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Book Review of Redefining Theatre Communities: International Perspectives on Community-Conscious Theatre-Making

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***Redefining Theatre Communities: International Perspectives on Community-Conscious Theatre-Making.* Edited by Marco Galea and Szabolcs Musca. Intellect Books Ltd, 2019. pp. vi + 236. \$35 Hardback, \$28.60 e-book**

This book, written by both academics and theatre practitioners, aims to facilitate the relationship between theatre and communities via creating a “community-conscious theatre” (Galea and Musca 2019, 1). The book is divided into five parts.

Part (I) is a discussion by Stefan Aquilina which examines the history of amateur theatre that has developed in the post-revolutionary Russia. Vicki Ann Cremona and Ruben Paul Borg identify and locate different theatres in the Maltese Islands to facilitate exchange and communication in smaller communities. Lastly, Zoe Zontou places the role of performance and personal narratives at the heart of community-conscious theatre-making (Zontou 2019,49) by examining the Fallen Angels Liverpool Performance Group (Zountou,53).

In Part (II), Maria Elena Capitani discusses the effectiveness of the reworkings of Greek and Roman tragedies in eliciting an ethical rather than more aesthetic-related response from the audience. Puja Gosh explores two rural theatre groups in the Bengal whose different aesthetics freed them from state-supported mainstream theatre (Gosh 2019, 96). Lastly, Marco Galea discusses the “concept of national community with regards to theatre” (Galea 2019, 101) in Malta. Galea concludes that Malta has yet to build a national theatre that can engage with other theatre companies (Galea 2019,111).

In Part (III) Szabolcs Musca discusses festival performance and how to keep the balance between delivering an intelligible performance and reflect the performer’s identity (Musca 2019,120). Evi Stamatiou gives insight into her own experience at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (EFF) (Stamatiou 2019,135). She highlights the artist and the audience commodification which undermine the very globalism of the artistic endeavour. Hasibe Kalkan positively highlights The Ballhaus Naunynstrabe theatre in Kreuzberg (Kalkan 2019,149) Championed by Shermin Langhoff who has attracted more attention to her topics by introducing “new linguistic repertoire” (Kalkan,158) that has forged a new understanding between the host and the migrant community.

Part (IV) documents interviews with theatre directors/practitioners to comment on the outreach of their artistic institutions. Mark O’Thomas, dramaturg and translator for the Royal Court Theatre, talks to director Vicky Featherstone, who comments that The Royal Court’s mission is not to take a ready-made theatre to the community as much as it is about creating a theatre from within that community. The theme of theatre *from* the community is connected to the conversation between Zoe Zontou and George Sachinis about the UrbanDig Project that aims at social engagement by triggering the audiences’ “social imaginary” (Zontou and Sachinis 2019,173). Marius Bogdan Tudor and Ionut Sociu conclude with David Schwartz who is part of O2G that intervenes to recover the social and political role of art in Romania.

In Part (V) Agnes Bakk tackles the digital media performance spaces by examining the Bristol-based artists’ group *Blast Theory*’s latest production, the app *Karen* (a life-coach app which problematizes the issue of personal data protection by collecting data from users and generating a psychological report after assessment). This gamification is continued as Nada Satkova’s discusses *Remote X* (2013-present) by three artists labelled Rimini Protokoll. It targets non-

professional actors who explore the urban space of their city. Lastly, Bettina Auerswald discusses Verbatim theatre (Auerswald 2019,232) with *The Laramie Project*, a play by Moises Kaufman, which aims to restart dialogue to create a space where contrasting voices interact to “[promote] empathy”.

The inclusion of Malta and Romania has dislodged the book’s central argument from the center to the margins thus enhancing the book’s outreach.

The different methods of theatre making from *within* the communities rather than *for* the communities is another strong methodological strategy. The honest, candid account of the theatre artists/ practitioners struggle with funding in their performances has not only opened the discussion of a timely matter under the shadow of Brexit, but also reflected the behind-the-scenes challenges we are most often unaware of. The rich background of the multiple authors adds a layer to their research and personal experience in engaging with marginalised communities. The book is focused on the teaching of performance as research on multiple levels—it provides innovative engagement tools to cater for different audiences; offers suggestions and strategies on how to deal with cultural heritage, memory, vulnerable groups, and forgotten theatre spaces, and finally, imparts upon its reader a methodological approach for any theatre practitioner on how to revive mythical, and cultural stories by bringing the past to the present to discuss current issues.