

ADDRESSING URGENCIES OF DEMOCRATIC INTERACTION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

AN ATTEMPT TO FACILITATE DISAGREEMENT ON AUDIENCE DRAMATURGIES OF DISAGREEMENT — SIEMKE BÖHNISCH

Abstract

In the research project 'Dramaturgies of Disagreement in Contemporary Theatre,' I examined how theatre performances dramaturgically work with substantial disagreement within audiences and non-audiences. In the first part of this article, I present and discuss the cultural political context, the societal backdrop, and the agenda of this research. I argue for the need to deal critically with normative premises and closures in this research. In the second part, I exemplify how a move from a normative point of departure towards a more descriptive approach may be realised. I start this part by presenting the applied sociological theory of communities of disagreements (Iversen 2014), before I describe, analyse, and compare three Norwegian participatory performances from recent years. I propose the metaphorical terms of theatre as either *arena*, *laboratory*, or *catalyst* for communities of disagreement to highlight differences between the dramaturgical approaches. I further examine how the relation between the limited public space of the theatre and the wider public sphere is conceptualised differently in the three cases. Finally, I relate the analysed dramaturgies to a spectrum of political theory that spans from deliberative to agonistic democracy to further illuminate and facilitate legitimate disagreement on dramaturgies of disagreement.

KEYWORDS:

DRAMATURGIES OF DISAGREEMENT / RESEARCH AGENDA / DEMOCRATIC INTERACTION / PUBLIC SPHERE / CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

Art does not need any justification. Yet public funding of the arts in democratic societies is dependent on such justifications. And no public funding results in poor conditions for the arts. That means, art is dependent on justifications after all. As a theatre researcher, I contribute to the formation, affirmation, and negotiation of such justifications, whether I am aware of it and intentionally partake or not.

The Nordic welfare states are known for their (relatively) extensive support of the arts. However, the traditionally presumed societal consensus on this support has been showing signs of weakness for a while. Hence, the Arts Council Norway and the Danish Arts Foundation¹ have called attention to the need for renewed strategies of legitimisation. Their latest research programme, 'Arts and Social Communities,' has been motivated by this need. My research into dramaturgies of disagreement in contemporary theatre has been funded by this programme. What I present and discuss in this article reflects my experiences of contributing to this programme.

THE MANTRA OF THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE ARTS

Different times and societal contexts favour different justification strategies for public funding of the arts. In the following, I focus on the contemporary situation in Norway. During the last decade, Norwegian Official Public Reports and white papers concerning art and culture, cultural policy, and freedom of expression have displayed a strikingly strong faith in the transformative power of the arts in society.² Correspondingly, assertions of the social impact of the arts

have developed into the most prominent justification strategy for public funding of the arts. To put it briefly, the social impact of the arts has become the mantra of our times. This mantra resonates with developments within the arts towards socially and politically engaged art forms as well as with similar trends within research in the arts. My own research during the last decade is deeply invested in this trend.³

At the same time, public conflicts concerning the funding of the arts have escalated, particularly in the field of independent theatre and performing arts that I study.⁴ These conflicts have prompted an increasing rhetoric of cultural war⁵ within the art field. Thus, alarming public statements of being endangered now coincide with omnipresent 'official' statements on the societal value of the arts.

I read this contemporary situation as a conspicuous instantiation of the 'twin narratives of transformation and beleaguering'⁶ that Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett have described and analysed as a persistent aspect of the intellectual history of the arts in Western civilisation. The two researchers in cultural policy state: '[I]t is an enduring feature of the history of these claims and counter-claims that assertions of value [of the arts] have always been fiercely contested. From this perspective, the consensus that advocates for the arts so earnestly seek [...] appears not only unrealistic but also to miss the point.'⁷

REFLECTING CRITICALLY ON RESEARCH AGENDAS—THE NEED TO COUNTERACT NORMATIVE CLOSURE

In this context, Belfiore and Bennett call our attention to the shortcomings of research in the arts when understood and carried out as *advocacy* for the arts: 'Advocacy, by definition, excluded the possibility of a critical and open-ended interrogation.'⁸ The tendency to turn research into advocacy is probably enforced when public funding of the arts is under increased 'attack' and the governmental operators responsible for the funding are in search of renewed justifications, underpinned by

research. As Belfiore and Bennett observed: 'the tendency to connect [the] debates [on the value of the arts in modern societies] to questions of funding almost always involved a slide into advocacy.'⁹

For me as a researcher, the problems of advocacy, to start with, were perceptible as a growing urge to stress that my research should not be understood as prescriptive.¹⁰ The need to counteract normative closure became more acute when I started to research a case of a theatre production that operated *within* the heated conflict concerning public funding of the arts.¹¹ My way to deal with the normative pressure of this case was to accentuate a descriptive theoretical and analytical approach,¹² as well as to refrain from explicit contributions to the public debate on this production while I worked on the analysis.¹³ In this article, I want to go one step further. My aim here is twofold: I want (1) to present the research project in a way that renders visible some of the basic normative closures that *define* the project to make them more accessible to critical reading and reflection; and (2) to present and analyse selected cases from my project in a way that illuminates and facilitates legitimate disagreement on dramaturgies of disagreement, thus counteracting normative closure *within* the project.

As space is limited, I choose to incorporate the meta-perspective within the short project-presentation below by three reflective stop points [presented in square brackets].

DRAMATURGIES OF DISAGREEMENT AND THE URGENCIES OF THE DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SPHERE

In my research project 'Dramaturgies of Disagreement,' I explored how theatre performances dramaturgically leave room for, facilitate, provoke, and work with substantial and perceptible disagreement within audiences and non-audiences. By the latter I mean people who are not attending the theatre but nevertheless hold opinions—sometimes very strong ones—about a performance or an artistic practice, and who participate in the public discourse about it (most prominently when non-audiences

protest or try to intervene and cancel or stop a performance).¹⁴ In other words, I have examined conflict as part of an audience dramaturgy evolving within, through and around theatre performances. That is what I have called 'dramaturgies of disagreement'.¹⁵

The societal backdrop of my research interest is the ongoing disintegration of the public sphere in Western democracies by processes of polarisation, fragmentation and echo-chamberisation. My way into this societal urgency is a general observation: We have a problem with conflict. This problem may be framed as a paradox: The public sphere in Western democracies today is characterised by too much and too little conflict at the same time.¹⁶ On the one hand, we witness escalating hate speech, personal defamations, and verbal threats of violence in public debate. On the other hand, the space for legitimate political and societal conflict is shrinking. Algorithms that feed us with what we liked before, claims for safe spaces, the (re)framing of political questions as juridical questions, or questions of moral or professional expertise with indisputable answers, may all be symptoms of what has been called the post-political or post-democratic era, where the political understood as legitimate conflict is vanishing.

[Stop point 1: The contemporary urgencies of democratic interaction in the public sphere in Western societies may be described and interpreted in different ways. My understanding leans upon political theory that values conflict, but at the same time I insist on a paradoxical description of the situation. 'Too much and too little conflict' implies a positioning in the ongoing dispute over freedom of expression. My approach is apt to focus on dilemmas and paradoxes concerning freedom of expression and will neither be compatible with a freedom of expression-fundamentalism, nor with a restrictive regulation policy.]

My question then is how theatre may address these urgencies of democratic interaction in the public sphere by 'dramaturgies of disagreement.' In my approach, I built on and adopt a particular concept of community to dramaturgical analyses, the concept of 'communities of disagreement,' launched

by the Norwegian sociologist Lars Laird Iversen.¹⁷ Iversen's minimal definition of a community of disagreement is: 'a group of people with different opinions who are in a common process of solving a problem or dealing with a challenge.'¹⁸ Hence, communities of disagreement are not based on pre-established and agreed upon shared values, but on the experience of 'sitting in the same boat.' This experience arises, according to Iversen, when dealing with shared problems and challenges in common arenas for discussion.

[Stop point 2: Iversen's theory, and thereby also my approach, is positioned against an understanding of communities relying on shared values. He criticises 'a bundle of ideas that [he] calls "the rhetoric of communities of value" or "the value rhetoric".'¹⁹ His point is twofold: (1) the value rhetoric leads to false descriptions of the national community in Norway, and (2) it has 'dangerous consequences.'²⁰ In my words: it contributes to the aforementioned urgencies of democratic interaction in the public sphere.]

When we adopt Iversen's perspective, our main task in order to meet the urgencies of democratic interaction today is to maintain and improve the conditions for disagreement. That is what 'architects of disagreement'²¹ do. My question is, then, in what ways theatre performances dramaturgically may function as architects of disagreement.

[Stop point 3: As mentioned above, early on I felt the urge to stress that my research into dramaturgies of disagreements should not be understood as prescriptive: I do not intend to ascribe a duty to artists to work as architects of disagreement. Neither do I intend to inspire governmental art-funding operators to legitimise funding by the societal value of 'successful' dramaturgies of disagreement. But I face the fact that my normative contextual framing of the research project, my understanding of the urgencies of the democratic public sphere, as well as the chosen sociological theory instigate such readings.]

COMMUNITIES OF DISAGREEMENT ON THREE LEVELS AND A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

Iversen examines communities of disagreement on three levels: (1) individuals as a community of disagreement (micro level); (2) face-to-face-groups (intermediate level); and (3) big, 'imagined' communities (macro level).²² The intermediate level is obviously important to my project since theatre performances generally unfold on this level. But the other two levels are also significant, as the societal urgencies of the public sphere concern the macro level, and as the micro level of individuals dealing with disagreement within themselves might be a prerequisite for the other two levels.

When we ask how art can make a difference in a contemporary world dominated by complex and intense political, economic, environmental challenges and conflicts,²³ the crux of the matter seems to me a critical reflection on how these levels might be interconnected (or not). To boil it down to concrete questions in my project, I may ask how the limited and concrete public space of the theatre is conceptualised in relation to the wider public sphere, and how potential disagreements within individuals (ambivalences) are activated or worked with in the face-to-face theatre situation. As space is restricted, I choose to concentrate here on the first question (with the second question resonating between the lines).

In the following, I present and compare three participatory performances that exemplify quite different dramaturgical possibilities of working with disagreement within audiences (and non-audiences). My intention is that the cases illuminate each other and contribute to a (non-exhaustive) descriptive mapping of dramaturgical possibilities. By choosing contrastive cases and reading them comparatively, I want to show how different dramaturgies of disagreement are based on different poetic values²⁴ and, in addition, resonate with different conceptions of democracy. In other words, I try to counteract normative closure by opening for legitimate disagreement on dramaturgies of disagreement.

All three cases work thematically with contemporary controversial issues that are highly debated in the wider public sphere. Thus, they 'import' societal disagreement into the theatre. In the light of the above cited definition of communities of disagreement,²⁵ we may say that the controversial issues reveal shared problems and challenges that must be dealt with together despite differences of opinion. This reveals a potential weak spot: How diverse are the opinions of the attending theatre audience, and how is the diversity made palpable and relevant for the performance?

CASE 1: TRIAL OF THE CENTURY

The performance *Trial of the Century*²⁶ (2017) by Traavik.info²⁷ was a *pre-enactment*²⁸ of a court case in the Norwegian Supreme Court (Høyesterett), the so-called 'climate-law-suits' by the environmental organisations Nature and Youth (Natur og Ungdom) and Greenpeace against the Norwegian State. The claim against the state was that further oil extraction in the Barents Sea would break Article 112 of the Norwegian Constitution (called the environment-paragraph): 'Every person has the right to an environment that is conducive to health and to a natural environment whose productivity and diversity are maintained. Natural resources shall be managed on the basis of comprehensive long-term considerations which will safeguard this right for future generations as well.'²⁹

The site-specific, one-time-only performance was staged in Northern Norway, in the town of Kirkenes that lies on the shore of the Barents Sea and close to the Russian border. It was staged in an outdoor, temporary, ice-built theatre space under open sky. The performance is based on one of the oldest dramaturgical formats we know: the trial drama. The dramaturgical twist used here to involve the audience as an active agent in the disagreement at stake is to assign the attending spectators the role of the trial jury who, at the end of the performance, must decide YES or NO: 'Further oil extraction is—or is not—against the Norwegian Constitution's Article 112.'

Thereby, the assembled spectators not only become an active part of the disagreement, but they are also forced to make the crucial decision (within the universe of the theatre performance).

The mock trial, staging real experts and theatre spectators with real interests, opinions, and political engagement, lasted three days. The conclusion of the theatrical people's trial was 'YES: further oil extraction is against Article 112.' But the decision was quite close: 74 voted YES, it is against the constitution, while 49 voted NO. Thus the result still made the disagreement palpable. Three years later, the conclusion in the real court case in Supreme Court was the opposite: 'NO, further oil extraction is NOT against Norwegian Constitution's Article 112.'

CASE 2: AGONISTIC CONVERSATION

My second case is the performance *Agonistic Conversation*³⁰ that is entirely dependent on audience participation. The spectators do not meet any actors, only a 'conversation guide' that instructs and leads the audience through the event. *Agonistic Conversation* is part of a series of performance concepts titled *Building Conversation*, originally developed in the Netherlands by Lotte van den Berg and collaborators.³¹ In my case, the concepts were transferred to Norway and realised by Østfold Internasjonale Teater in Fredrikstad. According to the theatre's announcement of the production, the conversation concepts are inspired by different cultures and philosophical theories; in the case of *Agonistic Conversation*, by the political theory of Chantal Mouffe and by the Maori people's ways of dealing with conflict.³²

After the preliminary instructions in *Agonistic Conversation*, the assembled audience must choose one out of several controversial political issues to work with. One of these issues is almost the same as in *Trial of the Century*: the question if Norway should cease to exploit oil. Other suggested issues are if Norway should have a stricter immigration policy or if we should expand the use of wind power in Norway significantly.³³ In

addition to these themes suggested by the conversation guide, the audience may come up with one other controversial issue which has to be formulated as a question that calls for a yes-or-no answer.

When the audience has chosen one of these issues, every spectator must choose one out of two possible stances, *for* or *against*. In this performance, the choice is explicitly not dependent on the spectators' actual opinions. Then, the two groups, representing respectively the *for* and the *against* positions, are placed in two rows in front of each other, and are instructed to confront the opponent group verbally in a pre-configured way. Short confronting statements must include a negative characteristic of the opponent party, and should follow a turn-taking dramaturgy, without discursive argumentation or dialogue, only verbal confrontation. When time is up, the two rows are supposed to walk slowly close to each other, to stop right in front of one of the opponents, and to 'breathe the same air' for a short while. The last part of the performance is a collective reflection on the experience of this enactment. Laying on their back on the floor, looking in the imagined sky, the spectators are invited to share their experiences from the first part of the performance. The performance ends when everybody has shared what he/she wants to share.

ARENA AND LABORATORY

When we compare these two cases, we see quite different dramaturgies of disagreement. I will coin one of the leading differences between these dramaturgies using two metaphorical terms. In the first case, the theatre is used as an *arena* for a community of disagreement, while it is used as a *laboratory* for such a community in the second case.

An arena is a site for a confrontation to happen, to be witnessed and to be decided. It is also a site of assembly which reminds us of the traditional function of the theatre as *the* site of the public sphere. A laboratory, on the other hand, is a place to experiment under controlled conditions, separated from the non-controlled or controllable reality

outside the laboratory. While *Trial of the Century* emphasises the real political struggle and puts the audience in the (quasi-) powerful position of the jury deciding the (mock) court case, *Agonistic Conversation* turns the spectators' attention to their own experience of playing a part in an antagonistic confrontation—independent from one's own political position or opinion.

Playful action can be a vehicle to experience the opponent's position, but it may also hide the fact that independent, experimental theatre may strive to reach out to a broad audience representing a diversity of political stances. My third case enters right into this question. Who is assembled and how can the non-audience be included?

CASE 3: THE WASTEFULNESS COMMISSION—CATALYST

*The Wastefulness Commission*³⁴ is a recent project by Taavik.info.³⁵ The project has caused enormous conflict within the art field in Norway during the last couple of years.³⁶ For this project, Morten Traavik invited and collaborated with one of the perceived 'enemies' of the art field,³⁷ the so-called Sløseriombudsmannen, a Facebook profile and self-appointed ombudsman, accusing state authorities of wasting tax funds on diverse policy areas, among them public funding of experimental, independent theatre.³⁸ The Facebook profile (with about 70,000 followers) has displayed a substantial effect on the Norwegian public sphere. The daily posts trigger the algorithms, as well as the populist condemnations of perceived elites of all kinds, among them artists working in the field of independent theatre and performing arts. This in turn has resulted in hate mail and personal defamations for several artists, as well as in parliamentary debate.

The Wastefulness Commission is a so-called hypertheatre project,³⁹ which means among other things, that the public debate about the artistic project is made part of it. Dramaturgically, the project works with a paradoxical intersection of two apparent communities of consensus: the followers of the anonymous Facebook profile

(as an explicit non-audience) on the one side, and the independent experimental theatre and performing artists and their supporters on the other side. In this paradoxical intersection of two consensus-communities, we find two highly contentious questions: What kind of art—if any—should be publicly funded? And what qualifies as legitimate critique of art and public art funding? In addition, these questions imply even more general questions: What is (good) art, and who is qualified to take part in the debate concerning this question? And behind all of this: What is the function and value of the arts in society? Despite the highly conflictual public processes around the project, including claims of boycott, it resulted in two theatre performances in 2021, part I and II of *The Wastefulness Commission 2021*. In addition, part III was staged in November 2022, *The Wastefulness Commission 2022*.

I will suggest a third metaphorical category for how this hypertheatrical performance concept dramaturgically works for or with communities of disagreement: It functions as a *catalyst*. In chemistry a catalyst is a 'substance that alters the rate of a chemical reaction but is itself unchanged at the end of the reaction.'⁴⁰ In a metaphorical sense, the catalyst is an actuating element or a triggering cause, setting off and speeding up processes in its environment. The processes that are induced by the project in the wider public sphere amplify the urgency of public debate. In this case, that's public debate concerning the arts and art funding. The project induces a disagreement within the apparent consensus-community in the art field, and performatively entangles the participating non-audience on stage as well as the participating artists in radical ambivalence.

THEATRE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE—PROTO/RECLAIMED, DETACHED/FREE, INTERWOVEN/ RECONNECTED

How is the limited and concrete public space of the theatre related to the wider democratic public sphere in the three cases that I have labelled arena, laboratory, and catalyst? How is the relation between the

intermediate level of the face-to-face situation to the macro level of the public sphere configured by the specific dramaturgy?

In the first case, the theatre is used as a kind of reclaimed proto public sphere. While the real court case in the Norwegian Supreme Court (Høyesterett) may be seen as an example of the de-politicisation of political issues since the question of further oil exploitation is dealt with as a juridical one that will be decided by Supreme Court Judges, the theatre performance that preenacts this court case re-establishes the question as political by moving it to an arena where the 'people' in Kirkenes, represented by the attending audience, are presented the arguments from all sides, and dramaturgically 'given (back)' the power to decide. At the same time, the powerlessness of a theatrical mock trial is obvious. *Trial of the Century* reminds us of the traditional function of theatre as *the* site of the public sphere, with all the ambiguity that this gesture implies in the contemporary situation.

In the second case, the theatre is used as a space explicitly separated from the public sphere. It is dramaturgically conceptualised as a place for testing, experimentation, and reflection based on an experience that is rendered possible by detachment. In the words of the original conceptualisers of *Building Conversation*: 'The art space is a place for life exercises. Here, *detached from everyday reality*, we can reflect, rethink and reform in a *free and experimental space*. Practice, rehearsal, and sketching are not preparatory side-effects of art, but the essence of what art is and should be. We establish art as an exercise area and as such return it to the world.'⁴¹ The confrontation, enacted by the spectators in the mode of the theatrical 'as if,' marks the difference. The played confrontation is configured to mimic the destructive, polarised conflicts in the wider public sphere, while the last part of the performance, the reflection-part, emphasises the physical co-presence and the open, non-confrontational collective sharing of individual experience.

In the third case, the limited and potentially disconnected public space of

the theatre is interwoven and reconnected to the wider public sphere from the same moment when the performance project is publicly announced. The public conflicts evolving about and around the project in social media, art-specific media and established edited mass media such as newspapers and broadcasting, are dramaturgically redefined to be a part of the artistic project.⁴² The theatre performances in the narrow sense, that take place in theatre spaces, are not only the culminating point, but also the imaginary motor, the actuating element for the conflictual processes in the wider public sphere. Representatives for the non-audience are transformed into actors on stage in the theatre performances, while the harsh critics of *The Wastefulness Commission* that scandalised the project in the Norwegian public sphere are dramaturgically manipulated into the paradox embodiment of art-hostile art-defenders that tried to boycott and stop the performances, thus becoming the non-audience.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION: FACILITATING DISAGREEMENT ON DRAMATURGIES OF DISAGREEMENT

I wanted to present and analyse selected cases from my project in a way that counteracts normative closure *within* the research project. The above-cited artists' vision-statement on the performance series *Building Conversation* illustrates normative closure: 'Practice, rehearsal and sketching are not preparatory side-effects of art, but *the essence of what art is and should be*.'⁴³ What I have coined the *laboratory* function, or use of the theatre performance, is declared by the artists to be the essence of all art. My task here as a theatre researcher is neither to confirm, nor to disprove or delegitimise this (or any) essentialist poetic value judgement, but to understand, describe and analyse how the different dramaturgies of disagreements are coined by and related to such values, and how they thus connect and interact differently to and with 'the world.'⁴⁴

Following this descriptive research agenda, I try to act as an architect of

disagreement myself, facilitating legitimate disagreement on dramaturgies of disagreement. This disagreement may not only be related to differing poetic values, but also to differing conceptions of democracy. At this point, we must return to the applied sociological theory on communities of disagreement.⁴⁵

Iversen's theory operates in between two conflicting approaches to democracy: agonistic conceptions, most prominently known by the writings of the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe,⁴⁶ and deliberative conceptions as developed by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.⁴⁷ Iversen accounts in detail the parallels and differences of his approach to both Habermas' and Mouffe's position.⁴⁸ It would take us too far to go into these details here, so I will only pinpoint some basic traits.

The agonistic approach to democracy understands conflict as the core of the political. This conflict should take the form of an agonistic struggle of legitimate adversaries under democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries. The idea of agonistic democracy is opposed to deliberative democracy, where the core is understood as deliberation between communicatively rational actors who ideally will reach a rational consensus by the force of the better argument. Iversen's *in between* position highlights cooperation (Norwegian: *samhandling*) instead of struggle (Mouffe), and substantial disagreement instead of rational consensus (Habermas), and collective learning instead of both struggle and rational consensus. Indeed, the point of departure for Iversen's approach is playful interaction in face-to-face-learning communities.

As Iversen operates in between two conflicting theories of democracy, we may find some inner tensions and paradoxes within his approach. It stretches, so to speak, from deliberation to agonism. My point is thus that the three cases analysed above may be related to different positions on the spectrum from deliberative to agonistic conceptions of democracy: *Trial of the Century* (case 1) resonates in many ways with the idea of democratic interaction as deliberation, by the trial drama's claim of

procedural neutrality, fair and unbiased administrated confrontation, and perhaps also through the force of the better argument; *Agonistic Conversation* (case 2) resonates, despite its title, first and foremost with the field of playful interaction in face-to-face learning communities; while *The Wastefulness Commission* (case 3) transgresses the safeguards of the theatrical as-if and resonates most clearly with the idea of conflict as the core of politics, i.e., an agonistic approach to democracy.

My intention was to illuminate and facilitate legitimate disagreement on dramaturgies of disagreements. How we (e)valuate the differing dramaturgical approaches will depend on choices of value related to both poetics and democracy. Neither democratic interaction nor the arts benefit from assumed or claimed agreements on values.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 The main governmental operators responsible for the public funding of non-institutional art in Norway and Denmark respectively.
- 2 See, for instance, Report to the Storting (white paper) Meld. St. 8 (2018–2019), *Kulturens kraft- Kulturpolitikk for framtida* [The Power of Culture – Cultural Policy for the Future] (<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-8-20182019/id2620206/>) and the Norwegian Official Public Reports NOU 2013: 4, *Kulturutredningen 2014* (<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-2013-4/id715404/sec1>); and NOU 2022: 9, *En åpen og opplyst offentlig samtale – Ytringsfrihetskommisjonens utredning* [The Norwegian Commission for Freedom of Expression Report] (<https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-2022-9/id2924020/>).
- 3 As is the Art in Context research platform at the University of Agder (Norway), where I am affiliated.
- 4 See Siemke Böhnisch, 'Hyperteatral og paradoksal uenighetsdramaturgi,' in *Kunstskapte fellesskap* ['Hypertheatrical and Paradoxical Dramaturgy of Disagreement,'] In [Communities in Art], eds. Melanie Fieldseth, Hanne Hammer Stien and Jorunn Veiteberg (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2022), pp. 367–399.
- 5 See, for example, Per Christian Selmer-Anderssen, 'Det vonde teateråret [The Bad Year in Theatre],' *Aftenposten*, December 27, 2019, pp. 34–35.
- 6 Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, *The Social Impact of the Arts: An Intellectual History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010 [2008]), p. 11.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Belfiore and Bennett 2010 [2008], p. 10.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Articulated, for instance, in my article Siemke Böhnisch, 'Uenighetsdramaturgier: Samtidsteateret som arena, laboratorium og katalysator for uenighetsfellesskap,' in *Kunst og konflikt: Teater, visuell kunst og musikk i kontekst* ['Dramaturgies of Disagreement: Contemporary Theatre as Arena, Laboratory and Catalyst for Communities of Disagreement,'] In [Art and Conflict: Theatre, Visual Art and Music in Context], eds. Siemke Böhnisch and Randi M. Eidsaa (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2019), pp. 69–90, p. 74. This article was written and published before I got research funding from the Arts Council.
- 11 Traavik.info's *The Wastefulness Commission* (Norwegian title: *Sløserikommisjonen*) that even involved the Arts Council Norway as a (involuntary) actor in the production's 'drama.'
- 12 My analysis is published in Böhnisch 2022.
- 13 I will return to this case. See case three, below.
- 14 Cf. Vicki Ann Cremona, Peter Eversmann, Bess Rowen, Anneli Saro, and Henri Schoenmakers (eds.), *Theatre Scandals: Social Dynamics of Turbulent Theatrical Events* (Leiden; Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2020).
- 15 I introduced this term in Böhnisch 2019.
- 16 We have developed this approach in the research group Art and Conflict at the University of Agder, Norway. See Siemke Böhnisch and Randi Margrethe Eidsaa, 'Innledning,' in *Kunst og konflikt: Teater, visuell kunst og musikk i kontekst* ['Introduction'] In [Art and Conflict: Theatre, Visual Art and Music in Context], eds. Siemke Böhnisch and Randi Margrethe Eidsaa (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2019), pp. 11–25, pp. 11–13.
- 17 Lars Laird Iversen, *Uenighetsfellesskap: Blikk på demokratisk samhandling* [Community of Disagreement: A View of Democratic Interaction] (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2014).
- 18 Iversen 2014, p. 12, my translation. Original: 'en gruppe mennesker med ulike meninger, som er i en felles prosess for å løse et problem eller en utfordring.'
- 19 Iversen 2014, p. 11, my translation. Original: 'en idépakke som [han] kaller «retorikken om verdifellesskap» eller verdiretorikken.'
- 20 Iversen 2014, p. 11, my translation. Original: 'farlige konsekvenser.'
- 21 Iversen 2014, p. 27, my translation. Original: 'uenighetsarkitekter.'
- 22 The face-to-face groups that Iversen (2014) examines are school classes. On the macro level, he investigates Norway as an imagined national community.
- 23 The question was included in the call to this special issue of the APRIA journal.

- 24 Cf. Janek Szatkowski, *A Theory of Dramaturgy* (New York, Routledge, 2019), p. 87: 'values in relation to what art should do and look like, when society is as it is.'
- 25 Iversen 2014, p. 12.
- 26 Norwegian title: *Århundrets rettssak* [Trial of the Century].
- 27 Traavik.info is the theatre company and artistic production label of Norwegian director Morten Traavik. His work is internationally known since his projects *Miss Landmine* (2006–2010) in Angola and Cambodia.
- 28 As distinct from the better-known format of reenactments that enact events from the past, pre-enactments enact future events.
- 29 From Article 112, The [Norwegian] Constitution, <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/english/constitutionenglish.pdf>
- 30 Norwegian title: 'Agonistisk samtale.'
- 31 Building Conversation, accessed November 10, 2022, <https://www.buildingconversation.nl/en/>.
- 32 Østfold internasjonale teater, 'Building Conversation,' accessed November 10, 2022, <https://oit.no/produksjon/building-conversation/>.
- 33 These were the issues suggested by the conversation guide when I attended the performance in June 2021.
- 34 Norwegian title: *Sløserikommisjonen*.
- 35 For an in-depth-analysis of this production, see Böhnisch 2022. My presentation of case 3 is based on that article.
- 36 Since it was announced publicly in December 2019/January 2020. See the listed mass media publications on <http://traavik.info/works/the-wastefulness-commission>.
- 37 The rhetoric of cultural war and enmity is widely established in this context, as is the dualistic antagonistic pattern of friends versus enemies. In the Norwegian language, we even have the noun 'kunstfiendtlighet' [art hostility] and the correlating adjective 'kunstfiendig' [art hostile], often used in advocacy of the experimental arts to denote the perceived antagonists.
- 38 The Facebook profile is anonymous, but the man cooperating with Traavik.info, lost his anonymity during the process of cooperation. He was disclosed as the financier Are Sørberg who had been involved with the ultra-liberalist political party *Liberalistene*.
- 39 Cf. Traavik.info, 'Manifesto: To be in it but not of it. A 10 point hypertheatre manifesto in progress,' accessed 10 November 2022, <http://traavik.info/manifesto/>.
- 40 Ordnett.no referring to Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary, 'catalyst,' accessed November 10, 2022, <https://www.ordnett.no/search?language=en&phrase=catalyst>
- 41 Building Conversation, 'About,' accessed November 10, 2022, <https://www.buildingconversation.nl/en/over/>, my emphasis.
- 42 See my detailed analysis of these dramaturgical strategies, based on a system theory approach, in Böhnisch 2022.
- 43 Building conversation, 'About,' my emphasis.
- 44 Cf. Szatkowski 2019.
- 45 Iversen 2014.
- 46 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000); Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013).
- 47 Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns II: Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft* [The Theory of Communicative Action] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995); Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* [The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004 [1990]).
- 48 Iversen 2014, pp. 138–155. See also Lars Laird Iversen, 'Communities of Disagreement: Tracking Truth Without Consensus,' *Common Knowledge* 27, no. 3 (2021): pp. 337–353.