

*From opera to opra to Ø
to the Followers of Ø
– A tracing of the
history leading up to
The Norwegian Opra's
affirmative Oratory
To arms! To arms!*

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From opera to opra to Ø to the Followers of Ø – A tracing of the history leading up to The Norwegian Opra's affirmative Oratory To arms! To arms! is a commissioned text where the opra director at Den Norske Opra, Trond Reinholdtsen, writes about the history of this institution and its followers.

Trond Reinholdtsen is educated as a classical composer and singer. In his work, he is mixing references to lecture, documentary, performance and banality with his interest in narrative form, mathematical structure and communist propaganda.

It is not necessary to repeat to the readers of this publication that opera as a relevant and potent art form is dead, and has been so for almost a hundred years (since 1925, exactly). Despite the effective use of newly built fancy-schmæncy architecture opera houses serving as tourism magnets, despite politicians' vanity projects and signifiers of urban capitalistic dynamism, and despite desperate attempts to fake coolness and contemporaneity in belated Regitheater-stagings with Rigoletto in jeans, der Holländer as business man or Papageno as television celebrity, and despite still another sorry composer sacrificing artistic integrity and accepting impossible working conditions in the hope of gaining some remnant of quasi-public appreciation, we will not let ourselves be fooled: Nothing, in terms of true artistic value or authentic creation, is happening with opera anymore.

This we all know.

And it needs no further discussion. So when the The Norwegian Opra had its inaugural performance of Orpheus in the opera director's living room in Oslo gate 7 in Oslo 2009, it was but a coincidence that The Norwegian Opera and Ballet in Bjørvika – which incidentally can be seen from of the former institution's

toilet window – opened the same week (or so). The art form in question is no longer the outcast genre of “opera”, but rather the new and potentially virginally fresh “opra”; a genre devoid of the Schlamm of traditions and definitions. While The Norwegian Opera and Ballet considered having one world premiere during its first five years, The Norwegian Opra announced 15 in its first year (admittedly all of them by the opra director himself).

The founding principle of The Norwegian Opra was the old Marxist maxim to gain “total control over the means of production”. All aspects of the institution should be treated artistically. The aim was, through a radical downscaling of the opera apparatus, to reclaim nothing less than ARTISTIC FREEDOM AT ITS PUREST (which is fundamentally lost in the repressive bureaucratic, overly-academic, sneak-commercialized and conservative elitism of the contemporary music scene). I was myself the dictatorial opra director, the composer of all works, as well as the librettist, director, Heldentenor, scenographer, propaganda minister, web designer, ticketmaster, cleaning assistant, conceptual consultant, head of the Worker's Union, restaurant chief etc. No more weak institutional criticism aiming to modify the system from the inside

(which I had done for years)!
From now on, I build my own
institutions!

In 2015, The Norwegian Opra had grown to a small crew of dedicated Opra-Superstars and moved its location to the forest in Sweden to further radicalize its quest for “isolation and concentration” signaling a brutal cut with THE SYSTEM, and in the end also abandoning the concept of “the audience”. Instead, in the cellar of the opera house, an infinite series of opra-films, was begun under the name \emptyset . It is a mixture of dystopian science fiction, verismo, communist propaganda, outdated existentialism and plump autobiography. In other words, a little like *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (but much longer of course). The operatic series counts 16 – no, 17! – episodes at the moment of writing, with one – admittedly complicated, but nonetheless continuous – narrative: Three protagonists, for the sake of simplicity let’s call them Parsifal, Parsifal and Parsifal, grow up in a cellar totally isolated from THE OUTSIDE. They form a kind of enthusiastic alchemistic sect, and gradually, a vision of a totally world changing Event grows forth. Gradually though, their experiments in political theory and new art forms seem to somehow lose some of the initial “directedness”, and the fear is that they are getting stuck

in some sort of theoretical centripetal post-structuralist blind alley quagmire of doubts, indecisions and general philosophical fragmentation. They are also perfect. Yes, this is what perfection looks like. Perfection comes in the form of the Void (\emptyset is the mathematical symbol of the “empty set”). It would be irritating to go into a further explanation at this point, so please just accept this as an axiom for now.

BUT (fortunately): The opra films are posted on the so called “internet” and a group of viewing enthusiasts, a gang of idealized audience members, a true cult of Precariat-Proletariat of Chosen Ones going under the name of “The Followers of \emptyset ” have gathered together from all over the world, transcending all identitarian borders, at a big meadow in the forest of Sweden. Toward this unlikely spot, they all gravitate: The old, the sick, the converted capitalists, the minorities, the incels, the Lumpenproletariat, the stupid, the sick, the animals, the monsters, the un-organic things, all forms of matter – in short: the radical universal Everyone. They aim to interpret and translate the message of \emptyset into potent action in the concrete reality of our world: An affirmative transition from theory to PRAXIS.

A kind of nucleus commune is consolidated on the paradisiacal meadow, but their true orientation and format is The Whole World. While \emptyset is the ultimate withdrawal from political, digital and everyday banality for the sake of Truth in an absolute refusing of the Idea of the Public, The Followers, in an operation of true Hegelian *Aufhebung*, turns this into its own negative. The authentic Opposite is the confirmation of the original Truth. Or in a more theological language: If \emptyset is the testament, The Followers of \emptyset are the apostles. Their first official appearance will be a two and a half hour ideological affirmative Oratory in Jakob kirke in Oslo called *To arms! To arms!* Yep, ladies and gentlemen, the time of ambiguous theatre of minor particular struggles, weak pockets of resistance and meditative considerations is over. The time for the propagandistic medium of the forgotten Oratory is here! Oslo International Theatre Festival has changed its name to Oratory Festival of the Stunde Null Internationale! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

The Followers, as the rest of us, have understood that we are all heading towards the Apocalypse. As a civilization we have totally lost the ability to create or to re-imagine the future. All political invention, creativity and grand-

ness come solely in the form of neo-fascism and are driven by the more or less secret desire for violence. Meanwhile, the rest of the political sphere are forced into a totally defensive apathy and are not able to do anything other than trying to save what can be saved of formerly gained goods of the common, lobbying for unisex toilet and otherwise keep as silent as possible and hope for the best. It is an impotent struggle for a “capitalism with a human face”.

There has evolved a version of so-called “accelerationism” bordering on the pathological in a dark corner of contemporary thinking (but the dark corners seem to be the new centre anyway). This version, sometimes called “Apocalyptic accelerationism”, may represent the true moral challenge of today. It grew out of a hallucinatory mixture of the cyberpunk culture of the 80’s, the rave and drug Jungle-techno scene of the 90’s, and a sinister desire for the ultimate unknown and radical alterity. It was cooked up by the notorious Nick Land and his gang of student disciples in his infamously greasy office in the University of Warwick in England. When reading about it today, it comes forth as pure death drive translated to philosophy: To accelerate capital, growth, digitalization and cryptology (!) until systematic overflow and possible

human extinction, until hopefully some form of artificial intelligence takes over the Promethean task of continuing progress and history. To go as far as possible whatever outcome, as general Kurtz in Nick Land's favourite movie *Apocalypse Now!* or as formulated in the title of his only published book *The Thirst for Annihilation*.

In 2020, when the perspective of catastrophic climate change and other environmental and social disasters feels acute, Land's suicidal strategy on behalf of humanity looms in the unconsciousness of our collective politics. Land offers the desire of submitting to the dynamic of capital and the machine while at the same time enjoying the hopelessness and apathy. A reality where, in the end, occultism is the only answer. It is a fantasy that is truly tempting.¹

Does \emptyset prescribe an ethics of "deceleration", for example in the famous *Decelerationism Aria* of the mystical character "The Idea" in episode 9? Some musicologists, hermeneutics and researchers around the world certainly think so. But this would be a too simplistic simplification. To get to the bottom of the matter, it needs a bit more work (that is why the complete \emptyset -films, with live analysis and illuminating interventions by The Norwegian Opra crew, will be screened as a Vega cinema

Vorabend two days before the Oratory). "The Followers of \emptyset " have carefully studied the \emptyset -cycle and reached an already expert level of understanding. They aim to be the instruments of \emptyset . Former audience members of \emptyset have tried to interpret the world. The task now is to *change* it. But praxis means failure. Praxis always involves misunderstandings of theory. Praxis means repetition ("failing better" and all that). Praxis means continuation. Praxis has to cast off depression and fear. And most important: Praxis means commitment. Where follows: Praxis needs energy. Ergo: Praxis needs lemonade. The Oratory is a lemonade motor in the fight to upholding the energy. The energy to say (and do) "Yes". The libretto will be "Yes! Yes! Yes!" First act: "Yes!" Second act: "Yes! Yes" Third act: "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

1. Oder mit Wotan: "Nur eines will ich noch: Das Ende!"