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Editor's Introduction to Issue 5 (Fall 2020)

PTO Journal Editor

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Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Journal

Vol. 5, Issue 1 (Fall 2020)

Editor's Introduction to the 5th Issue of the *PTO Journal*

Mark Weinberg¹, editor

This brief letter from the editor provides an introduction to this somewhat unusual issue of the Journal and announces a new approach to ongoing dialogue about published articles.

Dear Readers,

It's been 2020 for a L O N G time. Storms and droughts and fires and other symptoms of the climate crisis are wreaking havoc on place and planet. The COVID-19 pandemic threatens lives and livelihoods.

Systemic racism in the US and elsewhere, always present, has become clearer to more white allies and accomplices while the far Right has become stronger and more violent. The world seems more ideologically divided yet global capitalism has consolidated wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands. In the US election anxiety dominates so many conversations.

And yet many of us still teach, make theatre, and organize through other means: In ways that shout out against oppression, against the exploitation of people's labor and the silencing of their voices. In ways that challenge oppressive systems by promoting critical thinking and social justice through liberatory theatre

¹ **Mark Weinberg** (MFA, Ph.D., University of Minnesota) is co-director of The Center for Applied Theatre, which he co-founded with Jenny Wanasek in 2000. He has over 35 years of university experience teaching a wide range of traditional and applied theatre courses and communication skills, has been a member of PTO for over 20 years, and served on the Board for 9 years. Mark began his study of Theatre of the Oppressed with Augusto Boal in 1992. He has created Forum Theatre performances and conducted workshops and training sessions for educators, administrators, students, business leaders, NGOs, and community organizations in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Austria. He has published and lectured widely on theatre and social activism and chronicled the development of collective theatre in his book *Challenging the Hierarchy: Collective Theatre in the United States* (Greenwood Press, 1992). Some of the techniques developed by CAT are described in "The One-Line Play," a chapter of *Come Closer: Critical Perspectives on Theatre of the Oppressed* (Lang, 2012).

and popular education. In ways that act within, amplify, recognize, or document movements as diverse as Black Lives Matter and Brazil's Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra – MST), mothers in Tehran and students in Mumbai. In ways that, as the staff of the People's Theatre School put it “spaces are created for activating citizenship, addressing material reality and the issues that permeate social life. And, in the current scenario, it is clear that the conjuncture – the political correlation of social and political forces at a specific moment – requires reflection, contestation and intervention.” As Dasha Kelly Hamilton reminds us in her beautiful poem *Creatives*,

We vibrate with imagination
With abandon, reverence and
arduous hope

This issue of the *PTO Journal* is an attempt to both celebrate and critique the ways we teach, the ways we make theatre, and the other ways we do social justice work. It is an attempt to examine the role of activist theatre and critical education to support movement building in the face of systemic racism; in the face of police, military, right wing extremist, and institutional violence; in the face of mass incarceration as a tool of oppression; in the face of educational structures that distort history and stifle critical thinking. Authors from *nine* different countries contributed to the unusual array of articles, reports, journal entries, photos, videos, and poetry in Issue 5, which also includes two special sections: *TO and PO during the Pandemic* and *TO and PO, Anti-Racism and Protest*.

As our physical space becomes more circumscribed, our online connections have often become broader and we have continued to learn more about the intersections of oppressions globally and the opportunities for international collaboration to combat them. It is interesting to see how several of the articles from different spaces echo and problematize each other. For example, Joschka Köck's article, “Global TO Movement(s) and its Discontents,” examines if and how TO can be considered a movement and what that might mean for our politics and practice. In “Joker Exchange Online – Meeting The Risks and

Opportunities of the COVID-19 Crisis,” authors Uri Yitzchak Noy Meir and Anne Larcher report on the Joker Exchange which gathered jokers online from all over the world and spawned several international projects, and in “The Year in Review, 2019-2020” the PTO Board reports on the organization’s activities in the past year. Do either of these groups reflect an international movement? And how does that sense of movement compare with the Highlander Center’s community-building virtual spaces described by Je Naé Taylor in “Highlander Center: Hotlines and Cultural Bazaar?”

“A Continued Theatre of the Oppressed” by Tania S. Cañas, “Virtual Newspaper Theatre: Zoom as a Theatrical Playing Space” by Nabra Nelson, and “Demechanizing Whiteness: Lessons from Theatre of the Oppressed” by elizaBeth Simpson all focus on technique, but with very different attitudes, while “Theatre of the Beat’s Restorative Justice Theatre Program: Highlights from the Baseline Evaluation” and “Abbreviating Boal at the Louisiana Old State Capitol Museum: Using Image Theatre” both discuss and raise concerns about using TO techniques in institutions which have their own, often competing, agendas and ask us to consider the wisdom of offering workshops if the liberatory and anti-oppressive function of TO might be compromised. Guest editor Joschka Köck and I have written an editorial comment in this issue which raises questions about these concerns. Reports from Tehran and Nairobi and New York and Mumbai and Rio and New Market, Tennessee all reveal how TO practitioners are struggling to put an end to physical, emotional, and intellectual oppression. The stories seem so different, but the goal of humanizing the world remains the same.

Likewise, the mission of the *PTO Journal* remains the same: participating in anti-oppressive struggle by providing a venue for promoting, documenting, and critically reflecting on the theory and practice of revolutionary pedagogy and theatre. The goal is to create a rigorously critical and community-based space for dialogue about oppression and liberation, and to foster collaborative connections that share, develop, promote, and document how transformative theory (including, but not limited to, Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Theatre of the Oppressed) can affect social change locally and globally. The journal

is dedicated to critically celebrating experiences of communities we belong to and interact with and serving as a weapon in the struggle against systemic oppressions in the pursuit of liberation and justice. We welcome submissions from artists, educators, practitioners, and activists who wish to contribute to the on-going discussion and development of liberatory practice around the world.

And let's keep the discussion going! We are especially excited to announce *Raising Revolutionary Voices*, the monthly PTO newsletter. Not only does the newsletter provide information about TO and PO and links to timely articles and events, but it will also serve as a venue for dialogue about articles in the *Journal*. If you have a response to anything published here, send it to *Raising Revolutionary Voices*. Please take advantage of this opportunity to make the *PTO Journal* another way of extending the vibrant dialogue that is at the core of liberatory practice

We encourage submission to any areas of the *Journal* in any style or format that you feel communicates your ideas. We will support both experienced authors and those new to publishing with editorial advice, critical commentary, and whatever else is needed to help you make your contribution ready for inclusion in the *Journal*.

Contributors to this issue have responded to that call, submitting reports in various formats. This variety required extra work for many of our reviewers and those who provided editing assistance. Many people volunteered a great deal of time and effort to review and edit articles and advise me on technicalities and procedures. I thank them, and all the authors who submitted articles (both accepted for this issue or still under consideration for future issues). I cannot thank enough those who volunteered to work directly with authors to help them prepare manuscripts: Katherine Burke, Doug Paterson, S. Leigh Thompson, and Jenny Wanasek. I'd like to add special thanks to members of the PTO Journal Working Group, Robin Brandehoff and Rebecca Struch, for their support and assistance, to Joschka Köck for jointly writing with me the editorial comment mentioned above, and to author, artist, and activist Dasha Kelly Hamilton for her inspiring poem *Creatives* that opens this issue.

It has been my honor and privilege to serve as editor of the PTO Journal for two years and I look forward eagerly to editing my third, and last, issue in 2021. It is humbling to read about the efforts of TO and PO practitioners worldwide. I hope our efforts as editors and reviewers offer sufficient response to the trust these same practitioners, activists, and educators have put in us. If you are interested in serving as editor for issues 7-9, please contact the Journal Working Group or email me at ptojournaleditor@gmail.com for more information. I urge anyone who might be interested to work with the team on the next issue as an Associate Editor to learn the process.

There are many ways to support the efforts of PTO and its members to promote liberatory and revolutionary action in the service of social justice. Work on the *PTO Journal* is just one of those ways. I urge you to visit the PTO web site (www.ptoweb.org) to find out more about the organization and its amazing members, to join PTO as a way of supporting our mission, to comment in *Raising Revolutionary Voices*, and to submit to future issues of *PTOJ*.

In solidarity and with love –

Mark Weinberg

Editor, *PTO Journal*