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Colman, Robert

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The significance of Barney Simon's theatre-making methodology and his influence on how and why I make theatre: an auto-ethnographic practice as research

By Robert Colman

Abstract

In this autoethnographic Practice as Research (PaR) I will reflect on the significance of Barney Simon's theatre-making method as a primary influence in my body of work asking how and why it is still useful today. Specifically, I will reflect on the devising process of the play *Batsamai* in which I applied my embodied knowledge of Barney Simon's play-making as a 'test-site' for my research question.

By structuring his methodology into six distinct organic stages: (sensitisation; gossip; research; biography; improvisation; writing); and weaving present (*Batsamai*: 2013) and past (devising Simon's *Score Me the Ages*: 1989) I will argue Simon's methodology as a rigorous and therefore useful South African theatre-making tradition; and I will advocate the pedagogical and theatre-making uses, with particular focus on teaching play-making as well as some acting-teaching benefits.

I will argue that useful methodologies evolve – as interpreted and used by others besides the 'originator'; that in essence my record (this document) and use of Simon's methods is interpretative and therefore a record of my methodology with Simon acknowledged as primary source; and that if students who devised *Batsamai* use what they learnt (their embodied knowledge) the methods will evolve further.

I will use these arguments to demonstrate Simon's methods as a dynamic force for contemporary South African theatre; and to examine the value of embodied knowledge in enriching contemporary practices.

In my own methodology I will explore three core creative impulses (the personal, archive and loss); reflecting on how these manifested in *Batsamai*, and in a sample of my body of work.

I will apply Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003) as a theoretical framework to deepen my exploration. Besides literature on Simon and related theories I will refer to my *Batsamai* rehearsal journal, student interviews and a *Score Me the Ages* journal.