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Artists in an iron cage?

Artists' work in performing arts institutions

by

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Introduction

Nordic performing arts institutions are often described as slow-moving and heavy 'art factories', where artistic creativity is almost suffocated within bureaucratic 'prisons' (Grøndahl 1985, Bjørkås 1998). Such pessimistic evaluations of the institutionalisation of the performing arts are inspired by well-known classic sociological theories of modernisation: Max Weber was concerned about the expansion of bureaucratic, at the expense of charismatic, authority.ⁱ Is this still a relevant theoretical resource for analysing the performing arts field in the Nordic countries? Are Nordic performing artists trapped within a bureaucratic 'iron cage', or have they rather found shelter in a 'charismatic sanctuary'? This is the issue that we want to discuss in this paper, with a particular focus on institutional theatres and symphony orchestras.

According to Weber, rationalisation processes during modernity tended to trap the individual in a bureaucratic 'iron cage'. On the other hand, charismatic authority became more and more routinised by the economic forces of modern capitalism (Gerth & Mills [1946]1968). Jürgen Habermas (1971) has also warned against the 'system world's' 'colonisation' of the 'life world', by the combined forces of the state and the market. Several other scholars have described the organisation of modern industrial production as 'Fordist'ⁱⁱ, i.e. as characterised by work efficiency, standardised mass production/assembly lines, scientific management and extensive division of labour (Barker 2004). From this point of view, most productive sectors, performing arts included, were considered to be dominated by the Fordist regime. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) have rephrased Weber's original thesis about an irreversible rationalisation of modern organisations. They agree, indeed, about the general trend of bureaucratisation and homogenisation of modern organisations, but they interpret this primarily as a result of cultural imitation and homogenisation processes ('institutional isomorphism').

Several cultural policy researchers also consider cultural life to be exposed to 'political colonisation' by an instrumental market ideology (Duelund 2008). They are concerned that the introduction of New Public Management (NPM), and the subsequent 'increasing evaluation and quality control of the public sector', will reduce the autonomy of cultural life (Nielsen 2003:240). Røyseng (2007) considers that such views reflect a general 'anxiety discourse' among cultural policy researchers. They fear an increasingly instrumental and technocratic cultural life caused by an expanding state that promotes a market ideology.

Such questions may seem somewhat outdated in an arts world characterised by increasing de-institutionalisation, flexibility and mobility (Mangset/Røyseng 2009). One should keep in mind, however, that the performing arts sector in the Nordic countries, and in Norway in particular, is very institutionalised, dominated by relatively few institutions heavily subsidised by public authorities. Both the commercial sector and the independent groups are weak in Norwegian performing arts (Sirnes 2001). Traditionally many performing artists, i.e. actors in theatres and musicians in orchestras, have been permanently employed by their institutions, more or less like civil servants. During the last two decades these structures have been challenged, but not fundamentally altered, by typical late modern transformations: the number

of freelance artists has increased substantially; performing artists are more often employed through open competition; permanent employment has been somewhat limited; and several temporary performing art projects crop up. But basic aspects of the Norwegian model of organisation of the performing arts still persist (Sirnes 2001, Mangset 2004, Heian et al. 2008).

Artistic production in bureaucratic factories or charismatic communities?

In order to understand the performing arts institutions properly we should, however, remember that production in the performing arts normally takes place within the context of temporary projects, e.g. the production of specific plays, concerts etc. (Grund 2008). That is the case both in large institutions and in small non-institutional companies. Carrying out such temporary projects requires a community of artists working closely together during a limited period in order to obtain the best possible result before the deadline.

Performing art production also demands close co-operation between several partners (Becker 1982). It may be difficult – and create tensions – when a group of individualistic artists are obliged to co-operate very closely with each other. Thus there is a demand for strong leadership. The predominant tradition among performing artists is to accept and follow unconditionally the omnipotent charismatic artistic leader during the period of artistic production (Røyseng 2007). On the other hand, performing arts institutions have many bureaucratic and Fordist characteristics: they are, to a certain degree, characterised by formal administrative hierarchies, rational planning, budget control and working environment regulations (Bjørkås 1998, Løyland/Ringstad 2002). This may result in tensions between charismatic and bureaucratic authority.

In the Nordic countries the system of permanently employed companies of actors is often termed ‘the ensemble model’. However, this term is often misinterpreted elsewhere in Europe, where a performing arts ensemble would not be considered to be remotely similar to the Nordic ‘art factory’.ⁱⁱⁱ In order to clarify the ambiguity, Sirnes (2001:58) distinguishes between ‘proper’ and ‘false’ ensembles, the latter comprising the typical Norwegian institutional theatre. On the other hand several Nordic scholars have described the ‘proper’ or ideal type ‘ensemble’ as a ‘temporary artistic community’ directed by an artistic leader with extended authority for a limited period of time (Långbacka 1981, Grøndahl 1985, Langsted 1999). Långbacka (1981:281-83) distinguishes between the ‘artistic theatre’ and ‘the institutionalised theatre’. He considers the artistic theatre to be resourceful, because it functions as a creative theatre with contemporary significance and social relevance; in contrast, the institutionalised theatre puts creativity at risk because it ‘swallows spiritual and material resources’. In the ideal type ‘artistic [ensemble] theatre’, the artistic director gathers a group of followers around himself/herself and his/her artistic project for a specific period of time. He or she will have full artistic control and authority, similar to the prophet’s control over his/her disciples. The artistic director would like to be a charismatic leader in the Weberian sense of the word. Because the whole project is temporary, and directed by an artistic vision, the artists who follow the leader may have to endure both a low income and substantial occupational risk. Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop, Peter Brook’s Paris Ensemble and Ariane Mouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil may be mentioned as examples of such ‘artistic theatres’.

According to Långbacka, there is no clear-cut distinction between the artistic and the institutionalised theatre (ibid: 309). There is rather a continuous stream of differences along a spectrum. Even though the Nordic ensemble theatre is a typical example of an

institutionalised theatre, it also includes some elements from the artistic theatre. The Nordic ensemble theatre may therefore be considered as an adaptation (or perhaps a distortion?) of the European ‘artistic ensemble model’ when faced with a Nordic welfare oriented social-democratic context, which attempts to integrate the artistic ensemble and the omnipotent artistic leader into the bureaucratic and/or Fordist structure of permanent institutions.

The previous analysis is probably more valid for theatres than for orchestras. It is our hypothesis that the ambivalent relationship between charismatic and bureaucratic leadership affects working conditions differently in theatres and orchestras. One very important difference between the two types of institution relates to the ‘organisation of working time’: The project development periods for theatre productions are usually much longer than those for concert productions. The relatively long-term development periods of theatres follow a kind of time-consuming and relentless logic which is difficult to adapt totally to the routines of bureaucratic organisations or Fordist factories. It is also more difficult to adapt the daily and weekly working hours of the theatre to the ordinary sequences of Fordist and/or bureaucratic working life than to adapt to those of the orchestra. A point of balance between the two logics is reached, but the balance may be different in theatres compared with orchestras.

Research questions and methodology

The general problem that we raise in this article is whether the pessimistic picture of the relation between state control, market influence and artistic work – drawn by several Nordic scholars – is relevant for studying the performing arts today:

- Does the distinction between bureaucratic and charismatic leadership represent a fruitful analytical tool for analysing the working conditions of performing artists in a post-Fordist era?
- How has the construction of strongly bureaucratic, publicly subsidised performing arts institutions affected the working conditions and the creativity of performing artists?

We focus upon the encounter, or adaptation, between an artistic or charismatic, *and* a bureaucratic or Fordist, logic within the performing arts world: are performing artists in Norway trapped within an ‘iron cage’ of bureaucracy? Have they rather found shelter within a ‘charismatic sanctuary’? Or does the development of post-Fordist labour make these questions superfluous? In addition, are there significant differences between theatres and orchestras in these respects? In order to shed light on these general research problems we treat the following topics in the empirical analysis:

1) What are the working day routines among performing artists? The rationalisation/bureaucratisation hypothesis suggests that one might expect to discover quite structured working routines in performing arts institutions, more or less similar to conditions in bureaucratic organisations or Fordist factories.

2) How do employees in performing arts institutions deal with the relation between working life and the private sphere? Again the rationalisation/bureaucratisation hypothesis predicts a quite strict separation between the work sphere and the private sphere among artists working in performing art institutions, e.g. in Max Weber’s classical expression: ‘In principle, the modern organization of the civil service separates the bureau from the private domicile of the official, and, in general, bureaucracy segregates official activity as something distinct from the sphere of private life. In principle, the executive office is separated from the household,

business from private correspondence, and business assets from private fortunes' (Gerth/Mills [1946] 1968:197).

3) What kind of power or authority structures exist within performing art institutions? Under the rationalisation/bureaucratisation hypothesis one would expect to discover hierarchical/bureaucratic structures, rather than autocratic/charismatic authority structures.

4) How do employees in performing arts institutions experience potential pressures from the outside world, especially from public authorities and from market forces? According to the rationalisation/bureaucratisation hypothesis one should expect performing arts institutions to be exposed to active intervention by the state and the market, i.e. one should expect an increasing 'colonisation' of the artistic community by government and market forces – and a commensurate limitation of artistic autonomy.

5) Finally: Is the bureaucratic/charismatic dichotomy relevant at all for studying contemporary Norwegian performing arts, or has this analytical dichotomy become outdated by recent transformations in the field? Based upon post-Fordist theories about the transformations of work relations in late modernity one may question the relevance of the bureaucratic/charismatic dichotomy (Beck 2000, Barker 2004, Mangset/Røyseng 2009).

The study is primarily based upon qualitative interviews with employees in two performing arts institutions, the principal theatre in one of Norway's largest towns and a symphony orchestra in Oslo. In the article we have named the first institution 'the Theatre', the second 'the Orchestra'. We have conducted qualitative interviews with 27 informants, 13 in the Theatre and 14 in the Orchestra. The majority of the interviewees were actors and musicians, but some administrators and leaders were interviewed as well. All interviews have been recorded, transcribed and systematically analysed. The interviewees have been given fictitious names in the present text. In addition, we have benefited from some written documents provided by the two institutions for our analysis.^{iv}

Of course, the study of just *two* institutions does not allow generalisation in a statistical/quantitative sense. Nonetheless the study may still – when combined with other related studies and theoretical considerations – contribute to more general knowledge of the working condition of Norwegian performance artists. It is well-known from several studies that the structure of subsidised performing arts institutions is quite uniform in Norway (Grøndahl 1985, Bjørkås 1998, Løyland/Ringstad 2002, Grund 2008). Thus it should be possible to make 'qualified generalisations' about the working conditions of Norwegian performance artists based on case studies such as ours, combined with other case studies (Andersen 1997). We also believe that the comparison between two performing arts institutions that are similar in many respects, but differ in some key ways, may contribute to shedding new light upon the workings of each institution.

The routines of the working day

Are performing arts institutions characterised by structured working routines more or less similar to conditions in bureaucratic organisations or Fordist factories? And how do theatres and orchestras differ in this respect?

The Theatre

The working days are, indeed, quite routinised both in the Theatre and the Orchestra. However, the use of time during the working day is less structured, or structured in more

complex ways, in the Theatre. In general, work is organised in relation to the ongoing productions, i.e. in relation to specific temporary projects. One actor may be involved in several productions during the same time period. However, there are also periods – between productions – where actors have little or nothing to do. Therefore they do not always experience their working days as being ‘normal’ or completely structured by rigid routines:

You certainly feel that it’s *normal* when you have worked like this for a long time. But for me it was ... kind of strange, and a bit peculiar; because suddenly you find yourself ..., for instance, at the moment I don’t have anything to do for a couple of weeks, while I’m still ‘at work’. It’s not a holiday. It’s a sort of paid ..., but suddenly you find yourself working far too much. So I find it very ... I like working this way.

says ‘Fredrik’, a young actor. Nevertheless, ‘Jacob’, an actor who has worked in the Theatre for many years, maintains that there are quite stable working routines in the Theatre: rehearsals for new productions generally start around 10-11 a.m. and end at 3 p.m. But the working days of performing artists are more split up in sequences than the work of many other workers/employees. A normal working day will either imply that you work with the rehearsals of a play from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., or that you play in a performance six evenings a week. Often you depart from the routines. You may have to start rehearsals for a new play before you have finished the previous play, so you have to ‘work double’. On another occasion, the rehearsal of a new play may not start until the previous play has ended. This may involve actors having nothing to do for a period of time. On rare occasions actors may also have to do rehearsals of a play during the daytime, put on a children’s performance at 5 p.m. and also play in a new performance at 8 p.m.

Despite this ‘haphazard regularity’, several actors interpret their working days as being ‘normal’.

The rules and routines of the working day have changed over the course of time, mainly because of trade union initiatives and negotiations: over the last few decades several Collective Agreements have been made between the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association and the Association of Norwegian Theatres and Orchestras concerning working hours, overtime pay and the number/proportion of permanently employed actors at each subsidised theatre. This has certainly contributed to standardising working routines in the theatres. However, the intensity of work still varies considerably from one period to another. This may cause a clash between the artist’s charismatic dedication and the organisation’s bureaucratic routines. It is often difficult to predict the exact need for artistic labour in the near future. The actors must therefore constantly be ready to participate in new rehearsals. They do not experience such a clear-cut distinction between work and leisure as in traditional bureaucratic and Fordist organisations. In this sense the organisation of work in the Theatre has much in common with ideal type post-fordist work, often described as temporary, discontinuous, flexible and precarious (Beck 2000). Several scholars also consider that the organisation of artistic work since long has anticipated the organisation of work in late modernity in general (Boltanski/Chiapello 1999, Menger 2002). Like many post-Fordist workers, the performing artists in the Theatre are not altogether free, even during their spare time. This aspect is also intensified by the sequential division, between rehearsals and performances, of the working day. During some periods the actors may stay in the theatre building all the time from 10 a.m. until late in the evening. After the performance they often go out and relax until late at night with their work mates before returning home. But these seemingly post-Fordist aspects of the

work situation of performing artists are not at all new, but rather a traditional aspect of artistic work that recently has been spread to many other areas of working life.

Some actors may even be unemployed or underemployed for long periods. This is experienced as psychologically painful, even stigmatising. 'Jacob' says:

Let's say that if you walk around and have [just] four lines in a play, repeatedly. [...] You never get the chance to develop something in yourself, especially if you're an actor with a potential for doing more. You can't develop your potential if you're not given the opportunity; it's quite impossible; too little. It's like sitting behind in the classroom raising your hand all the time. You're never noticed.

Not 'working' for a long time is a problem, despite the fact that one is permanently employed. It may even cause additional stress to be permanently employed and receive a wage, without working continually. It may create psychological and social problems if you are not given acting parts for long periods. You experience a stigma – real or imagined – you feel isolated; you feel that you are a burden on the whole institution.

Parts in plays are not democratically or equally allocated. When an actor gets a new part it is also a sign of artistic appreciation. 'Peter', another experienced actor, relates that in a theatre you 'are working together with others all the time; you work in a situation where – in a way ... people's good and bad qualities become more explicitly exposed than in other situations'. There is constant public display of which actors are trusted with good parts and which actors are repeatedly excluded from productions. The excluded actors experience professional shame; they therefore often try to make themselves 'invisible'.

The selection of plays determines which parts will be available, and it is the current artistic director who decides which plays will be performed. The dramatic pieces available do not always provide an equal proportion of parts for younger and older actors, or for men and women. In particular, there are relatively few parts available for middle-aged and older actresses. The availability of parts is also limited by conventional norms in the theatre world concerning which parts female and male, younger and older, actors can and cannot play (Sirnes 2001, Røyseng 2007). Therefore quite a few middle-aged and older actresses risk becoming redundant or underemployed. Consequently, according to some of our informants, the artistic directors to some extent take into account the age and gender distribution of the permanent ensemble when selecting plays.

On the whole, the Theatre is a place of work marked by the ambivalence between ordinary Fordist routines and an 'enchanted' internal culture. It is both similar to, and different from, other workplaces. 'Oda', a young actress, says:

But I believe that this has something to do with the fact that we're talking about a theatre. Yes, [it is] not the typical factory; of course it's a factory, a theatre factory, in that sense. We also produce something, and we're fond of what we do. We stand for what we do; it's not just the money, but a lifestyle. It's not just an occupation.

According to this informant the Theatre both is, and is not, a 'factory': Despite the irregular working hours actors experience a sense of routine in their everyday working life. But they also experience that their occupation is something quite different from other 'ordinary' occupations, as something extraordinary. Perhaps they work in an 'enchanted' factory? Or do

they rather experience a post-Fordist spirit within Fordist structures? The organisation of the actors' work seems to depend more upon the artistic director's flow of creative ideas and projects than upon the bureaucratic routines of the theatre organisation.

The Orchestra

The working routines in the Orchestra have more in common with the routines of traditional Fordist places of work, for instance a bureaucratic office or a Fordist factory. Temporary productions contribute strongly to structure the work in the Orchestra, as in the Theatre. However, each production in the Orchestra corresponds more closely to the organisation of the ordinary working life. A production in the Orchestra usually takes just one week, while the productions in the Theatre are much larger and more long-lasting.

The working day in the Orchestra is divided between a) regular/statutory working hours, b) independent flexitime and c) imposed overtime. The regular/statutory working hours consist of rehearsals, which are scheduled from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. All the musicians have to be present at rehearsals. Concerts are also included in the regular/statutory working hours. The rest of the working time is devoted to individual training. The musician may start an ordinary working day by warming up, checking notes, fetching sheets and getting the instrument in order. Then she/he may continue with up to five hours rehearsals. 'Rasmus', who has been in the Orchestra for more than 30 years, experiences the working day as quite routinised. He says:

Altogether our working week corresponds to about 37½ hours. This includes 25 hours of rehearsals, and in addition you can reckon with around 12½ hours practice, in addition; ... And when I've finished a rehearsal, then I practise about one additional hour; I check the programme for the next week, or I practise more on what I'm going to do. So [it is] more or less from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. That's what's normal for the musicians.

It is worth noting that musicians usually work continuously during the day. The working hours of the musicians are less divided up than the working hours of the actors. In this sense the musicians have much in common with the majority of workers or employees in bureaucratic or Fordist institutions. It is also worth noting that they, or at least this informant, interpret their daily (9 to 4) and weekly (37.5 hours) working hours directly in accordance with what is considered to be a 'normal' working day and working week in Norway ('a '9 to 4 job', 'a 37.5 hours week'). Several informants also refer to the trade unions' Collective Agreement when they are asked about so-called 'normal' working hours. It seems to be important to them to stress the normality of the organisation of their working time in the Orchestra.

Nevertheless, the working day in the Orchestra is now more divided up than it was before. The Orchestra has had to adapt more to market demands. This has challenged the Fordist working routines. A few years ago the Orchestra was hit by a serious economic and organisational crisis, and was nearly closed down. Consequently, the Orchestra had to go through a difficult re-organisation process in order to survive. It was obliged to increase its market income considerably, especially by increasing the number of public concerts. As a result, the working days of the musicians have changed a lot. Previously, the regular/statutory working hours lasted from just 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. According to 'Line', one sometimes 'started at 10 and now and then was finished by 10.30'. However, in the last five to ten years, the working day has changed radically. Now the musicians have to work more often in the evenings and at weekends. 'Line' says the following:

Before, we had a maximum of one concert per month, when I started. Often it meant just playing a short piece for the radio, recording. There was just one evening concert a month. Now there is one a week. [...] So the working day has changed radically.

This implies more stress at work, and the working hours are more divided up than previously (especially because of evening and weekend concerts). Nevertheless, it seems as if the musicians are quite pleased with this intensification of their working hours. Amongst other things, it has contributed to ensuring that the Orchestra will not be shut down, and it makes the work situation more meaningful. It may also be the case that they refer to the increasing intensity of work and the normality of working hours in order to legitimise the further existence of their institution.

Artistic work in the Orchestra appears to be more standardised and repetitive than artistic work in the Theatre. It may therefore have more in common with work routines in bureaucracies and Fordist factories. But the working routines of the Orchestra have also been challenged by general post-Fordist transformations of work.

Work and family

Does work in performing art institutions imply strict separation between the work sphere and the private sphere, more or less similar to bureaucracies and/or factories (Gerth/Mills [1946] 1968)? Or have the distinctions between work and home, professional life and private life – in line with post-Fordist work organisation – become more unclear (Mangset/Røyseng 2009)? How does work in the performing art institutions affect private life/family life? Is the separation between the work sphere and the private sphere – and between work and family – structured differently in the Theatre and the Orchestra?

The Theatre

The routines and rhythm of work in the Theatre may make it difficult to live an ‘ordinary’ family life. The Theatre has some features in common with a ‘total institution’^v in the sense that the employees have strong personal attachments and loyalties within the Theatre – and often less personal attachments outside the Theatre. They also spend much of their time, even leisure time, within the Theatre. The working hours in the Theatre are organised in such a way that the actors are kept within the confines of the institution, at least mentally, more or less around the clock. Working hours and leisure time are not sufficiently separated to allow the actors to change completely from the work sphere to the leisure sphere after work.

There are also strong informal social networks within the Theatre. Many actors prefer to stay with workmates after working hours, for instance, to go out on the town together at night after performances. A lot of actors can do this without any problems, because they are young and have no children. Others are able to do it, because their partner also works at the Theatre. A lot of the actors talk about an inclusive work environment and a strong team spirit within ‘the house’. This even includes other theatre professionals, such as the technicians. They all belong to the same big ‘theatre family’. The metaphor ‘professional family’ is also used by Menger (1997:39) to describe similar informal relations among French actors. However, according to Menger, the French world of actors is also characterised by close ‘family relations’ in another sense: Many actors are married or cohabit with other actors. A lot of French actors also have brothers or sisters who perform art professionally. Menger qualifies this as a high level of ‘professional endogamy’ (ibid: 40). We do not have access to strictly comparable data from Norway, but according to a survey of the members of the Norwegian Actors’ Equity Association, 19 per cent have close family members who are actors. Among

permanently employed actors the proportion is even higher – 31 per cent (Gran/Banken 2008). Actors also seem to belong to the same ‘family’ in the sense that they are often recruited from a highly educated and well-off social stratum. Both Menger’s study of French actors and our own general survey of Norwegian artists support this conclusion (Menger 1997, Heian 2009).

Strong attachment to, and solidarity within, the Theatre can also contribute to isolating the institution from its surroundings. As mentioned above, many of the actors are married or have a partner who is also an actor. ‘Kristin’, who divorced her actor husband several years ago, has re-married a man who does not have any connections to the theatre world. This has allowed her to break out from her ‘isolated theatre world’. She expresses this in the following way:

And then I had the good fortune to meet a new man who doesn’t work in the theatre, who comes from a place outside town. And he has *his* own people. I have to say that life is this has meant a dramatic change in my life, a tremendous change. To talk with ordinary people; because before, of course, everything involved you know ... [the Theatre, the world of theatre].... Because you worked so much; therefore social life was very much confined to your colleagues. I think I can count on one hand how many parent-teacher meetings I’ve attended. I have two children who are now 17 and 22 years of age; but, I can count on one hand the number of parent-teacher meetings I have attended in the evenings. I haven’t been able to attend any end-of-term ceremonies. I haven’t been able to see them perform ... I can count it on one hand.

Despite the good and inclusive atmosphere, the all-consuming social life in the Theatre can become a real burden. In the theatre world you have to sacrifice almost everything for dramatic art. This is similar to the charismatic followers’ unconditional willingness to sacrifice everything for the charismatic leader. But when ‘Kristin’ looks back at her long and successful career, she regrets her total dedication to the profession:

When the children were small and got sick, then it was rather painful. And the youngest, who had an operation, and you couldn’t be there in the evening at the hospital, and ... If I could reverse something, or do it differently, then I would have asked for more free time when the children were small. I haven’t put my kids to bed very often. That has been I probably feel that that has been the worst [thing]. And that you couldn’t ... the social life; I somewhat discover it periodically; other things that I’d like to try and do, because the theatre is of course not everything.

‘Lars’, a young actor, tells a similar story:

It’s difficult to combine acting with a normal family life. You live, in a way, outside the rest of the society. We’re asleep when most other people have already been awake for some hours, and we’re supposed to be at our highest peak [...] at eight in the evening. So, as far as family life is concerned, it can be very difficult.

These presentations of the actor as a socially marginal, profoundly dedicated figure who sacrifices everything for the art certainly reflects the conventional description of the charismatic artist (Kris, E./Kurz, O. [1934] 1979, Hauser [1962]1977, Heinich 1991, 2005). It also seems that future actors are socialised into such charismatic isolation as early as when they attended drama school (Mangset 2004).

The Orchestra

The musicians are also very dedicated to their profession, and they enthusiastically describe their working environment as being very good. Several informants stress the internal cohesion and solidarity in the Orchestra. Some relate it to the crisis that the Orchestra went through a few years ago. The rescue operation after the crisis has also contributed to strengthening their internal solidarity.

Lehmann (2002) found that there were strong lines of demarcation and distinct conflicts between the members of different instrument groups within the French symphony orchestra that he studied: 'the instrument group' seemed to constitute the principal basis for the divisions into social networks, leisure activities, etc. Our research also uncovered similar clear divisions or conflicts between members of different instrument groups; and in our material, 'the instrument group' appears to be the most important social category. Informants speak of close relationships, including relationships of mutual support and comfort, within 'the instrument group'.

There are of course social networks and relationships between different musicians in the Orchestra, both within and across instrument groups. Does this imply that they go out together during their leisure time? 'Some of us do, it always depends a bit upon ... Small groups are created within the bigger groups. You're not together with all of them, right? Well, I often meet one [female] friend in particular, but also several others', says 'Beate', a musician who has worked in the Orchestra for decades.

Nevertheless, the social relationships within the Orchestra do not appear very different from social relationships at other places of work. There are a lot of fruitful internal networks and relationships, but the Orchestra members do not have as strong internal 'family relationships' as the actors in the Theatre. This may partly be explained by the fact that the working hours are organised differently. Despite the increasing number of evening and weekend concerts there is a much more clear-cut division between working hours and leisure time in the Orchestra than in the Theatre. Consequently, combining artistic work with family life is also much easier and occurs more frequently in the Orchestra than in the Theatre. 'Line', who is in her 40s, has positive experiences combining her work in the Orchestra with family life:

This is a dream job for a mother with small children and a full-time job. The children are now grown-up. But, no, I think it was wonderful that I could always be at home when the children came home from school, and that I was able to follow them to school before I went to work. And I have been able to practise after they went to bed. Because it isn't just those four hours that's included in the working hours; it also includes all the practice. And [practice] at the weekends too. So perhaps I haven't prioritised practising while the children were at home. If they were out at their friends homes, or if they were doing something else, then I was always ... you can always control when you are doing your personal practice. So I think it's been very good instead of being obliged to be at work from 8 to 4 every day and every other Saturday.

'Beate' confirms that the working hours and the organisation of work at the Orchestra is – and was – well adapted to having a family life with small children: 'I have to say that when the children were small, I was very happy to be able to practise, and be available, even if I was home and working'.

Despite the internal networks, the close personal relationships and the good social environment in the Orchestra, the musicians are somewhat concerned about drawing lines between each other's personal spheres. The daily life in the Orchestra is characterised by very stable physical and spatial relations between the various members. The musicians are often employed as a member of the same orchestra for many years, and they also often occupy the same space in relation to other musicians for decades:

It's clear that playing in an orchestra is so damned extreme. You're sitting playing next to people during a period of forty to fifty years irrespective of whether you are friendly with someone or not; you have to be a team player, and that's something like ... If you are working in an office, then you can just close the door, and you're alone; but here you're crowded together every day,

says one musician. You experience the musical qualities, physical peculiarities (bad body odour, bad habits) and the mental moods of your colleagues on an ongoing and close basis. This may be one of the reasons why the musicians are quite pleased to be able to leave the 'orchestra family' and join their private families after work.^{vi}

On the whole it is easier for the musicians in the Orchestra than for the actors in the Theatre to keep the work sphere and the private sphere apart, except for the musicians' practice at home.

Authority and hierarchy

What kind of authority structures appear in theatres and orchestras? Bureaucratic authority presupposes quite formal and hierarchical structures, while a charismatic authority structure implies more direct personalised and autocratic execution of power. Does bureaucratic authority predominate in the Theatre and the Orchestra?

Theatre

Bureaucratic authority does not predominate in the Theatre; on the contrary, the study confirms our expectations of a charismatic and autocratic authority structure. The authority of the artistic director^{vii} seems to be almost unconditional. This appears similar to the authority structure of most other theatre institutions in Norway. The organisational structure of theatres has often been characterised as being 'feudal'. In a study of another Norwegian institutional theatre we have characterised the ideal type role of artistic directors in more general terms:

Artistic directors have been considered to be sovereign chiefs that have managed their own way with the economic and human resources of the theatre at their own discretion, often based on strong private preferences and interests. Their style of leadership has been described as charismatic, informal and unpredictable. The artistic director has appeared as an autocratic leader who is not very concerned about the opinions and interests of his co-workers (Røyseng 2007:172-73).

Such ideas are also reflected in this study, in descriptions of the authority structure made by actors or other artistic personnel in the Theatre. According to one of the dramatic advisors, 'Gunhild', the artistic staff must always follow the personal preferences of the artistic director. When a new artistic director is appointed she, as a dramatic advisor, always has to spend time finding out how the director thinks so she can adapt her work to it:

But I, now in this new cooperation, I just have to listen and find out where 'Nils Tore's' [the new artistic director] heart is; because it takes some time to do that too. But that's just

something that I have to find out. There's not very much space for pursuing one's own interests in such a situation. You can always try of course, and sometimes it works, but you have to listen to ... After all, *he's* the one who is there in the capacity of directing the theatre and represents us in relation to the public. We, the others, are in reality just supportive persons for him. The theatre is somewhat hierarchically^{viii} constructed in a way; it is somewhat feudal.

It is not enough that the dramatic advisor knows how the artistic director *thinks*; she also has to find out where he has his *heart*. It is not enough to know his strategies and values; she also has to get acquainted with his feelings, wishes and desires. 'Gunhild' describes the artistic director as a charismatic leader, who directs his 'flock' more or less like a religious leader with god-given powers. When the powers are god-given one cannot question them.

'Peter' is another informant (actor), who attributes the validity of 'law' to the words of the artistic director:

In a way, it's a very feudal system, one of the last. You don't need to give grounds for it ... One can hide oneself behind very subjective concepts all the time. It's like that. The artistic director might say: 'The instructor won't include you [in the play]. He doesn't think you're good enough. *I* do not think you fit in. *I* don't think you're good enough.' You can't argue rationally against such an allegation. You can just say: 'But I do not agree'.

'Peter' describes an authority system which has much in common with an autocracy or an absolute monarchy, i.e. a system where the king/monarch has absolute power which is delegated from God. You cannot question the decisions of the monarch – or the artistic director. The legitimate power of the former emanates from God, while the power of the latter emanates from his heart. Consequently, the artistic director appears as a modern charismatic leader rather than a traditional monarch.

However, is it still possible to influence the artistic director? Are there any democratic channels of influence in the Theatre? During the 1970s 'artistic councils' were established in the theatres for this purpose after negotiations with the unions. Every theatre with an artistic director should have one, the aim being that the artistic council should have a say concerning the artistic management and direction of the theatre, i.e. about repertory, cast and artistic employment. It should also contribute in advising and developing each individual actor artistically. However, according to our informants in the Theatre, the artistic council does not have much real power. It is considered to be a rather impotent talking shop. When 'Irene', who has worked at the Theatre for years, was asked whether the artistic council serves any purpose, she responded:

None whatsoever! As the word [artistic council] implies, it is an advisory body, and it may be quite engaging, but you feel that ... Now and then you think that it's just a waste ... I'm wasting my time. It doesn't have any significance at all. I'm not influencing anything at all.

'Irene' has been a member of artistic councils in several theatres, but she considers them to be just a waste of time. It is the artistic director who has the final say and who makes the decisions: 'I've been in the artistic council, and absolutely nobody cares about what you have to say. No artistic director, I mean.' Several of the actors voice similar opinions.

However, this does not mean that the actors – or other artistic personnel – are totally impotent; they often exert influence in a more informal way. If actors wish to affect the artistic direction of the Theatre, then they should not primarily use formal channels. It is certainly possible to influence the artistic director by means of more informal channels. ‘Jacob’ expresses this in the following way:

There’s no reason to hide the fact that it’s not democratic. I can’t go [to the artistic director] and say that ‘I absolutely think that’ No. You’re not allowed to do that. So it’s a pyramid. It always has been, and you can’t get away from that fact either – with the king at the top and all us others beneath him. But if you play ball with the king, then it works.

Consequently, ‘Peter’ says that you have to ‘make friends with the right people’. Other actors also confirm that it is the informal influence that mainly functions in relation to the artistic director. This may be characterised as a client-patron relationship. It is also worth noting that ‘Peter’ emphasises the charismatic perception of the artistic director by calling him a ‘king’.

Thus the authority structure of the Theatre is neither bureaucratic nor democratic. It rather appears as autocratic and charismatic. It has also little in common with the ideal type authority structure of a post-Fordist work organisation, where the individual worker’s initiative and competence is supposed to make a difference.

The Orchestra

The authority structure in the Orchestra is very different from that of the Theatre in the sense that it is less authoritarian and that several people and organisational bodies are involved in artistic decisions. This may also include the employment of artistic personnel, even the appointment of a new *chief conductor*. Thus the Orchestra appears to be a more democratic institution than the Theatre. However, in the Orchestra there is a distinct difference between a) the performing orchestra in a concert or rehearsal situation and b) the orchestra as an institution, as far as artistic decisions are concerned. During concerts and rehearsals the *conductor* is the undisputed leader. Under him (it is usually a man) in the organisational structure is the *concert master*. In an ordinary orchestra the *solo violinist* holds the position of concert master. He or she directs the group of *first violinists*, but also the whole group of musicians. Each instrument group also has a *group leader* or *soloist*. The Orchestra is therefore more hierarchically organised than the rather autocratic Theatre.

The hierarchical order between instrument groups and musicians is also reflected in the way they are physically placed in the concert or rehearsal hall. This rank order is also reflected in the ritualised behaviour that exists between the members of the Orchestra. For instance, one of the musicians, ‘Geir’, says that the musicians located in rear positions are in some situations obliged to make sacrifices with regard to those musicians who are located at the front:

There are eight first violinists; and then [if the string of] the violin of the guy sitting in front snaps; what happens then? Then there’s an unwritten rule that the one sitting behind in the orchestra makes a sacrifice and gives them his [or her] violin; and then the damaged violin will be sent to the rear.

To a certain degree we recognise the same kind of charismatic leadership in the Orchestra (personified by the conductor) as in the Theatre (personified by the artistic director). Several rituals confirm this: Both the musicians and the audience grow quiet when the conductor

makes his entrance at the beginning of a performance (and in the rehearsal hall at the beginning of a rehearsal). The authority of the conductor is also displayed by his position on podium which is located *above* the audience and the musicians. The conductor directs both the audience and the musicians: the conductor's baton signals the start and end of a performance. His authority is also symbolised by the fact that he does not enter the concert or rehearsal hall before the musicians are absolutely ready to start (also in rehearsals). Consequently, they must complete the tuning of their instruments before he enters the hall. Both during rehearsals and concerts the conductor must be treated respectfully. But it is also clear that the charismatic power of the conductor is much more restricted to a specific area and context than the charismatic power of the artistic director.

Most orchestras hire a chief conductor. However, in the Orchestra this position was vacant during our round of interviews. The chief conductor normally plays an important role in the repertory planning and the other artistic decisions of the Orchestra. He is the artistic director of the Orchestra. However, he is not as powerful as the director of the Theatre. Several other organisational bodies and positions are involved in the artistic decisions. Firstly, the *orchestra director* is the head of the whole Orchestra as an institution. This is primarily an administrative position, but he/she is also to a certain degree involved in artistic decisions. Secondly, a *programme committee*, consisting of six musicians and representatives from the orchestra direction, is heavily involved in artistic decisions, especially the planning of the repertory. The programme committee of the Orchestra is not a pseudo democratic body like the artistic council of the Theatre.

As mentioned above, the Orchestra did not have any chief conductor during our field work. Therefore the programme committee had a heavier than normal workload involving the artistic planning and decisions than if a chief conductor had been employed in the position. However, even when the Orchestra has a chief conductor, the programme committee plays a very active role. The present situation – without a chief conductor – also clearly demonstrates that the Orchestra can manage perfectly well without one. However, it is not so likely that the Theatre would be able to function without an artistic director.

All in all, the Orchestra has several bodies or councils in the organisation that are involved in artistic decisions, for instance, the chief manager, orchestra director, program committee and several other artistic councils. This certainly demonstrates the democratic aspects of the organisation. Thus the musicians have considerable influence upon repertory planning, the recruitment of new musicians after auditioning and the appointment of chief conductors. The Orchestra is also attentive to their opinions concerning concrete circumstances that may affect their working conditions. It is difficult for the Orchestra to oppose a clear majority of the musicians, even if this majority refuses to re-engage the chief conductor. It seems as if the artistic leader of the Orchestra needs active and continuous support from a majority of the musicians in order to retain his position, while the artistic leader of the Theatre is more often able to continue in his/her position without active support – or he/she receives such support almost automatically except for some quite rare exceptions.

External pressure

How do artists and other employees in the Theatre and the Orchestra experience external pressure from the public authorities, market forces or other external social institutions? Do NPM objectives and evaluations or market concerns and/or pressure substantially restrict the autonomy of performing art institutions?

The Theatre

As stated above, many scholars have been concerned about the intrusion of market interests and market discourses into the arts field. Artistic autonomy is also often considered to be under pressure from government authorities. However, our previous studies do not consistently support these views. In a comprehensive study of one of the major Norwegian theatres, we found that artistic logics were quite resistant to pressure from both economic and political logics (Røyseng 2007). In several other studies, we have also found that Norwegian artists still tend to defend artistic values and ‘deny the economy’ (Mangset 2004, Røyseng et al. 2007).

The present study certainly demonstrates that the Theatre takes the market into account when it plans its artistic activities. However, box office income represents only a small percentage of the total running budget of the Theatre (less than 15 per cent); income from sponsors represents even less (less than 1 per cent). None of our theatre informants reported that they had felt any pressure from sponsors concerning their artistic activities. The relationship between the Theatre and the public was more ambivalent. The Theatre certainly staged some light plays primarily in order to attract a broader public and make a profit. The noble justification for this could be that one needed some profitable ‘French farces’ to be able to subsidise the staging of high quality plays with less market potential. The director of the Theatre, however, also stressed that people’s demand for popular plays may be justifiable from a cultural policy and artistic point of view. He explicitly said that he wants to present ‘broad, popular theatre’, but sometimes he felt that the staging of some light plays came close to artistic ‘prostitution’.

However because government support represents more than 80 per cent of the revenue budget of the Theatre, and because an NPM regime has been introduced, one might expect that the government would intervene quite actively into the operation of the institution. It is indeed true that the subsidies are followed up by specific public regulations (e.g. performance indicators). However our informants did not feel that those regulations really limit their artistic autonomy. Public authorities do not intervene very actively in the operations of the Theatre. An actor, who has previously been a board member, expressed clear opinions about this:

There is indeed no other public regulation than the economic [regulation, i.e. support]. The Theatre is absolutely free to do whatever it wishes. It’s like this: ‘Here you have 85 million if you please. You have to tell us what you do with it [the money], and you must provide a report.’ But there are no other restrictions than this. There are no artistic restrictions whatsoever. There is nothing except for the economic aspect of it.

The artistic director expressed similar views: ‘I experience that we’re allowed to do what we want really, within reason. That is, we’re allowed to keep control with what we do except for the economic aspects. I experience that we really have a huge freedom of action’. He thus confirms that the Theatre benefits from substantial artistic autonomy, but he stresses more explicitly than the previous informant that economic concerns may limit the freedom of

action. Nevertheless, the present study confirms the findings of our previous theatre study, i.e. that according to the rules of play ‘economic considerations must be kept apart from the creative artistic processes’ in the day-to-day operations of the Theatre (Røyseng 2007:185). Economic and artistic considerations are not allowed to interfere directly with each other. The director still thinks that the governmental conditions, which require a certain level of market income, may cause harmful commercialisation.

It might also be expected that a high level of public subsidy implies that the government require an active dialogue with the Theatre concerning the use and effects of government support. However, according to the artistic director, no such dialogue really exists. Instead they have to report to the government about specific aspects of the operation of the theatre. Of course it is important to be able to report about high attendance figures; a report must also be made concerning the number of performances. Moreover, it seems as if the reports primarily involve some kind of discursive adaptation to governmental indicators, i.e. that the Theatre has to adapt its reports to what is ‘popular [in governmental circles] at the present time’. Consequently, it seems as if the performance indicators that were introduced in relation to NPM have primarily resulted in a ritual dialogue.

On the whole it appears that the public control of the Theatre is limited. But the discourses about artistic autonomy in the Theatre are ambivalent. The artistic director in particular stresses that the artistic autonomy from public authorities has its limits.

On the other hand, the theatre employees experience much stronger pressure from the culture and media field: It is the press, the critics, the intellectuals and other theatre people who represent the real pressure on the Theatre, according to several informants. Thus, when asked where the ‘important voices’ come from, the artistic director answers: ‘They come from the press, they come from the theatre world, they come from intellectual Norway’; apropos: is the Norwegian intelligentsia aware of the power it holds?

The Orchestra

The Orchestra is owned by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK^{ix}) and its status as a public broadcasting orchestra has traditionally limited its artistic autonomy. A few years ago the Orchestra went through a crisis and there were even discussions about shutting it down. However it survived, but only under stringent conditions: It had to generate more income from the market. As a consequence, the Orchestra now performs much more independently than it did before, and holds performances in the evenings and at weekends.

This stronger exertion of pressure by NRK (and indirectly from the government) to adapt to market demands is not really experienced as an inconvenience or limitation on artistic autonomy by our informants. It is rather felt as a reappraisal of the Orchestra and as a justification of its existence. The members of the Orchestra appreciate being considered as useful. They do not complain about any excessive board control with their artistic decisions. According to one of the younger musicians, the broadcasting director does not interfere very much. This informant would prefer it if the Orchestra was ‘seen’ more by the superior directors. He believes in ‘a strong leadership from above’. He also expresses a lot of trust in governmental authorities, and is confident that the government has ‘good intentions’. Other musicians express similar views. One of them expresses that he is not afraid of the tasks that are imposed ‘from above’: ‘Even if it comes from above it generally speaking involves interesting tasks. I haven’t felt that something has been forced upon us’. The Orchestra has experienced a very positive development recently, according to her. They have gone from

being a quite peripheral instrument of the public broadcaster to becoming an autonomous artistic unit, of which the owners are proud.

One experienced musician feels that the Orchestra has become less instrumental than before – and a more autonomous artistic agent. The musicians want to benefit from relative freedom in relation to the public broadcaster, but at the same time be appreciated as a useful provider of musical productions. Nobody in the Orchestra is afraid that their artistic autonomy is threatened. They believe in a ‘good and gentle’ government. Similar to the Theatre, the Orchestra’s freedom of action is of course limited by its budget. However, within this framework it benefits from considerable artistic autonomy. It also experiences much less pressure from other external players (for instance the media and the intellectuals) than does the Theatre.

The discourses of our informants in the Theatre and the Orchestra about external pressures differ quite explicitly from the usual discourses both in debates and research about cultural policy (see for instance Røyseng (2007) about a general ‘anxiety discourse’ among many researchers in the field). Further research may uncover whether these findings are valid even for other institutions than the Theatre and the Orchestra.

Conclusion: A charismatic trap?

Our analysis does not offer strong support to the initial hypothesis, i.e. that Norwegian performing artists are trapped within ‘the iron cage of bureaucracy’. The artists in the Theatre and the Orchestra do not seem to be suffocated by excessive bureaucratic institutionalisation. They do not experience being ‘colonised’ by excessive governmental control or strong intervention from the market. However, there are substantial differences between the organisation of work and the working cultures in the two institutions: The artists in the Theatre are more strongly integrated in the ‘theatre family’. They have to adapt to rhythms of artistic production that are less predictable; the separation between work and leisure time is often not that distinct. Their work organisation therefore appears to have more in common with the ideal type post-Fordist than the Fordist work organisation. But this conclusion is premature. Their work organisation rather reflects traditional working routines in the theatre field than the transformation of work in post-modernity. The actors are also subjected to the authority of an omnipotent charismatic artistic director. The musicians in the Orchestra, on the other hand, experience a more structured working day. The separation between work and leisure time is more distinct, even if the flexibility has somewhat increased because of adaptation to market demands. But on the whole the musicians have much more control over the use of their time than the actors. It is much easier for them to combine work and ordinary family life, and they work in a more democratic work organisation where they have substantial opportunities to influence both artistic decisions and working conditions.

Consequently, when we compare the Theatre and the Orchestra a somewhat paradoxical picture emerges: It seems as if the actors in the Theatre are trapped – not so much within ‘a bureaucratic iron cage’ – but rather within ‘an iron cage of charismatic leadership’, while the musicians in the Orchestra enjoy the relative freedom and democratic power of a rather soft bureaucratic organisation. It remains to be studied whether these findings have a more general relevance in the field of performing arts.

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ⁱ According to Gerth & Mills ([1946] 1968:53), 'Weber's conception of the charismatic leader is in continuity with the concept of 'genius' as it was applied since the Renaissance to artistic and intellectual leaders'.

ⁱⁱ Bjørkås (1998:130) qualifies cultural production within the field of performing arts as 'preserved Fordism'. The Fordism metaphor refers to the organisation of industrial production marked by Henry Ford (1863-1947) as a dominant capitalist entrepreneur.

ⁱⁱⁱ In a previous comparative research project of ours a French artistic director of a theatre remarked that the 'artistic ensemble' model had helped him and his actors avoid 'becoming civil servants'. They were instead 'approaching the status of artists'. He was himself able to stay 'an independent producer' within this kind of artistic ensemble (unpublished data from interview, 1994).

^{iv} The whole study is published in Norwegian in Kleppe, Mangset & Røyseng 2010.

^v 'A term introduced by Erving Goffman in *Asylums* (1961) to analyse a range of institutions in which whole blocks of people are bureaucratically processed, whilst being physically isolated from the normal round of activities, by being required to sleep, work, and play within the confines of the same institution. Prisons and mental hospitals are Goffman's key examples, but he suggests others including concentration camps, boarding schools, barracks, and monasteries' (Encyclopedia.com, 24.06.09).

^{vi} It may be objected that work in contemporary bureaucratic organisations often takes place in open landscape offices. But this is just partly the case in Norway.

^{vii} The director of a Norwegian institutional theatre is primarily an artistic director, but he/she is also usually the head of the whole institution, including the administration of the institution. He/she also usually has a managing director or executive director by his/her side. The artistic director is usually employed for a term of years.

^{viii} The informant perhaps means 'autocratic' rather than 'hierarchical'.

^{ix} The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) is a public service institution with a long history as the unique broadcasting institution in Norway. In the 1980s and '90s it was supplemented by several private broadcasting companies, but NRK still has a quite dominant position on the air. The audience figures are higher than for most other public service broadcasting companies (Larsen 2008).