

Editorial

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In the first issue of *ArtsPraxis* published in 2004, Philip Taylor introduced the journal as an electronically published periodical posted at the Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions at New York University's website. The journal offers a platform for scholars, artists, educators, therapists, administrators and community workers in the arts to engage in evaluative, analytical, and reflective dialogues concerning diverse topics in the field. According to Dr. Taylor, "*ArtsPraxis* [was] a deliberate title choice highlighting the critical orientation of the publication to stimulate good and collegial debate across the art forms." I hope the articles in this issue will inspire further conversations among readers, across disciplines, with the authors, and out in the field, as the terms ethnotheatre, ethnodrama, and theatre for social justice continue to evolve.

In line with the Call for Papers, the umbrella definitions we are working from in this issue are intentionally broad to encourage a dialogue regarding the many diverse practices that fall under these categories. Ethnotheatre references applied theatre presentations

powered by authentic human stories. Theatre for Social Justice aims to elevate discourse on diversity and inclusion. The 2006 NYU Forum on Ethnotheatre and Theatre for Social Justice was a lively exploration of how theatre contributes to culture and politics.

Key questions the Forum asked participants to consider:

- What is theatre for social justice and what contribution does ethnotheatre make to social discourse?
- How can ethnotheatre operate as a qualitative research method?
- Is there an ethnotheatre aesthetic?
- Who are the beneficiaries of theatre for social justice and ethnotheatre?
- How is Theatre for Social Justice, in its diverse manifestations, reflected in our arts education research practices?
- What are some of the ethical issues involved when we use theatre as a tool in qualitative research?

The four authors contributing to this issue of *ArtsPraxis* consider these topics and offer their own perspectives. In the true spirit of this journal, each of the authors invites further dialogue regarding their article and the issue as a whole through email communication. You will find the authors' emails at the beginning of each article.

Johnny Saldaña – Reflections on an Ethnotheatre Aesthetic

To begin the conversation, Saldaña invites us to consider his five assertions regarding an emerging ethnotheatre aesthetic that weave together the authentic, artistic, and academic elements of the art form.

Careful to own all of his definitions and assertions, Saldaña has emerged as one of the leading scholarly and artistic pundits on the topic. I use this term in its most reverent form, taken from the Sanskrit origins to mean wise man or learned teacher. This status becomes even more apparent as we read all of the subsequent authors in this journal issue referencing his writing on the subject in their articles. Saldaña recognizes the evolutionary nature of the genre and reminds us that the field will continue to change in the future. With deep humility he reminds us that these are his musings on the topic and his personal goal as an artist is to develop an ethnotheatre aesthetic that captures on stage a

complex rendering of ethnotainment.

Nancy Putnam Smithner – The Women’s Project: A Director’s Perspective on Creating a Performance Collage

If some moments in life are truly worth living, then Smithner reveals in her article that certain events are certainly worth reliving, and indeed even worth sharing with an audience. She describes the journey of fifteen women, including herself as director and curator of the project, in creating a unique, insightful and compelling performance collage about the human condition. Smithner reminds us of the intersection fed by ethnotheatrical practices; “[m]erging text (autoethnographic narrative) and the body (the performative aspect), the act of performance allows researchers to ‘re-inhabit’ their bodies as they build knowledge.”

As an audience member who witnessed this performance at The NYU Forum on Ethnotheatre and Theatre for Social Justice, I was struck by the grace with which the women on stage performed their auto-ethnographies, spoken word poetry, rants, and monologues, and I marveled at the adept use of physical movement and characterization that wove the fabric of their lives and cultures together. Smithner and the other women illustrated how ethnodrama expands our field of possibilities both as an art form and as research. Through this project, each of these women took on the role of autoethnographic researcher and wrote her narrative; the director had the opportunity, I might even say the responsibility, to hold a mirror up at various angles and reflect the lives of these performer/researchers onstage. Finally, as performers, these women embodied some of the most tender, frustrating, painful, and vivid memories of their lives. Through her article, Smithner invites us to sit in the front row and peer into the context and process through which this performance collage was developed and complements this approach with a theoretical discussion of the feminist and post-colonial lenses she employed as a director/co-researcher in this project.

George Belliveau and Vincent White – Performer and Audience Responses to Ethnotheatre: Exploring Conflict and Social Justice

Belliveau and White manifest the true potential and mission of *ArtsPraxis* through engaging in a dialogue with one another regarding the methodological and ethical issues involved when employing ethno-theatre as a performance and research genre. They further extend the

discussion by highlighting the responses and feedback of participants and audience members of certain ethnotheatrical events to critically examine the efficacy and potential of ethnotheatre. These authors raise fascinating points for us to consider as practitioners and audience members of ethnotheatre, and they too highlight the evolutionary nature of these practices.

I am reminded of the talking books the late Paulo Freire engaged in with critical educators such as Ira Shor, Donaldo Macedo, and the late Myles Horton, among others. These two authors speak to one another, question each other, and reflect back to the other their impressions of the art form as both a performative act and applied research. Belliveau and White's contribution to the examination of ethnotheatre frames it as a theatre of the people, one through which they, as researchers, give careful consideration to the purpose, nature and ethical implications of the dramatic engagement. They are always conscious throughout the research and artistic processes of who the intended audience is for the work.

As authors, they recognize that although they engage in an academic form of playwriting through this article, their piece is not meant for performance. However, they do set the stage for us to further the dialogue about ethnotheatre and theatre for social justice.

My Final Reflections as Guest Editor

One of the greatest pleasures I have taken in editing this second issue of *ArtsPraxis* is the ability to celebrate such diverse voices from the field. The authors published here represent multiple identities in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, country of origin (out of respect for our Canadian colleagues, I have honoured the original spelling forms throughout this issue), and scholarly and artistic disciplines. This issue brings together voices who have decades of theatre experience and are new to the field of arts-based research, and educational researchers who are just getting their feet wet in terms of theatrical practices. We welcome any and all discussions and inquiries about the articles and projects published in this issue of *ArtsPraxis* and look forward to furthering the conversation with all of you.