

## APPLIED THEATRE/DRAMA

Martha Katsaridou <sup>1\*</sup>

Koldo Vío<sup>2\*\*</sup>

The term Applied Theatre/Drama was introduced in 1990 and essentially became prevalent in the following decade. According to Helen Nicholson, the term is used as a kind of shorthand to describe forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies (Nicholson 2014, 3). It is an evolving field and reasonably an umbrella term, as a variety of different practices are applied depending on the context and purpose (Ackroyd 2000).

Balme articulates the legitimate question that arises from the choice of the term Applied Theatre: "Applied to what?" he answers "to those who participate in the theatrical process" (Balme 2012, 220). In Applied Theatre the emphasis is no longer on the audience, who is watching or who is anyway involved in the theatrical process, but on the participant who is actively acting and completing the theatrical act. In Applied Theatre, aesthetics are as important as in "art theatre". Furthermore, an Applied Theatre performance can be presented to an audience that does not participate in the theatrical process, but because there is some connection to it, it appeals to those audiences and reaches its goals.

Some experts in the field distinguish Applied Theatre from Applied Drama, arguing that the first has the theatrical performance and the existence of an audience as its main characteristic, while the latter emphasizes the process itself, without requiring theatrical skills from the participant(s) and without necessarily leading to a theatrical performance (Prendergast & Saxton 2013, xi-xii).

In particular, Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton distinguish practices such as drama therapy and theatre practices in companies, considering them to be more relevant to the field of Applied Drama, which is based on process, i.e. the use, within a group, of theatrical practices rather than the creation of a theatrical performance aimed at an audience.

For the two authors, Applied Theatre, while initially following similar practices to those of Applied Drama, ultimately results in a structured or semi-structured performance involving an audience. Performance creation, in other words, is a distinctive feature of Applied Theatre (Prendergast & Saxton 2009, vi). Applied Theatre clearly aims to either confirm or question socio-political norms in order to critique, highlight the way the world works and lead to social action and change.

Prendergast and Saxton (2009, 3-6) refer to the following forms of Applied Theatre:

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<sup>1\*</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Thessaly, Greece

<sup>2\*\*</sup> Theatre educator, Director

Community-based Theatre, Reminiscence Theatre, Museum Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, Popular Theatre, Theatre in Education, Theatre in Health Education, Theatre for Development and Prison Theatre.

For example, Reminiscence Theatre, Community-based Theatre and Museum Theatre usually set out to reaffirm and honor memory and history. On the other hand, Theatre of the Oppressed, Popular Theatre, Theatre in Education, Theatre for Health Education and Theatre for Development focus more on re-examining the status quo in order to promote positive social change. Prison Theatre varies according to the different objectives and content. Reassertions or undermining intentions are the two ways of re-examining the world, discovering how it works, becoming critically aware of our place in it and seeking social change (Prendergast & Saxton 2009, 8).

It is, of course, worth noting that some experts in the field, despite any differences, find it difficult to distinguish between the terms Applied Theatre and Applied Drama and use them interchangeably with a preference for using the first term. There is a reluctance to make a neat separation between process and performance-based work, and many practitioners acknowledge that they have found a productive consonance between the two (Nicholson 2014, 5). In this context, Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode, who see theatre as the 'direct experience shared when people imagine and behave as if they were other than themselves in some other place and at another time', propose the 'convention approach' in order to convey meanings. They argue that content can not be separated from form, experience from structure, drama from theatre. As they underline 'The conventions selected are mainly concerned with the process of theatre as means of developing understanding about both human experience and theatre itself' (Neelands & Goode, 2000, 1-8).

In this context, creatively linking process and aesthetic outcome as two points of the same continuum, Motos, Navarro, Ferrandis and Stronks (2013) proceed to the following categorization of Applied Theatre/Drama forms, an "open" and flexible categorization that allows for the inclusion of any form of Applied Theatre/Drama:

1. **Theatre in education:** forms of Applied Theatre in formal and non-formal education. Theatre in education is an aesthetic experience that motivates those involved in the educational process to develop new teaching approaches based on theatre (Motos, Navarro, Ferrandis & Stronks 2013, 145). Moreover, it is worth noting that the approach of "theatre in education" can be approached in three forms: 1) as an art form by staging theatrical performances 2) as a teaching tool for approaching various subjects of the curriculum, 3) as a tool of research and social intervention for decision making, problem solving and the development of the student's personal expression (Katsaridou 2014, 177).

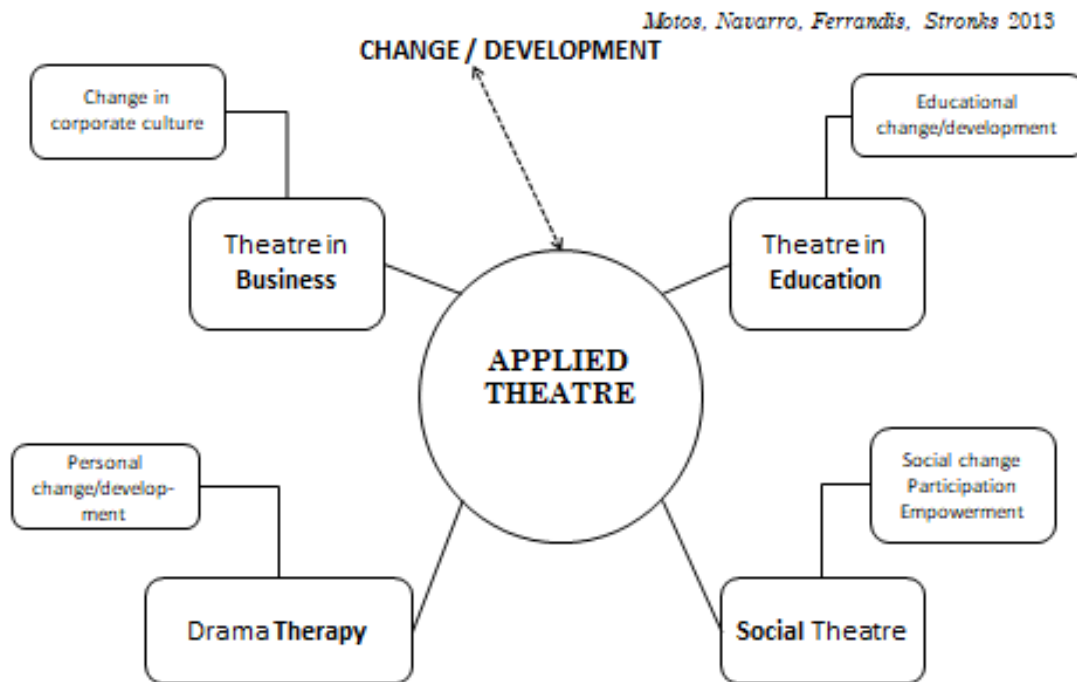
2. **Social theatre:** forms of Applied Theatre in non-formal and informal education. Social Theatre aims at social action/intervention, participation, empowerment and ultimately social transformation. "Art is not merely contemplation, it is also action, and all action changes the world, at least a little" (Tony Kushner in Nicholson 2014, 10). According to Thompson & Schechner (2004, 12), Social Theatre can take place in a variety of places

with different participant(s). Examples of places include prisons, refugee reception areas, hospitals, schools, orphanages, and nursing homes. Similarly, participants in social theatre activities may be local residents, people with disabilities, refugees, prisoners and, more generally, people belonging to vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups. They may also be individuals who have lost their sense of belonging to a group, being internally and externally marginalized.

**3. Drama therapy** (or therapeutic theatre) is "the application of theatre arts in clinical, therapeutic and community contexts, and involves individuals who are experiencing problems or disorders" (Jennings 2005, 17). It is the area of personal change and/or change in group members, understood as therapy, where theatre and dramatic techniques are used as a social-emotional learning tool (Motos, Navarro, Ferrandis & Stronks 2013, 131).

**4. Theatre in companies:** There are various ways of using theatre within companies: in training, in corporate events and in employee counselling. Through the above suggestions, employees have the opportunity to attend theatre performances as a simple audience or even to take part in participatory performances. In addition, theatrical techniques can be used to develop certain skills of employees and/or facilitate the application of acquired knowledge in practice (Motos, Navarro, Ferrandis & Stronks 2013, 219).

Essentially, Motos, Navarro, Ferrandis and Stronks (2013) 'draw' the following map:



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