Title
"The Trust Laboratory": Experimenting with Communication and Informal Authority

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Publication Date
2018

Supplemental Material
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“The Trust Laboratory”: Experimenting with Communication and Informal Authority

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

by

Ashley Martin

Committee in charge:

Lisa Porter, Chair
Robert Brill
Charles Means

2018
The Thesis of Ashley Martin is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2018
EPIGRAPH

I’ve learned that fear limits you and your vision. It serves as blinders to what may be just a few steps down the road for you. The journey is valuable, but believing in your talents, your abilities, and your self-worth can empower you to walk down an even brighter path. Transforming fear into freedom.

Soledad O’Brien
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge Professor Lisa Porter for her support as chair of my committee. Through speedy draft exchanges and lengthy debates, her guidance shaped the completion of this thesis and my past three years at UC San Diego.

I also acknowledge Professor Charles Means for his care and direction throughout my time in the Theatre and Dance program.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“The Trust Laboratory”: Experimenting with Communication and Informal Authority

by

Ashley Martin

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Stage Management)

University of California, San Diego, 2018

Professor Lisa Porter, Chair

I utilized What of the Night as a leadership laboratory to experiment with tactics for building trust and establishing informal authority with my collaborators. I learned that I am most engaged as a leader when I closely consider the group’s dynamic and adapt my methods accordingly. My first trial was with the stage management team. I directly invited their feedback on my methodology, requested their perspective on production challenges, and practiced translating my direct language into indirect communication. This openness to feedback communicated trust, enhancing my connection to the team. However, it also provided an opportunity for the team to push hierarchical boundaries, causing me to increase my efforts in
reasserting the structure. Next, I worked closely with the design team by articulating my expectations of self-advocacy. I spoke with pathos, promised to advocate for the designs, and provided concrete suggestions for how to improve group communication. Utilizing this authority during the transition into technical rehearsals prepared both the stage management and design teams for the shift into the theater and the challenges ahead. Finally, I built trust and authority with the director by offering myself as a guide to the UC San Diego collaborative structures and as a resource for a personal challenge outside of the production process. Ultimately, my risk taking on the What of the Night collaboration enhanced my leadership confidence and intuition. I will incorporate these lessons courageously and continue to experiment with enhancing group trust and connection through this transparent, efficient, and adaptive approach.