



***Rebellious Mirror, Community-based Theatre in Aotearoa New Zealand* by Paul Maunder.**

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Reviewed by Judy Cleine.

Rebellious Mirror (based on Paul Maunder's

Canterbury University Film and Theatre Studies 2011 Phd thesis) is an analytic study of community-based theatre in Aotearoa and a personal account of his experiences and observations as a practitioner in the field.¹ One of the secondary purposes of the publication is to enter the unsung story of community-based theatre into the public record, and to provide a methodology for community-based theatre facilitators.

The nature of community-based theatre (as distinct from amateur community theatre) is fraught. As defined by Cohen-Cruz² and applied by Maunder, community-based theatre must have a “communal context”, “reciprocity” and “hyphenation.” Roughly translated, these requirements mean that the dramatic impulse must come from a specific community (coal miners, troubled youth, rape victims); that the process of creating a performance must be cooperative (participants and professionals listening to and learning from each other), and that there be a (“liminal”) educative or cathartic purpose beyond the aesthetic or entertainment value of the performance. In other words, telling Our story to Our community in Our words.

The differing nature of rural and urban communities (German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*) also plays a part in the perceived difficulties (or successes) of community-based theatre. A performance on a mārae, preceded by traditional greetings, whakapapa and acknowledged rules of conduct, will be embedded in a community context. As Jim Moriarty³ of the Māori Theatre Trust says, “We were random, but we had purpose In some places the powhiri went on longer than the show. There was increasing consciousness around Maori telling their own story” (p 71).

In special interest groups in an urban setting (*Gesellschaft*) people from differing ethnic and social backgrounds are often tacked together only by the organisation they belong to, or the trauma they have suffered. “Is it valid to call a group of prisoners, forced by the state to be there, a community?” Maunder asks (p111).

Identity-issues and ownership problems can also muddy the waters. Can a myth from one culture be legitimately borrowed to illustrate a problem in another group? And how does the state, through its form-filling funding policies, dictate what is ‘theatre’ and what is not?

Maunder addresses all of these issues with personal honesty and academic rigour, well organised into five Chapters with sub-headings also listed in the Contents. *Rebellious Mirror*, well designed and illustrated, is supported by a good but slightly incomplete index⁴, a broad bibliography, glossary of Māori terms, photos and extensive footnotes. Sadly there is some inaccuracy of dates.⁵ Nevertheless, the work fulfils Maunder's objective of creating “a resource and advocacy tool for those in the field.”

At times this generalist reader found the academic analysis and terminology difficult to cope with. However, background research concerning the often subversive nature of community-based theatre, together with the anecdotal material, combines to deliver an absorbing study, well worth the telling.

- 1 Paul Maunder is a professional actor and founder (1971) of Wellington's touring Amamus Theatre Group.
- 2 *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* by Jan Cohen-Cruz. New Brunswick, USA: Rutgers University Press (2005).
- 3 Jim Moriarty, Brian Potiki and Rori Hapipi (Rowley Habib) were instrumental in the founding of the 1960's Māori Theatre Trust.
- 4 The Index gives mention of proper names but is less attentive when referencing more conceptual forms, such as ‘forum theatre’, which is indexed for its first mention but not for its many appearances thereafter.
- 5 For example, Greg McGee's *Foreskin's Lament* premiered in 1981, not 1985 (p26); there was no New Zealand International Festival of the Arts in 1989 (p 95); they are always on even years in Wellington, and the “marae theatre programme” Jim Moriarty's Te Rakau Hua o Te Wao Tapu Trust was commissioned to produce was, presumably, *Marae* by John Broughton in the 1992 festival, co-directed by Rangimoana Taylor and Moriarty (who also revived his solo performance of Broughton's *Michael James Manaia* in that festival).