

Editorial

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In April 2017 artists and scholars from around the world descended on New York University for the Program in Educational Theatre's Forum on Ethnodrama: The Aesthetics of Research and Playmaking. This interdisciplinary gathering explored a series of guiding questions, which included the following:

- What are best practices for the development and performance of ethnodramas created within a variety of different contexts (e.g. communities, therapeutic settings, schools, colleges and universities, and professional theatres)?
- Why does such varied terminology exist for this style of data-based playmaking, and what effects does this have on it?
- What is the significance and effect of the interplay between aesthetics and ethics in the creation and presentation of an ethnodrama?
- What are the best methods for assessing the quality of the research and performance/presentation of an ethnodrama?
- What does the future hold for ethnodrama: what's new, what are the trends, where are we heading?

Given the state of world affairs back in April 2017 and our current state at present, these questions highlight the ongoing importance of ethnodramatic work. At a time when so much of what is real and actually unfolding seems unreal, our collective work in ethnodrama takes on an even greater importance. We have largely forgotten how to see and hear one another, bear witness to one another, be in the presence of one another. I believe wholeheartedly that the ethnographic process of gathering data, listening carefully to another's story, actually seeing another person, and re-presenting those stories in theatrical ways, is the only way we can move forward through these tumultuous and unsteady moments of our shared experience. Our mediated understanding of one another via social media platforms has contributed to our estrangement from one another. While geographical distance between people seems to grow smaller and less cumbersome, the chasm between one person's perspective and another's seems to get larger and deeper. Ethnodramatists have great potential to fill in these chasms through our creative processes. Our power lies in our understanding of aesthetics, and the way our artistic choices can make the familiar strange in ways that shine a penetrating light on situations, circumstances, phenomena, and each other.

This invited special issue of ArtsPraxis features voices from that two-day forum and offers just a small snapshot of the varied perspectives and practices that gathered together at NYU. I was keenly interested in sharing the powerful and resonant comments of established leaders in the field alongside new and emerging artists and scholars whose work covers new ground either in form or content. The issue begins with an excerpted version of the forum's opening keynote conversation with **Dr. Patricia Leavy**, best-selling author, book series creator and editor, and internationally recognized leader in arts-based and qualitative research, in which she discusses her origins and evolution as an artist and scholar and shares her thoughts on the aesthetics and ethics of ethnodrama and arts-based research. This is followed by the text of a keynote delivered by leading scholar in ethnodrama and ethnotheatre **Emeritus Professor Johnny Saldaña**, in which he situates our practice as theatre makers within the complex world at large, shares examples of plays from across the genre that illustrate this "art of fabrication," and makes recommendations for how we move forward as artists and scholars in a post-truth era. Emerging

scholar and drama therapist **Darci Burch** introduces the term “ethno-actor” and defines the aesthetic and ethical implications for an actor who performs the speech and gestural patterns of an actual person.

The issue then includes three ethnodramatic scripts, each of which takes a different approach to the form and content of the genre. **Thomas Murray's** *The Right of Way* examines the circumstances surrounding the death of a cyclist in Chicago while simultaneously offering historical contextualization of transportation in the United States, highlighting the growing tensions between cyclists, automobile drivers, and pedestrians. **Jamila Humphrie** and **Emily Schorr Lesnick** explore how young members of the lgbtq+ community choose to express and explain their identities with their interview theatre play, *How We GLOW*, which has been performed over 30 times in venues throughout the United States and Ireland. And the special issue rounds out with *My Other Job* by **Cali Moore** and **Rachel Tuggle Whorton**, their humorous and insightful homage to the actor’s “survival” vocation, and how that plays out across a variety of experiences and contexts.

I hope that this issue can serve as the beginning of more dialogue around ethnodrama and ethnotheatre, as I look forward to learning more about new works and practices that emerge in the coming years. I’m grateful to all of the contributors for their willingness to share their work and their patience as this issue came together over an extended period of time. Also thanks to *ArtsPraxis* editor Jonathan Jones for this guidance and ever steady hand in completing this process.

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Joe Salvatore is the director of the [Verbatim Performance Lab](#) and teaches courses in ethnodrama, ethnoacting, new play development, and applied / community-engaged theatre in NYU Steinhardt’s Program in Educational Theatre. Verbatim Performance Lab projects include *The Democratic Field* (with Artists’ Literacies Institute), *The Serena Williams Project*, *The Veterans Story Collecting Project* (Johnson County, KS), *The Kavanaugh Files* (including a live version at Geva Theatre Center), *No(body) but nobody*, *The Grab ‘Em Tapes*, *The Moore / Jones*

Challenge, *The Lauer / Conway Flip*, and *Of a Certain Age* (in collaboration with The Actors Fund). In 2017, Joe collaborated with economist Maria Guadalupe (INSEAD-France), to create [*Her Opponent*](#), a verbatim re-staging of excerpts of the 2016 presidential debates with gender-reversed casting (nominee: [Off Broadway Alliance Award](#) for Best Unique Theatrical Experience). He is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, American Alliance for Theatre and Education, Association for Theatre in Higher Education, and an alumnus of the Lincoln Center Directors Lab.