

only provide the source of its power as a mode of practice, but also produce its political and ethical position.

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doi:10.1017/S0266464X16000178

Peter O' Connor and Michael Anderson, ed.

Applied Theatre Research: Radical Departures

London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015.

306 p. £14.30.

ISBN: 978-1-4725-0961-1.

The authors make a compelling argument for the role of applied theatre as research in a contemporary context. Using practice research case studies located in theoretical argument, their book illustrates the relationship that socially engaged arts practice, defined here more broadly as Applied Theatre, has to conceptions of conventional research. The authors robustly state their desire for an enhanced role for applied theatre in a global context of conflict, greed, and neo-liberal agendas, defined by them as 'post' normal.

In this environment O'Connor and Anderson make a challenge to the applied theatre field to evolve a methodology of practice as research that does more than document the outcomes of applied theatre projects. Their manifesto advocates Applied Theatre as Research (ATAR), a robust articulation of the many ways of knowing that derive from applied theatre research through the varied languages of the research itself.

The editors argue that the methodology of ATAR is inherently creative in ways that are agile enough to respond to the multiple, complex needs of contemporary society and its communities. *Radical Departures* highlights the opportunities afforded to participants of applied theatre projects through its application as a rich modality of creative research. It states that ATAR promotes

participants to the role of researchers rather than the subjects of the research, and uses the performative aesthetic of theatre to enable participants to reflect emotionally and cognitively on their situations through engagement within a fictional frame of art.

The description of the dual engagement of ATAR creates the possibility for understanding, resilience, and resistance that eloquently restates the often over-ambitious transformative claims made by applied theatre. The case studies that comprise the second half of the book are selected to elucidate this belief. They do not set out to prescribe how ATAR can achieve this aim, but rather illustrate the rich and textured results of ATAR research that is democratic, multi-layered, and that, as argued by Haseman in the final case study, can robustly evidence the kind of outcomes often attributed to more conventional research modalities.

For readers new to applied theatre, the book provides an articulate summary of the ethical and aspirational components contained in the practice. Applied theatre, as illustrated in this collection, can and, as described in the case studies, does generate change. However, when applied theatre is framed as research this outcome can be seen as tenuous, complex, or difficult to immediately discern. *Radical Departures* challenges practitioners and researchers to embrace the challenges as an opportunity to advocate for dissemination of their research that is not translated into forms inexactly borrowed from other disciplines. Applied theatre does not need to plead a case as being special because it is complex, rather that the peculiarities of its practice are different from those of researchers in other fields. This restating of the terms of applied theatre research offers timely support in troubling times for those who continue in their desire to pursue ATAR.

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