

EDITORIAL

Getting Inside Culture

Ethnography is an *embodied practice*; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing. The embodied researcher is the instrument. (Emphasis original, Conquergood, 1991, p. 180)

Drama and theatre are intricately linked to ethnography and the understanding of culture. Raymond Williams (1983) sees drama as a way of getting cultural analysts through to the fundamental conventions that group people together in society. Dorothy Heathcote urges drama teachers to think and work like “archaeologists” or “ethnographers” to look for meanings and implications beneath the surface of dramatic actions (Wagner, 1999, p. 73). Drama and theatre education is embodied practice as ethnography is. The ethnographer and the drama practitioner and researcher must “be there” to grasp both verb and non-verbal means of communications as well as to situate experience and practice within broader analytical frames.

Dwight Conquergood (1991) has taken a radical rethinking of ethnographic inquiry in terms of body, borders and performance in his seminal paper “Rethinking ethnography”. The rethinking is a response to the crisis of representation of the time when colonialism collapsed and when the post-structural and the postmodern thinking began to critique detached and neutral ways of observing and explaining “raw” data across natural sciences, social sciences and humanities disciplines. To rethink ethnographic practice out of the crisis of representation, Conquergood brings in the lens and the practice of performance. The embodied ethnographer observes and senses the “interpersonal contingencies and experiential give-and-take” in her research site (p. 181). She is physically present not only in *space* observing cultural practice, but also in *time* listening, speaking and sharing the rhythm, pace and sounds of the culture she temporarily resides in. With the fact that geographical boundaries and borders that were once discretely divided and patrolled is now crisscrossed and negotiated in the post-colonial globalized

world, Conquergood argues for a view of identity as “a performance in process” that can be “recollected”, “recontextualized” and “refashioned” rather than as something to be claimed in entity (p. 185). “Performance-inflected vocabulary” makes its ways into ethnography informing ethnographers’ ways of thinking and talking about people as actors who improvise creatively and playfully, and express themselves symbolically when negotiating and reinterpreting their everyday lived experiences. Now, the embodied ethnographer becomes “performance-sensitive” and engages in the “coactivity” or “co-performance” with the individuals in her research site (pp. 187, 188).

In relation to this radical rethinking of ethnography is thinking new questions for performance as practice and as a mode of inquiry. In this regard, Conquergood (1991) asks: while the performance lens offers a view of culture, identity and the world as a performance in process, how could we think performance when we move it outside of the theatrics and the aesthetics and situate it at the centre of everyday lived experience? In terms of ethnographic praxis, how does the performance model shape the fieldwork practice and the positioning of the researcher? As far as writing and publishing research report is concerned, what implications does hearing the voices from the field interpreted through the voice of the researcher have for all those involved in it: the listening audience, the performing researchers and those whose stories were being voiced and performed? Last but not least, questions about interrelations between performance and power: “How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology? How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony? How does performance accommodate and contest domination?” (p. 190) These sets of questions have no doubt inspired lots of subsequent works in the field of ethnography and the field of applied theatre/drama.

The papers gathered together in this issue offer opportunities to see different aspects of embodied ethnographic inquiry and border-crossing performance practices in drama and theatre education. Joe Winston researches the use of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in an early-years English as an additional

language classroom. He argues that the dark side to the Shakespeare story such as jealousy, trickery, rivalry, cruelty, and the language of power and aggression are all part of a good story that is helpful to children's moral as well as language development. Children "know there is darkness in the world" and a good story for drama is one that "includes rather than excludes this darkness", Winston contends. With the right use of visual, rhythms and sounds, drama appeals to children's senses and emotions, making learning opportunities available for them. To facilitate drama pedagogy in the classroom, teachers need to re-delegate their authority, and Winston proposes three images for teachers: the storyteller, the referee and the magician or "enchanter". Winston's research suggests that the power of drama that could nourish the moral and empathetic children in early years education lies in the everydayness of the stories which contain both the dark side and the bright side of things. The politics of drama resides in the aesthetic pleasure from the creative and playful use of evocative language that get children connected to, rather than detached from, the language used in daily interactions.

Herlin Putri's reflective practitioner research on "ensemble pedagogy" to teaching and learning Shakespeare in a mixed English ability drama classroom provides a good companion piece to Winston's paper. Putri's paper examines how it is like when students are on their feet "doing" Shakespeare as a way of "living his plays by imagining, acting and performing them out". She underpins "ensemble pedagogy" as proposed by Jonathan Neelands with Vygotsky's learning theories, and the Royal Shakespeare Company's action approach to Shakespeare. While at first glance, ensemble learning looks like usual script-reading activities, Putri and her collaborating teacher have observed that ensemble pedagogy opens up a space where students feel safe because they "got their friends with them". "In the ensemble, everybody is actively engaged in exploration, commitment and collaboration toward a shared goal to think and work together", Putri writes. This in turn has invited Putri to "dethrone" her teacher power for the facilitator's role, enabling students to perform their learning "with" the peers. The shift from a tightly scheduled (drama) classroom to a more open collaborative learner space requires *trust*, which, Helen Nicholson (2002) argues, is itself a performative

act that is “contingent on context and is continually negotiated and re-negotiated as new and unexpected circumstances arise” (p. 85).

Border-crossing practices as Conquergood has proposed in his rethinking of ethnography and performance is something familiar to researchers and practitioners in applied drama and theatre education. The final two papers in this issue identify some of these practices. Karen Pik-yiu Wong’s article discusses her action research using “Enhanced Forum Theatre” in parenting, an area of concern in the field of social work. Wong details how the parent-participants intervened in the performance process. The major research concern is whether and how forum theatre facilitates reflections and effect changes among parents in their parenting. Forum theatre, both the classic and the enhanced models, works best with a very concrete incident of oppression or conflict. As an action researcher-practitioner, Wong critically reflects on the importance of understanding the complexity of parenting when using forum theatre as an intervention. Wong’s reflection suggests, on the one hand, tensions and dynamics that underlie this form of theatre and the evolving aesthetics in response to the needs and the context of the participants. On the other hand, her reflection implicates the embodied ethnographer’s own call to be “inside” the culture of parenting, and to locate their experiences, oppression and conflicts within the everyday parenting activities and the wider social contexts.

The final paper in this issue by Sheng-tao Fan discusses the cultural phenomenon on using improvisatory forms of drama and performance in corporate learning in Taiwan. Fan discerns that the Laozian notion of creativity differs from the capitalist individualistic creativity as it celebrates pluralism. This openness to pluralism that is at work in the Taiwanese corporate culture, Fan argues, “can soften or dissolve power structures in business.” He would like to see future research to review the impact of performative experiences on the individual’s everyday lived experiences. Fan’s essay offers an interesting thick description of his own corporate training experiences using improvised musical performance. His participants experimented with sounds and rhythm, and made musical ensembles out of

everyday objects like oil bucket, trash can and swatter. In Fan's case, sounds and rhythms generate music, and they also point to the cultural dimension of time, pace and rhythm, if we take on the critical ethnographer's sensibility and sensitivity that Conquergood (1991) has suggested. To think in this light, we might as well ask: How do participants conceive and understand time and temporality socially, artistically and experientially in the corporate environment? How does corporate culture organize time, and how could and would performing music and rhythm enable the participants to make sense of the organized time? What emerges out of this thinking could be yet another line of ethnographic inquiry into performative corporate training.

References

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