

CHAPTER 18

MOHAHLAUDI-BAHAHLAUDI (TRAVELLER-TRAVELLERS): A CASE OF PRACTICE AS RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

The scholarly texts constituting Part 1 of this publication provide testimony to the fact that PaR is the kind of methodology that scholars like Mark Fleishman, and many others, have been seriously engaged with over time. Their committed engagements have facilitated a situation whereby the methodology has gained validity within various drama and theatre university departments in South Africa, India, the United Kingdom, Finland, the United States of America and elsewhere globally. My reading of these scholarly contributions is that they generally share the common denominator of explicating PaR in terms of its various philosophical underpinnings and defining characteristics. This observation is intended to state this chapter's point of departure and essential focus, which is that it does not mainly attend to the task of adding to the existing scholarship that defines the methodology in question. Instead, it serves as an offering to the scholarship that sheds light on the possible how to of PaR, which is a challenging undertaking to deal with considering the inherently subjective nature of PaR in general and its aspect of methods in practice. As such, it needs to be noted that this chapter does not necessarily articulate an argument. Rather, it is an articulation of my experiences of having engaged with PaR during the course of my doctoral study at the University of Cape Town's Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies from 2011 to 2022. Specifically, the chapter is an account of: (a) how I went about conducting my research, and (b) what the processes and objects of my research were.

The contributions constituting this publication are meant for a primary readership of MA and doctoral candidates who are grappling with PaR in one way or another, particularly the methodology's methods in practice. The mentioned category of readership is one that I am 'close to' as an artist-researcher who grappled, and continues to grapple with PaR. Then, it is worth briefly mentioning that the decision to undertake a doctoral study was informed by two reasons: (1) my personal-professional need to have a better understanding of my way(s) of working as a theatre director who was, and still is, invested in devising performance, and (2) making a scholarly contribution to the literature that explicates directing practice particularly from a south(ern) African perspective. My doctoral thesis: *The [un]knowing director: a critical examination of directing within the context of devising performance* (Thulo, 2022) became a culmination of those inspirational factors.

Essentially, my doctoral study argues that the [un]knowing director is the kind of director who makes their artistic decisions or choices during the moment-to-moment unfolding of a devising process through their intuition and collaboration with other theatre practitioners, particularly performers. The study clarifies and highlights that the [un]knowing director is fundamentally characterised by their particularity of employing non-predetermination as pertaining to how they arrive at artistic choices such as performance text, style, venue, technical and/ or staging choices. As such, an argument is put forward which philosophically argues for knowledge as an enterprise that is acutely emergent and/ or non-predeterministic in character. Furthermore, knowledge is a non-representational endeavour that does not resonate with the Western philosophical orthodoxies that have conceived of knowledge as being inherently presentational and a product of a schism between the human mind, body and surrounding environment(s). The notion of the [un]knowing director speaks of an epistemology and ontology referred to as the I-We perspective so as to articulate the study's specific southern African socio-cultural context and ideological orientation. Tim Ingold's notions of "wayfaring" and "wayfinding" (2000 & 2011), Henri Bergson's (1907) notion of "duration" and Leopold Senghor's concepts of "rhythmic attitude", "reason-eye" and "reason-embrace" (Diagne, 2019), have generally served the study by constituting its conceptual framework. In terms of its methodology, three creative research projects were undertaken in 2012, 2016 and 2018 respectively. Additionally, seven south(ern) African directors contributed to the research by responding to its questionnaire.

As a way of proceeding with this chapter's essential focus, I will now, and hereafter, refer to the two pieces of writing that depict my sense of PaR and *methods in practice*. As indicated by this chapter's title, the first piece of writing, written in South Africa's Sesotho language, is entitled *Mohahlaudi-BAHAHLAUDI*.⁵² It is accompanied by a very basic English translation thereof entitled *Traveller-TRAVELLERS*. Notedly these pieces of writing should not be considered 'separately', but are meant to facilitate some lingual accessibility for the non-Sesotho speaking reader particularly. Due to this chapter's limitations, I cannot discuss the problems of linguistic translation that come with providing the two pieces of writing. However, it is necessary for this chapter to provide the two literary expressions because such a choice serves the key task of foregrounding my socio-cultural subjectivities, which have profoundly affected my doctoral study. For example, the I-We epistemology and ontology mentioned above fundamentally stem from the Basotho philosophical principle of *botho* and the cultural practice of *letsema*.⁵³ Then, I trust that the importance

52 Please note that *Mohahlaudi-BAHAHLAUDI* (*Traveller-TRAVELLERS*) appears as Appendix 1, immediately following this chapter.

53 The Basotho are one of South Africa's black indigenous ethnic groups. *Botho* is a Sesotho word that is the equivalent of *ubuntu*, which is an Nguni (isiZulu and isiXhosa languages) word. Both words denote the African philosophical axiom: "I am because we are and, since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1970:141). Furthermore, *letsema* is the Basotho people's socio-cultural practice of voluntarism geared towards the assistance and well-being of community members who are in need of essentials such as food, shelter and security (Lebeloane & Quan Baffour, 2008:45).

of such subjectivities is not surprising since they are the foundation of my being in the world(s) and intrinsic sense of knowledge as an artist-researcher.

EMBRYONIC MOVEMENTS

From the onset, it should be noted that I am generally referring to my study's *methods in practice* as *movements* based on three reasons, namely: (a) PaR is characterised by a researcher's undertaking of a series of specific bodily undertakings or activities emanating from their artistic practice(s); (2) these bodily undertakings require certain methods as a means of momentarily yielding the necessary knowledge; and (3) *Mohahlaudi-BAHAHLAUIDI* and *Traveller-TRAVELLERS* portrays PaR as an unfolding journey of sorts, which implies travelling (a series of 'physical' *movements* from one place to another). Emphatically, here, it is worth mentioning that PaR in general, and its aspect of *methods in practice (movements)*, is not necessarily realised in any linear manner, although PaR-based postgraduate studies give an impression of linearity in terms of the structure of their pedagogical activities. This is a crucial point to note because it speaks to the challenge that drama and theatre departments are confronted with in light of broad university requirements that 'conceal' PaR's inherently complex nature because it,

[...] is more directed at a not-knowing, or a not-yet-knowing. It creates room for that which is unthought, that which is unexpected – the idea that all things could be different. Especially pertinent to artistic research is the realization that we do not yet know what we don't know. (Borgdorff, 2012:46)

Now, the *embryonic* (initial) *movements* that I undertook, are those related to the task of getting my research proposal approved by the Doctoral Board at the University of Cape Town. Getting this approval can be viewed as a given circumstance for postgraduate studies. However, I do not think it is such a simple matter because it was during my engagement with the referred to task that I developed a *hunch* as to what kinds of methods would be appropriate for satisfying my study and realising its methodology in particular ways. I am consciously using the word *hunch* to indicate the provisional nature of a doctoral study's proposal approval with specific reference to a student-researcher's envisioned and proposed methodology and methods. As such, I think that it is very important for any postgraduate student who is keen on employing PaR to consciously accept the provisional nature of their proposal's details as pertaining to research design and methods, at the least. Furthermore, a consideration of an MA or PhD study's proposal-writing, submission and eventual approval is helpful to appreciate as a set of *embryonic movement(s)* because it also creates the necessary opportunity for a student-researcher to somehow reflect upon their preceding creative-artistic practice(s)/ process(es) as knowledge 'sites' wherein tools or methods for their prospective research projects could be located. This is an important point because it provides possible insight as to how a student-researcher can choose appropriate research methods with reference to PaR. Such importance is based on the afore-mentioned complexity of PaR, namely, its existing myriad possibilities and/ or

options of methods. In his explication of the 'general' characteristics of artistic research, which are indeed applicable to PaR, Henk Borgdorff's following assertion is aligned to this chapter's above suggestion:

The distinctiveness of artistic research, nevertheless, derives from the paramount place that artistic practice occupies as the subject, method, context and outcome of the research. Methodological pluralism – the view that various approaches deriving from the humanities, social sciences, or science and technology may play a part in artistic research – should be regarded as complementary to the principle that the research takes place in and through the creation of art [...]. (2012:46)

Interestingly, it follows that a student-researcher's encompassing activities of their proposal-writing and eventual approval raise the following necessary question: where is the artistic practice part of PaR, particularly with reference to methods, during those activities? This is because the referred to activities, at least based on my experiences, largely involved spending many hours thinking, reading academic texts and writing (proposal development) while excluding any artistic practice. I consider this to be one of the problems with PaR-driven doctoral studies' programmes that require a student to write a proposal, hoping for its eventual approval, without providing some structure and/or 'space' for the student's artistic practice as a key part of their proposal-writing activities. Nevertheless, the referred-to *embryonic movement(s)*, also included my discovered need to reflect upon my most significant artistic practices/ processes that led to a PhD study as a strategy to compensate for the mentioned 'missing' element. Specifically, I reflected, as best as I could, in the form of vaguely recalling the kinds of directorial things (activities, strategies, methods etc.) I did in the rehearsal rooms of various devised performance projects. Notedly, not much came from such reflective efforts, which served as part of my rationale for undertaking a PhD. Overall, the major suggestion that this chapter seeks to make, is that the proposal-writing activities for a PaR-driven PhD study in particular, should be viewed as an *embryonic movement or set of movements* whose method-related choices should ideally be informed by a student-researcher's existent artistic practice(s)/ process(es), and whose outcomes are productively provisional due to the fundamentally emergent nature of PaR as articulated by *Mohahlaudi-BAHAHLAUDI (Traveller-TRAVELLERS)*.

The concept of *methods in practice* as movements suggests that PaR requires a researcher to appreciate that it is the kind of methodology that is acutely embedded in a trial-and-error like execution of particular artistic practice-derived activities. These activities would/could facilitate a researcher's development of appropriate research methods in a manner that is emergent and momentary in nature thus characterising the research process as a series of movements that 'solidify' over time.

TRAVEL-LIKE MOVEMENTS

This chapter's introduction states that the specific methods that enabled me to journey the paths of my PaR-driven PhD study were: (1) a questionnaire that was responded to by seven South(ern) African devising performance theatre directors; and (2) three creative research projects that ultimately operated as an integrated case study in the sense that they co-constituted an investigative cycle. For the reader's benefit, I think that it is useful for this section to provide pertinent details about how I decided upon those methods and how they operated.

The manner in which I implemented my study's *methods in practice*, was certainly characterised by adaptation as necessitated by practicing (lived experiences) and reflecting thereon. Regarding the first method, it is worth noting that the initially decided-upon method (i.e. as per my approved research proposal) was the qualitative research method of a structured interview and not the eventual questionnaire. I can imagine the possibility of one's regard of such a method-related development as having been inconsequential. However, from a 'novice' doctoral student-researcher's perspective, the actual practicing of their initially envisioned methods can be daunting as expressed through *Mohahluadi-BAHAHLAUDI's (Traveller-TRAVELLERS)* various references to a PaR traveller's experiences of anxiety, fear, being lost, lack of clear sight/'unforeseeing' etc. The shift in this case was due to my realisation that (a) conducting interviews with my study's 'sample' of directors would not be effective because they did not reside in the same cities; (b) I would need a transcriber; and (c) it would take me much longer than necessary to complete my data collecting (interviewing) process, all of which were going to be costly to my research process in more than one way. Through reflecting on such an unexpected method-related shift, I was able to alter my *movement(s)* while travelling.

Specifically, reflecting in this case refers to my literal act of writing notes about how the method unfolded and sharing those with my supervisor as a form of verbal reflection geared towards a refining of the method. The study's method of developing, refining, disseminating, receiving and analysing its questionnaire was not 'flawless' in its implementation or in my practicing thereof, but it yielded a very productive research outcome of determining the plausibility of the [un]knowing director from 'other' devising performance theatre directors. If one thinks about it, these directors also constitute the 'We' part of my study's grounding epistemology, referred to as its I-WE epistemology, which is also evidenced by *Mohahluadi-BAHAHLAUDI (Traveller-TRAVELLERS)*. The point is that a PaR student's choice or decision of methods might also be determined by considering the philosophical premise of their pursued epistemology and ontology and how best to champion it through their methods.

The second method included the qualitative research method of case study. Similar to the above-mentioned, this method was also adapted to satisfy the study's particular purpose, which required me to engage with my specific artistic practice/ process as a devising performance director. Literally, the manner of adapting the case study method meant my undertaking of three creative research projects in 2012, 2016 and 2018

respectively. Similar to an aspect of the discussion mentioned above about *methods in practice*, the content of my approved research proposal indicates that I initially envisioned doing two creative research projects in which the first project would ‘perfectly’ lead to the second. Obviously, that was not the case as will become apparent. Moreover, my need and eventual decision to embark upon the third project was definitely unforeseen by me. The third project came from my supervisor’s advice that I needed to undertake it in order to have the kind of data ‘set’ that could equate to or be substantive of a ‘complete’ case study investigative cycle. Specifically, my undertaking of the third creative research project was necessitated by a research need to explore whether or not the study’s key insights, discovered through the preceding projects, could shift in any way or if they would be sustained. The third project also played a role in ensuring that the feedback (learning) loop gathered through PaR and its *methods in practice* as applicable to my study, was robust. Hence, the three creative research projects serve as the study’s co-constitutive moments and iterations of research.

Indeed, a reading of *Mohahluadi-BAHAHLAUDI (Traveller-TRAVELLERS)* is expressive of PaR as characterised by a researcher’s manner(s) of travelling being akin to an emergent, i.e. non-predetermined, and quite lateral series of *movements (methods in practice)*. Additionally, PaR’s *movements* imply repetition as their *modus operandi*. *Mohahluadi...* is suggestive of a researcher’s possible scope of experiences during their travel(ling). Generally, these refer to a researcher’s conscious or unconscious engagement of their senses as their journey (research) manifests in a non-predetermined manner. The PaR traveller clearly relies on their feelings (intuition) in order to undertake the necessary *movement(s)* while fundamentally being with ‘others’ along a path that reveals itself as a series of moments.

Concurrent with the case study method, in the form of the three creative research projects, my study employed the methods of what I have coined as ‘quasi’ auto-ethnographic note-taking and journaling. The latter method, i.e. journal accounts, is one that I adapted from Donald Schön’s method-notions of reflecting *in* and reflecting *on* a professional practice, both of which are aspects of his forensic reflection methodology (1983). The ‘quasi’ auto-ethnographic notes are referred-to as such because my study’s aim was not to produce an auto-ethnographic text as a research outcome. Instead, I saw it as productive to somehow find a useful way of employing an auto-ethnographic approach in order to generate the necessary data materials, which were ultimately the devising session accounts gathered through the study’s three creative research projects. An example of a devising session account is provided⁵⁴ for illustrative purposes pertaining to this chapter’s discussion on *methods in practice*. As far as this chapter is concerned, there are four useful points worth sharing regarding my manner of adapting Schön’s forensic reflection methodology and auto-ethnography.

Firstly, I considered the moments of my directorial engagement with a devising process as a way of ‘determining’ the structure of my note-taking and journaling accounts.

⁵⁴ Please refer to Appendix 2, which is one of the devising session excerpts (accounts) of my doctoral study’s creative research project 2 (Thulo, 2022:122).

This led to a structure that includes *pre-session notes*, *during session notes* and *post-session reflections*. The *pre-session* refers to those moments prior to a rehearsal session when I would be 'alone' inside or outside a rehearsal room. The *during session* refers to the moments during which I would be working together with my co-collaborators inside a rehearsal room going through the moment-to-moment unfolding of a devising session. The *post-session* refers to those moments when I would be 'alone' at the end of or after a devising session. In terms of specific application, I, through practicing the methods over time, learned that my *post-session* moments (and pre-session to an extent) were comparatively more effective for my writing of more detailed and useful reflective accounts of a devising session. On the other hand, my *during session* moments were generally not ideal for my taking of time to sit and write my reflections on a session because I would be actively working with my co-collaborators, which required my immediate action-reactions as the [un]knowing director. However, I can argue that I did employ a kind of reflective practice *during session*. The main difference is found in its non-literary and instantaneous nature, similar to the one a surgeon would experience when undertaking a delicate surgery and not having the time to consult a medical journal to decide on a route of action(s) to take.

Secondly, it is definitely useful for me to re-emphasise that my application of these *methods in practice* improved over time, which should be expected due to the iterative nature of PaR. Relatedly, which is similar to my method-related shift mentioned earlier, I undertook creative research project 1 with the initial 'plan' to also use the methods of collecting my devising sessions' audio-visual recordings and my co-collaborators' written reflections of their experiences of our devising process. Once again, it was only through actual implementation that I came to terms with the ineffectiveness of those methods. Specifically, the method of collecting my devising sessions' audio-visual recordings was ineffective because I came to realise that it was inappropriate for enabling me to articulate my lived experiences of the moment-to-moment unfolding of a devising session. Thus, it was through generating written notes and journal accounts of a devising session that I managed to articulate my lived experiences, which enabled me to effectively extract my thoughts, feelings, (artistic) discoveries, lessons, etc. On the other hand, the method of collecting my co-collaborators' written reflections of their experiences of our devising process proved to be ineffective for my research context (Creative Research Project 1) because I decided to use it based on an assumption that it would be appropriate and/or effective. Essentially, the method's ineffectiveness was due to the fact that my co-collaborators were not accustomed to engaging with literary reflective practice and some of them were simply physically unable to handwrite.

Thirdly, I think that it is helpful to appreciate the operations of my currently referenced *methods in practice* as being interdependent because I could not see how each method would operate in isolation. This could probably be attributed to my study's subject matter, but it was certainly because of my need to devise a methodical manner of momentarily capturing my lived directorial experiences of a non-predetermined devising process.

Fourthly, which is not the least important, my study's *methods in practice* enabled me to develop a sense, or awareness, of the complex interplay of theory and practice

as applicable to its particular research context. I realised PaR's theory-practice interplay by literally focusing on each task of my research and trusting that my awareness and articulation thereof (interplay) would manifest in one task or another. For example, I undertook creative research project 1 with a foundational sense of what the [un]knowing director could be in terms of having identified the study's basic definition of intuition that provided the necessary theoretical clarity of the concept. This work was achieved during my *embryonic movement(s)* of travel, particularly the developing of my research proposal's conceptual framework that provided an initial explication of the [un]knowing director with reference to the study's conception of intuition as a way of knowing. Furthermore, my research proposal's conceptual framework was instrumental in aiding me with developing the basic terminology that I would use in naming my artistic discoveries as intuitive emergences, for example, and framing my perspective of the devising sessions as being fundamentally emergent and/ or non-predeterministic in character. This implied that I started creative research project 1 having acquired a certain vocabulary emanating from theory, i.e. my proposal's conceptual framework and envisioned methods to be practiced and a sense of the kinds of *things* (intuitive emergences) that I would 'look' for during the moments of my artistic practice. Relatedly, a general reading of my study's devising session accounts evidences the moments in which I would be articulating my engagement with theory through reflecting on my artistic practice and how my artistic practice yielded research discoveries that contributed to developing some of the study's theoretical postulations.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided the details pertaining to my doctoral study's *methods in practice* with the sole intention of shedding light on the pertinent specifics of 'what I did' to conduct the research, 'how I arrived' at its method-specific choices and the application thereof. Generally, the chapter has made reference to *Mohahlaudi-BAHAHLAUDI (Traveller-TRAVELLERS)* as its encompassing literary expression of what PaR experientially entails based on the [un]knowing director's perspective. A PaR-focused student-researcher is considered to be the chapter's primary audience and I can only hope that the salient contents of the discussion are adequate in suggesting that PaR's *methods in practice* should be derived from the researcher's deploying of travel-like movements in the form of selectively drawing from their artistic-practices/processes through their undertaking of reflective practice. Lastly, the researcher should find the necessary solace in the fundamentally exploratory, adaptive, emergent and iterative character of PaR and its myriad *methods in practice*.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES

Bergson, H. 1907. *Creative evolution*. New York: Random House.