

## **Introduction: On Practice-Based and Applied Theatre Research**

It is with great pleasure that I take on the role of co-editor of the *Canadian Journal of Practice-based Research in Theatre* with this issue. I look forward to collaborating with my colleague and co-editor Claire Borody on future issues, as we share a wish to create a peer-reviewed venue for archiving Canadian theatre-based artistic and pedagogical processes that might otherwise be lost.

When Dr. Borody invited me to move from the Editorial Board of CJPRT into the co-editing of the journal in the summer of 2010, I found the timing to be fortuitous. In May of this year, I organized and co-presented on a panel at the Congress of Learned Societies dedicated to a SSHRC funded applied theatre project. The collection of papers presented offered panelists' multiple perspectives on the applied theatre component of a collaborative study on older driver safety, carried out with co-researchers in the Centre on Aging at the University of Victoria. It seemed to co-investigator Dr. Warwick Dobson and me that these papers were worthy of publication as a valuable record of the challenges to be faced and negotiated when creating a piece of *research-based theatre*. As our focus in the panel was very much on practice—that is, how each of us in our various roles in the project saw both the processes and outcomes of the applied theatre component—I felt that the script and accompanying papers would be an excellent fit with CJPRT. Fortunately, Dr. Borody agreed and thus this special issue has come into being as a contribution to a journal I am very pleased to see making its own entrance into the field of Canadian theatre studies.

I see a deep resonance between practice-based research in theatre and the research-based applied theatre project presented in this issue. For me, practice-based research attends to the processes involved with either the creation of a theatre piece in the 'artworld' or the pedagogies carried out to transfer practices for students to create effective and innovative theatre in educational institutions (or other settings). I am an interdisciplinary scholar in both theatre studies (specializing in applied theatre, devising and audience studies) and drama/theatre education (specializing in process drama, secondary level drama and audience education). My interdisciplinary experience has led me to see theatre practice

broadly interpreted as *both process and pedagogy*. The rehearsal and performance practices carried out by professional or community-based theatre artists are one kind of process. The pedagogies of theatre artists who make some or all of their living teaching in schools, communities, universities and conservatories across the country involve theatre practices and processes as well, although these may need to be adjusted and adapted for the particular needs of students/participants. Thus, in my co-editorship of CJPRT, I am just as interested in excellent renderings of innovative pedagogies in theatre studies, or drama/theatre education, as I am in the ground-breaking practices of Canada's best theatre artists and companies.

Within the script and papers presented in this special issue are found many valuable reflections on both process and practice in *applied theatre*. While this term is becoming more accepted and understood, we are well aware at the University of Victoria that we offer one of the very few undergraduate and graduate programs in this field of 'extra-theatrical' —as in community-based and most often working with non-professional participants—practice in Canada (two other programs, with their own distinct approaches, are offered at Brock and Concordia Universities). When we were invited to participate in the SSHRC grant proposal that led to this project, it was perhaps with some small sense of trepidation that we entered into the arena of theatre created within research contexts.

Adding the word 'research-based' to theatre can bring with it a strong sense of conditions and constraints that many theatre artists, valuing their artistic freedom above all else, may be inclined to resist. And yet there is a history of research-based theatre, cited across the papers in this issue, that offers some inspiring and exemplary practices. I particularly value the work of Ross Gray, Jim Mienczakowski and Johnny Saldaña in this regard. I also see the works of theatre artists, in projects like: Anna Deavere-Smith's *Let Me Down Easy*, *Twilight: Los Angeles*, and *Fires in the Mirror*; Moises Kaufmann's *The Laramie Project*; Jessica Blank and Eric Jensen's *The Exonerated*; and Tricycle Theatre's Tribunal Plays, among others, as theatre projects with strong research components, even though the artists involved may not identify themselves as researchers.

Indeed, we did encounter some areas of tension and negotiation as a theatre team. We were presented with a white binder filled with hundreds of pages of transcribed and thematically coded focus group data by our colleagues and collaborators from the Centre on Aging, who specialize in the general topic of aging and the particular one of older driving, which was the focus of the study. This omnipresent white binder became both a blessing and a burden in the devising process, as is reflected upon by many of the contributors to this issue. Jerome Bruner's notion of 'disciplined intuition' – introduced in Trudy Pauluth-Penner's essay then further explored in Lauren Jerke's—offers a much-needed understanding of how the theatre artist's free play of the imagination may be successfully harnessed for the purposes of research-based theatre making.

As you read through the script generated by the applied theatre team and written by Dr. Warwick Dobson, and the papers reflecting on the processes involved with both the creation and performance of *No Particular Place to Go*, I invite you to consider your own contexts and locations in relation to the challenges and potential rewards of applied and/or research-based theatre. What opportunities might there be in your educational institutions or communities to enter into the kind of collaborative project we were part of in this study? How does research inform your practice, your teaching or the work of theatre artists you admire? What kinds of research methods might generate data that would prove to be most useful in a research-based theatre project? These questions, and more, came to me as I edited this special issue, which I now invite you to enter into and enjoy.

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