Developing Journalistic Documentary Theatre as Part of the Education of Journalists and Actors

ABSTRACT

In recent years, several Finnish theatre productions have combined journalistic data acquisition processes with the narrative and presentational means of theatre. These productions have stirred a great deal of public interest and debate about the means of presenting political processes and politicians, both in theatre and in journalism. These productions have been referred to specifically as journalistic documentary theatre: they don’t simply circulate and make use of already published texts and news, but rather use the methods of investigative journalism to create the script and the performance.

The School of Communication, Media and Theatre in the University of Tampere has a central role in the education of Finnish journalists, the education of Finnish theatre professionals, and in the academic research fields of both communication and theatre. In co-operation of these units, a multi-disciplinary research project is being carried out that studies journalistic documentary theatre as an intersection of these two central institutions of society and culture. By combining the recent research problems of theatre studies and journalism studies, the project seeks to ask: How do the artistic and social goals of theatre and journalism meet in journalistic documentary theatre? What can journalistic documentary theatre bring to the audience that neither theatre nor journalism alone can offer? Could a more systematic development of connecting and combining journalism and theatre provide concrete solutions for these institutions, who are both struggling with the changing media field and fragmenting audiences, trying to maintain their functions?

This research project produces new material and conceptualisations of the relationships between journalism and theatre, about their work processes, possibilities for co-operation and about the expectations that both the audiences and the professionals hold for these institutions.

This paper focuses on the part of the project that studies the experimental collaborations of journalist students and theatre students, the teaching of these groups and the outcomes of these collaborations (a theme issue of a student newspaper and theatre performances). The theatre students will also produce a theatre production together with a professional theatre for autumn 2015. The students will also be interviewed for the research purposes. This part
of the project studies the conceptions of professional identities among these student groups, and how these identities get negotiated and reworked in the collaborative process.

As theoretical and conceptual basis, the project builds on and further develops the theoretical discussion on documentary theatre by studying the recent documentary performances in Finnish theatre: how the relation between the real and the performed is constituted in the discourses of making and receiving performances?

Author Biographies

Mikko Hautakangas (MA, researcher) works as researcher in the Tampere Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Communication (COMET), in the School of Media, Communication and Theatre of University of Tampere. He is currently working in the project “Journalistic Documentary Theatre as a Common Ground for the Artistic and the Social”. In this project, his special focus is in the professional practices and identities of journalists and actors.

His earlier research interests include cultural studies, popular culture, fan cultures, reality television, and internet communities. He has studied the participating audiences of Big Brother, fashion blogs and young men’s media participation.

Laura Gröndahl (Doctor of Art, researcher) works as researcher in the project “Journalistic Documentary Theatre as a Common Ground for the Artistic and the Social”, based in the School of Media, Communication and Theatre of University of Tampere. Her special focus is in the performance strategies of staging documents as representatives of real. In her earlier research she has studied scenographic practices, the rhetoric of stage space and visual communication. Her doctoral thesis (2004) discussed the adaptations of naturalistic efforts into modern and postmodern scenography.