision) more and more of much of what is virtually basic to human functioning (e.g., a cyber self, instantaneous and varying communication networks, global supply chain networks [albeit indirectly], etc.).

Despite the bloody end to Ugelvik's career while attempting to supersede the neoliberal landscape of artistic production, Reinholdtsen concludes in celebration of Ugelvik's strivings (in the form of a tour of the brain matter influenced by the trenchant literary and musical works she has consumed). Reinholdtsen's quotation of Badiou within his supplementary article to the installation *Konserthuset* and performance \emptyset (episode 12) is particularly relevant here: "I go on, in order to think and push to their paradoxical radiance the reasons that I would have for not going on."¹²⁹ Fittingly, Reinholdtsen's painting of the island Hovedøya (where the radical political group tried and failed to set up their utopian commune) resembles a mountain which could be interpreted as an indication that while the scaling of the mountain (i.e., the strive to

¹²⁹ Badiou, Alain. *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2. London: Continuum, 2009, 89. https://firewords.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/logics_of_worlds.pdf.

supersede mimetic exacerbation) might be difficult (or even impossible), the mountain climb in itself can be both beautiful and absurd, even if ultimately futile. When juxtaposed with the Hovedøya painting, Reinholdtsen's final gesture of dense intersecting trajectories of soprano recorder mouthpiece sounds could be considered a metaphor for the messy and unpredictable strivings of all humanity to form their (often contradictory) visions of a Hovedøya-like utopia (i.e., what Reinholdtsen refers to as "the revolutionary totally society-shattering New Utopia"¹³⁰).

Furthermore, Reinholdtsen's instructions for the orchestra "to use telepathy for synchronization" and for Cathrine Winnes to relinquish the helm and join the orchestra in mouthpiece playing might evoke the necessity that the new springs forth from outside the confines of the old. The magic held within the meaning of the word 'telepathy' is the space for the unknown that might spring forth as the "revolutionary totally society-shattering" new. While the orchestra's use of telepathy does not seem to yield anything near total synchronization (which could be viewed as a metaphor for the awe-inspiringly new), the hopeful strives to achieve that possibility are both absurd and beautiful but, above all, human.

¹³⁰ Reinholdtsen, "The Return of...".

4.0 Chapter III - An Analysis of *Theory*'s Theatrical Climax: A New Music Pianist's Struggle and Failure to Overcome Musical Mimetic Exacerbation

The choice to focus *Theory*'s analysis on the climactic section stems not only from its central importance to *Theory*'s music-theatrical narrative but also from its extraordinary, unique use of musical pastiche and quotation of contemporary art music. The use of rapid-fire quotation in a contemporary orchestral work is nothing new, the third movement of Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* (1969) being a paradigmatic example. What sets *Theory*'s orchestral quotation and pastiche apart from others' is its layered dramatic function. In *Theory*, musical quotation and pastiche function as both cultural commentary and a character's action within a theatrical plot. In *Theory*, the audience experiences Reinholdtsen's commentary indirectly through the lived experience of a theatrical character. Reinholdtsen imbues musical quotation and pastiche with theater's empathic powers.

In *Theory*'s climactic section, Ugelvik strives to break the cycle of mimetic exacerbation but fails by instead only referencing artistic movements of the last hundred years. Ugelvik's repeated failed attempts to attain and perform utopia form a convincing and alarming display, casting significant doubt on the idea that substantive positive change is possible. At this point in history, we may be hopelessly entangled in flows of consumer products wrought from the increasingly consolidated capital of the few. Despite her extensive efforts, Ugelvik fails and, in failing, only continues the cycle, though, in her failing, exhibits a striving that feels utterly praiseworthy, even heroic.

4.1 A Formal Overview of the Climactic Section

Theory's climax is composed of four parts (A, B, C, and D) that feature the orchestra dramatizing Ugelvik's failure to play something that breaks the vicious cycle of mimetic exacerbation. The first section of each part (A1, B1, C1, and D1) is led by Ugelvik while the second section of each part (A2, B2, C2, and D2) is led by the orchestra. These parts reference artistic and political trends and movements from the last hundred years that failed to transcend (and were subsumed by) the flourishing of capitalism and its current instantiation as global neoliberalism—neo-primitivism, anarcho-primitivism, marching through the musical catalogue of extended techniques, (total) serialism, (post)minimalism, spectralism, and Fluxus. Each of Ugelvik's attempts is a musical quotation or pastiche that is transformed by the orchestra into a generic, watered-down caricature of a musical aesthetic movement of the twentieth century. Over the course of the four parts, Ugelvik's resolve wanes and is all but completely extinguished by the concluding destruction of the orchestral piano.

Each of the following analyses of each of the climactic section's four parts are in two pieces: 1) a score-based analysis of the part's musical content and 2) a contextualization of the artistic/political trend/movement suggested by the part's musical content within the overarching theatrical narrative and *Theory*'s broader meaning.

4.2 Part A: Ellen Ugelvik as the Piano-Slamming Anarcho-Primitivist

Inspired by Guevara's words that "It is not necessary to wait!", Ugelvik plunges palms first into the opening gesture of *Theory*'s climactic section—repeated two-handed cluster slams

on the piano that alternate between extremely high and middle registers.¹³¹ Ugelvik's previous performance anxiety has centered on the anticipation of this opportunity to perform something paradigm-shifting through her piano playing. I argue the video projection of the *Konserthuset* installation and Hovedøya performance presented shortly before this section compose a narrative of Ugelvik's radicalization towards anarcho-primitivism (a Marxist-influenced movement that peaked in the mid 1990s and has proven [at least thus far] ineffective in bringing about systemic change). Part A establishes the climactic section's primary music-theatrical tension between Ugelvik and the orchestra (especially the orchestral piano). This tension is held until the final gesture of the climactic section is performed by the orchestral pianist.

4.2.1 A Musical Overview of Ugelvik's Slammings and Their Resulting Orchestral Music

Ugelvik's slammings are the generative material of part A (p. 45 – 59; mm. 279 – 383). In A1 (p. 45 – 51; mm. 279 – 347), Reinholdtsen uses frequent sudden tempo changes (ranging from quarter note 65 to quarter note 120), polyrhythms (e.g., 2:3, 3:5), and recurrent abrupt timbral, dynamic, and registral shifts in the repeating pairs of piano slammings (see Figure 2). In A1, Ugelvik clearly holds the dominant position musically as the orchestra seems to respond to each of her gestures. In A2 (p. 51 – 59; mm. 348 – 83), the orchestra dynamically overpowers Ugelvik's playing of chromatic scales in octaves with a stream of eighth notes whose vertical slices contain a full chromatic set of pitches. Despite being drowned out by the orchestra Ugelvik continues to play keeping tension (unlike in B2, C2, and D2).

¹³¹ Ugelvik slammings: video, 00:44:01, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=g6ps1VTMy12JbZHe&t=2641>; score, p. 45 mm. 279, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZurXvJeFJtKAtwZF3qJ-OZMhkoutT37Y/view?usp=sharing>.

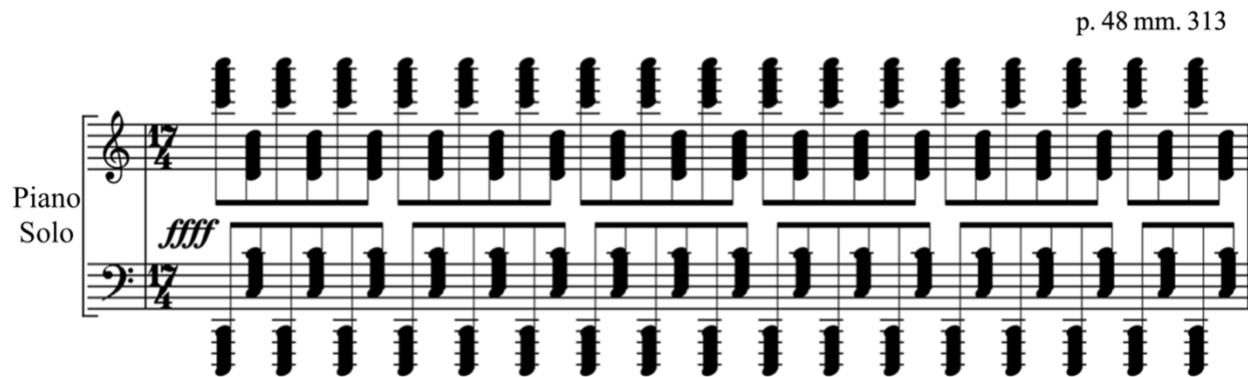


Figure 2 A Sample of Ugelvik’s Slammings

4.2.1.1 Ugelvik Leads A1

In A1, the orchestra mimics and responds to Ugelvik’s slammings through variously orchestrated repeated pairs of dissonant clusters with wide leaps between them. For example, in mm. 313 and 316 most of the orchestra mimics the slammings (see Figures 3 and 4).¹³² The most obvious and important mimicking of the piano slammings occurs when the orchestral pianist (playing an upright) alternates slammings with Ugelvik. Reinholdtsen highlights these alternations by creating a notation (i.e., X-shaped noteheads placed high on the staves) that “signif[y] both hands [are to be] held high up in the air” (see mm. 328 in Figure 5). During each X-shaped notehead, Reinholdtsen instructs the orchestral pianist to perform a “a big low cluster played with utter violence” (see mm. 327 in Figure 5). Ugelvik’s hand-raising draws attention to the orchestral pianist by highlighting to the audience that (in these instances) the piano slams they are hearing are not coming from Ugelvik (as they are likely expecting). The orchestral piano’s part could be interpreted as the distillation of the orchestra’s distorted version of

¹³² Orchestra mimicking piano slamming: video, 00:45:33, op. cit.; score, p. 48 mm. 313, op. cit.

Ugelvik's slammings (being that the orchestral piano's slams are virtually timbrally equivalent to that of the concert piano).

p. 48 mm. 313

Clarinet

Clarinet

Clarinet

mf

mf

mf

Figure 3 Clarinets Mimicking Piano Slammings

p. 48 mm. 316

Organ

ff

Figure 4 Organ Mimicking Slammings

p. 49 mm. 327-9

2. upright piano,
big low cluster played with utter violence

Percussion

fff

crossed noteheads signifies
both hands held high up in the air

Piano Solo

Figure 5 Orchestral Piano and Concerto Piano Interaction

4.2.1.2 Orchestra Overtakes Ugelvik in A2

Part A2 is composed of Ugelvik's playing being "drowned by the orchestra"¹³³ while she resolutely performs a continuous stream of chromatic scales in octaves that spread over all registers of the piano. Over the course of the first nine measures, the orchestra successively enters forming a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes that is likely algorithmically-derived (see Figure 6).¹³⁴ These elements act as a soundtrack to (what the audience will likely presume is) a live video projection of the once white bedsheet-clad *Geist* (from the earlier audio mixing room sequence) in a bathroom dancing atop and within a pile of dark soil (that suggests feces). Once these elements start, they precede mechanically and conclude A2 after two minutes.

The pitch material of the slammings contains the complete interval set available through the conventional playing of the piano's keys. What takes precedence (and is most interesting) in A1 is not the pitch material; it is the rhythmic delivery of this pitch material. In A2, the rhythmic interest of A1 is flattened into a chromatic stream of thirty-second note octaves (by Ugelvik) and eighth notes (by the orchestra) (see Figure 7). The pitch material (i.e., all conventionally available pitch material within these instruments' ranges) is virtually the same as it is in A1. While A1's rhythm is also flattened (especially as it reaches its conclusion), Ugelvik and the orchestra work as a unit, while in A2 Ugelvik and the orchestra are at odds. By design, Ugelvik's stream of chromatic scales are drowned out by the orchestra's bludgeoning eighth note pattern which mirrors Ugelvik's chromatic scales in pitch. Multiple vertical samplings of the orchestral eighth note pattern show that Reinholdtsen ensured that these vertical slices contain a full

¹³³ *Theory*: score, p. 51 mm. 348, op. cit.

¹³⁴ I assert this based on multiple conversations with Reinholdtsen wherein he spoke of regularly using algorithmic techniques to quickly generate material.

chromatic set of pitches (see Figure 6). In A2, the orchestra's playing waters down Ugelvik's playing in A1 by stripping it of its rhythmic interest.

p. 53 mm. 355-6

The image shows a page of a musical score for woodwinds, measures 355 and 356. The score is for measures 355-356, marked 'p. 53 mm. 355-6'. The instruments listed on the left are Flute, Oboe, three Clarinets, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon, and Contrabassoon. The music consists of a continuous stream of eighth notes across all instruments. The Flute part starts with a chromatic scale: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The Oboe part starts with a chromatic scale: F#4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F#4. The other instruments play eighth-note patterns that complement the chromatic movement.

Figure 6 Sample of A2's Woodwind Stream of Eighth Notes

4.2.1.3 Unresolved Music-Theatrical Tension Between Ugelvik and the Orchestra

Unlike the other parts, A's second part (A2) does not feature Ugelvik being completely overcome by the orchestra to the point of her ceasing to play. In A2, Ugelvik can be seen determinedly playing her chromatic scales despite their being completely masked by the orchestra. A2 ends with Ugelvik refusing to succumb to the orchestra's mockery of her playing,

and so the tension between the orchestra and Ugelvik remains unresolved. In the other parts, this same kind of tension (between Ugelvik and the orchestra) resolves because the orchestra completely overcomes Ugelvik's playing. The tension in part A is only resolved by the final gesture of the climactic section (which is analyzed at the end of this chapter).

4.2.2 Ugelvik's Slammings as a Representation of Her Aesthetic-Political Relationship to Anarcho-Primitivism

The dominance of rhythm over pitch and theatrical psychological setting of Ugelvik's piano slammings allude to musical works associated with the neo-primitivist movement of the early twentieth century. This reference provides an inroad to the aesthetic-political frame for Ugelvik's confrontations with her own subjectivity within *Theory* (e.g., her reading and quoting of Maoist French philosopher Alain Badiou, joining of the utopian commune on Hovedøya, finger-cutting, and reading of *The Quest for the Holy Grail*). The following analysis reveals Ugelvik's aesthetic-political frame to be anarcho-primitivism while situating it within *Theory*'s broader neoliberal critique.

4.2.2.1 Alluding to Musical Neo-Primitivist Works of the Early Twentieth Century

As the first of four artistic movements alluded to within *Theory*'s climactic section, the neo-primitivist movement of the early twentieth century failed (as did the other movements) to bring an end to the "exacerbation of the capitalist rubbish heap" in its call for a return to an era outside of capitalistic (re)production. At their best, works associated with the neo-primitivist movement embody a longing for a lost time of "enchanted unity with nature, meaning, dignity,

and harmonious community”¹³⁵ as well as a pessimism towards industrialization’s technological progress as the “sum of mediations between us and the natural world [which in turn] mediat[e] us from each other”¹³⁶. Viewed at their worst, these works can perpetuate a racist colonial perspective that exoticizes indigenous peoples by appropriating aspects of their cultures to create artworks which produce no benefit to these people groups.¹³⁷ Musical works typically associated with neo-primitivism hold “the ‘primitive’ [as] directly linked to the idea of rhythm”¹³⁸ as a representation of our “untamed selves, our id forces—libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous”¹³⁹.

Ugelvik’s psychological disposition in the moments leading to the climactic section is one of anxiety and fear turned to anger which manifests itself as violence towards the piano. Embittered by the destruction of the utopian commune by seafaring capitalists and spurred on by the words of the revolutionary Che Guevara, Ugelvik pounds the piano in a desperate attempt to elicit something of fresh artistic value.

Like the twentieth century’s absence of political movements that succeeded in derailing the formation of neoliberal structures, the Western art music movements of the twentieth century

¹³⁵ El-Ojeili, Chamsy, and Dylan Taylor. “‘The Future in the Past’: Anarcho-Primitivism and the Critique of Civilization Today.” *Rethinking Marxism* 32, no. 2 (2020): 177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08935696.2020.1727256>.

¹³⁶ Zerzan, John. 2009. “The Nihilist’s Dictionary.” Anarchist Library. <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/john-zerzan-the-nihilist-s-dictionary>. Originally published within: Zerzan, John. 1994. *Future Primitive and Other Essays*. Brooklyn NY Columbia MO: Autonomedia.

¹³⁷ Regina Schoeber comments that “the inherent irony of primitivism is thus the admiration and idealization of the ‘primitive,’ which was believed to give us access to our own selves, and which was also used by white modernist intellectuals as a means of criticizing one’s own culture and civilization in general, while at the same time establishing and maintaining the border between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ By ascertaining a connection with the ‘savage,’ the ‘untamed self,’ while simultaneously superordinating one’s own culture and identity over ‘the other,’ primitivism’s premises display a highly ironic dimension.” Schoeber, Regina. “Amy Lowell’s Peasant Dance: Transcribing Primitivism in ‘Stravinsky’s Three Pieces “Grotesques,” for String Quartet.” *Amerikastudien* 53, no. 2 (2008): 166. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41158371>.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 165.

¹³⁹ Torgovnick, Marianna. 1990. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 8.

can offer no aesthetic analogue in which Ugelvik can suitably musically situate her political ideals through the piano. In her struggle to express the new, Ugelvik's playing alludes to the only movement within Western art music that holds some congruency with her ideals, which are shown (in the following section) to more closely align with anarcho-primitivism.

4.2.2.2 Anarcho-Primitivism as Ugelvik's Aesthetic-Political Frame

For anarcho-primitivists it is only through the deconstruction of civilization that humanity can rediscover a profound connection with nature, regain a sense of purpose and worth, and establish a peaceful and cooperative community.¹⁴⁰ They maintain the bleak perspective that our longing to connect with others through technology ironically results in disconnection and isolation.¹⁴¹ From here a critique arises regarding the increasing influence of capital on human life. As capital progressively infiltrates and controls more of human existence, it leads to the commodification of everything, the domination of nonliving elements, and the capitalization of all aspects of life. Throughout this process, capital transforms into a social force, resembling a powerful entity that seizes and encompasses all material aspects of human existence. In essence, capital is transformed into the material embodiment of human society.¹⁴²

The anarcho-primitivist aversion to capital is reflected in Ugelvik's theatrical narrative. As discussed earlier, the piano in *Theory* is emblematic of capital/technology, so entrenched within the neoliberal system that its use cannot help but perpetuate the system it is entangled with, engulfing its user (Ugelvik) as an extension of that perpetuation. The piano's hold on Ugelvik is the driving factor in all Ugelvik's significant decisions in *Theory*.

¹⁴⁰ El-Ojeili, 177.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 180.

¹⁴² Ibid, 173.

Ugelvik's choice to leave the *Konserthuset* installation results from her realization that to perform on/use the piano is to perpetuate "New Music [that] feels old somehow", or in other words, music that perpetuates the neoliberal system. In opposition to this feeling of the old, Ugelvik sets out to participate in the new by joining the radical group starting a utopian commune (separated from mainstream society) on Hovedøya, an act that aligns with the values of anarcho-primitivism.

Ugelvik's reading of Badiou's work (which analyzes the nature of human subjectivity) reflects Ugelvik's struggle to understand her own subjectivity as a New Music pianist, which is in crisis. Part of her subjectivity (the piano) operates to spread an ideology which does not align with her values. Badiou reenters *Theory* when Ugelvik quotes him calling for the "renunciation of the body" before severing her fingers. This severing is a radical act of anarcho-primitivist destruction of civilization. Ugelvik's fingers are polluted by neoliberalism through her piano playing. By severing this iteration of civilization (in the form of her fingers), Ugelvik finally achieves separation from civilization, which Ugelvik directly references while singing the *Vernichtung* [Destruction/Obliteration] aria with Lenin's famous words.

As in *Inferno* (though more veiled here), Reinholdtsen alludes to a Wagner opera to support his theatrical narrative in *Theory*. Ugelvik's final connection to anarcho-primitivism arrives via Reinholdtsen's reference to *The Quest for the Holy Grail* found within her brain after the camera zoom through her hair. In Wagner's final opera, Parsifal embarks on a quest for the Holy Spear. In their 2014 article exploring nature's musical and textual depiction within the broader cultural context of anarcho-primitivism in Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882), Lisa Burnett concludes that "*Parsifal* weaves together several of the threads of anarcho-primitivist thought...holding out the promise of some sort of utopia as the curtain comes down on Act

III.”¹⁴³ While Parsifal finds the Holy Spear and becomes its guardian ensuring the attainability of the Grail by those who are worthy, Ugelvik’s quest for enlightenment and utopia is crushed by sea-faring capitalists and ends in self-destruction.

While Wagner holds hope for real societal change, Reinholdtsen shows that hope to be absurd. Perhaps the historical trajectory towards today’s neoliberal world had a legitimate chance to be rerouted towards a more sustainable and equitable future circa 1882 (the year of *Parsifal*’s premiere), but circa 2016 (the year of *Theory*’s premiere) anarcho-primitivist visions appear (to many) as “ultra-Left curiosit[ies]”¹⁴⁴ and leftover “spray-can graffiti”¹⁴⁵ expressions of anti-establishment notions that peaked in the early 1990s and, in retrospect, represent chic displays of rebellious individualism, not radical acts of community organization. The view that present-day articulations of anarcho-primitivist hopes mask “bourgeois individualism”¹⁴⁶ is not directly addressed in *Theory*. Ugelvik’s acts are framed as sincere, and Reinholdtsen takes a different bittersweet tack. Reinholdtsen argues that the creation of utopia is hopeless, but that the yearning and striving for it is absurd, beautiful, and utterly sympathetic.

At this point in *Theory*’s theatrical narrative, this argument has not yet completely unfolded. Unlike the following parts, Ugelvik does not lose faith in her playing by succumbing to an overpowering by the orchestra. Despite the orchestra completely drowning out her playing, Ugelvik holds to her anarcho-primitivist hope for utopia while determinedly playing her chromatic scales leaving part A unresolved theatrically. It is only until the final gesture of the

¹⁴³ Burnett, Lisa. “Savage Gardens, Original Sins: An Anarcho-Primitivist Reading of Wagner’s *Parsifal*.” *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts* 1, no. 4 (2014): 321. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.1-4-3>.

¹⁴⁴ El-Ojeili, 181.

¹⁴⁵ Bookchin, Murray. 1995. “Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: An Unbridgeable Chasm.” Anarchist Library. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/murray-bookchin-social-anarchism-or-lifestyle-anarchism-an-unbridgeable-chasm>.

¹⁴⁶ El-Ojeili, 172.

climactic section wherein the orchestral piano is destroyed by a Mahler hammer that Reinholdtsen releases the theatrical tension between the orchestral pianist and the piano soloist in part A.

4.3 Part B: An Ever-Expanding Search for More Aurally Musical Expressive Potential

In part B (p. 59 – 60; mm. 384 – 95), Reinholdtsen uses a historically unique aspect of Olivier Messiaen’s *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités* [Mode of values and intensities] (1950) (hereafter abbreviated to *Mode*)¹⁴⁷, the first work by a European composer to apply numerical organization to pitch, duration, dynamics, and timbre¹⁴⁸, to critique the “ever increasing, but still pretty worn-out catalogue of ‘extended techniques’.”¹⁴⁹ Reinholdtsen’s choice to highlight this parallel between “outworn contemporary music clichés [sic]” and *Mode* by explicitly addressing the audience via projected text prepares the audience for the exploration of the other parallels or pairings drawn in the following two parts (i.e., C and D). It also ultimately prepares the final parallel drawn during the climactic section’s last gesture which releases the aforementioned unresolved tension between Ugelvik and the orchestra established in part A. Each part features Ugelvik mimetically exacerbating an earlier twentieth century musical style by pastiche (as in A) or by quotation (as in parts B, C, and D).

¹⁴⁷ *Mode de valeurs et d’intensités*’s score: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11kLkJt-eXkE2c6q4YCqdL5gATfIE5SmD/view?usp=sharing>.

¹⁴⁸ Toop, Richard. “Messiaen/ Goeyvaerts, Fano/ Stockhausen, Boulez.” *Perspectives of New Music* 13, no. 1 (1974): 142. <https://doi.org/10.2307/832372>.

¹⁴⁹ Reinholdtsen, “MY VIA DELAROSA...”.

4.3.1 Messiaen to “Shameless Uses of Outworn Contemporary Music Clichées [sic]”

The first three measures of *Mode* are part B’s generative material. Ugelvik begins a quotation of *Mode* three times “with renewed faith”¹⁵⁰; each subsequent attempt is interrupted more quickly by the orchestra (for Ugelvik’s first attempt see Figure 7).¹⁵¹ After these attempts and their interruptions (i.e. B1 [p. 59 – 60; mm. 384 – 9]), Reinholdtsen slows the tempo and introduces breath effects as well as slide and key trills from the low woodwinds and brass (i.e., B2 [p. 60; mm. 390 – 5]) (brass see Figure 8). These elements are joined by a wind machine crescendo that underscores the following projected text to the audience: “The shameless use of outworn contemporary music clichées [sic] in these current two bars are to be understood as ironic” (see mm. 392 in Figure 9).¹⁵² Reinholdtsen concludes B2 with the expressive text *tremblente à la mortalité* [trembling with mortality] (which is referenced in Ugelvik’s Badiou quotation preceding the *Vernichtung* [Destruction/Obliteration] aria) (see mm. 394 in Figure 9).

¹⁵⁰ See mm. 384 in Figure 8 for “with renewed faith” expression marking.

¹⁵¹ Ugelvik’s first attempt (i.e., start of part B): video, 00:49:16, https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=QhoOv-KSJdSzIz8_&t=2956.

¹⁵² “outworn contemporary music...” projected text: video, 00:49:54, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=LAgRp2VpQdUjsOk&t=2994>.

Modéré
 (Messiaen: *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités*)
 with renewed faith

p. 59 mm. 384-6

The image shows a musical score for Piano Solo and Violin I. The Piano Solo part is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with dynamic markings: *ppp*, *ff*, *f*, *ff*, *mf*, *f*, *pp*, *ff*, *p*, *ff*, *mf*, *mf*, *p*. The Violin I part starts at measure 23 and includes dynamics *p* and *ff*, with an *8va* marking indicating an octave shift.

Figure 7 Ugelvik's First Attempt to Play *Mode*

p. 60 mm. 391-2

The image shows a musical score for the brass section. The instruments listed are Horn, Trumpet, Trombone, Bass Trombone, and Tuba. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and performance instructions like "air + key trill" and "air + slide trill".

Figure 8 B2's Brass Air, Key Trills, and Slide Trills

p. 60 mm. 392-4

tremblante à la mortalité

Piano in orchestra

TEXT: "(The shameless use of outworn contemporary music clichés in these current two bars are to be understood as ironic.)"

Screen

Figure 9 B2's Projected Text, Expressive Text, and Orchestral Piano

4.3.2 Tunnel Vision Towards the Aural in Music

By calling key trills, slide trills, and air noises “outworn contemporary music clichés [sic]” and placing them directly after the *Mode* quotations, Reinholdtsen draws a parallel between *Mode* and these extended techniques. Messiaen’s technique of dividing music into a set of parameters (pitch, duration, dynamics, timbre) and serializing them so that they can be manipulated more systematically sought to stretch music’s expressive potential.

The contemporary drive to continually find and catalogue extended techniques (which include part B’s key trills, slide trills, and air noises) also seeks to stretch music’s expressive potential. While Messiaen’s categorizations included the most fundamental aspects of sound (which when serialized can be used to create highly distinctive results), Reinholdtsen sees the ever-growing catalogue of extended techniques as becoming increasingly niche and superfluous with each new entry producing results with increasingly less meaningfully unique results.

the orchestra playing an increasingly watered-down version of her original attempt until Ugelvik's fourth attempt becomes a repeated middle C.

4.4.1 Webern into a Stream of Repeated Middle C Sixteenth Notes

Part C's generative material is mm. 28 through beat one of mm. 33 of *Variationen, Mvt. I*. Similarly to part B, the orchestra interrupts each of Ugelvik's four attempts to play the below portion of *Variationen*, each interruption occurring more quickly than the last (see Figure 10 for the start of Ugelvik's first attempt).¹⁵⁷ By Ugelvik's fourth and final attempt to play the Webern, she only plays the quotation's first two notes (see Figure 11 for Ugelvik's third and fourth attempts). By the end of the bar, all that remains is the claves in a steady sixteenth note stream which ends two bars later after passing the sixteenth note stream to the orchestral piano (see Figure 12 for a flattening of *Variationen's* rhythm and pitch). The stream of pianissimo middle Cs dies away at mm. 411 ending part C and segueing to part D where the pitch C is featured prominently (see Figure 13 for *Variationen's* disintegration into a repeated middle C).

(Webern: *Variationen*) p. 60 mm. 396-400

Sehr mässig ♩ = ca 40 rit. a tempo

Figure 10 Start of Ugelvik's First *Variationen* Attempt

¹⁵⁷ Ugelvik's first attempt (i.e., start of part C): video, 00:50:34, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=xwPv2TYlagnOck1B&t=3034>.

The image shows a musical score for Piano Solo and Violin I. The Piano Solo part is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with dynamic markings of *sf*, *f*, and *p*. The Violin I part consists of four staves, each playing a sustained note with a dynamic marking of *pp* at the beginning and *ff* at the end. The tempo is marked as "very strict tempo".

Figure 11 Ugelivk's Third (mm. 405) and Fourth (mm. 406) *Variationen* Attempts

The image shows a musical score for Horn, Trumpet, Trombone, Bass Trombone, Tuba, and Percussion. The Horn and Trumpet parts feature complex rhythmic patterns with dynamic markings of *f*, *mf*, *ff*, and *p*. The Trombone, Bass Trombone, and Tuba parts feature sustained notes with dynamic markings of *fp*, *f*, *ff*, and *p*. The Percussion part includes 1. snare drum, 2. claves, and 3. gran cassa, with dynamic markings of *ppp*, *ff*, *mp*, and *p*. The tempo is marked as "very strict tempo".

Figure 12 Flattening of *Variationen* Rhythm and Pitch by Brass and Percussion

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Percussion and Piano in orchestra. The Percussion part is for claves and consists of a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *pp* (pianissimo). The Piano part is for the piano in the orchestra and consists of a melodic line. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo). The tempo is marked *rit.* (ritardando) and the tempo is given as ♩ = 40. The score is for measures 409-11, page 62.

Figure 13 *Variationen's* Disintegration into a Repeated Middle C

4.4.2 Hinting at Terry Riley's *In C*

Musicologist Kyle Gann defines postminimalism negatively as “the exact antipodal opposite of serialism” (the style in which Webern’s *Variationen* is composed however minimally).¹⁵⁸ In part B, Reinholdtsen begins by quoting Webern and ends with the Webern transformed into an extended repetition of a middle C on the orchestral piano, a gesture that hints at the opening and closing measures of Terry Riley’s pioneering minimalist work *In C* (1964). While Webern’s music often packs a lot of information into a small amount of time, works of (post)minimalism often fill lengthy amounts of time with comparatively little information.

¹⁵⁸ Gann, Kyle. “Minimal Music, Maximal Impact: Minimalism's Immediate Legacy: Postminimalism.” NewMusicBox. November 1, 2001. <https://web.archive.org/web/20110604040811/http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=1536>.

4.5 Part D: A Specific Proto-Spectral Chord to a Generic Spectral Chord

In part D (the fourth and final part, p. 62 – 3, mm. 411 – 51), Reinholdtsen pairs Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück IX* (1961) (hereafter abbreviated to *IX*)¹⁵⁹ with spectralism. Considered by some to be a proto-spectralist composer¹⁶⁰, Stockhausen’s pedal middle C (which introduces *IX*’s final section) is converted by Reinholdtsen and converted into the fundamental of harmonic partials that are scored as an orchestral exemplar of spectralism. As in the previous parts, Ugelvik’s playing is again overtaken by the orchestra.

4.5.1 Stockhausen’s Pedal Middle C

Part D’s generative material is the third measure of the top system through the second measure of the bottom system of page 6 of *IX*. In mm. 411 of *Theory*, Ugelvik quotes the pedal middle C that starts the *IX* quotation (see Figure 14).¹⁶¹ For the first time in the climactic section, the orchestra does not interrupt Ugelvik but instead enters with Ugelvik. When Ugelvik quotes Stockhausen’s D#6 quarter note at mm. 414 and B6 eighth note at mm. 415, the spectral nature of the orchestra’s harmony begins to reveal itself (see Figure 14).¹⁶² The orchestra holds this same harmony in varying voicings throughout part D (e.g., see Figure 15) often with opposing pairs of hairpin dynamics wavering between forte and pianissimo every two bars or so as

¹⁵⁹ *Klavierstück IX*’s score:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mtmm_Sg0WngscnTFhVurEUhCmit1qDot/view?usp=sharing.

¹⁶⁰ Rose, François. “Introduction to the Pitch Organization of French Spectral Music.” *Perspectives of New Music* 34, no. 2 (1996): 6. <https://doi.org/10.2307/833469>.

¹⁶¹ Ugelvik’s pedal middle C quote (i.e., the start of part D): video, 00:52:04, op. cit.

¹⁶² Reinholdtsen does not notate microtonal accidentals or cents during part D, though (as is discussed in the next section) this perhaps only goes to show that Reinholdtsen’s pastiche is in mockery.

Ugelvik's quotation wanes. Part D ends with the clarinets holding this spectral chord with differing durations of very short sets of opposing pairs of hairpin dynamics (see Figure 16), a common feature of early spectral music of the 1970s.¹⁶³ Here, Reinholdtsen holds the dynamic hairpin pairs for far too long, comedically referencing a widely recognized trope of spectral music.

p. 62 mm. 411-6

(Stockhausen: *Klavierstück 9*)

Piano Solo

Violin I

Viola

Cello

25

mf *pp* *ff* *p* *f* *p* *pp*

pp *mf* *f* *mp*

ppp *p* *ppp* *p*

flautando *flautando* *flautando*

non vib

Figure 14 Portion of Part D's Beginning

¹⁶³ Two examples of extended passages of opposing pairs of hairpin dynamics in two important 1970s spectral works: 1) third measure of p. 53 to the second to last measure of p. 61 of Gérard Grisey's *Partiels*'s (1975) score: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IsgywQdv4WNMXftsopSIO3iaEWGmjJ_0/view?usp=sharing and 2) second measure of p. 7 to the last measure of p. 19 of Tristan Murail's *Treize couleurs du soleil couchant*'s (1979) score: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q4g1ueLvqtVCA-4zioWX9U9cdm0JdBTi/view?usp=sharing>.

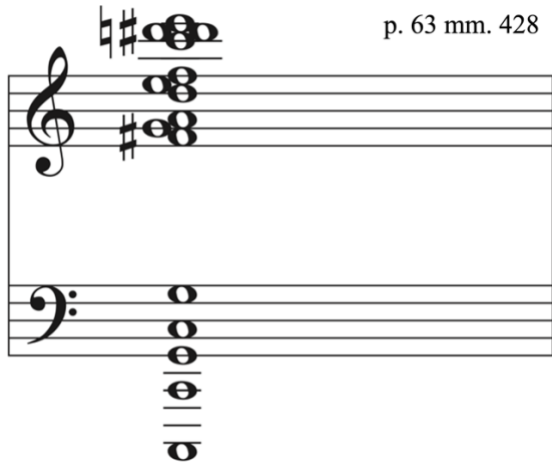


Figure 15 A Sample Voicing of Spectral Chord

p. 63 mm. 438-47

Figure 16 Short Sets of Opposing Pairs of Hairpin Dynamics in Clarinets

4.5.2 IX's Opening Chord and *Theory's* Spectral Chord

Stockhausen's opening chord is an example of a spectralist approach to sound changing over time via an aspect of the human anatomy's relationship to the piano—the limited size of our hands compared to the piano keyboard (see Figure 17).¹⁶⁴ Since this chord is for a human

¹⁶⁴ IX's opening chord: score, op. cit.

performer, Stockhausen takes advantage of the fact that it is impossible to play with one hand all four tones of the repeated chord simultaneously or with identical intensity which causes the tones to change continuously and unintentionally in prominence forming a sort of micro-melody.¹⁶⁵

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The tempo marking is ♩=160. The dynamic marking is *ff* *poco a poco diminuendo* leading to *pppp*. The score shows a repeated chord structure with an arrow indicating a shift in dynamics. The text 'Piano' is written to the left of the staves. The page number 'p. 1 mm. 1' is in the top right corner.

Figure 17 *Klavierstück IX*'s Repeated Opening Chord

This compositional technique foregrounds the chord's timbre over the chord's pitches. After a few repetitions of the chord, listener attention is likely to shift away from the static pitches of the chord and (possibly) to the continuously changing dynamic balance between each of the chord's pitches. This phenomena in listening finds an equivalent in the way that ostinatos generally seem to shift to the backgrounded in a listener's ear after sounding for more than a few bars. Once a listener perceives that a sound will continue unchanged for an indefinite amount of time, that sound (in a sense) ceases to be perceived as important. Consequently, the timbral quality of *IX*'s repeated opening chord takes precedence over its pitch. This kind of timbral approach was novel at the time, anticipating similar approaches within the spectral movement by

¹⁶⁵ Miller, Paul V. "Mary Bauermeister, Ich Hänge Im Triolengitter: Mein Leben Mit Karlheinz Stockhausen (Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 2011), ISBN 978-3-570-58024-0." *Twentieth-Century Music* 9, no. 1-2 (2012): 223. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S147857221200028X>. The concept of variability in a repeated chord originated from an improvisation by Mary Bauermeister on the piano at Stockhausen's apartment in Cologne-Braunsfeld. During the improvisation (which was possibly influenced by non-European music) she played a single chord repeatedly on the piano, subtly altering the finger pressure on the individual chord tones with each repetition, resulting in a sort of micro-melody.

nearly ten years as *IX* was premiered in 1962. For this reason, I consider *IX* a proto-spectralist work.

By beginning part D with a quote from a proto-spectralist work (i.e., *IX*'s recurring pedal C) and ending part D with a hairpin dynamic spectral chord, Reinholdtsen draws a parallel between these elements. The use of the middle C as the chord's pedal fundamental emphasizes the generic nature of part D's wavering final spectral chord given that middle C is virtually always the first pitch learned by anyone receiving an introduction to Western music theory. In this part, the orchestra again mocks Ugelvik's attempt by morphing a quotation of an innovative proto-spectralist work into a clichéd dynamically wavering spectral chord.

4.6 Anarcho-primitivism and Fluxus in *Theory*'s Climactic Gesture

Reinholdtsen concludes the climactic section by pairing a political movement and an artistic movement—anarcho-primitivism and Fluxus, respectively. As discussed previously, Ugelvik's piano slammings represent her attempt to use anarcho-primitivist inflected art to bring about a revolution in New Music, break the cycle of mimetic exacerbation, and point towards a future beyond the neoliberal status quo. The destruction of the orchestral piano (as a reference to Fluxus instrument breaking pieces) extinguishes any remnants of Ugelvik's hope. Even the revolutionary potential held within the act of destruction is consumed by neoliberalism and the cycle of mimetic exacerbation.

4.6.1 The Return and Resolution of Part A: Piano Slammings and a Mahler Hammer

The final gesture of the climactic section acts as a return and resolution of part A. At the conclusion of part A, a music-theatrical tension is created and left unresolved when Ugelvik refuses to admit defeat and continues playing while the orchestra overshadows her, unlike in subsequent parts wherein she stops playing. A special tension is also created between the orchestral pianist and Ugelvik (which Reinholdtsen achieves visually, by having Ugelvik raise her hands while the orchestral pianist performs an opposing piano slamming of their own). These are the climactic section's unresolved music-theatrical tensions.

Ugelvik's hope that she might play utopic art remains alive throughout the climactic section despite the orchestra's continual interruptions and overpowerings of Ugelvik's playing. Directly following the wavering spectral chord which ends part D, Ugelvik's fading hope for the new is obliterated by a caricature of the climactic section's opening gesture. Ugelvik's piano slammings return (decrescendoing and moving downward in pitch) (see Figure 18) and are quickly overshadowed and halted by the orchestral pianist's poundings of the upright piano keyboard, first with hands and then with a Mahler hammer (see Figure 19).¹⁶⁶ Ugelvik's violent pianistic gestures are nothing new.

¹⁶⁶ Return of piano slammings and orchestral pianist with Mahler hammer: video, 00:54:04, https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=DQeQ0WR_zlv8AHZE&t=3244; score, p. 63 mm. 451, op. cit.

p. 63 mm. 451

Piano Solo

Figure 18 Return of Ugelvik’s Slammings

p. 64 mm. 452-3

Percussion

upright piano
Mahler hammer

pesante
Hammerschlag
ON upright piano, crushing
the instrument ad lib.

go cluster bananas

played with buttocks

gran cassa

ff *ffff*

Figure 19 Climactic Gesture Mahler Hammer Smashes Orchestral Piano

4.6.2 Fluxus Instrument Destruction

While instrument destruction (e.g., guitar smashing) began during rock ‘n’ roll performances during the 1950s¹⁶⁷, it was not until the ‘60s that Fluxus artists performed works

¹⁶⁷ Trapp, Philip. “The History of Guitar Smashing in Rock ‘N’ Roll.” Loudwire. May 1, 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230501183447/https://loudwire.com/guitar-smashing-history-rock-destroyed-smash-instruments/>.

which centered the destruction of musical instruments (instead of considering it ancillary to a performance). Paik's *One for Violin* revolves around the destruction of a violin, which he believed was closely intertwined with construction, representing fundamental aspects of human existence both philosophically and psychologically. The premiere took place at the Düsseldorf KammerSpiel theater during the Neo-Dada in der Musik event in 1962, featuring Paik alongside Tomas Schmit, Wolf Vostell, and Benjamin Patterson. In this performance, Paik handled the violin not like a musician, but as if he was a warrior gripping a sword's hilt. After slowly raising the violin, Paik forcefully smashed the violin onto the table, evoking the image of a blacksmith striking an anvil with a hammer.¹⁶⁸ As the violin shattered, the lights instantly went out, associating destruction with complete darkness and creating a tangible sense of apocalypse.¹⁶⁹

In October 1962, Maximum Rock'N'Roll opened with young Fluxus artist Robin Page taking his beloved guitar and, in an act of sheer rebellion, hurling it off the stage at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). He proceeded to mercilessly kick it along the Mall, down steps, and pavements until it was reduced to a mere tangle of shattered fragments and strings. When the remaining pieces were exhibited at the ICA, the destructive display became an officially recognized work of art titled "Guitar Piece."

In 1966, a gathering of artists from various parts of the world convened in London to take part in the inaugural Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS). Among the attendees were representatives of Fluxus and other counter-cultural artistic movements who (as stated in the event's press release) aimed "to focus attention on the element of destruction in Happenings and

¹⁶⁸ Performance of *One for Violin* by Vasilisa Filatova in 2016 at the Stanislavsky Electrotheater in Moscow: video, 00:00:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTXTOJLFmFw>.

¹⁶⁹ Hoffmann, Justin. "One for Violin Solo." See This Sound: Webarchiv. Accessed August 1, 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220528044918/http://www.see-this-sound.at/works/540.html>.

other art forms, and to relate this destruction in society.”¹⁷⁰ In a daring display during DIAS, American artist Raphael Montañez Ortiz used a hammer to smash a grand piano which challenged conventional notions of music and instrumental play framing them as expressions of ritualistic violence. Throughout his artistic career, Ortiz has executed over eighty piano destruction performances¹⁷¹ in various museums and galleries worldwide.¹⁷²

4.6.3 Ineffective Violence Towards the Piano and the Self

The point of similarity between both anarcho-primitivism and Fluxus which undergirds Reinholdtsen’s pairing of these movements’ concern with social reality in its totality. Anarcho-primitivist thought advocates rejection of civilization in its current form and calls for its practitioners to strive for localized community organization outside the influence of hegemonic forces. Fluxus questions the distinction between art and everyday lived experience¹⁷³ and affirms art that recontextualizes the commonplace¹⁷⁴.

In *Theory*, both Ugelvik’s anarcho-primitivist inflected piano-playing as well as the orchestral pianist’s Fluxus inflected piano destruction cannot transcend the neoliberal status quo. In *Theory*’s narrative, capitalist forces thwart Ugelvik’s anarcho-primitivist attempt to form a utopian society on the island Hovedøya. Similarly in the real world during the 1990s, the anarcho-primitivist movement was largely subsumed into market trends fueled by trendy

¹⁷⁰ Zhao, Scarly. “Art as Collectible, Art as Destruction.” *Collecteurs*. Accessed August 1, 2023.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230801224439/https://www.collecteurs.com/article/art-as-destruction>.

¹⁷¹ An Ortiz piano destruction performance: video, 00:02:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3u9tWcLFDc>.

¹⁷² Zhao.

¹⁷³ Galliano, Luciana. “Toshi Ichianagi, Japanese Composer and ‘Fluxus.’” *Perspectives of New Music* 44, no. 2 (2006): 256. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25164637>.

¹⁷⁴ Rush, Michael. *New Media in Art*. New ed. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005: 24. <https://archive.org/details/newmediainart0000rush>.

individualism.¹⁷⁵ For example, the emblematic black flag, hoisted by revolutionary social anarchists during insurrectionary conflicts in Ukraine and Spain, became a “fashionable sarong for the delectation of chic petty bourgeois” yuppies, a far cry from its use as a symbol for the “development of serious organization, a radical politics, [and] a committed social movement [with] theoretical coherence and programmatic relevance.”¹⁷⁶ Correspondingly in *Theory*, the destruction of the orchestral piano (a reference to Fluxus instrument breaking pieces) does not signal a revolutionary end to the piano as the musical epitome of the mimetically exacerbated consumer product. More pianos will be made; more pianos will be broken with little else changing in the world. In *Theory*, neoliberalism has the power to subsume a symbolic act of its own destruction into its own self-preserving narrative. This underscores the difficulty (and perhaps impossibility) of breaking with the underlying system of capitalistic value exchange responsible for the piano’s proliferation as a mass-produced product.

After Ugelvik’s piano slammings fail to yield her desired result and are overshadowed by a much more forceful (and violent) act towards the piano, Ugelvik considers approaching the liberation of her subjectivity from the opposite side—violence against herself. Through the pairing of these two violent gestures, Reinholdtsen suggests that there is no satisfactory way to disentangle oneself from the neoliberal order that creates one’s subjectivity. At this stage of capitalism, humans may be helplessly ensnared by the products they consume, each existing for and with the other as one organism.

¹⁷⁵ Bookchin, “Social Anarchism...”.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

5.0 Chapter IV - *Theory's* Effectiveness as Institutional Critique

Theory's effectiveness as institutional critique can be measured by its impact within Norwegian politics and on Reinholdtsen himself. In this final chapter, a combination of Hannah Arendt's theorizing of the relation of freedom to politics and Adorno's antinomy of art and utopia prepare discussions of *Theory's* role in the negotiation of political space for Norwegian artists and Reinholdtsen's choice to move his own institution, The Norwegian Opra, from Oslo to a Swedish forest. This chapter culminates in an encapsulation of Reinholdtsen's approach to artmaking.

5.1 Art and Politics Put into Conversation

In *Theory*, Reinholdtsen concludes that neoliberalism prevents the institution of contemporary art music (i.e., New Music) from fostering the creation of artworks that can reveal the "revolutionary totally society-shattering" new. By tracing this fundamental failing of New Music to the deeply entrenched underlying system by which the contemporary world operates, Reinholdtsen enacts the futility of working within the institution of New Music with the intention of creating something truly world-changing. There is, in *Theory*, no hope of reforming it so that it might be able to create something truly outside the neoliberal paradigm. New Music's dysfunction stems from outside itself. Thus, to reform New Music, the world must be remade. *Theory* dramatizes an attempt to rectify New Music's fundamental failing through the creation of

a utopian commune that seeks a total separation from our world. In *Theory*, this attempt fails but is nevertheless beautiful, if absurd.

Theory is a peculiar artwork of institutional critique in that its critique is leveled, not so much at the institution in which the artwork is situated, but at the world which creates the conditions for the failures of that institution. In *Theory*, the theatricalization of failing institutional structures of New Music (e.g., the piano concerto and the “ever-increasing yet still pretty worn-out catalogue of extended techniques”)¹⁷⁷ is the method by which Reinholdtsen depicts and critiques our neoliberal world. In *Theory*, the state of New Music is a microcosm of the neoliberal world; Reinholdtsen specifically states in *Theory*’s opening that what remains of *Theory* is “some kind of programmatic music as it describes, in a brutal but truthful way, THE SYSTEM or if you like, THE STATUS QUO OF TODAY’S WORLD” (which, in Reinholdtsen’s companion article to his *Konserthuset* installation, is defined as neoliberalism). *Theory* depicts the state of an artistic institution (i.e., New Music) as the result of political reality (i.e., neoliberalism). Furthermore, *Theory*’s opening includes two artworks that Reinholdtsen explicitly states (via text within a video projected to the audience) are representations of political ideologies—Cage’s piano concerto “as a representation of the political ideology of democracy and liberalism” and *Yellow River* as a “communist propaganda piece.” Through *Theory*, politics and art are put into conversation.

¹⁷⁷ Reinholdtsen, “MY VIA DELAROSA...”.

5.2 Artistic Action as Political Space-Making

In the summer of 2018 and after ten days screening The Norwegian Opra's \emptyset series throughout Europe by van (with widely varying degrees of "success" [of which more about later]), Reinholdtsen and his crew resorted to pitching a tent beneath a highway overpass in Austria for a private screening of \emptyset (episode 11)^{178, 179}. As crew member and dramatist Snorre Hvamen cooked (and burned) microwave popcorn on a camping stove inside the tent¹⁸⁰, Reinholdtsen poked fun at himself and the usual plight of explicitly political artworks lamenting (in his signature overly acted way): "Buhu! We only interpreted the world. We didn't change the world."¹⁸¹ While *Theory* easily might have become merely a reorchestrated "Buhu!" (albeit a massive, complex, beautiful, and irreverent one), *Theory* subsequently reached beyond the interpretive and into the transformational. Because of *Theory*, politics and art were put into action, as shall be seen.

Theory can be considered a lamentation at the lack of space for action caused by neoliberalism's consolidation of capital for the few. While Reinholdtsen's works are often highly philosophical, political, and allegorical tales that are sometimes meant to feel unreal¹⁸², *Theory* played a significant role in the very real stories of a recent unfolding and negotiation of political space for Norwegian artists as well as The Norwegian Opra's move away from Oslo to a Swedish forest. Before a robust discussion of these episodes can take place, it might be useful to

¹⁷⁸ \emptyset (episode 11): video, <https://youtu.be/L66HJtNXko?si=1fx2fIA6LPK7hdmC>.

¹⁷⁹ *Roadshow* Day 11: video, <https://youtu.be/uIFGOtT5WQ0?si=Tx0g6SKr3M2Y4Vom>.

¹⁸⁰ Burned popcorn in tent: video, 00:02:43, op. cit.

¹⁸¹ Reinholdtsen crying watching \emptyset (episode 11): video, 00:02:05, https://youtu.be/uIFGOtT5WQ0?si=Hwe82s4zON_kT8Go&t=125.

¹⁸² During our first in-person meeting, I commented to Reinholdtsen that I felt his \emptyset series (of which more about later) was a type of "hyperreal" musical theater. I was quickly corrected by Reinholdtsen who said that the \emptyset series was meant to be the opposite—"unreal" and "magical" music theater. I now feel "utopic" is the most apt adjective.

inspect Hannah Arendt's commentary on the intersection between politics, freedom, and art and Adorno's reflection on art and utopia.

5.2.1 Action in Space: Freedom's Function in Art and Politics

Historian and political philosopher Hannah Arendt believes that "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom."¹⁸³ Reinholdtsen believes that "art has to do with a discussion about freedom."¹⁸⁴ If freedom plays an important role in both politics and art, how do these concepts interrelate?

Arendt states that freedom's "field of experience is action"¹⁸⁵ and that "to *be* free and to act are the same"¹⁸⁶. For this field of experience to exist, there must be a common public space to meet others in a society, or, in other words, a politically organized world into which members of a society can insert themselves by word and deed.¹⁸⁷ In this space, each member acts in accordance with principles (or virtues) which find their realization in these actions themselves.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, it is then possible to understand politics' *raison d'être* as the establishment and

¹⁸³ Arendt, Hannah. "FREEDOM AND POLITICS: A Lecture." *Chicago Review* 14, no. 1 (1960): 28. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25733551>.

¹⁸⁴ Reinholdtsen's connection between art and freedom: Murins, video, 00:39:57, <https://youtu.be/PGZ3KMYuWHI?si=Sv1ImJXHfIS1p8R&t=2397>.

¹⁸⁵ Arendt, 28.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

safeguarding of a space where freedom as virtuosity (i.e., the acting out of virtues¹⁸⁹) can appear.¹⁹⁰

According to Arendt, virtuosity links the performing arts to politics. Dancers, actors, musicians, etc. require an audience to showcase their skills. Similarly, members of a community require the presence of others to make their actions meaningful. In both cases, their performances rely on the participation of others within a dedicated public space.¹⁹¹

Theory seeks to expose the stagnant and flawed public space of our world as something which limits the creative space for artists. While Arendt spoke of totalitarianism and mass society as the limiters of public space in the 1960s, today we deal with the malign effects of neoliberalism.¹⁹² Arendt states that, “freedom is the *raison d’être* of politics only if it designs a realm which is public and therefore not merely distinguished from, but even opposed to the private realm and its interests.”¹⁹³ Neoliberalism’s primary function is to shift the authority over economic matters from the government to the private sector. If anything is antithetical to Arendt’s conception of political space it is neoliberalism, a political space destroyer.

What limits political space for action (or newness) is the way neoliberalism devolves power (which is essentially money) from individuals to corporations and public monies to powerful private interests. State funded art, on the other hand, is public monies to public art with some corporate money from taxation going to individual artists.

¹⁸⁹ Arendt heralds courage as the preeminent virtue which (as the first of human qualities) guarantees all other virtues. For Arendt, courage is indispensable for political action because it does not gratify our individual sense of vitality but is demanded of all individuals by the very nature of the public realm. In a January 2023 interview, Reinholdtsen’s final bit of advice to younger generations of composers was to “train their compositional courage every day”: Murins, video, 00:52:41, https://youtu.be/PGZ3KMYuWHI?si=sHHpfWLQP8B-v_pb&t=3161.

¹⁹⁰ Arendt, 35.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 34.

¹⁹² Ibid, 45.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 36.

5.2.2 Conceptions of Utopia: Art as the Creation of Public Space

Through state-funded art, a society could enable its members to conceive of a world different from (and hopefully better than) their current one. As Adorno describes, this template is not without its (perhaps necessary and inevitable) contradictions:

At the center of contemporary antinomies is that art must be and wants to be utopia, and the more utopia is blocked by the real functional order, the more this is true; yet at the same time art may not be utopia in order not to betray it by providing semblance and consolation. If the utopia of art were fulfilled, it would be art's temporal end.¹⁹⁴

Utopia is a place in which all people within a group can and do (inter)act in an ideal way. In

other words, utopia is the ideal space for public action (i.e., freedom according to Arendt).

According to Adorno, art is the conception of this space. One then might argue (via a combination of Arendt and Adorno) that by publicly giving monies to individual artists to make public art, the possibility for a virtuous positive feedback loop occurs wherein art continually inches a society closer to utopia.

If a publicly funded artwork does push a society nearer to utopia, the possibility for the creation of more space-making utopic art increases in likeliness because the area in which to construct this art has expanded. Thus, one might extend Arendt and Adorno to say that one could consider the dimensions of a society's commitment to publicly fund art as one of (if not) the best barometers for the quality and quantity of freedom within that society.

¹⁹⁴ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 32.

5.2.2.1 The Bleakness within Adorno's Paradox

This ideal model (formulated from Arendt and Adorno) is, at least, the hoped for outcome, but *Theory* embodies the dark side of Adorno's antinomy—art must be what it cannot be (i.e., utopia). The search for the 'new' in *Theory* is the search for what Reinholdtsen refers to as “the revolutionary totally society-shattering New Utopia”.¹⁹⁵ *Theory* is a dramatization of Adorno's words. But art is *not* utopia, and it may or may not give us a view into utopia. In fact, it probably will not since utopia is but one of an infinite number of possible othernesses of which art would more likely stumble upon instead while on its search.¹⁹⁶ And, an even more sobering thought, these non-utopic othernesses are much more likely to instead be muddied regurgitations (i.e., mimetic exacerbations) of our current world that we mistook for otherworldlinesses, or worse, that are outright celebrated.

For how can one make what is not from within what is? This question might spark memories of Ugelvik's reading of *Theory of the Subject* (i.e., Badiou's book, not Reinholdtsen's piano concerto) which interrelates Lacan's theory of the lack, Ernst Zermelo's and Abraham Fraenkel's “axiom of choice” from within mathematics, as well as Hegel's antithesis as a path towards elucidating the nature of human subjectivity. How does one become? Or what is it to be a body perceiving itself in relation to other bodies? Ugelvik's encounter with the book and her resulting contemplation of these questions stemmed from her failure to achieve utopia when her utopian commune was destroyed by neoliberal forces (i.e., by what Adorno might term “the real functional order”). She failed to become an other to herself. And when Ugelvik again tried for utopia in *Theory*'s climactic section, the orchestra engulfs her in distorted reproductions of her

¹⁹⁵ Reinholdtsen, “The Return of...”.

¹⁹⁶ This might explain why among *Theory*'s utopian commune members are Stalin, Ho Chi Minh, Lenin, and Che Guevara. Communism (as humanity's grandest experiment at otherness) failed, just as *Theory*'s commune failed.

own performance, essentially herself disfigured, though only reorganized, not truly othered. Instead of achieving utopia, Ugelvik's actions only served to illustrate Adorno's paradox and evoke Badiou's questions: Is lack an impossible conversion to substance? Is choice but an illusion? Has history halted? Just as Ugelvik's confrontation with the tension held within Adorno's contradiction forced her to sever her fingers, so too *Theory* may have forced a self-inflicted (though unintentional) wound to Norway's public space for artists.

5.3 *Theory* Acts within Norwegian Politics: Sløseriombudsmannen and Sløserikommisjonen

Theory not only puts art and politics into conversation but puts them into action. While it may not have had the effect that Reinholdtsen would have hoped, *Theory* did have a real and significant effect in the world, which is much more than can be said of the vast majority of avant-garde musical works.¹⁹⁷ *Theory* provided fuel for Norway's on-going polarizing though important debate about the status and role of public art in Norwegian society.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ I am highlighting this point not so as to give Reinholdtsen a sense of pride at *Theory*'s real-world impact but to argue for setting the bar higher for what is considered excellence in this genre.

¹⁹⁸ It should be noted that while *Theory* plays a part in this debate, I have found no record of Reinholdtsen commenting on *Theory*'s role in the debate or the debate more broadly.

5.3.1 The Facebook Group “Sløseriombudsmannen”

In September 2014, Norwegian right-wing¹⁹⁹ hedge fund millionaire Are Sjøberg created the Facebook page “Sløseriombudsmannen”²⁰⁰ [The Wastewater Ombudsman²⁰¹] (which has since garnered over 106,000 followers, a large number considering Norway’s population of only 5.4 million). While Sløseriombudsmannen’s stated purpose of investigating “how bureaucrats and politicians waste your tax money” implies a broad outlook, their primary targets are often confined to government-funded artists and the state-funded art they deem *dritt*²⁰² [shit]. Many of Sløseriombudsmannen’s most popular posts consist of an almost entirely uncontextualized and short (given the artwork’s total runtime) video clip of an artistic performance which is then

¹⁹⁹ A few of Sløseriombudsmannen’s members have taken issue with my labeling of Sjøberg (and what they saw by extension Sløseriombudsmannen as a whole) as “right-wing.” In my threaded Facebook comment conversations with them, they claimed that the label right-wing is not a fair label for the group because the group is only concerned with the prevention of “wasteful” government spending, not partisan party politics. Sjøberg himself eventually weighed in commenting the following: “I see you spoke with Chris Erichsen [referring to my quotation of Erichsen in this dissertation] who I have also debated with a few times. He is a communist, so from his perspective, almost anyone would be seen as right-wing. He was literally a leader in the norwegian communist party. Not that this disqualifies him from having opinions, but few would see him as the most balanced source of norwegian politics. It is probably true that my posts on average are more popular among people on the right wing vs left wing, but I even have people from Rødt (socialist/communist-ish party one step away from Chris Erichsens purebred communist party!) who I meet and who I’ve shared texts in support of.” I am not aware of exactly how Sjøberg obtained the draft of this dissertation, but he made a post on Sløseriombudsmannen linking to the draft that featured a video clip of *Theory*’s white bedsheets-clad *Geist* dancing in fake feces [of which more about later]. The above quoted comment was made in this post’s comment section. As of now (3 April 2024) the post has garnered almost 800 likes and over 170 comments (on which a member referred to me as *Dr. galskap* [Dr. madness]). I should note that Sjøberg has been kind to me, even commenting on a post (I made about my dissertation defense) within a (relatively) small public Facebook Pittsburgh community artists page that he wished me luck on my defense. Link to Sløseriombudsmannen post linking to a draft of this dissertation: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/435547385599702>. Link to my post about my dissertation defense (upon which Sjøberg commented a wish for luck) on the small Facebook Pittsburgh community artist page called “Pittsburgh Experimental”: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/PGHexperimental/permalink/3867658573515702/>.

²⁰⁰ Sløseriombudsmannen Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044464058098>.

²⁰¹ An *Ombudsman* is an appointed official, typically by the government or parliament, often with a notable level of autonomy. Their role involves investigating complaints and seeking resolutions, usually through recommendations, whether binding or not, and through the process of mediation.

²⁰² Quotation from Guro Berg Hermansen’s comment on a Sløseriombudsmannen post of an uncontextualized 58-second clip from Reinholdtsen’s 40-minute previously discussed work *Musik*: <https://fb.watch/orPJSpl2kr/>.

denigrated by pun-toting commentators, what some have deemed “ragebait”²⁰³. Admittedly, the clips do often contain relatively “shocking” content (e.g., Vegard Vinge²⁰⁴ shooting paint out of his butt)²⁰⁵, but it seems that most of Sløseriombudsmannen’s commentators lack the ability or will to consider how these elements’ “shocking” nature might amplify the artwork’s meaning. According to post comments, many of Sløseriombudsmannen’s followers subscribe to the libertarian-aligned view that an artwork’s value is primarily determined by its marketability and/or the Classicist view that art should conform to conventional notions of beauty and structure.

(According to Norwegian writer, filmmaker, and musician Chris Erichsen, most of Sløseriombudsmannen’s users are not only against public funding of art but are also against *all* public funding and do not want to pay any taxes.²⁰⁶ Erichsen continues, arguing that, logically speaking, it cancels the Sløseriombudsmannen’s basis for existence. Why debate individual items on the state budget when you are against the concept of a state budget? Erichsen encapsulates this irony by referencing Georg Johannesen’s²⁰⁷ example from the 1970s of *Dagbladet*’s²⁰⁸ cultural radicalism: being against priests but for female priests.²⁰⁹)

²⁰³ Sibué-Birkeland, Anne-Cécile. “A Methodical Bullying Ombudsman.” *Black Box Teater*, April 16, 2021. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230601202131/https://blackbox.no/en/a-methodical-bullying-ombudsman/>.

²⁰⁴ Reinholdtsen and Vinge (along with Ida Müller) have made seven massive productions (up to 12 hours). For four years, the three of them produced work at Volksbühne in Berlin.

²⁰⁵ Sløseriombudsmannen post featuring a clip of Vegard Vinge’s body painting: <https://fb.watch/orPuAsqRET/>. Chris Erichsen comments that the center of gravity of the debate on Sløseriombudsmannen’s wall has for a long time systematically shifted to the right and is now in a place where Sløseriombudsmannen’s fake news representations of Vinge’s butt painting, as if that is what his art is about, sets the standard. Erichsen, Chris. “Det de kaller sløseri.” *Scenekunst*, (2020). Accessed November 20, 2023. <https://web.archive.org/web/20221201001112/https://scenekunst.no/sak/det-de-kaller-sloseri/>.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Georg Johannesen was a Norwegian author and professor of rhetoric at the University of Bergen.

²⁰⁸ *Dagbladet* is one of Norway’s largest newspapers and is published in the tabloid format.

²⁰⁹ Erichsen.

5.3.2 Morten Traavik's *Sløserikommisjonen*

The 14 July 2020 Sløseriombudsmannen post of a 3-minute video excerpt from Reinholdtsen's *Theory* (in which the *Geist* rolls in "feces" in the concert hall green room's bathroom and the climactic section begins with Ugelvik violently slamming on the piano) garnered over 300,000 views, 1,700 likes, 650 shares, and 600 comments making it one of the most trafficked posts in the page's history at that time.²¹⁰ Many of the post's most liked comments are short, feces-related zingers²¹¹ or outcries for the government to end Reinholdtsen's support and instead treat his perceived ailing mental health²¹². The irony of these statements is that Reinholdtsen himself is critiquing artistic decadence by framing (through an audience direct address) the *Geist* as a representation of the impractical side of an artist's split subjectivity during the creative process. It appears this nuance was lost on virtually all Sløseriombudsmannen's followers.

Around six months after this post, during a fraught time in Norwegian politics where questions of "freedom" were being scrutinized and scandalized (see Appendix A for an outline of some of the key events in this debate), Norwegian director and artist Morten Traavik²¹³ contacted Sjøberg (who was, at that time, running Sløseriombudsmannen anonymously) about creating a

live TV transmission in front of a live studio audience [where] the Sløseri Ombudsman himself [Are Sjøberg] partake[s] as the Grand Inquisitor, with the audience as jury in a

²¹⁰ Sløseriombudsmannen post of a video excerpt from *Theory*: <https://fb.watch/o7uyEXTKywW/>.

²¹¹ Tim Robin Øyen comments, "*Hvor kan man henvende seg for å donere avføring?*" [Where can one go to donate feces?].

²¹² Morten Hultman Andresen comments, "*Dette er ikke kunst, men en diagnose som trenger behandling.*" [This is not art, but a diagnosis that needs treatment.].

²¹³ According to his website (<https://web.archive.org/web/20230610211520/http://traavik.info/organisation/morten-traavik>), Traavik (b. 1971) works "across a wide spectrum of artistic genres and international borders. Trained as theater director in Russia and Sweden, the notion of the world as a stage and identity as role play is never far away in his works, as well as a characteristically blurred distinction between art, activism[,] and social issues." Traavik's one-hour pandemic-era artist talk concerns three of his most significant political theater works: <https://vimeo.com/466106805>.

People’s Tribunal of sorts [in which] the whole cultural sphere put[s themselves] on trial[, and] the accused and defendants are those...who perform, dance, sing, create, produce, and consume arts and culture. Jerry Springer meets The Commission of Free Speech, interspersed with witch hunts, pundit pissing contest[s], and general pandemonium.²¹⁴

Søberg agreed to the collaboration, and in May 2021 Traavik premiered *Sløserikommisjonen* [The Wastefulness Commission]. A paradigmatic work of hypertheatre (a term and form of theater Traavik created)²¹⁵, *Sløserikommisjonen* blurs the lines between stage and reality, making it challenging to distinguish between what is considered true and what is perceived as the theatre work.²¹⁶ In an interview within *Morgenbladet*²¹⁷, Traavik describes *Sløserikommisjonen* as a

theater version of the Sløseriombudsmannen’s Facebook page [that] give[s] flesh and blood to all these virtual arguments that are going on, because [he] think[s] that in our time it is far too easy to shoot at point-blank range behind a keyboard and remain in trenches and echo chambers—regardless of one’s convictions.²¹⁸

Sløserikommisjonen (Part 1 – *Vestland* [Western Norway]) takes its form as a series of TV broadcast gameshow/talk show-styled vignettes that range in tone from deadly serious and emotionally moving (e.g., Julian Blaue’s nude performance of *True Money: a lecture on the hidden nature of economics* in relation to state-funded art)²¹⁹ to tongue-in-cheek comedy (e.g., Shabana Rehman Gaarder’s performance wherein she rubs red paint on her butt before smearing the paint on a bed containing an unsuspecting sleeper)²²⁰. When the “Sløseri Ombudsman” and “Grand Inquisitor” himself takes the stage, Søberg chooses Reinholdtsen’s *Theory as the*

²¹⁴ From Traavik’s description of *Sløserikommisjonen*: <http://traavik.info/works/the-wastefulness-commission>.

²¹⁵ Hypertheatre manifesto: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230407144855/http://traavik.info/manifesto/>.

²¹⁶ Hvidsten, Sigrid. “Et Helvetes Kaos.” *Dagbladet*, September 6, 2022.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20220906214817/https://www.dagbladet.no/mening/et-helvetes-kaos/77075555>.

²¹⁷ *Morgenbladet* is Norway’s oldest daily newspaper, covering politics, culture, and science.

²¹⁸ *Morgenbladet* Traavik interview:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20231123184138/https://www.morgenbladet.no/aktuelt/2010/06/25/morten-traavik/>.

²¹⁹ Blaue nude performance on state-funded art: video, 01:10:26,

<https://youtu.be/HJyfMXY7HaU?si=DE2zkw7MtlNDX9Lf&t=4226>.

²²⁰ Gaarder’s red paint performance which acts in part as a satire of the previously cited Sløseriombudsmannen post on Vinge’s butt painting: video, 02:10:10, <https://youtu.be/HJyfMXY7HaU?si=r8zCCZ1f-fwppUz7&t=7810>.

representative wasteful state-sponsored artwork, playing for the audience a few seconds of the 3-minute *Geist* and “feces” clip from the previously cited Sløseriombudsmannen post.²²¹

For *Sløserikommisjonen* Part 1 almost all the artists Traavik invited to defend their art understandably declined to participate (save Mimir Kristjansson, Kurt Johannesen, and Julian Blaue) as it was difficult to tell the difference between Traavik and the neoliberal Ombudsman.²²² The neutrality which Traavik (at least ostensibly) intended for *Sløserikommisjonen* Part 1 was not very apparent, and it seems the Sløseriombudsmannen followers continued to condemn state-funded artists in yet another (though significantly less reverberant) echo chamber.²²³

According to Blaue, Traavik managed to start a divisive but perhaps valuable discussion.²²⁴ And for Traavik’s third iteration of *Sløserikommisjonen* (which premiered in Kristiansand November 2022 and included Marina Abramović-styled “staring contests” that perhaps helped *Sløserikommisjonen* step closer to some semblance of neutrality)²²⁵, he implored avant-garde artists to participate and encouraged Traavik to make it attractive for these artists to do so.²²⁶

²²¹ Sjøberg presenting the *Theory* “feces” clip: video, 01:24:47, <https://youtu.be/HJyfMXy7HaU?si=LNFxgEbhCRNIWszm&t=5087>.

²²² Blaue, Julian. “Et Upartisk Kunsttribunal Med Avantgarden I Forsvar!” *Scenekunst*, September 13, 2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20221012014419/https://scenekunst.no/sak/et-upartisk-kunsttribunal-med-avantgarden-i-forsvar/>.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Eikeland, Torgeir. “«Sløserikommisjonen 3» Blir Stirrekonkurranse.” *Fædrelandsvennen*, October 6, 2022. <https://www.pressreader.com/norway/faedrelandsvennen/20221006/281883007231800>.

²²⁶ Blaue.

5.3.3 Norway's Exceptional Standing in Debating Public Art's Value

In a recent text message exchange of mine with a Norwegian composer and sound engineer of my generation (who wishes to remain anonymous), they termed Norway's debate concerning public arts spending and state-funded artists' free speech a "*first first world* problem."²²⁷ In 2019, *Kulturrådet* [The Norway Arts Council] spent roughly 33.5 times more money per capita²²⁸ than the United States' equivalent organization, The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)²²⁹. Norway's remarkably prosperous position²³⁰, highly equitable public policies²³¹, and unique artist funding model²³² allow its citizens to experience art which is significantly more removed from market forces than that of other wealthy nations. Norway's state-funded artists are not accountable to private interests but to the public good. There is perhaps no other place in the world where Adorno's antinomy can find as vibrant a realization.

²²⁷ A similar debate spearheaded by Republican Senator Jesse Helms unfolded in the U.S. during the 1980s and '90s. The result of which was a 1992 congressional bill that prohibits the NEA from using any of its funds to promote or disseminate materials "that depict or describe, in a patently offensive way, sexual or excretory activities or organs." Pianin, Eric. "HELMS WINS SENATE VOTE TO RESTRICT NEA FUNDS." *The Washington Post*, September 19, 1991.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20180724074953/https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1991/09/20/helms-wins-senate-vote-to-restrict-nea-funds/b7ced7b8-98c8-4596-909a-9fef9f487bcd/>.

²²⁸ Jansen, Charlotte. "This Is What It's Like to Be Paid by the Government to Make Art." *Elephant*, June 6, 2019. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230609182745/https://elephant.art/this-is-what-its-like-to-be-paid-by-the-government-to-make-art/>.

²²⁹ Cascone, Sarah. "Despite Threats of Budget-Slashing, the NEA Actually Saw Its Funding Increase in Congress's Newly Passed Budget." *Artnet*, August 2, 2018. <https://news.artnet.com/news/nea-2019-budget-passed-1327829#:~:text=Photo%20Saul%20Loeb%2FAFP%2FGetty,for%20the%20forthcoming%20fiscal%20year.>

²³⁰ Norway's 1.4 trillion-dollar sovereign wealth fund (as of December 2023) is the largest in the world by sheer value, topping even China. This is an astounding figure considering that Norway's population is over 261 times smaller than China's. Extensive natural gas and oil reserves (discovered in the late 1960s) are responsible for much of the fund's investment. The recent discovery of a massive phosphorous deposit within Norway's borders will likely cause the fund to balloon in coming years.

²³¹ In 2021, Norway ranked thirteenth (above the US, Germany, and Japan) on the world human freedom index (a broadly comprehensive measure that encompasses both personal and economic freedom).

²³² Jansen.

5.4 *Theory Acts on Reinholdtsen: Ø, Roadshow, and Followers*

In each of Reinholdtsen's significant institutionally critical works, his grievances against the institution of New Music grow until finally (within *Theory*) they outgrow the medium of institutional critique itself: from *Faust's* narrower critique of some New Music works' inconsequentially minute motivic developments to *Musik's Krise* of contemporary music through *Inferno's* questioning of a life devoted to avant-garde music to *Theory's* sprawling critique of the neoliberal world responsible for the failings of New Music institutions. *Theory* exhausts institutional critique's usefulness for Reinholdtsen and drove him towards a need to "challenge the institutional boundaries in a more profound way."²³³ The Norwegian Opra became Reinholdtsen's vehicle for confronting these borders.

According to Reinholdtsen, The Norwegian Opra wants to be a kind of parallel action to Wagner's famous festival theater in Bayreuth.²³⁴ *Ø, Roadshow, and Followers* are the embodiment of Reinholdtsen's attempt to evoke a "time when music was at the center of the arts, politics, and philosophy and helped to construct and reinterpret the determining myths of humanity and progress."²³⁵ *Ø* represents a determining myth. *Roadshow* portrays the spread of this myth. *Followers* theatrically depicts this myth's power to shape the world. But The Norwegian Opra frames theater as more than fiction. Within The Norwegian Opra, theater is political action.

²³³ Reinholdtsen, "MY VIA DELAROSA...".

²³⁴ Lehmann, "Neue Intendanz!".

²³⁵ Ibid.

5.4.1 The Norwegian Opra's Ø series

Following *Theory*, Reinholdtsen stopped crying about a lack of political space for artists and, instead, tried to create new space through The Norwegian Opra's Ø series. His work shifted entirely away from institutional critique (or did it?) to focus solely on building his own institution in relative isolation.

In 2009, Reinholdtsen started The Norwegian Opra²³⁶, which was housed in “a cheap ground floor apartment in a noisy street in Gamlebyen, Oslo²³⁷.”²³⁸ The Norwegian Opra's Theory and Propaganda Department's first publication posed a series of questions²³⁹ that laid the foundation for the declaration (that occurred six years later in 2015) of Reinholdtsen's intention to create an artistic institution which seeks total freedom from the conventional trappings of contemporary artistic institutions. In the years leading to this announcement (2009 to 2014—the latter being the year Reinholdtsen finished a fellowship in artistic research²⁴⁰ at NMH), The Norwegian Opra produced works ranging from the 4-minute video work *Fitzcarraldo* (2009)²⁴¹

²³⁶ Here is a link to The Norwegian Opra's website: <http://www.thenorwegianopra.no/>.

²³⁷ *Apocalypse* (2010) clip showing apartment crammed with an audience: video, 00:29:28, https://youtu.be/jph9X61TwmY?si=8I3nyUF1pzF_NiA5&t=1768.

²³⁸ Reinholdtsen, Trond. “DIE GEBURT DES OPRA DURCH DIE KRISE DER ZEITGENÖSSISCHEN MUSIK: THE NORWEGIAN OPRA.” The Norwegian Opra. December 1, 2009. <https://www.thenorwegianopra.no/post1.html>.

²³⁹ Questions: “Is it possible to strenghten [sic] a kind of holistic compositional perspective in opera by refusing the traditional splitting up of the artistic process into specialized fields like composer, performer/singer, director[,] and producer? What possibilities for visionary and utopian thinking can an extreme downscaling of the opera format give? What kind of music-theatrical results can one gain by removing the narrative of opera, or the voice, or the very scenic event? Is it, by establishing a “smaller” form of opera, possible to move opera towards a more flexible, more relevant in political and social terms, and more receptive for influence from new theatre theory and contemporary art? And is it under these circumstances possible to approach a multimedial art genre with music as the motor, that on the one hand respects the opera tradition of great pathos, excessive emotions and Grössenwahn, and on the other hand reflects the conceptualism and critical position of contemporary art music?”

²⁴⁰ A term coined in 1993 by Elliot Eisner, ‘artistic research’ (as a relatively new academic field) merges artistic and scientific methodologies for knowledge creation. Ibid. <https://www.thenorwegianopra.no/post1.html>.

²⁴¹ *Fitzcarraldo* (2009) video: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cHUmCbD6MPIkdr1WBnx0uQFOwwkTx3W-/view?usp=sharing>.

wherein Reinholdtsen vocally proclaims his intention to start The Norwegian Opra while watching Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) on his laptop computer to the two-and-half-hour-long opera *Narcissus* (2013) wherein (among many things) Reinholdtsen dramatizes the bombing of The New York Stock Exchange in 1920²⁴². In 2015, Reinholdtsen announced that The Norwegian Opra had moved to a Swedish forest near Karlstad²⁴³ and that he had begun creating the 17-episode video series *Ø*²⁴⁴ whose narrative Reinholdtsen summarizes as follows:

A kind of mysterious monster, let's call it Mother (the musicologists quarrel around the question if she/he/it is loosely based on Ymir from the Norse mythology, Herzeleyde from the Parsifal legend, Francis of Assisi, or Erda from Wagner's Ring) wakes up in an unknown place. She/he/it utters the sound "øøøøø" and gives birth to three figures that will be the protagonists of the following episodes. These three slowly develops [sic] a form of private language, and their first communicative interactions seem to gravitate around the notions of "Existence", "Time", and "the We". They have barricaded themselves in a cellar in a hidden location in a forest in Sweden. Their aim is to live as *disconnected as possible* from "the Outside", from "the System", from the "Networks"[,] and from all practical considerations (family, work, money, internet). In this centripetal world—through contemplation and concentration, meticulous planning and private experiments in art, politics, and alchemy—a big world changing "Event" is prepared.²⁴⁵

This move marked a turning point in Reinholdtsen's career. According to Reinholdtsen, the contemporary music world is "very academic, in the worst sense of the word."²⁴⁶ There are certain codes and unspoken rules (which are sometimes incorrectly referred to as 'craft') that must be followed to show that one belongs to this academic system.²⁴⁷ But Reinholdtsen believes academism is "always a sign of fear—fear of the anarchy of invention, novelty[,] and amateurism."²⁴⁸ This is why contemporary music is guarded with super-strong institutions (e.g.,

²⁴² *Narcissus* New York Stock Exchange bombing: video, 01:57:34,

<https://youtu.be/i9W1ZfLLv84?si=Ryxd97zdn3coPa9o&t=7054>.

²⁴³ Reinholdtsen presenting The Norwegian Opra house: video, 00:01:53,

<https://youtu.be/tnoFg46hp00?si=52VwOpY5szlPuh7p&t=113>.

²⁴⁴ Webpage with YouTube links to all 17 episodes: <https://www.thenorwegianopra.no/>.

²⁴⁵ Reinholdtsen, "MY VIA DELAROSA...".

²⁴⁶ Lehmann, "Neue Intendanz!".

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

academies, festivals, ensembles, orchestras, concerts, and commissioned works) that favor the “most pragmatic projects and support works of the least possible resistance.”²⁴⁹ The move to a Swedish forest was a key step in attempting to question these institutional coordinates, i.e., the infrastructure of production.²⁵⁰ In this forest, there are no orchestras, festivals, academies, etc.

5.4.2 The *Neo-Hippie-Interventionistische-Anti-Internet-Peripherie-Welttournee-Roadshow*

In 2018, Reinholdtsen, Hvamen, and filmmaker Tobias Schülke embarked on a 12-day tour called the *Neo-Hippie-Interventionistische-Anti-Internet-Peripherie-Welttournee-Roadshow* (2018) (hereafter abbreviated to *Roadshow*) in order to “directly engage with the proletariat of Europa”²⁵¹ by screening all the episodes of The Norwegian Opra’s \emptyset series “in the hope that the message of \emptyset will give new power to the struggle of the masses,” undoubtedly an absurd enterprise.²⁵² While \emptyset marked the establishment of The Norwegian Opra as an artistic institution striving towards total independence from a neoliberal world, *Roadshow* politicized this striving by co-creating \emptyset ’s meaning with the public.

Within the first YouTube episode documenting the first day of *Roadshow*, Reinholdtsen clearly states that a primary part of the mission of The Norwegian Opra is “to gain total control over the production means of art...in search of total artistic freedom...and in total isolation from

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Notable (and humorous) examples of engagement with “the proletariat of Europa”: Reinholdtsen announcing the beginning of the tour to his Swedish neighbors from Day 1, video, 00:02:13, <https://youtu.be/8KD-OpwrCTA?si=wfrk0V6D8Vf6YRfd&t=133>; screening for a self-described “hippie” at a Swedish campground from Day 3, video, 00:00:57, <https://youtu.be/rfMjkbT-liM?si=wmHFcBm29HnjW8b8&t=57>; Reinholdtsen having to explain to an audience [on a tour boat’s Bingo Hall in the waters off of Gdańsk, Poland] that the screening would have been better if the sound had been working from Day 4, video, 00:02:55, <https://youtu.be/7HTU90F3Nw0?si=jtWC8jlrMfm0EKI8&t=175>; screening for enthusiastic intoxicated bargoers from Day 5, video, 00:01:14, <https://youtu.be/9LOhKp38aKY?si=NeFnwxN6nvWr0Dxo&t=74>.

²⁵² Explanation for the roadshow: video, 00:01:08, <https://youtu.be/8KD-OpwrCTA?si=gjSSEIm8m6dzVoh3&t=68>.

The System.”²⁵³ The continuation of the \emptyset series narrative is the first artistic result of Reinholdtsen’s choice to move The Norwegian Opra to a Swedish forest and establish it as an independent artistic institution. Despite this seemingly unpolitical creative drive for “total isolation” when creating the \emptyset series, *Roadshow*’s screening of \emptyset to the “proletariat of Europa” (a sentiment mocked by one of the Swedish locals in the Day 1 audience²⁵⁴) morphed \emptyset into a political act.

Within the Day 7 *Roadshow* episode, Reinholdtsen discusses \emptyset with a bewildered young Ukrainian couple during its screening outside a nightclub.²⁵⁵ Here, Reinholdtsen tried to fulfill his stated goal (which is itself a part of the artwork as *Roadshow* contains a video of Reinholdtsen stating this goal) of spreading “the message of \emptyset ” in hopes that it “will give new power to the struggle of the masses.” By discussing \emptyset ’s meaning with this couple (and the many others he met during *Roadshow*), Reinholdtsen collaborated with and worked to co-create with audience members a shared artistic meaning of the \emptyset series. Furthermore, this co-creation was in fact a part of the work itself as Reinholdtsen explicitly set the boundaries of the work to encompass this form of audience co-creation. Through *Roadshow* the \emptyset series acted within public space.

²⁵³ Declaration of part of the primary mission of The Norwegian Opra: video, 00:00:48, op. cit.

²⁵⁴ Audience member mocking Reinholdtsen’s hope that the message of \emptyset will give new power to the struggle of the masses (*Roadshow* Day 1): video, 00:02:25, <https://youtu.be/8KD-OpwrCTA?si=yLNkeiKGXXMBkuVw&t=145>.

²⁵⁵ Moments before Reinholdtsen discusses an episode with a couple outside a nightclub in Ukraine from *Roadshow* Day 7: video, 00:01:38, <https://youtu.be/m5wLSUER2-Q?si=l8qXZluJkCQFuqo&t=98>.

5.4.3 *The Followers of Ø*

Ten years after *Faust* (Reinholdtsen's first substantial work of institutional critique), and a little over a year after Reinholdtsen received a 10-year *Stipend for etablerte kunstnere* [Scholarship for established artists] from *Kulturrådet*²⁵⁶, and amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, Reinholdtsen began *Followers*. These followers have

watched all the episodes of *Ø* and ha[ve] joined a community of world historical, empirical, universal individuals consisting of proletar-precariat-dilittante-philosopher-kings [who] have transcended all identitarian borders,...gathered on the meadow in Sweden to live as if there is no distinction between life and idea, and...put the theory of *Ø* into praxis.²⁵⁷

Produced and set in Reinholdtsen's Swedish Opra meadow, *Followers* features Reinholdtsen's distinctive directorial style which includes little to no rehearsal time²⁵⁸ and a distinctly 'outsider art' aesthetic with elaborate DIY 'trash' aesthetic costuming, unrealistic acting, and a musical score that is blatantly and nearly entirely orchestrated with General MIDI sounds.²⁵⁹

As a theatrical narrative of an attempt to create a society outside of the neoliberal system, *Followers* parallels *Theory*'s utopian commune sequence, though, unlike *Theory*, *Followers* (at least in its first five parts) presents an optimistic view of this attempt. At the conclusion of

²⁵⁶ In 2019, Reinholdtsen was one of 35 artists awarded this grant which totals roughly \$30,000 per year (an amount that is reassessed and raised marginally every year), can be reapplied for at the end of its 10-year term, and has virtually no restrictions on how it can be spent:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230815061212/https://www.kulturdirektoratet.no/web/guest/stotteordning/-/vis/stipend-for-etablerte-kunstnere/tildelinger/2019/2019>.

²⁵⁷ Reinholdtsen introducing *The Followers of Ø*: video, 00:14:23, <https://youtu.be/tnoFg46hp00?si=n7uOUMM1vkN41TK4&t=863>.

²⁵⁸ Extensive rehearsal time is not needed for *Followers* because Reinholdtsen pipes verbal instructions into in-ear monitors worn by the actors as their performances are being recorded.

²⁵⁹ An example of these elements in *The Followers of Ø, part 1*: video, 00:23:51, <https://youtu.be/qK0cnhSWCFU?si=HS1Cb03MNsM8jOen&t=1431>.

Followers part 1 (2021), the proletar²⁶⁰, the incel²⁶¹, the minority²⁶², the idiot²⁶³, and the old²⁶⁴ gather in the Opra meadow, bury the dead capitalist²⁶⁵, proclaim themselves followers of Ø²⁶⁶, and decide to begin building a new society. By *Followers* part 4 (2023), they are discussing the “best limit to put on the size of a city”²⁶⁷ (a discussion lifted from Plato’s *The Republic*²⁶⁸) while sitting amongst their recently completed cinema²⁶⁹, science center²⁷⁰, and textile factory²⁷¹. In the most recent *Followers* installment (Part 5 [2023]), climate refugees fleeing the “WORLD-AGGRESSION”²⁷² ford a river²⁷³ in “the hope of being received friendly by the followers of Ø.” In 2024, Reinholdtsen plans to bus audience members to his Opra village in Sweden for a 6-7-hour live performance of *Followers*.²⁷⁴

5.4.4 Beyond *Theory*: Reinholdtsen’s Opra as Praxis

Reinholdtsen’s institution The Norwegian Opra and *Followers* are not so much descriptive as they are actional. Reinholdtsen’s focus is no longer the critique of New Music

²⁶⁰ The Proletar: video, 00:07:24, op. cit.

²⁶¹ The Incel: video, 00:09:23, op. cit.

²⁶² The Minority: video, 00:11:20, op. cit.

²⁶³ The Idiot: video, 00:13:24, op. cit.

²⁶⁴ The Old: video, 00:15:36, op. cit.

²⁶⁵ Burying the capitalist: video, 00:29:38, op. cit.

²⁶⁶ Proclaiming themselves followers: video, 00:34:22, op. cit.

²⁶⁷ Discussing city size: video, 00:04:00, https://youtu.be/VOjg3qVkJUzU?si=m_KTWJkmdyZKjbZk&t=240.

²⁶⁸ Plato, G. R. F Ferrari, and Tom Griffith. *The Republic*. Cambridge University Press, 2000: 115.

<https://ia802802.us.archive.org/20/items/PlatoTheRepublicCambridgeTomGriffith/Plato%20The%20Republic%20%28Cambridge%2C%20Tom%20Griffith%29.pdf>.

²⁶⁹ Cinema: video, 00:02:06, op. cit.

²⁷⁰ Science center: video, 00:02:35, op. cit.

²⁷¹ Textile factory: video, 00:03:27, op. cit.

²⁷² Fleeing the “WORLD-AGGRESSION”: video, 00:00:31, <https://youtu.be/19GjLu9GFA?si=83gBD-dPHMDOKcq7&t=31>.

²⁷³ Climate refugees fording a river: video, 00:07:33, op. cit.

²⁷⁴ Reinholdtsen on new 6–7-hour live work: Murins, video, 00:40:40, https://youtu.be/PGZ3KMYuWHI?si=DCyORNTWmL660HJ_&t=2440.

(which can ironically confirm and even perpetuate its problems by drawing attention to them) but the subversion of New Music's systemic flaws through the building of an institution. The Norwegian Opra seeks to be separate from the institution of New Music and has as its output *Followers*, an artwork about building a new institution or society outside of neoliberal strictures. Instead of confirming, describing, or illustrating Adorno's antinomy (i.e., that art must be and, at the same time, cannot be utopia) through theatrical depiction (as Reinholdtsen does within *Theory*), Reinholdtsen questions (or perhaps enacts) Adorno's antinomy by simply striving to make art outside of the neoliberal paradigm. The focus of *Followers* is not the specifics of outcomes stemming from action (which are difficult to reliably predict or maintain much less understand or utilize as a way closer to utopia, especially considering Reinholdtsen intent for Ø's narrative to last indefinitely—even beyond his death). Instead, the focus of *Followers* is the safeguarding, celebration, and implementation of action itself as a confirmation that free (i.e., public) experimentation is the best path towards better societal outcomes.

Theory currently stands as the inflection point of Reinholdtsen's oeuvre. After *Theory*, Reinholdtsen's work crossed from theory into praxis—from the critique of an institution into the creation of an institution. Despite there, of course, being no guarantee The Norwegian Opra will lead to a better world (or make any lasting effect on the world at all for better or worse), the Norwegian public has entrusted Reinholdtsen with the privilege and labor of exploring and creating for their edification.

6.0 Conclusion: *Theory* as a Neo-Dadaist Work

While *Theory*'s eclectic mix of theater, concept art, installation art, political messaging, art theory, shock value, and dark humor backdropped by Western contemporary art music (of all things) may seem uncategorizable, Reinholdtsen's approach shares much in common with the approach of the Berlin Dadaists. Like Reinholdtsen, Dadaists thought the systemic cultural values and ideals responsible for the degradation of society were a result of a bourgeois society so indifferent that it would rather engage in self-destructive warfare (i.e., World War I) than challenge the prevailing norms. Dada emerged during the postwar economic and moral crisis as a deliberate effort towards destruction and demoralization,²⁷⁵ and one of its primary targets was capitalism.²⁷⁶

6.1 *Theory*'s Connections to Berlin's Dadaists

Unlike the New York Dadaists who were relatively far-removed from Europe's war, Berlin's Dadaists were at the war's heart and devastating fallout. While the New Yorkers created "less aggressive and more playful" works as they entered the Roaring Twenties²⁷⁷, the Berliners developed "sharp criticisms of [the] capitalist revisionism" implemented by the postwar Weimar

²⁷⁵ Gardner, Helen, and Fred S. Kleiner. *Gardner's Art through the Ages : A Global History*. Fifteenth edition, Student edition. Boston, Massachusetts: Cengage Learning, 2016, 754.

²⁷⁶ Hubregtse, Menno. "Robert J. Coady's The Soil and Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: Taste, Nationalism, Capitalism, and New York Dada." *RACAR* 34, no. 2 (2009): 37. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069487ar>.

²⁷⁷ "DADA New York." National Gallery of Art, Accessed April 2, 2024. <https://web.archive.org/web/20081101225228/http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2006/dada/cities/newyork.shtm>.

Republic.²⁷⁸ *Club Dada*'s letters to Weimar politicians urging them to embrace anarchist revolution²⁷⁹ embodied Berlin Dadaists' adherence to a systematic politic.²⁸⁰ Despite their relevance at the time, these calls to political action and aesthetic criticisms of capitalism and the military-industrial complex lacked a clear plan for fostering effectual leftist opposition.²⁸¹ Unable to form an organized resistance, Dadaists resorted to gradual escalations of the shock value in their works²⁸² but to no avail.²⁸³ Meanwhile, Germany's sustained economic woes during the early 1920s generated lasting postwar resentment (especially on the political right), which served as soil for the seeds of Hitler's Fascism in the early 1930s.

Painter Hans Richter distilled Berlin's Dadaism to its leftist "politic[s], inexhaustible energy, and mental freedom which included the abolition of everything."²⁸⁴ *Theory*'s aesthetics parallel these descriptors. Its multiple referents to far-left ideologues and iconography (e.g., a Maoist political poster²⁸⁵, a Che Guevara quote²⁸⁶, a lip-synced aria on Lenin's call for *Vernichtung* [Destruction/Obliteration]²⁸⁷, and a book [after which *Theory* is titled] authored by a

²⁷⁸ Anania, Billie. "The Dada Movement's Political Turn." Jacobin.com. March 25, 2022.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20220921050253/https://jacobin.com/2022/03/dada-movement-radical-weimar-republic-political-art>.

²⁷⁹ "The Dada Movement - Berlin, Cologne, Hanover, Holland." dadart.com. Accessed April 3, 2024.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230228034635/https://www.dadart.com/dadaism/dada/022-dada-berlin.html>.

²⁸⁰ Visser, Joep De. "Dadaism in Berlin. The Radical Opponents of the Establishment and Their (Un)Organised Contradictions." joepwritesthehistoryofberlin.wordpress.com. March 15, 2013.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230201161638/https://joepwritesthehistoryofberlin.wordpress.com/2013/03/15/dada/>.

²⁸¹ Anania.

²⁸² John Heartfield and Rudolf Schlichter's *Prussian Archangel* (an effigy of a pig soldier hanging from a ceiling and accompanied by incendiary text) earned them a defamation charge from authorities:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120204221731/https://weimarart.blogspot.com/2010/06/berlin-dada-fair-1920.html>.

The work was exhibited in 1920 during the First International Dada Fair.

²⁸³ Anania.

²⁸⁴ Richter, Hans. *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965, 122.

²⁸⁵ A Maoist political poster in the background during Reinholdtsen's speech: video, 00:21:05, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=ufd9niphjtNatk8a&t=1265>.

²⁸⁶ Projection of Che Guevara quote "IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO WAIT!": video, 00:43:54, <https://youtu.be/VsT0ZkbwYdg?si=fHyIRhVkJDoZxtVio&t=2634>.

²⁸⁷ Ugelvik lip-syncing the "destruction" aria: video, 01:07:47, op. cit.

philosopher who has argued for a resurrection of communism²⁸⁸) support the following news headline styled summary of its theatrical narrative: ultra-far-left artist resorts to professional suicide after failing to form an anarcho-primitivist utopia on an island in Oslo's fjord. That *Theory* embodies a leftist politic seems undeniable. Despite espousing these leftist ideals, *Theory* suggests (in elaborate terms) that attempting to transcend or destroy our neoliberal reality is hopeless, yet Reinholdtsen proclaims, "I go on, in order to think and push to their paradoxical radiance the reasons that I would have for not going on,"²⁸⁹ refusing to rest.

Even so, Reinholdtsen's connection to the Berlin Dadaists reaches beyond similarities in artistic intent and thematic content. In *Theory*'s conceptual opening, Reinholdtsen employs a technique attributed to the Berlin Dadaists, a musical form of photomontage. Similarly to Berlin Dadaist John Heartfield's²⁹⁰ use of montage with Nazi photographs as a weapon against fascism and The Third Reich²⁹¹, Reinholdtsen stitches together two musical works that create a Frankenstein monster of opposing ideologies held by the East and West. Reinholdtsen's and Heartfield's work share a similar patchwork approach to mocking powerful political entities.

A century after Dada formed, Reinholdtsen found familiar fears to similar systemic problems faced by the Dadaists. *Theory* acknowledges that this time has passed and, more importantly, that humanity did not make progress towards addressing these underlying problems. In fact, we solidified a much more powerful and systemically entrenched version of the capitalism the Dadaists railed against. Considering its pairing of historical awareness and

²⁸⁸ Badiou, Alain. *Philosophy and the Idea of Communism: Alain Badiou in Conversation with Peter Engelmann*. English ed. Malden, MA: Polity, 2015, 101.

²⁸⁹ Reinholdtsen, "The Return of...".

²⁹⁰ George Grosz regarded Heartfield as the inventor of photomontage. Selz, Peter. "John Heartfield's 'Photomontages.'" *The Massachusetts Review* 4, no. 2 (1963): 310. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25079020>.

²⁹¹ Two of John Heartfield's Nazi Photomontages: https://archive.org/details/384x_20240403.

similarity to political intentions, thematic contents, and (to some extent) artistic techniques within Dada, the label Neo-Dadaist fits *Theory*.²⁹²

6.2 Reinholdtsen's Conviction

While many Dadaists took a biting satirical stance towards and ironic distance from their material, Reinholdtsen's work is utterly personal. He wants to transcend the political ideology of his time and open the possibility for a new perspective on the world—not merely mimetically exacerbate it by perpetuating, highlighting, or attempting to only create a crack in the current dominant political ideology. At the same time, Reinholdtsen's often self-effacing, silly, or farcical tones hide a painful self-awareness of the grandiosity of this conviction (and the difficulty and unlikelihood that this conviction could be fully realized in his art or someone else's). The vulnerability exemplified in this sincere recognition and humble self-reflexivity can break down barriers between artists and audiences that most contemporary composers are happy (or fearfully compelled) to hide behind.

Reinholdtsen believes that he “overplays” aspects of his compositional self (e.g., the moving of *The Norwegian Opra* to a Swedish forest)²⁹³. In my many conversations with him, Reinholdtsen underplays (rather than overstates) the importance of his work. The importance of

²⁹² I am not the first to brand Reinholdtsen's work Neo-Dadaist: percussionist Håkon Stene (in his critical reflection for artistic research at NMH), *The Los Angeles Times* (in their article on Reinholdtsen's performance of *Unsichtbare Musik* in LA), Brandon Farnsworth and Christian Grüny (in their new [2024] open access anthology on institutional critique in New Music), and (perhaps most notably and certainly most humorously) a shouting, angry, and offended German audience member during a performance of Reinholdtsen's *Unsichtbare Musik* at the Darmstadt Summer Courses in 2010.

²⁹³ Reinholdtsen stating that he “overplays” his compositional self: Murins, video, 00:38:15, <https://youtu.be/PGZ3KMYuWHI?si=7p0tXezXhzd-k0IZ&t=2295>.

Reinholdtsen's work does not rest upon whether his work achieves transcendence of a political reality but rests upon his willingness to genuinely attempt this transcendence. Reinholdtsen's humor, self-deprecation, and slapstick antics never come across as wholly ironic or derisive but really serve to highlight Reinholdtsen's angst in the face of humanity's hellbent acceleration down the path to its own destruction.

Over drinks after attending an NMH student composers' concert, Reinholdtsen (staring off to the side somewhere and with a neurotic, pain-filled [though somehow equally hope-filled] expression) exclaimed, "Does anyone care?". With hours of conversation as context for this exclamation, I knew immediately what he meant by that question. Does anyone care about his music? New Music, conceptual art, contemporary art with its critical stance, etc.? The accelerating acceleration of economic inequality in the West? The exponential growth of the military industrial complex? The climate disaster? The power of Reinholdtsen's work is in its allowance of others to see, hear, and feel the state of our world through his particularity. In Reinholdtsen's work, one can glimpse Hegel's *Geist* [World Spirit].

Courage is indispensable because in politics not life but the world is at stake, a world about which we have to decide how it is going to look and to sound and in what shape we want it to outlast us.²⁹⁴

I believe something similar can be said of art as the benchmark against which our ability to conceive of the world we desire to create through political means can be judged.

²⁹⁴ Arendt, 35-6.

Appendix A *Sløserikommisjonen* in Context: Norway's Recent Freedom Debates

Traavik's *Sløserikommisjonen* emerged within a tense time in Norwegian politics where questions of "freedom" were being scrutinized. In 2020, *Ytringsfrihetskommisjonen* [The Freedom of Expression Commission] was tasked with examining various aspects, including the influence of the internet on freedom of speech and editorial accountability. Among the members invited were (according to member Begard Reza²⁹⁵ in her *VG*²⁹⁶ article) *kulturkrigere* [culture warriors]²⁹⁷ who use the US-imported terms "identity politics" and "cancel culture" as their main weapons against social criticisms of language as power and racism.²⁹⁸

Within this article, Reza publicly announced and outlined her reasons for withdrawing from *Ytringsfrihetskommisjonen*. Chief among them were the commission's invitation of Sjøberg²⁹⁹ to join the commission as a member as well as what Reza deemed the violation of the commission's *punkt* [point] 4 which requires the facilitation of a broad public debate that includes persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and national minorities as well as ethnic, religious, linguistic, and sexual minorities.³⁰⁰

The fallout from Reza's resignation was heightened when the freedom commission's leader Kjersti Løken Stavrum gave commission member Kjetil Rolness access to a subsequent

²⁹⁵ Reza is the secretary general of Salam (a humanitarian organization for LGBTIQ+ people with a Muslim background).

²⁹⁶ *VG* or *Verdens Gang* [The course of the world] is a tabloid and the most read online newspaper in Norway.

²⁹⁷ In 1992, the Republican Pat Buchanan coined the term "culture war" to describe conservatives' struggle to return to traditional "American" values that had prevailed in the 1950s, as opposed to liberal values from the civil rights movement and countercultures which he believed had harmed the country.

²⁹⁸ Reza, Begard. "Derfor trekker jeg meg fra Ytringsfrihetskommisjonen." *Verdens Gang*, June 23, 2021. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210623081050/https://www.vg.no/nyheter/meninger/i/R9JgBW/derfor-trekker-jeg-meg-fra-ytringsfrihetskommisjonen>.

²⁹⁹ Sibué-Birkeland.

³⁰⁰ Reza, "Derfor...".

yet-to-be published in-progress Reza VG article without Reza's permission or knowledge.

Rolness framed the incident publicly in his *Subjekt* article:

In this text I am sharing unpublished material, without permission. The material was intended to detonate as a new “bomb” in the debate, and hit me, among other things. So, see this as an attempt at a controlled explosion, for teaching or informational purposes. And an opportunity to ask some fundamental questions³⁰¹ about today's speech climate[.]³⁰²

Reza's “bomb” was the sharing of her experience on the first day of the commission meeting during a break in a toilet queue wherein Rolness and another person [anonymized by the article's author] loudly trumpeted sexualized and objectifying comments about trans people and their abdomens³⁰³ as they gestured at their own genitals to emphasize their point³⁰⁴. Rolness went on to wholly deny the accusation. In her *Utrop*³⁰⁵ article, Reza responded to Rolness with a point-by-point refutation of the positions in his article.³⁰⁶

Amidst the events of this scandal, 15 artist organizations (in solidarity with Reza's resignation) signed a petition addressed to the freedom commission regarding the increased conflict surrounding the value and status of art in Norwegian society and the resulting threats,

³⁰¹ Rolness's questions: “Are there no limits to what political activists can say to damage a public commission and advance their own cause? Are lies about named members acceptable means in the fight? Are there no limits to which claims can end up in print in chronicles? Or how long a newspaper can take to decide on publication? While the “accused” are informed of the charges, and don't know when—or if—they end up in jail? Do the organizations in the art world understand what kind of campaign they support? Do they not see that the threat to freedom of expression comes not only from culturally hostile right-wing forces, but also from illiberal, irrational actors in their own ranks?” Rolness, Kjetil. “Sex, løgn og ytringsfrihetskommisjonen.” *Subjekt*, July 30, 2021.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20221201171701/https://subjekt.no/2021/07/30/sex-logn-og-ytringsfrihetskommisjonen/>.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Reza, Begard. “Uredelig og usant fra Ytringsfrihetskommisjonen.” *Utrop*, August 17, 2021.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20221208154236/https://www.utrop.no/plenum/ytringer/271517/>.

³⁰⁵ *Utrop* is the first online newspaper for minorities in Norway.

³⁰⁶ Reza, “Uredelig...”.

violence, and harassment of artists who often must stand alone in these demanding situations.³⁰⁷

This only spurred more controversy as prominent author Roy Jacobsen resigned (as a 36-year member) from *Forfatterforeningen* [The Norwegian Authors' Association] in protest of the petition stating that

I am a supporter of a state that is generous in the cultural field, but the premise is that it must be an open and free debate. The petition tries to place restrictions on the free debate. I cannot be a member of an association that supports the message of protecting artists from criticism.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ 15 Kunstnerorganisasjoner. "Vi anmoder Ytringsfrihetskommisjonen om å ta dette på ytterste alvor." *Subjekt*, June 25, 2021. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230530015250/https://subjekt.no/2021/06/25/vi-anmoder-ytringsfrihetskommisjonen-om-a-CC%8A-ta-dette-pa-CC%8A-ytterste-alvor/>.

³⁰⁸ Svelstad, Oda E., and Camilla Norli. "Roy Jacobsen melder seg ut av den norske Forfatterforeningen." *Verdens Gang*, July 5, 2021. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230906114451/https://www.vg.no/rampelys/bok/i/aPr11M/roy-jacobsen-melder-seg-ut-av-den-norske-forfatterforeningen>.

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Dissertation Composition

[Repetition Exercise: A Play in Three Lectures](#)³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹ *Repetition Exercise* video documentation:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nfxm8W9IVHTMB_esYYSzvsWm5Ow6piBI/view?usp=sharing.