**Applied Theatre in times of Terror:**

**Accepting aesthetic diversity** **and** **exceeding dilemma**

***Bjørn Rasmussen***

Professor

Department of Arts- and Media Studies

NTNU

Norway

Email:bjorn.rasmussen@ntnu.no

## Norwegian Title

Å iscenesette det usette og uhørte. Teaterkunst og dramapedagogikk- tett på demokratiet (Chapt 2, Anthology 1))

## Biography 100w

Dr. Bjørn Rasmussen is Professor in Drama/Theatre since 1998 at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Department of Arts- and Media Studies, Section for Drama and Theatre. Since 1990 he has published books and articles in national and international journals on the drama education, applied theatre, arts education, theatre aesthetics. He acts as a reviewer for several academic journals and supervises at postgraduate level. He has been a guest scholar in QUT, Brisbane and Bergen University Teacher College and has contributed heavily to the Nordic net of applied drama/theatre research. He conducts several projects, currently on drama, theatre and democracy; Building democracy through theatre.

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Earlier versions have been reviewed a Norwegian panel of 3 senior researchers and Editores of the Norwegian anthology (Norwegian version). Furthermore a preliminary version has been reviewed by a RIDE journal panel (English version). Following the offer from ATR, the submission for RIDE has now been withdrawn and released in accordance with the editor, Helen Nicholson. This current version is built on all reviews that I have been lucky to get during the process (2014-2017).

Bjørn Rasmussen

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**Abstract 150w**

A Norwegian project on drama, theatre and democracy has been instigated after experiences of terrorism, framing a need to investigate applied theatre in the current democratic context.. Through historical evidence and a research review, the positive assumption is that theatre may provide democratic inclusion where any felt understanding is accepted as aesthetically valid insights to be uttered on stage. This is how drama is created and ultimately how diversity is treated and tolerated. However, dilemma occur when applied theatre aims to be participatory democracy in action. These are dilemma linked to conflicting practices and discourses, and by the help of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière such dilemma connect to conflicting aesthetic thinking or regimes. The particular dilemma discussed here deals with the location of aesthetic autonomy as well as the dilemma of free utterance versus transformed mediation. A short analysis of two contemporary performance cases will further illuminate such dilemma.

**Key words:** applied theatre, Rancière, democracy, discourse, aesthetic dilemma, terror

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The Norwegian research project ‘Drama, theatre and democracy’ (2014-2017)[[1]](#footnote-1) was initiated in the wakes of the deadly attack on government property, officials and young Labour party members on July 22, 2011. We were brutally reminded that ethnical born citizens in democratic societies might develop terrorist behaviour. We learned that extreme violence cannot solely be excused or explained by traumatized war backgrounds, nor is it only caused by religious or political calls for glory and martyrdom. For example, the film documentary on British ISIS terrorists (Khan, 2015) reveals a picture of citizens fighting against a democratic society in which they find themselves marginalized; not seen, heard nor tolerated. Destructivity by young people seems profoundly linked to life conditions where people ‘fall out’ and become ‘maladjusted’ for different reasons and by different means- occasionally to the extremes such as the Norwegian terrorist in 2011. By looking into selected reports of Norwegian citizens who join the ISIS movement, one finds a range of possible influences, varying from well-functioning but ethnical pre-occupied families (Seierstad, 2016) to different maladjustments such as bullying, loneliness, family dysfunctionality (Rygg, 2014, Sheikh, 2015, Krokfjord and Bergsaker, 2014, Sandnes, 2015, Thjømøe and Bache, 2013). Notwithstanding the complex causes for destructive behaviour, we are nevertheless facing a considerable number of citizens in democratic societies who act destructively and violently, in spite of civil rights, freedom of expression, access to communicative media and compulsory education.

 The above mentioned research project, through its partners and cases, has explored how theatre may serve as arena for non-violent utterances and hence take part in democratic communication and societal development. This article will further examine some assumptions concerning the application of theatre in democracies, and discusses some important problematics concerning conflicting discourses and practices that seem to work against a realisation of theatre’s democratic potential. The analyses will be framed mainly by political-aesthetic theories of Jacques Rancière and like-minded thinkers, as well as through a short case analysis of two theatre works that in different ways negotiate and redistribute democratic issues. While such cases can be seen as democratic utterances, they are also influenced by conflicting thinking on art, dilemma that seem to disturb the recognition and impact of the practice. The conductive question is: What can theatre potentially offer to democratic societies in our times, and what are the obstacles both within and outside theatre art that seem to prevent the realization of those potentials?

## Applied theatre and democracy. The state of the art

Applied theatre show a long history of addressing marginal voices, aiming at empowering groups and individuals in democracies and less democratic societies (Neelands, 2007, Prendergast and Saxton, 2009, Prentki and Preston, 2009, Thompson, 2005). This work is often accompanied by a political understanding of how theatre may mobilize people who do not recognize that they ‘direct their own realities’:

In so-called Western democracies, the few represent the many in the political sphere just as the few represent the many in the dominant theatre tradition, which makes the mass of the audience into passive non-actors, and the few on the stage to act on our behalf and in our place. The idea that we are all social actors with the possibility of being our own artistic actors in the direction of our realities and our dramas will need to be reclaimed (Neelands, 2009:186)

Moreover, there is a belief that democratic utterances through symbolic media may prevent or perhaps replace otherwise violent utterances. This is supported by a well-known thesis from drama education theory, stating that ‘reflexive action’ and form-making through symbolic media may somewhat replace ‘reactive’, non-mediated actions (Witkin, 1974). From such an assumption it easily follows the belief and assertion that ‘ensemble theatre is not merely a model of participatory democracy; it is participatory democracy in action’ (Neelands and O' Connor, 2010:117).

 Notwithstanding the many positive assumptions concerning theatre’s democratic potential, theatre history does show how theatre in different times both instigates and support democracy. In recent times, both developments in modernism and the last century American cultural democracy support and substantiate the ambitions found in many current applied theatre practices. One significant historical modernist example is the way many Jewish actors, dramatists and directors after 1900 made the stage also a life arena; a stage for democratic expression, problem solving and claims for societal status. The ‘mise-en-scène’ of Jewish culture, the staging of so-called ‘unheimliche’ bodies and ways of ‘uncanny’ being (Shahar, 2004) points towards the later autobiographic practices of performance art. There are certainly nuances to this picture of art-as-tool. While it can be asserted that the Jewish actress Elisabeth Bergner performed ‘herself’ in expressionist roles, other Jewish actresses, such as Sarah Bernhardt (Bergman-Carton, 1996), denied her cultural identity, found no reason to utter the Jewish culture on stage, and rather improved her life and status through joining high-status traditional classicist theatre. In spite of such nuances, Jewish modernist art throws light on the social and political dimension of the arts practice (Malkin and Rokem, 2010, Nochlin and Garb, 1995).

 In America, theatre modernism influenced the development of cultural democracy. One example is the impact of Stanislavskian methods on the development of participative children’s theatre in New York emigration environments (McCaslin, 1971). Another, the application of Jaques Copeau’s and Suzanne Bing’s ensemble tools (games and exercises) in similar work in Chicago, also related to cultural activist Jane Addams (settlement houses) and sociologist and theatre professor Neva Boyd (Frost and Yarrow, 1990, Syssoyeva and Proudfit, 2016). In Chicago, John Dewey became aware of the theatre modernist influence on American cultural democracy, perhaps partly explaining his harsh critique on mainstream art in ‘Art as experience’ ([1934] 2005), and even more significant, perhaps influencing his pragmatist aesthetics that accompanies his view on culture and democracy. This is certainly one point in history where we find the junction of applied theatre and insights on culture as a way of democratic life:

[…] we have had the habit of thinking of democracy as a kind of political mechanism that will work as long as citizens were reasonably faithful in performing political duties. Of late years, we have heard more and more frequently that this is not enough; that democracy is a way of life (Dewey, 1939:2)

Deweys understanding is that democracy, as a way of life, is measured by the amount of inclusion, built relations and inquiries in collective safe arenas. This sounds like an echo of some avant-garde artistic approaches. It includes theatre, meaning both the conflicts of opinion and its potential symbolic and artistic media for communication. A living cultural democracy here presupposes communicative arenas for the voices or bodies often not heard, seen or given credibility (as for example immigrants and marginal communities).

## Current aesthetic-political thinking and its dilemma

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière shares the insight that we may inherit democracy as a political system but not necessarily as a way of life (Rancière, 2006). What makes him and like-minded thinkers useful to the discussion of applied theatre and democracy is also that this current thinking bypasses the dichotomy of practices that are either categorized as ‘pure’ qualified art or ‘pure’ (and aesthetically unqualified) social life. This dichotomy, supported by dominant analytic aesthetics (Shusterman, 1992), delayed for a long time the impact of Dewey’s aesthetics and shoved many playful aesthetic practices, for example drama in education, under the umbrella of progressive education. Rancière’s discourse on the aesthetic-political and the ‘aesthetic regime’ (Rancière, 2004, Rancière, 2013, Rancière and Corcoran, 2010) may now help to retrieve theatre and theatricality as political-educational practice and potentially democratic action, somewhat independent of its membership in the institution of Art.

Applied theatre theory has recently turned to Rancière’s contemporary aesthetic paradigm in order to better understand and support theatre’s political validity and topicality (White, 2015). Jacques Rancière’s thinking is moreover important because he offers a democracy critique (Rancière, 2004) that is recognisable from the applied theatre as well as from a Dewyan perspective. This critique intertwines with Rancières aesthetics, which offers a view on how art at best may vitalize or ‘redistribute’ the democracy (Rancière, 2004, Rancière and Rose, 2004, Rancière and Corcoran, 2010). Finally, Rancière challenges basic prejudices on art and reveals some of the paradoxical dilemma that also concern applied theatre. This is so even if Rancière has no knowledge of applied theatre. There is no evidence that he has ‘[…]engaged beyond the European metropolis with actual practice in the rough hinterlands of applied theatre, or that he would, indeed, recognize these experiments as theatre in the first place’ Bharucha quoted in (Mackey and Stuart Fisher, 2011:371).

## Dilemma 1: The whereabouts of aesthetic autonomy

This quote above introduces a first dilemma of concern to both Rancière and applied theatre; *the whereabouts of aesthetic autonomy*. Rancière is seemingly not prepared to identify any art with political potential outside the institution of Art. The creative otherness of Art must be protected from instrumentalism and social dilution. At the same time, his historical examples of aesthetic-political emancipation stem from a broader performative framework. In fact, he collects his historical examples of the performative aesthetic-political emancipation outside the arts scene; the cultural emancipation of French workers and the rise of the Roman-plebeian democracy (Rancière, 2011). The appurtenant understanding of staging the unheard and unseen voices by theatrical means is familiar within a discursive-performative framework of cultural agency, for example developed in globally oriented performance studies. It is less familiar within a traditional Eurocentric aesthetics, and Rancière is thus struggling with a rather naïve concept of emancipated spectatorship (Ranciere, 2007) as well as with an idealistic and unclear wish of preferring art that blurs the boundaries of fiction and the real. That is, the political potent art is the one that risks its own identity; namely the inherited identity of the non-real (Rancière, 2009).

 This dilemma is also visible within the discourse of applied theatre, in the way it is

implied in the understanding of theatre and theatricality as both autonomous, extraordinary and at the same time “real” educational, political practice (White, 2015). The comprehension of the ‘real unreal’ owes however little public recognition in a dichotomy-infused modernity and seems accompanied by either-or discourses that also disqualifies instrumental views on art. Therefore it is not only Rancière who presumably disavows or does not recognize applied theatre, also (applied) theatre artists are happy to attack what they find to be an instrumental practice, accusing applied theatre for being a method of correcting and manipulating audiences (Adebayo, 2015:126). Such accusations stem from a discourse of either- or; either art or social instrumentalism. The unlucky consequence is that it leads to a disregard of practices ‘in-between’, it leads to the legitimation of the sensuous affect and to the end of (social) effect (Thompson, 2009), eventually disarms the credibility of applied theatre.

From a performative standpoint, where theatre is included, one may object that uses of theatre, such as correcting and manipulating audiences, are what characterizes most mainstream theatre that applied theatre comes out against. And of course, if non-mainstream theatre artists do not recognize the term ‘applied’, or do not recognize the importance of identifying and labelling a theatre culture outside mainstream theatre industry, no one will.

Applied theatre’s democratic ambition does relate to a broader conception of contemporary performative-democratic culture both on and off the formal art stage. This is an understanding of the aesthetic performativity that sometimes pays respect to individual adaptation to societal expected roles and behaviour and other times to the creation of the non-expected, the yet unknown or yet unaccepted insights, the different roles, ideas or mis-en-scenes. This way of looking at democratic performance is partly idealistic and of course no simple task to anybody to undertake, as underlined by Rustom Bharucha:

It is one thing to formulate democracy at a constitutional level, but it is quite another matter for people across the diverse class and social groups to actually perform its negotiations of difference[…] (Bharucha, 2014:147)

When ‘performing’ is understood in the artistic sense, this is where Rancière’s conception of ‘re-distribution of the sensible’ (Rancière, 2004:45) becomes a helpful frame to overcome the dilemma linked to demands of autonomy defined as art proper. The redistribution of the sensible addresses the aesthetic in a way that exceeds or at least challenges the interface of creative professions and artistic norms. What Rancière and his followers are looking for are arenas for expression that permit the ‘unpredictable democratic subject that takes the stage’(Edkins and Vaughan-Williams, 2009:272). This implies art by unpredictable agents at unpredictable spaces. In this light, theatrical behaviour is creative and theatre art may offer one participative arena to ‘negotiate otherness’ (Munster, 2009:273). In the cases presented below, this redistribution concerns unpredictable agents aiming at negotiations of power, particularly the negotiation of the able disabled and the negotiation of the other, sensuous-based education.

## Dilemma 2. Free utterance versus mediated transformation

Adebayo’s critique above illuminates a second dilemma that occurs when applied theatre claims to be democratic practice. This is the dilemma of *free utterance versus the transformation of the uttering participant.* In Rancière’s aesthetics the emancipatory and political power seems to rest on the possibility and right to utter and hence empower marginal or suppressed voices, ideas, lifes, where the cultural agency happens both through emancipated spectatorship and through making theatre. In this claim, we recognize the artistic intention, both the artistic authority and the spectator’s authority, so to speak without interference. The idea seems to be that there is one a priori given insight that needs to be uttered/communicated. It is another way of expressing the autonomy of the involved participants; artist, work, spectator, the rhetor.

However, applied theatre often challenges this view on linear communicative authority by adding context sensitivity, allowing the participating other (where the other is not only a person) to influence dramaturgy and alter preconceived intentions and receptions. All collaborative theatre production of course modifies individual ideas and utterances in order to find a united form. Not all theatre production though succeeds in adapting and mediating the voices of the participant. By stimulating ‘all social actors’ (see quote above) theatre inevitably increases the influence of the other voice and reduces the power of the one ingenious dramatist/actor/director presenting her voice and her form.

It is of course gatekeepers of such an understanding of ‘autonomy’ that also fear the loss of control and a shared ownership. On the other hand, the certified skilled artist is also one social actor amongst other social actors, claiming a right to her own expression. The democratic right to stage one’s opinion and intentions versus the modification of intentions through collective mediation therefore tends to be a paradoxical dilemma frequently addressed in applied theatre.

Again, the simple way out of such dilemma is normally to fall back on the right side of the dichotomist discourse; either artistic authority or artistically disqualified participation. What then gets lost may be the art and the educational benefit caused by collective practices where different intentions and attitudes clash and are processed collectively, as one important alternative to the digital and analogue media that allow people to utter what they were already thinking on beforehand. Whereas marginal voices today do have communicative platforms, Internet also tends to bring out ‘everyone’s inner asshole’ (Manson, 2013).

What theatre allows and may offer to democracy is a face-to-face negotiation where voices are both uttered, respected, questioned, even modified and altered. It is in this context we also should understand the inevitable ‘resistance’ in current pragmatist aesthetics (Dewey, [1934] 2005:143f). In order to realize this complex view on aesthetic communication, the paradoxical discourse that often ends in simple dichotomy needs to be exceeded. Again, what Rancière and his followers are looking for are the ‘the kind of disruptive, disincorporating process of political subjectivation’ (Mcdonnell, 2014:51). For this to happen to any potential social actor the tradition of the few ingenious/certified artists acting as creative substitutes on behalf of the industrial working people needs to be challenged. The contingent organisation of art carries a view and discourse on production, communication and dissemination that needs correction in times of inter-subjectivity and negotiation of (and not only plain utterance of) difference.

What both these dilemma illuminate are clashing discourses and understanding of aesthetics interfering and eventually blocking a full realisation of applied theatre as democratic practice. This will be further elaborated through the following cases.

## Killing Oliver - and the value of theatre

For a period of six months in 2014-15 the theatre master student Nanna collaborated with the actor Kine[[2]](#footnote-2) on a performance where they both performed and gave material to the stage text as well as collaborated in generating the performance dramaturgy (Edvardsen, 2015). The performance came out of weekly exercises and playful collaboration on issues and interests uttered by Kine. Kine has Down’s syndrome and was repetitiously occupied by intertextual scenes from Dickens’ Oliver Twist as well as from popular-cultural icons such as Elvis. Kine is motivated by any kind of theatre that allows her the fame and status of an acclaimed actress, however this performance and performance process was also part of Nanna’s masters research, offering a conscious aesthetic-social interference that illuminated the social potential of theatre. The insight here draws from the master thesis (Edvardsen, 2015) as well as my own interference as observer and examiner. Working experientially and in a non-representative mode, the affectively loaded scenes gave reference to Kine’s repeated issues such as poverty, violence, abuse, illness. Slowly working towards the final performance, the regular playful work concurrently was a serious and regular processing of Kine’s sensuous experiences as well as of the mutual relation between Nanna and Kine. As a person with a severe speech handicap, Kine’s concrete and affective bodily work in space seemed to replace verbal meaning construction and its abstraction level that Kine could not relate to.

Furthermore, Kine was given the role as a genuine co-owner of practice; co-responsible for the manuscript, the dramaturgy and the acting. This released a sense of mutually valued equality in the relation between Nanna and Kine, with the consequence of altering both subject positions. Nanna developed a new understanding and a deeper respect towards Kine in specific and towards handicap in general, and a new understanding of herself through the aesthetic-social gathering. Kine was given a stage for utterance and for breaking her marginal status. It meant taking command, achieving increased status in her community as well as a raised self-esteem and life quality during and after the project. Through theatre she meant something. It is an example of potent applied theatre which gives the participant and audience-witness an aesthetic experience on many levels; not least understanding Down’s syndrome, reducing the hierarchy of human variance and building tolerance and life quality. It is Kine that investigates her real life, allowed and protected by the actress and dramaturg Kine and Nanna.

Nevertheless, this kind of theatre work often owes little recognition in the Ministry of Culture and stakeholders of the dominant aesthetic-artistic discourse. This is a discourse where professional quality of refined works steers the distribution of funds and reputation. From this perspective the artistic value and quality of the Killing Oliver project may actually be discredited; the acting may be judged as rather poor and the performance too short and fragmentary to have any public interest besides sharing the work to Kine’s friends in her day institution. The work may be said not to qualify for art ‘proper’ it provides no other than a pretentious professional artistic arena for Kine. For Nanna, the role of the artistic director is here supplied by the role of teacher and a fellow-being, supplementary roles not often associated with or recognized as art production roles.

Therefore, in order to recognize the aesthetic-political value of this work, it needs a more complex aesthetic optic, which does better justice to the work. A discourse of Art is on the one hand important for the acceptance, status and self-respect of all participants, funders and management included. On the other hand, used in the particular context it may easily lead to ridicule from professional gatekeepers of the Art- where educational or social values are often sub-ordinated the so-called artistic and aesthetic qualities. Hence, Killing Oliver may be dismissed as instrumental use of tools at hand for educative purposes, and not approved as theatre production by professional standards. This is how discursive power and dilemma may work against the recognition of the democratic potential of theatre.

This is not only a disapproval caused by the lack of certified artists and refined works. It is disapproved by a lack of discourse; a lack of a culturally approved rationale for this kind of practice. While Nanna does recognize a different aesthetic approach in her research, both she and Kine is motivated by the status of doing proper Art- a status which may only be partly achieved. Both may move on and one day fulfil their dreams of becoming ‘proper’ artists. They are both driven, in different ways, by the wish of recognition -as artists, which regrettably often leads into the business of representational roleplaying rather than democratic utterance, performative power and life expression. What is at stake, and what this modest performance case illustrates, is the aesthetic negotiation of democratic values interfered by a ruling discourse of art entertainment not totally applicable to this practice and one that conceals a more appropriate pragmatist aesthetics. Kine masters the role of agency in a pragmatic aesthetic framework, but dreams about the actor status in the entertaining Art she knows and probably will not master. The valuable aesthetic autonomy is here seated in Kine’s day institution, if and only if one accepts aesthetic diversity. This diversity is partly indicated and explained by Rancière’s different aesthetic regimes and their competitive discourses. What is needed to recognize Nanna and Kine’s performance as valuable social-aesthetic practice beyond entertainment is a change from a discourse of aesthetic hierarchy to aesthetic equality and diversity. In this way, society and art face common structural challenges in a democracy ridden by terror and marginalisation.

## Sisters Academy

The Danish performance artists Gry Worre Hallberg and Anna Lawetz have for some years produced several performances and events of ‘parallel reality’ (Hallberg and Lawaetz, 2011, Hallberg and Harsløf, 2013, Hallberg, 2016, Hallberg, 2015, Krøgholt et al., 2013). ‘Sisters Academy’ is one such ambitious project split into several sub-projects, which all interferes with the educational debate, and the issue of arts and education. Instead of arguing verbally for the need for aesthetic practice in education, they simply try to stage the utopian reality when sensuous knowing infuses education. What is here deconstructed and reconstructed by the aesthetic framework is the educational space, the environment, the educational thinking. Based on the avant-garde recognition of the theatrical and utopian as another possible reality, they have for periods of weeks ‘taken over’ the management of schools, by changing the social environment to an aesthetic environment for sensuous learning and knowing. This means that they take the roles as school principals, directing normal school activity as a multimodal arts project, including the staging of pupils and teachers in different but not totally different roles. The project can also be read as ‘role training’ in the modernist sense, modelling a new educational reform within the aesthetic frame. It is thus an attempt to construct new life through social-aesthetic action, by a physical- sensuous discourse.

 In many ways, the Sisters Academy project seems to be exemplary as a demonstration of democratic performativity whereby everyday performances are charged and extended in extraordinary ways to become art within the social environment. It also seems exemplary in the Rancierè’s preferred sense of theatrocracy; the staging of unexpected people in unexpected places (Hallward, 2006:116f). This is an understanding that many applied theatre practices may relate to. Hallberg and Lawetz stage their own views on education and school by insisting on a different practice not yet recognized by society. They try to avoid and overcome repressive discourses on education by staging another possible reality by sensuous and theatrical means. The value of aesthetic education is hence felt by the teachers and pupils, which is a bodily experience that probably will produce educational change more effectively than the verbal discourse of arts education. The aesthetic affect and political effect seem here to be united in exemplary ways.

However, the fact that the projects are legitimated by established performance artists and funded as “proper” arts projects, interferes with the political ambitions and creates problems and impairment of potential. Here also, the problem may be allocated to the vague recognition of a different aesthetic that may replace dominant habits within the arts institution, habits that are not easily overcome in the arts business. For example, as professional artists they approach the educational institution well prepared by a detailed dramaturgical plan, guaranteeing the aesthetic quality of the installed sensuous practice. The directing form, insisting on certain planned experiences are common to audience-related artistic thinking, may nevertheless compromise the interaction and democratic collaboration.

 Furthermore, the artists are evidently staging and controlling their own critical voices and ideas (see dilemma 2) and may have less motivation and experience in facilitating democratic utterances by others. For example, to what extent does Sisters Academy stage the unheard voices of the teacher or pupil? One may object that cultural habits are only amplified; the directing teacher is replaced by a directing artist, which does not create much of a change for the rendered passive child. While Sisters Academy may stage their utopia, there is also an ethical dilemma of using teachers and pupils as extras. This is where traditional art discourse and conventions may impair the ground-breaking aesthetic-political practices such as the Sisters Academy projects. At least it illuminates the dilemma of authority and power distribution. Who owns the staged reality?

Moreover, the arts conventional inherited traditional dichotomy of feeling and reason, senses and intellect is also at stake here. In this case, it drives the artists to think that schools lack sensuous stimulation. The Sisters of Academy therefore provides strong sensuous stimulation (colours, materials, sound/music) into the school environment, as if the pupils lack aesthetic input and sensitivity. One may object, with Rancière, that the aesthetic is always being at the heart of our everyday. In spite of the dominant rationality in schools, one may claim that pupils are already sensuously overstimulated or sensuously directed/distributed. They do not miss artworks or receptive sensuous stimuli. What they miss is the kind of aesthetic form making that may process their sensuous perceptions and possibly lead to reflexive behaviour. They miss exactly what the performance artist is obliged to do herself as a dramaturg and producer. What is lacking then is the recognition of artistic quality that includes the criterion of facilitating the participant as dramaturg and producer, and which accordingly releases artistic project funding by other criteria than the applicant’s own artwork quality.

Staging a sensuous society (a term borrowed from these artists) that presents another rationale than the one of economy, is a difficult exercise, especially if the practice is funded on the premises of traditional art discourse and its expected primarily artistic outcome. This is also how we may perceive the latest development (2017) of this project, where the interventions seem to have been situated as an ‘installation’ of the visionary future of a new Boarding School (<http://sistersacademy.dk/>). Framed as art, lacking an approved rationale of the united political and aesthetic, the artists may be excused not to involve in burdensome collaborations with real teachers and pupils. What they are presumably paid to do is performing an artwork/installation, not releasing democratic emancipation.

Also, within the traditional art rhetoric this kind of work easily risks to be dismissed as ridiculous aesthetic experiments with little relevance to the real democratic society. This kind of compensatory tag is not only given by the discourse external to art, but also stems from the art institution itself, where works and commodities are expected. Following the analysis of another performance artist, Gil Vicente, the artist may harm the potential of her brave practice by turning the act of resistance into a commodity: ‘[…]the possibility of emancipation is being blocked by its very protagonist, the artist himself. The emancipatory attempt is conserved by and into the media[...] the perversion of the art represented as quasi-emancipatory commodity is indeed enabled by her/himself’(Jelesijevic, 2012:4).

Sisters Academy has no wish of being a commodity, but may be perceived as selling a performance to schools. Nothing could be more harmful to the social-political ambition of this kind of sensuous democratic practice. The right to stage a radical and yeat marginal view of education is paramount, still the social realisation of this aesthetic scenario depends on a public recognition of the practice as not only artistic utopia. This recognition should start by recognising an alternative discourse of art that releases the educational, social and political potential of the theatre/performance practice and ultimately recognize aesthetic diversity.

## Return to terror- a closure

The project of ‘Drama, theatre and democracy’ made us investigate what theatre may offer to democratic societies in times of terror. This included an analysis of what kind of obstacles that may prevent the realisation of such contributions. The task of this article has been firstly to point out, through historical evidence and case interpretation how applied theatre may contribute to democratic participation by staging marginal bodies and voices. What this means in particular is that collective art work provides inclusion where any felt understanding is accepted as aesthetically valid insights to be uttered. This is how drama is created and ultimately diversity is tolerated as a result. This becomes a political potential when insights from all theatre making and reception become part of public discourse. Theatre and performance hold the undeveloped potential of offering a safe environment for theatrical utterances that have no place in everyday life and consensus-driven discourse. There is one important link between early modernism and its ‘unheimliche’ bodies and voices of Jewish culture, their urge to fight misplacement in society- and the contemporary uncanny voices of unsettled young people feeling misplaced today. These arguments form the basic assumption that critical and active participation by ‘social actors’ and by non-violent means such as theatre somehow prevents or replaces destructive participation by arms and violence:

Rather than delivering democracy through an invading army, the ability to create dialogue that challenges and critiques terrorism from within a felt understanding of its force and horror is the true democratic response to the great issues of the early twenty-first century (O’Connor, 2015:145).

Secondly, it is shown through the chosen philosophical perspective, that colliding discourses affect the realisation of applied theatre negatively. It is a well known experience that Western anti-theatrical societies effectively prevent and dismiss the full potential of the aesthetic-theatrical language, which is seen as fantasy and fabrication. It is however less considered how different discourses of aesthetics also affect applied theatre negatively, causing public confusion, possible fragmentation and debility. The case analyses indicate that it is not one dominant art discourse that impedes applied theatre practice. Rather it is the conflicting or inconsistent discourses that maintain paradoxical dilemma. Furthermore, these dilemma seem to find resolution by following the dichotomist power technique; claiming the traditional and safe high art discourse that overshadows new discourses that support new practices, even in the long preventing the restructuring of mainstream theatre. For example, the demarcation of art from education (from both sides) is just one discursive strategy within a regime that seeks stability and power, following Rockhill and Watts (2009).

A distribution of the sensible here basically means discursive power that maintains or produces inequality which, in Rancière’s understanding, not only affects cultural practices but eventually leads to hate and violence in a democratic ‘polis’ society (Rancière, 2004). Democracies are by ways of majority consensus and control protecting such as established norms, the market economy, institutional segregation and hence suppressing ‘otherness’, in van Munster’s words:

When there are no political ways of negotiating otherness, the other returns in its absolute form, as the object of our hatred. Violent outbursts in the form of racism, religious fundamentalism [… ]and consensus democracy are thus two sides of the same coin: the suppression of real democracy (Munster, 2009:273)

This is where terror gets an extensional definition, namely the “terror” of continuous marginalisation and disavowal of aesthetic-social arenas for negotiating otherness, difference and create a peaceful culture of diversity. It is a disavowal stemming from both the inside and outside of arts communities. This is also where the democratic concept of diversity must be addressed to cultural practices that suffer from aesthetic hierarchy, control and privileges of the vicarious aesthetic agents we name professional artists. One may retrieve aesthetic autonomy from notions of elevated seclusion and illusion to conceive play and art form as fabrication of new forms of life (Carnevale and Kelsey, 2003).

From this argumentation it should be clear that the increased recognition of communicative arenas such as applied theatre relies on the public acceptance of aesthetic diversity and the exceeding of dilemma that govern the field. If one agrees, our educational institutions have a strong responsibility to act. In a real democracy, aesthetic and social communication cannot paralyse any cultural agent and cannot be left to certified artists or agents only.

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1. This project involves ca 50 artists, teachers and researchers from Norwegian academic institutions, and has produced two Norwegian research anthologies: Sæbø, A. B., Eriksson, S. A. & Allern, T. H. 2017. *Drama,teater og demokrati Antologi I I barnehage, skole, museum og høyere utdanning*, Fagbokforlaget.

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2. Kine is not her real name. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)