THE DIFFERENCE OF PERFORMANCE AS RESEARCH[8]

By Mark Fleishman

Baz Kershaw, director of the UK's PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) programme (2001–5),[9] recently observed that by the end of the last decade "practice as research" (PaR) had become "a well-established approach to using creative performance as a method of inquiry in universities in the UK, Australia, Canada, Scandinavia, South Africa and elsewhere" (Kershaw, 2009).. The establishment and growth of interest in the idea of practice or performance as research[10] is reflected in the increasing number of publications[11] devoted to the subject that grapple with the concept in all its heterogeneity and complexity.

While accepting that, at this juncture, definitions of PaR are at best provisional, there is a general consensus that PaR concerns research that is carried out through or by means of performance, using methodologies and specific methods familiar to performance practitioners, and where the output is at least in part, if not entirely, presented through performance. In other words, such activity suggests that there are certain epistemological issues that can only be addressed in and through performance itself and that such performance practice 'can be both a form of research and a legitimate way of making the findings of such research publicly available'. Hence, there is no necessary connection "assumed between the apparatus of research and the written word" (Painter, 1996:n.p.).

My own ideas on PaR have developed within my institutional context in South Africa, which, while having connections with the global academic mainstream, has been

8 This text by Mark Fleishman was first published in 2012 in *Theatre Research International*, Volume 37, Issue 1, under the same title. It is reprinted here with the permission of Cambridge, **https://www.cambridge.org/**, on behalf of *Theatre Research International*.

9 Practice as Research in Performance (PARIP) was a five-year project headed by Baz Kershaw and the Department of Drama at the University of Bristol and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board. Its objectives were 'to investigate creative-academic issues raised by practice as research, where performance is defined … as performance media: theatre, dance, film, video and television' (**http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/introduction.htm**).

10 There are a number of terms used to describe the type of research activity we are dealing with here, including practice/performance as research, practice/performance-based research and practice/performance-led research, creative research, artistic research etc. While the use of practice rather than performance opens up the concept to a broader range of disciplines and applications within disciplines, for the remainder of this article I will use the term performance as research and/or its abbreviation, PaR, for its greater specificity in relation to my own work and because this is the currently agreed terminology within IFTR's Performance as Research Working Group.

11 Recent publications include Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Ludivine Allegue *et al.*, *Practice-as-Research: In Performance and Screen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter, *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research: Scholarly Acts and Creative Cartographies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

sufficiently isolated in the recent past as to create interesting spaces for experimentation. At the same time, my thinking in this regard has also been informed by the PARIP process and more recently (since 2006) through my engagement with colleagues in the Performance as Research Working Group of the IFTR. Informed by these contexts of creative thinking, I set out here to contribute to understandings of PaR by proposing a conceptualization in which PaR is posited as a series of embodied repetitions in time, on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events, productions, projects, installations) levels, in search of a series of differences[12] In order to do so, however, I need first to elaborate on the ways in which PaR more generally has been making a difference to theatre and performance studies as an academic field of study – this not least because performance ways of knowing propose *different* ways of knowing from those of traditional textual scholarship.

PaR: A PARADIGM SHIFT

For Kershaw, placing "creativity at the heart of research implies a paradigm shift, through which established ontologies and epistemologies of research in arts-related disciplines potentially could be radically undone" (Kershaw, 2009).

Further, in his article subtitled "Practice as research as a paradigm shift in performance studies", Simon Jones insightfully reminds us that "the term paradigm is taken from Thomas Kuhn's *The structure of scientific revolutions*", where it is defined as being "sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity" while simultaneously being "sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve" (Kuhn, 1962:10, cited in Jones, 2009:19).

The Performance as Research Working Group of the IFTR arguably exemplifies – in Kuhn's terms – a "redefined group of practitioners" engaged in attempting to resolve a set of problems arising from the idea of performance as a mode of research, problems that are both ontological and epistemological. These include issues of knowledge types, aesthetic values, contextual responsiveness, practice/theory problematics, questions of how to best present PaR in conference contexts, debates about different types of reflexivity appropriate to PaR, and so on.[13] While accepting that there are no neat and easy solutions to these problems, the group is convinced that there are differences that exist between

12 The ideas that follow have their origin in a presentation made in an open panel at the 2010 IFTR conference in Munich entitled Exhausting Modernity – Repetition, Time and Generative Processes, with reference to the ideas of Teresa Brennan on modernity as exhausted or exhausting. This panel formed part of the Performance as Research Working Group's broader investigations of repetition, time and generative processes. In general, the Working Group has focused less on the sharing of individual projects and more on grappling with the workings, the nuances and the complexities of PaR, usually by means of performance itself. In other words, the Working Group has set out to contribute to developing the meta-discourse of the practice.

13 Information available at www.firt- iftr.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=3&lang=en.

PaR and other forms of scholarship and that these are important and productive for the discipline, that they open up new ways of thinking and new subjects for exploration that traditional textual scholarship does not or cannot gain purchase on. There is no doubt that increasing numbers of scholars and students within the discipline wish to include performance as an integral part of their research activity and that this number widens as we move across geographical boundaries and particularly away from the Euro-American academic context. There is a real desire for information and a real need to articulate what PaR is all about, how it works and how it differs from other ways of knowing.

However, by suggesting that performance constitutes an alternative way of knowing I am not suggesting in some naïve way that PaR will or should simply replace other forms of scholarship. Too often in the past practitioner-researchers have jumped reactively to defend the discontinuities between what we do and what they do, between embodied practice and traditional textual scholarship. Such a response is often framed as a contest between epistemes: the particularity of performance as a way of knowing and its place vis-à-vis dominant and hegemonic forms of knowing in the academy. In the narrative of this contest the dominant way of knowing is characterized as being: distanced, static, dispassionate and self-contained contemplation, a product of the mind as somehow separate from the body, giving rise to concepts that are durable, stable, available and transmissable, requiring a language shared by a community and a particular technology of communicating that language – in this case, writing.

The performance way of knowing is, by contrast, close, active, immediate, on the move, embodied, sensual, fluid, interactional and affectively engaged. It gives rise to representations but is not of itself 'a project concerned with representation'. It is a way of acting on the world "probing more deeply into it and discovering the significance that lies there" (Ingold, 2000:11). And this significance is available to those who are attuned to it and transmissable through the interactional relationships of bodies.

The narrative goes on to argue that the processes of attunement required to grasp such transmission of knowledge are seldom covered in the curricula of the Euro-American-style academy. As Dwight Conquergood writes, "the root metaphor of the text underpins the supremacy of Western knowledge systems by erasing the vast realm of human knowledge and meaningful action that is unlettered". He elaborates, "scholarship is so skewed towards texts that even when researchers do attend to extralinguistic human action and embodied events they construe them as texts to be read" (Conquergood, 2002:147). This hegemony of the text is not politically innocent: as De Certeau would have it, "scriptocentrism" is a major part of Western imperialism (De Certeau, 1984, cited in Conquergood, 2002:147). So, according to this view, performance constitutes 'an alterity' that resists the hegemony of the text in the academy. It is a transgression that seeks to break down the separation of subject and object, of body and mind, and therefore it must be either expunged, silenced or policed by the academy.

Now this particular contest narrative, while politically expedient at certain key moments in terms of certain immediate struggles within the academy, and while both complicating and clarifying an understanding of the workings of the binary described

above, tends perversely to reinforce and propagate the very binaries and dualities that the political project is trying to do away with. What is required is an honest acceptance that the principle of 'compossibility' – fleshes alongside texts alongside images, sight alongside hearing and touching and feeling and moving – is called for. Or perhaps, from the converse perspective, what characterizes performance as research is, as Jones observes, "the materializing of 'incompossibilities', paradoxes at play, the mixing of ideas and things anomalous to each other's paradigms" (Jones, 2009:24). So what is the difference of performance as research? How does it operate differently from conventional scholarship, and what kinds of insight might it deliver that other forms of knowing find difficult to grasp?

MY TAKE ON PERFORMANCE AS RESEARCH

I begin with the proposition (1) that performance as research is a series of embodied repetitions (2) in time, (3) on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events, productions, projects, installations) levels, (4) in search of difference. I will consider this proposition briefly in terms of Bergson's notion of "creative evolution" and Deleuze's engagement with it, and with fleeting reference to two projects in performance as research that I have been involved with over the past nine years: the Clanwilliam Arts Project, a participatory project with school learners in the rural town of Clanwilliam, three hours outside Cape Town, and a project on "remembering in the postcolony" that uses a particular dramaturgical method to engage with the historical archive of Cape Town, the (post)colonial city. However, I will begin with two whimsical performative anecdotes:

ANECDOTE 1 – THE MOSQUITO

I am lying on my bed in the thick heat of an African summer night and a mosquito is sounding a high-pitched squeal somewhere above my head [sound of mosquito whining can be heard]. I can hear it, but I cannot see it. I lash out in an attempt to ward it off or, better still, squash it [frantic attempts to catch the irritating invader]. It continues to squeal [continued sound effects]. Again and again I lash out at it, sometimes with the flat of my hand [hand bangs down hard on the surface of a table or lectern], sometimes with a rolled-up newspaper, desperately trying to control the squeal but it will not go away. It is too fast, too illusive, and I am too slow. I am never successful at warding off the mosquito, at stopping the squeal, but I keep lashing out, night after night, on and on until I have exhausted myself. On some nights I believe I have it in my closed fist but when I open my fingers it is not there. On other nights I actually grasp it [hands clap together violently], I can feel its wings against my skin, I close my fingers around it, squeezing tight [closed fist held up to view], but when I open my fingers again the mosquito flies away [fist opened to reveal nothing], squealing triumphantly. Despite this failure, I believe, fundamentally, that one night I will make real contact and bring the squeal under control, so I keep on trying.

ANECDOTE 2 – 'THROW ME ON THE FLOOR, DADDY!'

When my son was little he loved playing a game called 'Throw me on the floor, Daddy'. The rules were simple – he stood still in front of me and I was to lift him up into the air and lay him down on the ground, only for him to stand up and demand that the whole thing be repeated again and again [physical action of lifting and dropping repeated a number of times in a repetitive fashion]. He could go on for hours being 'thrown onto the floor', squealing with delight. I, on the other hand, became rapidly exhausted and tried to bring the game to a close as quickly as possible. He wouldn't give up very easily and so I would have to keep myself interested by inventing new and more creative ways of getting him onto the floor. He couldn't care less how I did it as long as I repeated the action of 'throwing him on the floor' and would have gone on forever, I believe, if I didn't insist that the game come to an end.

In the first of my performance projects, a particular story is chosen each year from the Bleek and Lloyd Collection,[14] an archive of San mythology housed at the University of Cape Town, and introduced to a group of around six hundred school learners in a small rural town around 250 kilometres outside Cape Town who engage with the story using a variety of artistic modalities in order to find the importance or significance of the story for their lives. For ten years the same set of stories, the same methodology, the same broad outcome: a parade through the streets with lanterns and a performance of the story for the community.

Year 1 – Year 2 – Year 3 etc. . . . Year 10

In the second project, four different performances were created between 2002 and 2008 based on research done on four sites of memory in and around the city of Cape Town – Robben Island (place of banishment and incarceration and its museum and archive), District Six (apartheid-evacuated working-class city district and its museum and archive), the Bleek and Lloyd Collection referred to above, and the archive of slavery at the Cape (a dispersed collection of trial records, household inventories, legal and bureaucratic documents and physical sites). Each performance event created was different in form but followed the same basic dramaturgical making process that became more and more refined and conscious over time.

Production 1 – Production 2 – Production 3 – Production 4

Standing on this side looking back at these repetitions I often hear myself calling them a series, like *The Sopranos* or *CSI*, perhaps. But a series implies that I knew what I was embarking on at the beginning and then played it out one episode at a time. But I did not. I knew what I wanted to do in that moment with that first production when it started and it was not to create a series. So why the repetitions? Why the compulsion to return over and

14 See http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za

over to the same thing, to do it again and again, in this way and that way, with this content and that content? Am I under an illusion that if I repeat the same thing more often it will gain in value or weight, that it will be taken more seriously? Or are there really differences in this sameness? And if so, what is the nature of these differences and where do they lie: in the repetitions or in the spaces in between? And is there a point at which the unleashing of differences is exhausted and I am compulsively repeating what is already known and experienced, or is it just me that is exhausted, unable or unwilling to go on repeating in this way? And does it make a difference, this embodied repetition in time? Is there an ethical or political dimension to working in this way, with the body, over time, again and again and in an institutional context designed to at best demean and at worst disqualify and discipline this way of working?

According to Keith Ansell Pearson, "Deleuze conceived a thinking of difference and repetition as historically specific to capitalist modernity" (Pearson, 1999:4). For Pearson, Deleuze's project is an attempt to reinvent this modernity and articulate a radical project for philosophy, through Bergson (Pearson, 1999:2). I would suggest that through Bergson and then Deleuze we can begin to understand the difference of performance as a mode of research, its refusal of binaries (body-mind, theory–practice, space–time, subject–object), its radical openness, its multiplicities, its unrepresentability, its destabilization of all pretensions to fixity and determination.[15]

For Bergson, time is not a series of instants but an experienced duration – "the continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist" (Bergson, 1965:49) or "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (Bergson, 1944:7). When Bergson speaks of duration he does not refer to the realm of distinct entities ("things and states") but to a realm of creative processes and becomings ("changes and acts") (Bergson, 1944:270). He is, in Pearson's words, less interested in "the thing produced" than in the "activity of evolution itself", the infinite capacity for inventive novelty (Pearson, 1999:44). But this realm of creative processes and becomings is not an abstraction for Bergson; it is a form of practised embodiment close to the concrete, everyday life-world (Linstead & Mullarkey, 2003:3-13).

This idea of duration informs Bergson's notion of "creative evolution". In his book *Creative evolution*, Bergson rejects both neo-Darwinian mechanism, in which evolution is driven by a pre-existent model or latent code that plays itself out mechanistically over time (a compulsion of the past), and neo-Lamarckian finalism, in which evolution works towards a perfect form achieved at the 'end' (the attraction of the future). Instead he suggests that evolution is a process of constant invention (a series of explosions) in which contingency plays a significant role. For evolution to take place requires only two

15 I acknowledge that using philosophy in such a selective and reduced fashion in support of a practice for which it was never intended is a risky business and might render the philosophy itself unrecognizable. However, given that philosophers have few qualms about using theatre and theatricality in similarly selective and reduced ways in support of their arguments, I am prepared to take the risk here.

things: an accumulation of energy and "an elastic canalization of this energy in variable and indeterminable directions" (Bergson, 1944:278). For Bergson, we cannot know where we are going to until we have got there, for, as Pearson summarizes it:

> Only once the road has been traveled is the intellect able to mark its direction and judge that where it has got to is where it was going all along. But this is no more than a deception since 'the road has been created *pari passu* with the act of traveling over it, being nothing but the direction of the act itself' (Pearson, 1999:44)[16]

This process of creative evolution is, for Bergson, "a continual invention of forms ever new", a ceaseless string of invention and reinvention (Bergson, 1944:374). The ethical project is, for Bergson, to learn to live in duration – "It is no use trying to approach duration: we must install ourselves within it straight away" (Bergson, 1944:325).

Deleuze (later with Guattari) builds on Bergson in a number of key ways as he transforms creative evolution into "creative involution", a concept that must be distinguished from any association with regression or a movement to a state of less differentiation or the exhaustion of differentiation – "Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:238). In summary, Deleuze and Guattari achieve this first by bringing creative evolution into relationship with the "non-evolutionist idea of transversal communication", emphasizing the non-genealogical, non-filiative nature of creative evolution and stressing instead change occurring across phyletic lineages (Pearson, 1999:162). In other words, they counter the progressivist and perfectionist ideas of evolution with the notion of transversal 'becomings'. Second, they argue that such becomings "involve neither the development of forms nor the constitution of substances and subjects but rather modes of individuation that precede the subject or the organism" (Pearson, 1999:159). These modes of individuation exist on a different level, a "plane of immanence" consisting of "abstract" and "non-formal" elements, intensities and qualities, "relations of speed and slowness", affective variations and so on (Pearson, 1999:159).[17] In other words, change or difference occurs at the molecular level, not at what he calls the "molar" level of formations and structures. Third, Deleuze and Guattari stress the surplus value of any code and its capacity for free variation. In other words, it is through excess, through surplus, through the accidental and unexpected that difference emerges. These surpluses are engaged in "side communication" involving heterogeneous populations and "machinic assemblages" that evolve through recurrence, in unexpected mutations and "monstrous couplings" (Pearson, 1999:151 & 159).

16 The reference to Bergson in the Pearson quotation is to the 1962 French edition: L'Évolution créatrice [Mindy's addition here – check you're happy with it?].

17 For a more detailed exposition of the 'plane of immanence' see Gilles Deleuze and Felix´ Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (1994:35–60).

So what does this mean for performance as research? I would argue that the PaR project is a process of creative evolution. It is not progressivist, building towards a finality; nor is it mechanistic in the sense that it knows what it is searching for before it begins searching. It begins with energy (an impulse, an idea, an intuition, a hunch) that is then channelled, durationally, through repetition, in variable and indeterminable directions; a series of unexpected and often accidental explosions that in turn lead to further explosions. It expresses itself through a repeated, though flexible and open-ended, process of ontogenesis. It is not, as Gregory Bateson would say, "bounded by . . . skin but includes all external pathways along which information can travel" (1987:231). In fact I would argue that it does have some kind of membrane around it that is perceptible in retrospect and establishes a 'territory', but that such a membrane is always elastic and porous. This is in line with Deleuze and Guattari, who, despite arguing for "open systems" and "deterritorialization", emphasize that limits always exist and play an important part in any process of "creative evolution". This is because "the territory does not merely isolate and join but opens onto . . . forces that arise from within or come from outside, and renders their effect . . . perceptible" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994:185-6). In other words, while creative evolution does lead to some degree of individuation and closure, such closure is always in communication with an outside that includes Bateson's multiple "external pathways", through a variety of means that Bergson identifies as "musical": "created by modulation, repetition, transposition, juxtaposition" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994:190).[34]

So to return to my two projects identified at the start, if there is difference arising from the successive iterations of each project, it is not occurring serially in the individual representations as a set of connectable points. Rather it is occurring in the "middle" as a process of inventive becoming, and "becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination . . . [it] is neither one nor two nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight" that runs perpendicular to both (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:293).

Furthermore, it is not occurring at the level of the formation itself, at the level of the individual production or representation (perceptible through reflection); it is occurring at the molecular level of its process of production as changes or shifts in intensities or qualities (perceptible only by living through the duration of the process). In other words, this difference is not something to be looked at from a position outside and after the fact, like a text to be read; it must be experienced from within a durational process of continuous and multiple becoming in which the perceiver is also in a state of emergence. But the difference, the changes, the continuous inventions and variations, are occurring at what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the "absolute speed of movement", (1987:293) like the squealing mosquito audibly present but not quite visible or easily graspable, or the train in Zola's *La bête humaine* (1890) that Deleuze refers to as part of his discussion of "the crack" in *The logic of sense*: (Deleuze, 2004:359-62) "hurtling towards the future with mathematical rigour, determinedly oblivious to the rest of human life on either side".[38]

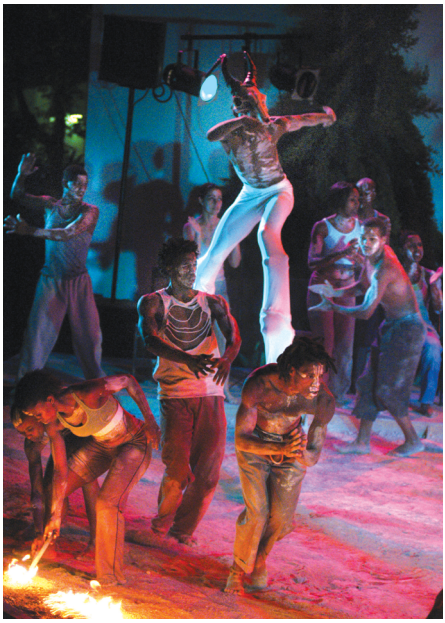
For Deleuze and Guattari, "Movement has an essential relation to the imperceptible; it is by nature imperceptible . . . Movements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness, pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception"(cited in Pearson,

1999:116). If the 'event' of PaR is a runaway train, beyond the 'threshold of perception', and if the researcher is hanging on trying desperately to make sense of it, or trailing behind trying desperately to catch up, then how do we make the knowledge of the event conscious? How do we make it visible to ourselves and to others? If performance as research is anything, it is the desire to make conscious, to become aware from within the midst of the endless process of becoming and then to attempt to translate this for others through a variety of modalities. This requires a kind of perceptual still point, a slowing down or thickening of the ongoing, of the flow, so as to surface the differences in the spaces in-between.

My suggestion is that repetition is the apparatus by which we achieve this slowing down. Repetition is an attempt to trip us up, to stop somehow the onward flow or at least to interrupt it, to slow it down so as to allow us to grasp it even if only fleetingly. Nadia Seremetakis describes it as "discontinuous punctures, that render the imperceptible perceptible as they produce marked moments – tidal pools where an experiential cosmos can be marked out in miniature" (Seremetakis, 1994:12). For *André* Lepecki, discussing the repetition inherent in the work of choreographer Jerome Bel, "Repetition creates a form of standing still that has nothing of the immobile" about it. He characterizes such repetition as "paranomasia", a rhetorical form in which an idea is developed linguistically through stringing together words that share the same stem. He argues that "repetition with a difference performs a reiterative spacing of the idea, allowing for a specific kind of slow turning that gives 'intellectual objects' variation and hence shifts their aspects or appearances" (Lepecki, 2006: 62).

But however much repetition might slow things down it never exhausts the capacity for difference. Difference continues to be produced on a molecular level as long as the performance repeats and even after it has finished repeating, in the repetition of its traces – "the mobile flies forever before the pursuit of science" (Bergson, 1944:327). It is us who struggle to keep up, to keep trying to bring things to consciousness, to keep failing to translate for others. It is us who become exhausted and who draw a line underneath the project and say 'enough'.

But just because it is difficult to imagine how to "think true duration", to stay focused on the "movement going on" (the flux/flow) rather than on the "movement accomplished" (the final form or representation), (Bergson, 1944:325) is not an excuse for not trying or a reason for disqualifying the activity. What is required is a willingness to continue to engage with the task, to create the conditions for seeing from within duration where all is movement and change. For, as Bergson makes clear, conventional scientific enquiry is "accustomed . . . to think the moving by means of the unmovable". It is always focused on "immobilities", on stable points or "points of rest" in the movement flow. The intervals between these stable points, "the movements constituting the action itself [,] either elude our consciousness or reach it only confusedly" (1944:325). We need to find ways to "feel and live the intervals" (Bergson, 1944:368). This is the radical project of performance as research, and its difference.



Figures b and c: *Rain in a Deadman's Footprints*, Oude Libertas Amphitheatre, Stellenbosch, 2004. Photograph by Garth Stead.