

URC RESEARCH REPORT

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Project Title: Training Actors in a Research Theatre Company Context: A Practical Analysis of the Internal Structure of a Permanent Actor's Laboratory in New Zealand.

RMOL#: 2009-1142

1. What is (are) the research question(s)?

The objective of this research project is to identify and define the main elements of a Research Theatre Company. This project is a practical and theoretical analysis of a Research Theatre Company's internal structure, methodology and function.

2. Rationale

The main value of this project was to establish a group engaged in the formation of a company focused on the investigation of the actor's work. Research Theatre Companies are unified by the drive towards distinct and clearly articulated research and methodological platforms, unlike standard theatre companies which work mainly towards the production of an end product.

There are several benefits of a project like this for the development of theatre community in New Zealand. Research Theatre Companies become very well-known quickly for the originality, uniqueness, depth and importance of their work; long periods of rehearsal, investigation and creation generate works with quality and innovation; and its reputation are associated to the name of institutions they are sponsored/commissioned.

3. Methodology

The project was totally based on practical application of techniques and exercises focused on physical training and mask improvisation. At the end of the process of training the actors were engaged in creating a theatre spectacle and the public performance of the show. After the completion of the project I interviewed the actors and analysed the data aiming the writing of an article. This essay discussed the experiences and the process of being part of a theatre company focused on research. The data was analysed and interpreted using methodology and analytical framework informed by the general theories of theatre,

4. Outcomes / findings

The first expected output was a public performance of the theatre show *Alfonsina* held at The Performing and Screen Arts Department Theatre at Unitec Mount Albert Campus. The performance was well received and the audience survey showed that 95 per cent of the audience approved and recognized the quality of the performance, the principles behind the work of a research theatre company, the particular theatre language with emphasis on actor work, the simplicity of the production, the sincerity of the actors, the physical preparation (precision, rhythm and intention of gesture and text) and the entertainment value of the show.

The finding was the philosophy of the theatre company based on heart, discipline and honesty (as stated by one of the participants); the development of a particular theatre language based on the fusion of technical and ethical values as the foundation for aesthetic investigation.

5. Publications and dissemination

I have sent the article *Heart, Honesty and Discipline: Mask Training and the Foundation of Lab: Research Theatre Company* to be published on a peer reviewed journal of Drama New Zealand *New Zealand Journal of Research in Performing Arts and Education: Nga Mahi a Rehia*. The article will be published in the December 2010 issue.

In addition to the Auckland performance in October 2009, *Alfonsina* was performed at the Wellington and Dunedin Fringe Festivals in February and March 2010, went overseas as a special guest of Vertice Brazil 2010 (International Women in Theatre Festival). Recently the show toured around schools in Auckland and had a week long season at the Musgrove Studio also in Auckland. *Alfonsina* received audience and critical acclaim with positive reviews and invitations to tour overseas in 2011 and 2012.