

The Dance Floor Is Open. On the Necessity of Involvement in the Art of Steinar Haga Kristensen

I believe one could put the following quote into Steinar Haga Kristensen's mouth without him spitting it back out: "Thinking is not something that takes place in our heads, but something we do in order to belong to a situation."<sup>[1]</sup> The exhibition *PANSOCIAL DEVELOPMENTCENTRAL* throws a wrench into the machinery of spectatorship. The art is clearly addressed to us, but the works do not consolidate themselves in the gaze of the viewer; they form part of a constellation in which relations—including those to the art's observers—carry more weight than the objects themselves. The exhibition could just as well have been titled "involvementcentral." For Haga Kristensen, involvement and development are, in a sense, cut from the same cloth—or one follows from the other. Let me get ahead of myself and suggest that his art constitutes a kind of moral lesson in the consequences of involvement. At the same time, it is a requiem for a social order—a way of being in the world—that we are in the process of leaving behind.

What is being replaced in art is a historical spectator position we might call melancholic. Summarized broadly, it is marked by distance and devotion—a posture that seeks to shield art from demands of accessibility. The larger presentational form in which this kind of art is embedded does not announce that something is about to happen, but that something has already happened. And our task is to bear witness to it, in silent reverence. There remains here a trace of the Romantic conception of art: our stillness is a virtue, a sign of respect, but also of powerlessness. Haga Kristensen's wrench is meant to collapse this pacifying transaction and initiate a situation in which action and participation are called for. A more spirited motto might be: let the fumbling begin!

The neologism pansociality is a useful concept to think with here, though it calls for some definition. The intuitive way to grasp it is as indicative of a notion of art's sociality illustrated through a panning motion—a horizontal sweep. This panning gesture is like a brushstroke that passes laterally across a social field, blurring the contours of its agents. Everything is placed on the same level and rubbed together. This gesture—at once dissolving and binding—recurs in several of Haga Kristensen's works. I will look at three of them here, which stand out as particularly exemplary, before turning to the issue of development and the ethical imperative underlying it.

The teeming crowd of dancing bodies that covers the ceiling painting in the exhibition is, in a sense, far too literal—and precisely for that reason a fitting place to begin. One way to see it is as an image that signals the direction of development. The dance floor serves as a metaphor for the mode art is to realize. Dancing obstructs observation, overcomes distance, by continuously pulling the outside in—persuading us to lose our balance and submit to the rhythms. The fact that the dance floor is mounted on the ceiling introduces a striking verticality, which in turn highlights the very thing it otherwise seeks to dissolve. The spectator must reorient themselves, adjust the angle of their neck. It is in this minute shift—

a first motion or step—that thinking begins. That may sound pious, but it is also a practical task. One must determine where one stands in relation to what is taking place.

The words I initially placed in Haga Kristensen’s mouth—that thinking is something we do in order to belong to a situation—are in fact Isabelle Stengers’. For Stengers, a situation is not the frame surrounding a phenomenon, but a state in which something is at stake. The task of thinking, for her, is not to explain what is happening, but to figure out how one might join in without ruining it. My aim here is not to indulge in puppet-like philosophizing or to rehearse the clichés of new materialism. The crucial question is how this mode of co-thinking can be made fruitful as a model for engaging with art. One place to begin is with the postulate that meaning resides not in individual works, but between them. It’s easy to mistake this idea for a recent invention. But art has previously had a similar function—not as communication, but as a situational technology.

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, art was embedded in liturgical and ceremonial structures.[2] It was not an isolated object, but an active element within a holistic, embodied ritual. The viewer was a participant—not in a symbolic sense, but through actual physical involvement. Altarpieces opened to reveal Christ’s Passion, fresco cycles unfolded world history across church walls, and sculptures returned your gaze with sovereign authority. The artwork was not something to be assessed, but a functional component in a social choreography. The Baroque tightened the staging: art and architecture became part of a forceful dramatic design aimed at persuading and instructing the masses.[3] Haga Kristensen recalls this liturgical form through his use of sacred elements—but with a different purpose. Whereas historical church art served to uphold a preordained social order, Haga Kristensen’s situations are demonstratively open, freed from any such instructive or authoritative aim.

The ceiling-bound dance is brought quite literally down to earth in *ULTRAIDENTIFICATIONPAVILION*, a video game developed by Haga Kristensen, in which a humanoid avatar navigates a virtual world constructed from reproductions of his physical artworks. Video games are characterized by what Alexander Galloway calls an “aesthetics of action.”[4] Unlike traditional media, where the aesthetic unfolds in representation, the game’s aesthetics are rooted in what happens at the interface between user and system. It is not primarily something to be looked at, but something to be done—and it is in this doing, in the very interaction, that the form of the work emerges. The gaming experience consists not only in the consumption of images and sound, but also in the rhythm between keystroke and effect, in the anticipation of resistance or flow. Interactive aesthetics do not operate by staging something, but by organizing action. *ULTRAIDENTIFICATIONPAVILION* lacks clear goals and reward systems. Nevertheless, it offers what game designers refer to as affordances—possibilities for action. Affordances are not explicit instructions, but cues embedded in the environment: openings, surfaces that signal that something can be done. This means that it is the player who must create coherence within the experience, and the “form” of the work emerges through a rhythmic, embodied, intuitive engagement with the space and its rules. The sense one gets

is that it is not the game assigning you a task—it is you who generate lines of meaning as you play.

In contrast to the melancholic spectator, the player is an active figure. Participation—the performance of actions—is a non-negotiable premise. We affect and are affected continuously. The absence of clear goals and progression challenges the player to cultivate a low-intensity, curiosity-driven interaction with the game environment. There is no external authority assigning meaning to the elements you engage with; meaning arises through use and interaction. It is not about understanding, but about orientation. The aesthetic experience of gaming takes place in this ongoing repositioning—a continuous oscillation between waiting and acting, listening and responding, observing and intervening. And this alert, responsive mode of interaction carries over to the exhibition as a whole: the spectator is tethered to a body, to a set of choices and movements.

*The Lonelinesses of the Index Fingers (Part III)* is a music-theatre piece composed for this exhibition and the final installment in a trilogy that dates back to 2009. The work is performed by the professional chamber choir Ensemble 96, in duet with a virtual choir assembled from voice recordings of the Norwegian Opera's children's chorus, accompanied by Hardanger fiddles. The choir is situated inside the iconostasis that divides the space, with their heads protruding through openings in the image wall. In the Orthodox tradition, the iconostasis is not primarily a wall that separates the sacred from the profane, but an interface that enables communication between these spheres. It may be likened to a membrane—a sensitive film that regulates the exchange between living systems.

For Adriana Cavarero, the voice is the body's most immediate sign.[5] It does not point to a thought, but to a body—to the presence of another person. The voice always belongs to someone, but it cannot be possessed. It comes into being as it is uttered, and vanishes just as quickly. This gives rise to a different kind of connection than vision allows. Where the visual can isolate and objectify, the voice operates situationally; it blurs the boundary between here and there, between speaker and listener. The listener is already part of what is happening—a point within a shared acoustic structure.

Haga Kristensen employs a consistent exhibition formula: casting a canonizing, retrospective gaze on his own practice. At first glance, this formula may appear anachronistic, but it also participates in the horizontal restructuring of the exhibition space. The retrospective format is not a narcissistic preempting of canonization, but rather a way of distributing authority across time and positions of agency. Instead of awaiting institutional validation, Haga Kristensen reconfigures the conditions under which value is produced. In doing so, he borrows the gestures and packaging of traditional forms of artistic valorization, but without adhering to the usual hierarchy in which value is conferred by institutions. The artist himself establishes the archive, interpretation, and formal frame. Yet the exaggeration undermines any illusion of sincere self-mythology. One might say that this self-canonization becomes a pedagogical situation, in which the viewer is not meant to accept the claim to value, but to see through its constructedness. Rather than cultivating

reverence for what has already been recognized, it invites reflection on how we might relate to art outside such authoritative frames—how we might participate in a logic of the work that does not seek to enforce its meaning. Here, symbolic value is not distributed from above, but horizontally, through a model in which being in the orbit of the work matters more than locating it within an established narrative.

The concept of development carries connotations from evolutionary biology. It is not merely a cognitive process or event—a private, inner maturation of the kind set in motion by the viewer's solitary contemplation of the work. Development implies an active adaptation that involves the whole organism and the sociality it is part of. It is fundamentally extroverted and presupposes interaction with an environment: bodily engagement with a complex situation that demands new solutions. And it unfolds over time, through trial, error, and subsequent adjustments. We may view Hoga Kristensen's exhibition as an attempt to construct just such an environment conducive to development.

The pansocial reconfiguration of our mode of engagement with art is not merely a clever aesthetic innovation—a new item on the menu of contemporary artistic strategies—but signals a necessary shift in art's self-understanding. It responds to a cultural condition marked by excessive complexity, ecological crisis, and social fragmentation—conditions that impose new demands on us as social organisms. The passive spectator is becoming obsolete, because we can no longer afford to look without engaging. The question now is not what art means, but what it does—how it prompts us to respond, and what forms of collaborative skill it trains us in. We must develop an ethical competence that is not based on fixed norms, but on attentive listening. Development, in this sense, is not about striving toward a goal, but about calibrating oneself to a reality in motion.

For several decades, Donna Haraway has been a key figure in the development of an epistemology for a world in crisis.[6] She argues that what we need is not more detached insight, but more situated knowledge—a term she uses to describe a kind of knowing rooted in relationships, embodiment, and responsibility. Haraway critiques the notion of a neutral, all-seeing gaze and insists that all insight is localized and shared. This requires not less thinking, but a different kind of thinking: one that stays in motion and knows it is never outside what it describes. Rather than viewing art as a path to truth—in the sense of deeper, inner revelation—pansociality points toward a heuristic practice. For Haraway, heuristics is not merely a technique, but a form of ethical practice—a matter of how we live with, rather than over, one another. Heuristics entails acting without full overview, and being able to recalibrate along the way—with others and for others.

John Dewey wrote that all experience is experimental: it consists in doing something to a situation in order to see what follows.[7] This pragmatist way of thinking resonates with Hoga Kristensen's practice, in which the viewer is not meant to understand the work, but to engage with it. A similar distinction can be drawn between representation and participation. Representation presupposes a distance between artwork and viewer, whereas participation requires interaction. Where representation seeks to make something visible, participation seeks to make something possible. Pansociality calls for participation

in the construction of a shared horizon. It also demands a willingness to undergo moral recalibration. The viewer's competence is not measured by their ability to interpret correctly, but by their capacity to respond appropriately—to be a co-thinking participant. The old conception of art was built on an ideal of revelation; but in Haga Kristensen's works, there is no hidden core waiting to be unearthed. Art is not a riddle, but an occasion for becoming entangled in the problems we share. If you look around, the floor is cleared, all works drawn to the walls. The dance floor is open.

Stian Gabrielsen and ChatGPT-4

NOTES:

- [1] Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts* (Harvard University Press, 2011), s. 25.
- [2] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), s. 18–43.
- [3] Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600–1750*, Vol. 1 (Yale University Press, 1999), s. 25–35.
- [4] Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), s. 3–22.
- [5] Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford University Press, 2005), s. 169–175.
- [6] Donna Haraway, «Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective», *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1988), s. 575–599.
- [7] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (Perigee Books, 2005 [1934]), s. 38–42.

## Divine Comedy. On Steinar Haga Kristensen's Art-Sociological Theater

*PARASOCIALAWAKENINGAPPARATUS* is a dreadful title. Still, we will dwell on it for a second, and not dismiss it as merely an irritating appendage to the works on display—which is always tempting when faced with titles that get stuck in your mouth. It actually offers a precise description of an attitude towards art that you might suspect Steinar Haga Kristensen of sharing. Every exhibition implicitly prescribes an ideological program for art, even when unaware of doing so. The questions we must logically begin with to grasp Haga Kristensen's program are: What is the parasocial? and What does "awakening apparatus" mean?

Parasocial interaction describes intimate relationships people form with media personalities. A classic example is the bond between a famous actor and a film or TV audience, in which some begin to perceive the actor as a friend—someone they genuinely feel they know—and begin investing emotional energy in the relationship. In extreme cases, parasocial interaction can manifest in antisocial behavior, such as stalking or violence, but it exists on a spectrum, and in a mild form it is pretty commonplace, as witnessed by the tabloid media's capitalization on public interest in celebrities' private lives. It is this normal parasociality that is of interest here—that is, a one-sided relationship in which the celebrity becomes the object of emotional projection by the audience due to their status and media access, without resulting in deviant or ethically questionable behavior. Parasociality prescribes a relationship in which distant admiration blurs into a longing for intimacy. One can easily replace the film star with the artist and see the same dynamic at play (even if the intensity of the longing is perhaps less acute). The artist is lifted out of the anonymous masses and placed at the center of an attention they are structurally unable to reciprocate.[1]

The relationship between the masses and the individual, specifically the artist, is a recurring theme in Haga Kristensen's work. In rough terms, one could say that the central motif of his practice is a persistent reminder of this parasocial relationship, enacted through an ambiguous revival of admiration as the foundational mode of engaging with art. Let us tentatively call his overarching technique an art-sociological theater. By this, I don't mean the theatrical forms he employs (although they are indicative), but that the exhibition uses dramatic means to stage itself as a social phenomenon. But I'm getting ahead of myself. I must begin with a cursory description of how the parasocial model is staged. Haga Kristensen primarily uses three strategies to evoke and amplify this motif: self-canonization, sanctification (of art engagement), and mystification (of the object). I will briefly describe how these strategies are realized, before turning to the question of how we should understand the concept of an «awakening apparatus».

Self-canonization is the most conspicuous of Haga Kristensen's strategies. Primarily, it takes shape through the adoption of a retrospective perspective on his own production. The retrospective mode is an exhibition formula he employs rather consistently. The recycling of earlier works and motifs—often reaching as far back as his youth—has been a mainstay in Haga Kristensen's practice throughout his artistic career; one could even say that the practice itself is founded on this very formula.[2] His engagement with early works is also marked by a noticeable reverence, bordering on the comic. The homage embedded in this gesture asks the public to set aside skepticism and accept a claim to value that has not yet been granted an official social guarantee. Put differently: the artist invites fascination with his own creations that preempts the recognition of their quality—something that properly belongs to the domain of reception. Haga Kristensen's retrospective operation symbolically bypasses critical response and usurps the external, authoritative recognition that usually serves as the mechanism leading to canonization.[3] In this way, Haga Kristensen foregrounds the construction and negotiation of the artist's value and his relationship to the audience.

Sanctification is the aesthetic—or more precisely, atmospheric—corollary to an admiring relation to art. It is a way of organizing the presentation of art that elevates it. Sanctification is taken to its most pronounced form to date in *PARASOCIALAWAKENINGAPPARATUS*, where the exhibition's basic architectural layout unabashedly mimics a church interior, with a monumental ceiling painting and an iconostasis dividing the room in two.[4] Pointing out the resemblance between art spaces and places of worship—a secular temple—is a cliché. Yet the comparison is apt. Today, we have become allergic to the feeling of smallness that church interiors give us. Even the church does what it can to tone down this effect, to accommodate a cultural climate that cannot tolerate vertical differences except those produced by the market. What matters here is that both the church and the art space are sites of trust-based commitment to something that claims, in a sense, not to belong to this world. Even in its most profane form, art is marked by an exemption from the demand for immediate usefulness or fungibility; it offers a delayed and uncertain return on our investment. This contract presupposes trust, and the admiration of the artist that allows us to accept it shares much with the posture of the believer. The relationship to God in Christianity is also parasocial, in the sense that the longing to be united with God (in the hereafter), and thereby overcome the distance to Him, is central. This is a beautified version of the same desire that makes you want to hang out with people you've seen on TV.

The iconostasis is not merely an architectural form in the exhibition; it also serves as the stage for the performance of a newly composed choral work. Using the exhibition as a

frame for musical works—often with theatrical elements—is something Haga Kristensen has done on several occasions.[5] High-cultural musical forms such as choral compositions and operas help to reinforce the sense of reverence. They are aesthetic gestures that, at a basic level, fuel admiration, because they carry a commanding form, a grandeur, that we cannot help but register. Even when we do not fully surrender to them, they instruct devotion and prompt us to give ourselves over to the work.

Mystification is related to sanctification. The more than one hundred individual works exhibited at Kunstnerne Hus indirectly gives the artwork status as a relic. The sheer number creates a sense that no selection process has taken place—that everything has been included. This tells us that the object's value is not determined by a filtering of the artist's production through external evaluation. It is the initial act of creation, the physical engagement with matter, that constitutes the decisive instance. This all-inclusive gesture parallels how Haga Kristensen, through the retrospective mode, bypasses reception—or allows reception to unfold within the exhibition itself. There is something demonstratively anachronistic about insisting on this biographical-sensual criterion. It overrides the symbiosis between artwork and institution by sidestepping the demand for explanation. The urge to explain is provoked by a mystique that, for ideological reasons, cannot be left unresolved. A characteristic prejudice of our time is the belief that the enigmatic is merely something waiting to be conceptualized. Adorno argues that the truth of aesthetic experience lies in its resistance to conceptual capture; art expresses what cannot be articulated in language.[6] He states: "As cognition, however, art is not discursive, just as its truth is not the reflection of an object." [7] In recognition of this postulate—that art demands we reconcile ourselves to a riddle that cannot be translated into communicable meaning—the modernist object is portrayed as a target of blind veneration in many of Haga Kristensen's images. The rich stylistic history of modernism also serves as a template for his practice more generally, as if the work consisted in coughing up provisional variations on the last century's esoteric formalisms.[8]

The awakening alluded to in the exhibition title is logically tied to an object that is uncommunicable, or that resists exhaustive transmission. The idea of art as a awakening apparatus fuses an attitude toward art as a unique form of experience with the parasocial relation to the viewer. Awakening is a term with religious connotations, while apparatus has technical. Religion is a social technology that generates awakening (among many other things). Awakening is the process of becoming conscious of something previously unknown. In Christianity, it is related to salvation, which adds a new dimension to existence, allowing us to see the world in a new light, or as illuminated from within. The

awakening offered by art is more trivial, yet it still bears resemblance to its religious counterpart. Our encounter with the work carries the potential for a shift in awareness. This conception of art resembles the one Maurizio Lazzarato ascribes to Duchamp.[9] He writes that Duchamp's ready-made functions as "a machine for desubjectivation." The precise nature of the Duchampian awakening is less important here than the general function Lazzarato attributes to the artwork.[10] It performs a negative operation (dismantling the categories upon which our subjectivity is constructed), but this process can lead to a transformative epistemic liberation. Duchamp replaces a substantialist theory of value in art with a relational one, Lazzarato writes; the value of art lies neither in the labor invested in its making nor in the object's use value, but arises in the interaction between work and viewer, who assumes the role of co-producer.[11] We might also put it this way: the encounter with art means stepping into and activating an apparatus that awakens us from habitual thought. The artist is a kind of social engineer who creates situations in which such awakenings can occur. The point is not what one awakens to, but that the purpose of art is to effect awakening.[12]

Duchamp sought to dissolve the hierarchical relationship between artist and audience—something that, in fact, runs counter to the parasocial model described above. And yet, his name retains an aura of genius. Granted, one that has been imposed from the outside, by a cultural environment unwilling to let go of its habitual infatuation with the exceptional individual. The relationship remains stuck in the hierarchical mold that Duchamp ostensibly wanted to explode. But paradoxically, the gravitational pull of the artist's name is also essential to activating his apparatus; it is necessary to persuade us that a return is to be expected—one that is not immediately visible, but presumably worth the effort—and thereby to make us donate our time.

It must be noted, with regard to Duchamp: the ready-made is not Håga Kristensen's dominant technique. He primarily works in traditional media—fresco, oil and tempera on canvas, ceramics, and so on—and makes no attempt to hide the artist's hand or demonstratively outsource his labor, even though he collaborates with specialists when needed (singers, composers, writers). But the expectation that the viewer relate to the work as an apparatus is clearly present. Håga Kristensen draws attention to the sensory manifestation of the work by every available means. This is a mode of art engagement that centers the encounter with the object, where our experience of the work's specific properties is essential. For the record, we are not speaking only of immediately sensible qualities. The point is that the thing placed before us becomes the object of interpretive effort. That may sound self-evident, but there are competing models for interaction with art that downplay the importance of our perceptual involvement with the object—where the exhibition instead becomes the site of a primarily interpersonal process, and where the

artwork recedes to give room to ideas, intentions, and attitudes that circle it, but that have little to do with aesthetic form. Instead they are aimed at shaping or confirming the audience's political and moral outlook. In such contexts, the specific characteristics of the art object are more or less irrelevant. What matters is how well the work functions as a resonance chamber for the discourse that surrounds it. To risk a somewhat general claim, one could say that this conception of art is in replacing the parasocial awakening apparatus as the dominant template within art institutions. The historical reason is that communication has become the museum's core function, and art must now carry content suited to that purpose. A previous relation, in which communication served art—but never exhausted it—has been turned on its head: now it is art that must conform to the needs of communication, make itself communicable. A form of mediation that refuses to acknowledge what is unrepresentable in art is also uninterested in the kind of experience only art can offer. The communication of art often hinges on its least complex features, rendering it into statements that feel self-evident—platitudes—which in turn switches off the apparatus.

The obsession with communication is indicative of the fact that trust in art—the precondition that allows awakening to occur—is gone. Awakening is only a structural possibility; it is not guaranteed. Awakening was what we once implicitly *hoped* for when looking at art. Art-religiosity has an embarrassing ring to it, but it was, to exaggerate slightly, the only way to relate to art without rejecting it. Only by believing in it—that is, by accepting the proposition of art's irreducibility—could one fulfill its address. Modern art (in the broad sense) justifies itself through the individual viewer's active assent. But today, belief is no longer necessary; explanation precedes the work and is sufficient to itself. The celebration depicted in Haga Kristensen's ceiling painting (look up) is the emblem of such an interpersonal viewer culture, where the meaningful transaction takes place at the interface between bodies that have, so to speak, turned their backs on the art. Art then becomes nothing more than an interchangeable frame for the generation of social enthusiasm—and no longer a singular cultural form.

Communication has no real obligations toward art. Its only task is to ensure maximum reach, and it enjoys a license to speak about anything and but the thing it is supposedly tasked with communicating, from which it is systemically detached and therefore owes nothing. I note that artists have begun to accommodate this distributive ambition by depositing a confessional form of self-interpretation in their exhibitions.[13] These personal addresses cast a veil of relatability over the work and revive an intentional and biographical lense, in which the meaning of the work is either prescribed in advance or reducible to lived experience—and thus already primed for circulation. This intimizing communicative gesture both responds to the parasocial desire to collapse the distance

between artist and audience, and serves as a way to ensure that the engagement with art becomes primarily a social exchange between people—by closing off access to the work on its own terms. This closure is likely, at a deeper level, a reaction to broader changes in the media culture in which art now circulates, where speed and immediacy of contact are the central criteria by which artistic statements are also judged.[14] The imperative to share, which governs networked media, has displaced the solitary immersion in the work; art's affective or social potential is something that must be realized immediately.[15] The demand for rapid effect and dissemination means one can no longer count on a recipient who "completes the work," who approaches it with a willingness to engage its complexity. The apparatus is simply too slow a medium for a culture that has pressed the feed to its heart.

One aspect that may, by now, seem suspiciously omitted is Hoga Kristensen's comedy. It makes itself felt through a combination of caricatured figuration, exaggerated pretentiousness, and a provisional—and thus "unserious"—materiality (tellingly, his pedestals are nothing more than empty cardboard boxes). At first glance, this seems to work against the formation of a parasocial relationship. At times, the irony is so thick that the works verge on outright parody. Laughter at the artist's expense makes him more approachable. Yet it would be mistaken to think that subversion is the goal. Just as Hoga Kristensen does not aim to restore the figure of the genius, neither is he out to ridicule it. His comedy should be understood as a tactical processing of the interface between art and an audience raised on communication, and whose prejudices must be catered to in order to not losing them. It is a pragmatic solution to an inevitable resistance to contemplation and surrender, that must be defused to prevent the artist from being perceived as unintentionally comical—and consequently dismissed. A pretentiousness that laughs at itself is not so easily mocked, and what truly matters—namely, getting the audience to assume the role of admirers, or at least to find the portrayal of such a relation palatable—can happen without offending an egalitarian sensibility. The position Hoga Kristensen places the viewer in transforms our admiration into reality by repeatedly generating and exposing us to that admiration as a staged relation. And by participating in it, we unwittingly grant the artist the status of a legitimate object of veneration, even as we are invited to laugh at the very pretension of it.

In an egalitarian society, the parasocial hierarchy carries a faint moral stigma and is ideally replaced by an opposite, *horizontal*, relation in which the artist stands on equal footing with the audience. Peter Sloterdijk writes about how the radical principle of equality in modern democracy attacks the talent-aristocracy of bourgeois culture.[16] In the arts, this manifests

as “the genius’s self-liquidation within the artistic forms.” He offers three paradigmatic examples: Beuys shifts from genius to social worker; Warhol relocates talent from serving art to serving money; Duchamp is the symptomatic artist of the century—he liberates talent from the studio by exhibiting endlessly interpretable quasi-works.[17] The participatory art forms of recent decades may appear as the culmination of this self-liquidation, insofar as they allow the artist to vanish into the prosocial activation of audiences and collaborators, and reemerge as a coordinator of an aesthetic production outsourced to its environment—where the work as such is dissolved into the activity it generates. Yet the parasocial schema persists in the background, albeit in a paler form. The rapture of the creative process is to be shared, but a residue of “admiration” is still required for the artist to be able to generate the enthusiasm needed to inhabit the role of facilitator for this distributed creativity. One effect of Hoga Kristensen’s persistent rehearsal of the artist’s social role is that he lays bare the internal contradiction within a relationship to art that seeks to abolish the cult of genius, yet continues to rely on the artist’s charismatic presence.

Is it accurate to call Hoga Kristensen’s art an awakening apparatus, or is its address ultimately just as adapted to art’s new conditions? The question should probably be posed more generally: Is the awakening apparatus still possible in art at all, or has the redistribution of power between artist and viewer reached a point where such a transaction is no unfeasible? Participatory art has, in a sense, become the template for our relationship to art in general—even when the object is not, strictly speaking, dissolved. The imperative of participation is, at its core, about approaching art with a different disposition than before—a different sense of what it can offer us—summarizable as a demand for faster, ideally immediate, returns. And this shift is most clearly traceable in art’s institutional and distributive frameworks, rather than in the formal qualities of the work itself. It is these conditions that primarily determine our relationship to art by programming our expectations.

On a formal-aesthetic level, much of Hoga Kristensen’s work could be classified as a kind of archaic modernism—thus carrying within it the latent offer of awakening. But he seems wistfully resigned to the fact that the invitation to solitary absorption in the work falls on deaf ears. The loss of the viewer’s interest in experiencing the work on the terms of its enigmatic presence is compensated for by the totalizing, dramatic form in which individual works are embedded—what I have called above a “sociology of art theater.” This lends the work a much-needed suggestiveness and constitutes a pragmatic concession to the historical situation in which our encounter with his art takes place—a situation subordinated to the inexorable demand for communicable returns and immediate affect.

Stian Gabrielsen

Translated with ChatGPT-4

NOTES:

[1] The current media environment increasingly facilitates the realization of the longing for connection inherent in parasocial interaction. Today, the 'celebrity' is more often pressured to cultivate real—albeit primarily mediated—relationships with their audience. This reciprocal relation is enabled by social media and is typical of the communication between influencers and followers. One could call this a horizontalization of the celebrity relation. The causal explanation is presumably that networked media feed on traffic and therefore incentivize reciprocal responsiveness to a greater extent than the earlier mass-media bond between celebrity and audience.

[2] The first public manifestation of this retrospective program was Haga Kristensen's graduation project, shown at the Stenersen Museum in 2009.

[3] This bypassing of contemporaneous authority is unusually pronounced in his music-theatre production *The Loneliness of the Index Finger. The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Conceptual State into Stabilized Theatrical Sensibility, the Phantom View*, performed at Unge Kunstneres Samfund in 2009, in which time-traveling art critics from the future visited the artist's exhibition and (literally) sang its praises.

[4] An iconostasis is a wall of icons and religious paintings, often with doors, that separates the nave from the sanctuary in Eastern Orthodox churches. It plays a central role in the liturgy.

[5] The choral work performed in the exhibition is the third in a series of musical productions under the title *The Lonelinesses of the Index Fingers*.

[6] In Adorno, the modernist artwork exists in a tension with language, which it resists. This presupposes a logocentrism that is today challenged by the cultural dominance of image media. But this does not alter the essential point: to underscore a distinction between the spheres of art and communication.

[7] See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 343.

[8] The stylistic variation and aspect of reuse have been noted by several reviewers of Haga Kristensen's work, including Ingvild Krogvig (<https://kunstkritikk.no/i-repetisjonenes-desperate-tidsalder/>) and Nora Joung (<https://kunstkritikk.no/en-regnbue-av-brunt/>).

[9] See Maurizio Lazzarato, *Marcel Duchamp and the Refusal of Work*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014).

[10] Lazzarato argues that the readymade performs a series of refusals, of which the negation of labor is central—but also 'of meaning, of communication, of taste, and of aesthetics.' *Ibid.*, p. 24.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[12] Somewhat broadly, one could say that this awakening function became dominant in Western art institutions with the institutionalization of the European avant-garde after World War II.

[13] A striking example is the ongoing Ed Atkins retrospective at Tate Britain, where the presentation of his art is accompanied by explanations written by the artist himself, in which he links the works to his own biography.

[14] Caroline Busta writes about how strategies for managing information are changing, with consequences for art as well. We are no longer expected to contemplate or decode, but to respond immediately—share, comment, repost—and thereby become co-producers of the information flow. See Caroline Busta, 'Hallucinating Sense in the Era of Infinity-Content', *Document Journal*, Spring/Summer 2024, published May 22, 2024. Available at: <https://www.documentjournal.com/2024/05/technical-images-film01-angelicism-art-showtime-true-detective-shein/>

[15] According to Anna Kornbluh, a shift toward streamlining has made immediacy a dominant stylistic feature in both art and the wider media culture. See Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy: Or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2024), p. 13.

[16] Peter Sloterdijk, *Masseforakt: Kampen mellom høy og lav kultur i moderne samfunn*, trans. Eivind Tjønneland (Oslo: Spartacus, 2002), pp. 92–94. (My translation.)

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 94.