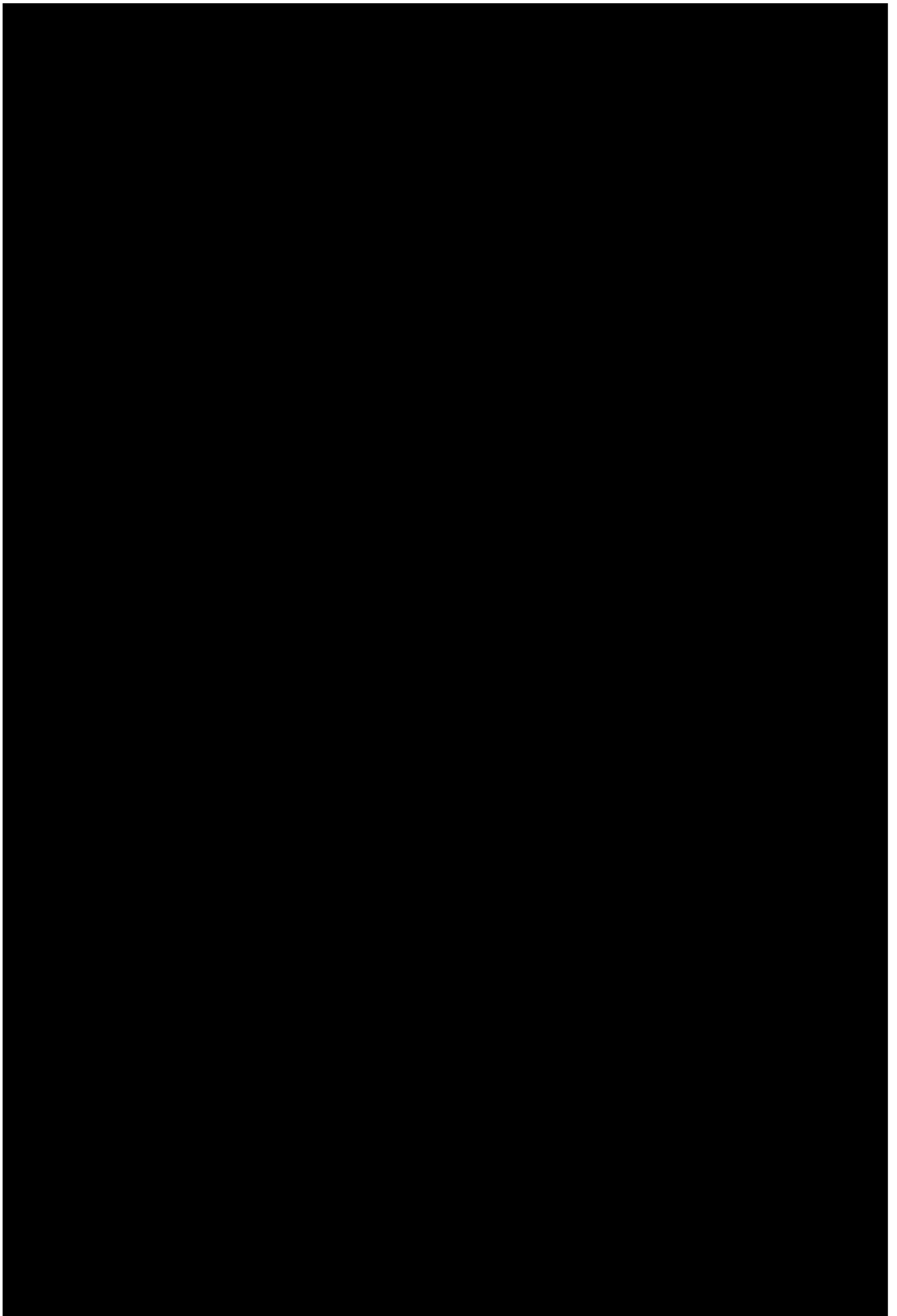
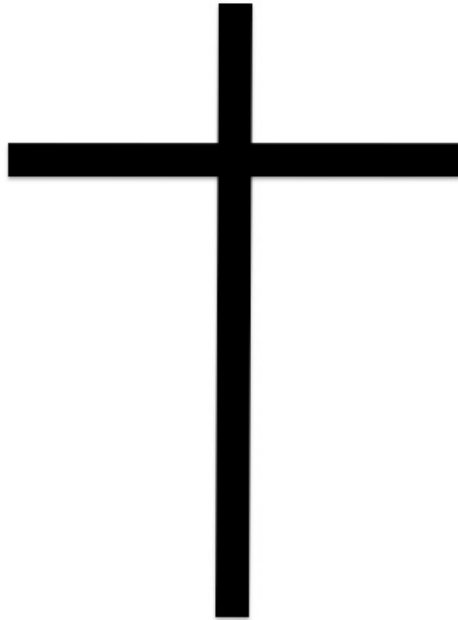


THERE WILL BE NO CRITICAL REFLECTION



The last bag of remains from The Norwegian Opra is thrown into the public garbage dump in Oslo:





THE NORWEGIAN OPRA
2009-2013

It is the 30th February 11 pm 2014, Heiligenstadt. The Research Advisor at The Norwegian Academy of Music has granted me an extra two weeks to finish my “critical reflection” for my opera house project “The Norwegian Opra”. Now my deadline is 1st March. Which means I have to finish the thing in just a few hours time. But the truth is, I have still not begun writing (except for these five sentences). Inspiration is lacking. My flesh is weak and my spirit is even worse. I have been drinking coffee constantly for the last two months in an attempt to ignite some spark of energy. But I am tired. I want to sleep. Honestly, I want to die. And quit composing¹. I can’t even seem to remember what my project was. I don’t remember what I was trying to investigate or what my research questions were. At the moment, I totally lack interest in it. Some composers and artists never get tired of revising and documenting and promoting and re-performing old works. I just feel dirty when I think about it. After every little premiere I always try to forget what happened. The project “The Norwegian Opra” did have some kind of power when it was still alive, I guess, and the performances and the intense production periods had their own dynamic and logic, but I failed to do much reflection underway. It is not a

¹ And move to Albania. Bomb the internet. Begin studies in History or Mathematics. Become religious. Change my therapist. Etc.

project suited to any critical reflecting. It was all very un-intellectual. I must have been at my intellectual low point during these years. It was more some kind of sustained panic action. Maybe it was a kind of illness more than an academic art project. Now I only have a strong feeling of shame and disgust and that is probably an impossible point of departure for a reflection on the work. I even have put myself in a situation where I have to write in English², which is a language I have no feeling for. I already sense that each sentence is too short and the rhythm becomes primitive and rigid. It is a poor man's Hemingway. It is the language of capitalism, imperialism and pop music. I hate the sound and the looks of English. How can anyone reflect about anything in such a language – the *Mördersprache* of today's world?

*

That first paragraph took me two hours to write. I would of course have deleted it if I had time to write a new one, or if I had the skill and concentration to write one with any relevant content. *Ach, wie wär es möglich, das ich dann die Schwäche eines Sinnes angeben sollte, der bei mir in einem vollkommenern Grade als bei andern sein sollte, einen Sinn, den ich einst in der größten Vollkommenheit besaß, in einer Vollkommenheit, wie ihn wenige von meinem Fache gewiss haben noch gehabt haben.* My critical reflection sense is lost.

² The intention was originally that this project should boost my international career.



Opera director during writing of the critical reflection.

On the 2nd March I *have* to begin my next piece, the first after the death of The Norwegian Opra. I am already very late for that as well (and I have no ideas). I know that it will have to be an orchestra in the piece. And the orchestra needs many, many notes. And I have never written anything for the orchestra before. And I am not even sure about the range of the clarinet (or the snare drum). As a matter of fact I always loathed my (successful) friends who farted out orchestra piece after orchestra piece. It is absolutely impossible to do any relevant art in the medium of the orchestra! It is not part of the tradition of contemporary music at all! It fell off the wagon after *Gurre-lieder*!! Writing for the orchestra is wasting your time!!! It is submitting to the system!!!! It is just a career pushing exercise!!!! It is something you do to impress your mother.

Rrrrrrrring! Oh my God! The phone is ringing!

It is Asamisimasa (the famous new music ensemble). "Please remember that it will be a performance of your August Strindberg adaption *Inferno* at the prestigious festival Ultraschall in Berlin today. It could be your international breakthrough. This is your moment, maybe. Johannes Kreidler will be in the audience. You have to come to push the video button on and off, to revise the 'mid life crisis jogging section', to make sure the percussionist wears a business style white shirt instead of some sexy fashion shit, to insert flour and turmeric powder into the balloons to create the spectacular quasi alchemic explosions, to cook fake *feces* out of rolled oats and chocolate. You will get no fee and I hope you have booked you plane ticket already."

One less day of reflecting on the reflection.

Ach, Schmach! I want to stay at home in my armchair reading Thomas Bernhard and yelling at the curtains instead.

*

The rehearsals are not going well. Actually, there *is* no rehearsal because the young German superstar composer Martin Schüttler, which will be performed at the same concert as me, apparently needs TWO DAYS to put up his sophisticated electronic stuff of which the effect is still a mystery for me. Ok, no rehearsals then. Which is a little risky as I have changed quite a few things in the piece the last days and there are new sound files (Strindberg translated into German) that we didn't really have time to test. We will have to trust Fate and the Gods of Technology.

I get a call from the nervous festival director. I tell him that I hope he is aware that the concert will be two hours long and that it will be a problem for the ones in the audience wanting to go to the next concert of the festival, which of course will begin immediately after. I also add that this is not really my responsibility. The festival director and the ensemble are the ones who have done the programming. I will only have a piece performed at the concert. More nervousness. The festival director will do some thinking. New call. The festival director says that the concert is too long. I agree. He hints that maybe one piece has to be removed... Or shortened... I make a "telling silence" and he doesn't dare to finish his suggestion. The technical problems continue. The six different pieces of the concert all have different set ups. The Tonmeister is working overtime. His

ten or so assistants appear a little uninspired and it is hard to understand who is responsible for what. I am very happy when four chairs that I asked for suddenly appear. Still, each new technical test reveals a new problem. A lady asks me if there will be "Schmutz" on the floor. I answer "no", which is not really true in a hundred-per-cent kind of way. One hour before the concert one of the performers suggests that we cancel *Inferno* because "it's too much stress". I answer: "Ikke faen!" which is a way of saying "no" with emphasis in Norwegian.

The concert begins. In the first piece (by Martin Schüttler) there are unfortunately technical problems. Some sound files are never played. He tells me afterwards that these sound files were really important for the general dramaturgy of the piece. Then there are three pieces for loudspeakers of totally different aesthetics with a lot of rigging in between. The audience has been informed that this is a radio transmission and somebody will be talking to the radio listeners in between the pieces and we, the audience in the hall, will have to wait and wait in concentration draining silence while something is being said somewhere else to somebody else. Next piece. The click track is apparently not working. The ten people in the technical crew are not too happy to go on stage and are instead letting the musicians try to solve the problem themselves. It seems like the percussion player has a theory of what is wrong. After ten minutes the problem is solved and the piece begins. Nice piece. My piece will be after. I usually prefer to have my pieces played after bad pieces. I had a piece right after Ferneyhough in Darmstadt once. It was my greatest success.

Applause. Rigging. Too much rigging actually!! The plan that everybody agreed upon was not to rig anything! I had suggested to the producers that we either have a real clearing of the stage or we do nothing. To have something in between will look shit. Also, to save time, I had accepted as a compromise and gift to the arrangers that we make no intermission (even though the audience at this point were clearly exhausted, not to say bored). We were going to just immediately continue with *Inferno*. Instead it becomes an intermission. The audience leaves the auditorium. The concert has already lasted one hour and forty minutes and my piece is forty minutes. Anyways, after fifteen minutes, the audience (which has been substantially reduced in numbers) again sit in their chairs. The light is lowered. The performer of my piece walks onto stage and strikes the midi drum before there is silence in the hall (against my instructions. The beginning should not be performed as an expression of confidence, but rather in a state of apathy and lazy nonchalance). There is unfortunately no sound from the loudspeakers. Technical problems. The performer turns to his computer. The mistake is not found. After some confusion the Tonmeister shouts to the audience that we will have to make another intermission. The audience doesn't seem too enthusiastic. The performer walks back and forth on stage in his white business style shirt trying to fix things. Some of the radio technicians had pulled out a cable too much in the rigging, we learned afterwards. I am still sitting next to the mixing board ready to push the video button on and off.

After five minutes the festival director comes onto stage with a microphone. He is exhausted. He has been running from the venue where the next concert will take place to inform them to postpone it. He manages to get a few laughs from the audience by plunking down into the armchair that was supposed to be a prop for my piece and thereby underlining his exhaustion. He says something about the logistics of running a festival and that it is not so easy always, which is probably true. He says that he has

discussed with the ensemble (not the composer) and decided to cancel the last piece. He also says he is very sorry.

Cleaning. Gathering of props. Drinking. Hyper self-ironic loud talking. "Hurrah! An evening without shame!" Mid life crisis dancing at a Kreuzberg gay disco. Falling asleep on the floor of an unknown young composer at 8 am. Going home. No explanation or excuses received either personally or by e-mail.

*

Something is rotten concerning the state of contemporary music. The grand totality of production, institutions, presentations and infrastructure of contemporary music is a mire that sucks out whatever remains of creative energy. It all serves only its own bureaucratic feedback loop. How can we geniuses be free in this jail of anti art structures? Crisis! It's a crisis! CONTEMPORARY MUSIC IS IN CRISIS!

Wait! Where have I heard this word before ("Crisis!!")? Haven't I myself repeatedly been screaming it out from the stage and in seminar halls? Haven't this word been the refrain in every of my pieces from at least 12 years back³? Who is having a problem here? It seems like other composers are very fine and relaxed. They wake up at 8 am every day

³ Yes. For example here:



and quietly and humbly continue work on their careers. CAN'T YOU ALL SEE IT'S A CRISIS⁴??

For the first time since the dramatic drowning of Narcissus in the dirty pond of self-reflection at the final production at The Norwegian Opra, I long back to the utopia of my own living room stage. This "opra", which was the newly invented genre notion, was called *Narcissus* and ended in a logical and beautiful way, or so I felt at the time. Narcissus is the metaphor for the opera house itself and its four-year history. He doesn't care about the love and flattering of others. He is centripetally self-absorbed. He is happily enclosed in a private bubble of manic depression, ridden by Grössenwahn, totally uninterested in impulses from the outside. This world is only able to develop through mutations. There is no breeding and expansion of the genetic pool of ideas. But it was Art at its purest, unstained by pragmatism.

Still, he *had* to be killed. Four years were enough. He had to die and transform into a plant without ambitions (a Narcissus flower). I was fed up and happy to leave the introvert egotism of the project and looking forward to again take part in the networking and jolly professional friendships of the festival world and to discuss and share knowledge with experienced musicians and schooled theoreticians and music critics. Now, for the first time in my life, it felt right to accept a commission for orchestra! It would be fantastic to just write many, many notes going up and down and then up again, to return to the Elysium fields of "Pitch und Dauern", of details of musical form and exploration of tricks of extended instrumental techniques. I looked so much forward to closing the opera house for good and enter into a new calm yoga existence of the clearly defined frame of the orchestra.

⁴ I admit I have been feeling rather paranoid screaming "Crisis! Crisis!" for 12 years while all others seemingly just go on happily as if nothing is the matter, celebrating the internet and laptops and what do I know. But! Lo and behold! See what I found in the new edition of Paul Griffiths' standard work on new music *Modern Music and after*, in what is a kind of conclusion to the whole book and a view on the present situation:

The past continued to seep into new music, and qualities of retrospection, reinspection, retrieval, recuperation or recycling earlier found in Ligeti and Berio, Rihm and Riehm, Schnebel and Goehr, Adams and Saariaho, or Pesson and Pauset became inescapable, contribution to the stationary feel of music in the new century – the new millenium. From one point of view, music became more realistic – more attuned to its audience's habit of listening.

The visionary times are over it seems. And he continues:

The stability of new music – the fact that there has been no major innovation since the developments in computer sound synthesis, noise composition, new complexity, spectral music, and minimalism in the 70s – may also have something to do with the greying of the avantgarde.

There is "NO MAJOR INNOVATION"! The reason is maybe the bettering of general health conditions in the West meaning the lifespan of a Elliot Carter (not a Mozart) is now the new composer norm. Anyways, Griffiths and I agree that it's a CRISIS!!

But this *is* the temptation of the Devil. I was right all the time (during the Fellowship Programme)! Contemporary music *is* in Crisis. And this must have a consequence! I can't keep screaming "crisis" for the rest of my life! I have to reflect on this! I have to reflect! I still have one hour and 24 minutes left until the deadline!! New page!

THE NORWEGIAN OPRA

**Critical Reflection,
Philosophisch-ideologisch-
ästhetische Theorie,
Manifesto,
Oper und Drama 2,
Picture book
and
New FIVE-YEAR PLAN.**

Trond Reinholdtsen

Artistic research project “The Norwegian Opra”
The Norwegian Academy of Music
Documentation at www.thenorwegianopra.no

My supervisors were the highly inspiring characters of Olav Anton Thommessen and Manos Tsangaris, but since I am not very into this idea of “critique” (more on that later), either giving or receiving, they should not be blamed too much.

BEAUTY REFLECTED:



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**THE NORWEGIAN OPRA
PRODUCTIONS:**

(2009 *The Norwegian Opra*, launch, 30 opra trailers, 2 ½ hours)

2009 *Fitzcarraldo*, video loop, 3 min

2010 *Orpheus*, 3 act opra, 2 ½ hours

2010 *The Apocalypse*, 4 act opra, 3 hours

2010 *Cinderella*, discarded opra

2011 *Utopia*, 5 act opra, 2 ½ hours

2011 *Penelope*, performance

2011 *Faust, or the Decline of Western Music*, for pianist, Power Point, sound and theatrical effects, 45 min

2012 *Musik*, for ensemble, composer/lecturer, Power Point, opra film, 6
Gesamtkunstwerkmaschinen, 40 min

2013 *Inferno*, for percussionist, recorded sound, theatrical effects, gorilla films, 35 min

2013 *Narcissus*, 2 act opra, 3 hours

INTRODUCTION

Shortly before the premiere of *Orpheus*, the opening performance at The Norwegian Opra, the aesthetical-ideological programme of the The Norwegian Opra was formulated to the public in the following text published on the opera house's website and read aloud at a seminar for fellow researchers in Bergen:

The Norwegian Opra Theory and Propaganda Department Publication I
1st Dec 2009

DIE GEBURT DES OPRA DURCH DIE KRISE DER ZEITGENÖSSISCHEN MUSIK: THE NORWEGIAN OPRA

The project will consist in forming and running a complete opera house which during three years will produce (at least) fifteen new «opras». The composer and researcher Trond Reinholdtsen will be the dictatorial opera director, composer, main performer, director and producer, but will also invite artists to take part in different forms of collaborations unique for each production. A cheap ground floor apartment in a noisy street in Gamlebyen Oslo will function as the opera house and stage, with all the opera houses traditional functions potentially intact, like PR-department, restaurant, programme book publisher and workers union, where the whole structure of the institution will be artistically exploited. The opras will be very different in format, from large scenic productions and guest plays («The Norwegian Opra on tour»), to conceptual sketches, recorded invisible operas and musical performances. The Norwegian Opra will function as a parallel to Richard Wagners famous Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, which was built exclusively to perform Wagners own operas. The main aim for the project will be to investigate possibilities for radical and unexpected ways of understanding opera as an art genre by approaching the whole apparatus of opera as an experimental field:

·Is it possible to strengthen 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 multi-medial 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?

Rather soon, a further question was added, which in its pompousness became the main problematic of the project, and also summed up all the other questions:

· What is artistic freedom?⁵

It is probably over-ambitious to expect of an artistic research project that all of these problems should find satisfactory conclusions. But at least, the last and most important question got a clear answer.

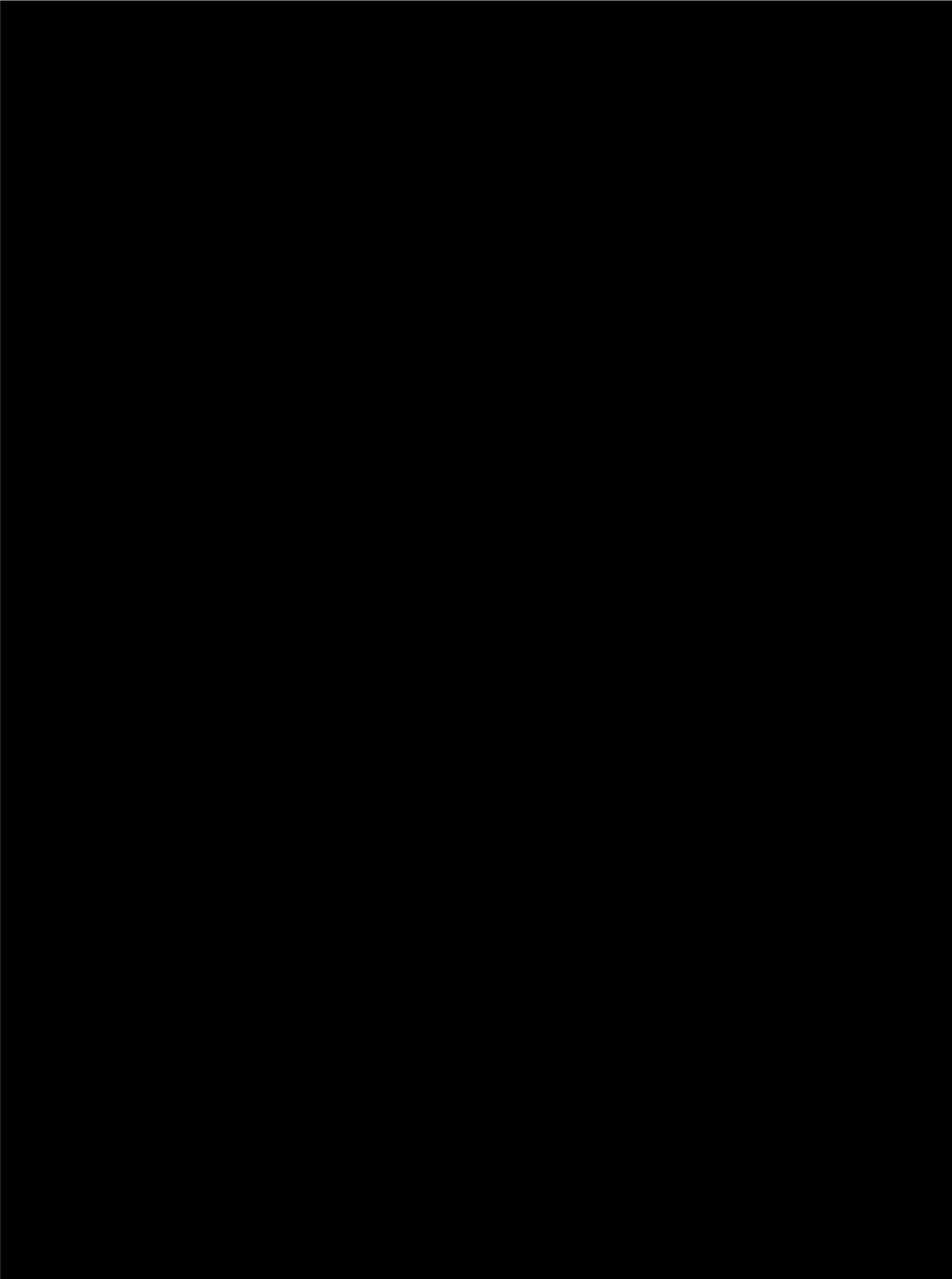
⁵ It was for example raised in the piece *Musik* (at the point where the composer has just walked off stage and thereby left the institution of the festival concert situation, and decided to build a private opera house instead) with a reference to Beethoven's *Fidelio*:



**CHAPTER ONE:
WHAT IS ARTISTIC FREEDOM?**

To be able to say “no”.

THE NORWEGIAN OPRA REFLECTED:



APPENDIX I:

**REFLECTION AS THE
NEGATIVE OF
ARTISTIC FREEDOM**

As is known from the Greek Myth, Narcissus dies in front of his reflection:



It seemed very clear for me all through the four-year period of the project that writing a “reflection” would be deadly for The Norwegian Opra.

I have nothing against theory (or the activity of reflecting/thinking) in general. The problem today is rather that people *do* too much and think too little (especially composers). As a matter of fact I consider myself a supporter of a stronger influx of aesthetical, political and philosophical discourses into music. Compared to other forms of art, music and musicology has for a long time been somewhat hermetic and are too

often narrowly focused on details of the written score and on compositional technique, more than reflecting around its general conditions and potentials for taking part in a broader discussion with the world. The artistic research fellowship programme could offer opportunities to change this a little. That I admit.

In no way am I against artists commenting or thinking around their own works. I have no particular fascination towards composers refusing to reveal “secrets” about their activity, or that prefers to cover their masterpieces in mystical silence: “I only ask questions. The curators have to provide the answers”.

At periods in life I have been active as a writer on music and often consider this work as more important than composing. Music is as much in need of context, discussion and an infrastructure of understandings and misunderstandings as other art forms. I was even part of founding a magazine (back then) called *Parergon*, meaning “outside of the frame” or “that which is around the work itself”, in an attempt to celebrate and intensify the contemporary musical discourse. My work for five years as artistic director of the festival *Happy Days*, which was criticised for being more theory than music (to which I agree), had the same goal. I adore the classics in the genre of composer’s “artist’s texts”, like the quasi positivist self desiccation of the young Karlheinz Stockhausen in his “Texte zur Musik”, the epic narrative of the Arnold Schoenberg vocation to carry the heavy cross of dodecaphony on his shoulders, constantly in strife with the philistines of tonality in “Style and Idea”⁶, the often over-confident subjectivity and the bold mixing of literature and music theory (and psychology!) of Robert Schumann, and of course the compositional do-it-yourself handbooks of Olivier Messiaen and Paul Hindemith⁷. Iannis Xenakis’ *Formalized Music* is a hilarious hot pot of contemporary musical technique, modern mathematics, pre-Socratic philosophy and social critique – all coming conceptually together in a new symbolic wedding of music and science. Conceptual music was never to reach the same heights again.

The Xenakis’ “reflection” is written at a point in the history of new music which was full of visions and new ideas. The invention of new *concepts* of organizing sound went faster than the actual composing of works (and the acoustical and cognitive testing of all the new hypothesis). The music *needed* the theory. They are intimately linked in a multi-medial work context consisting of both of text and sound.

I never had problems with doing “self-analysis” of my own works as a (modernist) younger composer. Starting from the piece *In context* from 2003 though, this happy time was over. From now on I also refused to write programme notes. Firstly, I felt it was a worn out genre. The programme note was such a totally standardized part of the

⁶ Who can resist this introduction to an article on the rather dry subject of twelve tone composition: “[...] there was no light before the Lord said: ‘Let there be Light.’ And since there was not yet light, the Lord’s omniscience embraced a vision of it which only His omnipotence could call forth”? (Arnold Schoenberg: “Composition with Twelve Tones” from “Style and Idea”)

⁷ It would of course be tempting to solve the reflection problem by turning this text into my own *Technique de mon langage musical*, with numerous exercises in the Reinholdtsen opra-style, to hopefully spread the Reinholdtsen School to all known corners of the civilized contemporary music world.

contemporary music concert ritual. One couldn't have a performance without publishing a programme note! This programme note was typically to be read by the listeners right before the beginning of the piece. It actually functioned like a compulsory actual *programme* for the piece, like in a symphonic poem by Liszt: *This* is what you are going to hear (whether a "story" or a compositional "concept"). We had all become programmatic music composers! Secondly, and the most important thing here, there was the fact that my pieces now included more and more "non-musical" elements. They had more concrete "information", clear references to philosophical and aesthetical discourses. They sometimes even included a pedagogical real time listening user's guide. It was aesthetically wrong to add a programme note on top of all that. The "programme note" was already part of the piece's time. I wanted it to be "inside the frame". The eventual commentary should evolve from the artwork itself, follow its inner, sometimes weird logic and not necessarily be scientifically or biographically reliable.

With the project The Norwegian Opra the situation became even more extreme. Since the reflection is the "public" and "official" written text on the project (it is written from "inside" the project) it has the same status as a large programme note in my view. It is impossible (or at least artistically unsatisfactory) to separate them. I *did* write a thesis during my master studies in composition where one was supposed to discuss ones own activity as a composer. I investigated the relation between contemporary music and "reality" as this was a hot topic in Oslo at the time⁸. Here I more or less did what was the normal expected solution, using relevant theory from contemporary music, literature theory and philosophy. This was executed without major mental breakdowns. In this situation it *was* possible to separate my musical works from the discussion (actually I left them completely out) and also the position of being a student allowed for a mode of writing that "applied to the rules". In the Fellowship Programme on the other hand, the art is supposed to be of "high international standard" (as formulated in the "Guidelines for the Assessment Committee"). This is certainly an ambitious goal for an academic programme, but I would like to applaud this bold emphasis. There will of course be several opinions on what art of the "high international standard" implies. In my view (and I think I am not totally alone in this) art (if it is more than bureaucracy) often has a brutal side. The activity of Art is precisely to experiment and challenge the coordinates in which it functions. Art has a way, maybe even a licence, to cut through established systems. For me, art is maybe best defined negatively: It is the opposite of confirming the status quo of the situation. If artistic research is to use a method based on "artistic thinking" (what else can it do?), it is a calculated opening up to a certain amount of chaos. A type of art that is a carrying out of "what is expected" of the programme is not

⁸ Now I read in the magazine *Positionen* that the craze of "Alltag" has finally reached German contemporary music. I am even invited to seminars in Darmstadt in a few weeks to discuss this new trend and I feel it is my job to tell the foreigners that hey, this is a thing of the 90's and that "jetzt ist UTOPIEN und KOMMUNISMUS und TRUE CHANGE wieder". The age of "soft interventions" and soup serving as the ultimate art form is over! This "Weltzuwendung" in my own past and in present Germany was countered in the second Act of *Narcissus* in its numerous subtle references to the narcissist "Weltabwendung" of the German Romantics like Schelling and others.

of “high international standard”, and it is certainly not “critique”. It would rather be art of a “medium Kongsberg standard⁹”.

Is it impossible to make art of “high international standard” where it is obligatory to include a “critical reflection”? Certainly not. But sometimes the logic and gravity of the art project and its process does not allow this. Is this an over-sensitive response? I claim that artistic sensitivity and urgency is exactly what an artist is trained to trust.

In The Norwegian Opra, not only the “programme notes”, but also the whole apparatus of reception are already included in the institution itself. The Norwegian Opra organized it’s own theoretical seminars (the most famous was *The Return of the Great Narratives* which was an intense attack on post-structuralism and propagated that opra should reclaim the central position (from film) as the “mythograph” (the instance which continue the interpretation and writing of myths) of our time: That is, as the Main Art Form) where only the employees of the opera house was admitted. The opera house had its own Theory and Propaganda Department, although this wing of the institution was not well functioning due to a breach in the collegial milieu after several sexual harassment scandals in the opera office. The opera director also embarked on a theoretical Lecture Tour (disguised under the title *Concert Music Piece*) to Copenhagen, Huddersfield, Leipzig and Corsham, explaining the logical transition from contemporary music to opra using Power Point and audio illustrations performed by musicians (an example can be seen here: [Concert Music Piece](#)). Even the set-up of the receivers, the audience, was “designed” (it was easy to control as the opera director also took care of the e-mail booking ticket office) so that only friends and well-meaning people were allowed¹⁰. I wanted it to be like a cult, like the Bayreuth predecessor. To change the infrastructure of The Norwegian Opra’s institution now, to allow for a distanced critique performed by the opera director himself, would be to compromise the whole project.

The project as a whole could probably be considered, at least in part, as an ongoing four-year “performance” with myself in the role as the megalomaniac hermit opera director. The nature of this form of performance is not always very clear, but it is probably natural to assume that the opera director is some “role” that Trond Reinholdtsen is playing, and that there is a difference between the behaviour and actions of the opera director and the private life of its Clark Kent version. It is fair to say that the “official voice” of the opera house was not one of rational reflection or distanced critique. The Norwegian Opra didn’t have a “polite” public language. It was more like a raving drunkard narcissist preaching manifestos and screaming out political dystopias. For my

⁹ This is where I grew up, went to piano lessons and also was a boy scout. The last activity was more like being part a guerrilla dada performance group though, and our scout patrol (Beaver) produced something like ten packed cassettes of songs, Hörspiele and poems in addition to several films (*The Viking Godolf* is a classic), “camp fire performance art” and fanzines. I didn’t have much connection to other Kongsberg art at the time so I will not be able to judge how our work stands in a quality relation to that.

¹⁰ This system collapsed in the final production *Narcissus*, where for the first time the strict half biblical idea of having a “chosen” audience was not possible. Not only was a “committee” let in to judge the quality of the performance, also bureaucrats and critics filled the hall. This opening was one of many symptoms that the opera house now laid on its deathbed.

piece at Donaueschingen, *Musik*, in 2012 I made an unexpected (for whom?) return to the programme note genre. Since this work is directly concerned with the discontents of the concert ritual¹¹ (etc) I decided to follow the expectations of the game this time and sent a text which was typical of the “opera director language”. I guess some would call this a “performative” text:

This exiting and informative little piece of program music begins with a systematic phenomenological investigation of "musical material" in today's contemporary music, where the human cognitive apparatus and its 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. A soft explosion is heard as if from far away: The pragmatism of the professional musician, the politics of commissions and the tactics of festival networking is ruthlessly exposed as grim metaphors for the policing of the status quo in bureaucratic capitalist society and more substantially: The phenomenal world as such is disqualified as an adequate arena for true artistic invention in the 21st century. Only theory at its most abstract and pure can help us now. After the Three Weak Centuries of Contemporary Music (1980-2010), lazily resting upon an aesthetic regime of artistic humility, consensus, poorly disguised entertainment, art as advertisement for Apple products, repeated exercises of deconstruction of deconstruction and a semi spiritual preference for sonic vagueness "trembling with mortality" – it becomes necessary at this moment in the piece (which exactly corresponds to the Golden Section moment) with a re-education of the new music audience, and to propose some new statements on musical ontology of mathematical rigor, centred around constructing a new foundation for Compositional Form able to strangle the spectre of post-modernism and prepare the ground not only for a reinvention of the actuality of music as an art form, but also to a new type of virginal Communism. But this gesture, let's call it a reactive classicism, is negated by a sudden strike of Angst of boring the audience. The result is a critical investigation of the notion of "freedom". The concert hall is dismissed as a valid dispositive for true utopian art production as a Return of the Grand Narratives is propagated with full force and non-ironic sincerity. But, with a Europe in moral and financial crisis, is it already too late? The great hero of antisocial musical idealism Conlon Nancarrow makes a surprising entrance onto the scene and offers an alternative in the form of the example of total seclusion from the official musical scene and presents a new prototype for the Gesamtkunstwerk Player Piano. In short: There should be something in this piece for all tastes.

Could this language be continued into the “critical reflection”? I think the obvious answer is no. Not if one is to take the notion of “criticality” seriously.

“Performance” is anyway not a very satisfying term here at all. I follow the idea that we all “perform” in different situations of life and constantly adjust our behaviour and our idea of ourselves. But without going into the philosophy, I refuse the idea of the vulgar

¹¹ The Norwegian Opra was constantly threatened by compromise and vanity. After three “pure” productions in the living room (*Orpheus, The Apocalypse, Utopia*) the opera director accepted three invitations to write pieces for conventional festival concert settings. This turn was thematized (critically reflected) and dismissed in one of these pieces, *Musik*, as the following quote reveals.

constructivism that claims we sdfjudithbutlersdfderridadfischerlichtesfsd¹². Yeah, you know what I mean. The Norwegian Opra was precisely an attempt to transcend or cut through all different kinds of “performances” we take part of in real (professional) life, and instead, as faithfully as possible, to be true to the idea of an attempted artistic autonomy and of some authentic unity of art creation and life. After all, my whole apartment and what exists of my daily routines was totally swallowed up by the artistic works (at least during the intensive production time) and the whole process and artistic result was a kind of mishmash of daily life and intensive staging, where the one could not be separated from the other. The big ideas and visions of the opera director are no part of a “play” and certainly no ironic posing. It is the closest I get to any honest communication of my artistic ideas. In the book to the exhibition *Utopie – Gesamtkunstwerk*¹³ it is argued that a new understanding of the term “Gesamtkunstwerk” not only designates a combination of many (all) art forms into a whole, but could also stand for an artistically exploited correspondence between artwork and life. In this sense my project, in it’s necessary mixing of visionary concepts and dishwashing, is a double Gesamtkunstwerk¹⁴.

It is in the writing of the critical reflection that I get into real problems. For the first time in the project, I am in a situation where I feel I have to indulge in a true “performance”. THIS IS THE PERFORMANCE. The writing of this sentence is a performance. Not the opra-shows. Not the behaviour of the opera director or the diva on and off stage. The opera house allowed me to have a space where I didn’t have to be part of a performance. The feeling I have *now* is that I am supposed to play my role in a clearly defined form of academic theatre. I am again trapped in a polluted ecosystem of institutions, critique and opinion, the whole soup that the opera house project wanted to transcend.

¹² Some would claim that the entire (publicly known) life of Andy Warhol was a performance. I don’t know if that is true. But hadn’t it been one of the great disasters of the 20th century if he at one point decided to go into a “critical reflexive” discussion on his own persona??

¹³ Edited by Agnes Husslein-Arco, Hrald Krejci and Bettina Steinbrügge.

¹⁴ One could argue that the great father of the Gesamtkunstwerk also did mix his visionary concepts and his dishwashing in several of his Music Dramas, which clearly are pumped-up mythical versions of very private frustrations, often of a sexual nature, for example in *Tannhäuser*. In the work of an artist like Christoph Schlingensiefel, who was an obvious reference for all directors (and composers) who decided to enter stage themselves, the difference between life and performance is extremely blurred, where even his gradually worsening health and subsequent death became part of his total art universe.

Example of transcendence of the soup: The advertisement for *Orpheus* in the window of The Norwegian Opra, Oslo gate 7:



The Norwegian Opra relates to classical conceptual art in that there is *one* idea that shapes the whole process of the project¹⁵: To construct a utopian space *freed* of all institutional concerns.

It was an act of emancipation of the (egotistic) artist in a musical artistic world increasingly overloaded with economical and bureaucratic structures of pragmatism. All

¹⁵ But maybe Conceptual Art is just an offspring of music? It was after all a composer, John Cage, that kick-started it all (at least according to the introduction of Peter Osborne's *Conceptual Art*), and the concept of the score was instrumental in the infant stage of the movement in the 60's in the works of Sol LeWitt and others. Also the hang-up on series and systems had its most important predecessor in musical serialism. Music *is* essentially a conceptual art form. It is always a tension field between conceptual thought and acoustic (or other) phenomena. As music (mostly) is an art form played out "in time" there is a potential for a complex approach to conceptuality where development, conflicts and polyphony of *ideas* are possible. If the Conceptual Art of the 60's was close to the poem (Marcel Broodthaers was even a poet until he decided to become an artist at the age of 40), I would argue that music is often more related to the genre of the novel, which is essentially "impure". To view The Norwegian Opra as a "concept" would maybe imply that there exists an initial idea that is a trigger of a huge process that in its unfolding in time and in interaction with the world is chaotic and full of paradoxes.

demands and restrictions from the Big Other, or other others, were confidently overruled.

The very idea of “critique” was thus not part of the universe of The Norwegian Opra. It was the main enemy.

The idea of founding an own institution implied an attempt to step out of the infinite loop of critique, and the critique of the critique, of which, I should admit at once, I have long experience¹⁶.

To found a new institution meant to define an intrinsic set of rules and practises that doesn't necessarily need to be defended in a dialogue with “the outside”¹⁷. The Thinking of The Norwegian Opra is one-directional and without doubt. It is a preacher, not a discussion partner.

¹⁶ The founding of the opera house was a direct reaction to my own 12 hardcore years of being a “music deconstructivist” highly inspired by works like *Sur scene* and *Staatstheater* by Mauricio Kagel. I had composed loads of works treating the many and strong “institutions” of new music (like the concert form, the ensemble, the (power) relation between composer and musician, economic structures and “the commission”) as part of the “musical material” that can be re-composed and developed and (following the term of Schoenberg) liquidated. In the end I had reached a position of artistic impotence. I was destroyed by critique. I should add though, that I also tried to build on the liberating potentials in Kagel's work: He opened up new music to all kinds of material (and thereby anticipating the “post-medium condition” in the visual art coined by art theoretician Rosalind Krauss much later) and also reconnected it to theatre, to politics and the wider world. In terms of “stage attitude” though, my consent to the Kagelian-Cagean ideal of the “disciplined action” was heavily challenged by my experiencing of the theatrical aesthetics of the Volksbühne in Berlin (which I enthusiastically visited from around 2000). The wild energy and embracing of chaos in the productions of Frank Castorf and Christoph Schlingensiefel was something I wanted to bring into the world of contemporary music.

¹⁷ Here there are significant differences in the work of the pioneers of Institutional Critique. My main hero for The Norwegian Opra would be the already mentioned Marcel Broodthaers who was a *constructor* of a new institution and opened the *Museum of Modern Art* in his own studio. He considered the museum itself as his “material” and the *autonomy* of his institution is essential. His counterpart in this sense would be Hans Haacke whose works went into direct confrontation with the established institution of the museum and his commissioners and examined the economical and political structures of the art system (for example in the famous work for the Guggenheim museum (*Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*) where he investigated dubious estate transaction activity by one of the museum's trustees and exposed the material as a beautiful series of photographs and documentation). After Haacke it was never again safe to be in the position of the commissioner (or festival director). One of the proponents of the so called “second generation” of Institutional Critique artists, Andrea Fraser, again re-enters the official museum and interacts with its standardized elements like the curator's opening speech and the audio guide tour which she turns into subversive performances.

Already half a year into the fellowship period, the new fellows were asked at one of the main gatherings at Voksenåsen (where all fellows from all art institutions of Norway meet to discuss their projects and the programme in general) to present their plans for the critical reflection. My presentation was half an hour of doubt and paradoxes without conclusion, and my position has unfortunately not changed during the fellowship period. No περιπέτεια to report¹⁸. The artistic production was no problem, at least not in quantity. My total output was something like 14 hours of condensed opra (of which only a smaller part was made public on the website. The Norwegian Opra took the idea of “ephemeral art” out to it’s extreme: The video documentation were often of bad quality, the scenography was always trashed during the show and thrown away right after the performance, it didn’t exist any conventional scores for posterity (except for schemes like this from *Narcissus* where the different performers are given time cues when to enter the stage:

	Trond	Snorre	Kai	Amund	Erik	Ragna	Christina
	Wagner sitter inne						
0'00		(TEPPE OPP)					
0'45"	arie: "F oder Fiss"						
0'54	"Fiss oder Giss..."		overhead 7				
1'40			overhead 8				
2'16	bass: "alt er gjort ført"		overhead 9				
2'29							
2'40	tenor: "Alt er gjort ført"			light to blue/lighter			
3'12	"F oder G oder G#..."			light change to darker			
5'16					serverer et. orange maske		
6'30					serverer et. blå maske		
7'15	Faust-tenorarie		overhead 10				
7'50							
7'55					light DRAMATIC/dynamic		
9'30	Strindbergsitat		overhead 11		light BRIGHT		
10'12							
10'40	røykmaskin				light MAGIC		
11'30	mer røyk	Mefisto inn					
13'00	bord ut						
15'10		Alchemy 2		Alchemy 1			
15'30							
15'50						Alchemy 3	
16'07	lytting		lytting				
17'46					light FADE to MYSTICAL		
20'00					light NORMAL	Alchemy 4	
20'15							dekke piano
20'30	SPACE-opera		SPACE-opera			SPACE-opera	
20'40	vifte: popcorn						
22'30	terris				light STROBE		
22'43			alle ut		light BLACKOUT		alle ut
23'14					light NORMAL		
23'35							
23'40							
24'08	SPACE-opera 2		SPACE-opera 2			Alchemy 6	
24'37	vifte: fjær/terris					SPACE-opera 2	SPACE-opera 2
27'07							
27'25	L'Albatross-arie						albatross inn
30'30			overhead 12				alb ballett
33'50				Wall St	Wall St		
35'15	konfetti					konfetti	
35'23	SPACE-opera 3	vifte: mel/saofilis	SPACE-opera 3	STROBE	SPACE-opera 3	konfetti!!!!	som albatross
38'46							
39'20				BLACKOUT			
				light NORMAL			

¹⁸ There is a lot of buzz in programme (also mentioned in the guidelines to the “critical reflection”) around the notion of the “turning point”, where, I imagine, at approximately 11 months into the project some inner conflict in the project comes to the surface which leads to a major crisis, catharsis and subsequent revision of the project description, following the dramaturgy of the classical Greek tragedy. As a composer in the tradition of Wagner, Stockhausen and Lenin though, I rather support the idea of 5-year (or longer) plans. Wagner more or less laid out the whole plan for both the libretto and the new groundbreaking aesthetics of the whole Ring cycle in 1848 and obediently executed this plan until its completion in 1874. Similarly Stockhausen wrote the “formula” for his Licht opera cycle in 1977 that was the structural genom for his seven opera monument.

¹⁹), and the operas were always played only once for a very limited number of audience witnesses). But I had no solution for the text that remained true to the Spirit of the project, except for uttering a Bartlebyian “I would prefer not to...” I honestly mean that the true failure of the project would be to compromise my core artistic concept.

I claim that the whole artistic production of The Norwegian Opera, which should be around 9 operas (analogous to the 9 Maoist model operas), in themselves contain “reflection” as they stand. The art form in which I work is hyper-reflexive in its nature.

¹⁹ The definition of Hans-Thies Lehmann’s so called “postdramatic theatre” is a form of theatre that does not (first and foremost) rely on a literary text. If we were to translate this thinking into opera it would maybe be to claim that opera does not necessarily rely on a traditional score. It would be easy to point out how the standardized hierarchical separation of work in traditional opera production functions conservatively, where the norm is that first the librettist writes the libretto, then the composer composes the score, then the director makes some drama, then the scenographer adds a fitting image on stage and so on. Lehmann argues for a “musicalization of theatre” where the different art forms are balanced in a more democratic way. It is certainly time for a “musicalization of opera”. For my pieces *Faust, or the Decline of Western Music*, *Musik* and *Inferno* I made a return to the paper score, but with the intension to take the format of the “study score” seriously. There are for example long passages of text, pictures and conceptual sketches that are bonus material for the reader and do not have a scenic or acoustic consequence. This is two pages from the score of *Musik*:

**SOOORRY VERLAG! I
KNOW THIS IS
SUPPOSED TO BE THE
OFFICIAL FINAL
PARTITUR BUT THIS
SECTION IS ABSOLUTE
SHITTY SO WE WILL
HAVE TO MAKE SOME
CHANGES HERE.
SORRY SORRY**

**I DON'T EVEN HAVE A
VERLAG! I MUST SAY
THAT HAVING A VERLAG
WOULD SAVE ME FROM
MUCH STRESS. THE
MUSICIANS ALWAYS
COMPLAINS ABOUT MY
SCORES AND DIE
MUSIKWISSENSCHAFTLE
RINNEN SIND TOTAL
NERVÖS UND GESTRES-**

And this is a page from the score of *Inferno*:



From the Artistic Research Workshops (private photo by the composer)

Through the artistic works themselves is “knowledge gained and experience shared”. This would be perfectly in line with the premise of the whole idea of artistic research: It *is* possible to do research *through* art. It should then follow: It is possible to do research through art, *without any explanation*.

The final production at the opera house, *Narcissus*, was obviously a reflection on the whole project. It included a *Werkeinführung* by myself, going through the history of the opera house and offering some structuralist analysis of it all. Moreover the main protagonist, acting as a metaphor for the whole opera house (as already mentioned), was continuously reflected in the muddy pond on stage. The Norwegian Opra reflects on its own image: Who am I? Why is my image slipping away as I start to cry? This is the archetypical staging of the questioning of the Self. The answer (the reflected image in the pond) was there for the public to see as precisely a “reflection”. Which academician can deny that?? Also, at one point in the narrative of the opra, Narcissus invoked a “theory fan” that blew crumbled pieces of paper into the faces of the audience. Each of the three members of the committee was handed a piece of this empty paper with the information that “this is the reflection” (which apparently was not taken seriously as I later received several topics on which to “elaborate further” in “the reflection to come”).

The only solution in the end was this:

To hand in a one-page document with only this sentence:
"There will be no critical reflection".

It is a little childish, but it is the Truth (both in a factual and artistic sense). Art should seek Truth.

This solution is what I have decided upon. The pages 2 to 87324 should be considered as the footnote to this sentence, which is put on page 1. It is a little like John Cage had written a five movement romantic symphony as a footnote to *4'33*, which we should be happy he didn't do.

Appendix II:

Hypothetical attempt to follow the rules of the system

"The candidate must submit:

Personal artistic position/work in relation to chosen subject area nationally and internationally; "

Position is number One.

"How the project contributes to professional development of the subject area;"

By setting a new standard as number One.

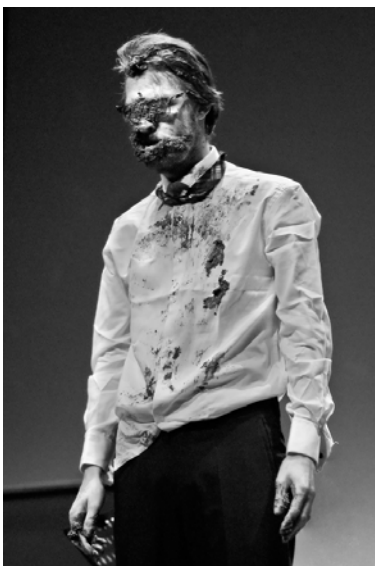
"Critical reflection on the process (artistic choices and turning points, theory applied, dialogue with various networks and the professional environment etc.);"

The process was ok, but could also have been better. It was a lot of depression. I also lost my girlfriend during the composition stress of the Donaueschingen piece.

"Critical reflection on results (self-evaluation in perspective of the revised project description)."

The result was not so good. I fell back into operatic and avant-garde clichés²⁰ several times. There were quite a lot of compromises and I had to rely on the amazing handy man skills of Snorre Hvamen all the time. But still it was better than the rest out there. Lesson for the future: It has to be SMALLER!

²⁰ For example here:



New Five-year plan

2014 Rest

2015 Yoga

2016 Soft social interactions

2017 Compose solo bassoon sonata number 1

2018 Retirement

**TO BE
CONTI
NUED**

...