

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is a product of the Reimagining Tragedy in Africa and the Global South (ReTAGS) project, a research project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, of which Mark Fleishman is the principal investigator in partnership with Mandla Mbothwe. ReTAGS is housed within the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies (CTDPS) at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The project's thematic concern is with how the concept of tragedy might be re-imagined through African and other global South contexts to serve as a critical lens for engaging the complexity of the global postcolonial present and negotiating possible futures within and outside the discipline of theatre. The methodology for the ReTAGS project is artistic practice as research (PaR)¹ and one of the key aims of the project, alongside its thematic investment, has been to develop a younger generation of African theatre and performance scholars, specifically in the use of PaR. In service of the intention for ReTAGS to offer scholarly training, this handbook was planned as a resource that might provide guidance to theatre and performance scholars in Africa and globally beyond the official conclusion of the project.

What do we mean by artistic practice as research? In summative terms, we mean using an artistic process as a way of developing knowledge: I apply my artistic practice to investigate a research question. The art-making provides 'answers' or understandings in response to a research question, but the art produced in the process also offers a medium for sharing these findings. In other words, I don't only document the knowledge generated through the artistic process in the words of formal scholarly writing, but the artistic products themselves document, reflect on and broadcast the knowledge generated. Though it may be fairly quick and easy to give this summary of artistic PaR, the implications of doing it, accounting for the depth and range of its value and possible methods, and having the research institutionally recognised, are far from simple.

In recent decades, there has been considerable debate on artistic PaR and on practice as research more broadly. Terms such as artistic research, performance as research, practice-led research, practice-based research, the practice turn and phronesis, all speak to the same territory of learning and sharing knowledge through practice. Recognition of the value of PaR, what we might call 'knowing through doing', is not new, but the robust revival of the debate responds to numerous factors in the contemporary context of higher education and knowledge development more generally. A book like *The practice turn*, offers excellent insights into a contemporary championing of practice as a way of learning and knowing across disciplines in the humanities, social sciences and so-called 'hard' sciences (Schatzki, Knorr

1 A note on the use of the acronym PaR: PaR can stand for 'performance as research' or 'practice as research', where performance might mean artistic performance or the broader sense in which any practical action is a performance, a process of doing something. In this introduction we have used artistic performance as research/PaR to indicate the specific PaR area the handbook locates itself in. Throughout the book the acronym PaR is favoured, with an intended dual indication by the 'P' of 'performance' and 'practice'.

Cetina & Savigny, 2001). In their respective books, Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2007), Henk Borgdorff (2012) and Robin Nelson (2013 and 2022) offer valuable summations of the debates and investments of artistic research, in particular, as a practice for knowledge development.

All these authors reflect on shifts in higher education artistic training across the globe, where conservatoire-style training centres have been either incorporated into universities or been required to shift their internal assessment process to align more with university research accreditation models (see, in particular, Nelson's articulation of this trend, 2022:3). The result, as Borgdorff articulates, is a resistance from arts professionals to the "academisation" (2012:5) of the arts and a resistance from academics outside of the arts to artistic research as "unregulated" and insufficiently regulatable (4). These core polarised concerns – on one hand of the arts losing their artistry through an association with academia, and on the other hand, the rigour of the academy's methods being undermined by 'unruly' artistic ways – have required an engagement in the argument for artistic PaR in the arts on three fronts:

1. Arguing for artistic PaR as valuable to developing knowledge by: (a) productively expanding the boundaries of the academy by including artistic PaR; (b) productively expanding the boundaries of artistic value through its engagement with academia; and (c) questioning the definition of boundaries within the academy. This final point is compellingly supported by scholarship like *The practice turn*, which considers that all research, even in scientific laboratories, is characterised by an unruliness that is productive to knowledge (see, in particular, Knorr Cetina, 2001:186). As Borgdorff argues, the cognitive, analytical approach of conventional academic scholarship draws on an intuitive practice, much as the creativity of art-making requires cognitive logic (2012:49).
2. Developing systems for recognising artistic PaR within higher education systems.
3. Putting artistic PaR to work in research investigations to: (a) extend knowledge and arenas for sharing knowledge; and (b) develop understanding for how artistic PaR might be constructively used to innovate in knowledge development and conceptions of knowledge.

This handbook offers numerous perspectives on advocating for artistic PaR, with Part I particularly focused on the philosophical argument for PaR as a knowledge paradigm. The effort to have artistic PaR recognised within higher education systems is less directly dealt with, aside from a reproduced chapter by Mark in Part 1, "Artistic research and the institution: a cautionary tale". However, the rewards of motivating for institutional recognition of PaR are evident in the fact of having published in this volume chapters by 19 artistic researchers reflecting on their post-graduate PaR projects. Putting artistic PaR to work in research investigations (Point 3, above) is the handbook's key contribution, but with a particular focus on the *how* (the things done) of the PaR as opposed to the *what* (research subject, research data and analysis).

There are particular nuances to artistic PaR endeavours in different geographical regions, and this handbook is concerned primarily with the South African context as it

connects to the African and then global South contexts within international PaR discourse and practice. It is also concerned with artistic *performance-based* PaR, encompassing such sub-disciplinary practices as theatre, dance, live art, scenography and video art. Although there may be some blurring of boundaries with visual art and sound art/music in the research projects discussed, the focus is on theatre and performance practices.

The handbook draws on over two decades of training in artistic PaR from postgraduate theatre programmes at the University of Cape Town (UCT). In 2008, the first cohort enrolled in the coursework MA in Theatre and Performance, an MA scaffolded for students to design their own artistic PaR process over the course of the two-year degree. The MA Theatre and Performance gives constructive, creative prompts and parameters progressing through minor, medium and major projects. Through these projects each student develops their own individual PaR process to explore their thematic research focus, culminating in the substantial artistic product of the major project. At the time of writing this handbook in 2023, the UCT MA programme had graduated 60 MA students, through what was the Drama Department and became, in 2018, the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies through a joining of the Drama and Dance Departments.

In 2012, Aja Marneweck was the first doctoral candidate at UCT to graduate with a PhD that included practice as an examinable element of the thesis,² with artistic product and thesis carrying equal weight. Since then two other PhDs have been conferred to candidates on this basis and at the time of writing in 2023 there were seven people registered. Many more doctoral candidates have come through the UCT Drama Department/Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies employing PaR as their foundational methodology even though they have been examined conventionally on the basis of an 80 000-word thesis.

Part II of this handbook, and its most substantial component, is made up of chapters by theatre and performance scholars who did the MA in Theatre and Performance course or their doctorates, or both, through UCT Drama Department/Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, using artistic PaR as their methodology. In these chapters, the authors consider their research design: what methods they used to do what they did to explore their research curiosity. In the case of artistic PaR, what is visible at the end of a project is the artistic product. The process that realised the product is invisible or hard to trace, and yet it is through the process that so much of the significant knowledge development happens. Since a thesis, at MA or PhD level, is far more concerned with the concepts and findings that are developed through the research this means that an explicit focus on how you did what you did to learn what you came to know through your PaR is sidelined to a brief discussion of methods in a methodology section. With this handbook we hope to achieve two related things. First, to give space and visibility to the invisible processes of PaR so that an MA or PhD student starting out, or for that matter a well-established researcher moving into artistic PaR, might gain clear insights as to the overall nature of doing PaR: the kinds of serious thinking and practical things that get done, and how the thinking and doing are an evolving process of research design. Second, to make explicit that there are no set templates for actioning PaR as a research methodology.

The diversity of themes, methods and structures for the PaR process across the chapters illustrates the uniqueness of each PaR project. Where there is similarity across the Part II chapters it is in the authors describing how they grappled through practice to work out how and what to do. It is both this diversity and this similarity that we hope readers will take away with them. Each PaR process is unique and each process is a grappling with *thinking through doing* to discover what your unique research process will be.

With the core intention of the handbook being to offer researchers who are starting out with their artistic PaR case-specific, method-focused insights into the practice as research process, Part I frames the conceptual concerns of PaR through a selection of reproduced articles, chapters and keynote addresses by Mark Fleishman. Artistic PaR has been Mark's defining methodology over the course of his career, and his scholarship has been crucial in the evolving debates on PaR since the early 2000s: championing PaR, unpacking the nuance of its epistemological value in the academy and beyond and critically engaging with its limitations. It is Mark's own PaR journey and his significant involvement in PaR discourse internationally that underpins the ReTAGS use of PaR as a methodology and the project's investment in developing a younger generation of African theatre and performance scholars working through artistic PaR.

Part I starts with two articles by Mark: "Knowing performance: performance as knowledge paradigm for Africa", which was first published in 2009 in the *South African Theatre Journal*, and "The difference of performance as research", first published in 2011 in *Theatre Research International*. These articles are in a sense the starting point of the arc in Mark's published thinking on PaR and describe what makes artistic practice as research distinctly valuable relative to other research methodologies. The second two papers in Part I are "Beyond capture: the indifference of performance as research", from the 2015 International Federation for Theatre Research conference in Hyderabad, and "Artistic research and the institution: a cautionary tale" from the Arts Research Africa conference 2020. These two articles represent the other end of the arc that started with the first two articles, as indicated in the play on words in the titling, which refers to the "difference" of performance as research in the 2011 paper and its "indifference" in 2015. The "cautionary" in the title of the *Arts Research Africa* paper alludes to the intervention these later papers make. Having established the value and use of PaR, it can be engaged critically as a knowledge paradigm to offer some cautionary thoughts about the extent to which we can account for what artistic PaR does and how. This critical engagement in no way undermines Mark's earlier argument for the value of PaR, but rather points to a new frontier of thinking around it: in the excess of what emerges through PaR processes, there is more than we can "capture" to measure its value.

These first four pieces are followed by reproductions of writings that present more granular, case study-based discussions of Mark's work with PaR. They are: 'Cargo: staging slavery at the Cape' (*Contemporary theatre review*, 2011) and 'Making space for ideas: the knowledge work of Magnet Theatre' (*Magnet Theatre: three decades of making space*, 2016). In these reproduced writings, Mark considers one of his own long-term, multi-production PaR projects and the ways in which it sought to respond to the concerns of the Cape

postcolony. Written over the course of a decade and for various contexts, the reproduced works in Part I inevitably contain some repetition. We encourage the reader to engage with Part I as a record of an unfolding PaR journey, offering insights into the different, though overlapping, concerns of PaR.

Part I is more conceptual in its focus, but does also indicate methods and their evolution. Conversely Part II focuses on methods, but also inevitably speaks to the conceptual in each author's PaR work. To bridge the shift in emphasis from conceptual concerns to practical methods, Part II starts with a section where authors have used the analysis of how they developed their methods to speak more philosophically about the PaR process. The second section of Part II includes chapters that deal more singularly with the methods the authors used in their PaR. The final section of Part II comprises two chapters that consider data management and analysis. Although these are critical tools for all research, it is often hard for artistic researchers who are starting out to see what counts as data in their artistic processes and products, let alone how they might store, sort and analyse it.