

Professor Mark Fleishman: Citation

Nominated by Dr Sara Matchett

Director: Centre for Theatre, Dance & Performance Studies (CTDPS) at UCT

This citation serves to nominate Professor Mark Fleishman to the College of Fellows. The nomination recognises the outstanding contribution Fleishman has made to the Theatre and Performance landscape, both nationally and internationally. Fleishman is a recognised thought-leader in the field of Theatre and Performance around the world and has especially excelled in an area of the discipline known as Theatre- or Performance-Making. A distinct departure from the more conventional practice of interpreting and staging pre-existing “canonical” dramatic texts (which are often grounded in and reflect a western imperial worldview), Fleishman’s practice shifts the focus of making theatre to the creation of new work and looks to various kinds of popular and scholarly archives as the starting point for a critical excavation of the legacies of oppression that produced those very archives and their silences. In this way, his creative practice invests in producing new critical meanings from the remains of the past, whilst also calling on us to imagine vital new possibilities and radical futures in the afterlife of empire. The decolonial ethic that suffuses much of this work places his research at the very cutting edge of contemporary African scholarship. Of particular note in this regard are his efforts to draw traditions of African tragedy into contemporary relevance for a South African, African and international audience by exploring the postcolonial/post-apartheid condition through themes of migration and belonging. Although Fleishman has published numerous articles in internationally recognised journals and written chapters for books, the primary focus of his research since he has been at UCT has taken place in and through theatre and performance practice. His research materialises primarily in rehearsal and performance spaces and the outcome results in productions and/or workshop projects that are documented in writing or through other media such as film and audio.

During his tenure at UCT, he has broken significant ground in developing the profile of the discipline and positioning it as an essential and valid site of knowledge-production within the institution and the global scholarly community of which it is part. Coupled with his deep sense of duty and ethical commitment to social responsiveness, Fleishman’s investment in socially engaged paradigms of performance scholarship and practice has also had an essential and demonstrably positive impact on communities beyond the walls of the academy, both in South Africa and abroad. His work with Magnet Theatre, of which he is a Co-artistic Director & Managing Trustee, is testament to this. As a scholar whose creative work is coupled to and produces field-defining research, whilst also serving the ends of social justice by shaping lives in communities outside the academy with whom his work engages, Fleishman undeniably embodies the ideal UCT academic. The range of projects that Fleishman has pursued over the years of his performance scholarship and practice ably demonstrates the best qualities of socially engaged research, and the wide-reaching impact that he, in particular, has had on the many worlds he touches as an artist (theatre maker and director), lecturer, researcher and social activist.

Fleishman’s co-authored monograph, titled *A Story is the Wind: Representing time and space in San narratives* (Skotnes, P. & Fleishman, M. 2002), is but one excellent example of how his research acknowledges these multiple roles, bringing them to bear in critically generative ways. While the monograph reflects on one of his performance productions, it also reflects on the Clanwilliam community where the broader multi-year project out of which this production emerged is based. He has several publications in edited collections, peer-reviewed journal articles, books and conference proceedings that are animated by similar concerns. Among these written outputs, *Magnet Theatre: Three Decades of Making Space* (Lewis, M & Krueger, A (eds.). 2016) focuses on 30 years of Magnet Theatre’s work, detailing Fleishman’s creative vision and the creative outputs that he produced at the helm of this regionally and nationally important theatre company.

Fleishman has directed and served as dramaturg on 34 theatre productions that traverse over 30 years of practice. One of his major artistic works, *Every Year, Every Day, I am Walking*, was created at the end of 2006 on commission from the African Festival for Children and Youth Theatre in Yaounde, Cameroon. The resulting performance work was subsequently invited to the Main Festival Programme at the National Arts

Festival in Grahamstown in 2007. At that point, it was revised to produce the current, internationally recognised iteration. *Every Year, Every Day, I am Walking* has been performed almost continuously since 2006 throughout South Africa (in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Hilton, Grahamstown, in Oudtshoorn at the Klein Karoo Nationale Kunstefees, and in Potchefstroom at Aardklop), as well as in 18 countries around the world, having shown three times in the United Kingdom, twice in Brazil, twice in Japan, as well as Cameroon, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi, Swaziland, Mozambique, Argentina, India, Sweden, Germany, France and the USA. The play won *Pick of The Main Festival* in Grahamstown in 2007; was nominated for *Best Foreign Production* at the 2009 Argentinean Theatre Awards; won the *Best Actress Award* at the Aardklop National Arts Festival in 2009, and was nominated at the KKNK in the same year.

The success of this particular work perhaps speaks to and underlines the relevance of Fleishman's work to African and global audiences at a time of ever-increasing human conflict and migration. *Every Year, Every Day, I am Walking* tells the story of a mother and daughter from an unnamed Francophone African country whose home has been destroyed in a violent internecine conflict the likes of which have been seen too often in postcolonial Africa, and which are partly responsible for massive transcontinental migration of people seeking security and better prospects elsewhere. The play chronicles the pair's harrowing journey to South Africa (a seemingly magical utopia where they might restart their lives and heal from the trauma of the losses they have suffered), and the subsequent difficulties that they face integrating into Cape Town where their immigrant status subjects them to yet other kinds of indignity. This work uses the practical epistemology of theatre to make the 'invisible' community of (im)migrants to South Africa visible, and makes palpable their struggle for the most simple of human needs: a place to belong and call home in the context of violent displacement and trauma. The body is treated as a tool through which a phenomenology of migrant experience, laid down through the perpetual movement that those who have been displaced from the places they call home are doomed to, might be traced and made intelligible to audiences who may otherwise not be compelled to consider such lives (even as they intersect with their own in complicated ways) in other circumstances. Issues such as the loss of language, voice and agency, and the unspeakability of an environment suffused with intense and persistent violence and the various registers of affect that it engenders, describe the contours of the many complicated processes of 'silencing' that sit at the heart of the migrant experience, and offer, even if only in the temporary but nevertheless powerful language of the theatre, a powerful voice and space for these stories to be heard.

Added to this, Fleishman has two notable multi-year Artistic Research projects to his credit. The first project, 'The History Plays', includes five major artistic works: *53 Degrees* (2002), *Onnest'bo* (2002/3/4/5/5), *Rain in a Dead Man's Footprints* (2004/5), and *Cargo* (2007). These creative research outputs, together with his PhD thesis and various publications, constitute this project. The second project, 'The Migration Plays', includes four prominent artistic works: *Every Year, Everyday, I am Walking* (2006-2019), *Die Vreemdeling* (2010), *Ingcwaba Lendoda Lise Cankwe Ndlela* (2009) and *Inxeba Lomphilisi* (2010/11/12/13/14). These, together with the published collection of playscripts, *The Magnet Migration Plays* (Fleishman, M & Reznek, J. 2012) and the collected essays, *Performing Migrancy and Mobility in Africa Cape of Flows* (Fleishman, 2014) make up this project. Together, these two rich bodies of creative scholarship and practice are significant academic and artistic achievements, both institutionally and beyond.

Fleishman's current research projects include 'Re-imagining Tragedy from Africa & the Global South', and 'Translation and Performance', both of which are multi-year international research engagements. The first project, 'Re-imagining Tragedy from Africa & the Global South' proposes to take a concept — tragedy — from the very beginnings of theatre in its European manifestation and to reimagine it from an African perspective to gain purchase on our evolving global presents and possible futures. This five-year project, for which Fleishman raised ZAR 9 Million from the AW Mellon Foundation, is currently in its second year. The second project, 'Translation and Performance', is a collaboration between colleagues from South Africa, India and Amsterdam. The project is in the process of being completed. Publications include two special

issues of the *South African Theatre Journal* titled *Translation and Performance in an Era of Global Assymetries, Part 1* (Fleishman, M & Bala, S. 2019) and *Part 2* (Matchett, S & Fleishman. 2020). Fleishman raised a total of just over ZAR 1 Million over three years for this project from the NRF, UCT International Collaborative Research Projects and the Amsterdam Globalisation Fund.

These exceptional projects all speak to how Fleishman's Artistic Research makes a significant contribution to the discipline of Theatre and Performance.

Among his many notable achievements as a leading scholar in the institution, Fleishman's near-single-handed efforts to establish and achieve crucial recognition of Practice-as-Research (PaR) as a valid critical research methodology at UCT must also be noted. He has been involved with developing the PaR methodology both in the South African context and in the context of the International Federation of Theatre Research (IFTR) where he has been a member of the Performance as Research Working Group and was its co-convener for several years. His research approaches are highly valued nationally and internationally. He is frequently invited to conduct performance research seminars, teach and advise on practical performance and theatre-making programmes, and run PaR sessions, programmes and projects at national and international academic institutions.

References:

Fleishman, M. & Bala, S. (eds.) 2019. *Translation and Performance in an Era of Global Assymetries, part 1. South African Theatre Journal* 32(1), special issue.

Fleishman, M. (ed). 2015. *Performing Migrancy and Mobility in Africa: Cape of Flows*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fleishman, M & Reznik, J. 2012. *The Magnet Migration Plays*. Cape Town: Junkets Publisher.

Lewis, M. & Krueger, A. (eds.). 2016. *Magnet Theatre: Three Decades of Making Space*. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect.

Matchett, S. & Fleishman, M. (eds.) 2020. *Translation and Performance in an Era of Global Assymetries, part 2. South African Theatre Journal* 33(1), special issue. [articles published online, awaiting hardcopy publication].

Skotnes, P., Fleishman, M. 2002. *A Story is the Wind: Representing time and space in San narratives*. Llarec: The Museum Workshop at UCT, Cape Town. ISBN 079922149-X.