MAKING SPACE FOR IDEAS: THE KNOWLEDGE WORK OF MAGNET THEATRE[44]

by Mark Fleishman

The work that Magnet has produced over the past 27 years can be described as 'boundary work' in the sense in which it is used by Henk Borgdorff. In an interview on Artistic Research,[45] Borgdorff suggests that art works that propose to be research projects are 'boundary objects', a term he borrows from Thomas F. Gieryn (1983) and which he describes as objects "that [change their] ontological and epistemological nature depending on the context in which [they are] used". He suggests that "artistic research places itself on the border between academia and the art world" (Borgdorff, 2012: 177). To this extent, I am interested here in exploring the particular ways in which Magnet's performance practice – that is produced for and has its existence and a particular set of meanings within the art world – might be understood as quite consciously making space for ideas or generating a particular way of thinking both about itself as performance and about aspects of the world beyond the theatre. In other words, the ways in which it can be understood as a research or knowledge practice in the academic world.

I would propose that Magnet's work is a process of research both in the sense of 'research for' theatre – gathering material for the making of work through intensive processes of information gathering that makes use of more conventional research methods as well as somatic or embodied methods – and in the sense of 'research about' theatre **–** a self-reflexive interest in the methods and particularities of our practice; what in fact is actually going on in the multitude of individual moments and the flow of our processes. But it is also "research by means of" theatre in so far as how we make work and how that work functions in the world is a way of thinking the world and the work. And in this sense it is hopefully performative in the way in which it enacts something, brings something into being in the world through doing and making, through the fabrication of concepts and ideas and speculative projections that might have the effect of changing attitudes and beliefs, a process I would describe as a project of active and creative citizenship in a transitional social context.

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44 This text by Mark Fleishman was first published in 2016 in the book *Magnet Theatre: Three Decades of Making Space* as Chapter 2, titled "Making Space for Ideas: The Knowledge Work of Magnet Theatre". The copyright is held jointly by the editors, Megan Lewis and Anton Krueger and by Magnet Theatre and it is reproduced here with the permission of the Licensor through PLSclear.

45 There is little agreement over terminology for this kind of activity. Artistic Research is the term preferred in non-anglophone European contexts while Practice or Performance as Research (PaR) is the accepted term in anglophone countries and the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR) working group on the subject is called the Performance as Research Working Group. Some other jurisdictions and groupings prefer Practice/Performance-led Research. In my view these terms all refer, to a lesser or greater extent, to the same idea or set of practices.

In what follows, I will begin by outlining the relationship between philosophy and performance broadly and then move on to discussing the particular knowledge practice in Magnet's work using one production process to ground the argument, finally I will try to show how individual Magnet productions form part of larger research assemblages, with different modes of articulation, within the overall body of work.

PERFORMANCE PRACTICE AND PHILOSOPHY

In a recent article, Laura Cull asks the question: "What is the relationship between performance and philosophy?" (2012: 20). She suggests that in theatre and performance studies we need "less philosophy *per se*" and more attention paid to "specific philosophies" which "provide us with the resources to rethink performance itself as a kind of philosophy, and indeed to reconceive what counts as philosophy" (21). She points out that what motivated her interest in this question was primarily a desire to articulate how the arts work in different ways; ways that value and express those aspects of performance practice such as "art's affective presence and material force" (21) and the "seemingly ineffable" (20) aspects of what we do that other discourses always fail to express.

According to Cull, this is not a question of simply applying philosophy to performance but rather "that the rare marriage between performance and philosophy is at its richest and most egalitarian if philosophy is willing to encounter performance as thinking" (2012: 21). In other words, performance practice avoids application "when it conceives of itself as a way of thinking rather than the mere demonstration of existing ideas" (23). For Cull, the meeting of performance and philosophy must bring about "new ideas [for] both on the basis of a mutually transformative encounter" (23). Her conclusion is that "we need to move away from the application of the theoretical models we already possess and towards an embodied encounter with the resistant materiality of performance's thinking, its embodied-thinking, participatory thinking, or durational thinking – encounters that generate new ideas of what thought is and where, when and how it occurs" (25). The example she uses to support this proposal emerges from "practice-as-research" that in her words "has already gone some way to explore the nature of performance's kind of thinking, taking a particular and strategically necessary interest in how performance practice produces new knowledge" (25). But she warns, "the production of knowledge is arguably only one definition of thinking, or specifically of 'research' […]; indeed, rather than applying this definition of thinking to practice (as if it were the same as text-based research), perhaps we need to look to performance itself to produce new ideas of what thinking is" (Cull, 2012: 25).

As Cull herself points out the practice or performance as research (PaR) movement has for some time now set out to investigate what performance as thinking might mean and having been involved with PaR both in the South African context and in the context of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) where I have been a member of the Performance as Research working group and its co-convenor for a number of years, my thinking has been both shaped by the discourse generated in that context and my

work with Magnet has contributed to that discourse. In other words, there has been a mutually beneficial relationship backwards and forwards between the practice at Magnet and the meta-theoretical ideas on PaR developed amongst international colleagues though workshops and conferences.

The general consensus is 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. Previously (Fleishman, 2012a) I have argued that PaR is a form of creative evolution in the Bergsonian sense, not a progressivist building towards a finality; nor a mechanistic unfolding of a predetermined plan in search of something it knows exists before the search begins. It begins with energy (an impulse, an idea, an intuition, a hunch) which is then channelled, durationally, through repetition, on both micro (of bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (of events, productions, projects, installations) levels, in variable and indeterminable directions, in search of difference. Such an ongoing channelling has been described by theorists of practice as a kind of "tuning"(Pickering, 1993: 564) or "tinkering" (Knorr Cetina, 1981: 34) – a set of adjustments in the reciprocal encounters between different sets of actors – human and non-human.

According to Joseph Rouse, "the concept of practices is typically invoked to explain continuities or commonalities among the activities of social groups" (2001: 190). The particular practice Magnet has been involved in for 27 years is the making of performance works or productions. This is a practice I have described as dramaturgy.

Elsewhere I have outlined the features of this dramaturgical practice (see Fleishman, 2011 and Fleishman, 2012b for example). Following Tim Ingold I have described it as a process that is more about dwelling than building. For Ingold:

> [T]he forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagements in their surroundings. [...] People do not import their ideas, plans or mental representations into the world, since that very world, to borrow a phrase from Merleau–Ponty, is the homeland of their thoughts. Only because they already dwell therein can they think the thoughts they do. (2000: 186)

According to this view, we build forms, not as a consequence of having had thoughts but as a consequence of dwelling, of being in the world, of being in ongoing action. And one kind of action we take whilst dwelling, one among many, is "taking thought" or imagining ways of meeting our needs. "In the process of dwelling we build" (2000: 188).

In line with this view, in Magnet's dramaturgical process we don't build a structure for the performance to dwell in; we dwell in the landscape over time in order to learn *how* to build there. It is not a case of building a container in the mind and then filling it. It is a case of allowing our embodied, active and participatory dwelling to reveal the right

container. This is a methodological approach that reverses the cognitive model. It is not a Cartesian thinking to effect being; it is an incarnated, participatory being developing thought through creative discovery and paying attention to the specific landscape of each individual project as it emerges. The dramaturgical view is from the inside rather than from a distanced perspective and by paying attention to the embodied encounters that unfold in the process, both content and a way of creating form suggest themselves.

I have also suggested elsewhere (Fleishman, 2014) that it is a choreographic practice following Andre Lepecki who points to the "syncretic composition" of the word "choreography" that fuses "two apparently incongruous terms – movement and writing – into one single linguistic sign" (Allsopp & Lepecki, 2008:1). In other words it is a process of writing with bodies in and through movement. It has been a feature of all of Magnet's work since its inception in 1987 that theatre originates with specific bodies in specific spaces rather than with words on a page, so there have only been few occasions over that time in which the script has been the starting point for a production rather than a record of what has been created through processes of physical making.

Furthermore, as a choreographic process it involves what Rudi Laermans has described as "*the making and modulation of assemblages ...* the explorative associating or coupling of materially heterogeneous kinds of actions of humans as well as non-human performers" (2008: 11, italics in original). Such choreographic assemblages involve a non-hierarchical collection of human and non-human bodies encountering each other in such a way so as not to favour the human bodies over for example bodies of light and of sound and of scenography. And what emerges from such assemblages is a particular singularity that is more than the sum of the individual parts, that is characterised by a complex layering of movement(s), and that engages the audience in a bodily and visceral way in a space that is beyond language.

But my argument here is that besides being a practice of making works the practice of dramaturgy is also a knowledge practice. In other words, while making space for new works Magnet also makes space for thinking, for raising questions, generating ideas and developing concepts. In this respect, in Karin Knorr Cetina's terms, Magnet Theatre is a particular 'knowledge setting'. As such it has its own 'epistemic culture' that is defined by Knorr Cetina as "those amalgams of arrangements and mechanisms ... which, in a given field, make up *how we know what we know*" (1999: 1, italics in original), and its own knowledge-producing strategies that are not so much regulated as normative patterns of activities.

While unpacking this 'epistemic culture' completely is beyond the scope of my considerations here, I would like to highlight four features: the method of practice, the nature of the object of knowledge, the structure of participation, and the philosophical orientation. First, as has been alluded to above, the body is the central methodological instrument in Magnet's knowledge practice. Knorr Cetina describes the body as a "black-box instrument" (1999: 99). By this she means two things. First, the body is silent, it provides "no systematic description of sensory or bodily behaviours, no written instructions as to the appropriate bodily reactions in specific experimental situations, and no behavioural rules to be followed [...]" (99). Second, through repeated physical and

sensory activities the body becomes experienced. A specific "tacit knowledge" become inscribed in the body, which Knorr Cetina describes as "a bodily archive of manual and instrumental knowledge that is not written down and only clumsily expressed" (99). Turner (1994) has highlighted the fact that such body experience is difficult to share and uses this to suggest that perhaps something like a coherent practice that is shared by a group, cannot be said to exist at all, but I would suggest that it is not impossible particularly in a discipline that relies heavily, and as a matter of course, on the body-to-body transference of skills and knowledge, the way one body affects, and is affected by, other bodies. In addition, while there is clearly nothing like a tacit rule-book that must be followed when engaging in such a practice, there is an agreed set of values, principles and techniques that is not so much laid down through a linear process of instruction or a set of standing orders, but is produced collaboratively through ongoing, iterative conversation in which parties feel their way towards a level of stable understanding and agreement.

Second, the nature of the knowledge objects in Magnet's knowledge practice can best be described as what the historian of biology, Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, calls "epistemic things". Rheinberger is particularly interested in "objects of knowledge that escape fixation", that are less like things and more like projections and/or processes (Knorr Cetina, 2001:181). As Knorr Cetina suggests these are knowledge objects that are "open, question-generating and complex" (181). For Knorr Cetina there is an "incompleteness" about such knowledge objects, they unfold indefinitely over time and in unanticipated directions, never quite attaining a finality or fixedness. All we can hope for are representations that stand in for these knowledge objects as if they were able to hold together the object in time long enough for us to grasp its possibilities. Even when the project is "finished" there is a sense that it could have been otherwise, that it is never quite perfected or final or definitive. If we were to continue to work on it the object would mutate and produce other meanings and significances, would generate more questions, would extend the practice, but it would remain unfinished, incomplete. In my understanding this description of a particular kind of research that is dynamic, creative and constructive, drawn from biological sciences, is close to what we are engaged in when performance practice becomes research practice. Even if productions emerge from such processes that have lives in the professional theatre context and that end up as archival objects or traces in the company's historical record, as research objects they remain unfinished parts of a continually unfolding thinking process that expands in time and across space and intersects in the process with other unfinished objects and their thought processes. As Knorr Cetina reminds us, "a stable name is not an expression and indicator of stable thinghood" (2001: 184). In other words, just because a Magnet project produces a production with a title does not indicate that the name represents a stabilised object. Over time that object is changing either by virtue of its continual performance in a variety of diverse contexts, to different audiences and sometimes with different performers (various aspects of the production intensify, clarify over time), or by virtue of its shifting life in the somatic memories of those who encountered it and are then reminded of it or recall it for one reason or another at another time, or in its comparison with other works by Magnet

or other performance makers or other thinkers, writers, artists engaged with similar themes and ideas.

Third, each Magnet production has a project team which constitutes a "repertoire of expertise" (Knorr Cetina, 1999: 225) required to bring the production to fruition. There are two levels of participants at Magnet that I will loosely define as practitioners and leaders. The practitioners (performers, designers, technicians, composers) are passing through, making their particular contribution to the project (or perhaps a series of projects over time) but at the same time building up their own profiles which leads to a certain tension between what the company is trying to do and what the individuals aspire to do. The practitioners are also more or less experienced, more or less involved, and have spent more or less time working with Magnet. The leaders, on the other hand (primarily Jennie Reznek and I[46]) while often fulfilling specific practitioner functions are oriented differently. A significant part of the leader's orientation is outward away from the specifics of the work itself to the society broadly. The leader has responsibility for ensuring the sustainability of the company as a whole, of ensuring that the work is disseminated successfully whether in the form of performance on various platforms or in the form of the discourse on the practice which is disseminated in both formal and informal ways through a variety of both written and oral, analogue and digital, channels. What this means is that over time, and as the company has grown and become more successful, the leaders are pulled away from doing the actual work to writing grant proposals, mentoring new people, attending meetings, relaying information backwards and forwards between the company and the world. This means that certain other individuals begin to take on directorial functions on productions so that a kind of hierarchy begins to develop at the practitioner level with certain practitioners (Mandla Mbothwe is the primary example here) beginning to absorb certain leadership roles with their own productions, which, while falling under the Magnet banner and suffused with the practice culture that has been built up over time, also begins to take on the particular intellectual concerns, aesthetic orientations and predilections of the new leader figure. There is a certain play that is at work here because while Magnet absorbs these new directions and ideas and they become part of the evolving practice culture, if they were to deviate significantly from the core values and principles of the company, this would produce an unacceptable tension. In any event, even where the absorption of the new directions does not produce a conflict in terms of the work produced it might very well produce an internal conflict for the lead-practitioner who begins to feel the need to individuate, to find a new space in which to develop independent of Magnet at which point s/he leaves to take on a leadership role somewhere else.

What this points to is not so much a picture of a closed and stable structure rather a kind of rhizomatic structure which has different entry and exit points, is open to the world and adaptable to new things, in which a multiplicity of pathways and event nodes intersect, entangle and engage to produce a fluid and evolving practice which is still sufficiently coherent so as to be recognizable as Magnet work.

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46   Jennie Reznek and Mandla Mbothwe are co-artistic directors of Magnet Theatre alongside myself.

Fourth, if Magnet's practice *is* a way of thinking, another way of doing philosophy, then it is a philosophy understood in Deleuze and Guattari's terms not as a set of concepts that are "waiting for us ready made like heavenly bodies" (1991/1994: 5) to be applied to the world and our engagement with it, but rather the "art of forming, inventing and fabricating concepts" (2). Furthermore, it follows A.N. Whitehead in understanding philosophy as "an experimental adventure" (1929/1978: 9), "an adventure of ideas" (1933/1967). For Whitehead, every "new idea introduces a new alternative" (1929/1978: 11), a new way of approaching and understanding experience. As Isabelle Stengers remarks in her book *Thinking with Whitehead*, to think with Whitehead today is "to imagine, and to fight against 'ready-made' models and above all, not to despair" (2011: 11).

To think with Whitehead today is also to affirm that the success of a philosophical proposition is not to resist objections but to give rise to what he himself calls a "leap of the imagination" (PR, 4) – and the point is to experiment with the effects of that leap: what it does to thought, what it obliges one to do what it renders important, and what it makes remain silent (2011: 22).

With these thoughts from Whitehead in mind, let us take the imaginative leap into a concrete example, the production *53 Degrees*.

THE LEAP (*53 DEGREES*, 2002–2003)

I might have chosen any production but I have chosen this one based on the history of Robben Island, the low-lying, rocky outcrop situated some 10 km off the coast of Cape Town that has been occupied in one form or another from before the first colonial arrival. It has been used as a place of exile, banishment, isolation and imprisonment for centuries but it is most widely known as the prison in which Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for more than twenty years along with other leaders of the liberation movements resisting the apartheid regime.

Figure h: Gosekwang Poonyane in *53 Degrees*, Grahmstown Power Station, NAF, 2002. Photograph by Garth Stead.

It is an early production in my body of work that sets out to engage dramaturgically with the Island in an attempt to construct a more inclusive historical presentation. In this sense, *53 Degrees* proceeds as a kind of 'microhistory'. Microhistory has been defined as the reduction of the scale of observation for "experimental purposes", motivated by "the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved" (Levi, 2001: 101). Carlo Ginzburg, one of the foremost exponents of microhistory, in an article entitled 'Microhistory: two or three things that I know about it' (1993), identifies a number of key features including:

- "the minute analysis of a circumscribed documentation, tied to a person who was otherwise unknown" (22)
- [In our case, Florrie Berndt, the daughter of the Robben Island baker, and one of the first women to swim from the Island to the mainland];
- a focus on the narration of an individual event rather than being restricted to its "reconstruction" (23)

[In our case, the story of the first organized swim from Robben Island to the mainland];
- "obstacles interfering with the research [are] constituent elements of the documentation and thus ... become part of the account" (23)

[In our case, the staging of a contemporary woman's struggle to reclaim a creative life interrupted by domesticity, and the difficulties, both personal and historiographical, that this presented].

The latter is a kind of Brechtian distancing device intended to overcome the possibility that the narration "*could* translate itself into an account that filled the gaps in the documentation to form a polished surface" (Ginzburg, 1993: 23, italics in original). Ginzburg, the historian, "who has only at his disposal fragments of things and documents" (28), accepts their limitations while "transforming them into a narrative element" on "a terrain of invention" (28). He describes this work as a "leap" over the "inevitable gap between the fragmentary and distorted traces of the event ... and the event itself" (28); a leap betwixt the past and the present, across the inevitable abyss that lies between.

It seems to me that such a leap, with all its impossible dimensions, is central to what I am trying to argue for here and to the way of working Magnet has been engaged in over the past 27 years.[47] In fact, it is one of the core images of *53 Degrees*, repeated over and over again in Nxele's attempt to jump across Cove Rock. Nxele (or Makana) was a prophet who led the Xhosa nation in battle against the British in the 19th century, at a place now known as Grahamstown[48] which today hosts one of the biggest theatre festivals in the world:

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47   This text was first written in the lead up to Magnet Theatre's 30th anniversary. At the time of publication of this handbook, Magnet Theatre has been active for 37 years.
48   At the time of this chapter's first publication, the place was still known as Grahamstown, though was changed to Makhanda on 2 October 2018, in honour of Nxele.

For Nxele, the last act had come. He had fled with his followers eastwards along the coast. His final gesture of resistance created an extraordinary scene in an extraordinary setting. He chose a place known today as Cove Rock … a huge cliff-like slab, 86 feet high … at the extremity of a wide sandy beach.

Cove Rock … is cleft by a deep, wide notch in the middle, through which the sea thunders, and is in fact two separate slabs. The one side adjoins the shore and the other the deep sea, and it was from atop the landward slab that Nxele declared that he would summon the Xhosa ancestors to rise from the sea and come ashore to help drive the white man from the land.

To summon them, he said, he was required to leap from the landward slab to the seaward one, across the gap above the dashing seas that burst into the notch.

[…] On the appointed day the sands surrounding Gompo [the Xhosa name for the sandy beach below Cove Rock] were packed by a multitude eagerly awaiting the miracle. Nxele ascended the rock from which he was to leap and sat atop it, contemplating the wide and dangerous gap. He sat thus through a long, weary day and made no attempt to jump. […] From the crowds rose urgent cries, "Nxele, the sun has set. We are tired and cold. Leap! Leap!" But he remained motionless. (Mostert, 1992: 483)

In the end, the Xhosa were defeated and Nxele ended up being imprisoned on Robben Island. He drowned while trying to escape in a small boat but his body was never found and the Xhosa believe that he will still return.

In the episode described above Nxele stands poised, ready to take the leap. In the end he does not jump, but at that precise moment everything is possible – all routes remain open and available, the miracle is still possible, the ancestors might still arise. What is required is a decision; a risk. It is this aspect of the decision that is central to the process of making and the emergence of novelty, the way the virtual becomes actual in the process, and it is used in the way it is understood by Whitehead "in its root sense of a 'cutting-off'" (1929/1978: 43). It is an act of selecting or choosing from alternative possibilities. And such moments of decision are, at least primarily, felt rather than thought. They are suffused with what he calls "affective tone" (1933/1967: 176) and this affective tone and our feeling of it, exists prior to any attempt to cognize it, and is in excess of any attempt to cognize it. In fact the feeling of the affective tone is a condition for any cognizing that might occur. Furthermore, such decisions are singular – they cannot be determined in advance or made according to any rule. It is what Étienne Souriau refers to as "a case of instauration, a risk taken, a discovery, a total invention" (Latour, 2011: 310).

The dramaturgical process in this early work was much less formed or conscious than it has subsequently become, but it produced a multitude of questions and first tentative answers that were to be worked through with greater clarity in productions that followed.

Some might raise the objection that to begin without a question in mind reflects a rather sloppy, unsystematic, perhaps random approach to conducting research. But I would argue that far from being unsystematic or random it represents one of the actual strengths of performance as a mode of research, its particular emergent character. As Baz Kershaw puts it, "even the most open and carefully expressed [questions] inevitably imply a more or less predictable range of responses, which flatly contradicts the qualities of radical openness and excess that the creativity of performance practice at its best can produce" (2009: 112). Objections to this approach are based on a particularly orthodox sequentiality of knowledge production based on an idea that knowledge systems are vertically integrated. In other words they involve the application of a pre-existent schema or concept onto the experience of the world. According to this view, in order to know we refer our immediate and fragmentary experience or sense-data (lower level) to the pre-existent schema (higher level) in order to render it coherent and intelligible. In other words we produce a kind of cognitive map, defined according to a predetermined question or set of questions, *before* we use it to find our way. Then as we move in the real world we refer back to the map to check where we are and whether we are heading in the pre-determined direction towards the pre-determined destination which is the answer to the predetermined question/s. This results in a closing down of the possibilities of the future. It reduces the potential for getting lost and for chance encounters along the way and it restricts adventurousness and novelty and the unexpected discovery. But it also assumes that the world represented by the map is fixed rather than in a state of constant emergence, that the meaning that we seek is suspended awaiting our arrival, and that we are somehow detached from the world, self-contained, stable and fully formed rather than in a constant state of our own emergence in the course of our embodied, practical engagement and involvement with the world.

Ingold argues, based on the work of David Turnbull (1989, 1991), that knowledge is not vertically but laterally integrated, formed or in a constant process of formation as we move around in our environment. The knowledge that has brought us to one place is put to work in setting off towards another (Ingold, 2000, 229). So rather than applying a map that has been pre-made, the map is produced on the go. In other words, as Ingold puts it, "we know as we go, not before we go" (230). This is not map-making or map-using but simply mapping, an ongoing process of attention and involvement and if this gives rise to artefactual representation these are merely "stepping stones along the way, punctuating the process rather than initiating it or bringing it to a close" (231).

The experimental nature of performance as process, the trial and error method of feeling one's way towards a goal, open to the possibility of bumping into new discoveries along the way, the creation of imaginary or potential spaces within which to engage with specific questions, is what makes performance able to "articulate complexes of thought-with-feeling that words cannot name, let alone set forth. It is a way of accessing the world, not just a means of achieving ends that cannot be named" (Radley, 1995: 13). The problem with this, as Nigel Thrift points out is that "many academics do not see the world in this experimental way. For them it is already found before it is discovered. But in a world that has never been

more mapped we surely still need to set out without maps every now and again" (2003: 2023).

So setting out 'without maps', at first with just the desire to create something new, we became concerned with finding images of women doing extraordinary feats despite the difficulty of their circumstances. This was the starting point of the journey. This led us to the first Robben Island swim and that in turn led us to the site of Robben Island and its history, because to engage in the event of that first swim proved impossible without engaging in a heterogeneous history, filled with contesting narratives or at least fragments of narratives some more visible than others. Also because the swim suggested itself as another image of escape, another way to attempt to flee the bondages of the Island bringing the swimming narrative into relationship with the narrative(s) of escape attempts that are so much a part of the Island's various histories.

As we worked, the original impulse to find images of women transcending the limitations of female lives in a male-dominated world through physical activity (inspired/ driven by a contemporary woman's struggle to reclaim a creative life interrupted by domesticity) continued to interface with the emergent discoveries of the varied and complex history of the Island. And the difficulties of the research endeavour (both because of the complexity of the history and because of personal life demands) became part of the research itself.

Questions emerged or perhaps puzzles that required solving. Central to these was one regarding the relationship between the past and the present. How do they exist alongside or perhaps entangled with each other? How do they speak to each other, if at all? More specifically we were engaged by the challenge of making the piles of paper drawn from the archive – the traces of the past – live on stage in the present. In other words, how to embody or perform the archival fragments? What spatial image to create on stage to contain the fragments of the past? How to define the nature of relationship between the body of the actor present on stage and the bodies from the past, absent except for their disembodied and fragmentary inscription/description in documents from the archive? Dramaturgical questions of space, of structure, of character, all determined by the central question regarding the nature of the relationship between the past and the present.

As I engage in remembering the production, *53 Degrees*, it is obvious to me that these questions did not lead to easy answers. In fact in many senses the answers are as paradoxical as the questions were and continue to be and the production reflects this in its uneasy and disordered character.

What I am trying to point to here is the way a process of thinking unfolds and at a variety of different levels or scales, woven into the making of the work, which gives rise to questions and some proposed answers, however tentative these may be, and these are picked up and developed further in other works that forms part of what I would call a particular research assemblage that operates over an extended period of time. In the next section I will try to think through how this happens in some more detail with recourse once again to Whitehead.

Figure i: Jennie Reznek in *53 Degrees*, Grahmstown Power Station, NAF, 2002. Photograph by Garth Stead.

THE CORPUS

A production like *53 Degrees* exists as an entity on its own with its own proper name. But to say this does not imply that it is a fixed and finished thing. Rather, to describe a production as an entity is to suggest that it has achieved a certain level of "objective immortality" (Whitehead, 1929/1978: 29; 238); enough of a sense of "integral satisfaction" to suggest something relatively stable has come into existence even if there can be no suggestion of finality here because the "pure thisness" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1977:7) of the thing produced is "perpetually perishing" (Whitehead, 1929/1978:29). This is both in the sense that all performance works have their existence only when they are being performed, and the sense in which the existence of these performance works in the corporeal memories of those who participated in the performances – practitioners and audiences – fades progressively or becomes more and more imperfect over time, or on the contrary, the sense in which these works shift and expand as a result of additions to the overall landscape of productions.

At the same time, following Whitehead, "there is nothing that floats into the world from nowhere" (1929/1978:244). Each individual production is related to all other productions while not being determined by them. Each new production reacts consciously or unconsciously to the gestures, propositions, the thoughts and questions raised in earlier productions, but at the same time each production asserts its own singularity. As Whitehead puts it:

> [each] novel entity is at once the togetherness of the 'many' which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive 'many' which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthesizes. The many become one and are increased by one. In their natures, entities are disjunctively 'many' in process of passage into conjunctive unity (1929/1978, 21).

So every production, which is ultimately an event, a process of becoming, is connected to what it is related to from before and is attempting to break away from these interconnections. "It both inherits everything that comes before it and breaks away from everything it inherits" (Shaviro, 2012: 110). This is what Whitehead calls a "route of inheritance" (1929/1978:279).

Whitehead's ideas on routes of inheritance are applicable at various levels of scale in Magnet's work: at the molecular level of the process of making or of performing, as we leap from one moment of decision to the next; at the molar level of formations – how one production relates to others; and, at the level of the *corpus* – the body of work as a whole. And it is this third level that I am most interested in here.

The body of work is a "conjunctive unity" of other bodies – "the many become one". But this does not imply that the body of work is a simple totality. As Deleuze and Guattari proclaim:

> [if] we discover totalities alongside various separate parts, it is a whole of these particular parts but does not totalize them; it is a unity *of* all these particular parts but does not unify them; rather it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately. (1972/1977: 42, italics in original)

Nor does it imply a consistency or continuity whereby the body of work maintains itself by recreating the very processes that produce it (Varela's process of "auto-poesis"). Rather it implies a process of "continual redefinition, or becoming other than what it was" (Shaviro, 2012:112, note 7).

There is, however, another, intermediate level of organization at play in the work of Magnet Theatre that is central to the 'epistemic culture'. Early Magnet works tended to be random, opportunistic events that responded to various impulses and circumstances. Over time a more considered relationship between the work in the university and the idea of research, and the practice in the studio began to emerge. This led to conceptualizing a number of multi-year thematic foci around which different kinds of activities and outputs coalesced. The first of these themes concerned performing history or staging the archive. This involved four productions: *53 Degrees, Rain in a Dead Man's Footprints, Onnest'bo* and *Cargo*, the work in Clanwilliam with school learners on the Bleek and Lloyd Collection in the Clanwilliam Arts Project, a number of journal articles, and ultimately a PhD thesis with the title, *Remembering in the postcolony*. The second focus was on migration. Here again, there were four productions: *Every Year, Everyday, I am Walking; ingcwaba lendoda lise cankwe indlela* [the grave of the man is next to the road]; *Die Vreemdeling* [The Stranger]; *Inxeba Lomphilisi* [Wound of the Healer]; journal articles; a collection of playscripts: *The Magnet Theatre 'Migration' Plays* (Reznek *et al*, 2012); and a collection of academic essays: *Performing migrancy and mobility in Africa: cape of flows* (2015).

In this way, productions are arranged into what I will term research assemblages. The concept of the assemblage appears in the work of Whitehead and Deleuze and Guattari and while all use it to refer to a set of relationships between heterogeneous elements, it

is the latter pairing who are most systematic in defining what is meant by the term. It is instructive that the French word that is translated as 'assemblage' in English is *agencement* and according to Shaviro it is defined "as a conjunction 'of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another,' and also 'of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies'" (Deleuze & Guattari quoted in Shaviro, 2012: 148, note 3).

Some of the elements that make up any particular assemblage take the form of an "intermingling of bodies reacting to each other" at a variety of scales – the human and non-human bodies engaging each other in the molecular moments of each production; one production reacting to another at the molar level of forms and formations. This is what Deleuze and Guattari refer to elsewhere as "the *production of productions,* of actions and of passions" (1972/1977: 4, italics in original). Other elements take the form of "acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed *to* bodies" that might be formal (as in journal articles, or book chapters) or informal (as in interviews, rehearsal notes, post-performance discussions, reviews etc.). Deleuze and Guattari refer to these as "*productions of recording processes,* of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of reference" (1972/1977: 4, italics in original). Some of the elements are produced by Magnet and some are produced by others in reaction to what is produced by Magnet. To this extent the assemblage is not entirely predictable or planned. It is not determined in advance but emerges over time revealing its properties and capacities in the process. It is a structural composition defined by its dynamic nature, shifting and adapting as it incorporates new elements. In line with this, as Manuel DeLanda emphasizes, the assemblage is not based on relations of interiority in which the individual parts form the identity of the whole. Rather, they are defined by relations of exteriority in which the whole is not reducible to its parts – the components that make up the assemblage are not essential to the identity of the whole; they could be replaced by other components (DeLanda, 2006:18). But this does not mean that the components do not interact with or relate to each other. The assemblage produces associative links between elements as a result of their contiguity in space and time, relations of resemblance, and relations of cause and effect. Together these produce a sense of coherence between the elements. But this doesn't mean a sense of total agreement. The assemblage is characterized by difference, by the emergence of alternative possibilities. What is required is what Deleuze and Guattari call a "disjunctive synthesis" which is an affirming and "positive relation among a multiplicity of... incompatible alternatives" (Shaviro, 2012:114). This can be likened to Leibniz's notions of compossibility and incompossibility. But where for Leibniz there is one "most perfect or most fully real" incompossibility in the series of incompossibilities, for Whitehead all incompossibilities must be equally affirmed. Or as Deleuze puts it: "For Leibniz... bifurcations and divergences of series are genuine borders between incompossible words. [...] For Whitehead ... on the contrary, bifurcations, divergences, incompossibilities, and discord belong to the same

motley world" (Deleuze quoted in Shaviro, 2012:116/7).

The combination of these research assemblages make up the body of work and as

Jean-Luc Nancy suggests, "it makes sensible an insistence, if not an obsession... a certain way of thinking" (Nancy, 1993: ix) or as Cull would have it, "a kind of philosophy" (2012: 21). As a kind of philosophy it "does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure" and "this cannot be known before being constructed" which is how Deleuze and Guattari describe all philosophy (1991/1994: 82).

As a kind of thinking it is as Henk Borgdorff suggests – with reference to Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's work – "unfinished thinking" – "a productive *not-yet-knowing* against the backdrop of an ever receding knowledge horizon" (2012: 194). It is a leap into the unprecedented and the unknown. Furthermore, it does not reveal the meaning of the work/world as if it had been hidden away, out of sight, awaiting our arrival and our sudden raising/parting of the curtain, the sudden capacity to see it, or make it be seen, as if for the first time. Rather such thinking is a form of poesis that as Nadia Seremetakis reminds us "means both making and imagining" – an "action that is the cause of something to emerge from non-existence to existence" (Plato quoted in Seremetakis 1994: 15) – it brings something new into being; new concepts, new methods, new ideas, new questions, projections and possibilities. In this way it becomes a machine for thinking the future even when, as is the case with much of Magnet's work to date, it works with material from a past that will not easily pass. To this extent, it is motivated by an ethical project, the concrete obligation to intervene in the present, to respond to the task that is before us in South Africa today, the task of being free.