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## REVISITING QUESTIONS FROM THE 2017 NYU FORUM ON ETHNODRAMA

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**ABSTRACT:** This review presents reflections on the 2017 NYU Forum on Ethnodrama. <<http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/music/edtheatre/forum>>

**KEYWORDS:** Art/Research reviews; Ethnodrama; Ethnotheatre; Research-based theatre

In April 2017, ethnodramatists from around the world gathered for the NYU Forum on Ethnodrama, chaired by Joe Salvatore. Academic conversations were complemented by selections of performed research in various stages of development including “Watched in the World” and “America is Hard to See.” Building on the theme “aesthetics of research and playmaking,” questions and discussions occupying the field emerged, including those around assessment, ethics, and the complex interrelationship between fact and fiction.

As part of the opening plenary, Patricia Leavy (2017) discussed assessing ethnodrama, including the criteria of usefulness. While usefulness may be immediately apparent, it may also lie brewing in the minds of audiences, researchers, and participants long after a project’s formal end. How might assessments of usefulness consider long-term and potentially unknowable impacts?

**“Ethical considerations emerged throughout the conference, from practical suggestions to in-depth discussions...”**

Ethical considerations emerged throughout the conference, from practical suggestions to in-depth discussions such as the one offered by Gallagher and Kushnir (2017) who highlighted both academic and artistic perspectives. Drawing on disabilities studies, they stressed involving participants throughout the creative process: “nothing about us, without us.” But working in ethnodrama can be emotionally challenging. How much can we involve participants before creating an undue potential for harm? How do we ethically respond to the impacts on participants, audience members, and researchers?

In his plenary, *The Art of Fabrication*, Johnny Saldaña (2017) stressed that ethnodramatists stitch truths into fabrics of reality. For theatre does not present a reflection of reality, it creates refractions, skewing reality in order to see it from new perspectives. But has “fake news” misappropriated this skewing of reality to solidify power rather than challenge it? If so, what is our role as ethnodramatists in resisting this?

The NYU Forum on Ethnodrama provided a wonderful opportunity to gather as a field to consider these and other questions and directions in our future ethnodramatic experiments.

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