

# Caught in the Ibsen Machine?

Tradition, transmission, transgression

*An analysis of Sebastian Hartmann's The Ibsen Machine and the 20<sup>th</sup>  
anniversary of the International Ibsen Festival*

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M.A. Thesis in Theatre Studies

Program for Aesthetics

IKOS, HF

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Fall 2012





## Summary

This thesis study of the the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Ibsen Festival, which took place at the National Theatre in 2010, and the main performance presented during the festival, Sebastian Hartmann's *The Ibsen Machine*. It discusses how The National Theatre, through the arrangement, has tended its role as a care-taker for Ibsen's dramatic heritage. A central part of my analysis is aimed at the festival event itself, and how the National Theatre through the arrangement of the festival seeks not only to reincorporate and develop the Ibsen tradition, but also to engage its audience in a debate and questioning over the value of Ibsen's artistic heritage and how it should be maintained. Sebastian Hartmann's *The Ibsen Machine* is discussed and analysis in light of the tendency towards self-questioning that characterizes the organization of the International Ibsen Festival.

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## Foreword

Writing this masters thesis has been a complicated affair. Without the people around me I am certain that completing the task would have been infinitely more complicated.

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor Live Hov for her guidance and advice. I would also like to thank Anita Hammer for sharing her thoughts and inspiring me at the start of this project. I also owe a great thanks to the National Theatre for having kindly given me access to the manuscript and video recording of *The Ibsen Machine*.

I would like to thank Mari Midthun for her beautiful illustration, and also Ingrid Austveg Evans for doing such an excellent job prof-reading my thesis.

A heartfelt thanks to my family for all their love and support. And also all my dear, dear friends for being such wonderfully clever and inspirational people.

Regretfully, the writing of this thesis has coincided with a the now seemingly imminent closure of the department of theatre studies at the University of Oslo. The writing process has therefore been intermingled with melancholy and frustration, but also, surprisingly, a renewed understanding for why my subject is both so important and so interesting. This is not in the least due to having had such truly wonderful comrades in arms in the fight against the closure of theatre studies: I am forever grateful to the insightful Eline Arbo, and the ever industrious Espen Dahl Hjort, and also my fellow companions in the newly formed Avdeling for Teatervitenskap: the wonderfully bright Sara Hammer and Heidi Jor.

Lastly, I extend a heartfelt thanks to the brilliant and loyal Hallvard Markus Stette, without whom I would be inextricably lost.

Tora Myklebust Optun

Oslo, fall 2012

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 On the Life and Death of Henrik Ibsen

Over a hundred years have passed since the death of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen in 1906. Time, it seems, has done little to diminish the great significance of Ibsen's artistic legacy, something that is perhaps most clearly seen if we, as this thesis does, look to the theatre. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and now also the 21<sup>st</sup>, Ibsen's dramas have become integrated components of theatre repertoires across the globe: To this date over 8500<sup>1</sup> different theatrical productions have been presented to audiences all over the world. In light of this it would appear that Ibsen has come to lead an astonishingly prosperous 'life beyond the grave'. We often turn to metaphors of this kind when discussing artists whose works we considered to be of particular importance. If we find a work of art to be meaningful, we might say that the artist responsible is alive, and, conversely, if we find it to be irrelevant, we might be tempted to say that the work as well as the artist is dead. Such descriptions could easily be dismissed as insipid, but a closer examination of what is meant when we say that Ibsen 'lives on' might, nevertheless, provide us with a clue as to how to approach and discuss the historical life of Ibsen's works.

When we say that Ibsen lives on we seek to express that in spite of the time that has gone by since their conception in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ibsen's dramas still speak to us. The expression attributes to the playwright, and his dramas, a status of being 'timeless'. It is not initially clear, however, how this idea of Ibsen's timelessness is to be understood. How do an artist and a work of art withstand the passing of time? One explanation could be that Ibsen's dramatic works *in themselves* contain a form of 'timeless quality', that enables them to ring out, so to speak, at any place and at any time. This understanding views Ibsen's timelessness as exactly that: *timeless* and subsequently a-historic. However, if we look at the actual historical unfolding of Ibsen's dramatic works it is difficult to determine a single cause that explains why we keep returning to these works. Ibsen's timelessness as described above becomes particularly problematic when trying to discuss Ibsen's 'life' in the theatre. The multiplicity of theatrical interpretations that make up the now global Ibsen theatre tradition would, if this perspective were laid down, would merely be seen as obscuring the determination of a

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<sup>1</sup> For the precise number of productions cf: <http://ibsen.net/index.gan?id=2953&subid=0>

universal cause for Ibsen's timelessness.

An alternative reading of the expression 'life beyond the grave' presents itself if we relate the discussion of Ibsen's longevity to the influence Ibsen's works have upon the world. This interpretation seems compatible with the logic of the expression, which clearly views Ibsen's posthumous life as dependent upon his works engaging the interpretive interest of living people – readers, researchers, audiences and artists. This interpretation views Ibsen's vitality as being realized in the meeting of an interpretive subject and the dramatic text, or, as in the theatre, in the meeting of an audience and a theatre production based on Ibsen. This perspective allows us to put aside the precise cause of Ibsen's influence, and view multiple interpretations of Ibsen's dramatic works as expressions of Ibsen's vitality. Moreover, this latter understanding of Ibsen's timelessness is, I would argue, the most productive when the aim is to discuss the theatre, since it allows us to reflect on the actual historical unfolding of Ibsen's works, rather than operating on the basis of an essentialist understanding of Ibsen's timeless appeal.

The theatrical history of Ibsen's works show us that as Ibsen's dramatic works have transgressed the borders of both time and space they have undergone significant changes with regards to how they are interpreted and performed. In light of this it would appear that while people all over the world have undoubtedly been affected by Ibsen's dramas, the dramatic works themselves have in turn been affected by the interpretive engagement of audiences, directors, and actors. How are we to understand these developments? Do they mean that Ibsen's dramatic works have taken on a 'life of their own', liberated from the playwright's intentions? And what can this mean for our understanding of Ibsen's timelessness?

### **1.1.1 Interweaving Ibsen: Forming Memories**

An answer to these questions can be found if we turn to the recently published *Global Ibsen – Performing Multiple Modernities* (2011). In the introduction to the book the theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte establishes a theoretical perspective on the globalization of Ibsen's dramas. Her reflections can therefore help shed light on how Ibsen's works have gone down in history. What is of particular interest to our discussion is Fischer-Lichte's argument that the theatre, as a aesthetic and cultural arena, has functioned as a catalyst to ensuring the historical expansion of Ibsen because it has presented theatrical *reinterpretations* of Ibsen's dramas. A theatre production, Fischer-Lichte points out, always involves a translation – an interpretation – of the dramatic work

from a point of view in time and place. This is the case regardless of how ‘true’ to the text, or to the original production, the specific theatre production aims to be (Fischer-Lichte, 2011: 9). What Fischer-Lichte’s analysis shows is that the sense of perspective enforced by the ontological specificity of theatre, which exists in the here and now of the theatre performance, is decisive in ensuring the historical expansion and ‘vitality’ of Ibsen. This means that while Ibsen can still be said to speak to us, he does so not via a unitary voice, but rather in a kaleidoscope of voices. Fischer-Lichte wishes to draw attention to how the expansion of Ibsen’s works, by being dependent upon reinterpretation from a cultural and historical point of view, must be approached as a multi-dimensional process, as opposed to a monolithic western take-over. She therefore introduces the concept of *interweaving* as a replacement for the term inter-cultural theatre (Fischer-Lichte, 2011: 5-7).

The question posed here is how this can inform our understanding of Ibsen’s timelessness. Firstly, Fischer-Lichte’s discussion substantiates the perspective forwarded here, namely that Ibsen’s timelessness manifests itself *in* time and not outside of time. This means that interpretive alterations of Ibsen dramas, which the theatre by its very nature ensures, is decisive in ensuring Ibsen’s ‘longevity’. And secondly, the concept of interweaving is particularly interesting in this regard because it captures the dynamic nature of the interpretive processes that characterize the inter-merging of Ibsen’s dramas. Interweaving can therefore be used to denote the dynamic process of interpretational involvement that undergirds the historical transmission of these works.

The idea of the historical evolvment of Ibsen’s works constituting a process of *interweaving* can moreover be used to show that the processual evolvment of Ibsen’s dramas take place not only in history, but also in the historical consciousness of communities. For, since Ibsen’s ‘vitality’ depends upon our interpretive engagement in his works, this would mean that a reinterpretation of Ibsen’s drama in the theatre represents not only a point of artistic evolvment, but also an evolvment of the audience’s relation to and understanding of Ibsen’s dramas.

Given the central position that Ibsen has come to hold, many audiences in many parts of the world are already familiar with Ibsen’s dramatic works, and with a particular branch of the theatrical Ibsen tradition. A theatrical reinterpretation of Ibsen’s works thereby represents a further evolvment of an already interwoven Ibsen tradition, as a re-representation of a work that the audience is already familiar with.

In *The Haunted Stage – Theatre as Memory Machine* theatre scholar Marvin Carlson

explores the relation between theatre and memory formation. The metaphorical description of the stage being ‘haunted’ describes how the theatre come to ‘recirculate’ and retell stories that are considered important. This is a function that the theatre appears to have had since its beginnings. The theatre is deeply involved in what Carlson calls processes of ‘recycling memories’ and operate as what Carlson describes as a *memory machine*, that continuously reincorporate and restructure the audience’s memories and understanding of the dramas (Carlson, 2001: 2–8). By emphasizing that this process of reinterpretation of the dramatic material involves the audience’s memory, Carlson establishes a perspective where a production of an Ibsen play can be approached as an event that not only restructures the Ibsen tradition, but which also involves the audience in a process of restructuring their cultural memory. This can be related to the concept of interweaving, which can then be understood as a dynamic process of retelling, remembering and restructuring the audiences memories of Ibsen’s works.

The idea that the theatre is an arena where we encounter ‘haunted’ material, and where we engage in processes of remembering and interweaving memories, will figure most centrally throughout this thesis. My fascination for this perspective, and my interest in exploring how this might inform the study of theatre as a cultural and artistic site can partly be explained by my own encounters with the theatre, but also with other forms of art. In many instances my experience of a works of art can be described as a reencounter, because the work is already familiar to me. This is either because I have on previous occasions seen, read or heard about the work. Upon reencountering the work of art my past memories of it can be said to interconnect with the ‘new’ presentation of the work, and the familiar material comes to take on a new form before my eyes and ears. I become reacquainted with the work, and my memory and understanding of it are altered.

### **1.1.2 A Haunted Stage: The National Theatre**

The present thesis focuses arena that is, to use Carlson’s description, ‘haunted’ by the dramatic works of Ibsen: the National Theatre in Oslo, Norway. Since its establishment in 1899, the National Theatre can be said to have performed the function of memory machine by retelling Ibsen’s dramas to the Norwegian audience. This has led Ibsen’s works to become interwoven not only with the theatre tradition at the National Theatre but also with the cultural memory of the Norwegian audience. In spite of having had a somewhat strained relationship with Norway, something that undoubtedly shines through in his dramatic works, Ibsen still holds the position as one of the most important cultural

figures within Norwegian culture. Even though the relationship is, as this thesis will show, still somewhat strained.

The present thesis focuses on Ibsen in contemporaneity, but the past will, as indicated by the perspective presented in the initial discussion, be of central importance throughout my discussion. I will here undertake a study of the the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Ibsen Festival, which took place at the National Theatre in 2010, and the main performance presented during the festival, Sebastian Hartmann's *The Ibsen Machine*. The aim is to discuss how The National Theatre, through the arrangement, has tended its role as a care-taker for Ibsen's dramatic heritage. A central part of my analysis is aimed at the festival event itself, and how the National Theatre through the arrangement of the festival seeks not only to reincorporate and develop the Ibsen tradition, but also to engage its audience in a debate and questioning over the value of Ibsen's artistic heritage and how it should be maintained. This discussion can be traced back to the initiation of the festival in 1990, by the then current director of the National Theatre Stein Winge.

The International Ibsen Festival is a biannual event dedicated to presenting new theatrical interpretations of Ibsen's works. In an interview given in *Dagens Næringsliv*, Winge explained that the festival was organized because Ibsen needed to be 'brought back to life'. The apprehension at the time was that Ibsen's works were irrelevant and out of date, and that the interpretive tradition established at the National Theatre was partly responsible for this. Winge advanced this argument, saying in the interview that the blame for Ibsen's apparent 'lifelessness' is not Ibsen himself, but the interpretive tradition which took Ibsen's dramas 'too seriously', and had come to perform Ibsen's works in 'accordance with a routine'. The International Ibsen Festival was arranged in order to restore Ibsen to his former glory by presenting artistically innovative productions of Ibsen's dramas, not only from the National Theatre but guest performances from all parts of the world. In doing so, Winge hoped that Ibsen's vitality would be restored, and that the audience would once more come to discover that: "Ibsen is more alive than what we make of him" (*Dagens Næringsliv* 25.08.1990).<sup>2</sup>

This ideal of 'revitalization through transgression' constitutes a form of guiding principle for the organization of the International Ibsen Festival, and it was echoed in 2010 by the then current director of the National Theatre, Hanne Tømte. In her welcoming address in the official program of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Tømte argued that the survival of the Ibsen

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2 Unless otherwise noted the interviews and text's presented here (including *The Ibsen Machine*) have been translated by me.

tradition was dependent upon artistic innovation. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary was to encourage this development by presenting the audience with productions that ‘transgressed the boundaries of the Ibsen tradition’ (Tømta, 2010: 3). Tømta’s statement makes it clear that the debate concerning the vitality of Ibsen has not waned since the first International Ibsen Festival, but has rather come to function as a backdrop for the arrangement. This shows us that while the International Ibsen Festival is an arena that recycles haunted texts, this process of recycling is accompanied by a debate concerning how the Ibsen tradition should be tended. The questions: Is Ibsen alive? How might his vitality be restored? is brought up each time the festival is arranged.

### **1.1.3 *The Ibsen Machine*: Deconstructing Ibsen**

Sebastian Hartmann’s *The Ibsen Machine* becomes an interesting subject for discussion and analysis in light of the proposed ideal of revitalization through transgression, but also in light of the tendency towards self-questioning that characterizes the organization of the International Ibsen Festival. *The Ibsen Machine* was commissioned to be the main production during the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Ibsen Festival and opened the celebration on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010. The production was a collaboration between the National Theatre and Hartmann, and featured a cast from the National Theatre. In the official production program Hartmann is described as being a ‘progressive director’. Hartmann’s previous productions at the National Theatre are also listed: Ibsen’s *Ghosts* (2000), *John Gabriel Borkmann* (2004); Knut Hamsun’s *The Growth of the Soil* (2007), George Büchner’s *Leonce and Lena* (2008), and it is concluded that in each performance Hartmann has challenged both the audience and the National Theatre “with his unyielding will to surpass the conventions and create theatrical art for our time” (Gjerstad, 2010). Hartmann is clearly viewed by the organizers as a director whose performances transgress the boundaries put up by tradition, and whose works can live up to the forwarded ideal of artistic innovation. *The Ibsen Machine* can therefore be said to constitute a highlight of the artistic direction the National Theatre has sought to advocate through the organization of the festival.

*The Ibsen Machine* clearly challenged the Ibsen tradition and the interpretive conventions that had governed the Ibsen tradition at the National Theatre for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *Realisme, Symbol og Psykologi (Realism, Symbol and Psychology)* scholar Keld Hyldig argues that the Ibsen tradition established and developed at the National Theatre has been characterized by what can be described as a *psychologically*

*realistic* performance-style. Essential to this interpretive paradigm is the understanding that the theatre production should present Ibsen's text in accordance with Ibsen's original intent. This understanding has, as Hyldig's dissertation shows, set the standard for the evaluation of theatre performances of Ibsen works, not only within the theatre but also for the field theatre critics (Hyldig, 2000: 314–16). In this production, Hartmann abandoned these ideals, and created a collage based on the entire Ibsen-mythos. *The Ibsen Machine* was compiled of fragments from Ibsen's dramatic works, but also the theatrical tradition itself and biographical material on Ibsen, pieced together to form a new whole.

When giving an introductory description of *The Ibsen Machine* it is useful to reflect on the production's title, and the different ways that the production utilized the idea of an Ibsen machinery. The theatre scholar Knut Ove Arntzen's article "Den Gjennoppståtte Teatermaskin og en Ny Scenisk Forståelse" ("The Resurrected Theatre Machine and a New Scenic Understanding"), gives an account of the production's dramatic principles.<sup>3</sup> Arntzen here argues that the term machine is, in the case of *The Ibsen Machine*, not primarily a description of the physical theatre machinery that makes up the set design of the production, rather, machine denotes the production's dramaturgical approach. It describes, according to Arntzen, an approach where the 'driving forces' of a drama are understood from a mechanical perspective. It is a strategy which represents a new approach to classical material, an approach where canonical dramas such as Ibsen's plays are disassembled, or deconstructed, like parts in a machine and then reassembled to form a 'radically new interpretation' (Arntzen, 2010: 8–10). Arntzen's analysis indicates how the radical nature of the performance is measured in relation to the established theatre conventions,

Another scholar that can offer further insights into Hartmann's method of 'deconstruction', and how stresses the fact that these aesthetic strategies manifest a reaction against the established interpretive paradigm, is the theatre theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann. By abandoning the interpretive ideals of the the psychological realistic acting-style, *The Ibsen Machine* falls under the heading of what Lehmann describes as *post-dramatic* theatre. Lehmann's theory of the post-dramatic encompasses a wide range of theatre forms developed from the 1970s and onwards. The common denominator for

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth mentioning that the article was written in connection with the production, and was featured in the program magazine to *The Ibsen Machine*. This means that the attending audience will have been given a general idea of what to expect in the production, and gives another example of how the attending audience are involved by the organizer in a reflection over the artistic development of the tradition.

these theatre forms is that they either implicitly or explicitly give expression to a reaction against the paradigm of dramatic theatre, where the psychological realist rendering of the text has been a guiding principle. The usage of the prefix ‘post’ in post-dramatic illustrates how the aesthetic strategies used can be read as a negation of the dramatic theatre that ‘includes the presence or resumption’ of older aesthetics:

The adjective ‘postdramatic’ denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time ‘after’ the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre. What it does not mean is an abstract negotiation and a mere looking away from the tradition of drama. ‘After’ drama means that it lives on as a structure – however weakened and exhausted – of the ‘normal’ theatre: as an expectation of large parts of the audience, as a foundation for many of its means of representation [...](Lehmann, 2006: 27).

In my analysis of the International Ibsen Festival and *The Ibsen Machine* I will attempt to show that it was a production that through its deconstruction of Ibsen played out a reaction against an interpretive tradition developed on the basis of the works of the forefather of modern theatre. The fact that this took place within the framework of an institution that has for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century considered its principle task to uphold a variant of the dramatic paradigm is significant.

The thematics explored in *The Ibsen Machine* enhanced the sense of deconstruction enforced by the constructional principle. The production presented and explored the idea of the theatre being an *Ibsen machinery*, where the multitude of different Ibsen characters that figured in the production were inextricably caught. The production thus commented upon the repetitive nature of the Ibsen tradition, and the theatre’s role in ensuring the recirculation of Ibsen’s works. If we relate this confrontational questioning of the repetitive nature of the Ibsen tradition to the circumstances of the production’s presentation, the term ‘machine’ also described the system put in place to ensure the continuous theatrical reproduction of Ibsen’s dramatic works; The International Ibsen Festival is a form of Ibsen machinery, that works in ensuring the continued functionality of the Ibsen tradition. *The Ibsen Machine* thus brings to the fore the idea that the theatre, by ensuring the reproduction of Ibsen’s dramas, comes to perform the role of a life-support machine for the Ibsen tradition. And this begged the question: Is Ibsen really alive? Or is he being kept alive by structures put in place by the institution?

This questioning is also something that the audience were invited to be involved in, something which adds another facet of meaning to the title *The Ibsen Machine*. In order to give an account of this I have to rely on my own experience as a member of the audience. In retrospect I would describe my encounter with the performance as being



inside a reverberant chamber: The labyrinthine Ibsen-landscape presented in the production, where the actors performed the parts of a myriad of Ibsen-characters, evoked memories, both of Ibsen's dramas, the Ibsen tradition, and of Ibsen as a historical figure. A particularly significant reason for this effect was the intertextual strategy applied by Hartmann. The complex structure of textual fragments, costumes and symbols that made up *The Ibsen Machine* undermined any sense of narrative development of a plot, and disrupted my sense of direction. However, since the fragmented components that had been assembled to make up this Ibsen-collage were familiar to me, my encounter with *The Ibsen Machine* felt strangely like a process of recollection in the sense proposed by Carlson. This Ibsen-collage seemed to be as much an assemblage of my own encounters with, and thoughts of Ibsen and his dramatic works, as a theatrical presentation of Ibsen's textual material.

The principle of deconstruction applied by Hartmann in this production induced me to reassemble disassembled pieces on the basis of my memories of these works, and this created a heightened sense of awareness of how much my interpretation depended upon my own familiarity with Ibsen's works and knowledge of the Ibsen tradition. And so, while the production can be described as a deconstruction of an Ibsen-universe, I would in retrospect argue that my own memories and knowledge of Ibsen and his dramas enabled me to undertake a form of reconstruction of the disassembled pieces of the Ibsen machinery.

This awareness of my own relation to the Ibsen tradition was furthermore heightened because I experienced the production as part of a festival dedicated to the continuation of the Ibsen tradition. On the basis of this I would argue that 'machine' also came to signify how the functionality of the Ibsen machinery depends upon my interpretational involvement as an audience member. This process of self-reflection sprouted by the aesthetic strategies also meant that I, as an audience member, became deeply involved in the production's questioning of the Ibsen tradition, particularly its thematic handling of how the tradition has come to capture the Ibsen characters, forcing them to repeat Ibsen's story line and dialogue seemingly forever. This was a problematic that came to concern me as well, and as a result their questioning came to be my own: What is it that makes me revisit Ibsen's works? Do Ibsen's works still have value? Or, is the theatre merely dragging the deadweight of Ibsen around? Should the Ibsen tradition be revered and sustained, or has Ibsen come to haunt us, audience, actors, and directors alike?

The focus of my analysis of *The Ibsen Machine* is how the production, both thematically

## Introduction

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and by way of the aesthetic strategies used in the production, stages a confrontational development of the Ibsen tradition. In addition to this will explore how the festival event engages its audience in a debate over how Ibsen's artistic legacy should be maintained, not only by evoking the memories of Ibsen but by seeking to renegotiate and restructure these memories. This thesis asks two intersecting questions: How does the International Ibsen Festival mediate and renegotiate the Ibsen tradition? And, secondly: how does the aesthetic strategy of *The Ibsen Machine* utilize and handle elements from the Ibsen tradition, how is the audience interpretively engaged in this process? In other words, how does the International Ibsen Festival and *The Ibsen Machine* function as a memory machine?

## 2 Theory and Method

### 2.1 Tradition, transmission, transgressions

We can not disassociate ourselves from our past. It's a part of our nature, in a certain sense our productivity, that we try to understand ourselves in every past, [...] that in every past we see a present.<sup>4</sup>

– Wilhelm Furtwängler

But he also wonders about himself, that he cannot learn to forget but clings relentlessly to the past: however far and fast he may run, this chain runs with him. And it is a matter for wonder: a moment, now here and then gone, nothing before it came, again nothing after it has gone, nonetheless returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”,(1997).

The present chapter is aimed at outlining and discussing a conception of tradition that can encompass, and further illuminate the idea that the historical evolvement of Ibsen's dramatic works within the theatre constitutes a process of *interweaving memories*. The theoretical framework presented here is mainly drawn from the philosophical hermeneutics of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose reflections on the hermeneutic nature of understanding and interpretation will here be used to explain our involvement with tradition, and the processes that undergird the interweaving movement of tradition.<sup>5</sup>

As a supplement to Gadamer, I will also include a discussion of the Czech philosopher Karel Kosík's *The Dialectics of the Concrete – A Study on Problems of Man and World*.

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4 “Wir können von der Vergangenheit nicht abstrahieren. Das gehört zu unserem Wesen, ich möchte in gewissem Sinne sagen produktive in uns, daß wir versuchen in jeder Vergangenheit—unbeschadet der Erkenntnis ihrer besonderen Bedingungen und Begrenzungen—zugleich uns selbst zu finden, das heißt also zugleich eine Gegenwart zu sehen.” (Schmidt-Garre, 2004)

5 My reading of Gadamer does not include a discussion of the criticism that has been raised concerning Gadamer's conception of tradition, and any opposition to this criticism will therefore be indirect. The criticism falls along two main-lines (1) Jürgen Habermas criticized Gadamer's rejection of the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudice, and the conservatism that he saw as inherent to Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudice. Gadamer countered Habermas' critique by arguing that the aim of his philosophical hermeneutics was to outline the conditions for understanding, and moreover that his exploration of these conditions did not exclude radical change or criticism. In my reading of Gadamer I emphasize that criticism of tradition is central to Gadamer's understanding of the dynamical evolvement of tradition, although I recognize that Gadamer's terminology might make him particularly vulnerable to problematizations of this kind. (2) Jaques Derrida focused on the limits of hermeneutics by problematizing Gadamer's conception of dialogue. For more on this cf: *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. And also: *Dialogue & Deconstruction – The Gadamer - Derrida Encounter* (1989), State University of New York Press.

Like Gadamer, Kosík writes in a continuation from the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, and in many regards their theories correspond. In spite of their similarities, I have chosen to include Kosík because I have found that his theory, to a greater extent than that of Gadamer, or, at least more clearly, accentuates that we as interpretive beings are able to take an active and critical part in forming our own understanding of history. Kosík's theory will thus help inform the discussion of tradition as an interweaving structure, where questioning and critical revisal are central forces to ensuring its continuation.

The aim of this thesis is to discuss a festival that forwards an interpretive ideal that includes a critical distancing from a established interpretive tradition, and a production that exhibits an 'antagonistic' and critical attitude towards the established tradition. These theories are discussed in order to develop an understanding of tradition that can view these developments as ways of conserving and maintaining the Ibsen tradition.

In addition to discussing a conception of tradition, and our relation to tradition, this chapter also includes a discussion of intertextuality, relating it to Gadamer's understanding of tradition and the idea that tradition constitutes an interweaving evolving structure. I will also focus on aspects of Gadamer and Kosík's understanding of art with the aim of explaining how works of art, such as Ibsen's dramas, come to be a part of interpretive traditions. In the final part of this chapter I focus on the methodological implication of the theories presented. I will here turn to Hans-Robert Jauss, whose theory of reception fuses the analysis of poetics with that of hermeneutics, and whose theoretical reflections on analysis include both Kosík and Gadamer as theoretical contributors.

At this point I find it relevant to point out that this chapter is, in the same manner as the rest of this thesis, structured in accordance with what might be described as a hermeneutic principle. The circularity of my dialogical engagement with the material is not only aimed at providing answers to the questions posed, but through this to unravel different dimensions and facets of the discussion.

### **2.1.1 Hermeneutic's and the problem of tradition**

Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself: from interhuman communication to manipulation of society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he encounters society; and from the tradition as it is built of religion and law, art and philosophy, to the revolutionary consciousness that unhinges the tradition through emancipatory reflection (Gadamer, 1976: 18).

Tradition is a term that signifies a process of conserving, whether it be customs, texts, or sets of values, that have been inherited from our forebears. The term can therefore be said to be connected to the idea of memory, in that it is through a process of remembering traditions that they are upheld. Tradition is a term that has both negative and positive connotations: On the one side, the practices and values upheld by tradition can be regarded as being founded on knowledge and insights that should be respected and upheld. On the other hand, traditions can be viewed as deeply problematic precisely because of the authority that tradition supposedly commands. In many instances it appears that what makes traditions questionable is, in fact, their unquestionable nature. In this instance we are approaching an arena that has given rise to a debate over, and a questioning of the established interpretive tradition.

Hermeneutic's is also a field of study where tradition and a questioning of the authority of tradition has been, and continues to be, of central concern. Hermeneutics can, somewhat superficially, be described as a theory of interpretation, associated with philology and the study of history. The discussion of tradition appears intricately bound up with the subject-matter of hermeneutics. As pointed out by scholars Bjørn Ramberg and Kristin Gjesdal, hermeneutics is to a great extent centered on a 'deep concern' over problematics connected with making sense of text 'handed over to us from the past' (Ramberg, & Gjesdal, 2005). When faced with the task of interpreting a text handed down through an interpretive tradition, we can imagine that the interpreters could ask: Is the interpretive tradition to be viewed as a source of authority that allows the text's meaning to come to the fore? Or, reversibly, does the interpretive tradition merely serve to occlude the text's true meaning? This discussion is similar to the one voiced by the National Theatre through their arrangement of the International Ibsen Festival. However, here the question is whether the established interpretive tradition is able to communicate the value of Ibsen's dramas. In addition to this the 'hermeneutic situation', where the interpreter is – metaphorically speaking – caught between the anticipation of the texts meaning and a familiarity with and knowledge of the interpretive tradition that has handed it down, is similar to the situation that we find ourselves in when attending a production based on a dramatic work that we are familiar with. The hermeneutic discussion on how the interpreter's historical conditioning and affinity with an interpretive tradition comes to affect the interpretational process will therefore help shed light on this encounter. Two of the questions we ask in this connection is: How does this familiarity with the interpretive tradition affect our process of interpretation? And secondly: What is our relation to tradition?

To provide us with an answer to these questions we here turn to the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose theory radically transformed the hermeneutic discussion. In his major work *Truth and Method*, which is a collection of essays written over a number of years and then finally published in 1960, Gadamer criticizes the foregoing hermeneutic discussion for

having failed to recognize the true authority of tradition, and for failing to acknowledge the fundamental way in which history and traditions condition both our understanding, and, subsequently, our processes of interpretation. The reason for this ‘failure’, Gadamer argues, is that the foregoing hermeneutic discussion had based itself on the assumption that there was an ‘abstract antithesis’ between history and knowledge of history (Gadamer, 2004: 283). The misconception that tradition and knowledge are two fundamentally separate categories must, according to Gadamer, be traced back to the Enlightenment. The rational ideal established in the aftermath of the Cartesian doubt came to view the interpreter’s historical outlook and affinity with interpretive traditions as conditions that had to be overcome if texts and historical events were to be understood correctly. This has had a profound impact on the hermeneutic discussion, the clearest expression of this being, according to Gadamer, that the validity of prejudice, judgments based on an affinity with the interpretive traditions, was found to be inertly problematic (Gadamer, 2004: 273–4).

These developments caused the hermeneutic discussion to center on developing methodological solutions that would enable the interpreter to overcome his historical entanglement, or at least limit the effect of his historical prejudices. A central example of a methodological procedure aimed at reducing the interpreter’s historical conditioning was proposed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Friedrich Schleiermacher, who advocated that the interpreter was to undertake a careful scrutiny of his historical biases. By undertaking this self-conscious outlining, the interpreter, according to Schleiermacher, opened himself up for true insight into the text’s meaning. However, Schleiermacher maintained that a completely adequate and truthful understanding could never be achieved, indicating that the meaning discovered would inevitably be tainted by the interpreter’s prejudices (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005).

While the hermeneutic discussion remained locked in battle with the Enlightenment’s rational ideal up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the attitude towards tradition was, Gadamer points out, altered with the emergence of Romanticism. With Romanticism, tradition came to be viewed as a source of insight and value because it allowed the interpreter to retrace the steps back to a mythical origin. This understanding of tradition caused the emergence of what Gadamer calls the traditionalist movement. However, while the attitude towards tradition changed, Romanticism did not, Gadamer argues, overcome the established divide between rationality and tradition since Romanticism’s validation of tradition was a mere reversal of values, where mythos was afforded priority over logos – irrationality over rationality (Gadamer, 2004: 275).

The traditionalist belief in the value of origins is, as we shall explore more fully in the following chapter, an understanding that has characterized the psychological realistic tradition developed at the National Theatre. The clearest expression of this is a conviction that the theatre performance should realize the dramatic work in accordance with the author’s intent. And it is exactly this ‘traditionalist understanding’ of Ibsen that is challenged by the National Theatre through their

organization of the International Ibsen Festival, which, as we have seen, forwards an ideal of artistic innovation and transgression of the boundaries put up by tradition. Interestingly, this opposition to the traditionalist appraisal of origins can also be traced back to Romanticism, which, in addition to the traditionalist movement, also gave rise to a movement that not only dismissed the rational ideal established in the Enlightenment but also propounded the idea of a revolutionary opposition to tradition and the past. Central to this was the post-Kantian ideal of the ‘untainted genius’, who had access to, and could convey, insights governed neither by tradition, nor by rationality.<sup>6</sup>

According to Gadamer, we are unable to sever the bonds we have to traditions, and merely ignore how traditions condition us. By drawing on Gadamer, it is possible to view these different ways of ‘dealing’ with tradition as expressions of different ‘attitudes’ towards tradition. This makes it possible to operate with a conception of tradition that encompasses both these apprehensions, and enables the discussion of these understandings within the framework of a more fundamental understanding of tradition and of our relationship to tradition. Gadamer’s conception of tradition therefore helps shed light on the undergirding interweaving movement of tradition, and how critical revisal and alteration of tradition involves an interweaving and restructuring of our memories. In order to comprehend on what basis Gadamer reevaluates tradition it is necessary to comprehend how he overcomes the divide between knowledge and tradition. This means giving an outline of what is oftentimes referred to as the ontological turn of hermeneutics.

### **2.1.2 The Ontological Turn of Hermeneutics – The Basis for Gadamer’s reevaluation of tradition**

The ontological turn of hermeneutics meant that hermeneutics now stepped away from a methodological discussion, and started dealing with understanding as a fundamental condition for man’s being in the world. This meant a revisal of the discussion of how the interpreter’s historical outlook and familiarity with interpretive traditions affect his or her processes of interpretation. This turn was instigated by the publication of *Being and Time*, by Gadamer’s philosophical predecessor and teacher Martin Heidegger (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2005). Heidegger’s theory is of central importance to Gadamer, who described Heidegger’s explication of being as the “impetus that made me go critically beyond the discussion of method and to expand the formulation of the hermeneutic question [...]” (Gadamer, 1989: 22). A full outline of Heidegger’s theory is a task too

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6 This idea of revolutionary opposition to tradition and history introduced in Romanticism later came to inspire the avant-garde movement, which, according to scholar Renato Poggioli, was characterized by an antagonistic view of tradition and the past. The avant-garde battle to overcome tradition was perhaps most poignantly expressed by the Italian Futurist Gulliaume Apollinare: “You can’t lug the corpse of your father all over the place” (Poggioli, 1968: 30–5). This is also an attitude that can be said to characterize certain forms of the post-dramatic, as described by Hans-Thies Lehmann.

great to undertake here, and so the focus is restricted to a few aspects of Heidegger's theory that are central to Gadamer's theory, particularly the elements that help inform our discussion of tradition.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces the term *Dasein* as a denomination for the being of man. *Dasein* literally means *being there*. This is in and of itself an indication that the being of man must be understood in relation to its historical situatedness, an idea which Heidegger further expands by arguing that the essential state of *Dasein* is being-in-the-world. Our worldliness is constitutive of our being, in the sense that as inhabitants of a historical world, we are familiarized with an already established understanding of being that belongs to *Dasein*'s ontological structure (Heidegger, 1962: 80–5). This contests that we are, under any circumstances, and by way of any scientific method, able to stand outside of history and traditions when determining the meaning of the world that surrounds us. It also means that *Dasein* inherits its possibilities from its forebears as already meaningful and mattering, which show the 'hold' that history and, as Gadamer latter explicates, tradition have on our understanding and interpretation. This has to do with the fact that Heidegger's theory shows that the hermeneutic situation, where we humans interpret on the basis of a world already interpreted, is not an accidental or subjective premise, it is an ontological one.

The nature of *Dasein*'s involvement with the world is further enlightened by the imagery that Heidegger uses when describing *Dasein*'s relation to the world as *thrown*. This is a description both of how *Dasein*'s understanding of the world is inherited, passed down to *Dasein* as a fundamental condition for its being-in, but it is also a description of the projective movement that structures *Dasein*'s experiential and interpretive involvement with the world:

The character of understanding as projection is constitutive for Being-in-the-world with regard to the disclosedness of its existentially constitutive state-of-Being by which the factual potentiality-for-Being gets its leeway [Spielraum]. And as thrown, *Dasein* is thrown into the kind of Being which we call projecting (Heidegger, 1962:185).

*Dasein*'s potentiality-for-being, its ability to realize future possibilities of itself, is conditioned by the established understanding of being that, as we have seen, *Dasein* belongs to. This shows how our historical conditioning founds the basis from where we come to experience and interpret and means, as Heidegger underlines in *Being and Time*, that our phenomenological engagement with the world is hermeneutic in character (Heidegger, 1962: 61–2). It shows that the hermeneutic circle – the dialogical circularity



of textual interpretation – does not primarily describe a methodological procedure that we as interpreters apply when seeking to determine the meaning of a text. Rather, the hermeneutic circle conceived of as the totality of our existence is a movement into which Dasein is thrown and perpetually situated in. It is thus a phenomenon that describes the nature of interpretation and understanding in general.

For Gadamer Heidegger's theory becomes significant because it shows that hermeneutics is not limited to a purely methodological discussion of textual understanding, rather, its subject matter concerns the basic structure of our being-in-the-world. Drawing on Heidegger, he argues that understanding and interpretation are not to be conceived of as a 'process of comporting oneself towards definite objects of knowledge', but a dialogical process, where we come to modify and reach a new understanding on the basis of a 'world already interpreted' (Gadamer, 1989: 22–3). This basic underlying dialogical engagement characterizes all of our different interpretive modes, showing that interpretation constitutes a dialogical process of foregrounding (*abheben*): "Whatever is being foregrounded must be foregrounded from something else, which, in turn, must be foregrounded from it" (Gadamer, 2004: 305). These insights found a basis for the discussion of how the interweaving movement of traditions does not merely constitute a process of historical development, but also an interweaving movement of memories that are continuously formed throughout our engagement with the world.

Gadamer's primary focus is to show what this can mean with regard to understanding our historical involvement, something that his reevaluation and reconceptualization of tradition bears witness to. This is, according to Gadamer, what differentiates his theory from Heidegger's. For while Heidegger in *Being and Time* "entered into the problems of historical hermeneutics and critique in order to explicate the fore-structure of understanding for the purposes of ontology", Gadamer seeks to show how hermeneutics "once freed from the ontological obstructions of the scientific concept of objectivity, could do justice to the historicity of understanding" (Gadamer, 2006: 268). This indicates the shift of focus between the two theoreticians, which is not to say that the historicity of our understanding is not also a subject that Heidegger touches upon. So, before we turn our attention fully to Gadamer and his application of these insights, it is worth relaying elements of Heidegger's discussion of Dasein's relation to history, and how historical involvement and the forming of history relates to Dasein's process of projecting itself onto future possibilities of self:

In its factual Being, any Dasein is as it already was, and it is 'what' it already was. It *is* its past,

whether explicitly or not. And, this is so not only in that its past is, as it were, pushing itself along ‘behind it’, and that Dasein possesses what is past as a property [...]: Dasein ‘is’ its past in the way of *its* own being, which, to put it roughly, ‘historizes’ out of its future on each occasion (Heidegger, 1962: 41).

These are insights that have profoundly influenced Gadamer’s discussion of tradition, which has as its basis that “belonging to traditions belongs just as originally and essentially to the historical finitude of Dasein as does its projectedness toward future possibilities of itself” (Gadamer, 2006: 252). Because of our hermeneutically structured interpretive involvement with the historical world we can, as interpretive beings, be said to be engaged in a mediation of history. For, while our ‘outlook’ is directed towards the future, and towards realizing future possibilities of ourselves, the hermeneutic structure of our engagement means that we *bring our past history with us*. This shows that we are historical beings not only in the sense that our outlook is structured by an already disclosed understanding of being, but also in that we through processes of interpreting *foreground* our already given understanding of being, and thus come to bring our past memories and knowledge with us when we interpret. Somewhat superficially, it could therefore be said that we are historical beings not only in the sense that we are conditioned by history, but in that we, through our processes of making sense, also come to make and shape history. This, as we shall explore more fully in the following, allows us to approach and analyze tradition as a process continuously forming and interweaving memories in the manner presented in the introduction.

### **2.1.3 Belonging to Tradition: Gadamer’s retrieval of prejudice**

Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world (Gadamer, 1976: 15).

A central example of how Gadamer shows how traditions establish a ground for interpretation and understanding is his retrieval of the concept of prejudice as a basis for knowledge and insight. We have seen that the rational ideal propounded in the Enlightenment viewed prejudices as expressions of the interpreter’s affinity with an interpretive tradition, and on that basis it was concluded that prejudices did not provide a sound basis for interpretation and understanding. Gadamer agrees with the assessment that prejudices are indeed expressions of fore-meanings based on an affinity with tradition, but reverses the Enlightenment’s rational ideal by arguing that it is not so much

our judgements as it is our prejudices that form a basis for the determination of meaning (Gadamer, 1976: 9). As historical beings we are fundamentally entangled with our historical world – in its culture and language – and this is not a condition that can be overcome by any methodological procedure. Gadamer therefore proposes that prejudices are ‘biases of our openness to the world’, they are, essentially, what *enable* understanding and interpretation:

[T]he historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. [...] They are simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us (Gadamer, 1976: 9).

Gadamer’s reevaluation of prejudice brings down the divide upheld by the Enlightenment’s rational ideal, and comes to unravel our true relation to history. By acknowledging the nature of our historical affectedness Gadamer allows the role that tradition plays in the transmission and determination of meaning to come to the fore. This is done by acknowledging that our historical situatedness is not something that we can rise above, rather it structures our potentiality for understanding and interpretation, which lies at center of Gadamer’s assertion that history is not something that belongs to us; on the contrary, it is we who belong to history (Gadamer, 2004: 278).

### **2.1.4 Expanding one’s horizon: The dynamics of tradition**

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening of new horizons [...] (Gadamer, 2004: 301).

In order to conceptualize how our fundamental sense of belonging to tradition structures our engagement, Gadamer introduces the concept of the *horizon of understanding*. This is done in order to show how the facticity of the hermeneutic situation means that we have a sense of perspective – an outlook – on ourselves, and on the world we inhabit. In a particular hermeneutic situation, for example when we seek to make sense of a work of art, our preliminary outlook is determined by our prejudices, which constitute what Gadamer describes as the *horizon of a particular present* (Gadamer, 2004: 304–5).

The idea that thinking is profoundly rooted in a historical and cultural context, and that this involvement implies a sense perspective – a horizon – had, however, been discussed by others before Gadamer. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Giambattista Vico, who also opposed the then emerging Cartesian rational ideal, argued that it was important to realize that the

cultural and historical time in which man lives has a profound effect on man's understanding (Vico, 1990: 33–4). An aspect that becomes particularly important for Gadamer is Vico's argument that what directs the human will and understanding is not an abstract universality of reason, but, rather, a *communal sense* (*sensus communis*). This is because it shows that interpretation and understanding is of an inter-subjective nature (Gadamer, 2004: 19). The idea of a communal sense does not abandon an idea of individuality, but moves away from the idea that understanding and interpretation is a general faculty or capacity, claiming instead that it is an ability conditioned by our belonging to traditions and to history. Since the anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding proceeds from a bond that we have with tradition, the anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding means that interpretation is not primarily an act of subjectivity (Gadamer, 2004: 293). This enables a discussion of how interpretive events such as the International Ibsen Festival and *The Ibsen Machine* engage a historically situated audience, with an outlook that is conditioned by a horizon of understanding that precedes the performance.

In his exposition of the horizon of understanding, Gadamer emphasizes that the horizon shows not only that 'thought is tied to its finite determinacy' but that it also indicates the gradual expansion of one's range of vision (Gadamer, 2004: 301). The horizon thus conceptualizes the movement whereby we project ourselves towards 'future possibilities of ourselves'. It thereby illustrates that while we, as historical beings, have an outlook that is 'limited', this is simultaneously what opens up for the possibility of new understandings. It also renders visible Gadamer's profoundly original revisal of the tradition, proposing that it is an ever evolving and dynamical structure, as opposed to a passive act of conserving and repeating that which is handed down:

The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition is always in motion (Gadamer, 2006: 303).

### **2.1.5 Tradition: Interweaving Memories**

Gadamer's conception of tradition, and the continuous movement of our horizon of understanding, enlightens the proposed idea that traditions evolve through a process of interweaving memories. This is because it has as its foundation the idea that historical movement is not something that takes place only in historical events, but also in

understanding itself: “*Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in the event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated*” (Gadamer, 2004: 29). This process of transmission draws attention to the fact that tradition is essentially a formative process, where the memory of the past is remembered, that is to say revised and altered. The theatre is, as already established, an institution that through its retelling of dramatic works such as Ibsen’s can be said to actively contribute to the development of an interpretive tradition in that reminding the audience of the work of Ibsen induces them to remember, and revise their understanding of Ibsen. It is an interweaving of memories, where the past memories come to intermingle with the new memories formed by the interpretive encounter with the new production of Ibsen’s dramas.

What is of particular interest to our discussion of tradition as a process of interweaving memories is Gadamer’s discussion of memory-formation and self-cultivation (*Bildung*). For Gadamer it is essential that we recognize that memory is not a purely psychological capacity and is not ‘for anything and everything’. For Gadamer, remembering and recalling constitutes a process of self-formation and are a part of man’s historical *Bildung*, which is a process that is never complete (Gadamer, 2004: 10–14). Gadamer here undermines the idea that we by way of our subjective faculties register events and facts, by arguing that the process of remembering and recalling belongs to the historical constitution of man. This understanding of the dynamics of memory-formation substantiates the idea that tradition constitutes an interwoven structure. Not only by showing that we belong to tradition, in the sense that it is deeply interwoven with our understanding of being, but also that we through our interpretive involvement come to engage in an interweaving evolution of memories. But what is it that comes to effectuate the expansion of our horizon and the evolution of tradition? This question is answered in the following.

### **2.1.6 Emancipatory reflection: Preservation through Transgression**

Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand and participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine ourselves (Gadamer, 2004: 293).

It is, according to Gadamer, the act of interpretation that enables us to ‘expand our range of vision’ because it asks that we open ourselves up to the meaning of the other person or

text. The interpretive event that the performance of *The Ibsen Machine* and the circumventing festival can be said to effectuate is such an opening, precisely because it constitutes an interpretive act. The openness induced by the act of interpretation involves what Gadamer describes as a ‘suspension of prejudice’, where we come to examine the legitimacy of our prejudices. It is, according to Gadamer, this dialogical reevaluation of our fore-meanings that can lead to the expansion of our horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 2004: 269). Gadamer thus comes to reformulate the hermeneutic methodological ideal proposed by Schleiermacher, where the interpreter was to outline and examine his own prejudices.

The opening up to what is meant does not mean, however, that we simply replace an already established understanding with a new understanding handed to us by the text or object we have sought to understand. Rather, understanding derives from a dialogical interpretational process that involves “[...] situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it” (Gadamer, 2004: 271). This lies at the center of Gadamer’s evaluation of the hermeneutic circularity of our interpretational being-in-the-world.

It is, however, somewhat difficult to determine whether the openness brought forth by the interpretational act is something we consciously ‘open ourselves up to’, or whether this dialogical engagement arises in the process of interpretation itself. In the subsection “The Hermeneutic Priority of the Question” in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that our hermeneutical consciousness is characterized by the ‘logical structure of a question’. Furthermore, he points out that the question, which brings about this openness, is ‘implicit in all experience’ (Gadamer, 2004: 356). This can be interpreted as Gadamer’s way of showing that our experiential engagement with the world is, in essence, dialogical and therefore questioning. On a fundamental level this shows that what we find questionable relates to, and sometimes derives from, the already disclosed understanding of being that we orient ourselves on the basis of. This makes it a matter of distinguishing between different degrees, or modes, of openness, since the nature of our dialogical engagement will differ, depending both on the nature of our encounter, and our willingness to enter into an interpretive engagement, and thus our willingness to revise our prejudices and our relation to tradition. In this instance it becomes a matter for discussion what form of dialogical modes of engagement is effectuated by the interpretive encounter with the artwork.

The idea that the dialogical act of interpretation opens up for an alteration of one’s own

relation to and understanding of tradition shows that there is an element of freedom that characterizes our involvement with tradition. It indicates that while we, as historical beings, have a fundamental affinity with interpretive traditions, we are no mere uncritical conveyors of tradition.

The idea of freedom is central to Gadamer's discussion of the authority of tradition. According to Gadamer the authority that traditions have over us can never be overcome in the manner proposed by the Enlightenment's rational ideal. However, this authority has, according to Gadamer, nothing to do with blind obedience to commands, since its authority is *earned* rather than bestowed (Gadamer, 2004: 281). In order to further explain Gadamer's meaning we can look at how Gadamer conceives of the mode of being of power, which is connected to the authority tradition exercise over us. Power is, according to Gadamer, not something that is realized through effect but rather through the suspension of effect. This comes to mean that self-questioning and self-criticism are ways through which the authority of tradition is ascertained (Gadamer, 2004: 202). This indicates not only that critical reflection and questioning is characteristic of our involvement with tradition, but also that this form of engagement can even be viewed as ways of ensuring the continued authority of tradition. In fact, Gadamer views such *emancipatory reflection* as central to the dynamic expansion and formation of our horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 2004: 305).

In his discussion of how traditions come to be preserved Gadamer indicates that interpretive alteration must be understood not as processes that water out the tradition by removing it further away from its origin, but rather as a process that cultivates and reaffirms tradition:

The fact is that in tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation, and it is active in all historical change (Gadamer, 2004: 282–3).

In the context of this thesis, we are approaching an interpretive event aimed at securing the continuation of an interpretive tradition that is deeply interwoven with the historical memories of the attending audience by actively restructuring the dramatic works it seeks to uphold. According to Gadamer, seeking to understand the 'traditions from where we come', constitute an important part of testing and revising our prejudices (Gadamer, 2004: 305). In his discussion of this involvement, Gadamer argues that this encounter demands a reflective dimension from the very beginning: "Understanding is not a mere

reproduction of knowledge, that is, it is not a mere act of repeating the same thing. Rather, understanding is *aware* of the fact that it is indeed an act of repeating the same thing” (Gadamer, 1976: 45). That Gadamer’s theory of tradition encompasses this form of self-conscious reflection helps shed a light on the ability we have for self-conscious reflection which manifests itself when we encounter traditional material. Moreover, this indicates that through an interpretive encounter it is possible to explore the foundations of one’s own prejudices, and our bonds to history and to tradition.

### **2.1.7 Karel Kosík on Man as History-formative being**

That we, as interpretive beings, come to engage in critical and questioning revisal of the past is a phenomenon explored by Karel Kosík in *The Dialectics of the Concrete*. Writing in a continuation of both Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger, Kosík focuses on man’s interpretive involvement as a historical being in a historical world. Similarly to Gadamer, Kosík maintains that we approach reality not as detached cognitive beings, but as historically involved beings, and that it is on the basis of this fundamental involvement that we come to engage in attempts to capture and fix the ‘phenomenal shape of reality’ (Kosík, 1976: 1). What is of particular interest to our discussion of tradition is how Kosík applies these insights in his discussion of man as a being that is not only shaped by history, but who can also shape it. According to Kosík, human history is to be understood as an active structure, and as an organization of human consciousness. This relates to his view that man should be understood as an onto-formative being, in that we as historical beings incorporate the past into our present:

It is an historical ability and an historical structure because it is based not only on an historically evolving sensory – rational ‘equipment’ of man. It can draw past things out into the present and transcend the temporary because man does not leave the past behind as some discarded object. Rather, the past enters into his present and constitutes his present in form of a formative and self-formative human nature (Kosík, 1976: 85).

This process of recalling constitutes what Kosík calls a ‘revival’ of moments from the past, and are, he emphasizes, not passive acts of recalling, but a dialectical and critical appropriation of the past (Kosík, 1976:85/137). Similarly to Gadamer, Kosík’s reflections show that we do not passively store and then recall past experiences or encounters, rather, remembering can be seen as a process of active restructuring and reincorporating of the past.

Kosík’s theories thus contribute to the understanding that critical appropriation of the



past is something that characterizes our relation to tradition. His reflection further substantiates the idea that upholding tradition is not synonymous with dogmatic adherence to the rules and understandings it prescribes, but rather an active, reflective act of preservation that can involve transgression and alteration.

## 2.2 A 'Web of Echoes': A Perspective on Intertextuality

Having now expanded the idea of tradition as an interwoven structure that can contain critical revisal and questioning as a way of ensuring its continuation, we now turn to the discussion of intertextuality. As mentioned in the introduction, *The Ibsen Machine* used a particular intertextual strategy where textual fragments had been removed from their meaning-bearing structure in order to form a new textual structure. The aim here is to establish a theoretical basis from where the effect of this intertextual strategy might be understood, and to show how Gadamer's understanding of tradition can help shed light on this phenomenon. It is worth noting that the 'text' in intertextuality is not limited to include textual signs only, but is interpreted to include all signs that connote meaning since we are here approaching a theatrical text, which is built up of the totality of theatrical signs presented during the performance.

### 2.2.1 Interweaving Language

*Intertextuality* is a term used to denote all conceivable connections between texts. The most central example of an inter-textual connection is when a text contains quotes from another text. The citation may be direct or indirect, or there may be no indication at all that a particular textual line is derived from another work. This latter instance clearly demonstrates how the knowledge, or memory, that the interpreter has of the cited quote will affect his or her understanding of the text. This is because the reader's ability to recognize the quote is entirely dependent upon his or her knowledge of the work that is cited. An example of how knowledge of a quote's original setting comes to affect the process of interpretation can be found by turning to Richard Strauss' elegy of the destruction of German culture during the Nazi regime, *Metamorphosen*. In this piece Strauss quotes several bars of the funeral march from Ludwig van Beethoven's Eroica Symphony. If the listener is already familiar with this theme, the *Metamorphosen* comes to acquire a breadth of meaning that sheds a new light on Strauss' exploration and mourning of the destruction caused by war. It is an example that not only shows how the usage of intertextual connections can affect the meaning of the work, but also how

intertextuality brings to the fore a consciousness of the audience's history and culture: The *Metamorphosen* was written at the end of World War Two, and was performed after the war had ended. One can only imagine how the German audience, who had experienced the war and the destruction caused by it, experienced Strauss' usage of a musical fragment of one of the most beloved figures in German culture in this mourning-piece. These reflections are only meant to form a backdrop for the analysis of how *The Ibsen Machine* comes to actively restructure the audience's memories of Ibsen by the use of intertextual elements.

The theory of intertextuality is, however, not limited to analyzing the use of intertextual references, but has also included a discussion of how inter-textual relations are constitutive for all processes of determining meaning. This latter theory stems from Michael Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, introduced to the post-structuralist discussion by the French semiotician Julia Kristeva, who in the article "Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le Roman" (1967) explored the idea that meaning is formed through a dialogical exchange, and how reading therefore involves situating oneself withing a network of textual relations. A theoretician who has explored this understanding of intertextuality is Roland Barthes, who introduces the term 'Text' to denotes a system that embodies all cultural codes and signs. Barthes argues that all text's, including the literary work, draw their meaning from a relation to the Text. He thus denounces the understanding of 'text' as a sealed off aesthetic product made up of signs endowed with an inherent meaning. Rather, a particular text constitutes a tissue of citations that are all drawn from the 'innumerable centers of culture' (Barthes, 2006: 44).

This latter understanding of intertextuality shows how reading, as a fundamental mode of interpretive engagement, is not limited to textual works, but essentially draws meaning from the totality of our relation to language, culture and history. It is a theory that draws attention to how interpretation, and meaning-bestowing in general, is deeply connected with memory, since it after all is our memory, as a historical and culturally formed being, that holds and focuses the interconnections that make up the tissue of citations that the meaning of a work is drawn from.

Gadamer's understanding of the hermeneutic structure of our being-in-the-world sheds light on this understanding of intertextuality. Hermeneutics has, as I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, centered on a methodological discussion concerned with how the interpreters' familiarity with an interpretive tradition that had handed down a text conditioned the interpretive process. As we have seen, Gadamer utilizes the insights

derived from the ontological turn of hermeneutics to show that our familiarity and entanglement with interpretive traditions is not something that we can disengage ourselves from. Rather, these are factors that founds our interpretational processes. These reflections are central to Gadamer's understanding of language, which he views as the means by which our hermeneutic consciousness is mediated.

Language is, according to Gadamer, not a tool that we apply to express an already formed thought. Rather, we are at home in a language, in the same way that we are at home (inhabitants) in a historical world, and it is through language that the world confronts us and comes to make sense for us (Gadamer, 1976: 62). In a passage from *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains the meaning-bestowing function of language by examining a section from Augustine's writings on Genesis, dealing with the creation of light at the moment when God speaks:

Agustin interprets this speech, by means of which light is commanded and created, as the coming into being of mental light, by means of which the difference among created things is made possible. It is only through light that the formlessness of the first created mass of heaven and earth is rendered capable of being shaped into a multiplicity of forms (Gadamer, 2004: 478).

Augustine's writings suggest an intricate bond between *logos*, speaking, and understanding of the world. This is used by Gadamer to draw attention to the fact that language has the illuminating quality of light: It shines a light on our world that renders it visible and meaningful.

What is central to our discussion of intertextuality is Gadamer's argument that language expresses our fundamental affinity with tradition: "What is said in it [i.e. language] constitutes the common world in which we live in and to which belongs also the whole great chain of tradition reaching us from the literature of foreign languages, living as well as dead" (Gadamer, 1976: 65). This establishes a basis for understanding the intertextual nature of textual interpretation, since it contains the basic claim that language – our means of bestowing meaning – is an expression of our affinity with tradition. In fact linguistic traditions are, according to Gadamer, traditions in the 'proper sense' of the term because they show how interpretive tradition, handed down to us, come to affect our processes of interpretation (Gadamer, 2006: 391). Gadamer's understanding of language thus illuminates how we, as linguistic beings, are fundamentally involved in an interpretive tradition that has handed texts down to us, and how this involvement affects all our interpretive encounters and our meaning-bestowing processes. It shows that our encounters with traditional texts constitutes a form of recollection, where the meaning of

the work is modified and remembered in a new way. If we relate this to the aforementioned discussion of interweaving, this process of remembering can be viewed as a process of what Fischer-Lichte has described as generating new differences.

### 2.3 Interweaving Art

I began by asking how Ibsen's timelessness is to be understood, and I answered that the timelessness of Ibsen must be understood in relation to the historical unfolding of his works which can be conceived as a process of interweaving. The question we ask now is how is it that works of art come to inspire and become part of interpretive traditions?

#### 2.3.1 Kosík on the historical life of works of art

In *The Dialectics of the Concrete*, Kosík approaches art with the aim of understanding how works of art figure in history, and how works of art come to survive and surpass the conditions where it originated. The 'life' of the work does not, Kosík argues, derive from its permanence outside of time, but stems from the works ability to set itself in time. The work proves its vitality by outlasting the historic time in which it is created:

They do of course testify to the time and the conditions of their genesis as well; but apart from this they are (or are in the process of becoming) constitutive elements of the existence of mankind [...]. Characteristic of works is not *historicity*, that is, 'bad uniqueness' and irreplicability, but *historism*, i.e. the capacity from concretization and survival (Kosík, 1976: 79–80).

The 'life' of the work of art is dependent upon its having and influence upon living people. This means that the timelessness of a work must not be understood as it existing without time, which the literal reading of the word would imply: "Being in time is not a movement in an external continuum, but temporality, i.e. the realizing of the work in time. The timelessness of a work is in its temporality as activity" (Kosík, 1976: 81). Works of art come to be a part of history through the reciprocal interaction of work and mankind, since the influence of the work manifests itself is an event that "affects both the consumer of the work and the work itself" (Kosík, 1976: 80). This means that the work of art comes to acquire different meanings during the course of its historical life.

A questioning that arises from this understanding of the historical life of the work, and one that Kosík addresses, concerns the distinction made between an inauthentic and an authentic rendering of a work. Kosík argues that the borderline between these two

categories is from the outset difficult to ascertain on the basis of the forwarded recognition that the work of art “points beyond itself, as something that transcends it”:

In the course of this concretization the work acquires different meanings. We cannot always see in good conscience that every one of them has been intended by the author. While creating the author cannot foresee all variants of meanings and all the interpretations that will be imputed to his work. In this sense the work is independent of the author’s intentions (Kosík, 1976: 80).

The theatre is an arena that actively seek to uphold the ‘life’ and influence of works of art such as Ibsen’s dramas by setting them in time. It is also, as the National Theatre exemplifies, an arena where the debate over the author’s intentions and the authenticity of the interpretation is recurrent. However, the presence of such a debate does dissuade the fact that works of art, such as Ibsen, gain a historical life by being reinterpreted from a historical and cultural point of view. In this sense they are liberated from the artists intentions.

Kosík’s argument that the life of the work derives not from its “autonomous existence but from the *mutual interaction of work and mankind*” (Kosík, 1976: 81–2). He thereby opens up for a discussion of how interpretive traditions, such as those developed at the theatre, ensure that works of art continue to exist as living monuments by being continuously revived. In this instance we are approaching an arena that in its attempts to keep Ibsen alive has come to presents theatrical reinterpretations that radically transform Ibsen’s dramatic works. However, as has already been discussed, Kosík understanding of the onto-formative nature of our being has shown that we never ‘passively’ remember the past, rather, we reintegrate the past into our present, a process that is at one and the same time a critique and an appreciation of the past (Kosík, 1976: 85). This is an activity that also applies for our encounter with works of art from another time and place.

### **2.3.2 Gadamer on ‘The Relevance of the Beautiful’**

Like Kosík, Gadamer also addresses the idea of the timelessness of works of art, arguing, like Kosík, that the timelessness of an artwork must be thought of together with the temporality to which essentially belongs to the work of art (Gadamer, 2006: 119). As we have seen Kosík argues that the meeting of work and man is an event that effects both parties, but does not elaborate on this insight. Gadamer, however, goes into specifics with regards to the particular interpretive mode instigated by the art encounter.

Gadamer argues that that the temporality that characterizes the art encounter should not be approached as a mode of givenness in the consciousness, but as a *task* for

consciousness and an achievement that is demanded of it (Gadamer, 2004: 123). What Gadamer wants to underline by saying this is that the art encounter effectuates a particular interpretational mode in those who encounter the work: “The pantheon of art is not a timeless present that presents itself to a pure aesthetic consciousness, but the *act* of a mind and spirit that has collected and gathered itself historically” (Gadamer, 2004: 83). Gadamer’s dismissal of the idea that art is a ‘timeless present’ argument must be read in light of Gadamer’s opposition to the consciousness of art that arose in the aftermath of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*. What Gadamer finds problematic with this is that it has inspired an understanding of the encounter with the beautiful in a work of art as characterized by a form of immediacy that is *untainted* by reflection. For, although Gadamer recognizes that the work of art is characterized by a form of immediacy, this is only significant because it offers the starting point for a particular form of interpretive engagement through which the artwork is realized.

To comprehend what Gadamer means, it is worth relaying aspects of Gadamer’s etymological investigation into the double meaning of the work *Erlebnis*, which explains the relation between the art encounter and memory. *Erlebnis* captures the productive union of experience and the experienced: *Erleben* and *das Erlebte*, where *Erlebnis* signifies the immediacy of an experiential encounter, which precedes interpretation and reworking, while *das Erlebte* signifies the permanent content of what is experienced (Gadamer, 2006: 53). According to Gadamer, *Erlebnis* signifies an experience that eludes every attempt to finalize its meaning, but he maintains that this experience constitutes itself in memory: “What we call *Erlebnis* in this emphatic sense thus means something unforgettable and irreplaceable, something whose meaning cannot be exhausted by conceptual determination” (Gadamer, 2006: 58). According to Gadamer an experience constitutes itself in memory, which means that it can have a lasting meaning for those who have experienced it (Gadamer, 2006: 58). This shows that encounters with works of art can come to be interwoven with our memories, and come to have a lasting impression on us.

The work of art effectuates a specific interpretive movement: a dialogic to-and-fro movement between the work of art and the interpreters horizon of understanding. This means that we are not merely passive recipients of a work’s meaning, but that we are interpretive participants in the construction of the artwork. When explaining the specificity of this form of interpretive engagement Gadamer rereads Kant’s much discussed assessment that form has primacy over color. Gadamer looks past the debate

over whether this is an expression of Kant conservatism and lack of insight into art, and rather asks:

What it is that is so distinctive about form? The answer is that we must trace it out as we see it because we must construct it actively – something required by every composition, graphic or musical, in drama or in reading. There is constant co-operative activity here. And obviously, it is precisely the identity of the work that invites us to this activity. The activity is not arbitrary, but directed, and all possible realizations are drawn into a specific schema (Gadamer, 1986: 27).

This shows that the encounter with art is essentially an interpretive act, where we as interpreters come to engage in an interpretive outlining of the structures and facets that make up the work.

What is of particular relevance to our discussion is Gadamer's argument that our sensibility to art is historically attuned, because our senses are "spiritually organized in such a way as to determine in advance our perception of art" (Gadamer, 1986: 11). The hermeneutic structure of the dialogic engagement means that our affinity with traditions is always involved in this process of interpreting the artwork, and contributes to structuring our interpretive engagement. In this instance it comes to mean that the memory of the foregoing encounter's with Ibsen's works come to structure the nature of our interpretive engagement.

The concept Gadamer chooses to focus on in his discussion of the particular nature of this interpretive engagement is *play*.

### 2.3.3 Gadamer on Play

Play's *mode of being* is, according to Gadamer, self-presentation (Darstellung): "The self-presentation of the game involves the player's achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing – i.e., presenting – something" (Gadamer, 2004: 198). This draws attention to the fact that the art experience is an event that is characterized by a synchronicity between production and reception, where the interpretive audience are participants to unraveling and transforming the work of art in to a wholeness. In addition to being reflections that are of particular relevance when seeking to discuss a theatre event, these reflections are important to our discussion because this 'eventness' of the artwork means that it undergoes what Gadamer describes as a 'continued determination of its meaning from the 'occasion' of its coming-to-present (Gadamer, 2004: 141). The fact that the work of art has to be realized again and again explain how works of art come to outlive their originating conditions, and become a part of a living, continuously

interwoven tradition.

This is further explained by Gadamer's argument that play is a self-renewing movement, which explains how the work of art resists coming to interpretation and finalization. We can never fully pin down the final meaning of the work of art, because the interpretive activity it instigates challenges the notion of final categorization and limitation of meaning (Gadamer, 2004: 102–5). This not only explains how works of art, as mentioned above, comes to be a part of our memory and create a lasting impression. The indeterminable nature of the art encounter can also be enlightened by Gadamer's argument that play is an activity that is coupled by a freedom: "The astonishing thing here is precisely not the drive of the 'constructive force', but rather the suggestion of freedom that accompanies the forms it produces" (Gadamer, 1986: 125). In "The Play of Art", Gadamer argues that what this freedom consists in can be 'grasped particularly clearly' in what he describes as the 'transitory arts', like that of the theatre, where the work of art must be 'reconstructed as a creation' (Gadamer, 1986: 128–30). This means that it is the reconstructive activity instigated by the encounter with the work of art that help explain how it comes to be a part of interpretive traditions, and how dramatic works such as Ibsen's 'stretch out of a past and into the present' as what Gadamer calls 'enduring monuments' (Gadamer, 2004:119). Gadamer's theory thus establishes a basis for understanding not only how works of art come to acquire a historical life by being continuously reinterpreted, but also that this constitutes a process of interweaving remembrance.

## 2.4 Between Theory and Method

### 2.4.1 Towards an Aesthetics of Reception?

What methodological lessons can we draw from the theories now presented? Since Gadamer's principal aim is to overcome the hermeneutic discussion of method in order to show that hermeneutics concerns the fundamental structures of understanding and interpretation, it is perhaps somewhat strange to turn to his theory for an answer to this question. However, Gadamer does provide reflections on interpretation that I view as valuable. First, he presents the idea that interpretation is essentially a productive and not a reproductive procedure. It is not a matter here of merely representing the phenomena, but of explicating the phenomena by entering into a dialogical engagement, where the answers given relate back to the questions posed. This means that the interpretive



movement is essentially hermeneutic. Moreover, it is a matter of keeping in mind that my interpretation not only reveals the phenomenon that I am here trying to understand, but that I am simultaneously giving an outline of the prejudices that make up my horizon of understanding. It is therefore a matter, for both the reader and myself, to keep in mind Gadamer's argument that "Understanding is not, in fact, understanding better [...]. It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all" (Gadamer, 2005). This underlines that interpretation and understanding is a process that is never complete, but rather constitute a continuous movement.

A theorist that does offer methodological insights as to how we might undertake an analysis on the basis of the theories now presented is the literary theorist Hans Robert Jauss. Jauss studied under Gadamer in Heidelberg after World War Two, and was profoundly influenced by both Gadamer and Heidegger's thoughts in his development of what is often referred to as reception studies. Echoing Kosík, Jauss argues that works of art are solely revealed, or manifested, by way of the reciprocal interaction of work and mankind. In *Towards and Aesthetic of Reception*, Jauss therefore argues that the analysis of a text's poetic structure must reflect the fact that the text is dependent upon the participatory interpretational activity of its readers (Jauss, 1982: 15–19).

Reception studies are aimed at analyzing the interrelation of production and reception. A key point to such an analysis is to understand the work of art in relation to what Jauss describes as the 'general process of history'. This means reflecting on how the understanding of a work is enriched and sustained by the 'chain of reception' that passes the work down from generation to generation (Jauss, 1989: 20). It therefore becomes a matter of discussing on what has characterized the Ibsen tradition in recent years, and how this might have helped shape the audience's understanding of Ibsen. Jauss provides a productive analytical tool for undertaking such an analysis, drawing on Gadamer's conception of a horizon of understanding. According to Jauss, the horizon represents one of the most central methodological insights with regards to approaching art because it creates an awareness of the historicity of understanding and interpretation necessary when conducting an analysis of a work of art (Jauss, 1989: 197–198). Jauss therefore introduces the idea of a *horizon of expectation* to denote the "'system of expectation' that arises for each work in the historical moment" (Jauss, 1982: 22). Gadamer's conception of the horizon of understanding shows how our connection to tradition conditions our processes of interpretation. However, his analysis is so closely aimed at discussing the underlying hermeneutic movement of our understanding that it becomes

somewhat difficult to apply the conception to an analysis of a concrete event. Jauss's concept of the horizon of expectation proves more fruitful because it allows us to limit the investigation to the developments in the historical consciousness of the work that preceded the time of its appearance.

I will here give an outline of the horizon of expectation that preceded the presentation of *The Ibsen Machine* by focusing on what has characterized the development of the Ibsen tradition in recent years, but also by focusing on the festival event. One of the central aims of my discussion is to show how the National Theatre has, by organizing the International Ibsen Festival, given rise to a new critical and self-reflective questioning of the value of the Ibsen tradition. In the following I will therefore delve more deeply into how the National Theatre through the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary seeks to negotiate audiences memories of Ibsen and the Ibsen tradition. In my discussion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary event I will draw on the program material, but I will also include an analysis of the opening speech held by Monna Tandberg at the premiere of *The Ibsen Machine*. My discussion of this event is based on the video recording of the premiere, since I did not attend the opening of the festival but saw the performance on two later occasions, one of the occasions was during the festival.

When it comes to my analysis of *The Ibsen Machine* I think it wise to mention that my reading of the production is based not solely on the basis of my encounter with the production, which took place over two years ago. During the course of these two years I have returned to *The Ibsen Machine* several times by way of the manuscript and the video-recording of the performance, both of which the National Theatre has kindly given me access to. In addition to this my reencounters with *The Ibsen Machine* has undoubtedly been shaped by the questions I have asked and by theoretical landscape I have explored in order to explicate the encounter.

### 3 The Ibsen Machinery

#### 3.1 An ‘Act of Remembrance’: The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Ibsen Festival

This chapter explores the workings of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Ibsen Festival at the National Theatre. The festival is approached as an event that evokes and renegotiates the attending audience’s memories of Ibsen and the Ibsen tradition, and the aim is to unravel how the event functioned as a memory machine. Particular emphasis will be placed on showing how the National Theatre involved its audience in an ongoing debate over how the Ibsen tradition should be managed if Ibsen is to remain a vital force within Norwegian culture. Through focusing on this undergirding discussion I hope not only to show how self-awareness and criticism have contributed to the development of the Ibsen tradition, but also to give an outline of the horizon-of-expectation that preceded and encompassed the presentation of Sebastian Hartmann’s *The Ibsen Machine*.

##### 3.1.1 Evoking the memory of Ibsen: The National Theatre as a site of remembrance

The National Theatre itself, as well as the architectural landscape that surrounds it, testifies to its role as a manager of Ibsen’s artistic heritage, and to the centrality of Ibsen to the Norwegian cultural heritage. If you walk down the main street of Karl Johan towards the National Theatre from the Government Building (Stortinget) you can see that there are silver-plated Ibsen-quotes laid into the stoneworks on the left-hand side of the pavement<sup>7</sup> These are physical imprints that evoke the memory of Ibsen, but there are also other ‘hidden’ reminders of Ibsen: Ibsen has walked this streets. Many will know the story of how Ibsen after having returned to Norway towards the end of his life walked here on his way to and from the Grand Café, which is situated on Karl Johan not far from the National Theatre. And also that Ibsen used to stop momentarily and set his pocket-watch to the clock on the University facade.

Walking up to the National Theatre you will see that its entrance is guarded by a bronze statue of Ibsen, standing to the left of a bronze statue of the author and dramatist Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. This gloomy Ibsen looms slightly over those passing by – his

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<sup>7</sup> “Ibsen Sitat” (Ibsen Quote) made by Ingrid Falkeid and Gustavo Aguerre and laid down in 2006 in connection with the celebration of the Ibsen centenary.

authority is somewhat challenged by the white bird-droppings that cover his hunched shoulders. If you look up as you enter the theatre you will see the name name ‘Henrik Ibsen’ – here in gold-plated letters – protruding over the entrance to the building. These visible and invisible markers testify to the centrality of Ibsen and the Ibsen tradition. The building’s temple-like construction, and the iconic presentation of the artist Ibsen, works as reminders of the long standing role Ibsen has as a father-figure of Norwegian theatre and the central part played by the National Theatre as caretaker for the Ibsen tradition. It is a site that remembers Ibsen, and that reminds those entering the National Theatre of the profound influence Ibsen’s works have had on the Norwegian cultural identity.

### 3.1.2 Ibsen: Dead or Alive?

The International Ibsen Festival was initiated in order to prevent the National Theatre from becoming a mausoleum for Ibsen’s dramatic works. Stein Winge’s statements asserting that the festival was arranged in order to revitalize Ibsen in the previously mentioned interview in *Dagens Næringsliv* is a clear indication of this. In the interview, Winge argued that the Norwegian Ibsen tradition had come to weigh Ibsen down, and that the main goal for the National Theatre was to make Ibsen ‘speak again’ by freeing Ibsen from the chains of tradition (*Dagens Næringsliv* 25.08.1990). Since the fate of the National Theatre and the Ibsen tradition appear to be inextricably linked together, the effort can be read as an attempt to reclaim its position as a leading theatre in Norway. The importance of reintroducing Ibsen was also forwarded in the media. In “Å Oppdage Ibsen” (To Discover Ibsen), journalist Jan E. Hansen argued that it was high time for the National Theatre to rediscover such a ‘passion for reinterpreting Ibsen’, particularly since the general public had Ibsen pinned down as ‘uninteresting’: “I believe that most Norwegians, even to a certain degree people in the theatre, in all honesty find Ibsen to be quite dull” (*Aftenposten*, 29.08.1990).

The need for revitalization of the Ibsen tradition has since been repeated by every National Theatre director following Winge. When Ellen Horn took over as director of the National Theatre in 1994, she wrote an article in *Aftenposten* emphasizing that while the National Theatre viewed Ibsen’s works as an artistic necessity, the institution’s responsibility as caretaker of Ibsen should not be perceived as placing a restrictive strain on the theatre’s artistic development. Horn asserted that Ibsen’s dramas represented opportunity for the National Theatre to further develop the Norwegian cultural heritage (*Aftenposten* 04.09.1994). Horn’s analysis illuminates how the National Theatre has

sought to reestablish Ibsen as a dramatist whose works are of value because they can inspire artistic development. When Erik Stubø began his work as director of the National Theatre in 2000, he too emphasized that it was central to ensure the further development of a vital Ibsen tradition (Aftenposten. 25.05.2000). And, lastly, this was brought up by Hanne Tømta in 2010 in her welcoming address to the audience attending the International Ibsen Festival.

This debate over Ibsen's vitality, and how it might be assured, has come to function as a backdrop for the arrangement of the International Ibsen Festival, including the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. However, the debate has not been limited to the International Ibsen Festival and the National Theatre, but has enjoyed wider cultural discussion as well.

There have been those who have voiced their opinion that Ibsen's works are irrelevant and outdated, and this has led to a questioning of whether Ibsen deserves such a central position within Norwegian cultural life. One of the most important expressions of this is the debate over whether Ibsen's works should be taken out of the obligatory curriculum in the Norwegian public school. In an article published on *ibsen.net* called "Ibsen i skolen. Hvilken Ibsen?" ("Ibsen in School. Which Ibsen?") from 2003, assistant professor Anne Marie Rekdal reviews this debate. Rekdal points out that Ibsen's significance to the Norwegian cultural heritage makes it difficult to merely remove Ibsen's works from the curriculum (Rekdal, 2003). Like the National Theatre, the Norwegian school has a historic responsibility to maintain the Ibsen tradition, which explains why simply ignoring Ibsen is not seen as a valid solution to the problem. In the article, Rekdal claims that the reason why Ibsen's works appear outdated and irrelevant to modern-day pupils is not that the works are in themselves irrelevant or outdated. Rather, the school system has failed in communicating the relevance and importance of Ibsen's works, and the reason for this, according to Rekdal, is that the education has been based on a specific understanding of Ibsen's universality and the 'general timelessness' of Ibsen's text. This has, according to Rekdal, prevented Ibsen, and Ibsen's works, from being approached and analyzed from a current-day point of view, which has, in turn, caused what she describes as a 'fossilization' of Ibsen (Rekdal, 2003).

What Rekdal's analysis draws attention to is how this understanding of Ibsen's universality has gauged the ways that Ibsen can be read and interpreted, which has subsequently led Ibsen to appear irrelevant and uninteresting to present-day students. The solution proposed by Rekdal is to divest Ibsen's works of their status as timeless, and to

allow teachers and students to interpret Ibsen's works in new ways (Rekdal, 2003).

A similar discussion could also be seen in an episode of the NRK program "Bokprogrammet" (The Book Program) in 2007, where the host, Hans Olav Brenner, interviews author Ivo de Figueiredo about the publication of his two-volume biography on Ibsen. In the interview Brenner asks de Figueiredo how it is that Ibsen can be both so popular and unpopular at the same time. This statement outlines to a great extent the nucleus of the debate: On the one hand Ibsen is viewed as being a national treasure, a writer and playwright whose works are of immense value; on the other hand there are those who perceive Ibsen's works to be unmodern, boring and irrelevant. De Figueiredo argues that it is important to come to terms with the multifaceted nature of the problem, and to realize that Ibsen is 'many things':

He is the literature. But he is also an institution and a tradition that has been built on his works. This has been going on for over a century. He is a part of our cultural heritage. He is great and he is alive, but we have to ask ourselves: Is he alive because he has beating blood in his veins? Or, is Ibsen alive simply because the institutions perform the role as life support machine?

Similarly to Rekdal, de Figueiredo here questions the system and the institutions that are responsible for communicating Ibsen to the Norwegian public. But whereas Rekdal argues for a revisal of the way Ibsen is communicated, De Figueiredo points out that the institutionalization of Ibsen demands that we question structures put in place to ensure Ibsen's centrality. What is it that powers the machine that keeps Ibsen alive? Is it the value of Ibsen's works? Or, is the machinery merely a construct that simulates Ibsen's vivaciousness?

Later on in the interview, Brenner also asks de Figueiredo whether students in the public school should be forced to read Ibsen? De Figueiredo answers that while Ibsen should be read, because of his role as one of the most central forefathers of Norwegian culture, this does not, however, necessarily mean that Ibsen will be liked. De Figueiredo argues that demanding that students like Ibsen is the same as saying You should love me because I am your father': "But in all reality you have to first prove that you are a good father, and if you are then you can reap the love. It's the same with Ibsen. We can say that you must read him. But we cannot say that you must love him". De Figueiredo's analogy shows that while Ibsen's position within Norwegian culture might not be diminished, it still remains an open question whether those who 'read' Ibsen truly find his works to be of relevance and interest.

These two examples illustrate the debate that has come to characterize the Ibsen tradition

in recent years. At its center lies a deep-founded questioning of Ibsen's value for people living today, coupled with debate over how Ibsen's works should be communicated by the cultural institutions in order to become relevant again. De Figureiredo in particular voices a form of critical self-awareness that can be said to characterize the discussion and problematization of the authoritative status of cultural father-figures such as Ibsen. This is a questioning that has come to shape the public's perception of Ibsen.

The debate over Ibsen's relevance has coincided with an increased focus on communicating his artistic legacy to the audience by the Norwegian government. This focus on Ibsen culminated in 2006 with the celebration of the Ibsen centenary, during which approximately 2,747 events were organized to celebrate the artist. A principal goal for the centenary was to contribute to the public understanding and interest in Ibsen, and to show that Ibsen is of current interest. According to the organizers the main goal was to 'inspire for the future' as opposed to looking to the past (Thoresen, 2007). The Ibsen-centenary shows how the norwegian national State has, through its cultural institutions, sought to actively shape the public's perception of Ibsen. Whether the increased focus is a response to, or a consequence of, the debate over Ibsen's value is somewhat difficult to ascertain. What is certain, however, is that the while the aim has been to show Ibsen's relevance, the discussion over the value of Ibsen has not been repudiated. Rather, critical evaluation and questioning has come to be an interlaced part of the interweaving movement of the Ibsen tradition. When we now turn to the celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Ibsen Festival we will see how an ongoing critical evaluation of the value of Ibsen's works and how this value might be communicated has become an integrated part of the festival.

### **3.1.3 Reawakening Ibsen: The International Ibsen Festival**

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary was an event that not only sought to present the Norwegian audience with theatre performances that would contribute to the revitalization of Ibsen. It was also an event that looked back at how the Ibsen tradition had evolved in the years that the festival had been celebrated: To celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Ibsen Festival the National Theatre commissioned the aforementioned Ibsen researcher Keld Hyldig to write an article on the artistic developments of the Ibsen tradition in the 20 years that the festival has been held. The article "Twenty Years of the International Ibsen Festival" was printed in the official program booklet and featured on The National Theatre's website, both in English and Norwegian. The text is not only an example of the

form of self-exploratory and self-critical tendencies that have arisen through the arrangement of the festival. It is also an example of how the attending audience are invited to remember, or become aware of the past developments of the Ibsen tradition.

Hyldig's analysis grants us central insight into the developments that the Ibsen tradition at the National Theatre has undergone in the past 20 years, and allows us to retrace the interweaving process that has characterized the Ibsen tradition in recent years. In addition to this, the text's framework means that it can also be analyzed as having had a direct impact on the horizon of expectation that preceded the presentation of *The Ibsen Machine*. Hanne Tømta's usage of Hyldig's text in her welcoming address exemplifies this. Tømta opens by quoting a section of the article where Hyldig argues that the Ibsen tradition has maintained its influential status not because the dramatic works are universally valid, but because experimentally minded directors, audiences and actors have 'rediscovered' Ibsen's works:

Looking back throughout the the history of theatre, it may appear as though each new generation or age has felt the need to 'rediscover' Ibsen. Time and again throughout history, a renewed feel from Ibsen's relevance and contemporary appeal has been found. Of course, Ibsen's dramas are coated with the dust of history; but through dramaturgical adaptation, the dedicated work of actors and cutting-edge direction, Ibsen's drama has been continually reinterpreted and made relevant throughout the 20th century. Thus, an Ibsen tradition has developed as a lasting and guiding force within Norwegian theatre (Hyldig, 2010).

Hyldig's analysis shows that wiping the proverbial dust from the pages of Ibsen's works, and daring to take new directions when it comes to performance style, has always been essential to ensuring the continued relevance of Ibsen's dramatic works. This analysis of the dynamics of innovation is used by Tømta to substantiate the interpretive idea forwarded by the National Theatre, namely that reinterpretation and artistic freedom are essential for the vitality of Ibsen. After having quoted Hyldig, Tømta argue that the festival is to be celebrated by presenting "playful projects, projects in search of freedom, which are willing to take risks" (Tømta, 2010: 3). By including Hyldig's analysis the National Theatre comes to include the audience in the ongoing debate over how the value of Ibsen's dramas are to be maintained.

The idea that the Ibsen tradition is revitalized by artistic innovation establishes a parameter for Hyldig's evaluation of the artistic developments that have been enforced by the National Theatre in their arrangement of the International Ibsen Festival. In the article, Hyldig argues that the International Ibsen Festival has "heralded a new wave of renewal" for the Ibsen tradition by seeking to "expand the scope from that of Ibsen in the



strictest of terms, to Ibsen as a source of inspiration for new drama and new theatre” (Hyldig, 2010).

The description of ‘Ibsen in the strictest of terms’ refers to the interpretive paradigm that has dominated the Norwegian theatre tradition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The principle aim of the interpretive paradigm established and developed at the National theatre was, as pointed out by Hyldig in his dissertation, to realize realizing Ibsen’s dramas in the way that Ibsen intended the drama to be realized. The psychologically realistic acting-style was seen as a way to achieve this truthfulness (Hyldig, 2000: 315). This interpretive paradigm upheld what Roland Barthes’ describes as a culture ‘tyrannically centered on the Author’, since the explanation for the work is sought in the man who produced it. The problem with this understanding is not only that it is theoretically unfounded, but that it imposes a limit by furnishing the text with a ‘final signified’ (Barthes, 2006: 43–4). The effects of this on the theatre, which is after all an institution that presents interpretations of Ibsen’s works, is that the interpretive tradition becomes aimed at upholding dogmatic rules that are to guarantee that the theatrical interpretations presented corresponds to Ibsen’s intent. This is essentially a *traditionalist* understanding of tradition, where the principle aim for tradition is uphold the connection to a mythical origin (see. 2.1.1).

It is this traditionalist understanding that the National Theatre seeks to abandon by initiating the International Ibsen Festival. What makes this interpretive paradigm problematic is that it establishes strict limitations as to how Ibsen can be performed, which is incompatible with the proposed idea that Ibsen’s vitality is dependent upon reinterpretation and artistic freedom.

Hyldig’s article outlines, and creates an awareness of what the National Theatre’s revitalization has entailed, namely doing battle with the psychological realistic traditions understanding of Ibsen. Not primarily because its means of representation, the acting-style for example, is in itself problematic, but rather the underlying understanding which has limited the scope of possible realizations. One of the ways in which the International Ibsen Festival has sought to overcome the traditionalist understanding of Ibsen is by presenting the audience with Ibsen performances from other parts of the world. According to Hyldig this has been significant in that it has created an awareness of the breadth of interpretations. However, the principle aim of the festival has, according to Hyldig, not only been to ‘survey’ all the world’s Ibsen productions but also to “examine Ibsen’s dramas with new theatrical eyes, break conventions and use Ibsen to develop new theatre” (Hyldig, 2010). One of the developments that Hyldig views as particularly

significant in this respect occurred with the festival in 2004. The festival featured six different productions of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which helped draw attention to how Ibsen's works could inspire a 'wealth of possible interpretations', as opposed to focusing on achieving a correct interpretation that lived up to the ideals believed to have been set forth by Ibsen. However, the festival was also important because it represented a breakthrough for German Regietheater, where Sebastian Hartmann is a key figure.

The movement towards Regietheater was a directional line that was advocated when the International Ibsen Festival was under the direction of Erik Stubø. As director of the National Theatre and the International Ibsen Festival, Stubø voiced a need to overcome the psychological realistic tradition established at the National Theatre. In an interview in the *Norsk Shakespeare – og Teatertidsskrift* in 2007 (The Norwegian Shakespeare – and Theatre Journal), Stubø indicated that the theatre was on the verge of becoming a 'modern theatre', but that there were still those who maintained what can be described as an traditionalist understanding of Ibsen:

We now find ourselves in an early stage of making modern theatre, because the romanticizing acting-tradition has had such a strong hold. And especially at this theatre, where it is still a little suspect that the director has an opinion besides that of hailing the Master who has written the text. I am sure that if you interview actors at this theatre, there will be many that are of the opinion that I go too far in furthering a form of directional dominance, and who feel that the directors should go back to the role of traffic wardens in the service of the actors. These are attitudes that you see a lot of in Norway today, just as you did ten years ago (*Norsk Shakespeare – og Teatertidsskrift* 1/2007).

Stubø's reflections shows that the crux of this debate, both inside the National Theatre and outside the institution, has been the understanding of the text and of the author's position vis-à-vis the creative director and scenic reinterpretation.

In "Twenty Years of the International Ibsen Festival" Hyldig note that the introduction of German Regietheater is significant because it marks an 'independence from tradition' by treating classical works 'progressively', 'freely' and even, Hyldig notes, sometimes 'disrespectfully' (Hyldig, 2010). It is a theatre form that demonstrates an independence of dramaturgical adaptation, and this freedom is viewed as being necessary for the revitalization of the Ibsen tradition. The director is instated as an interpretive creator, rather than as an executor of Ibsen's intent. Hyldig's article underlines that this development involves a movement away from the psychological realistic tradition, where the director's role has been considered "a sort of auxiliary aid compared to what was seen as most important, namely, presenting the content of the text and having the actors create credible (which is to say psychologically realistic) characters" (Hyldig, 2010).

While the National Theatre has sought to enforce this ideal by turning to Germany, there has been considerable discussion within the theatre field in Norway concerning the interpretive freedom of the director. A clear example of this was an interview in *Norsk Shakespeare – and Teatertidsskrift* in 1997, where Therese Bjørneboe interviewed Ole Anders Tandberg and Yngve Sundvor about staging classical works. In the interview Sundvor argues in favor of replacing what he describes as a ‘literary logic’ with a ‘theatrical logic’ when staging classic works such as those of Ibsen. The text should, according to Sundvor, be read and realized from different points of view because this is, essentially, what theatre is about.

A classic should be a text that people are able to retrieve, a text that is by way of the theatre performance handed the gift of life because we are able to do something new with it. If you can only do one thing with it then it is no longer a ‘classic’ in the theatrical sense, but in a literary sense. I’m not talking about the literary field here, but the people in the theatre who claim that a text should be read in a specific way (*Norsk Shakespeare – og Teatertidsskrift*, 1997/2: 47)

The introduction of Regietheater by the National Theatre radically demonstrates the emergence of a ‘theatrical sense’ by challenges the established hegemony of the text and the authority of the author. This is something that Hyldig emphasizes in his analysis of the artistic development of the Ibsen tradition advocated by the National Theatre:

Here, no particular mode of expression or textual interpretation is proscribed as the norm. Individual theatre productions are works of art in their own right; the acting style and mode of expression developed by the actors to fit each individual production. Actors can no longer rely on one single acting technique – that of the psychologic realistic style – but have to work with several different modes of expression and develop new ones (Hyldig, 2010).

That the National Theatre commissioned Hartmann to direct the main performance of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary indicates their dedication towards forwarding radical interpretations as a way forward for the Ibsen tradition.

In the article “Ibsenmaskin”, which was featured in the National Theaters repertoire magazine, Ingrid E. Handeland and Ingvild Gjerstad write about Hartmann and the production. Hartmann’s method of working and way of approaching Ibsen is seen as a way of further developing the Ibsen tradition by transgressing its boundaries: “When Hanne Tømta started planning this year’s Ibsen festival, she looked about for a director who could bring the development of the Norwegian Ibsen tradition one step further. One name in directing singled itself out: Sebastian Hartmann” (Handeland & Gjerstad, 2010: 6). Handeland and Gjerstad describe the rehearsal process and Hartmann’s method of direction, emphasizing that Hartmann views the actor not as an ‘interpreter of a text’ but

rather as an ‘independent artist’ (Handeland & Gjerstad, 2010: 8). This illustrates how the National Theatre through the program material advocates and create an awareness of the transition away from traditionalist upholding of the idea that the theatre performance should display faithfulness to the text and to Ibsen’s ‘original’ intentions.

### **3.1.4 Ibsen on the Horizon: the Opening Speech of the International Ibsen Festival**

The argument that Ibsen’s continued relevance is secured through artistic innovation was also forwarded in the International Ibsen Festival’s opening speech, which was held by actor Monna Tandberg. In addition to opening the festival, the speech prepared the audience attending the premiere for the performance of *The Ibsen Machine*. Tandberg is a well-known actress who has performed many roles at the National Theatre, and who is also known for having performed the part of Hedda Gabler in the Television Theatre production of *Hedda Gabler* in 1975. Tandberg can therefore be viewed as a prominent representative of the psychological-realistic tradition, which has been problematized by the National Theatre. This shows that the transition from one interpretive ideal to another can be said to constitute an internal struggle.

Tandberg begins her speech by welcoming the audience, and reminding them of how the festival has contributed to the revitalization of Ibsen by the presentation of new ways of performing him. The audience’s supposed familiarity with Ibsen’s works is presented by Tandberg as being the main reason for why radical interpretations of Ibsen’s works are needed. “We theatre people believe that you, dear audience, are as familiar with Ibsen as we are. And that you do not come here to ‘find out how it ends’. The inclusion of the audience exemplifies how the International Ibsen Festival comes to actively structure the audience’s ‘horizon of expectation’ by reminding them of the long standing of the Ibsen tradition. The audience’s familiarity with Ibsen is used in order to legitimize the need for a radically new approach to Ibsen: “We are entering a time where many instructors are under the opinion that the ‘triggers’ in a classical theatre text are so familiar that it is an insult to the audience to serve them ‘unprocessed’”. Again, the idea of an ‘unprocessed’ drama must be read as a comment on the psychological realistic Ibsen tradition, where a realistic presentation of Ibsen’s dramas have been the norm.

Because of the audience’s familiarity with Ibsen, the modern director should not merely ‘reproduce’ Ibsen’s dramas, Tandberg argues. Rather, the principal task when seeking to present Ibsen’s drama is, according to Tandberg, to find the work’s ‘core’. This idea of a

core appears to be a remnant of a traditionalist approach to Ibsen, but what Tandberg identifies as the 'core' is not the original production, or the artist's original intent, but rather Ibsen's radicalism in his own time. The 'radical' nature of Ibsen's works is something that has been watered down by the interpretive tradition that has presented Ibsen's works unprocessed, and is used to forward the interpretive ideal of revitalization through transgression. This indicates that while the National Theatre comes to reformulate the ideals governing the Ibsen tradition, it still maintains an idea of the author's original intent. The festival is at its best, Tandberg notes, when it presents theatre performances of Ibsen's dramas that are as radical and shocking as Ibsen was in his own time. Ibsen's original intent is thus reinterpreted to mean his radicalism, which is then used to substantiate the forwarded ideal of artistic innovation, as opposed to preservation. Similarly to Hyldig, Tandberg identifies the movement towards German Regietheater as being one of the most visible expressions of how the International Ibsen Festival, through radical interpretation, has helped 'renew' the Ibsen tradition. And, similarly to Hyldig, she argues that the development has been significant because it has 'strengthened the instructor's position', and opened up for new ways of interpreting the Ibsen tradition.

### **3.1.5 Confronting Tradition – Preserving Tradition**

In the theory chapter it was discussed how art acquires a historical life by being interwoven with an interpretive tradition. The organization of the International Ibsen Festival exemplifies how the National Theater has, in its efforts to revitalize Ibsen by initiating the International Ibsen Festival, given rise to a self-exploratory discussion over the value of the Ibsen tradition. Hyldig's article "Twenty Years of the International Ibsen Festival" becomes particularly significant in light of these developments. The article establishes an analytical perspective on how the festival has contributed to the development of the Ibsen tradition. This not only creates an awareness of the past development but is an opportunity for the audience to reflect on and think about the value of Ibsen's dramatic heritage, and how this value might be preserved by the National Theatre. Hyldig's article underlines that questioning and criticism have always been an integrated aspects of the Ibsen tradition, and that this has contributed to the artistic development of the Ibsen tradition:

Criticism and ongoing debate are important to the development of theatre. The artistic profile of the International Ibsen Festival has, throughout this running dialog with the theatre public in Norway, been steered toward contemporaneity, which is a necessity for the theatre in order to survive (Hyldig, 2010).

The fact that Hyldig views this sense of questioning as a catalyst for artistic development substantiates the ideal of ‘revitalization through transgression’, which has been forwarded by the National Theatre in their arrangement of the International Ibsen Festival. The National Theatre appears therefore to have established a new interpretive paradigm, where the Ibsen tradition’s authority is to be strengthened by having its authority continuously subjected to critical scrutiny, since this is a way of ensuring that Ibsen remains a vital force within the theatre. This illustrates that preservation of the authority of tradition is not limited to passive acts of acceptance, but can also include self-critical questioning and radical change.

The commissioning of Hartmann to write and direct *The Ibsen Machine* for presentation at the opening of the International Ibsen Festival illustrate that the National Theatre views the introduction of post-dramatic aesthetics as a way of preserving the vivaciousness and relevance of Ibsen. *The Ibsen Machine* abandoned the representational logic that has characterized the psychological realist tradition, and undertook what Lehmann has described as an ‘act of liberation from the interpretive regime’ (Lehmann, 2006: 27). The most clear example of how the production was an ‘act of liberation’ was Hartmann’s deconstructive reconstruction of Ibsen’s dramatic material. He thus abandoned and challenged the understanding that the theatre production should look to Ibsen as the final and guarantor of value, which, as pointed out by Barthes, is connected to the understanding that text “ releases a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God] (Barthes, 1968: 43–4)”.

The radical deconstruction of Ibsen must be read as an expression of a form of self-understanding that has arisen through the arrangement of the International Ibsen Festival, which has shown that the problematization and questioning of the value of Ibsen’s works have become an interwoven part of the interpretive tradition. The radicalism of *The Ibsen Machine* must be understood against the background of this tendency, which is seen particularly clearly in Tandberg’s reformulation of the idea that to find the ‘core’ of Ibsen’s text is no longer about presenting a lifelike rendering of Ibsen’s dramas but about unlocking and manifesting the radicalism of Ibsen in his own time. *The Ibsen Machine* can thus be said to live up to the National Theatre’s reformulated understanding of Ibsen’s intent by displaying a critical antagonism towards Ibsen and the Ibsen tradition. What does this mean with regard’s to the understanding that much of the effect and function of post-dramatic theatre is to negate, and directly confront the dramatic

paradigm.

I would argue that the attending audience are, in all likelihood, not unprepared for the radical reinterpretations of Ibsen's works presented by Hartmann. Nor do I think, as Lehmann does, that the "majority of spectators [...] expect from the theatre the illustration of classic texts [...]" and "subscribe to a comprehensible fable (story), coherent meaning, cultural self-affirmation and touching theatre feelings" (Lehmann, 2006: 19). I suspect that the audience, while they might be critical of post-dramatic aesthetics, something that I would maintain is in their right, are not so limited in their horizon as Lehmann here suggests. I and would therefore rather view the tension created by this encounter in light of Gadamer's reflections on the emergence of new aesthetic forms in "The Relevance of the Beautiful": "The reaction is clearly [...] a question of contrast, rather than a lasting experience of a permanent loss, but brings out the acute difference between these new forms and the old" (Gadamer, 1986: 8–9). In this instance this means investigating how *The Ibsen Machine* through the restructuring of text that are interwoven with the audience's memories brings Ibsen's dramas into a new light.

As we have seen, both Gadamer and Kosík's theories profess that tradition is not only upheld by a passive act of repeating, but that we as interpretive beings can actively and reflectively evolve our traditions. The festival event is an act of remembrance that actively contributes to the dynamic development of the Ibsen tradition by restructuring it. The National Theatre can therefore be said to ensure preservation of the Ibsen tradition by seeking to continuously expand the range of vision for what the Ibsen tradition is, a development that includes a critical and self-exploratory revisal of the tradition from the point of view of the here and now.

## 4 The Ibsen Machine: An Analysis

*The Ibsen Machine (Ibsenmaskin).*

Premiered at the main scene at The National Theatre 26. of august 2010.

*Based on:* Henrik Ibsen. *Director:* Sebastian Hartmann. *Scenography:* Susanne Münzner. *Costumes:* Adriana Braga Peretzki. *Light design:* Lothar Baumgarte. *Makeup-artist:* Annikka N. Andersen. *Dramatic adviser:* Hege Randi Tørressen. *Director's Assistant:* Pernille Skaansar.

*Cast:* Frøydis Armand, Trine Wiggen, Marian Saastad Ottersen, Anneke von der Lippe, Kjersti Botn Sandal, Kai Remlov, Ole Johan Skjelbred, Henrik Rafaelsen

During a talk on staging Ibsen at the Ibsen Conference in Skien in 2011, the director Ole Anders Tandberg spoke of how Ibsen was the ‘master builder’ of his mind. Tandberg used this reference to Ibsen’s play *The Master Builder* to express how profoundly Ibsen has influenced and structured his way of thinking. It is safe to assume that being a Norwegian director, Tandberg has an above average familiarity with Ibsen, Ibsen’s dramas and his dramatic form. However, the idea that Ibsen is a ‘master builder of minds’ can, nevertheless, be used as a description of how Ibsen, by way of the Ibsen tradition, has become so deeply interwoven with the memory of Norwegian audiences. These reflections therefore serve as a suitable point of departure for this chapter, which explores the workings of Sebastian Hartmann’s *The Ibsen Machine*.

In the opening of this thesis I sketched out three different facets of meaning that could be read from the title the Ibsen Machine. ‘Machine’ signifies, as pointed out by Knut Ove Arntzen, the dramaturgical strategy applied in the construction of the Ibsen machine, which approached Ibsen’s dramas from a mechanical perspective. Secondly, machine could also be said to evoke the theme presented and explored in *The Ibsen Machine*, namely the idea that the theatre functions as an Ibsen machinery – a mechanical construction where Ibsen’s dramas are continuously reproduced, in which Ibsen’s character’s are inextricably caught. Lastly, the aesthetic strategies, alongside with the thematics explored, enhanced a self-awareness of one’s own involvement as a clog in the Ibsen machinery. These three elements make up the different aspects of *The Ibsen Machine* that will be focused upon in the following chapter.

The main question guiding my analytical exposition of *The Ibsen Machine* is that of how the production involved the audience in a discussion over the value of the Ibsen tradition.



## 4.1 The Principle of Construction: The Collage

### 4.1.1 Demolishing Ibsen

*Machine* signifies a mechanical structure, contrivance or engine that has been constructed by assembling different mechanical components. The title *The Ibsen Machine* therefore draws attention to the manufactured quality of the work, and how the distinct elements have been conjoined. This is an approach that opposes the understanding that a theatre performance is an organic and unified whole, where the different elements seamlessly merge together. The conception most befitting the *The Ibsen Machine* is therefore *collage*, which not only signifies the production's principle of construction but also the totality of the assembled structure.

The term 'collage' derives from the visual arts and is usually used to describe pictorial works constructed by cutting fragments from other pictorial or textual works, which is then reassembled to form a new whole. Applying 'collage' as a description for the technique used in the construction of *The Ibsen Machine* draws attention to how the creation of the performance was based on a form of 'cut-and-paste', or decompositional, attitude towards Ibsen's dramatic material. *The Ibsen Machine* was a collage made up of textual fragments, themes, symbols and costumes from Ibsen's dramas, Ibsen's biography and the theatrical tradition at the national theatre. These elements had – metaphorically speaking – been disengaged from their original meaning-bearing context, and then reassembled to form *The Ibsen Machine*. The episodes and fragments that made up *The Ibsen Machine* did not seamlessly inter-merge, but rather formed a disharmonious, fragmentary and complex totality.

Since a theatre performance is, unlike a pictorial work, is not an object, the principal effect of this aesthetic strategy is not the breakdown of central perspective, but rather a dislocation of linear time, or, to put it differently, a disruption of the narrative development of a plot or story-line. In *The Relevance of the Beautiful* Gadamer addresses the break-down of linear perspective within visual art as being characteristic of the 'destruction of form' which characterizes art of the 'extreme modernity'. This new representational logic demands, according to Gadamer, a new form of interpretive engagement: "We must make an active contribution of our own and make an effort to synthesize the outlines of the various places as they appear on the canvas" (Gadamer, 1986: 8). That the abandonment of linear perspective, or narrative developments, demands a new form of interpretational engagement is echoed by Lehmann, who argues

that post-dramatic theatre is characterized by this form of ‘pictorial logic’ where the “eye of the viewer wanting to access the picture has to become aware of it and reconstruct its dynamic and processes” (Lehmann, 2006: 68). This begs the question: What is then that comes to structure and guide our interpretational involvement?

Gadamer forwards the argument that in spite of their ‘daring experiments with their unprecedented deformation of form’, works of art that fall under the category ‘extreme modernity’ is also incorporated in with our artistic tradition through memory and recollection: “The essence of what is called spirit lies in the ability to move within the horizon of an open future and an unrepeatable past. Mnemosyne, the muse of memory and recollective appropriation, rules here as the muse of spiritual freedom” (Gadamer, 1986: 10). We open ourselves up to the artwork, and take the construction of the work upon ourselves through a dialogic to and for movement between the work and our horizon. The changes to the artistic expression can therefore only be understood if we reflect on how these new aesthetic forms creates a confrontational tension in light of the old. In fact, Gadamer argues that complexity of these new work’s of art relates to the tension the create by breaking the prescribed rules of composition. It is this tension that establishes a ‘new vocabulary of harmony and dissonance’ (Gadamer, 1986: 8–9). This means that if we are to understand the radicalism of Hartmann’s production it is necessary to approach it as an interpretive event that restructure the memories formed by the interpretive tradition.

In the case of the collage, the restructuring of memories is, to put it bluntly, quite deliberate. A pictorial collage can be made up of ‘abstract’ materials, or it can be an assemblage of fragments and pieces from other artificial products, such as works of art. This means that the materials used contain the ‘imprint’ of works of art that are already known or interwoven in the memories of those seeking to decipher the work. Our already formed memories of the different elements that make up the image thus structures our interpretive engagement.

The Ibsen Machine was, as already mentioned, made up of textual fragments and episodes deriving from Ibsen’s works. It *The Ibsen Machine* displayed the form of self-conscious and juxtapositional reuse of material ‘haunted by memory’ that is, according to Marvin Carlson, characteristic of postmodern drama (Carlson, 2006: 13–4). The material utilized in the construction of *The Ibsen Machine* was ‘haunted’ because they contained the echoes not only of Ibsen’s dramatic works, but also of the theatrical tradition’s reinterpretations of Ibsen’s texts. In this instance the entire Ibsen oeuvre and the Ibsen

tradition. This inter-textual strategy means that the meaning of the components relates back to the original structure and acquire their meaning in the light of Ibsen's original text. This is, according to visual art's scholar Diane Waldmann, one of the principal effects of the collage:

One of the principal effects of the collage is that it layers several levels of meaning: the original identity of the fragments or objects and all of the history it brings with it; the new meanings it gains in association with other objects or elements; and the meaning it acquires as the result of a metamorphosis into an new entity (Waldman, 1992: 10–11).

Since the interpreting audience is in a position where they mediate between the coexistence of past and present, the production, while having radically disassembled Ibsen's works, still has a connection with the tradition from which the text speaks. Because of this, the textual fragments are not 'free' from the past, but rather pregnant with the memory of what has gone before. Looking strictly at the textual we see that the citations, while being distorted, still holds a connection to the originating textual structure, Ibsen's dramatic works. In the following analysis of *The Ibsen Machine* I will therefore approach the performance as an act of remembrance, and discuss how it comes to restructure and utilize the audience's memories to form a new image of Ibsen's dramas. In my analysis I have attempted to draw out the different facets of meaning that *The Ibsen Machine* acquires when read in the light of Ibsen's original text. This is done in order to explore how the intertextual strategy creates echoes that reverberate back to the original works.

### 4.2 Being inside the Ibsen Machine

Since the organizational logic of *The Ibsen Machine* has as one of its principal effects the disruption of a sense of narrative evolvment of a dramatic plot, it is both difficult and somewhat contradictory, to give an introductory synopsis of the story-line. What came closets to a story-line was the journey of the character Oswald, a character that originates in Ibsen's play *Ghosts*. This is the Ibsen drama that Hartmann draws most heavily on, and Oswald is the character that Hartmann pays particular attention to in *The Ibsen Machine*. Oswald takes on the function of a form of guide through the fragmentary and complex network that make up the Ibsen Machine. In Hartmann's production Oswald is traveling home form Paris. His journey is, however, not made up of a movement from one point to the next, and does not establish any sense of narrative development. A more accurate description would therefore be to say that Oswald functions as a central clog,

around which all the various Ibsen-fragments and episodes, and all the numerous Ibsen-characters revolve.

In the following analysis, which is aimed at unraveling the thematics dealt with in *The Ibsen Machine*, I will present and analyze the different scenes chronologically. This is done in order to give a sense of the productions fragmentary structure, and sudden shifts. However, since it is a principle aim to relay the different ways in which the production thematically explores the idea of an Ibsen machinery, this means that those elements of the production that gain particular weight due to the questions posed will be explored more fully.

In *The Ibsen Machine* the actors perform the parts of numerous Ibsen-character throughout, ‘jumping’ swiftly from one character to the next. Because of this I have chosen to, for the most part, use the the names of the actors when describing their movements as different Ibsen-characters. This is done for all with the exception of Oswald, played by actor Kjersti Botn Sandal, who, as already pointed out, functions as a leading figure in the fragmentary Ibsen-landscape presented in the production. I have chosen to include references when the quoted lines are a part of Hartmann’s script, and not when these are based on the video recording or my own memory of the production.

### **4.2.1 Death and Resurrection: When the Dead Waken**

The opening scene of *The Ibsen Machine* is described in the manuscript as the prologue. This scene can therefore be read as an introductory presentation of the central themes of the production. In addition to this what happens in the prologue takes place before the actual performance starts, as a form of preparation for what is about to unfold. The curtains were already drawn aside when the audience entered the main hall of the National Theatre. The members of the audience could thus see and become familiar with the scenography, which consisted of a large white tent-structure erected on stage. The tent was illuminated dimly, seemingly from within, making it appear like a snow-covered mountain. Along the sides of the tent lay plastic bags filled with what appeared to be snow.

Unannounced the actors began to emerge from the right-hand side of the stage from where the audience were sitting, stepping out of the shadows in what appeared to be a random order. All the actors are dressed in costumes from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in white and black, except for Trine Wiggen, who seems slightly misplaced in her short golden dress and a pink frilled jacket. The costumes are remnanta not only of the time where Ibsen’s

works take place, but also of the 'image' that has been presented of Ibsen's dramas in the psychological realist tradition's presentations of Ibsen's works. The actor Ole Johan Skjelbred wears a top-hat identical to the one worn by Ibsen when Ibsen was alive, as a form of homage to the departed playwright. The costumes, along with their unannounced emergence from the shadows, make them appear as ghost-like echoed returned from a passed era. This is further enhanced by the sense of timelessness which is created by the juxtaposing of modern costumes with historical-correct costumes, and the modern-day scenography. This scene can be interpreted as presenting the idea that the National Theatre is a place 'haunted' by Ibsen characters, or that the theatre is an Ibsen machinery with Ibsen characters. The fact that the opening scene falls under the heading "Prologue" substantiates the interpretation, since this 'scene' takes place before the start of the actual performance.

The actors continue to walk aimlessly around on stage, some glancing carelessly out at the audience and break down Ibsen's famous fourth wall. At one point Marian Saastad Ottersen steps forward, and while looking directly at the audience strikes a pose as though already involved in a soundless theatre performance of Ibsen's drama. She then laughs hysterically before venturing inside the tent. Suddenly, music starts playing and the actors stop their erratic wandering and line up with their backs against the tent, facing the audience. The music is a solemn march, with what sounds like a brass orchestra, and it is as though the march announces that the play is about to begin, thereby compelling the Ibsen characters into uniform action. When the music starts, Sandal (not yet revealed as Oswald), who is wearing men's clothes, and who has been standing still at one end of the tent, starts walking back and forth in a straight line up on stage while the others watch her. Her walking is strenuous and exaggerated, and she lifts her feet up high. After a few moments the other actors take their leave, entering the tent. Sandal, however, continues to walk back and forth. When the march stops, her heavy breathing and strained grunts can be heard. These grunts are timed so as to accentuate the rhythm of her walking, and this inspires laughter in the audience that becomes more marked as she continues this manner of walking for a long time without saying anything. When about two or three minutes have passed Skjelbred, Henrik Rafaelsen and Kai Remlov enter from the opening of the tent. Remlov lies down on the floor, facing the audience. Accompanied by Skjelbred and Rafaelsen on guitars, he sings the song "Shakespeare the Tourist". The lyrics speak of Shakespeare as an artist who knew, and managed to put words to the desires and longings of his own time, but also the epochs that followed his death:

Im Herzschlag die Gier der Epoche  
in his heartbeat the greed<sup>8</sup> of the epoch  
im Blut eine spätere  
[in his blood the next]

The images presented in the song are of Shakespeare who has come to travel the world because his dramas have reached out to audiences long after his death. Although the original text does not include it, Remlov, in his performance of the song, sings the line “Ibsen the tourist”. The song can therefore be read as a commentary on the status that Ibsen has within the theatre, and because of the circumventing festival event this poses an implicit question: Does Ibsen’s works still hold insights that capture the heartbeats of our epoch?

Towards the end of the song Sandal, pointing to the audience, yells: “I am Oswald”. Oswald’s opening lines of *The Ibsen Machine* echo that of Hamlet’s opening line in Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmaschine*.<sup>9</sup> Like Müller’s Hamlet, Oswald too is journeying home through a landscape that has no sense of time, but which is nevertheless recessed with historical references. The juxtaposing of fragments from different moments in time exemplifies how the collage-structure creates a sense of timelessness, not by mounting an abstract minimalist landscape without references to a historic period but by ‘dislocating’ time. This effect also shows how the production actively restructures memories that the audience have of the Ibsen tradition.

After having exclaimed that he is Oswald, Oswald proceeds to tell the audience what he is doing:

Oswald: I am coming straight from Paris – I am on my way – to you. Next to the steering-wheel of my car I have one of these buttons. If I press the button I change the channel (Hartmann, 2010: 4).

Oswald is journeying home through a landscape that has no sense of time, but which is recessed with historical references: The actors wear costumes from the time when Ibsen’s dramas were first performed, but these fragments from a past age are placed together with a ‘modern’ set-design and references to modern technology. This is an example of

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8 In the song the ‘die Gier’ is translated to the ‘greed’, which connotes greediness, but a more accurate translation would be longing or desire.

9 “Ich war Hamlet. Ich stand an der Küste und redete mit der Brandung BLA BLA, im Rücken die Ruinen von Europa”. (Müller, 1988: 38) “I was Hamlet. I stood on the coast and spoke with the surf BLA BLA, at my back the ruins of Europe”. (My translation)

how the collage-structure creates a sense of dislocated time – a sense of timelessness – not by presenting an abstract minimalist landscape without references to time, but by presenting several times at once. It underlines the idea of an Ibsen machinery, consisting of detached and reassembled components.

Oswald's description of driving through Europe in a motor car stands in stark contrast to the affective manner of his walking. While Oswald comically mimics driving home, he tells the audience that he spends a great deal of time reflecting on what will meet him when he eventually comes home, and that he stops at all the resting places to think on this (Hartmann, 2010: 5). Those in the audience familiar with the story-line of Ibsen's play *Ghosts* know what awaits Oswald, and the tragedy that will unfold when he comes home. In Ibsen's original play, Oswald, having returned to his mother, eventually comes to tell his mother that he is sick from a disease that he believes he has contracted due to his unseemly lifestyle in Paris. The disease, although never mentioned by name, is syphilis, which, at the time when Ibsen wrote the play, was believed to be hereditary. Upon being told of this, Oswald's mother, Mrs. Helene Alving, tells her son that he has in fact inherited his disease from his father, Chamberlain Alving, whose reckless lifestyle she has kept a secret. In *The Ibsen Machine* the audience come to learn that Hartmann's Oswald is not only aware of his disease, but also what will happen to him when he returns home. For Oswald suddenly, as if reminded of something, stops and starts to act out a scene between himself and his mother Helene Alving, performing the role of both characters:

Oswald/Mrs Alving: There's something I have to tell you, mother. / Yes, Oswald. / Oh, shut up – let me – let me die here alone in Europe – die finally – so I won't have to ask you./ Oswald? / Leave me alone, mother. / Oswald, where are you? / You know very well where I am – we've been through this a hundred times before – I die on my way to you (Hartmann, 2010: 5).

This seemingly schizophrenic rendering makes it clear that Oswald, like many in the audience, knows what will happen because, as he says, he's *been through it many times before*. Hartmann has afforded Oswald a sense of self-awareness of his existence as an Ibsen character by allowing Oswald to comment upon the repetitive nature of tradition. However, whereas in Ibsen's original play Oswald dies at home, Oswald here says that he dies on his way home to his mother. It is somewhat difficult to determine the meaning of this rewrite. The expression could be read as a metaphor over how Oswald is never truly reunited with his mother. Or, it might be read as an alteration of the story-line in order to uphold the presented idea that Oswald is undertaking a journey and that he will die

before being reunited with his mother.

Regardless, what is striking about this scene is the lack of emotion with which Oswald imparts, or plays out, this ‘scene’ between himself and his mother. It is clear that the prospect of dying does not frighten or distress Oswald. Rather, it seems that he is merely somewhat disheartened at having to go through the experience again, and again. Through Oswald, Hartmann voices an implicit criticism of the repetitive nature of the Ibsen tradition, by expressing resilience to being forced to live through these experiences again and again. Because Oswald is aware of his own existence, not as an actor, but as a character, the criticism and questioning of the circulatory nature of tradition is afforded an existential dimension. The production thus comes to ‘internalize’ the debate over Ibsen’s relevance by questioning it from within the fictitiousness of the theatre performance. Oswald’s struggles and turmoils should thus read in the light of his being caught in an Ibsen machinery, forced to perform the same function over and over. The Ibsen character’s inner turmoil is replaced by the turmoil arising from being seemingly inextricably caught in an Ibsen machinery. This scene casts a new, and somewhat more serious light on the strained manner of Oswald’s walking, and begs the question of whether Oswald has a will of his own, or whether his action is enforced by a power that compels him, like a puppet, or an automaton, to relive Ibsen’s drama.

Oswald eventually stops, and stands still for a moment before joining the others inside the tent. A susurrus of voices arise from within the illuminated white tent. Fragments from several of Ibsen’s works can be heard, as the characters play out detached fragments from Ibsen’s dramas. Wiggen talks of how “He is not like the other children” and how “He wants to be a soldier when he grows up”. These lines are from Ibsen’s *Little Eyolf*, where Eyolf after having suffered from polio at a young age cannot play games like the other children. This line of dialogue is however intersected by fragments from Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*, and someone talking of how Hedvig’s blindness is hereditary. Thematically, these fragments focus on the unfortunate fate of the children in Ibsen’s works. The ‘switch’ from one play to the next is done so quickly, however, that the episodes come to intermingle and overlap, making it difficult to ascertain and reflect on their meaning. In the manuscript this is described as a scene where the actors are to create what Hartmann calls an ‘atmosphere’ (Hartmann, 2010: 5). The creation of an atmosphere by gathering and conjoining textual fragments from Ibsen’s text exemplifies how this intertextual strategy evokes the memory of Ibsen’s dramas by creating text or memory clouds where the sense of direction depends upon the degree to which one



recognizes the textual elements. This scene also illuminates the idea of Oswald and the others being inside an Ibsen machine, where Ibsen's works are mechanically repeated. Their fast-forwarding through the material makes it seem as though they are merely passive vessels, devoid of any deep-founded meaning. This clearly opposes the acting-style of the psychological realistic tradition, where the actors were to convey the inner emotionality of Ibsen's characters.

After a few moments Ottersen steps out of the tent, and the others fall silent. Ottersen, who is wearing a white-laced dress, fiddles about trying to remove her undergarments. This goes on for a long time, since there are so many layers of clothes to remove. Finally she sits down and urinates. Representations of responses to a bodily needs is, to put it mildly, uncharacteristic of theatre presentations of Ibsen's dramas, but Ottersen appears to be unable to stop herself. While she is urinating, Rafaelsen emerges from the tent, and they immediately start to argue about whether or not they should leave and move to the sea. This scene is from Ibsen's drama *The Lady from the Sea* with Rafaelsen performing the role of Doctor Wangel and Ottersen his wife Ellida. The dispute is mainly built on paraphrases from Ibsen's text, and the lines are delivered with a feigned intensity of emotion that undermines the seriousness of the argument. Both Ottersen and Rafaelsen appear to find the discussion somewhat tiresome, and they both keep repeating the same lines over and over. This underlines the sense of mechanical repetition that has already been established. In addition to this the scene can be read as a satirical comment on the psychological realistic performance-style, where the presentation of the characters' inner turmoil have at times bordered on the melodramatic. This criticism is underlined when Skjelbred, who has ventured out from the tent in order to find his hat, is 'caught up' in Doctor Wangel and Ellida's argument. For as he steps in between them starts to move back and forth between them like a leaf blowing in the direction of their argument. This playfully undermines the 'drama' of Ibsen's play. When Skjelbred eventually 'untangles' himself from the argument he falls down on the floor. He tells Doctor Wangel (Rafaelsen) that he is most disappointed, since he thought they would reconcile their differences.

Soon after, the others emerge from the tent. They form a half-circle, sitting down in front of the tent similar to the way an audience sits before a stage curtain. One by one they venture inside the tent, drag the curtains aside and start to mimic a character from one of Ibsen's plays. Those who are seated then attempt to guess which Ibsen-character is being mimicked. This 'play within the play' is a comment upon how Ibsen's dramas are now so well-known that they are instantly recognizable. This is one of the scenes where it is

somewhat difficult to ascertain whether they are being ‘themselves’, as actors, guessing which characters the other actors perform, or whether this is a scene where the actors as Ibsen-characters play a game ‘amongst themselves’. Whatever the case, this is a scene whose frivolous handling of Ibsen begs the question of whether or not these works have any value, or whether Ibsen’s works have been played so many times that they have become devoid of meaning.

When it is Armand’s turn she emerges from the tent and stands there as though petrified staring out towards the auditorium while crying silently. This sudden emotional outburst is accompanied by solemn music which accentuates her sorrow. It appears as though Armand has been suddenly overtaken by the emotionality of the character she is imitating, although it is unknown which Ibsen character this is. Her emotionality contrasts the humorous caricatures that have been drawn out by the other actors in the foregoing scene. The other actors round up to console her, taking her hand and caressing her. But they do not ask and find out the cause for her sudden distress and before long, they are caught up in the machinery, once again performing fragmentary scenes from different Ibsen dramas. This abrupt transition from one emotional state to the next enhances the sense of fragmentation that characterizes the performance, and further outlines the idea that they are caught in an Ibsen machinery where they are unable to interact with one-another. It also shows how their captivity in *The Ibsen Machine* renders them unable to communicate by any means other than repeating lines from Ibsen’s dramas.

While the actors are performing parts from different plays, a softly rising rumbling sound can be heard, and while still talking, the actors empty-out ‘snow’ from some of the bags that have been lying at the side. The avalanche can be read as a symbol of how both they and the audience are submerged in the words from Ibsen’s dramas. This simulation of an avalanche also marks a transition to the next scene. While accompanied by a mechanical, machine-like sound, the actors push the tent further back on the stage, and as the tent starts to rotate on its own axis, the actors start emptying out the ‘snow’ from the bags that have been lying by the tent. When the mechanical music stops, Ottersen and Rafaelsen have climbed up on the top of the white tent. They start reciting lines from Ibsen’s *When We Dead Awaken*, where Maja Rubek and the bear hunter Wolfheim walk in the mountains. Down below, Wiggen addresses Skjelbred as Irene from the same play, acting out the final scenes in ‘real time’. In spite of the dramatic content of these lines, they are delivered with a form of disinterest that is echoed by Skjelbred as Professor Rubek:

Irene: I’ve had many children, but I have killed them all. I myself have been dead for many years.

Do you remember that word you said to me, when you had finished with me? You had finished with me and our child, and you said a word.

Professor Rubek: Yes, okay. I said a word.

Irene: You looked me in the eyes and I was breathless with anticipation, and then you said; ‘This has been a blessed event’. Thanks ever so much for that!

Professor Rubek: An episode. Well, okay.

Irene: And on that word I left you.

Professor Rubek: Yes, well you’ve always been somewhat dramatic.

Irene: Let’s cast all the heavy sorrow from our shoulders.

Professor Rubek: Yes, yes- yes.

Throughout their exchange Skjelbred and Wiggen, as Professor Rubek and Irene deliver their lines passively, as if profoundly uninterested in the scene they are acting in. Professor Rubek’s comment that Irene has always been ‘dramatic’, and his unaffected response to Irene means that the scene can be read as a commentary on the emptiness of Ibsen’s words.

Towards the end of this scene, the set design is altered further. Rafaelsen, after having helped Ottersen down from the ‘mountain’, tears down the white plastic cover from the tent to reveal the rigid framework. This as well is accompanied by music that simulates mechanical noises, emphasizing the idea of the stage and the theatre being a machinery. When the music subsides, all the actors are inside of the tent. Before long, Oswald emerges carrying a tin bucket. He walks up to the middle of the stage, which is illuminated by a blue light, and lifts the bucket over his head emptying a thick, black oil-like substance over himself. The lights at the back of the stage are turned off, and the front of the stage is illuminated by a bright white light that focus the attention on Oswald. After having put down the bucket, Oswald begins to smear the black oil over himself, sometimes spitting so as not to swallow it. This is accompanied by an eerie music that sounds as though it is reversed, and a deep, underlying, basse-tone. Eventually, Oswald begins to speak, while still smearing the oil over his face and body:

Oswald: If I could think it over – if I had thought of it – had I known – could I feel it – sense it. In all actuality I had forgotten all; around me there was an odor of thick woodwork. I always thought of damnation – the damnation. There was a sense of anxiety – but it diminished as soon as it got strong enough – I peered in to death – if it should turn out to be my own – everything would expire and begin again (Hartmann, 2010: 9).

Oswald here embellishes the idea of being caught in an Ibsen machinery that forces him

to relive his experiences. He appears here to give an account of his own death, and what it is like to be inside a coffin, reflecting once upon the repetitious nature of tradition by saying that if he should face his own death ‘everything’ will start again.

This is a scene that most clearly exemplifies how Hartmann’s Ibsen collage makes use of the layers of meaning that arise from the inter-textual references, which can be said to reverberate back to the original drama. In Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, Oswald is not frightened of dying, but has grown desperate in fear that his decease will cause him to lose his mind and reduce him to a helpless child. In Hartmann’s *The Ibsen Machine*, Oswald’s sufferings do not appear to derive from his decease, but rather from being caught inside the Ibsen machinery, which forces him to relive these experiences. The father-figure who is criticized in Hartmann’s production is not therefore primarily Chamberlain Alving, but the ‘father’ of modern theatre Henrik Ibsen himself. For Ibsen is, as the author, responsible for Oswald having to relive these experiences.

The sense of being driven to madness inside the Ibsen machinery by being forced to relive his experiences, is further elaborated by Oswald in the following lines:

Oswald: I’m thinking of sardines in oil – now right now – I’m thinking of their flesh that rests in the dark inside a can – I’m thinking that it must feel like suffocating – and that they don’t belong there – how they later keeps on dying through your mouth and then arrives in shit, literally – and I’m thinking of shit – of centuries of shit – Men, women and children in all that shit – Words that rise from the shit – You who returns to the shit – just shit, shit, shit (Hartmann, 2010: 10).

Oswald appears to identify with the sardines because they, like himself, have no means to escape from their captivity. Oswald’s description of the claustrophobic feeling of suffocation, and the sardines not being at home in the dark confinement of the tincan, can be read as an illustration of being inescapably caught inside the theatre, forced to experience the same events, and repeat the same lines over and over. The description of how the sardines ‘keep on dying’ as they are digested can be read in light of the foregoing description of continuously having to re-experience his own death. Oswald compares the movement of history with the digestion-process, that only results in shit that we sitting in the audience keep returning to. This illustrates how he, along with the other Ibsen characters, have throughout the course of the last 100 years been forced to repeat their performances. Oswald’s reflection can help explain the mechanical and unengaged nature of the performance style of the Ibsen characters that figure in the production. It would appear that the repetitious nature of the Ibsen tradition has reduced

all the emotion contained in Ibsen's works to an artificial affectedness. Coupled with Oswald's description of the repetitive and 'processed' nature of the Ibsen tradition, and the feeling of being caught, this expresses an antagonism towards the Ibsen tradition. What is of particular interest is the way in which Oswald points out that the audience is somehow involved in this process. While Oswald is talking, he directs his speech at the audience, indicating that the 'you' who keeps returning to the shit is the spectator sitting there in the audience, thus making us feel responsible for his sufferings.

In this scene Oswald also voices a longing for a different form of existence:

Oswald: Naturally I would like to be there – but not in this way – this is a public toilet – In Belgium – on the highway – I am Oswald – I am coming to you

Oswald's comparison of the theatre to a public toilet can be read as a comment upon the Ibsen tradition which has in some way polluted and reduced the value of Ibsen's works. After having delivered this line, Oswald commands Skjelbred and Rafaelsen to play the song "Noises". When Oswald is finished singing, he concludes: "It must be a misunderstanding – we are about a misunderstanding" (Hartmann, 2010: 10).

As if taken aback by this insight, Oswald begins to talk incoherently as though suffering from a hallucination. Rather than being brought by by his disease, this sudden attack seems to be a result of his captivity in the Ibsen machine. It is difficult to ascertain the meaning of Oswald's speech, but it can be understood as his grievance over his own fictitious life. At one point he expresses a deep-founded desire to escape what he describes as the 'conditions' and 'violence' of his thoughts. This is another example of how Oswald's sufferings in *Ghosts* have been rewritten to express his reactions to being a clog inside the Ibsen machine.

During this meltdown the other characters emerge from the shadows of the tent and try to console and comfort Oswald. They wipe his face, remove his soiled clothes. However, while they appear to have sympathy for Oswald, they are, as with Armand, unable to talk with him in order to ascertain the cause of his sufferings. While this is happening, Oswald continues to ramble on, and again the image of the sardines is evoked. Oswald describes how he wants to look in on the 'children', who are sleeping:

Oswald: I open the door carefully, there they lay – like small sardines in oil – breathing softly out in the air – I stroke their head – their little lives – I am so careful, so careful – I stand there – try not to think of anything, so as not to ruin this moment – these little lives [...] (Hartmann, 2010: 11)

If these lines are read as a description of the Ibsen characters' existence in the theatre – in the Ibsen machinery – these lines convey the compassion Oswald feels for his fellow captives, the other Ibsen-characters. Eventually Oswald lays down, and the others ceremoniously wreath him in a white shroud. Armand then asks the others if he is dead, but before an answer can be found to this question the scene changes and they begin acting scenes from Ibsen's works: Ottersen begins to talk to Remlov, saying that she wants to open an inn for sailors. This is another reference from *Ghosts*, where Englestrand tries to persuade Regine, his daughter, to join him in this venture. Ottersen is very excited about this idea, but is suddenly cut off by Skjelbred as a nonchalant Peer Gynt rendering his meeting with the bough. While this is happening, von der Lippe sits on the floor next to Oswald crying. The others appear to notice her anguish, but again they are unable to console her because they are too caught up in reciting their lines. Peer Gynt's story is suddenly interrupted by Rafaelsen, who starts yelling that there is a fire, but before this can be explained, Remlov cuts Raphaelsen off by yelling that he's had enough, and that they should all leave. This appears to be a response to the overwhelming chaos of this scene.

While referring to the others as 'children', thus enhancing the image presented by Oswald of their being like sardines in a tin-can, Remlov guides them off-stage saying that they need to leave because he is going to talk to 'mother', referring to Armand who is sitting on the stage floor. Having gotten the children out of the way he himself ventures off-stage and returns with a pistol while wearing earmuffs. He aims at the isles where the 'children' are standing, but before he can shoot he is thwarted by Ottersen who emerges suddenly, feverishly repeating the lines about how she is going to open an inn for sailors where there will be music and dancing. Ottersen then sings a song accompanied by Skjelbred and Rafaelsen on guitar. While she performs the song she is constantly interrupted by Remlov who is eager for her to finish. When she finally does, she and the others are sent off the stage. Remlov then turns to Armand, who has been sitting on the stage-floor throughout this scene, saying "Are you paying attention? This is important. This is necessary". When he is sure he has her attention he proceeds to shoot the 'children'. As they are shot the 'children' scream out in anguish.

It is clear that Remlov views murdering the children as the only way that he can have a chance to talk to Armand. The role Remlov has taken on in this scene, and the one he plays when addressing Armand is that of Chamberlain Alving, Oswald's father in Ibsen's drama *Ghosts*. Chamberlain Alving does not figure in Ibsen's play since he is long since

deceased when the action takes place. In Hartmann's production, however, he has come alive in order to confront his wife Helene Alving about the lies she has told about him and their life together:

Chamberlain Alving: Now, Mrs. Alving, or should I call you Helene. Now you are going to listen to me. Now you are going to finally hear my side of the story. You have told lies about me. In all these years you have lied. You told the world your version, but you know why I left you, you know I loved Oswald. As if your version of our life together was the right version. You have told the whole world that I was an alcoholic and a syphilitic. Let me this one time after 129 years tell you my story (Hartmann, 2010: 14).

Chamberlain Alving is frustrated and angered because his wife has in all the productions of *Ghosts* imparted a story where he is the villain. This can be seen as his attempt at reclaiming his life, and at defending himself. His attack is not only a comment upon how the Ibsen machinery – the theatre – has presented this story numerous times but also upon how the Ibsen machinery has control of his life. Mrs. Alving tries to respond, but since he is still wearing the earmuffs he does not hear her at first. When he finally removes them they start to quarrel about what actually happened in the years that preceded his death, and how he really should not be here since he is dead:

Mrs. Alving: You drank yourself to death! You are a ghost, you're not alive! That's the problem, you're dead, you were dead all your life. You believed in nothing, nothing was important to you. I've been here for 129 years, alone on this stage (Hartmann, 2010: 15).

They both question the fiction created by Ibsen, and the effect it has had on their existence. This scene clearly shows that Hartmann's Ibsen-characters have come to form a kind of self-awareness as to their own existence as characters. However, while they have broken free from the frame of Ibsen's drama text, and are able to question their existence within the Ibsen machine, they do this not as actors but as characters commenting upon the Ibsen tradition. This means that in spite of their ability for self-reflection, they are unable to escape the Ibsen machine. Chamberlain Alving appears to be attempting to rewrite his fate, and to form a new life for himself. But this attempt fails because he is inescapably caught up in the fiction Ibsen has created for him:

Chamberlain Alving: I don't know what truth to believe anymore. [...] In all reality, I don't know who I am (Hartman, 2010: 16).

Ibsen's dramatic works limits clearly limits freedom, something that is underlined by the following discussion over what Chamberlain Alving's first name is. They both find it strange that none of them can remember is first name. The explanation for this being that

Ibsen, whose fiction provides them with life, did not write a first name for Chamberlain Alving in the introduction list of characters. When they are nearing a form of reconciliation Chamberlain Alving asks if Mrs. Alving will ‘play it differently’ in the years that follow. To this she answers

Mrs. Alving: We have to be true to what the play says? I don’t know. I don’t know what I have done, don’t know which truth counts (Hartmann, 2010: 16).

This can be read as a commentary on how the interpretive tradition at the National Theatre has established an interpretive dogma which has stated that Ibsen’s dramatic works are to be presented as they were written. This is here turned into an existential discussion for the characters in the play, who are restricted to leading the life that the Ibsen drama provides. Chamberlain Alving then asks what will happen next, to which Mrs. Alving replies that he will have to go back to being a ghost, but before he does, she will sing him a song to comfort him. Since Chamberlain Alving has killed the ‘children’, they are left without anyone to play the guitars, and so Chamberlain Alving calls for the children to return to the stage. They are reluctant at first, protesting that they are unable to return to the stage since he has shot them, and they are now dead. However, they finally return to the stage, and Skjelbred and Rafaelsen accompanies Mrs Alving (Armand) while she sings “Where is our country”.

When the song is finished the Ibsen-characters enter the tent, and start, once again, to silently mimic characters from different Ibsen dramas. Trine Wiggen does not join them, but watches silently from outside the tent. As if having come to a decision she walks off-stage only to return with a knife, which she then points at the others. Skjelbred persuades her to give him the knife, since it is so sharp and dangerous. He encourages her to sing a song instead of killing them. Wiggen, apparently easily persuaded, sings the song “I like it all the same”. This echoes Oswald opening lines where, he describes driving on a European highway, using the radio dials to switch from station to station to hear different songs. During her performance of the song, Wiggen steals back the knife. Pulling von der Lippe towards her she tells her:

Wiggen: I want to protect you from being miserable, from being rendered childless, from seeing your husband fall in love with another woman, from hearing his love sick voice, from living in anguish, from believing that you have to remove yourself in order for your husband to be happy (Ibsen Machine, 2010)



Wiggen then proceeds to stab von der Lippe in the chest, while concluding that the killing of her is inconsequential since she would have thrown herself in the waterfall anyway. Those who are familiar with Ibsen's play *Rosmersholm* will know the story of how Rosmer's wife, Beate took her own life by throwing herself in the waterfall near the mill because she was convinced that she stood in the way of her husband's happiness. Wiggen justifies taking her life by nonchalantly pointing out not only that she would have died anyway, but also that she has spared her the agony and humiliations she would experience before committing suicide. Unfazed, Wiggen goes back to singing, but cuts the song off again to fetch another victim, namely Oswald. While stabbing him in the back she once again points out the agonies he would have suffered "You would have died anyway, after syphilitic hallucinations, insanity, headaches, and a long and agonizing death-bed". The next in line to be released of his suffering is Remlov. Grabbing him while cutting his throat Wiggen yells:

Wiggen: You're never going to live up to your ideals. You're never going to ennoble the mind of the common man. You're driven by desire – and you would have thrown yourself in the waterfall anyway.

Johannes Rosmer, is, like his wife, killed so as not to have to go through the trials he faces in Ibsen's play *Rosmersholm*. Wiggen then goes back to singing, but is interrupted by Ottersen who runs around on stage trying desperately to evade being killed. Wiggen eventually catches up with her, and while stabbing her with the knife she says: "Hedda Gabler, you would have shot yourself anyway". Having finished with Hedda she turns and points the knife threateningly at Skjelbred, ordering him to take of his guitar which he is still holding. When he has removed it she stabs him saying: "You're going to run around, looking for a 'child' that you think you've lost! Your going to go to Christiania, into all the bars! And then you're going to shoot yourself in the groin!". This section is also from Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, where Ejlert Løvborg, after having lost the manuscript to his masterpiece while on a drinking-binge, winds up shooting himself. While this is happening, Rafaelsen tries to sneak off to avoid being stabbed, but he is seen by Wiggen, who yells: "Hey! Hey! Come here! You're not going to have to climb that church-tower merely to fall down and be killed. Where do you want me to stab you?" After having settled on the stomach, Wiggen stabs the master builder Halvard Solness. While Solness lies dying on the floor, Armand suddenly appears, screaming a wild and dark scream while tearing down the verdigris green stage-backdrop. As Armand tries to frighten

Wiggen off she accidentally runs into the knife and is killed. Wiggen, seemingly taken aback, apologizes before returning to her song, now without the guitars to accompany her. But her song is interrupted by a cackling noise. Running of-stage she finds a prop-chicken, which ‘attacks’ her. Fighting back she screams “You’re not the wild duck! You are a hen!” As she manages to tear it away she stabs it and then, again, goes back to singing. However, when the hen lays an egg, which is accompanied by a popping-noise, Wiggen feverishly searches for the egg before finding it and throwing it away. A loud crashing sound is heard when the egg is crushed. Wiggen then finishes her song and stands there somewhat baffled, before laying down next to the others as if dead.

This scene is a humorous way of presenting the idea that the only way of escape the predetermined fate – the captivity in the machine – is death. However, this death soon proves to be merely a temporary release from the captivity in the machine. For, as they lie there as if dead the light changes into an artificial purple light, and a radio drama, seemingly from the NRK radio theatre productions of Ibsen’s dramas, can be heard. However, this is difficult to ascertain since the recording is played backwards. Regardless, this elements create a uncomfortable atmosphere, that is further enhanced as the slain Ibsen-characters start to move and fidget about uncontrollably, as though being jolted back into life by the voices. Their mechanical movements make them appear like puppets, or clogs. This creates the image of the Ibsen machinery being rewinded, thus bringing the characters back to life. After a few moments the distorted voices fall to the background as the prelude to Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal* is played. *Parsifal* tells the story of the Eucharist, the liturgical sacrament that restores life. The usage of this work as an accompaniment to the Ibsen-characters reawakening exemplifies how the usage of intertextual references accentuates the idea of resurrection. Eventually Wagner’s prelude subsides, and the characters ‘break free’ from their strained movements and starts to dance to Norwegian folk-music. When the music stops they turn to Wiggen and tell her that they want to ‘live a little longer’ in order to experience what their life has in store for them.

In the scene that follows, Remlov performs the role of political agitator, in a scene that appears to be based on several of Ibsen’s works that touch upon this theme. The clearest references are from *An Enemy of the People*, but a connection can also be made to other works by Ibsen such as *Rosmersholm* and *The League of Youth*. The others bring out drinks and smoke cigarettes while watching Remlov perform his speech. At different points they spur him to go on with his speech, clapping and encouraging the audience to

do the same. While talking, Remlov alters between being enraptured and involved in the opinions he is presenting, and then suddenly appearing more subdued and distracted. At times he forgets what he is talking about and why, and at one point he even asks the prompter what his lines are.

In his speech Remlov talks of problems with water pollution, and how the compact majority stands in the way of progress. However, these references are related to present-day discussion in Norway, for example the highly debated construction of power cables in the Hardanger fjord, and the discussion over whether or not Statoil should drill for oil on the North-Norwegian coast line. Remlov's ramblings and apparent disinterest make these discussions appear somewhat ridiculous. What appears to be commented upon in this scene is the attempts made by the National theatre to make Ibsen 'relevant' by explicitly linking his works to present-day problems. This is a discussion that was brought up, and problematized by the former director Erik Stubø. In an interview in 2001 said that the Norwegian theatre suffered from a 'modernity-complex', or what could be described as a 'current-interest neuroses' that had come to grab a hold of the Ibsen tradition:

No-one is talking of what the play is about, only of how it is of 'current interest'. This reached a climax when they were going to stage *Ghosts* here ten years ago, and they talked of how 'current-day' it was because of AIDS. This shows the extent to which you can turn material commonplace in the search for current-day interest (*Norsk Shakespeare – og Teatertidsskift.*, 2001/1 p.59)

What is interesting here is not whether Stubø or Hartmann are right in their criticism, but how this commentary upon past developments of the Ibsen tradition underlines the idea that the characters are 'caught' in an Ibsen machine. This is further enhanced by the fact that Remlov's political engagement and interest in the subjects he talks of appears feigned. It is as though he is merely going through the motions of being a political agitator. Suddenly Remlov begins to strip in order to illustrate a point that he is making. However, his taking off his shirt seems strangely unmotivated, and before too long he falls silent and starts wandering aimlessly about, looking bewildered. At this point von der Lippe 'takes over' and starts talking about political issues while Remlov mouths her words, as though being a ventriloquist doll, and she the puppet-master. Von der Lippe stars referencing the culture revolution in Norway, "I am a free man, remember the 70s and the revolution? I am unafraid!" In order to demonstrate how 'free' he is Remlov removes all of his clothes, while being under the 'control' of von der Lippe. While this is

happening, Remlov stares defeatedly out at the audience, silently protesting her commands. In a final degrading act von der Lippe takes hold of Remlov's penis and starts humming the tunes of the communist anthem "The International" while Remlov stands there looking forlorn, and gazing tiredly out at the audience

This scene demonstrates how little control the Ibsen characters have over their 'lives' and how the theatre – *the Ibsen machinery* – has unlimited control over their actions. Remlov's reluctance illustrates not only the Ibsen characters desire to escape, but also their inability to do so.

In the following scene, which takes place after Remlov, still naked, has performed the song Black Minute, Remlov asks if he can sit down with the others who are still having a party. Before too long Raphaelsen and Skjelbred enter the stage, after having disappeared for a moment, both wearing beards and holding a shield and sword. They start to fight, screaming angrily at one another. After a while Remlov, seemingly annoyed at the noise they are making, asks who they are. The answer that they are his 'internal conflict', and go back to fighting. This somewhat literal symbol of how Ibsen's characters are torn apart by an internal conflict is another example of the form of ironic commentary on the interpretive tradition that characterize *The Ibsen Machine*. Remlov is then told by the actors sitting next to him that if he wants the fighting to end he has to say that he has accepted his internal conflict. Remlov turns to Skjelbred and Rafaelsen, who are still fighting, telling them: "I have accepted my internal conflict". Remlov has to repeat this message a few times before Skjelbred and Rafaelsen lay down their weapons and wander off. After they have left, Armand suddenly rises, apparently feeling unwell since she staggers around. Eventually she stops near where the still naked Remlov is sitting, and throws up all over him. While this is happening, Remlov sits there silently. Armand then apologizes: "I'm so sorry! My internal conflict, I'm regurgitating it! Its coming out!" (Ibsenmaskin, 2010). This humorously literal presentation of the internal conflict is followed by a slapstick-routine where Remlov is two more times covered with the sick that Armand has conscientiously thrown up into a bucket that has been brought to her: As Ottersen leaves to empty the bucket she stumbles and accidentally spills the contents on Remlov's face. The scene draws to a close as Armand and Remlov lie down next to one-another on the floor and the others wrap them in a shroud in a ritual that echoes Oswald's 'death and burial' earlier in the production.

In the scene that follows Ottersen, while laughing hysterically, says that she has found some pages from a play called *When We Dead Waken*. After having commented that she

finds the title to be ridiculous she begins to read the lines, including Ibsen's stage descriptions in overtly 'dramatic' manner<sup>10</sup>.

Irene: (*Looks a while at RUBEK with terror in her eyes.*) Arnold, you hear that? There'll be men on their way up to fetch me! A party of men on their way up here...

Rubek: Irene, just be calm now!

Irene: (*In mounting terror.*) And that one ... she in the black ... she'll be with them. She must have long noticed I am gone. And Arnold she'll seize hold of me! She'll put me in the straitjacket. Oh yes, she's brought one with her in her box. I myself have seen it...

Rubek: No one shall be let lay a hand upon you.

Irene: (*With a crazed smile*): No indeed ... I do have answer of my own to that

Rubek: What answer, my dear?

Irene: (*Draws out the knife*). This.

Rubek: (*Grabs for it*). You have a knife!

Irene: All the time, all the time. Day and night. And in my bed.

Rubek: Give me that knife, Irene!

Irene: (*Hides it.*): You're not having it. I could well be needing it for myself.

Rubek: What use will it be to you here?

Irene: (*Fixes her gaze on him.*): Arnold. It was intended for you.

Rubek: For me!

Irene: When we were sitting by Lake Taunitz down there yesterday evening...

Up until this point Ottersen has been giving a caricatured rendering of the drama that unfolds in Ibsen's text, sometimes having to pause to catch her breath because she is laughing so hard. But as she talks of how the two characters sat together at Taunitzer See, it as if she is reminded of what it was like, or, as if she is suddenly taken in by what she is reading. She begins to sob while continuing to read the lines, indicating that in spite of her initial aloofness she is touched by the text.

Rubek: By Lake –

Irene: In front of the farmhouse. Playing with swans and waterlilies...

Rubek: And...? And ...?

Irene: ...and I heard you say, in a voice of ice, chill as the grave... that I had been noting but an episode in your life...

At this point Ottersen is sobbing, screaming out the word with an intensity of emotion that starkly contrasts with Wiggen and Skjelbred's unaffected and mechanical

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<sup>10</sup> While this is based on *The Ibsen Machine* I have chosen to include David Rudkin's translation of *When We Dead Waken*. The only alteration is that I have chosen to use the name Irene and not Irena as Rudkin has done. Cf. (Ibsen,1990: 252-255).

presentation of this episode earlier on.

Rubek: It was you who said that, Irene. I did not.

Irene (*continuing*): ... then I had the knife out. I was going to plunge it in your back.

Rubek: (*Dark*.) So why then did you stay your hand?

Irene: Because I saw all a sudden, horribly clear, you were already dead— these long years gone

Rubek: Dead?

Irene: Dead. Dead; you as I am. There we sat, before Lake Taunitz, the two of us, clammy corpses, playing a children's game with one another.

Rubek: I wouldn't call that being dead. But you don't understand me.

Irene: Where then is that burning want for me, you stove and struggled against, when I stood frank and openly before you as the woman risen from the grave?

Rubek: Irene, that love between us is assuredly not dead.

At this point the prelude from Wagner's Parsifal is played once more, again illustrating the thematics of death and resurrection. The underlines the drama of the text as well as the feeling of sorrow and despair Ottersen expresses upon reading these lines.

Irene: That love, that was of our earthly being – of our earthy being of beauty and of wonder; of our earthly being, so deep with mystery – for both of us, that love is dead.

Rubek: (*Impassioned*.) Well you know, it is that very love ... seething and burning me now with all the fire it ever did before!

Irene: But I? Have you forgotten who I now am?

Rubek: Be who you will, or whatever; to me, all one. You are to me the woman I look at and I dream I see.

[A few lines where omitted in the performance]

Irene: (*With downcast eyes*.) Now too late. Now too late.

Rubek: Not by the breadth of one hair has all that's happened in the years between made you any lesser in my sight.

Irene (*Raising her head*.): Nor in my own.

Rubek: Well then! So we are free now. And there is time for us yet Irene, to be alive and living.

Irene: (*Says sadly to him*.) Arnold, the desire for living died in me. I am arisen now. I search for you. I find you. And I see you, and all that's living, lying there – lying there as I have been.

Rubek: Oh my love how mistaken you are! The life within us and around us is in a ferment and a raging as ever it was!

Irene: (*Smiles, shaking her head*.): Your young woman has risen, and can see all livingkind lain out for dead.

Rubek: (*Seizes her in a powerful embrace*.) Then these two dead we are must live this one moment utterly alive – before we each sink back into our graves!

Irene: (*With a cry*.) My love!

Rubek: But not in this half-darkness here. Not here, with this hideous wet gravecloth beating

about us...

Irene: (*In transport of passion.*) No, no... up into the light, amid the splendor and the glory. Up to the promised mountain peaks above!

Rubek: There we shall hold our wedding feast, Irene... oh love of my heart!

Irene: (*Proud.*) Dear husband, now the sun may gladly look on us.

Rubek: All the Powers of Light may gladly look upon us. And all the powers of darkness too. (Seizes her hand). So will you come with me there, my ransomed bride?

Irene (*As if transfigured.*) Readily and freely, I come with my master and lord.

Rubek: (*Drawing her with him.*) First we must up through the gathering mist, Irene, and then...

Irene: Ay, up through all the gathering mist. And so, to the topmost towering pinnacle above, aflame there in the rising of the Sun.

*(The clouds of mist sink denser and denser about the landscape. RUBEK with IRENE, hand in hand, set off upwards across the snowfield to our right, and soon are lost amid the lower clouds. Sharp squalls of wind flail and whine through the air. The SISTER IN BLACK emerges, ascending the rockfall to our left. She pauses there, and looks about her, making no sound, scanning for a sight of them.)*

Maja: (*Heard rejoicing and singing in the chasm far below.*) I am free! I Am Free! I am Free! The cage has sprung open for me! I am free as a bird! I am free!

*(Suddenly from up on the snowfield a thunderous roar is heard: it's slipping and swirling in raging onrush down. RUBEK and IRENE are obscurely glimpsed, swirled about in the masses of snow, and buried in them.)*

The Sister of Mercy: (*Lets forth a cry, and reaches out toward the fallen, calling.*) Irene! (*She stands silent a while, then traces the Sign of the Cross in the air, and says.*) Pax vobiscum.

*(Maja's rejoicing and song are heard from yet farther off below.)*

Maja: I am free! I am free!

Ottersen repeats the words "I am free!" while throwing the snow that covers the stage over herself. The music eventually fades away and she continues to repeat the final lines about being free while crying uncontrollably. Exhausted, she eventually lays down on the floor sobbing silently.

The final scene from Ibsen's *When We Dead Waken* is here set in a new light. The image of Irene and Rubek being dead, clammy corpses devoid of life emerges as a description of the life the Ibsen-characters come to lead inside the Ibsen machine. Throughout the performance the characters' mechanical repetition of fragments from Ibsen's dramas have give the impression that they, similarly to Irene and Rubek, have been emptied of the burning desire described in their lines. This makes it appear that the repetitious nature of the Ibsen tradition removed the characters emotional investment in the 'lives' they lead. Ottersen's 'transformation' during the performance of this lines indicates that she

identifies with the description of the living dead, and, paradoxically, that she has found truth in the words of Ibsen. The almost compulsive repetition of the words “I am free” appears startlingly paradoxical in the light of the underlying thematic of the Ibsen-characters’ captivity inside the Ibsen machinery.

In the final scene of *The Ibsen Machine*, which follows Ottersen’s reading from the final of *When We Dead Waken* the light has faded on stage and only Remlov and Armand remain on stage wreathed in a white cloth like two mummified bodies. They talk together, of how they are at the bottom of the sea looking up at moving ships overhead. While they are talking Skjelbred and Rafalesen emerge carrying masks of the heads of Henrik Ibsen and his wife Suzannah. Oswald enters as well, wearing the mask of a young boy. It covers his head entirely, so he has to be guided by Wiggen. Skjelbred and Rafalsen carefully places the masks of Henrik and Suzannah on the heads of Kai and Armand. ‘Ibsen’ and ‘Suzannah’ then rise and are guided around. Von der Lippe emerges, shuffling forward on her knees. In a high-pitched voice she begins an explanatory monologue that appears to describe how human beings by writing create fictions that dissolve the barrier between what is real and what is imaginary. The writing engulfs all those that the writer has written of, and also the writer. The awakening of Ibsen and his wife Suzannah underlines this image of the writer becoming a part of his own fiction. When von der Lippe is finished with her monologue Remlov exclaims, in a hollowed voice due to his mask, that he is falling. He then removes the Ibsen mask and turns to Suzannah (Armand) and helps her remove her mask. The scene shifts, and the lighting fades but before to long Oswald emerges, now inside a transparent inflatable plastic ball close to two meters in diameters. While venturing from the stage and literally onto the audience he sing’s the song “The Line”. The text begins with a description of time moving through a landscape of shadows:

Time flows pretty  
along the line  
shadows melt  
into one another  
darkness fell upon the line

It’s only moving and forgetting  
the hills and glens  
became pains  
beside the line



(Hartmann, 2010: 33)

It appears that the text describes their experiences as Ibsen characters, and that they are the ones driven alongside this timeline, without the ability to control their movement: “No idea how to stop” (Hartmann, 2010: 34). But this continuous movement is disrupted and contrasted with the description of being forced onto the line and, consequently, ‘into time and space’ as ‘imitations’:

Forced into time and space  
and onto the line  
imi-tating the wild

All they believed in was that line  
(Harmann, 2010: 34)

The line appears to symbolize a demarcation between two dimensions, or modes of time: a timeless sphere and a momentary fixed present. Read as a commentary on their existence as Ibsen characters, this can be said to describe how they go from finding themselves in a timeless dimension, but also in the here and now. This transition from one sphere to the next appears to describe their transgression from a timeless existence to a the temporal existence in the here and now that is the theatre event. Oswald thus appears to convey what it is like to have been handed immortality and timelessness through Ibsen’s fiction, and how the theatre performances allow them to come ‘alive’ and step into time.

Throughout the song Oswald appears to implicitly question what it is that motivates their return in the refrain:

Everyone calls it love  
insists that this is love  
truly believe that our duration  
is related with love

Oswald sings the song, accompanied by the actors Skjelbred and Rafaelsen on guitar, while venturing out from the stage and into the auditorium. During the course of this journey the audience members are forced to either move away, or to help to push and steer the plastic ball towards the back of the auditorium. When the song is finished

Oswald stands in the midst of the audience. He asks members of the audience who are closest to him to help him exit the plastic ball. Armand, performing the role of Mrs Helene Alving calls out for Oswald. She recites the final lines from Ibsen's play *Ghosts*, which signals that the production is about to end:

Mrs. Alving: Do you feel calmer now?

Oswald: Yes

Mrs. Alving: What terrible ideas they were to get into your head, Oswald. But all just imagination. All these upsets have been too much for you. But now you'll be able to have a good long rest. At home, with your mother beside you, my darling. Anything that you want you shall have, just like when you were a little boy. There now. The attack's over. You see how quickly it went. Oh, I knew it would ... See what a lovely day we're going to have, Oswald? Brilliant sunshine. Now you'll be able to see the place properly<sup>11</sup>.

In this end scene from *Ghosts*, Oswald has convinced his mother that should he suffer the attack that might cause him to lose his mind and render him a degenerate 'child' she has to give him the morphine that will end his misery. In Hartmann's *The Ibsen Machine* Oswald's sufferings derive from his feeling of being caught inside the Ibsen machine. He is the one character who, similarly to the 'holy fool' in Wagner's *Parsifal*, has the most insight into his existence, but whose yammering the others have failed to recognize as insight. This comes to the fore in the last scene, when Oswald's mother dismisses his 'terrible ideas' as being figments of his imagination. Mrs. Alving's beckoning for Oswald to be rid of his dreadful thoughts, and to see his 'home' in the brilliance of the sunshine. In *The Ibsen Machine*, home is the theatre stage that Oswald, in an act of desperation attempts to escape. His mother's calling is a beckoning for him to abandon his escape-mission and to return to the Ibsen machinery. But Oswald remains standing in the auditorium as they continue with their lines:

Mrs. Alving: Oswald, what's the matter with you? What is it? Oswald! What's the matter with you? Oswald! Oswald! Look at me! Don't you know me?

Oswald: Give me the sun

Mrs. Alving: Me! Who have given you life.

Oswald: Me! Who have given you life

Mrs. Alving: Give me the sun.

Oswald: Give me the sun.

When seen in light of the theme explored in *The Ibsen Machine*, this final dialogue appears to describe not only their longing, but also how the fiction, as presented by von

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<sup>11</sup> This is taken from James McFarlane's translation of *Ghosts* (Ibsen, 2008: 163).

der Lippe, functions as a way of ‘inscribing’ or giving life. Rewriting Ibsen’s fiction appears to be their means of communicating with one another inside of the Ibsen machine. In spite of his mother’s beckoning, Oswald stays amidst the audience trying desperately to establish a sense of connection with those present. He talks directly to the audience, addressing those nearest to him as if they were the lover that once abandoned him. Towards the end of his dialogue he starts acting out the parts of himself and his lover, as if imagining an encounter where they talk of their love for each other. Finally, Oswald says that he is dying, to which the lover answers “But I love you”. Oswald answers that that is a good thing, and asks the lover if she feels calmer? To which the lover answers yes. Oswald then stands silently for a moment, looking out at the audience before he abandons the hall to return to the stage. The light fades and *The Ibsen Machine* has ended, with Oswald returning to the machine having, momentarily, experienced the intimacy and love he has longed for throughout the performance.

### 4.3 Caught in the Ibsen Machine

#### 4.3.1 Estrangement and Ensnarements: Ghosts in the Machine

*The Ibsen Machine* thematically centered on how the theatre functions as a machinery that reproduces Ibsen’s dramas. The Ibsen characters presented in the production seemed inescapably caught in a theatre machinery where they were forced to repeat the same lines over and over. At times they appeared to be ‘possessed’, not only because of the plenitude and suddenness of their ‘shifts’ between characters but also because they at times display a form of unwillingness or resilience towards performing their roles. In addition to this, the idea of death and resurrection was made an explicit theme by Hartmann, who throughout the performance killed off the characters, only to have them awaken again.

It would appear that at no point in the production do the actors ‘step out’ of their roles as Ibsen characters to comment ‘as themselves’, but the Ibsen characters do engage in a form of meta-commentary throughout the production, which also includes questioning or commenting upon the Ibsen tradition, for example Skjelbred’s comment ‘you were always so melodramatic’ (as Professor Rubek) to Wiggen (as Irene). But also, most notably perhaps, the argument over Remlov as Chamberlain Alving and Armand as Helene Alving over which story is true, and whether she will play *Ghosts* differently in the years to come so that his reputation might be salvaged. This voices a critical

questioning as to the value of Ibsen and the Ibsen tradition. However, they all partake in this criticism *as* Ibsen-characters. This is, I would argue, in correspondence with the underlying artistic idea explored in the production, namely the idea that the Ibsen characters are caught in an Ibsen machinery. Hartmann's strategy is different from that of Brechtian *Verfremdung*, or other forms of self-commentating strategies which are aimed at inducing a level of reflection over the fictitious nature of theatre. Here, Hartmann encourages self-awareness by allowing the fictitious to comment upon Ibsen's fiction as characters. The criticism of the Ibsen tradition is taken on from the inside of that very system in the form of existential questioning of Ibsen's characters, whose freedom is fundamentally limited by the control that Ibsen and the Ibsen tradition have over them. This is an artistic choice that shows how Hartmann has chosen to explore the problematics of the repetitious nature of tradition from within the tradition.

The characters 'captivity' in *The Ibsen Machine* shed new light of the title *Ghosts*, a drama that Hartmann focused the attention on throughout *The Ibsen Machine*. The Norwegian title of Ibsen's play is *Gjengangere*, a title that holds a meaning that is regrettably lost in the English translation. The literal translation of *gjengangere* would be those who walk again, and in Norwegian it signifies not only the ghostly apparitions of those who have come to suffer either a factual or a metaphorical death, it also indicates someone or something constantly returning. This functions as a fitting description of the ghost-like and haunting appearance of the numerous Ibsen-characters that figure in Hartmann's *The Ibsen Machine*, and symbolizes the repetitive nature of the Ibsen machinery that keeps Ibsen's works alive.

The idea that we are 'haunted' and possessed by the past, is a theme that is present in all of Ibsen's works. Ibsen's characters are almost all haunted by their past transgressions, and by the sins of their forbears which finally catch up with them. In fact, this is even underlined in the dramaturgical structures of Ibsen's works, where the past is the focus of attention. *Ghosts*, which is the work that Hartmann draws most heavily from, is perhaps the one play that most clearly voices this experience of being conditioned by the past. Mrs. Alving is the one who most clearly speaks of this, claiming in a conversation with Reverend Manders that she feels there is something ghost-like within her.

Fru Alving: It is not only that which we have inherited from our father and mother that haunts us. It is all sorts of departed opinions and old-fashioned dead beliefs and things of the like. They are not alive in us; but they are there in us regardless and we cannot be rid of them. Whenever I pick up a newspaper and read, it is as though I see ghosts steal between the lines. There must live ghosts in all corners of this land.

This sense of being haunted by the past comes to the fore not only in the thematic dealt with in *The Ibsen Machine* but also through the aesthetic strategies applied in the production. By using the collage as a constructional principle, Hartmann exploited the intertextual connection between the theatre text and Ibsen's original textual works, and thus drew attention to how interpretational process depended upon the already formed memory and knowledge Ibsen's works. This sense of self-reflection was heightened by the fact that the production explored the idea of being caught in an Ibsen machine, but also by the fact that the questioning of Ibsen's value functioned as a backdrop for the arrangement of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The festival event itself induced a high-level of self reflection as to how the Ibsen tradition might be upheld.

### 4.3.2 Reception

The reviews made it clear that the debate over the Ibsen tradition takes place not only in the theatre, but also in the overall media. This substantiates the argument propounded in this thesis that the Ibsen tradition has in the past decades become intermingled with a questioning of Ibsen vitality and relevance. Hartmann's *The Ibsen Machine* was clearly reviewed in light of the discussion of Ibsen's relevance, although the critics remained undecided as to whether Hartmann had managed to revive Ibsen. In the weekly paper *Morgenbladet*, Kamilla Aslaksen wrote in the article "'Råkult' 'Dødsfett!'" that *The Ibsen Machine* was the 'strongest' production of the year, and that it was much more than a 'reencounter' and a 'resuscitation' of over a hundred year old dramas:

*The Ibsen Machine* by Sebastian Hartman is a whole new theatre experience, where Ibsen's character play along, and override, the parts the text has given them, and where scenography, acting, music and directing together works in creating great theatre art for people living today (*Morgenbladet*, 24.09.2010).

The radical nature of Hartmann's playful and disrespectful treatment of Ibsen is moreover not viewed as abandoning Ibsen's ideals, but rather as being 'profoundly Ibsenesque' (*Morgenbladet*, 24.09.2010).

Also in *Morgenbladet*, critic Henning Gärtner reviews the performance differently, arguing in "Ibsensufflé" that the production's frivolous approach to Ibsen meant that it failed to deconstruct the playwrights dramas. The production did not, according to Gärtner, make the audience pick up on hidden connections in Ibsen's works, or succeed in activating the audience's creativity, which after all the goal of postmodern

performance-aesthetics. Rather, *The Ibsen Machine* made the audience turn off their critical thought and become entertainment-consumers (Morgenbladet, 03.09.2010). On the one hand, I agree with Gärtner that the production's use of humor and what appears at times to be an unmotivated superficial rendering of Ibsen-fragments can make *The Ibsen Machine* appear to be a somewhat shallow presentation of Ibsen's dramas. Moreover, the fact that the production was described in the program material as an Ibsen potpourri and a 'romping about' with Ibsen will have contributed to the production being experienced and 'read' in such away.

However, I would argue that the characters superficial renderings, the juxtaposing of humor and seriousness, could be read in light of the idea that the characters are caught in an Ibsen machinery that, through its constant repetition of Ibsen's works, have rendered them soulless. The superficiality 'on display' need not be interpreted as an exhibition of the superficiality of the work, but rather as the complex manner in which Hartmann choses to thematize and explore the idea of an Ibsen machinery, where the Ibsen-characters have been reduced to empty conveyance-machines forcibly repeating Ibsen fragments.

A scene that Gärtner finds particularly problematic is the scene where Marie Ottersen performs the later part of "When We Dead Waken". According to Gärtner, this scene exemplifies how the production attempt feministic deconstruction fails because Ottersen initial critical distancing to the words dissolves as she is 'seized by the text'. While I am in agreement with Gärtner on the point that this scene fails to deconstruct Ibsen from a feminist point of view, I disagree with the assumption that this was what was attempted. On the basis of my reading, argue that this scene should rather be read as an exploration of the captivation by the Ibsen tradition that *The Ibsen Machine* labors with throughout, as opposed to a failed attempt to render visible and criticize Ibsen for his hidden antifeminism.

## 5 Postscript

The theatre is an arena where the battle over traditions appears to be a recurrent phenomenon. Perhaps this is because the theatre is a public institution with a historic responsibility to care for the artistic legacy of cultural forebears such as Ibsen. The theatre is an arena where we can confront tradition by re-experiencing and re-interpreting works that have been handed down to us, and that are interwoven with our cultural memory, from a new point of view. This appears to have been the case with the theatre in ancient Greece, where the theatre was an arena where the best playwrights of the Polis were asked to rewrite myths deeply imbedded in the cultural memory of the Greeks.

The National Theatre has for over 100 years functioned as a guardian for Ibsen's dramas. The international Ibsen Festival appears to have been organized because the institution felt that it was chained to the past – haunted by a dead forefather. The questioning of the vitality of Ibsen appears to have give rise to a new artistic ideal, where critical evaluation and reinterpretation has supplanted an ideal where the principal goal was to repeat the words of Ibsen in the manner Ibsen intended. As pointed out by Gadamer, a text – in this instance Ibsen's dramas – only speak to us from the present, meaning that the subject-matter will always presents different aspect of itself from different point of views. This means that Ibsen's works will always acquire their 'life' only from the light in which it is presented to us (Gadamer, 2004: 285). The theatre is an arena that seeks to bring dramatic works of classics such as Ibsen to life by casting a new light on them. *The Ibsen Machine* is an example of one of the ways in which the National Theatre has sought bring Ibsen to life by challenging the ideal that he must be presented in accordance which what his own intentions were in life. However, the truth of the matter is that Ibsen's dramatic works were intended for the stage, and were intended to live on even after he had passed.

The National Theatre's intentions behind organizing the International Ibsen Festival is to approach Ibsen as a source of inspiration. This is done in order to create a dynamically evolving Ibsen-tradition that can make Ibsen speak to audience in the here and now. This is an understanding that was voiced by Keld Hyldig in "20 Years of the International Ibsen Festival":

By breaking the free from older theatre conventions and updating contemporary contexts, the historical theatre text can be integrated into contemporary theatre. Thus European theatre traditions contain a tension between the history of the original play and the contemporary context in which the texts are performed as theatre. And this is how tradition, such as the Ibsen tradition, can actually be kept alive through breaking free from convention and adapting to contemporary society. [...] If theatre did not concern itself with renewal and updating, it would stagnate, becoming and re-enacted museum piece. This goes against the basic nature of theatre as a living,

contemporary based art form” (Hyldig, 2010).

Hyldig’s text shows that it is decisive to question the authority of tradition, and to ask ourselves whether the words of our forebears still speak to us is a process that can allow these works to become living and enduring monuments.

In this thesis I have sought to outline a conception of tradition as a dynamic structure that can encompass critical alteration, opposition and self-reflection as characteristic elements contributing to creation. This has been done in order to shed light on an arena that through its preservation of the Ibsen tradition has come to give voice to a critical appreciation of him, and that has undertaken a critical exploration of its own understanding of and approach to Ibsen’s dramatic works.

The confrontational exploration of the foundations of the traditions that we belong to and the questioning of what hold traditions have over us can lead us to know more about who we are, and who we want to become. It is particularly important since such a questioning exploration can help prevent dogmatic adherence to its prescribed rules, which is problematic not only because we thereby run the risk of repeating past mistakes. It would also seem that our traditions thus run the risk of not speaking to us. A possible conclusion that can be drawn is that the developments of the Ibsen tradition at the National Theatre have voiced a new form of self-understanding, where the problematization of tradition and the questioning of Ibsen’s hold over us have become an interwoven part of the tradition. The revolt against tradition has taken on many forms, and *The Ibsen Machine* exemplifies a form of deconstructive efforts that does not seek to sever the bonds of tradition, but examines them: At the core of the deconstructive logic presented in *The Ibsen Machine* is the self-aware problematization of the hold that traditions have over us, and how the words of the dead both condition and restrict our freedom. However, while the production does give way to despair in the face of this it also voices a hope that we through words long since spoken can find new worth.

Gadamer’s exploration of the hermeneutic nature of our interpretive engagement with the world led him to argue that we always find ourselves ‘within’ traditions, whether we are aware of our affinity with tradition, or whether we deceive ourselves into thinking that we can escape them. Regardless, traditions are interwoven with our understanding – they structure our language, our way of thinking and our way of interpreting. The acknowledgement of our fundamental affinity with history and traditions implies, I would argue, a responsibility to understand the past and the hold it has over us. This form



of self-exploration not only unravels the meaningfulness of the past, but also of our future.

[We] already find ourselves within certain traditions, irrespective of whether we are aware of them or whether we deceive ourselves into believing that we can start anew. [...]. But it makes a difference whether we face up to the traditions in which we live along with the possibilities they offer for the future, or whether we manage to convince ourselves that we can turn away from the future into which we are already moving and program ourselves afresh. For, of course, tradition means transmission rather than conservation. This transmission does not imply that we leave things unchanged and merely conserve them. It means learning how to grasp and express the past anew. (Gadamer, 1986: 48–9)

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