

Research Space

Journal article

Celebration or critique? Performing Peer Gynt in the heart of Norway

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Celebration or Critique

Performing Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* in the heart of Norway

It is a sunny but crisp summer evening in the mountains. Your destination: The annual production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* by the Gålå Lake in Gudbrandsdalen, Norway. You have been driving for several hours earlier in the day in order to reach the hotel where you check in before a bus picks you up and takes you down to the festival area by the lake. You have booked in for a three-course dinner based on local food traditions before the performance begins, but you have some time, so you walk around the other tents and buy a T-shirt with big letters on the front: 'Peer, du lyver!' ('Peer, you're lying!'). Having enjoyed trout from the Gålå lake for dinner, you take your seat in the auditorium, with a view to the same lake and to the mountains in the background. In the far distance you see the actual Rondane mountains, which are also referred to in the dialogue on stage. After the intermission, the sun starts to set, creating spectacular lights in the sky that are mirrored in the surface of the lake, and you put on a jumper as it is much chillier. During the final scenes of the play, the mountains are less visible, more like large, dark shadows. After the performance, the busses are there to pick you up and take you back to the hotel, where you are greeted with warm meat soup, which you enjoy with the other guests that have also seen the performance that night. The next day, you drive the several hours it takes to get home, wearing your new T-shirt of course. This is the experience of *Peer Gynt* at Gålå.

The description above is hyperbolic, but it demonstrates how everything that surrounds the productions of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* at Gålå in Norway focuses on giving the audience a spectacular and authentic experience both of the typically Norwegian landscape, traditional Norwegian culture and of *Peer Gynt*, the most Norwegian of all plays. This article investigates the relations between the canonical play *Peer Gynt* and the location of

performance at Gålå. *Peer Gynt* has been performed at Gålå every summer since 1988, and the location carries special meaning in relation to the play because of its proximity to the locations in which the three first acts of *Peer Gynt* is set. However, through the way the productions at Gålå are framed, one can argue that Ibsen's play is not necessarily the main event, but rather a prop for facilitating a celebratory experience of Norwegian national culture. Every second or third year a new director is invited to create a new production at Gålå. The question becomes whether a production here necessarily have to subject itself to the celebratory atmosphere of the event, or whether it is possible for a production in these circumstances to question these messages and the hegemonic, national-romantic ideology behind them.

I use Chantal Mouffe's concept of 'critical art' and Louis Althusser's reflections on the relationship between theatre and ideology to discuss this question, and I suggest that whatever critical potential there is in performing *Peer Gynt* at Gålå, can be found in directly staging and questioning the expectations the event creates and audience members bring with them. To do this, I will analyse how the marketing and framing of the event creates expectations of a celebratory event with a particularly Norwegian flare, before I turn to a specific production (the one directed by Sigrid Strøm Reibo¹ in 2017) that exploited and interrogated these expectations directly on stage. I argue that while this production participated in and reinforced the celebratory, national-romantic ideology of the event, it also demonstrated how a theatrical production can begin to unpick, interrogate and challenge hegemonic ideology from within. Before I begin my analysis of *Peer Gynt* at Gålå, however, I will discuss more generally the relationship between audience expectation, the location of a theatrical performance and hegemonic ideology. (Figure 1).

Audience Expectations and Place

A theatrical performance is always surrounded by expectations. Producers emphasize certain features to sell a production and to incite certain reactions from the audience. Audience members show up to a performance with expectations of their own, some collective, based on specific features of the production, some individual, based on their own lives and backgrounds. Erika Fischer-Lichte argues that the audience's pre-knowledge is an important condition of the theatrical performance itself: '[T]he audiences' knowledge of different theatre forms falls under the category of cultural and theatrical conditions. These include performance traditions and conventions, acting styles, the actors of the company and their repertoire of roles, texts and their performance history, and many other aspects.'² As Fischer-Lichte points out, audience pre-knowledge and expectations determine their experience of a performance. Different productions create expectations related to different features, and depending on the specific context of a theatrical production, more or less any element of the production can become a main object of expectations. For example, when a famous film star takes on the role of Hamlet in the West End, the actor's interpretation and celebrity status are main points of expectation, while when *Hamlet* is performed at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, the theatre architecture and the production's relation to early modern staging practices probably form a basis for expectations for many audience members.

The place in which a production is performed is one of the most obvious contextual elements that shapes audience expectations and reception. This is definitely the case for the productions of *Peer Gynt* at Gållå where, as I will return to below, both the outdoor stage's position in the spectacular landscape and the special connection between the location and Ibsen's play create expectations for the audience. Where a performance takes place, the reputation of the theatre or location, how easy it is to access, whether it is a national institution, a small fringe venue or

not a traditional theatrical space at all, influences the ways in which audiences experience what they see. As Ric Knowles argues: '[T]he geographical and architectural spaces of theatrical production are never empty. These are spaces full of histories, ghosts, pressures, opportunities, and constraints, of course, but most frequently they are full of ideology – the taken-for-granted of a culture, that don't need to be remarked upon but which are all the more powerful and pervasive for being invisible.'³ According to Knowles, then, a performance space is always full of ideology. A performance space asks the audience to watch and experience the performance in specific ideologically determined ways. This is also the case when performances take place in untraditional spaces – such as the outdoor theatre at Gålå – because such spaces ask the audience to make connections between the play performed, the performance and the location itself.

The questions I explore in this article are what kind of ideological implications or 'taken-for-granted' the outdoor setting at Gålå constitutes and how these implications are dealt with both in the marketing and framing of the productions and on stage in Sigrid Strøm Reibo's production for the summer of 2017. The Belgian thinker Chantal Mouffe discusses the relation between art and ideology in her writings. She argues: 'One cannot make a distinction between political art and non-political art, because every form of artistic practice either contributes to the reproduction of the given common sense – and in that sense is political – or contributes to the deconstruction or critique of it. Every form of art has a political dimension.'⁴ Mouffe argues that all forms of art engage with ideology and hegemony, either by supporting hegemonic structures and ideology or by disrupting them. The kinds of art Mouffe values the most, however, are those which contribute to the deconstruction or critique of hegemonic ideology. This is the kind of art that she calls 'critical art'. She argues: 'critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to

obscure and obliterate.’⁵ Mouffe sees all art as political, because all art is related to the given common sense and hegemonic order, but art becomes critical when it contributes not to the constitution and reproduction of hegemony, but to the deconstruction and critique of it.

If ‘critical art’ consists, as Mouffe suggests, of disrupting hegemony and ideology, it is worth, at this point, to explore what the relationship between theatre and ideology might be. One understanding of this relationship that resonates with Mouffe’s ‘critical art’, is made by Louis Althusser in the essay ‘The ‘Piccolo Teatro’: Bertolazzi and Brecht’. Althusser suggests that there is a specific ideological relationship between theatre and society in that theatre at all points participates in constructing and sustaining the ideological foundations of society. However, Althusser is critical of how theatre makes audiences unknowingly and uncritically ‘buy into’ its ideological framework: ‘[T]his uncriticized ideology [is] simply the “familiar”, “well-known”, transparent myths in which a society or an age can recognize itself (but not know itself), the mirror it looks into for self-recognition, precisely the mirror it must break if it is to know itself.’⁶ Althusser suggests that in theatre, society recognizes its own ideological structures, but importantly, he suggests that when the ideology of theatre goes uncriticized, ideology will only be recognized and accepted and this process will not lead to a more critical attitude that will make society ‘know itself’. For theatre to provide society with opportunities of ‘knowing itself’, ideology must not go uncriticized; it must be made visible, explored, questioned and challenged. Althusser’s understanding of theatre’s ideological impact on an audience is useful in relation to Mouffe’s theory of ‘critical art’ because it shows how theatre participates in, constructs and upholds ideological hegemonies. Taking Althusser’s arguments into account, it becomes possible to see how disrupting audiences’ unconscious and uncritical identification with the ideology of theatre can be a form of art’s counter-hegemonic struggle as Mouffe envisages. In combining Althusser’s and Mouffe’s arguments, a possibility

becomes visible where a theatrical production's ability to be counter-hegemonic can begin with interrogating and questioning its own ideological foundations.

This notion of questioning ideology from within is useful in relation to the productions of *Peer Gynt* at Gålå. The events here create a quite specific ideological framework for the performances. Below, I argue that this ideological framework is clearly tied to a celebratory and romantic view of traditional Norwegian culture. Keld Hyldig argues that the play *Peer Gynt* is a symbol 'of Norwegianness and Norwegian theatre' and that there exists 'a lasting comprehension in Norway of *Peer Gynt* as a play about Norwegian identity.'⁷ As I will demonstrate below, this focus on a traditional view of Norwegian culture and 'Norwegianness' becomes particularly poignant in the productions at Gålå. However, taking Mouffe's and Althusser's arguments into account, I will also investigate how Strøm Reibo's production in 2017 explicitly investigated this ideological framework on stage and how such direct investigation influences the relationship between the audience and the event.

***Peer Gynt* at Gålå**

When Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* is performed at Gålå in Gudbrandsdalen in Norway, the location is among the most important elements in the productions, and the idea of 'bringing *Peer Gynt* to its home' is a significant condition for the event. Gudbrandsdalen is, in Ibsen's text, the actual setting for the first acts of *Peer Gynt*. Thus, the place itself offers a kind of authenticity to a production of the play, a sense of coming home, and the landscape and location give the productions of *Peer Gynt* an elevated status. In addition to the landscape and its connections to Ibsen's text, productions at Gålå are also 'ghosted' by past productions. The term 'ghosted' is defined by Marvin Carlson, who has explored how a theatrical experience always exists in conversation with the past. Carlson suggests that theatre 'is the repository of cultural memory'

and he argues that '[t]he present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations'.⁸ This notion of the present experience being 'ghosted' by previous experiences is particularly relevant for an event like '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå', where the same play is performed year after year. The amphitheatre by Gålåvatnet is the home of '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå' and is purpose-built for performing *Peer Gynt* in the summer. Several significant and well-known Norwegian directors and actors have been involved in the productions over the years, together with several generations of local volunteers. Thus, a production here always exists in conversation with – or is ghosted by – last year's and those running all the way back to 1988. In these ways, '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå' is filled with traditions and expectations, related to the connections between the location and Ibsen's text, the nature-experience and the memories of productions in years past. The productions at Gålå are presented as an 'authentic' *Peer Gynt* – the ultimate *Peer Gynt* experience – and this framing of the event is extremely present both in the marketing of the event and in the hospitality business that surrounds it. (Figure 2).

The productions of *Peer Gynt* at Gålå are organized by a company called Peer Gynt as ('as' being the Norwegian equivalent of the English 'Ltd.'). The logo of the company is a drawing of a man riding a reindeer buck, like Peer does in Ibsen's play. Thus, already here Ibsen's text is commercialized in quite direct ways. On their website, Peer Gynt as presents themselves with a short text: 'Peer Gynt as delivers artistic productions, experiences and activities of high quality, inspired by themes from the play *Peer Gynt* and with nature as frame and collaborator.'⁹ This seeming mission statement immediately emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the company Peer Gynt as, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and the nature or landscape of Gålå and the surrounding region. The main reason for Peer Gynt as to exist, according to this statement, is to release the supposed artistic, aesthetic and experiential potentials that lies in framing *Peer Gynt* in the landscape at Gålå.

The rest of the short description of the company attempts to clearly frame what the productions and other activities at Gålå are all about and creates a significant tension between goals of creating challenging art and a romantic celebration of the local milieu. On the one hand, the company expresses a wish of ‘tearing into’ their audiences with relevant and challenging productions, and a particular point is that events at Gålå ‘interprets Henrik Ibsen’s world-known figure Peer Gynt in relation to our contemporary times’¹⁰. ‘*Peer Gynt* at Gålå’ thus wishes to be more than a passive, backward-glancing event. Its goal is of course not necessarily the same as the goal of ‘critical art’ as presented by Chantal Mouffe, but this sentence in the presentation suggests that ‘*Peer Gynt* at Gålå’ is something more than a tourist attraction – it is supposed to give experiences that are particularly significant for contemporary audiences. On the other hand, the description of the company highlights the connections between play and location in a celebratory fashion. It is pointed out that the company is owned by a mix of ‘private investors and local municipalities’, but that the yearly festival reaches ‘an audience of around 30 000 people both from Norway and from abroad’¹¹. The company’s office is in Vinstra, ‘in the middle of the realm of Peer Gynt, right in between Rondane and Jotunheimen’¹². As we can see, throughout this description, emphasis is put on the relation between Ibsen’s play and the specific location of Gudbrandsdalen and, importantly, on the unique potential this relation provides for creating art that can ‘move’ both local, national and global audiences. In short, according to Peer Gynt as, the relation between play and place at Gålå and the productions they facilitate provide a unique setting for creating spectacular art that speaks directly to a diverse, contemporary audience.

This unique potential offered by the location at Gålå is also exploited in the hospitality business that surrounds the actual performances. Many audience members who travel to Gålå

will need to stay the night, and on the website of Peer Gynt as you can find links to a range of nearby hotels and companies that rent out cottages etc. Several of the nearby hotels organize their own shuttle busses for the performances, so audience members know they will be able to get to the performance on time and back to their accommodation at night. Some hotels offer particular show-deals, which includes for example a three-course dinner based on local produce, the bus fare and a meal upon return from the performance at night, often traditional meat soup and flat bread. Thus, the local hotels benefit from the performances at Gålå, and they use the connection between the play, the location and local culture in their marketing. In addition to the hotels, there are also tourist business ventures at the actual location of the amphitheatre at the Gålå Lake. Here, the audience can choose between Aslak's Matmie (Aslak's Food Forge – Aslak being the name of the blacksmith in *Peer Gynt*), which serves local food such as trout from the actual Gålå lake, and Anitra's Lounge which serves Middle Eastern inspired food (Anitra, of course, being the woman Peer meets on his Arabian travels). In addition, there are tents in which you can buy souvenirs such as T-shirts with quotes from *Peer Gynt* and traditional Norwegian tourist objects such as figures of trolls and cheese slicers. Thus, the productions of *Peer Gynt* at Gålå are surrounded by a network of tourist businesses, that exploits the connection between Ibsen's text, the local milieu and a traditional view of Norwegian national culture. The productions are not only a theatrical venture, but for *Peer Gynt* as and the local businesses it is an important source of marketing and income.

This commercialisation of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* is no doubt hugely beneficial for the local businesses and communities, but the question is whether the event at Gålå can become anything more than a reproduction and celebration of stereotypical Norwegian culture. The framing of the event as I have described it above, gives mainly a sense of celebration: Coming to Gålå is a celebration of Ibsen's text, of (a limited and stereotypical version of) Norwegian

culture, of the Norwegian mountain landscapes and of the experience this mix of elements facilitates. This kind of celebration is definitely good for business, but the question is whether it can facilitate what Mouffe calls ‘critical art’: art that exactly investigates, interrogates and challenges hegemonic or stereotypical ideology. At Gålå, the productions of *Peer Gynt* clearly participates in painting a specific, romantic image of Norway and Norwegian culture, but is it possible within this frame also to ‘tear into’ the audience by questioning and challenging this romantic image and the ideology it builds on? To put it bluntly, the question becomes whether productions of *Peer Gynt* within the commercialized frames at Gålå can be art with a critical potential, or whether these productions always are doomed to be spectacular and celebratory tourist attractions.

Sigrid Strøm Reibo’s Production of *Peer Gynt* in 2017

To explore this question, I will turn to a specific production at Gålå, namely the one directed by Sigrid Strøm Reibo for the summer of 2017, which also ran in the summer of 2018. In an interview just as she had completed the work on *Peer Gynt* at Gålå, Strøm Reibo explained that she was very aware of the particular aura of expectation that surrounds productions of *Peer Gynt* in this special location when directing her production, and that playing with this aura of expectations was a specific goal and strategy in her staging. Actually, Strøm Reibo explained that playing with audience expectation always is a goal for her when she works with canonical texts like *Peer Gynt*: ‘I want to break with expectations. I want to disrupt a bit. I want to go back to the text and see: What is the truth here?’¹³ To her, canonical texts like *Peer Gynt* always presupposes a set of audience expectations – they are so famous that they have acquired specific meaning in the cultural consciousness. This is clearly the case for *Peer Gynt* in Norway. Not only is it one of the most important works by Norway’s most famous author, but it is also undeniably linked to Norwegian national identity, as is also Hyldig’s

argument in the quote above. My reason for specifically focusing on this production, then, is that it strongly exemplifies the conflict I wish to discuss in this article: On the one hand we have a play and a performance setting that is steeped in hegemonic ideology and romantic celebration of national culture, while on the other hand we have a director that explicitly seek to challenge this ideology in the way she stages the play. Below, I discuss the measures Strøm Reibo employed in her production to achieve her goal.

Before I discuss this further, however, it is important to note a possibly problematic side of Strøm Reibo's remark above. It seems that Strøm Reibo is suggesting that there is some sort of fundamental truth – beyond cultural consciousness – that she can reach if she goes back to the text and studies it closely. Such a belief in 'the truth of the text' is problematic. Roland Barthes famously claimed that the author as a source of stable meaning is dead. Instead, Barthes argues, '[w]e know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash'.¹⁴ Taking Barthes's arguments into consideration, it becomes clear that there is no 'one truth' in a text that can be discovered by a return to or close study of that text. Rather, texts are always subject to interpretation, and the truth Strøm Reibo claims to find in *Peer Gynt* will always be her interpretation of Ibsen's play. However, Strøm Reibo's argument is nevertheless significant for my discussion because she claims that she seeks to break with expectations by returning to the text. She suggests that in her productions she wants to avoid the common expectations to the text – and also, in this instance, to the celebratory and romantic atmosphere of the event at Gållå – and produce something that is not affected by such expectations or that acknowledges expectations and consciously works against them. Strøm Reibo's point of departure seems to be to disregard the connection between play, location and romantic ideology so prominent at

Gållå, and instead look for other meanings, particularly in the text itself. In her production, therefore, working against the kinds of expectations related to the location at Gållå was one of the main staging strategies.

Strøm Reibo set her production in an unfinished theme park called 'Gyntiana', the name Peer gives to the country he wants to found in act four in Ibsen's text. Posters with information about the different attractions were hung around the stage, and several of the staging elements, such as a lorry functioning as a concert stage, a pool bar and a golf cart were reminiscent of leisure parks or summer festivals. (Figure 3). In the fifth act, when Peer returns to Norway and attempts to avoid damnation, the characters he met were reminiscent of a horrific circus – the stage turned into a big circus ring with zombie-looking characters moving around it. (Figure 4). Even if the performance of course still took place outside by the lake, the untouched nature that is so prominent in Ibsen's text and in the advertisement of Gållå as the home of *Peer Gynt* was no longer the most prominent feature. Rather, the production presented nature as developed and commercialized, and this Peer existed, not in the mountain landscape, but in its commercialized, adapted twin. In this sense, Strøm Reibo's choice of turning Gållå and the Gållå Lake into the theme park Gyntiana can be seen as a critique, or at least questioning, of the concept of the institution of '*Peer Gynt* at Gållå' as well. '*Peer Gynt* at Gållå' can be seen as a Gyntiana in itself where, as mentioned above, audiences are shipped to the performance with buses from local hotels, where the area outside the amphitheatre is reminiscent of a festival with stalls and tents offering food, drinks and souvenirs, and where spectacular attractions such as famous Norwegian actors and the sunset reflected in the lake are presented. Performing *Peer Gynt* at Gållå is of course not only a celebration of the Norwegian landscape and its connection to Ibsen's play – it is also a clear commercial exploitation of the same landscape. In the introduction, I pointed out how Althusser argues

that theatre must break its own ideological mirror in order to have impact, while Mouffe suggests critical art reveals common consensus and hegemonic structures. This is exactly what Strøm Reibo did in her approach to '*Peer Gynt* at Gållå': Her production was not simply part of the celebration of the landscape and its connection to *Peer Gynt* in any straightforward way, but instead it explicitly problematized its own conditions of production and the ideological framework in which it existed.

One staging element unsettled the relation between the landscape at Gållå, Ibsen's text and the production itself in a particularly clear and powerful way. As the audience entered the amphitheatre, the view towards the lake and the surrounding mountains was blocked by a large wall made out of plywood boards, which covered the full length of the stage. This plywood wall was made to look like the kind of walls that surround building sites – thus highlighting the setting as an unfinished theme park, but also framing the landscape as a building site for artistic entertainment. The wall was a very explicit break with the traditions and expectations that normally surround productions at Gållå, as Strøm Reibo robbed the audience of the iconic nature experience, making the lake more or less invisible behind the wall, which was rather ugly in comparison to the landscape. Even if the wall eventually was taken down, making the lake and mountains visible, the nature had to a certain extent been defamiliarized. Instead of making the scenic landscape a natural part of her staging, Strøm Reibo pointed to how producing *Peer Gynt* in such a setting was not a self-evident act, and through denying the audience access to the landscape from the beginning of the performance, she encouraged the audience to reflect on the values behind performing *Peer Gynt* in this location. (Figure 5).

Strøm Reibo did not only unsettle the audience's relation to the location in her production – also the relationship between *Peer Gynt* and Norwegian culture and identity was explicitly interrogated on stage in several ways. One example of this was the use of Edvard Grieg's music in distorted and inventive ways. Grieg is Norway's most canonical composer, and his music for *Peer Gynt* is a significant work in the Norwegian national canon. The productions at Gålå have often been accompanied by live performances of Grieg's music. Strøm Reibo also used Grieg's music, but not in the classical way it is usually performed. Instead the music was distorted, performed electronically and in new and strange arrangements, often reminiscent of the music at funfairs and circuses. Perhaps the most famous musical piece, 'In the Hall of the Mountain King', was performed by the trolls in an odd-sounding marching band. Thus, as was the case with the wall hiding the landscape, the music was not used in a national romantic celebration, but rather the distorted version of Grieg's music was another level of commentary on the event. Once again, the production refused to participate in a straightforward celebration of Norwegian national culture, but created a distorted and uncomfortable atmosphere that questioned the national romantic traditions at Gålå and asked the audience to reflect on what it means to perform *Peer Gynt* in such a clearly ideologically determined location. (Figure 6).

Denying the audience access to the landscape and playing with Grieg's music can be seen as important elements in Strøm Reibo's project of breaking with expectation and presenting what she sees as a 'true' version of Ibsen's text. The notion of whether Strøm Reibo's version is 'truer' to Ibsen's text is, as I point out above, highly problematic, but the result of her strategy is nevertheless significant in the context of '*Peer Gynt* at Gålå'. By putting up the wall and distorting Grieg's music, Strøm Reibo encouraged the audience to see beyond the national romanticism offered by the landscape, marketing and traditions at Gålå. Instead the

production explicitly questioned and interrogated the context of '*Peer Gynt* at Gållå' – Strøm Reibo's own participation in this event, included – on stage. To refer back to Ric Knowles, who I quoted above, one of the ideological 'taken-for-granted' of performing *Peer Gynt* at Gållå is that the landscape and its connection to the text adds both quality and authenticity to the productions. Strøm Reibo refused to take this for granted. Through blocking the audience's view and playing with traditions, she defamiliarized the connection between the landscape and the play; thus, directly challenging the points of expectation related to the connections between the play and the performance location.

Challenging the Ideology of Location

Above I referred to Chantal Mouffe who argues that all artistic practices have a political dimension in the fact that they either reproduce or disrupt hegemonic structures and ideology, and I pointed to Louis Althusser who suggests that in order to have a critical impact, theatre needs first to scrutinise its own ideological foundations. As I have demonstrated in this article, there are some very clear ideological structures related to a romantic view of Norwegian culture surrounding the event of '*Peer Gynt* at Gållå'. These structures are, as Hyldig points out, present already in the play *Peer Gynt* itself, which is often seen as 'a symbol of Norwegianness', and they are heightened in the ways '*Peer Gynt* at Gållå' is framed and marketed as creating a special connection between Ibsen's play, Norwegian landscape, and Norwegian culture by *Peer Gynt* as and the surrounding tourist businesses. As an event, before we start discussing the particular stagings of different directors, '*Peer Gynt* at Gållå' clearly reproduce traditional views of Norwegian identity and culture and seek to give an 'authentic Norwegian experience' to audiences, both Norwegians and foreigners.

The question I have explored in the second part of this article is whether a specific production can become an example of what Mouffe calls ‘critical art’ – art that disrupts and challenges hegemonic ideology – even when it is produced in an environment so clearly tied to hegemonic ideology as ‘*Peer Gynt* at Gålå’. I have suggested that Strøm Reibo attempted to question the hegemonic ideology at Gålå by directly interrogating the kind of event her production constitutes. By framing her production in a theme park setting reminiscent of the actual touristic venue the production was produced in and by distorting and playing with Grieg’s music and other traditional elements at Gålå, Strøm Reibo created a production that refused to take the ideological structures of the event for granted. Through denying access to the landscape, the production defamiliarized the connection between the play and the location which is so prominent in the marketing of ‘*Peer Gynt* at Gålå’, and it asked the audience to reflect on what it actually means to make these connections between Ibsen’s play, the location and Norwegian culture and identity. In these ways, Strøm Reibo’s production can be seen, to return to Mouffe and Althusser, to disrupt hegemony and ideology from within. While being clearly framed within a structure of hegemonic national ideology, the production refused to take this structure for granted and invited the audience to investigate it.

I am not suggesting here that Strøm Reibo’s production at Gålå necessarily is a clear example of what Mouffe calls ‘critical art’. The production clearly participates in the celebratory nature of everything that surrounds ‘*Peer Gynt* at Gålå’. In fact, the hyperbolic description with which I began this article, is a description of my own experience when I attended the performance in 2017. However, combining Mouffe’s and Althusser’s arguments suggests that a theatrical production *can* become an example of ‘critical art’, but through first critically engaging with its own ideological foundation and its own position within hegemonic structures. I argue that Strøm Reibo’s production at Gålå demonstrate exactly this. The

production makes visible the dominant consensus at Gålå, namely the celebratory attitude towards the connection between Ibsen's play, the location and landscape and Norwegian culture and identity, and importantly, it questions whether such connections are self-evident. Through critically engaging with its own ideological foundation, the production demonstrates to the audience how ideology can be scrutinized from within. The production asks the audience to reflect on what kind of event it is they are attending, what kind of processes they participate in when attending it, and why they participate. Even if the production ultimately sits comfortably within the hegemonic ideological structures at Gålå, at least it demonstrates that it is possible to scrutinize, interrogate and even challenge ideology and hegemony from within and that theatre can have political impact when it is willing to critically discuss what kind of ideological event it actually is.

¹ Sigrid Strøm Reibo is one of Norway's most successful contemporary theatre directors. When she directed *Peer Gynt* at Gålå, she was associate director at the National Theatre in Oslo. She is currently associate director at the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen.

² Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Interweaving Theatre Cultures in Ibsen Productions', *Ibsen Studies*, VIII, No. 2 (2008), pp. 93–111, p. 108.

³ Ric Knowles *Reading the Material Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2004), p. 63.

⁴ Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph, and Thomas Keenan, 'Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension. Chantal Mouffe, interviewed by Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph, and Thomas Keenan', *Grey Room*, No. 2 (Winter) (2001), pp. 98–125, p. 99.

⁵ Chantal Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces', *Art & Research*, I, No. 2 (2007), unpaginated.

⁶ Louis Althusser, 'The "Piccolo Teatro": Bertolazzi and Brecht', in *For Marx*. London: Verso (2005), pp. 129–151, p. 144.

⁷ Keld Hyldig, 'Robert Wilson's Staging of Peer Gynt and the Norwegian Tradition', *Nordic Theatre Studies*, No. 18 (2006), pp. 46–57, p. 47.

⁸ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage. The Theatre as Memory Machine*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (2001), p. 2.

⁹ *Om oss* (no date) *peergynt.no*. Available at: <https://peergynt.no/mer-info/om-oss/> (Accessed: 30 December 2020). This and all other references from the website of Peer Gynt as are translated by me.

¹⁰ Ibit.

¹¹ Ibit.

¹² Ibit. Rondane and Jotunheimen are two famous Norwegian mountain ranges, which both also features prominently in *Peer Gynt*.

¹³ Sigrid Strøm Reibo, interviewed by: Lars Harald Maagerø (15th August 2017).

¹⁴ Barthes, R. 'The Death of the Author', in John Caughie (ed.) *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1981), pp. 208–213, p. 211.