

Ethical Discourse in Applied Theatre: A Historiographic and Curricular Literature Review

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Introduction¹

For more than twenty years, applied theatre has been recognized as a branch of theatre practice interested in community-based interventions of many kinds. Scholars and practitioners in applied theatre come from a diverse range of backgrounds: some from theatre studies, others from theatre/drama education, theatre for development, theatre of the oppressed, and drama therapy. Ethics has been a key and necessary topic in the scholarship, but the multidisciplinary of the field makes it more challenging to “pin down” ethical discourses because the wide variation in these subfields has a bearing on how ethics is both understood and addressed. This chapter endeavors to sort through the threads of this discourse in order to identify and recommend to readers (1) the most noteworthy published contributions to ethics over time (historiography) and (2) how these readings, presented as a proposed curriculum on ethics in applied theatre, could be seen as working towards a fuller understanding of the significance a considered ethical stance has for our practice.

I take a historical curriculum development approach to this ethical discourse review by selecting material that could be deemed suitable for an upper-level undergraduate or postgraduate applied theatre course on this topic. This review was carried out with sources up to

2020; of course, over time the discourse will continue to expand and new sources will need to be added. As in any literature review, the risk for the writer is always to miss key sources through oversight or through the author's positionality, as discussed in the Introduction (pp. 3–4).

Key Texts

The first two books from the Global North to appear in the field with the term “applied theatre” in the titles were Philip Taylor’s *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community* and James Thompson’s *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond*, both published in 2003. Like many others, Taylor came to community-based applied theatre practice with a background as a drama educator. In chapter 4 of his book, Taylor writes about ethics from this educational perspective, asking, “Whose standards is the applied theatre enforcing? How do these standards interface with the communities who experience applied theatre? ... What makes applied theatre an ethical theatre?” (76–7). He then looks at a number of applied theatre projects and considers their ethical positioning. One of these exemplars involves drama therapy (82–5), and although Taylor does say, “in the applied theatre there is a desire to transform the nature of the world in which we live, [but] teaching artists are not operating from a therapeutic perspective” (85), there is a concern here around including a drama therapy case study at all. This might cause some confusion for an emerging applied theatre artist, and the boundaries between *therapy* (requiring certified expertise) and *therapeutic* (the more universal benefit of art-making) need to be held with ethical care. Taylor goes on to look at more applied theatre-oriented projects, in particular one he led on domestic violence. The project made use of verbatim theatre techniques in which participants’ words were crafted into dialogue and presented by teaching artists to a community audience affected by this issue (90–8). He concludes his chapter with

some more questions that begin to define how applied theatre workers could think about ethics:

How do applied theatre artists document a sustained change in people's lives?

Should applied theatre workers even be interested in documenting such change?

Is it ethical for applied theatre workers to begin to construe their mission as one of creating social change?

What moral authority do applied theatre artists share other than a commitment to theatre as an aesthetic medium to help participants act, reflect, and transform? (100)

These questions come with a useful warning: "Applied theatre workers cannot be conned into thinking they are the saviors of the community" (99). Indeed, it is key for those in the field to recognize when applied theatre projects are offered as weak substitutes for real-world progressive sociopolitical policies and programs. As Augusto Boal (1979) says, theatre provides the space for "the rehearsal for the revolution" (122) but cannot be confused with real change brought about by much more complex processes than creating and performing a play. So what can applied theatre do for its participants? It can provide the space and the opportunities for communities to begin the process of understanding what lies at the base of the issues they are facing. In this way they may be better prepared when real opportunities for social change arrive.

In "Becoming Ethical," Chapter 5 of *Applied Theatre* (2003), Thompson begins by stating there are "problems of a value-based practice constantly tested by the flexibility demanded by context" (173). Ethics are inherently values-based, as are aesthetics; how our values (and those of participants) inform both what we do and how we do it are key to passing the "test" of being flexible within shifting contexts. He reminds scholars in the field of their ethical responsibility, in that, "[b]y putting pen to paper, we engage in the generation of ways of seeing the world" (175) and that "[a]ny ethnographic account of a theatre practice will ... at its heart be dealing with the ethics of knowing and seeing"

(178). The chapter reflects on three projects led by Thompson in Sri Lanka in which a range of ethical moments are addressed. The third of these reflections—on a project with former child soldiers living in a rehabilitation camp (which inadvertently led to a subsequent attack on the camp)—moves Thompson into an evocative poetic piece of writing “more jagged, with more questions and in note form” (190): “*Ethically my tattered wings were (are) flapping. / I have responsibility because I have searched out this work*” (191, emphasis in original). In a powerful postscript, Thompson relates that after the rehabilitation project, the camp was attacked and “29 young men were killed and many more were injured” (197). As Taylor does in his chapter, Thompson ends with questions: “Implicated witness? Participant observer? Irresponsible responsible? This is the place where it ends? Ethically my shattered wings clink and clank with their knives” (197). Thompson went on to become a central ethical thinker and writer in the field of applied theatre, perhaps based in part on learning that this horrific event followed his theatre-based intervention. Thompson’s next two books also serve as ethical exemplars: both *Digging up Stories: Applied Theatre, Performance and War* (2005) and *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (2009) offer much thoughtful reflection of benefit to applied theatre workers.

In *Digging up Stories*, Thompson expresses his ethical concerns around asking participants to tell and perform their stories in a war-torn setting:

When creating theatre with vulnerable or marginal communities, the ethics of our practice must be a paramount concern, and I believe some of the most difficult issues arise within the structures through which groups tell stories or are invited to participate in that telling. [...] By asking for, witnessing or retelling stories, when does the theatre practice become implicated in the horrors of the situation it displays? (24–5)

He goes on to conclude that “[t]he digging up of stories in this context [in places of war] can become an act of exploitation rather than

support” (39) and that, more generally in applied theatre, “[w]e must question our right to ask a community to participate in the creation of performances about the substance of their lives” (40).

By 2009, in *Performance Affects*, Thompson was able to crystallize his ethical approach by drawing on a diverse range of ethical philosophers: Michel de Certeau, Simon Critchley, Jacques Rancière, Elaine Scarry, and Emmanuel Levinas among them. He writes:

Participatory theatre should focus on affect rather than effect. This would seek to avoid the anticipation or extraction of meaning as the primary impulse of an applied theatre process (both in execution of projects that communicate or teach and in the interpretation of those projects that report on effects, problems solved and things learnt). Working with affect awakens individuals to possibilities beyond themselves without an insistence on what the experience is—what meanings should be attached. (111)

Thompson concludes this influential book by suggesting that “[w]orking to keep people alive, to value their and others’ lives, and to announce proudly that they are worthy of living and being valued for being alive, is then central to the politics proposed here. And happiness, joy and celebration are indispensable sensations in this act of redistribution” (179). Indeed, this shift in emphasis from effect to affect has led to what has been called the “celebratory turn” (Prendergast and Saxton 2020, 11) in applied theatre—a move, for the most part, due to Thompson’s important writing on ethics.

Helen Nicholson’s *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* appeared in 2005 alongside Thompson’s *Digging up Stories*. Here, Nicholson considers the praxis of applied drama (inclusive of performed work as in applied theatre) that “bears witness to a plurality of voices and experiences and maintains a commitment to radical social democracy” (157). She envisions applied drama/theatre as a form of “active performative citizenship ... concerned with the ethics of how people interact with each other and with their environment” (36). Nicholson addresses ethical concerns throughout the book, particularly so in her

final chapter where she poses, and attempts to respond to, a crucial question: “What does it mean to act ethically in contexts where there are ‘competing conceptions of the good life’ [citing Chantal Mouffe] amongst participants and practitioners in applied drama?” (157). In her reading of “gift theory” (citing French social anthropologist Marcel Mauss), which positions the act of gift-giving on a spectrum between disinterested and self-interested motives, Nicholson adds more questions:

What do we, as practitioners, expect in return for our labours? Artistic satisfaction? The participants’ acquisition of skills or abilities? Do we ask participants to adopt new ways of thinking or different political values? Do we expect them to change their behaviour in particular ways? In turn, how far might our own perspectives alter as a result of the work? What about the funders? Do they have expectations of a return? (161)

She goes on to consider Derrida’s critique of gift-giving, concluding that “this theoretical reading of the gift relationship acknowledges the risks, contradictions and uncertainties of theatre-making in community settings” (163). Our role as practitioners is not to “*give* participants a voice ... but to create spaces and places that enable the participants’ voices to be heard” (163, emphasis in original).

Next to appear as a key text for the emerging field of applied theatre was *The Applied Theatre Reader*, edited by Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (2009). Introducing a section titled “Ethics of Representation,” consisting of eight chapters, co-editor Preston lays out useful ethical questions:

- How appropriate is our preferred aesthetic for engaging with the politics of speaking *with*, *for* or *about* participant communities?
- How do we deal ethically with moral and/or political tensions at the heart of the stories and texts that are created?
- How can we work sensitively, and create a genuine climate of dialogue and reciprocity with participants and participant communities?

- How are issues of voice, authority and ownership reconciled in the process of constructing narratives and representations that result?
- How will representations that have been created impact in diverse, unpredictable and political contexts? (68, emphasis in original)

This set of ethical questions is followed by section chapters that are more theoretical than practical but do provide clear sociopolitical positions underpinning some (not all) applied theatre practice. These chapters—by Edward Bond, Chantal Mouffe, bell hooks, and Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger—make clear (although only Bond is addressing theatre practice as such) that applied theatre is a social practice with political effects involving critical, radical, feminist, and ethical positioning that must be clearly understood by all involved. Representing the “other” lies at the heart of ethics in applied theatre; as Amanda Stuart Fisher explores in her chapter “Bearing witness,” “To enter into the confidence of ... testimony draws the listener into an *ethical* relationship with the other” (114, emphasis in original). Drawing on French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (who is frequently cited across this literature), Stuart Fisher reminds us that “to become a listener or an audience member of testimony, is to encounter what Emmanuel Levinas describes as the ‘infinite responsibility to the other person’” (114). Our ethical role as facilitators is to remember Levinas’s words, echoed by Stuart Fisher:

[T]he performance of testimony should perhaps always remain unsettling and never reassuring. This is because it brings before us our own vulnerability in the face of the incommunicable and allows us to glimpse the limits of our understanding of the world and of our place within it. In order to respond to the demands of testimony we must open ourselves up to this unsettling encounter with the other. (114)

We cannot assume a sameness between participants and ourselves, particularly when working with participants who have or are still experiencing trauma in their lives.²

The next book to appear that contributes to this review is *Theatre & Ethics* by Nicholas Ridout (2009). This short monograph is meant for a

theatre generalist audience, not specifically an applied theatre reader. That said, the book makes an excellent addition to both this review and to a possible course on ethics in applied theatre; it is readable and offers a historical survey of ethical thinking in theatre, both offstage and on. Ridout begins with a line from Sophocles' play *Philoctetes*, "How shall I act?," which is, in essence, the key ethical question. He then traces a line through Ancient Greek philosophy (Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato) and drama (Sophocles, Aeschylus), with a focus on Plato's rejection of theatre in his ideal Republic. He reinterprets this rejection as, in fact, Plato's demand "that theatre ought to justify itself in terms of the contribution it might make to an ethical life" (24). Ridout correctly notes the Western Eurocentrism of his historical tracing—another important ethical reminder for applied theatre practitioners:

Because this [modern European] theatre presents its values as "universal" and its culture as something to which the whole of humanity may aspire, it makes the implicit claim that anyone who does not participate in that culture (foreigners, people who do not go to the theatre, for example) is somehow defective. The universal concept of "human" which this theatre seeks to promote can easily lapse into "humans like me". (40–1)

In the third and final part of this all too brief monograph, Ridout notes Brecht's interest in the ethical dilemma, a stopping-point in many of his plays where an audience can wrestle with how a character may proceed, a tactic that is continued in the work of Augusto Boal and his Theatre of the Oppressed later in the twentieth century. He goes on to look at ethics post-Second World War, citing the works of Levinas, and reflecting usefully on some of the tensions that occur when trying to apply Levinas to theatre (53–6). Finally, Ridout moves into the twenty-first century in his consideration of Hans-Thies Lehmann's highly influential book *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006). Ridout sees contemporary artists' postdramatic works "as part of a long historical exploration of the relationship between the political, the ethical and the

aesthetic” (63). He also invites us to ponder how these examples help us to “think about what it might mean to be there” (64):

By this I mean three things: to be there is, first, simply to be present, to attend, as at the theatre; to be there is, second, to be part of it, to participate, as in politics, for example; and finally, to be there is to be there for someone, to engage in a relationship of care or support, to accept an ethical responsibility for the other. (64)

I will return to these key aspects of presence and care later in this chapter, but am grateful to Ridout for highlighting presence in his most useful and accessible short book. Ridout concludes his text by referring back to Plato and Levinas and proposing “that an ethical work or event of art would be one which demanded a labour of critical thought for its ethical potential to be realized rather than offering within itself anything of the ethical” (69). In other words, good ethical theatre contains the *conditions for prompting* critical ethical thinking rather than *doing the thinking* for participants or audiences.

Hazel Barnes’s (2011) chapter “Mapping ethics in applied drama and theatre” in the book *Acting on HIV* (edited by Dennis Francis) offers a detailed overview of workshops held in Johannesburg in 2008 at the Drama for Life Initial Africa Conference in Applied Drama and Theatre hosted by Drama for Life at the University of Witwatersrand. These workshops on ethics invited participants to place themselves in relation to a range of ethical quotes representing ethical positioning in the field. This work led to the posting of a co-written Ethics Declaration on the Drama for Life website. The declaration reads:

The Ethics working group considered that the following issues should be given serious attention by all practitioners of applied drama at all stages of the process of Intervention:

1. It is accepted that ethical principles as expressed through Human Rights declarations are fundamental to all research and intervention, but that their expression and lived experience is contingent and context bound.

2. There should be acknowledgement of the ideological basis of applied drama and theatre as embedded in Freirean principles of dialogue and empowerment, with the concomitant ethical principles.
 3. It is recognised that applied drama interventions may have unequal power implications; practitioners should establish a spirit of mutual respect among all parties involved and all participants in the intervention should follow the principle of doing no harm.
 4. There should be transparency about the purposes, intentions and methodology of the research/intervention wherever possible.
 5. At all stages the participants' informed consent must be negotiated and a spirit of reciprocity and respect among all parties should be established.
 6. There should be respect for intellectual property of and by all parties.
 7. Practitioners should ensure that the research and intervention are culturally sensitive.
 8. The results of the research should be returned to the community.
 9. The benefits of the research should be shared with the community.
- (141–2)

The field did not see the publication of many new books with ethical content until the appearance in 2015 of the Bloomsbury series in Applied Theatre, co-edited by Michael Balfour and Sheila Preston. One exception to the lack of books focused on ethics between 2010 and 2015 is a 2014 title *Ethics and the Arts*, edited by Paul McNeill (2014a). Although encompassing multiple arts practices, this collection includes a reprinted chapter from James Thompson's *Performance Affects* (2009), "Politics and ethics in applied theatre: face-to-face and disturbing the fabric of the sensible," and two chapters by editor McNeill (2014b, 2014c) that consider presence as a key aspect of ethical praxis across the arts: "presence' is treated as 'presencing'—as something an actor does and not a metaphysical entity—as a verb rather than a noun" (151). I will return to this point in my conclusion, but do recommend these chapters, as well as one by Miles Little, whose contribution, "Ethics and aesthetics—Joined at the hip?," does some essential work in examining the philosophical linkages between aesthetics and ethics. As Little writes, "Aesthetics and ethics are linked because they represent

the philosophies that underpin human judgement. In aesthetics, the judgement is directed toward the emotional responses that individuals have to sensory perceptions. In ethics, we are concerned with judgements of interactions between humans, and between humans and other entities in our environments” (185). When we separate ethics and aesthetics we risk missing this essential linkage: how ethics informs aesthetics and vice versa.

In 2017, Alice O’Grady’s edited book *Risk, Participation, and Performance Practice* features a key contribution by Clark Baim. This chapter, titled “The Drama Spiral: a decision-making model for safe, ethical, and flexible practice when incorporating personal stories in applied theatre and performance,” leads to Baim’s 2020 publication *Staging the Personal: A Guide to Safe and Ethical Practice*. Baim’s ethical contribution here is significant as he distinguishes between “*fictionalized personal stories, positive stories from the past* (stories of strength), *stories of resolved difficulties* (stories of survival, recovery, post-traumatic growth, resilience and overcoming adversity), and *stories of difficult and unresolved issues* (stories that are still traumatic or destabilizing)” (13, emphasis in original). The Drama Spiral model allows for a gradual movement inward by a participant group, from games and creative activities to fictional/distant stories to fictionalized personal stories to positive personal stories to stories of resolved difficulties to (finally) stories of unresolved difficulties (120). I believe that Baim’s Drama Spiral in practice will prevent some of the worst ethical abuses of participants that might occur with a facilitator who pushes them to disclose traumatic stories in a non-therapeutic space. It should be noted that Baim is a trained and experienced psychodramatist. And, it is clear that one should never move towards the center of the Drama Spiral without thinking ethically (and practically) about how to support participants who may be triggered by sharing stories of trauma. Working with a therapist alongside the facilitator to provide additional support to those who may be triggered by sharing stories of trauma is advised.

A 2018 title, *New Directions in Teaching Theatre Arts*, includes a chapter, “Generating ethics and social justice in applied theatre

curricula,” (Flotsos and Medford 2018) that focuses on the teaching of ethics in applied theatre, another important and perhaps neglected topic in our field:

To effectively teach ethics in an applied theatre curriculum, there are two components to address. The first is for students to clearly understand ethical concepts, such as confidentiality, informed consent, or cultural humility, as they are not part of regular undergraduate theatre curricula. The second is to look at the various models of applied theatre to identify where inherent ethical dilemmas lie and to practice how to proactively avoid those dilemmas or deal with them when they do arise. (237–8)

The appendix of this worthwhile chapter provides an applied theatre code of ethics that makes an effective addition to Barnes’s code presented above.

In 2020, as I write this, the world is facing the global challenge of the coronavirus pandemic. On the plus side, it was the year that saw the appearance of several new books, including Baim’s (2020), along with *Performing Care* (Stuart Fisher and Thompson 2020). Here, Thompson describes the ethics of care:

as a mode of enquiry that seeks to draw attention to interdependent human relations as a platform from which to enunciate broader conceptions of justice. The political aspirations for a fairer world should draw on the realisation that we are mutually reliant and that a better world cannot come about without a closer awareness of our reciprocal attachment to others. (41)

Further developing his ongoing interest in ethics, and its intertwining with both aesthetics and politics, Thompson states: “The care ethics expounded here, therefore, might be premised on the intimate moment of support exercised between two people, but it is insisting on a vision of politics that asserts a contract of mutual regard that extends far wider and demands a more fundamental realignment of human relations than one might at first assume” (43). Thompson’s weaving together of ethics and politics is a hallmark of his scholarship that is also evident

in Chapter 4 in this collection, where he defines ethics as a “series of micropolitical dilemmas” (p. 72).

I close this section on books and chapters that address ethics in the field of theatre/applied theatre with the third edition of D. Soyini Madison’s *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics and Performance* (2020). Madison is not writing about applied theatre; rather, her work is in the field of performance ethnography. However, her chapter on ethics (99–129) is exemplary and I include it for its value to applied theatre students and practitioners. Madison reminds us again of the value of inquiry to building ethical stances. She begins the chapter by posing key questions: “What does the ethical act really look like? How are my ethics different from or the same as yours? What principles will guide the *means* or method for us to achieve the ethical ends that we desire? How do we determine what is ethical?” (100); “Where do our systems of thinking and theories come from? To what end are we employing certain regimes of knowledge, and who or what is being silenced?” (111–12). She continues in this broad-ranging and intellectually stimulating chapter by tackling topics such as advocacy and ethics (101–2); ethics and the significance of the ethical question (103); the relationship between ethics and religion (104); ethics, faith, and environmental activism (105–6); the question of freedom (106–9); the ethics of reason, the greater good, and others (109–20); and an examination of Maria Lugones: Contemporary ethics, ethnography and loving perception (120–7). In this final section Madison draws on Lugones’ 1994 chapter, “Playfulness, ‘world’-travelling and loving perception,” to offer valuable and fresh ways to consider ethics:

[W]hen we travel to other worlds, we open ourselves to the greater possibility of loving perception and dialogical performance because (a) we witness and engage cultural aspects of other worlds; (b) we witness and engage with others’ sense of self in their own world; (c) we experience how we are perceived *through others’ eyes*; (d) we are now bodies that must touch, see, and listen to each other because we are inhabiting a space in their world where distance cannot separate you; (e) we witness and engage the Other as a *subject* even as he or she may

be subjugated, and as a result, meanings of power and positionality begin to arise between us; (f) we are dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood. Traveling to another world threatens arrogant perception and makes loving perception possible. Loving perception evokes dialogical performance and sustains it. Loving perception is not sentimental or sappy, nor is it a romanticization of the other. (126)

Madison concludes her chapter with a text box on empathy, highlighting the importance of this emotional capacity to ethical practice. This text, written by an African-American woman scholar, and drawing on the work of a Latina scholar to examine ethics in performance, does some important work in offsetting the predominantly white Eurocentric voices found in most of the sources included in this chapter.

I turn now to journal articles on ethics in applied theatre.

Key Articles 1985–2020

No literature survey on ethics in performance contexts should exclude performance theorist and performance ethnographer Dwight Conquergood's much-cited and reprinted article "Performing as a moral act: ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance" (1985). In order to address the moral and ethical concerns of his performances of ethnographic cross-cultural encounters, Conquergood outlines four "ethical pitfalls" (4) of performative stances towards a culture under investigation. He considers an ethnographic performance that corresponds to any of these four pitfalls as ethically problematic. The key to authentically conveying a culture is through "dialogical performance," "the moral center that transcends and reconciles" (5).

Conquergood's four problematic stances are: The Custodian's Rip-Off, or a stance of "strong attraction toward the other coupled with extreme detachment" (5); The Enthusiast's Infatuation, or the realm of the "quick-fix, pick-up artist" that is unethical because it "trivializes the

other” (6); The Curator’s Exhibitionism, or the practice of astonishing the audience rather than understanding, in which the ethical issue is sensationalism (7); and The Skeptic’s Cop-Out, or the refuge of “cowards and cynics” who refuse to face up and struggle with the ethical tensions of performing culturally sensitive materials (8). Alternatively, the positive stance of Dialogical Performance (also cited in Madison’s 2020 book) aims “to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate and challenge one another” (9), a critical discourse that extends beyond the stage to engage its audience.

The first decade (c. 2000–2009)

The shift to discourse more focused on the emergent field of applied theatre (in comparison to the sister field of drama education) can be seen in a *Research in Drama Education* special issue, “On ethics,” from 2005. As Helen Nicholson (2005b) asks in her editorial for this issue:

What are the ethical responsibilities of researchers when practice is developed collaboratively with participants? How might the drama be affected if participants know that they are part of a research project which might lead to publication? When is it ethically appropriate to ask participants for their consent? How might the voices of the participants be represented? What aspects of practice might be selected for analysis and opened for public scrutiny? (119)

She goes on to consider how ethics intertwine with both aesthetics and political activism, asking, “What motivated the research—aesthetics, ethics or activism? Who stands to benefit most from the research? How do researchers’ moral sensibilities and activist commitments inform and transform each other?” (120). The issue contains a number of excellent articles that focus on a range of projects across many countries. Of particular interest are the essays by Bill McDonnell and Amanda Stuart Fisher. In the former, McDonnell calls for more “thick description” (127) of applied theatre projects, and more inclusive dialogues with participants in terms of capturing and relaying information about a

project. In the latter, Stuart Fisher draws on French social philosopher Alain Badiou to consider that

[O]ur task as applied theatre practitioners can be construed as one of generating an encounter or intervention that enables the truth process of a group or a community to emerge. But how do we do this? Perhaps more importantly how do we guarantee fidelity to the truth of the situation, whilst not shaping our actions by our own normatively inscribed morality and preformed sense of what is “good”? (249)

This entire issue has the potential for offering its readers (particularly students of applied theatre) a series of rich sources upon which an ethical practice might be built.

Finally, in this section, I include David Kerr’s 2009 article “Ethics in applied theatre,” which offers a welcome look at how ethical thinking plays out in various theatre for development projects in the context of a number of African nations. Kerr reflects usefully on various projects dating back to the 1980s and offers ethical insights such as: changing the lyrics and therefore the meaning of Indigenous songs (177–9); navigating through negative audience response (in this case, to a play on HIV) (179–80); the need to protect communities and students from authoritarian government attacks (including imprisonment and torture) in response to radical applied theatre projects (180–2); how ethics plays out in mediated settings such as television or radio dramas, and on the internet (182–5). He concludes that “ethics need to be flexible enough to adapt to different times, geographical locations of shifting social, political or economic circumstances” (186). These ethical principles of flexibility and adaptation are helpful to both emerging and established applied theatre workers.

We can see, through the first decade of the twenty-first century’s questioning discourse on ethics in our field, the evolution of ideas about how to approach the work with principles of aesthetics, ethics, truth, and social justice, and the need for consideration of the tensions between individual and collective belief systems. The next decade continues to consider these ethical tensions and to add new thinking to this discourse.

The second decade (2010–2020)

In 2010, Fisher and Smith's article "First do no harm" offered important advice for theatre practitioners on how to gain informed consent from participants. The authors include a sample consent form (162), and of particular value is their advice to practitioners to be wary of stepping over the line into therapy or risking traumatizing others. As they say in the article's conclusion: "It is our hope that, through this proposal for informed consent, practitioners in applied theatre settings will develop an enhanced appreciation of the need to provide clear and open invitations to applied theatre work" (163).

Rustom Bharucha (2011) continues this critical discourse in his "Problematising applied theatre," in which he draws on philosophers Jacques Rancière and Elaine Scarry, among others, to argue that "what I have come to learn from my own experience of the theatre and of what lies beyond the exit of theatre is the recognition of the pain of the Other, which could be the first step in the beginnings of a radical sociality" (382). His key ethical point is that "we may have no other option but to be as vigilant and caring in our exploration of the pain of others, opening ourselves to our own pain in the process. Pain does not have to be locked in the other, any more so than oppression has to be designated outside ourselves" (381). The implications of this thinking involve applied theatre workers seeing themselves as bound up in the struggles of their participants, and that recognizing this entanglement, and the pain it may cause, is an ethical stance of some significance to our field.

Daniel Banks (2011), in his article "The question of cultural diplomacy: acting ethically," contributes to ethical discourse through his focus on how applied theatre practitioners can be "good guests" (112) when working in cultural contexts dissimilar to their own:

Cultural diplomacy, at its most human and aware, would be self-reflective: constantly striving for better ways to interact; consciously working to deconstruct multiple levels of hierarchy in a room; and seeking the space of pure presence where participants paradoxically

celebrate the implicit humanity that connects all people, while learning about significant differences. (119)

We work in a field that, although shifting over time towards increasing diversity, remains dominated by white scholars working in Black, Indigenous, or People of Color communities. Banks reminds us to remain sensitive and aware of cultural differences *within* participant groups as well as *between* facilitators and participants. What Banks calls the “space of pure presence” (119) is a concept I will return to in the conclusion to this chapter.

Next, in Leffler’s (2012) article “Replacing the sofa with the spotlight: interrogating the therapeutic value of personal testimony within community-based theatre,” we hear about a South African-based project in which participants were encouraged by one of the facilitators (not the author) to tell personal stories of frustration, some of which were validated more than others as “stories of harassment and emotional abuse” (347). Leffler’s analysis of his white middle-class discomfort with this approach allows him to recognize how religion, and the process of confession, may be valued by participants in ways that he does not share as a secularist. He concludes his article with these ethical questions: “Should non-local scholar-practitioners challenge an ‘aesthetic of injury’ out of our own sense of what may be therapeutic, or should we accept it as local knowledge which might constructively challenge our own academic convictions? How can we proceed with both cultural sensitivity and integrity?” (352). Here, Leffler echoes Banks’s (2011) call for the tactical skills of cultural diplomacy to navigate successfully in cultures different from our own.

Kay Hepplewhite (2013), in “Here’s one I made earlier: dialogues on the construction of an applied theatre practitioner,” considers how applied theatre practitioners are trained, arguably an understudied aspect of the field. In her interviews with twelve experienced applied theatre artists, Hepplewhite draws out the key areas required in educating future practitioners. She offers a model from nursing

called “ethical comportment” (52) as a framing for her interview analysis:

[Ethical comportment] combines aspects of expertise: having specialised techniques and an aptitude (skilfulness), the ability to make ethical judgements appropriate to context which consider the wider political impact of their practice choices and actions, and interactive “people skills” embodied in a demeanour (comportment). It offers a potential way to define what a “good practitioner” may look like, and also guidance on how to go about constructing one. (53)

She goes on to argue that

An applied theatre practitioner must also negotiate and assert their practice within a field of critical discourse, being reflexively aware of their own motivations whilst empowering the perceived concerns of the participants; championing a political vision and brokering wider social impact, whilst juggling the diverse agendas of others in the context, including stakeholders beyond the theatre participants. An ethically informed understanding of these issues is integral to informing good practice choices. (59–60)

Later in her essay, Hepplewhite warns that “It is bad practice to let theatre students loose in community contexts without full and proper preparation” (63), an important ethical consideration in training. She concludes by reminding us that “Applied theatre practitioners are complex and intuitive professionals who embody arts and social skills which are hard to identify and, consequently, to teach. Negotiation of this challenge presents an increasingly pressing task for educators” (70). It is becoming clear through this historical appraisal that the challenge to teach what is “hard to identify” is as much an ethical as it is an educational one.

Caroline Wake’s (2013) article “To witness mimesis” makes a critical ethical contribution in its layered critique of a documentary refugee theatre production in Australia called *Through the Wire*. Wake considers the ethics of how this play was created and performed, and highlights what she calls the “traumatic reveal” (111), in which the audience learns

that one of the four actors in the play was performing his own story, eliciting audible gasps from the audience that Wake considers to be sensationalist and voyeuristic. She also calls this production to ethical account for its use of “refugee as spectacle” under the gaze of audiences that “encourage the spectator to elide difference rather than come to terms with it” (120). Harking back to Conquergood’s (1985) ethical model, this is a clear example of Curator’s Exhibitionism (7) in practice, and a good reminder of how easy it can be to create unethical work even with the best of intentions.

The ethics of applied theatre resonates in many ways with the ethics of care (Gilligan 1982; Noddings [1984] 2013), and there is a marked increase in the discourse in the field of this and related concepts beginning around 2014. Indeed, *Performing Care* (2020) discussed above, offers a rich examination of the ways that other care professions—such as teaching, nursing, and social work—understand and practice the ethics of care. But let me now turn to Anne Smith’s 2014 article “Maximizing empowerment in applied theatre with refugees and migrants in the United Kingdom: facilitation shaped by an ethic of care,” which “highlights the necessity for all participants to be able to give as well as receive care and the impact of this upon achieving a sense of belonging” (177). Smith introduces readers to this key concept: “The ethic of care is a moral theory that foregrounds the interdependence of individuals and the salience of taking responsibility for particular others in a nuanced and individualized way which seeks to see those individuals empowered rather than maintaining a state of passive compliance and dependency” (178). The ethics of care as practiced in applied theatre can involve participants in seemingly simple ways such as: helping to set up or restore a rehearsal space, sharing food and drink with others, or doing the washing up (180). “Members of the group become host to one another, serving one another refreshments and demonstrating welcome and care to people arriving” (180). Here, participants engage in acts of generosity and hospitality rooted in reciprocity to create the sense of community so essential to making good theatre.

Kathy Bishop's 2014 article "Six perspectives in search of an ethical solution" surveys six applied theatre scholars (Johnny Saldaña, Jim Mienczakowski, Kathleen Gallagher, Tim Prentki, Anthony Jackson, and James Thompson) for what they view as the moral imperatives underpinning their practice. In analyzing these emailed surveys, Bishop identifies the five distinct approaches taken by her respondents as rooted in justice, critique, care, profession (or the artfulness of theatre-making), and moral integrity. She concludes with a "synergized moral imperative—Value the forms of theatre and research as you critique, care and choose with good character" (73–4) as her "guiding 'north star'" (74).

James Thompson's (2015) significant contribution "Towards an aesthetics of care" is reprinted in *Performing Care* (Fisher and Thompson 2020). In it, Thompson turns his attention to feminist theories on the ethics of care—led by Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings ([1984] 2013)—that has had a significant impact in care professions such as education, child and youth care, social work, and nursing. The ethics of care is a response to a careless world, and as Thompson summarizes, "care ethics draws attention to our reciprocal relations with others, or reliance on others, as a source of ethical enquiry" (434). Thompson goes on to place this ethical notion within the larger framework of social justice:

Care ethics, then, suggests we can learn about seeking justice and a practice that urges a fairer world from relationships where we are called to care for or have experienced the care of some other: where our interdependence and reciprocal needs are highlighted. ... The political aspirations for a fairer world should draw on the realisation that we are mutually reliant and that a better world cannot come about without a closer awareness of our reciprocal attachment to others. (434)

Thompson then applies this "closer awareness of our reciprocal attachment to others" to aesthetics in our field, concluding that "The shape and feel of the relationships at the heart of the project are its aesthetics—whether presented in front of hundreds or in a small circle in a rehearsal room" (439). Here, we see once more the vital connection

between ethics and aesthetics; how we create theatre is infused with both aesthetic and ethical decisions made throughout the process.

The next entry focuses on the topic of how to better approach the uses of personal stories in applied theatre. Yasmine Kandil's 2016 article "Personal stories in applied theatre contexts: redefining the blurred lines," reflects on an applied theatre project in which she was a paid participant/actor. Kandil weighs the level of discomfort—the feelings of shame and embarrassment—that she experienced around how her story was shared and performed. These reflections lead her to some strong recommendations about "the exploration of an ethical way to elicit and utilise personal stories" (210). Her recommendations include assessing with participants the overall purpose and agenda of a given project, including how consent for the use of personal stories should be continuously returned to throughout the shifts and changes of rehearsal and staging. She also sees the importance of participant agency and autonomy, including the right to refuse to share a story at any point in the process. In her conclusion, Kandil poses a key ethical question: "How many novice participants engage in this type of practice wholeheartedly trusting the experience, and end up feeling isolated and alone in facing the overwhelming feelings sometimes associated with telling and sharing their personal narratives?" (212). I would follow this up with another question: How can we ensure this kind of experience of embarrassment, shame, and isolation is never experienced by participants in our projects?

In 2017, Nehemiah Chivandikwa published an article reflecting on his experiences of facilitating applied theatre projects with disabled students in Zimbabwe. As in Bharucha's (2011) contribution, Chivandikwa (2017) acknowledges the ethical necessity of exposing himself to the painful oppression experienced by his participants. He chooses to share an embarrassing personal story in a playback theatre session that allows his own vulnerability to build deeper and more trusting relationships with participants. In co-creating what he calls a "political-ethical approach," Chivandikwa advises that "both creative and political-ethical issues become the collective responsibility

of everyone” (95) and suggests that “such an approach mandates non-disabled TfD facilitators to engage in multiple and potentially contradictory tasks and positions such as colleague, organizer, pedagogue, diplomat, learner, co-activist and adviser, in order to engage participants with disabilities in intensive encounters to advance radical disability politics” (95).

This section on ethics discourse from journals concludes with articles from Lazaroo and Ishak (2019) and Brown Adelman, Norman and Hamidi (2020). “The tyranny of emotional distance? emotion/al work and emotional labour in applied theatre projects” (Lazaroo and Ishak 2019) provides a look at how both facilitator and participants are required to carry out emotional labor, asserting that “Our research suggests that it is ... important to see how emotion management and emotional labour affect applied theatre participants. This is especially important in a context that is informed by social justice, where participants have a high degree of emotional investment in creating awareness about social inequalities and are acting as agents of change” (75). There are clear ethical implications in requesting emotional labor from participants, and this article provides welcome guidance for our field. Brown Adelman, Norman and Hamidi (2020) explore identity issues in their article “Identity matters. All. The. Time. Questions to encourage best practices in applied theatre.” They ask a series of questions as their subheadings and begin to answer them: “How does identity matter?” (16); “Should we use our own identities to engage with others?” (18); “How do we manage the intersections of identity?” (19); “Is it artistically necessary to think about identity?” (20); “How can we build awareness around identity?” (21); “What other ethical questions should we consider?” (23); and finally, “Should we personally be doing the social justice and anti-racist work that we hope to inspire others to do with our applied theatre performances?” (24)—to which the authors respond, “The answer here is quite simple. Yes.” (24). Both of these articles present ethical entanglements of emotional labor and identity issues of consequence that are reflected on through practice.

Conclusion: Crafting a Curriculum on Ethics in Applied Theatre

Diana Taylor's 2020 book *¡Presente! The Politics of Presence* places the quality of *presence* at the heart of socially and politically engaged performance practice:

¡Presente!, with and without exclamation marks, depends on context. As much an act, a word, and an attitude, ¡presente! can be understood as a war cry in the face of nullification; an act of solidarity as in responding, showing up, and standing with; a commitment to witnessing; a joyous accompaniment; present among, with, and to, walking and talking with others; an ontological and epistemic reflection on presence and subjectivity as process; an ongoing *becoming* as opposed to a static *being*, as participatory and relational, founded on mutual recognition; a showing or display before others; a militant attitude, gesture, or declaration of presence; the “ethical imperative,” as Gayatri Spivak calls it, to stand up to and speak against injustice.³ ¡Presente! always engages more than one. Sometimes it expresses political movement, sometimes a being together, walking down the street or celebrating and enacting our response, position and attitude in our encounter with others, even when the other has been disappeared, or hides its face. (4, emphasis in original)

Across the book, Taylor documents her lived experiences with community groups fighting for liberation in the North, Central and South Americas (38–9). She closes with a powerful story from Mexico that manifests an ethics of care, of being present with, to, and for others (245). A woman named Leonilla Vasquez sent her two daughters out to buy bread and milk in February of 1995. On their way home, the girls encountered a train carrying migrant workers north. These workers were crowded onto the roof of the train and called out to the girls for food and water. With no hesitation, the girls reached up their arms to share what they had. This act of selfless generosity (from those who have little enough themselves) became a movement, led by the girls' mother, called Las Patronas that prepares food for hundreds of Central

American migrants to this day (246). Taylor reflects on this act: “The women hold up their hands with food and water. Not for themselves, not just for their ethnic or political kin, but for strangers. That’s all. That’s everything. If this empathetic gesture animates a life-affirming form of ¡Presente!, how, I wondered, might I/WE be able to emulate, replicate, transform it into sustained political practice?” (247).

For applied theatre workers and artists, the final line of Taylor’s powerful book resonates as an ethical call to presence, service, and care, and the necessary entanglement of poetics and politics, aesthetics, and ethics: “¡Presente! Holding out one’s hands to others, is the beginning of everything” (250). My hope is that this collection of readings on ethics in applied theatre will be utilized as the curricular foundation for courses on this topic, alongside the other chapters in this collection, requiring ongoing ethical entanglements in praxis that are rooted in the key ethical precepts of service, presence, and care.

Notes

- 1 I wish to thank Professor Emeritus Juliana Saxton for her very helpful critical edits and input on this chapter.
- 2 The second edition of *The Applied Theatre Reader* appeared in 2021, co-edited by Tim Prentki and Nicola Abraham. It contains both retained and new material in the section “Ethics of representation” (pp. 69–128).
- 3 See Spivak 2012.

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