

APPLIED THEATRE

RESEARCH

Radical Departures

Peter O'Connor
Michael Anderson

ROOFSBURY

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square	1385 Broadway
London	New York
WC1B 3DP	NY 10018
UK	USA

www.bloomsbury.com

**BLOOMSBURY, METHUEN DRAMA and the Diana logo are trademarks of
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc**

First published 2015

© Peter O'Connor and Michael Anderson, 2015

Peter O'Connor and Michael Anderson have asserted their right under the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior
permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on
or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication
can be accepted by Bloomsbury or the author.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4725-0794-5
PB: 978-1-4725-0961-1
ePDF: 978-1-4725-1385-4
ePub: 978-1-4725-0951-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Typeset by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in India

*For our friend and mentor,
Professor John Carroll*

have been laid to waste as the greatest victims of the global financial collapse, and the triumph of global neoliberalism. Youth make up 40 per cent of the world's unemployed. Nearly 50 per cent of young people in Spain and Greece, approximately a 1/3 of young people in Italy, Portugal and Eire, and 22 per cent of young people in the United Kingdom were unemployed in 2012. The youth jobless rate of 16.1 per cent in the United States is over double the 7.6 per cent rate experienced by all Americans.

In all these states, where banks were bailed out and the rich continue to get even richer, the young are left to pay the price for the collapse of a capitalist system that seems intent on a feeding frenzy in the present, without consideration of the future. A growing cynicism and a sense of helplessness invade youth who see in post-normal times little sense or reason for hope, little belief in personal agency and understanding as the ways ahead appeared to be pre-determined.

We argue that the remarkable conditions of post-normal times urgently require politically and socially committed research. We argue for research that overtly positions itself as part of active resistance, which advocates for the rights of the marginalized, the silenced, and the forgotten. It demands of those of us in the research business a renewal of forms that return a sense of hope, reclaiming democracy for a tired world turning, and turning in the gyre.

Research and hope

The critical departure of this book is in the cry for research grounded in the hope for change. Not to a return to the 'normal', but a way for people to flourish and sustain their lives in the post-normal present. Like Freire, we understand that 'the world needs critical hope as a fish needs unpolluted water'. Freire understood that hope cannot be naive, it must be critically informed. He recognized that critical hope confronts 'the fatalism that pushes us to compromise with the surrounding reality

instead of attempting to transform such reality'.³² This is hope that challenges the seeming fixedness of the future, hope that

gives meaning to the struggles to change the world. Hope is grounded in concrete performative practices, in struggles and interventions that espouse the sacred values of love, care, community, trust, and well-being. Hope, as a form of pedagogy, confronts and interrogates cynicism, the belief that change is not possible or is too costly. Hope works from rage to love. It articulates a progressive politics that rejects 'conservative, neoliberal postmodernity'.³³

Hope is founded on the critical imagination. It is therefore not enough for research to tell us what the world is. Instead it must provide opportunities for communities to imagine what it *might* be. Imagining the world as it might become is the first and necessary step in creating the possibilities of social justice. Cesar Rossatto suggests 'transformative optimism is an expression of a deep sense of emancipatory hope'.³⁴ We advocate that such optimism must sit at the heart of research. Transformative optimism as a guiding principle for research inspires a sense of the collective's ability and possibility to overthrow neo-liberal devotion to the individual. It engages research as a tool for hope and resistance.

Research and democracy

John Dewey recognized that at the heart of democracy is talk.³⁵ The freedom and ability to talk in a way that is not constrained by the powerful, that is open to the possibilities of dissent, and that actively challenges and resists dominant ideologies. We understand that this sort of talk is central to any notion of democratic citizenship. The ability to participate in talk and in action, the ability to see oneself as capable of resistance, of participating in civil life, marks out a society with democratic ideals. As we have noted earlier, research has been culpable

in the past of continuing and supporting undemocratic practices, and in particular of perpetuating the colonization of Indigenous and othered groups. Research which silences and further marginalizes disenfranchised communities has been increasingly challenged by a range of more democratic research methodologies attempting to disrupt the traditional rules of the research game towards practices that are more democratic in nature. These research methodologies include community-based participatory research, participatory action research (PAR) and arts-based research.

Community-Based Participatory Research

This approach to research aims to reposition the 'subject' as an 'actor' within the research making decisions about the matter, and the method of that research. The benefit of positioning the 'researched' at the centre of the research's decision-making processes has its roots in PAR³⁶ (and is being mandated more enthusiastically by bodies such as the World Bank and the National Health Service (United Kingdom).³⁷ While there are definitional variations of opinion around what participatory research might be, there is consensus around the conditions that make this kind of research possible, namely a 'democratic and social context'.³⁸ Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a

collaborative approach to research, [CBPR] equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change to improve communities].³⁹

This has real implications for the way researchers approach and navigate the research relationship, bringing stakeholders into the conversation as soon as the design of the research begins. According to Israel et al., there are several principles this kind of working must fulfil, including:

1. genuine partnership means co-learning (academic and community partners learning from each other),
2. research efforts include capacity building (in addition to conducting the research, there is a commitment to training community members in research),
3. findings and knowledge should benefit all partners and
4. CBPR involves long-term commitments to effectively reduce disparities.⁴⁰

In post-normal times, participatory research has particular relevance and resonance for us. In a time of growing disparities, when building capacity within impoverished communities is increasingly vital, CBPR is a socially committed and politically motivated form of research with the potential to use its power to make a positive difference in the communities that researchers engage with. More politically charged in its approach to research is CBPR's cousin, PAR.

Participatory Action Research: Seeds of democracy

The origins of PAR can be traced usefully to a desire within the academy and beyond to create an antidote to research methodologies replicating the intellectual colonialism of Western social research into marginalized worlds. It has been driven by a desire to create more democratic forms of research involving disenfranchised people, as researchers seek answers to the challenges of their daily lives.⁴¹ PAR promotes research as a transformative tool, assisting people to imagine and articulate how they wish to see their world put together and run.⁴² Building on the Freirean concept of naming the world so as to transform their own lives, PAR is a means for enabling people to see themselves as actors rather than spectators, as people with agency and control.

Core to the philosophy underpinning PAR is the recognition that it provides opportunities for individuals and communities to challenge hegemonic knowledge that does not reflect the struggles and survival

of the routinely disenfranchised. This is achieved largely through the reframing of the roles of the researcher and the researched. The scientific model that artificially separate out the two roles are challenged by the creation of research partnerships that strives for an investigative process where both researcher and participants are actively engaged in the designing, interpreting, analysing and representing of data. In much the same way that Applied Theatre actively resists the actor-spectator divide, PAR seeks to equalize the power relationship and transform both parties of the research into actors.

Arts-based research

The search to find more democratic, participatory and critically informed research methodologies has been invigorated by arts-based research, which has emerged and pushed the boundaries of traditional research over the past 30 years. Dixon and Senior, when advocating for arts-based research, suggest 'the arts in general teach us to see, to feel, and indeed to know. What we are proposing is that the means through which the arts function as illuminating vehicles may find expression and utility in research activities as well as in the arts themselves.'⁴³ Shaun McNiff defines arts-based research 'as the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies.'⁴⁴ He argues that arts-based research is different to other forms of inquiry, where the arts might merely play the role of data used for investigation within more traditional scientific methods. Arts-based research practices are increasingly used however, as a set of methodological tools by qualitative researchers, not simply in the arts disciplines during all phases of social research, including data generation and collection, analysis, interpretation and representation. We have argued earlier that in a post-normal world, there is increasing urgency for research that addresses the ravages of global

capitalism in providing an antidote to its poison. McNiff argues that arts-based research is particularly useful in bringing 'relief and insight when difficulties in human experience become deeply lodged within individuals and groups, this is usually a sign that we are stuck in our ways of dealing with them.'⁴⁵

The arts also provide us with ways to look at the world in, and through, different lenses. McNiff argues, 'art embraces ordinary things with an eye for their unusual and extraordinary qualities. The artist looks at banal phenomena from a perspective of aesthetic significance and gives them a value that they do not normally have.'⁴⁶ Elliot Eisner, one of the founders of arts-based research understood too that it was through the arts capitalizing on the emotions that it was possible to see beyond what had been obscured by the habits of everyday life.⁴⁷ For us in applied theatre, we understand this slightly differently. We know theatre makes the familiar strange, and the strange familiar.⁴⁸ As a result, the everyday and commonplace are accentuated and given new or fresh life in the theatre. It is through this process that new understandings in theatre are created.

Arts-based research has challenged more traditional researchers to consider the ways research evidence can be generated, represented and presented. Leavy suggests 'Arts-based researchers are not "discovering" new research tools, they are *carving* them. And with the tools they sculpt, so too a space opens within the research community where passion and rigor boldly intersect *out in the open*.'⁴⁹ Haseman and Maite argue that it is important to rephrase artistic methods and tools as research methods.⁵⁰ It has provided a platform for understanding that arts create different ways of knowing, understanding and representing the world – ways that can either complement or challenge scientific ways of knowing. J. H. Rolling, writing from within the education research context, argues:

'The scientific and institutionalized belief systems that build taxonomic models in education present a monumental and oppressive structure that too easily occludes those educational stories that emerge from the margins – stories that disrupt the central or centring storyline. Edward

Said argues that travelling along this marginality can open up places for 'innovation and experiment rather than the habitual... rather than the authoritatively given status quo'.⁵¹

Further, Rolling argues, arts-based learning can often be labyrinthine, leading to divergent outcomes resisting those that neatly match taxonomical expectations.⁵² The borderland space in both teaching and research is a place where one eschews safe and taxonomically ordered assumptions for the possibilities inherent in making ourselves vulnerable to different ideas, thoughts, and ways of being. For Rolling, and for us, arts-based research gives 'significance of the marginalized, invisible, or silenced story... as a site of resistance'.⁵³

Arts-based research champions the idea that knowledge of the world cannot and should not be reduced into words and numbers alone. That representation through image, sound, movement and colour are equally valid ways of expressing knowledge. We argue that the almost limitless expressive possibilities inherent in the arts can break through the constraint of words and numbers. In a post-normal world, the arts are uniquely positioned to capture the flux and fluidity of a globe teetering on the edge of multiple extinctions. Although the arts-based researcher knows the world in and through different modes, self-reflexivity is important in adding perspective and to gain distance and viewpoints to avoid self-fulfilling and circular practice.⁵⁴

If the world cannot be reduced to numbers or words alone, arts-based research challenges traditional research's demand for validation and verification. It rejects the notion of singular truths or clear answers, instead searching for contrasting nuances, revealing ambiguities and complex multiple truths.

Joseph Conrad also understood how the arts provide a space for knowing and connecting to things beyond the everyday. For him, the arts touch beyond the material world, into the spaces in-between, into the ephemeral and unmeasurable. He acknowledges that the power of the arts is to shift away from the contemplation of the everyday, into a knowing of fundamental and life-affirming truths. He suggests the arts act as a way:

To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile – such is the aim, difficult and evanescent, and reserved only for a very few to achieve. But sometimes, by the deserving and the fortunate, even that task is accomplished. And when it is accomplished – behold! – all the truth of life is there; a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile – and the return to an eternal rest.⁵⁵

Central to arts-based research is the use of the sign systems of the different art forms. For example, dance might be used as the central way of generating data and then be used as a way of analysing and representing the findings of the research. In many arts-based research projects, multiple art forms are used. This reflects the manner in which the boundaries between the arts have been dissolved with the development of new technologies, and the desire of many arts researchers to use a variety of art forms as part of their research. Leavy suggests, 'technological advances have assisted with the development of arts-based innovations. Quite simply, new technologies have allowed for the construction, preservation, and dissemination of many new kinds of "texts." Examples of relevant technologies include the internet, Photoshop, digital cameras, digital imaging technology, and sound files'.⁵⁶

The body in research

The separation and then privileging of the mind over the body is an almost ingrained feature of Western academic thought stretching back to at least Cartesian dualism. The dualistic model constructs the mind as immaterial and distinct from, but with control over, a recalcitrant body. The famous dictum, 'Cogito ergo Sum,' gives such a privileged status to the observing reflexive capacity of the mind over the body that the person is entirely defined without the body. Susan Bordo traces the binary to antecedents including Plato, Aristotle and Hegel and

suggests that the body has been constructed as 'animal, as appetite, as deceiver, as prisoner of the soul and confounder of its projects'.⁵⁷ The long-standing association of the higher order of the intellect with men, while women have been pejoratively associated with the body and all its weaknesses, has silenced and marginalized women. It is not surprising then that the reclaiming of the body in academia has been occasioned through feminist theorists, foremost among these being Judith Butler who asserts that 'bodies cannot be simplistically understood as mere object of thought, and they indicate a world beyond themselves'.⁵⁸ For Elisabeth Grosz the politics of the feminist reclaiming of the body is to dismantle 'the social devaluing of the body that goes hand in hand with the oppression of women'.⁵⁹

As the body almost disappeared within Western academic thought, in the privileging of knowledge that stems from the intellect as opposed to the senses, one can trace the privileging of the sciences over the arts. Cartesian dualism has created other binaries that have been injurious to the arts within the academy. The false binaries of reason versus passion, depth versus surface, form versus matter, reality versus appearance have inevitably situated the arts as distinct from reason and knowing. This has reduced the arts to peripheral and untrustworthy forms of expression rather than ways of knowing.

In more traditional research approaches, nearly everything is mediated through the intellect alone. The body below the neck barely exists in this sort of research. Arts-based research recognizes that we know the world through all our senses, through our bodies, and that we can sometimes better represent that knowledge through our bodies rather than through what comes from our mind alone. The researcher in arts-based research doesn't merely take notes about what she thinks. She responds instinctively, passionately, critically to what she sees, hears, feels, touches, fears, hopes, dreams and recoils from. She moves, she rests, she draws, she paints, she dances and she feels. She responds with her whole body, and through her senses, to what she discovers. She then uses her body to understand and represent that new knowledge. Dixon and Senior argue that the artist is a researcher with her whole organism,

inquiring, testing with the body as well as the mind, sensing and seeing, responding and retesting – a multitude of functions performed simultaneously – registering complexity, then sorting, finding a pattern, making meaning.⁶⁰ Denzin argues passionately for the body in research, when he suggests its 'truth effects' should judge the validity of research.⁶¹ By this he understood that the validity of the claims in any research should be judged by how they resonate within the body. Eisner suggests, 'there is no test of statistical significance, no measure of construct validity in artistically-rendered research. What one seeks is illumination and penetration. The proof of the pudding is the way in which it shapes our conception of the world or some aspect of it'.⁶²

The body, how it performs and how it is performed, is central to the making of theatre. Understanding is created both in and through the body of the actor, but is also understood and felt within the bodies of the audience. The ability of the body to know in ways that are as valid as any other form of knowing is what uniquely positions theatre as a form of research.

Theatre, performance and research

Finding limitations with representing their research through the written word, researchers turned to performance as it:

allows one to retain, at least somewhat, the human dimensions of the life experience qualitative research attempts to study [helping] not to lose research participants in the data or not transform them into dehumanized stereotypes.⁶³

Erving Goffman's contention in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*,⁶⁴ was that 'the theatre of performance is in public acts', and ushered in the influential concept of the performative turn that was progressed significantly by Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. The contribution of the notion was that the performative turn would demystify and democratize the way we could understand and apply performance

within social contexts. Applied theatre, as illustrated perhaps most clearly in approaches practiced by Augusto Boal, extended this concept and included the every day occurrences within communities as the subject for dramatic presentation, using community members as the actors. This theoretical and practical advance allowed the practices to be applied in communities to support them in managing an understanding of everyday conflicts.

James Thompson usefully defines performance as 'an inclusive term for all those artistic practices that include the participation of groups and individuals as they present themselves to others'.⁶⁵ There has been much interest in the manner in which the everyday is performed.

There are a number of methodologies that represent the outcomes of research through performance, but what most share is the use of real peoples' narratives.⁶⁶ Performance provides the opportunity to work with narratives in the realm of metaphors and 'embodied analogies'.⁶⁷

Denzin argues that this shift to the performative in research is driven by recognition that 'it is not enough to want to communicate with ordinary people. That is no longer an option. The critical performance ethnographer is committed to producing and performing texts that are grounded and co-constructed in the politically and personally problematic worlds of everyday life'.⁶⁸ Denzin, not surprisingly, also understands the political implications of such research, including 'a commitment to participation and performance *with*, not *for*, community members. Working in this participatory, activist performance tradition gives back to the community, creating a legacy of inquiry, a process of change, and material resources to enable transformations in social practices'.⁶⁹

We believe that these performances of people's lives must be more than a celebration of their struggles. They must also reveal the manner in which political power has shaped and misshaped these lives, recognizing that in a post-normal world, such performances 'become a way of critiquing the political, a way of analysing how culture operates pedagogically to produce and reproduce victims'.⁷⁰ These performances must also move beyond the present and provide space for hope for the future.

We argue performance research which focuses purely on the forces of oppression, but does not consider the potentiality of hope, is ultimately disempowering for communities. Applied theatre, as a performance of hope and resistance, provides a unique opportunity for an aesthetic research form, one that challenges hegemonic structure and envisions the world as it might be. In this way performance ethnography meets the challenge that Linda Tuwai Smith makes for creative research, that

enables people to rise above their circumstances, to dream new visions and to hold on to old ones. It fosters inventions and discoveries, facilitates simple improvements to people's lives and uplifts our spirits. . . . Creating is about channelling collective creativity in order to produce solutions to Indigenous problems.⁷¹

For Rolling, the forms of narratives employed in performance research need to 'displace an oppressive bias against counterstories in favour of the kind of larger institutional grand narratives that are authorized solely to perpetuate the power of entrenched institutional systems to exert a self-sustaining order over their known world'.⁷²

Applied theatre as resistance

Ben Okri⁷³ claims:

Our old dreams are exhausted. Throughout the world there is a cry for a new way of being, a new freedom for social justice and fairness. One of the most fundamental cries springing from our hearts is that these earth-shaking times are in fact giving us a new chance to re-dream our lives, and we should take it with courage.

Norman Denzin suggests that

performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency. Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative, to foreground

the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience.

In this way performance is a form of agency, a way of bringing culture and the person into play.⁷⁴

Applied theatre, which always exists in the intersection of the aesthetic, the performative and the political can be seen ultimately as an act of resistance. We argue that applied theatre is part of a long tradition of theatre that at its heart contains the possibility of active and participatory citizenship.

From the beginning of theatre as a recognizable art form, and academic discipline in ancient Greece, theatre has served political purposes. In this book we recognize that the central interweave between research and applied theatre is political activity. In the same way as we have described the potential of research, theatre has provided a space for questioning, for challenging and celebrating our lives as individuals and as communities. Aristotle saw theatre as a tool for maintaining state control while others, including Bertholt Brecht, Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal, have recognized its potential as a revolutionary tool. Aware of, but perhaps also confused by, its potential, Plato banned it from the republic. Much mainstream theatre has also operated in many ways to divert and distract people from their everyday world, providing a chance to escape into safer or less troubled worlds. Theatre has become in many of its forms a social opiate in the same way that sport competitions operate. In much Western theatre, actors perform to silenced and invisible spectators. However, over the past 40 years, new forms of theatre which deliberately break down the space between actor and spectator by involving everybody in the making of theatre has signalled a return to the ideal of the theatre creating a space for communal discussion. Motivated by a belief that theatre might make a difference to the social and political lives of individuals and communities applied theatre uses a range of theatrical practices. This new form of theatre, although richly derived from progressive theatre movements predating the form and connected to people's theatre in non-Western traditions, is described with the portmanteau term 'applied theatre'.

Applied theatre refers to theatre not usually made within traditional theatre buildings, but made with and within communities. The term embraces a diversity of theatrical forms including community theatre, theatre in education, museum theatre, prison theatre, theatre in health, theatre for development, reminiscence theatre, participatory performance practices and process drama. In all of these forms, the boundaries between actor and spectator are deliberately blurred as participatory theatre is constructed to address key social issues, or to tell the stories of people who have been routinely dismissed or silenced.

However, Franc Chamberlain suggests that the term was simply 'a good marketing term' used by university theatre departments at a time of strained economic conditions because of its ability to appeal more widely than traditional theatre subjects, and it doesn't have the problematic associations of terms such as 'Theatre for Development'.⁷⁵

Although arising as a response to social conditions that marginalize and silence, applied theatre's ability to make significant or any difference to the lives of its participants has been problematized over recent years. Hero narratives that plagued the early work of practitioners have become increasingly replaced by a questioning of the claims of its most fervent advocates. Walter Pitman suggests that applied theatre is part of the spectrum of hope that allows

men and women to soldier on in the face of those things that seem to be disintegrating, undermining and eroding all that is best of the past and offering an illusory picture of prosperity for all in the future.⁷⁶

We recognize how too often applied theatre has been positioned as the new Amway, the new medicine man's brand of cure all, the panacea for lifting literacy, numeracy, stopping truancy, enabling the disabled, a magical potion for curing all the ills of the world. Pitman himself with his claims recognizes that they 'will bring a smile to the lips of any observer who has listened for too long to the exaggerated claims and expectations of educational leaders on "state occasions"'.⁷⁷ And yet, like Pitman, we believe 'one *might* (emphasis added) translate drama education into a strategy for humans' survival'.⁷⁸ That like Maxine

Greene, we have seen theatre 'arouse persons to wide awakeness, to courageous life.'⁷⁹

Michael Balfour argues that instead of conceiving of applied theatre in romantic and grandiose terms, the most we can hope for is a 'theatre of little changes'.⁸⁰ Applied theatre can also be naively complicit⁸¹ with an agenda for social change that can all too easily be subverted or used against itself by state or corporate funders. Applied theatre is morally and politically neutral in that its processes can also be used to inculcate messages just as easily, by fascist states, to create compliant and obedient masses, as it can be used to promote issues of social justice. Judith Ackroyd raises the question of how drama, when it deliberately neglects the reflective mode, can be used to promote 'truths' where the ends being sought are contestable. She gives examples of how such exercises might be used: to promote smoking, or to encourage a group to run into mortal combat with vigour. She reminds us of the 'need to ensure that our practice comprises more than simulation exercises and role play, that it is truly reflective and that we debate the purposes of what we are doing'.⁸²

The aesthetic in applied theatre

The changing wisdom of successive generations discards ideas, questions facts, demolishes theories. But the artist appeals to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom: to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition – and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation – and to the subtle but invincible, conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts: to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.⁸³

Applied theatre is first and foremost a form of theatre. It is therefore, in its own right, an art form, with distinct features and characteristics. Regardless of its progressive radical heritage, it must always possess aesthetic qualities that move and inspire to emotionally engage the audience and performer. The aesthetics of applied theatre have always demanded participatory forms, often with people without formal theatre training, but there is always the pursuit of beauty in the structure of the work. In our own applied theatre work, we chase the political goals of our work as we delight in the creation of theatre. We recognize that often the theatre we create is with people who have little opportunity to express their lives in aesthetic forms, and have very few chances to luxuriate in constructing beauty among the ugliness of their lives. As theatre makers, whether it is in drama classrooms, prisons, retirement villages, or among the rubble of earthquake zones, we work to make theatre that resonates, in and through the body, with its power and its beauty. Applied theatre is no less theatre, no less pure, than commercial theatre inside purpose built buildings. Applied theatre, like commercial theatre, has a number of agendas it seeks to meet. But first and foremost in our minds is the creation of the aesthetic.

James Thompson argues that the real question to consider is not whether applied theatre has effected change but whether applied theatre causes an affective response in the community it exists in. The creation of beauty and joy he argues should be considered ends in themselves.⁸⁴ It seems to us, that the creation of beauty and joy in a post-normal world where these qualities have disappeared or been banished is first and foremost a political act. Thompson recognizes too that such theatre 'far from a diversion, acts to make visible a better world'.⁸⁵ In citing Scarry 'When we come upon beautiful things they act like small tears in the surface of the world that pulls us through to some vaster space' Thompson aligns his work with a radical politics for applied theatre.⁸⁶ For as Joe Winston reminds us, 'the pleasures of beauty can keep alight the spark of hope in young people'.⁸⁷ He draws our attention to the philosopher Schiller who understood that 'beauty was the best way for humans to apprehend what a good society would actually feel like'.⁸⁸

The positioning we take, about the potential of applied theatre, is to understand that its role is 'not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve, but to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected, to discover new possibilities- new ways of achieving freedom in the world.'⁸⁹

In post-normal times, dominated by geopolitical forces creating the unseen, the unheard and the dismissed as whole classes of people, one of the central roles of applied theatre is to disclose the stories, the lives of those who exist within or beyond the margins. It is an active resistance to this form of silencing and stilling of people, to again create a form of theatre that sits at the heart of democracy.

Perhaps we have come far enough in applied theatre that we can finally reject the false binary of aesthetic versus instrumentalism, and recognize that both are totally and completely entwined. They cannot be meaningfully separated. We understand the quality of the aesthetics will determine the success of any instrumental goal affective or effective in bringing about social change.

Applied theatre and democracy

We take our lead on the possibilities of democracy by understanding as John Dewey⁹⁰ did that democracy is more than the government structures derived from popular suffrage. Dewey understood that democracy was about the realization of human potential through participation in the acts of citizenship. He argues that 'the key-note of democracy as a way of life may be expressed, it seems to me, as the necessity for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together: which is necessary from the standpoint of both the general social welfare and the full development of human beings as individuals.'⁹¹

Applied theatre, when it creates spaces for those regularly denied the opportunities of full citizenship, when it engages in ways which provides opportunities to participate in thinking and talking about the

world to those denied these rights, is a force against the anti-democratic practices of global capitalism. Paolo Freire, who has deeply influenced the pedagogical imperatives of applied theatre through the development of critical pedagogy, was primarily concerned with the creation of pedagogical tools that gave citizens the ability to name and remake the world. For Freire, the aim of critical pedagogy is to enable 'peoples control over their lives and their capacity for dealing rationally with decisions by enabling them to identify, understand and act to transform.'⁹² Freire argues that the educator, rather than deposit 'superior knowledge' to be passively digested, memorized, and repeated, must engage in a 'genuine dialogue' or 'creative exchange' with the participants.⁹³

We argue that the potential of applied theatre lies in its ability to create dialogue and creative exchange in communities where this has been either lost or stolen from citizens. The chances of such theatre creating more than little change is slim, it is unlikely it will transform the worlds in which the marginalized live. However, what it does achieve in its resistance is a humanizing, and a liberating of potential that should never be underestimated politically, socially or culturally.

Applied theatre and research

Applied theatre practitioners and researchers engage in multiple forms of research to elucidate their practice. Common methodologies include reflective practitioner case studies, critical ethnographies, performance ethnography, historical research, action research and arts-based research.

As a form of participatory and democratic theatre making, applied theatre clearly shares many of the same approaches as PAR and CBRD.

Each requires:

- a sensitive and self-reflexive response to the environment
- a willingness to improvise and to take risks
- the employment of multiple roles and changing settings
- a willingness to engage with narrative

Furthermore, both engage with:

- tacit knowledge involving affect and intuition
- personal and social realities
- metaphors and symbols to communicate meanings
- ways of knowing which people use in their everyday lives⁹⁴

More specifically, both Helen Cahill⁹⁵ and Diane Conrad⁹⁶ argue there are many similarities between PAR and applied theatre. Applied theatre, like PAR, often involves a process of inquiry, based on a topic, theme or problem that is relevant to the participants. Cahill observes that both traditions 'are centrally concerned with dialogue, praxis, participatory exploration and transformation' and involve 'collective processes of enquiry, action and reflection. In both processes the relationship between the researcher/practitioner and participants is a collaborative one.'⁹⁷

Beyond using performance as a way of representing and presenting research within communities, applied theatre can be a process of research which informs and shapes every stage of the research process.⁹⁸ Reflecting on her experience of using drama to research with urban high school students, Kathleen Gallagher comments: 'Led by art, researchers, teacher, and students moved differently. We created an experiment in research that changed the terms of engagement.'⁹⁹ Gallagher also argues that drama gives participants as co-researchers the opportunity for 'self-representation', whereas in other methodologies it is the researcher who represents the research subjects:

This is theatre as methodology, theatre as a mode of devising a meta-world; to collaboratively and artistically frame a 'real' research problem or context in order to peer inside it. Engaging youth in research - theatrically - provides a robust environment for questioning, as the work deals in metaphor, or recreates 'real life' situations in which collaborators are able to more freely experiment with alternative strategies and perspectives in testing the validity of their own theories and insights about the world.¹⁰⁰

In much of applied theatre, topics, themes or problems are explored through drama with a group of people. Participants can take on many roles: planning, acting in role, reflecting, critiquing out of role and presenting their work. Applied theatre might involve the participants working directly with an experience or issue from their own lives, or they might work analogously through a fictional frame. Either way, the theatre forms used are designed to create a safe and critical distance from a subject.¹⁰¹ A variety of theatrical traditions might be used: researching, writing and performing a scripted play, verbatim theatre, and storytelling, participatory improvisation, contemporary performance-art, forum theatre, process drama or site-specific performance. Applied theatre can engage people in identifying problems, considering diverse issues, experience and perspectives and imagining/enacting possible solutions or futures.

Decolonizing research methodologies through applied theatre

'Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers who tackle any facet of Indigenous study must have a critical analysis of colonialism and an understanding of Western scientific research as a mechanism of colonization.'¹⁰² Earlier in this chapter we positioned research as a political practice and as part of the progressive battle for social justice. However, we also recognized that research for many Indigenous peoples 'remains inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.'¹⁰³ Brown and Strega argue that 'historically, this has meant that those on the margins have been the objects but rarely the authors of research, and the discomfort that those on the margins feel about adopting traditional research processes and knowledge creation has been interpreted as their personal inability or failings.'¹⁰⁴

Smith¹⁰⁵ argues that through research, both formal and informal, the West has taken ownership of Indigenous properties, knowledge

and beliefs. At the same time, policies that are 'informed by research' impact on all aspects of Indigenous peoples' lives. She argues passionately that decolonizing methodologies mean Indigenous people might begin to reclaim the right to represent themselves in ways that envisage new futures, and to take control of the ways in which Indigenous issues are discussed and handled.

Indigenous researchers recognize how the arts provide different, and more appropriate, ways to represent knowledge than more traditional research forms. Brown and Strega argue how 'aboriginal realities are unique and diverse, and expressing these realities demands creativity and innovation. We encourage Indigenous writers to develop and utilize styles of writing such as narrative, self-location, subjective text, poetry, and storytelling that better reflect Aboriginal realities than do academic prose'.¹⁰⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith recognizes the importance of creativity and research as sites for resistance: 'The project of creating is about transcending the basic survival mode through using a resource or capability which every Indigenous community has retained throughout colonization – the ability to create and be creative.'¹⁰⁷ Denzin argues that: '... participatory performance work honours and respects local knowledge and customs and practices and incorporates those values and beliefs into participatory performance action inquiry'.¹⁰⁸

We understand that central to the process of applied theatre is the manner in which dialogue is established through the aesthetic process. 'Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversations with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them. The sensuous immediacy and empathetic leap demanded by performance is an occasion for orchestrating two voices, for bringing together two sensibilities'.¹⁰⁹

The participatory, democratic processes inherent to applied theatre work can be understood as the bridge which allows for intimate conversations about things which matter to all participants. Applied theatre has, in this context, a particular strength for working within Indigenous communities. Kovach argues,

the conversational method is a means of gathering knowledge found within Indigenous research. The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral story telling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. It is relational at its core.¹¹⁰

Creating new research languages

All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music – which is the art of arts. And it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unrelenting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.¹¹¹

We have struggled at many junctures in the writing of this book with 'old, old words' that have conspired on occasions to rupture our ways of thinking and representation. We have struggled with reductionist scientific terms such as data, the ease in which we can slip into talking about *subjects of research*, *research populations*, *the researched*, *validity*.

We are very aware of Denzin's challenge to 'not use words like data, or abduction, or objectivity. These words carry the traces of science, objectivism, and knowledge produced for disciplines, not everyday people'.¹¹²

And yet, we have struggled to find other words to replace them that don't have the same taint. We recognize the manner in which scientific and neo-liberal language has colonized our own thinking and its expression. In struggling to elucidate new ways of thinking about research, we have privileged an academic discourse that has been largely prosaic and has attempted but mercifully failed to be dispassionate. We have been overt in our political motivations, we believe our aesthetic positioning is also clear, but we recognize we have largely failed to present our work in a way that creates the magic suggestiveness of the artist.

In many ways the history of the relationship between applied theatre and research has been characterized by the desire of many, to break away from old forms of writing and representation within academic journals and books towards new and exciting modalities of representation. Yet there has also been a clinging on to old paradigms, and even older and more defaced words, perhaps no more so in the relationship between applied theatre and evaluation.

Evaluation and applied theatre

The most common form of research in applied theatre has been evaluations of existing programmes. Evaluations are variously called measurement, assessment or research. In these instances, funders typically require an external or internal evaluation of the impact of the programme. These aims may or may not approximate the aims of the researcher. In this section, we do not intend to review the different methodologies that could be applied to the evaluation of applied theatre. Our intention here is to instead review the traditions and practices that have become *habitus* in the field, and to make some observations about how we might strengthen theory and applied theatre through evaluation practices.

As the experienced Australian researcher Lyn Yates says those who commission evaluations (or as she calls it contract research) '... are not interested in some abstract ideal of good research they want

research that specifically meets their needs.'¹¹³ This can compromise the research and the researcher in a drive to meet the needs of the funder, but any researcher that receives funds and works with people has a responsibility to be transparent. Evaluation is one strategy for making the impact of applied theatre transparent. Additionally, the evaluation accounts for the way researchers work with communities, how often scarce resources are expended. Baños Smith believes that it is a key part of their work with children to be transparent and accountable:

We believe it is important to examine our impact so that we are accountable for what we do to those with and for whom we work, especially children themselves, and to our donors (both institutional and individual). In addition, assessing our impact can help us to learn from our experiences to improve our work, develop 'good practice', and to develop evidence based policy that can be used for advocacy. It is also critical that we share this learning with others both within and outside the organisation.¹¹⁴

This approach to evaluation balances the needs for programme enhancement, accountability and advocacy. A strong evaluation in applied theatre will meet several needs and courageous researchers who are able to admit their failings as well as triumphs are critical of the field. A more dangerous outcome in our view than mispending resources is wasting the time of our participants and raising false hope. The fear is that without effective methods of evaluation we will do more harm than good. As Etherton and Prentki argue, in the welter of effects and counter-effects in working with communities, understanding change is an imprecise science. They argue that equality and fairness can assist applied theatre practitioners as they aspire to ethical effectiveness:

But how can these values be assessed and measured over a sustainable period, when the undermining global economic context in which they have to operate counteracts all the good intentions? How can we detect whether 'positive social change' involving greater equality has taken place? Or 'social justice' involving a fairer distribution of resources has been achieved? What are the indicators for a better world in these

terms? In order to contribute to a more equitable world, we, as applied theatre practitioners need to have ideas of how to reform our praxis in order to contribute to long-term solutions. We certainly don't want to continue to be ineffectual while we try to persuade ourselves we are doing some good.¹¹⁵

These are basic and irrefutable questions for transformative principles that are at the heart of applied theatre research projects. The chasm that emerges between elevated ideals and programme realities is not merely a fact of life in research with human participants. If the gap between theory and practice is not understood and allowed for, it is potentially injurious to the credibility of the field. We are not arguing here that we should dump our aspirations for critical hope, democratic change and empowerment but rather that our evaluations should be unflinching in their pursuit of 'what worked' and 'what didn't work'. On occasions, this evaluative honesty may come at the expense of credibility with those who fund the work. The alternative, however, is to pursue a style of evaluation that does little to support the enhancement of programmes and the maturation of applied theatre generally.

Advocacy and research

The struggle for applied theatre to gain traction in the community development sector has led to a predictable relationship between advocacy and evaluation. A young field like applied theatre relies on the communication of its methods and approaches through its successes. We are not arguing here that the link between advocacy and evaluation or research should be severed. On the contrary, one of the prime responsibilities of any applied theatre researcher is to search for the success stories in the programmes we design and deliver with communities. We are arguing here, however, that these kinds of success stories should not be at the expense of robust findings. The current cycle of research and advocacy in applied theatre means that there is often subtle pressure to tell the 'positive story' and ignore the difficulties and

the failures. As Baños Smith argues there has been a tendency by some in the field to make unsubstantiated claims about their programmes suggesting change where the evidence does not exist for such change. She argues if we want to make claims for change or transformation these claims require solid, quality evidence. Baños Smith argues: 'Often reports discuss change, but these claims are not substantiated; in some cases comments are overly generic and unreferenced.'¹¹⁶

Baños Smith¹¹⁷ suggests a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is a persuasive approach in applied theatre keeping in mind the needs of the field and the funder. The quest to find data and findings that will satisfy funders, community members and participants will compel applied theatre researchers to employ a diversity of methodologies in evaluative research. As we mentioned earlier all research methodologies carry their own assumptions and cultural meanings, it is the role of the researcher to understand and locate these assumptions and to design research/evaluation that suits the needs of the communities and of course the requirements of the funder. Above all there is a need to understand the impact we are having on communities whether that supports our advocacy of applied theatre or not. As Baños Smith argues, '... we are not only interested in positive changes, but also in negative changes that may have resulted from our work, and in unintended changes that we had not anticipated.'¹¹⁸ If applied theatre practitioners ignore the whole story of the research we are likely to perpetuate the myth that applied theatre is a 'silver bullet' miraculously healing all manner of social and economic problems. As we mentioned earlier we prefer, Michael Balfour's concept of 'little changes'¹¹⁹ where modest but sustainable claims are made about the impact in the community.

Methodological complexity

Typically, impact in the kinds of projects that applied theatre practitioners engage with are complex and notoriously difficult to measure.

Effective evaluation in applied theatre

In applied theatre evaluation, the initial buzz after the euphoria of performance can provide very positive outcomes for an evaluator. This however, does not constitute the whole picture in applied theatre research. What is required is deep analysis (often over time) of how the process has made 'small change' in the lives and the communities of the participants. This kind of research feeds the growth of applied theatre by asking and responding to intractable and wicked problems. Working in this way is not always simple and requires methodological flexibility and sensitivity.

The growth of our field in breadth and depth is only sustainable if we can look the difficult questions of community change and effectiveness in the eyes and attempt in our own small way to describe how we make a contribution. The fruits of this kind of research will also assist us to develop theoretical positions that can be applied across international programmatic and institutional boundaries. This kind of praxis, born of the connection between theory, research and practice provides the opportunity for growth and development in our sometimes under-theorized field. Our ongoing sustainability depends on our ability to, through innovative, appropriate and flexible research and evaluation, create theory-related practice that builds credibility with funders, bureaucrats, governments and critically with those engaged in applied theatre programmes.

Applied Theatre as Research

In the next section of this chapter we outline our claim in more detail that applied theatre has a place not only as a site to undertake research but also as a methodology *for* research. Up to this point we have been providing a historical, political, cultural and methodological context for applied theatre and its place in research. Our approach from here

on in changes gear a little. While the discussions up to this point have been largely conceptual we would like to spend some time reflecting on the tangible processes of the approach we refer to as Applied Theatre as Research (ATAR).¹²⁷

In presenting an argument that applied theatre can be a research method in itself we are not suggesting in any way a transferable model of research. ATAR calls first and foremost for a politically and socially committed approach that requires research to be responsive to and driven by each unique setting. However, we believe that there are commonalities to approach and method that can be usefully drawn together to exemplify the way in which ATAR can be considered a new and distinct research approach.

Our research journey into ATAR has separately stretched over 30 years of engagement with applied theatre and research and 5 years of working together on several research projects. We have known and written about on several occasions the power of drama and theatre for education and social change, and it seemed to both of us that there was potential for these approaches and methodologies to be applied to the research questions that presented themselves to us on a daily basis. Of course, we were not the only people thinking along these lines. Going back to first principles we wondered how we could conceive of a research method that responded to the multidimensionality of human experience and offered the potential for critical hope. We both were interested in how we might use our skills in making theatre to inform research that perceptively and cogently generated data but simultaneously had the power to reflect that data back to the diverse audiences and communities from which it sprang. The question for us was not whether ATAR was a viable method, but rather why applied theatre was still a fringe dweller in the methodological metropolis. For us, Dixon and Senior's call for arts-based researchers to imaginatively and rigorously engage with the growth of methodologies struck a chord:

Art based research is in its adolescence. We need ongoing, critical reflection on goals, criteria, and limitations, and equally important,

compelling examples of ABR and DBR to understand possibilities and contributions to knowledge and understanding.¹²⁸

To us, this seemed like a logical progression from the process of performance ethnography where the data is collected using qualitative means and then communicated using drama and theatre. We were keen to see how ATAR might unify process and communication by using drama, theatre and other arts forms as the method of data generation and research communication within marginalized and displaced communities of need. Barone and Eisner claim that the unification of arts in the process and dissemination of research is a public service:

A better reason for doing arts based research may be this: to the extent that an arts based research project effectively employs aesthetic dimensions in both its inquiry and representational phases, to that extent the work may provide an important public service that may be otherwise unavailable.¹²⁹

For both of us ATAR coheres arts-based research and performance ethnography into a potent, sensitive and responsive methodology for research with diverse communities. For instance, in a recent project, the data collected provided the raw materials for a video documentary but also was presented to the funder and the community to explain the outcomes of the research. This is a powerful by-product of the research that not merely supports the communication of the research that allows funders and the community to advocate for policy and practice change. Our first research partnership began with a conversation with one of Michael Anderson's PhD students and colleagues. Costa Loucopoulos had extensive experience working in schools with drama education and had recently begun a programme with young Indigenous people in a skills development and leadership programme called Young Mob. Costa introduced us to World Vision, Australia (WVA) to assist in understanding how well the programme was meeting the needs of the Young Mob group and to advise on the redesign of the programme from the young peoples' perspective. At the time we were excited by the

funders' openness to using methodologies that engaged young people in a different kind of research relationship. WVA was interested in research that provided the young people involved with arts-based skills that also developed a vision of what worked in the Young Mob and the potential for a renewed programme based on the needs and desires of the young people who were at the centre of the programme. This seemed like an opportunity for us to use the skills we both had developed in the classroom and in communities through applied theatre programmes in the other sphere of our professional lives.

The underlying principles of ATAR

Performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency. Performance becomes public pedagogy when it uses the aesthetic, the performative, to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites and embodied experience. In this way performance is a form of agency, a way of bringing culture and the person into play.¹³⁰

We have used Denzin's words here as they nominate the power of the dramatic process as an active, morally engaged, aesthetic form that reveals power, status and agency. While Denzin is referring to performance ethnography we would nominate all of these qualities as sitting at the heart of ATAR.

ATAR is an act of political and cultural resistance that creates through the fictional frame a set of propositions that are co-constructed, analysed and then re-presented to communities as a method of creating new knowledge and forging social change. Like arts-based research, ATAR unifies the processes of data generation, data analysis and the dissemination/communication of findings using the rigour and discipline of multiple art forms. However, ATAR has two primary and complementary motivations, the creation of theatre and the performance of political and cultural resistance. As we claimed earlier,

