

“Ready to fly with a lust for life” Utopian Performatives in The Cultural Schoolbag

RAGNHILD TRONSTAD

ABSTRACT

The Cultural Schoolbag (TCS) is a national programme designed to provide all school pupils in Norway access to professional art and culture. On average three times a year, in their school time, children and youth get to experience art and culture in various forms, spanning literature, film, music, visual arts, cultural heritage, theatre, and dance. To build and maintain Norway as a democracy is an explicit aim of the programme. Securing all children and youth equal access to professional art and culture regardless of geography, economy, religious or cultural background is but one aspect of its democratic scope. Also important is the belief that being exposed to art and culture is instrumental in educating future citizens who are able, ready, and willing to take active part in a democratic society. Reflecting this rather utopian vision of TCS, the county municipality of Vestfold used to launch their TSC programme under the motto: “Livslysten og flyvedyktig”, in English; “Ready to fly with a lust for life”.

In what sense, however, do these utopian rationales influence the programme that is offered in the schools? How, exactly, may performance events and theatre experienced in TCS contribute to bringing up citizens that are “ready to fly with a lust for life”?

Presenting an outline of current ideological, cultural political, and educational discourses surrounding TCS, this study addresses how, and to what extent, political and educational guidelines have an impact on its artistic programme. Offering two recent TCS productions as examples, I discuss how the utopian spaces provided by these theatre and performance events prepare the grounds for enactment and reflection that may take performative effect in influencing the lives and futures of the participating children and youth.

KEYWORDS

The Cultural Schoolbag (TCS), Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA), utopian performatives, utopian space, relevance and artistic quality

ISSN 2002–3898

© Ragnhild Tronstad and Nordic Theatre Studies

PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE Open access: <https://tidsskrift.dk/nts/index>

Published with support from Nordic Board for Periodicals in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOP-HS)

DOI: 10.7146/nts.v34i2.141662

“Ready to fly with a lust for life” Utopian Performatives in The Cultural Schoolbag

“Most important for a human being is that which strengthens her lust for life: that which makes her live and provides her life with meaning. This is what must be passed on to all children.”¹

- Unga Klara

When I first read the above motto by the Swedish theatre Unga Klara, it had the effect of an epiphany – where in a glimpse, everything fell into place: Of course! Great art experiences are invigorating, evoking in us a lust for life. That is their essential purpose and meaning. What could be more important?

The Cultural Schoolbag

In the Epilogue to her book *Utopia in Performance. Finding hope at the theatre*, Jill Dolan wonders: “Perhaps our goal shouldn’t be to formulate or implement how utopian performatives can have social effect outside the theater, but should be to focus our activism on getting more and different kinds of people into the theater in the first place, so that they, too, might experience their affective power.”²

This is an apt description of what The Cultural Schoolbag (TCS) aspires to do. Established in 2001, TCS is a Norwegian national programme presenting professional art and culture to pupils in their school time. Its aim is that children and youth all over Norway will experience, get familiar with, and develop an understanding of artistic and cultural expressions of all kinds. Locally distributed, the programme is designed to reach everyone several times a year, spanning literature, film, music, visual arts, cultural heritage, theatre, and dance. Every year it engages more than three thousand artists, performers, presenters, and art educators. While the expressions and experiences kids at different schools are presented with vary, it is an important principle that the offer shall be of equally high and professional quality everywhere.

The programme is publicly funded and has an explicit democratic purpose: to provide equal access to all children and youth, regardless of geography, economy, religious or cultural background. Joint cultural experiences shall contribute to a shared frame of reference. In contemporary cultural political discourse, it is also a widely held assumption that meaningful encounters with art and cultural expressions of a variety of kinds may have an instrumental effect in educating independently thinking, contributing, and participating citizens of a democracy.³ Expressive of this common belief in the beneficial effects of being exposed to art

1 My translation from the Swedish original: “Det viktigaste för människan är det som stärker hennes livslust. Det är det som får henne att leva och det som ger mening åt hennes liv. Detta är det som måste förmedlas till alla barn.” Quoted in Carlsdotter 2019, 22.

2 Dolan 2005, 170.

3 Meld. St. 8, 2018-2019; Meld. St. 18 2020-2021; Ruud et al. 2022.

and culture, the county municipality of Vestfold used to launch their TCS programme under the motto: “Livslysten og flyvedyktig”, in English; “Ready to fly with a lust for life”.

In what sense, however, does this utopian vision influence the programme that is offered in the schools? How, exactly, may performance events and theatre experienced in TCS contribute to bringing up citizens that are “ready to fly with a lust for life”?

In this study, I shall discuss the above questions with reference to two performances recently presented in TCS: *Building conversations* by Østfold International Theatre and *Oh baby baby (goes viral)* by the independent theatre group Lost and Found productions. The former is a participatory work exploring how alternative forms of dialogue can be employed as tools for democratisation. The latter is a live streamed theatre performance aiming to equip its audience with tools to master life and erasing in them inhibiting feelings of shame. Before presenting the two examples, I shall describe some of the political and educational guidelines attached to TCS, and address how these guidelines are met by institutions, artists and programmers of TCS.

Instrumental Art

In 2021, the Norwegian government released a white paper on youth and children’s culture titled *Experience, create, share – Art and culture for, with and by children and youth*,⁴ stating that it is a basic feature of a democracy to let children participate in free art and culture.⁵ The white paper was preceded by a survey in which one thousand children and youth of various ages around Norway were asked about their previous experiences, their preferences and attitudes towards art and culture, to which it extensively referred.⁶ In the white paper, remarkably much attention was given to concepts of participation, involvement, and co-creation by children and youth on all levels, from cultural policy planning to art creation. It suggested that all publicly funded theatres should involve children and youth by including them in advisory boards, audience surveys or by other methods of involvement. Furthermore, it recommended that public theatre institutions should cooperate with the independent theatre field in order to strengthen their competence on how to work with children and youth as a target group.⁷

From a cultural sector perspective, to be acknowledged a desirable instrumental function by the granting authorities can be regarded both a blessing and a curse: a safety-net in terms of providing the field with arguments to politically defend its right of life in society, on the one hand. On the other hand, it poses an implicit threat to the arm’s length principle, according to which the funding and production of art should be kept at a proper distance from and independent of direct political influence. As theatre scholar Ine Therese Berg reasonably asserts, in her article “Norwegian theatre – a blind spot on cultural policy’s participatory agenda”: “The prescriptive aspect of cultural policies can potentially have significant aesthetic consequences if enough artists and institutions shift towards participatory strategies to legitimate their work.”⁸

Here, Berg addresses how concepts of “participation” have proliferated in Nordic and EU cultural policy documents during recent years, and how they affect theatre institutions and independent theatre companies. One of her aims is to show “how a ‘participatory agenda’ legitimizes, influences, and fosters ‘new’ artistic and institutional practices, but also creates new dilemmas for the artists and institutions – particularly in terms of aesthetic valuation and professionalism.”⁹

Berg refers to Lluís Bonet and Emmanuel Négrier’s description of the four paradigms co-existing in contemporary cultural policy: the “paradigm of excellence”, the “paradigm of cultural democratization”, the “paradigm of creative economy”, and the “paradigm of cultural democracy”. While the paradigms are overlapping and co-existing, she argues, in Norway

4 Meld. St. 18 2020-2021 *Oppleve, skape, dele – Kunst og kultur for, med og av barn og unge*.

5 Meld. St. 18 2020-2021, 103.

6 Kulturtanken 2019.

7 Meld. St. 18 2020-2021, 115-16.

8 Berg 2019, 36.

9 Berg 2019, 29.

the paradigm of excellence has a history of standing particularly strong both in cultural policy and in the public art discourse. The paradigm of cultural democratization, expressive of the idea that exposure to high culture and fine art is an important factor in the education of democratic citizens and thus should be accessible for all, aligns perfectly with the paradigm of excellence.

“In a paradigm of cultural excellence, artistic quality is a central legitimating factor for traditional high-art institutions – which the institutions, audiences, critics, artists and politicians variably uphold.”¹⁰ In contrast, the 2021 white paper on youth and children’s culture highlighted a paradigm of cultural democracy where “lower”, popular cultural forms preferred and chosen by the children and youth themselves gained importance. Consequently, in their study on how concepts of relevance are applied in the political discourse surrounding TCS, researchers Lise Camilla Ruud, Jorunn Spord Borgen and Gunn Helene Engelsrud observe that Norwegian cultural policy is marked by an ambivalence between the two paradigms cultural democracy and cultural democratization, and that this ambivalence is not least remarkable in the cultural policy documents on youth and children’s culture.¹¹

In the public discussion following the white paper, some clearly perceived its focus on concepts of relevance, participation, and involvement as a threat to the ideals of artistic quality and arm’s length principle representative of the long prevailing paradigms of excellence and cultural democratisation in Norwegian cultural policy. A representative of the state financed theatre institutions was sceptical to how the white paper expressed expectations regarding the involvement of children and youth.¹² Along with the suggestion that established institutions cooperate with independent companies to strengthen the overall competence in the field, it was criticized as an improper political intervention in the institutions’ methods of production and dissemination, in violation of the principle of arm’s length.¹³ Concerned that concepts of involvement and relevance may come to replace concepts of quality, they warned that this new direction in cultural policy may lead to less diversity in the field.

Relevance as a Quality Parameter

This is not to say that performances for children and youth produced by independent artists are considered qualitatively inferior to those produced by established institutions. Quite the contrary, there are several independent companies addressing this age group that have a high reputation and are well respected also internationally. One reason is the dedication by which many independent theatre and dance companies work specifically with young audiences as a target group, following the lead of Scandinavian pioneers in young audience research such as the aforementioned institution Unga Klara. Notably, this has led to a development in which the concept of artistic quality, when applied to art addressing young audiences, naturally includes the concept of relevance. It is acknowledged that understanding and taking into consideration the life worlds of the target audience is a prerequisite for succeeding in creating performances that are able to meet and communicate with its audience on the same level of substance, involvement, and intensity that we expect of high-quality art in general. In contrast, the institutional theatres have often been criticized for targeting too broadly when defining their audience, aiming at the entire “family” spectrum of children, parents, and grandparents when producing theatre for children and youth. It is, for example, rare to find a performance specifically addressing youth related issues in public theatre institutions. Of course, there are a number of institutions that specialize in producing theatre for young audiences to which this criticism does not apply. Co-productions between institutional theatres and independent companies specializing in children and youth as a target group are also becoming more customary.

For more than twenty years, TCS has provided a nationwide market with a steady demand for theatre and dance productions aimed at children and youth, where successful productions can be touring for years. Because of Norway’s vast and complicated geographical

10 Berg 2019, 38-9.

11 Ruud et. al. 2022, 109.

12 Meld. St. 18 2020-2021.

13 NTO 2021.

infrastructure, smaller productions that can easily be rigged and moved from one school to the next may have a practical advantage in TCS compared to bigger productions that require to be shown in specific cultural venues. Closely associated with TCS, Norsk Scenekunstbruk - The Norwegian Network for Performing Arts¹⁴ provides financial as well as practical support to independent theatre and dance companies addressing children and youth, who wish to take their productions on tour. Moreover, Norsk Scenekunstbruk manages an independent artistic council to which companies can submit their productions for quality evaluation. If the production passes the evaluation, it is included in Scenekunstbruket's repertoire of quality assured performances.

Every county municipality in Norway is a member of Norsk Scenekunstbruk, an arrangement implying that they are financially rewarded when choosing performances from this repertoire to their TCS programme. This makes it a huge advantage for productions to be included in the repertoire, just as it represents a financial advantage for TCS-programmers to choose productions that have undergone, and passed, Scenekunstbruket's quality evaluation.

Productions that are part of the regular repertoire of institutions are also presented in TCS. Often, when programming for high-school level, these may not necessarily be productions addressing youth specifically, but are considered relevant to TCS for other reasons. For example, by aligning well with the school's educational plans.

Educational Art

Happening during school time, one of its founding principles states that TCS shall be relevant to and interact with the schools' educational aims and plans. Despite this intention, not all teachers are able to see the value of TCS and how it can contribute to their teaching. Some even regard it as an annoying and meaningless interruption of their work that prevents them from rather than supports them in teaching the curriculum. High school teacher Sanna Sarromaa, for example, describes in a recent newspaper chronicle TCS events popping up as a total surprise to everyone, interrupting everything and never corresponding in any meaningful way to the part of the curriculum that she is responsible for teaching.¹⁵

Certainly, some school subjects are more readily compatible with the professional art and culture program of TCS. Relating in a meaningful manner concerts and dance performances to the curriculum may be easier for teachers of music or physical education than to one who is responsible for teaching the kids mathematics. A performance of an Ibsen play may have direct relevance to the curriculum of a Norwegian class, and a museum visit displaying cultural heritage objects may enrich and inform a history class.

Reflecting the principle that the TCS program shall be relevant to the educational aims of the school, examples exist of performances specifically addressing themes in the curriculum. One is a theatre performance by Teater Joker, a renowned independent company with more than thirty years' experience in producing theatre for children. Titled *Norway's history in 45 minutes*, this theatrical performance promises to teach the pupils more history in 45 minutes than the teacher is capable of in a year!

If TCS were to offer more productions of this kind, demonstrating a direct relevance to the schools' internal aims and plans, perhaps it would more easily be acknowledged by all the schools' representatives as a valuable arrangement. However, in terms of artistic autonomy, this could be more problematic and possibly interfere with an equally important principle stating that TCS shall present professional art and culture of high quality.¹⁶ In terms

14 <https://www.scenekunstbruket.no/en/about-norsk-scenekunstbruk> (1.8.2023).

15 Sarromaa 2022.

16 In the public discourse surrounding TCS a certain prejudice or suspicion is sometimes expressed that political or pedagogical guidelines influence the programming at the expense of the principles of artistic quality. In my experience, based on how local programmers have presented their principles of programming, this is rarely the case. On the contrary, the most frequently quoted principles for programming are that productions shall be of high artistic quality and that the performers are professionals. Performances shall be presented in a way that is relevant and accessible to the age group, and the programme as a whole shall reflect a diversity of genres and cultural expressions. However, not much formal research has been done on the programming of TCS in recent years, and an empirical survey on how programmers relate to the various principles in their programming practice would certainly be a valuable contribution to the knowledge base.

of professionalism, it cannot be the responsibility of the artists to secure the educational outcome of the meeting, as this is neither a natural part of their profession nor educational background. Demanding of art that it should fulfil a specific pedagogical purpose is to interfere with the artistic autonomy and may ultimately produce an art experience that is less convincing in terms of artistic quality. Admittedly, as veterans in this context, Teater Joker manages the balance very well in their attempt at teaching history through theatre. However, from an essentialist *theatrical* point of view, they have certainly produced several aesthetically and artistically more convincing pieces.

A plausible solution to the dilemma is to make teachers better equipped to utilise art experiences from TCS in their teaching by way of “aesthetic learning processes”. Aesthetic learning processes are part of the toolbox of methods a teacher ideally should be able to pick and choose from in their teaching, but few students are being trained in these methods at Norwegian teacher colleges today. This situation is the point of departure for the TCS-initiated research project *pARTicipED: Empowering student teachers as agents of change in cross-sectorial collaborations using The Cultural Schoolbag (TCS) in Norway as a learning platform*.¹⁷ The project involves several universities in Norway and will explore the potential of integrating The Cultural Schoolbag in the teacher training programs to enhance the understanding among future teachers of how art and aesthetics can contribute to learning.

Three Cross-Cutting Themes

It is possible to reflect the educational aims of the schools also in a less direct way, by relating to the three so-called “cross-cutting themes” that were introduced in the national revision of the educational plans in 2020.¹⁸ These are *public health and life skills; democracy and citizenship; and sustainability*. For periods of six weeks every year, all school subjects shall reflect one of these, so that in one period, public health and life skills will be in focus, in the next, democracy and citizenship, and so forth.

Already in 2019, the white paper *The power of culture. Cultural policy for the future*¹⁹ announced a connection between these cross-disciplinary educational themes and the cultural political aims of “educating reflective and creative, active and responsible participants of society.”²⁰ Reflecting a more universal set of values and issues, the three cross-cutting themes may represent a leeway for TCS artists who have previously struggled with the dilemma of artistic autonomy versus the schools’ demand for educational relevance. Considering the new themes’ rather universal relevance to our time and lives, it would be difficult for a theatre or dance performance *not* to evoke them somehow, either directly or indirectly.

The two performances I shall present in the following are examples of that. The first one evokes the theme democracy and citizenship and raises questions of sustainability. The second relates specifically to the theme public health and life skills. Finally, I shall discuss how these two performances shown in TCS provide “utopian spaces” that may take performative effect in influencing the lives of the children and youth that are addressed by them.

The Art of Dialogue

Building conversation is originally a Dutch performance concept describing itself as “a platform for Dialogical Art”²¹, which has been adapted to a Norwegian context by Østfold Internasjonale Teater. It is currently (2022-2023) part of the TCS programme of Viken county municipality, where it is presented to high school students 17-18 years old. In this participatory event, groups of 20 pupils are guided by a professional performer in one of two available conversation exercises: Agonistic conversation, or The Parliament of Things. Agonistic conversation is a form inspired by the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe’s idea that art can provide an ‘agonistic space’ for opponents to play out political conflicts. It is also inspired by how Maori communities use a welcoming ritual to introduce conflicting

17 <https://www.hiof.no/lusp/pil/english/research/projects/participed/> (1.8.2023).

18 Utdanningsdirektoratet 2020.

19 Meld. St. 8, 2018-2019 *Kulturens kraft. Kulturpolitikk for framtida*.

20 Meld. St. 8, 2018-2019, 81. My translation.

21 <https://buildingconversation.nl/en/over/> (1.8.2023).

parties to each other, in which a mutual acknowledgement of sharing the same space is established before the conversation may start. In the performative exercise, the pupils are first asked to suggest topics for discussion, then they vote over which of the topics to discuss. In the event in which I participated, Norwegian oil production versus the green transition was elected as the topic for debate. The pupils were asked to choose which one of the two main stands they would represent in the discussion – pro or contra an immediate termination of the Norwegian oil industry – and were grouped accordingly. They were not required to personally identify with the viewpoint they chose to represent. The two groups were given some time for themselves to develop arguments for their position before arranging themselves in two lines physically opposite each other.

The first round of agonistic conversation started by one person from one of the opposing lines presenting an argument or question to a member of the other party, challenging him or her to defend their position by countering the argument. Then this person would address a person in their opposing line in the same manner. An energetic discussion emerged, where arguments pro et contra were thrown between the two parties like a ball, keeping everyone alert and engaged. In the next round, participants were allowed to move freely around in the classroom and situate themselves closer to each other before continuing the conversation. In the final round, everyone was lying down on the floor. From here, staring up at the ceiling rather than confronting any one personally, the conversation took a new, more relaxed and introspective form.

My colleague in Kulturtanken, Charlotte Blanche Myrvold, joined the conversation format called The Parliament of Things, which is inspired by the French sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour and his Actor-Network Theory. I am indebted to her for details in the following description. In The Parliament of Things, participants are to take on the perspective of actants, that is, non-human actors and conditions that are part of and influence the case for discussion. The session starts by identifying relevant actants, which, in the example of the Norwegian oil industry, could be oil, the ocean, plants or animals of the ocean, Papua New Guinea, the Norwegian oil fund, and so on. There is a table with available objects, and every actant identified is assigned an object to represent it. The participants are invited to place the objects/actants in relation to each other on the table. Then each are to choose one object/actant whose perspective they shall take in the upcoming discussion. Participants are placed in a circle, on chairs, and can speak on behalf of their actant. The word is free. After a while, the participants are invited to change seats and choose a new object/actant whose voice they wish to express. Each participant thus represents a number of different actants and perspectives before the conversation ends.

Framing *Building Conversation* as a piece of Dialogical Art in the tradition of the German artist Joseph Beuys, critic Torunn Liven finds that the performance “in a unique way transcends the conception that art and pedagogy are contradictory practices.”²² The performance provides a safe space – a play space – in which democratic discussion can be practiced as a form of art in itself: A utopian space, in Dolan’s terms. The classes were instructed not to come unprepared to the performance but to inform themselves on the Norwegian oil industry in advance and reflect upon its sustainability. This way, all students would master the tools needed to play, and nobody had to put themselves at risk investing their personal opinion in the discussion – unless they chose to do so.

The work is described as a dialogical piece of art where all the contributing members take part in the creative process, assuming the role of artists. Liven nevertheless identifies an imbalance in the power relation between the professional performer guiding the session and the pupils participating. As the pupils lacked sufficient familiarity with the art historical context, and how to frame the event as art, they remained unaware of their role as artists in the process, and of their contribution to it being “art”, she argues.²³

Rather, the pupils participating in the event align with Dolan’s description of performance audiences as temporary publics, where “spectatorship might encourage them to be active in other public spheres, to participate in civic conversations that performance perhaps begins.

22 Liven 2022. My translation.

23 Liven 2022.

If, as Fraser theorizes, ‘public spheres are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion, [but are also] arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities,’ then audiences at performance can be seen to be actively forming themselves as participating citizens of a perhaps more radical democracy.”²⁴

The Potential of Elsewhere

“Perhaps utopian performatives create the *condition* for action; they pave a certain kind of way, prepare people for the choices they might make in other aspects of their lives.”²⁵

The next example I shall present is by the Norwegian independent theatre company Lost and Found productions and is shown exclusively for seventh-graders. The performance exists in two versions: The original, classroom version called *Oh baby baby*, and a digital version called *Oh baby baby (goes viral)*. During the covid-19 pandemic, it is the digital version that has been touring. This is the version I have seen and will be referring to.

There are two women on stage (or screen), presenting themselves as extra-terrestrial nurses and computer nerds. They tell us that they have access to an artificial intelligence in the shape of a robot baby doll, who is able to hack the pupils’ phones and computers and observe their future data traffic. Analysing the pupils’ future google searches, their mail and message exchanges, the nurses can see that the seventh-graders will have a lot of unnecessary worries in the years to come. Worries about their bodies, popularity, falling in love, sex, and other puberty related horrors. By enlightening the kids on these matters, the mission of the nurses is to delete all shame and worries from their future.

During the performance, the pupils may submit anonymous questions and have them answered by the two experts. The experts also independently address problems and issues typical of adolescence, motivated by their “reading” of the kids’ future data traffic. The nurses are outspoken, and their descriptions explicit and graphical. For example, when they, in an amazingly evocative manner, demonstrate masturbation by rubbing and stroking pieces of cut up fruit. Balancing between the liberating and the embarrassing, there are also moments of tenderness and care. As, for example, when the performance ends with a lullaby in which the actors express how they wish that the kids will experience their future: “I hope you will do exactly what you desire for, with no shame!”; “I hope you will love!”; “I hope you will dance whenever and wherever you want to!”; and so on.

These are utopian performatives, demonstrating for the kids “the potential of elsewhere”²⁶ where elsewhere is their own potential future. In Dolans words, “Utopian performatives, in their doings, make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better.”²⁷ In *Oh baby baby (goes viral)*, this is done by prospecting a future characterized by and expressive of – precisely – a lust for life.

Artistic Quality as a Performative Force

According to Dolan, even though “we can’t measure the effectiveness of art as we can a piece of legislation, or a demonstration, or a political campaign [...] the experiences of performance, and the intellectual, spiritual, and affective traces it leaves behind can provide new frames of reference for how we see a better future extending out from our more ordinary lives. Seeing that vision, we can figure out how to achieve it outside the fantastical, magic space of performance.”²⁸

Artistic quality, presented in a way that is relevant and accessible to the age group, is the decisive factor when it comes to presenting magic theatrical experiences of the kind that are capable of inducing in the kids a lust for life. Likewise, it is a matter of artistic quality to create utopian performatives that have the effect of changing the future lives of children and youth.

If *Oh Baby Baby (goes viral)* might have had such an effect on some kids, it is not only because its messages were important, true, and to the point in addressing the current life

24 Dolan 2005, 11.

25 Dolan 2005, 169-70.

26 Dolan 2005, 20.

27 Dolan 2005, 6.

28 Dolan 2005, 20.

world of its audience, but also because they were delivered in a delightfully precise and skilled theatrical manner. Even as experienced through a computer screen, the performance was mind-blowing, efficient theatre. And this, I believe, is crucial: it would never have worked if it wasn't good theatre.

Analysing the concept of relevance as applied in the public discourse surrounding TCS, Ruud et. al. identified an ambivalence in current cultural policy documents between the two paradigms cultural democracy and cultural democratization,²⁹ that is to say, an ambivalence between the idea that all cultural forms are equally valuable and the idea that every citizen should have access to high quality art. However, why do we have to regard these two paradigms as contradictory in the first place? The concept of artistic quality is always relative to the specific cultural and artistic field in which it operates and to which it is applied. Acknowledging this, it should be evident that when it comes to producing and presenting art and culture for children and youth, relevance and artistic excellence are not mutually exclusive concepts. They are both important ingredients reinforcing each other. And, in lucky moments, capable of producing utopian performatives that, finding their way to The Cultural Schoolbag, may affect some kid just about ready to fly with a lust for life.

AUTHOR

Ragnhild Tronstad holds an MA in Theatre Studies and a PhD in Media Aesthetics from the University of Oslo. She has worked as a researcher and lecturer within the fields of new media, theatre, and performance at the University of Oslo, The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, and Oslo Metropolitan University. Since 2018, she is a senior adviser of performing arts in Kulturtanken – Arts for Young Audiences Norway. Tronstad regularly contributes to Norwegian and international journals and anthologies, and as a theatre critic in [Norsk Shakespearetidsskrift](#) and [Scenekunst.no](#).

²⁹ Ruud et. al. 2022, 109.

References

Bammer, Angelika. 1991. *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopia in the 1970s*. New York: Routledge.

Berg, Ine Therese. 2019. "Norwegian Theatre – a blind spot on cultural policy's participatory agenda?" *The Nordic Journal of Cultural Policy* 22:1, 26-49.

Bonet, Lluís and Emmanuel Négrier. 2018. "The participative turn in cultural policy: Paradigms, models, contexts." *Poetics* 66, 64-73. DOI:[10.1016/j.poetic.2018.02.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.02.006).

Building Conversation. Østfold Internasjonale Teater, based on the concept by Lotte van den Berg, see <https://www.buildingconversation.nl/>. (1.8.2023). 25 March 2022, Asker VGS, The Cultural Schoolbag Viken, Norway.

Carlsdotter, Silvia. 2019. "De har något vi kan lära oss igjen. Intervju med Suzanne Osten.", *Drama. Nordisk teaterpedagogisk tidsskrift* 56:1, 22-7.

Den kulturelle skolesekken (The Cultural Schoolbag) <https://www.denkulturelleskolesekken.no> (11.8.2022).

Dolan, Jill. 2005. *Utopia in Performance. Finding Hope at the Theater*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Liven, Torunn. 2022. "Øko-kunstens pedagogiske funksjon" ("The pedagogical function of eco-art"), *Periskop – Kritikk av kunst for barn og unge*. <https://www.periskop.no/oko-kunstens-pedagogiske-funksjon/> (11.8.2022).

Kulturtanken. 2019. *Barn og unges stemmer – kunst og kultur. Innspill til barne- og ungdomskulturmeldingen. (BUSK-rapporten)*. https://cdn.innocode.digital/kulturtanken/uploads/2020/11/Kulturtanken_Busk_rapport_skjerm_print.pdf (12.8.2022).

Meld. St. 8. 2018-2019. *Kulturens kraft. Kulturpolitikk for framtida*. [white paper] <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/9778c28ab1014b789bbb3de0e25e0d85/nn-no/pdfs/stm201820190008000dddpdfs.pdf> (12.8.2022).

Meld. St. 18. 2020-2021. *Oppleve, skape, dele – Kunst og kultur for, med og av barn og unge*. [white paper] <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/57f98cf5845f4d3093b84a5f47cef629/nn-no/pdfs/stm202020210018000dddpdfs.pdf> (12.8.2022).

NTO. 2021. "Høringsuttalelse til Meld. St. 18 (2020–2021) *Oppleve, skape, dele. Kunst og kultur for, med og av barn og unge* fra Norsk teater- og orkesterforening (NTO)." https://nto.no/uploads/Barne-og-ungdomskulturmelding_h%C3%B8ringsuttalelse_NTO.pdf (12.8.2022).

Oh baby baby (goes viral). Lost and Found productions: Victoria Røising, Nikoline Spjelkavik, Per Magnus Barlaug, Magnus Sparsaas, Svein Spjelkavik and Anne Kari Spjelkavik. 13 October 2020. Live streamed performance, The Cultural Schoolbag Oslo, Norway.

Ruud, Lise Camilla; Jorunn Spord Borgen and Gunn Helene Engelsrud. 2022. ”Relevant for livet og skolekvardagen’. En analyse av relevansbegrepets inntog i Den kulturelle skolesekken.” *Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidsskrift* 25:1, 95-112.

Sarromaa, Sanna. 2022. ”Den kulturelle drittsekken.” *HA* 15 June 2022, <https://debatt.h-a.no/2022/debatt/den-kulturelle-drittsekken/> (12.8.2022).

Utdanningsdirektoratet. 2020. *Læreplanverket*. <https://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/lareplanverket/> (12.8.2022).