

**THE BODY OF THEATRE TECHNICIANS:  
Reviewing theatre performances from the offstage**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE BODY OF THEATRE TECHNICIANS - Reviewing theatre performances from the offstage**

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The aim of this thesis is investigating the actions performed by technicians during all phases of production of a theatrical performance. That is, the creative participation and embodiment of theatre technicians, whose participation in the creation and representation is often ignored or relegated to the more pragmatic aspects of the profession. The analysis contains academic contributions, fieldwork research and interviews with theatre workers, which extend the theoretical discourse with direct testimonials of the life behind the scenes and, on a larger scale, of theatre professionals. The research is not limited to backstage labour during the theatrical performance, but also on the performative role of technicians within the larger framework of the theatrical community that gathers around a common goal, the production, and the society where it is embedded. In this community, everyone participates in the performance within the performance. The relationship between the three levels in action during the live event, stage/backstage/audience, is described as a flow of creation and re-creation of symbols shared by the community.

*Keywords:* theatre technicians, theatre performance, backstage labour, technical theatre

## **RESUMO**

### **O CORPO DOS TÉCNICOS DE TEATRO - Revisão da performance teatral do lado dos bastidores**

**Silvia Demofonti**

A tese pretende explorar a acção desempenhada pelos técnicos de teatro durante todas as fases da produção de uma peça. Isto é, a acção criativa e o embodiment dos técnicos de teatro, cuja participação na criação e na representação dramática frequentemente acaba por ser ignorada ou reduzida às questões mais pragmáticas da profissão. A análise é acompanhada pela pesquisa de campo e por entrevistas a trabalhadores da área teatral, que ampliaram o discurso teórico com testemunhos directos da vida dos bastidores e, de forma mais abrangente, dos profissionais do teatro. Não se trata só da investigação do backstage durante a atuação da peça em si, quanto de reflectir sobre o papel performativo dos técnicos no quadro maior da comunidade teatral que se forma em volta do objectivo comum da encenação e a sua inserção na sociedade. Na comunidade todos participam na performance por trás da performance. A relação entre os três planos em acção, palco/bastidores/público, é um fluxo de produção e recriação dos símbolos partilhados pela comunidade.

*Palavras-chave:* técnicos de teatro, performance teatral, bastidores de teatro, técnicas teatrais

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## ***INTRODUCTION***

This study explores the actions performed by theatre technicians within productions, in both their material aspects, recognized by public and other members of the community, and symbolic aspects, which are often neglected by critics, academics and practitioners. Despite being present in most contemporary theatre productions, technicians have seldom received attention from pundits. Academics have favoured the study of performance from the actor's and the audience's perspective, and covered only the practical functions of technology in theatre without much investigation about who was occupied with those practices. The inclusion of backstage labour in the analysis of productions can open new perspectives in the study of theatre.

A theatrical performance is generally considered an act that implies artistic inspiration and motives, and which holds power of suggestion onto its spectators, who are often prepared to see something "culturally significant". It is a complex subject, since the very term *performance* (and related attribute "performative") investigated in this study can be applied, and indeed it has been employed to define social interactions, thus attempting to broaden the spectrum of analysis. *Mask* is a dense term that we link to theatre, as well as ritual contexts, but it has also been used in literature to describe our pursuit of authenticity through the enactment of our expectations of identity and their acknowledgment by the others. The Latin word for mask was *persona*, which is used to describe the enactment of a social role or a character in a play by an actor.

Theatre technicians can be described as the members of a theatre company or freelancers participating in a production by reproducing a model or a plan that is provided by designers or directors. My observation showed that in order to define a participant as a technician depends on their role within the production, and that tasks can vary. In receiving theatres, roles are usually well-defined and members of the tech crew very seldom change their status to designer; in producing theatres, technicians can assume the role of designer at times, according to the necessities of the production; the same can be said about freelancers, who, for their very nature, are not bound to any institution/company. Thus, theatre technician is a profession that comprehends practical knowledge and skills, but it can be extended to other areas that fall under the creative sphere of theatre occupations.

Technicians are part of the group dynamics of the theatre community and participate in live performances. The former contains roles and hierarchy, which places technical work on a functional level that does not hold artistic value, but only the ability in reproducing a given model. The importance attributed to the sensible and aesthetical qualities of acting is accepted, while creative contribution is denied to those whose presence is not visible and not credited by the general public. The process of embodiment is crucial when researching the relations between stage, audience and backstage. When a show is running, a theatre community opens its doors to the public, involving a new element, the spectators, that was only abstract during rehearsals and that necessarily alters the dialogue between onstage and offstage. The latter must cease to exist to the external eye, whose presence is, at the same time, unsettling and bearer of new meanings for the whole group.

The idea of sensibility implies a way to know the world through our body, understood as an object that is in relation with the space and whose connections can allow us to construct our vision of the world and create meanings. Thus, since performance is the use of our body under (and for) social action, technicians ought to be included in the analysis of theatre production as an active performative voice in the construction of the whole community where they reside. This study will also raise questions concerning the frontiers between art and technique, although it will be focused on the ascription of those properties to theatre technicians. That dichotomy, in fact, has been the object of a long history of studies which will not be extensively covered here, as the matter is not only intricate, but insoluble in an investigation of the size and objectives such as this dissertation.

In this study, the definition of technical theatre has its conceptual foundation in the works of Alfred Gell and Richard Sennett, as it is conceived as the result of intention-driven craftsmen working in a field that has been rather mystified and made inaccessible by practitioners and scholars. The studies that have been conducted about theatre practice concern a wide range of aspects of what defines theatre as human behaviour and social necessity, however actual investigations on the emotional, creative and intellectual participation of technicians are limited. The scarce amount of documentations may have been caused by the idea that backstage labour could be considered contingent and, therefore, prosaic and lacking "artistic" relevance.

This study is situated in Portugal, a geographical frame that entails a particular social and economical background, whose outlines will be drawn to understand the work market where our interviewees and observations were embedded. Vera Borges has investigated the Portuguese theatre world, focusing her data collection and deductions on actors and directors. The contributions of Idalina Conde here are mostly centered on the "vulnerabilidade" of theatre practitioners, still mainly actors. Nonetheless, the investigations conducted by the scholars represent a starting point to reflect upon the work conditions of the whole community working in the theatre field.

Theories by avant-gardist from the late-Sixties will be introduced as a counter-weight to my thesis, for they were very critical about technical theatre, as they, though on various degree of intensity and with different goals, considered it a petty, if not "deadly", imitation of television and cinema (Jerzy Grotowski 1968, Peter Brook 1968). I will employ Eugenio Barba's theatre anthropology and Antonin Artaud's ideas on the "langage concret du théâtre" to extend their discourse to theatre technicians, and integrate the recent studies of Tim Ingold about skills and adaptation to the space. The investigation will also see the necessary contributions of Erving Goffman and Erika Fischer-Lichte, as respectively sociological and performative perspectives on the actor/spectator relation and its transformative power. Those theories, especially Fischer-Lichte's and Ingold's, open the discussion to further analyze the construction of identity based on the appropriation of social and physical space, on the embodiment of that space and its consequent and continuous recreation (Arjun Appadurai). The interpretations of the history of theatre as institution provided by Christopher Baugh, Bruce McConachie and Gay McAuley are useful tools to reflect on the influence of social changes on theatre practice, and vice versa.

Victor Turner and Richard Schechner laid the premises to contemporary performance studies. Connections between theatre and society are a fertile ground for theories that will be here applied to the interpretation of the influence of the social background on backstage labour and how the latter contribute to the shaping of the perception of the audience/society. Turner's idea of the mutual influence between aesthetics and societal drama and Schechner's application of that concept to his *restored behaviours* are employed to introduce in the discourse the entire theatre community, including technicians, as members of a group that is continually in dialogue with the outside world.

Extracts from fieldwork will be offered throughout the first four chapters to sustain the arguments presented, while a systematic analysis of recurrent themes detected during

observation and interviews will be provided in detail in chapter 5. There will be given examples from my observation of the productions *Ilhas* (K.A.R.N.A.R.T.), *Tristeza e Alegria na Vida das Girafas* (Mundo Perfeito) and *Os Doze Pares de França* (TNDMII, Comédias do Minho), along with passages from interviews of theatre practitioners with comments. The last chapter is dedicated to a set of pictures that have been collected to illustrate some of the topics discussed in the study and used to put into practice that inversion of perspective that I first found in Essin's works - the invisible turned visible. The visual support emphasizes this new look and the images add to the discourse elements of background labour which could contribute to the review of theatre practices.

One of reasons behind my interest in technical theatre is the scarcity of documentation produced by scholars on this topic. Often neglected, when this aspect of theatre production is addressed, it is mostly a didascallic presentation on the "how-to" rather than an investigation on the emotional and intellectual motives of those who choose the profession of theatre technician, and their contributions in the production process. An article by Christin Essin, "An Aesthetic of Backstage Labor" (2011) and a collection of interviews conducted by Barbara Baker, *Backstage Stories* (2007) aroused my interest, so I started considering the hypothesis of applying the same perspective on Portuguese theatre. Like them, I had worked in backstage, although my participation was limited to a rather small production. The anthropological perspective assumed here aims at drawing a light on practitioners that inhabit spaces seldom touched by the academics - the maze of hallways, rigging systems, booths and workshops where technicians operate - and the relations between them and the rest of the theatre community.

The ambition of this project, certainly not modest, is to solicit the valorization of all the constituents of theatre productions and to investigate the emotional, critical and creative contribution of theatre technicians, considering the hierarchical patterns at play. That is, the more or less defined internal divisions between technical and creative crew, the relations between technicians and the rest of the group, and, on a broader level, the network between theatre community members. In Portugal, inadequate funding allocated to theatre can stimulate the use of unprecedented technical and stylistic means and the exploitation of original languages. However, it should not be overlooked that budget cuts can stop projects, but also foment a defensive attitude in theatre companies, that are threatened by the reduction of spaces and financial resources.

It is necessary to reconsider the theatrical space as a producer of meanings that shapes the performative actions of the group members who reside there. The preparatory work of rituals of passage, events that gather the symbols of a community in high concentration, can be put in parallel with the works of backstage. Theatrical performance bears a "magic halo" that can cause transformation in all participants to the event. The public, involved in this transmutation of bodies and objects into metaphors, is only one of the parts involved in this change. My proposition is that the aesthetic-cultural models presented in the *pièce* should be associated to the preparation of the *pièce* itself as, in the same way, it can be analyzed in the case of rituals.

Fieldwork research was conducted mainly through the observation of productions, new and repeated, and interviews with theatre workers, both freelancers and residents. It was central to choose participants from different areas to cover the net of relations and to try to establish a dialogue between the elements that produce and run a show. Nowadays practitioners are distributed between permanent theatre companies and freelancers, as theatres can rarely support large groups of personnel. The interviews followed a script that was adapted to the role of each person and the flow of the conversation. They took place in theatre lobbies, director's office, workshop, artist residency, belvedere, cafés and the streets of Bairro Alto. Adaptability in structure brought forth confidence and opened to the possibility to visit corridors, workshops and rigging systems, and, I believe, let interviewees feel free to talk about theatre life, internal principles and prejudices: valuable testimonials of the dynamics and taboos within the theatre community.

Interviews were conducted with producer (Magda Bizarro, Mundo Perfeito), technical directors (Paulo Prata Ramos, Culturgest and Jorge Esteves, Teatro da Cornucópia), artistic director/director/actor (Filipe Crawford, FC Produções Teatrais), stage manager (José Grande, São Luiz Teatro Municipal), music and sound designer (Rui Gato, freelancer), sound technicians (Ricardo Fernandes, São Luiz Teatro Municipal and Francisco Leal, Teatro Nacional São João), scenic artist/set builders (João Paulo Araújo and Abel Fernando, Teatro da Cornucópia), sound and light technicians (Sérgio Melo, FC Produções Teatrais and Sílvia de Sá, freelancer). It must be noted that the profession attributed to the interviewees above are not always fixed, but assigned according to the role they presented themselves as. Their position can differ depending on the production where they participate, although some are more likely to maintain their role.

The observations of three productions, *Ilhas* (K.A.R.N.A.R.T.), *Tristeza e Alegria na Vida das Girafas* (Mundo Perfeito) and *Os Doze Pares de França* (Comédias do Minho, TNDMII) provided an opportunity to explore the encounters between resident and touring companies and the patterns of communication and role division between practitioners. During observation, it was necessary and fun to learn the shared language and stories about the team and theatre conventions. Although I only realized later in my research, my positioning played a relevant role in what I focused on, as it was respectively from the perspective of the residents in the case of São Luiz and TNDMII and the incoming company in Montemor-o-Novo - a discrepancy that may be justified by the growing familiarity with the groups. Observing those productions allowed me to understand the technicians' interpretation of their function within the group. I tried to capture the emotions and intellectual involvement associated with technical work.

In each observation, I had the opportunity to talk with practitioners at work, study the relations between them and their modes of communication during the preparation of a play, the performative within the performance. *Ilhas* was an existing production that had opened one year prior to the run in São Luiz, and which is a Perfirst, a term coined to indicate a "performance+instalação", with a narrator voice that plays the main character and the leading force. Spectators were free to walk onstage, thus light and sound board were placed on the balcony, each on one side. The actors on stage did not have lines and they are illuminated, together with props orderly placed in front of them on a table, under the narrator voice's guidance. One of the technicians involved in the production told me that it looked like a "feira" (fair), which first led me to reflect on the implications brought forth by the adaptation to a new space and the "nomadic" nature of theatre production. The nature of the performance suggested the relevance of dividing rehearsals in different phases, and it also showed that time can be an indicator of the hierarchy within areas.

Shortly after my observation of *Ilhas*, I followed Mundo Perfeito to Montemor-o-Novo, where they were also putting on an existing play, *Tristeza e Alegria na Vida das Girafas*. The company and actors stayed at O Espaço do Tempo, an artistic residency that was known to them, which created a friendly and intimate atmosphere. Stage set up had started the day before my arrival, and I could observe the last works on light, music, which was played live, and tests with head-worn microphones. For two days I could be part of a welcoming theatre company and live with them at the residency. This observation was useful to feel the sense of community between members of the theatre world, and to learn that they may have

worked together in many occasions and for several productions, sometimes not bound to the theatre where they were employed. Also, that the paths that lead someone to be a theatre technicians are varied and very much tied to one's love for the profession, which requires sacrifice in terms of time and financial security. Overall, rather than observing technical labour in itself, that occasion provided me with insights on the more personal aspects of being a technician.

The third observation was for *Os Doze Pares de França*, a new production that opened in February 2016 at Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II. I planned it together with one of the theatre's stage managers, who put me in contact with Carlos Freitas, the one assigned to that production. I could start from the actors' rehearsals in the room provided by the theatre and, in parallel, assist to the building up of the scenography by an external company hired by the theatre. It was an imposing structure that had been designed to represent a transfigured barn, which actors had to climb and walk on, thus it was crucial to negotiate its aesthetics with safety. Since it was a new production, I had the opportunity to witness the staging processes, from scenography to light and sound operation and costumes in their distinctive quality. One of the main aspects my attention was drawn upon during the observation at TNDMII was the encounter between receiving and visiting groups, and the dynamics of territorial appropriation and defense. In fact, from the very declaration of intents of the director, the play represents an "Ocupação Minhota"<sup>1</sup>, the occupation of TNDMII by a theatre company from Minho, with the implications of being a clash between two ways of "making theatre", that is a national theatre and a regional theatre company.

This study aims at exploring not only backstage labour *during* the show itself, but also, and more considerably, at reflecting on the performative role and nature of technicians within the larger framework of the theatrical community that is formed around a production, along with the net of relations between practitioners of the theatre world. The microcosm that surrounds a play is created by bodies that introduce a paradox in the discourse on theatre practice: while the invisible technicians have contingent bodies used for practical purposes, visible actors have transcendental bodies, expression of non-literal meanings. As theatre, by its definition, is the "act of seeing" (from Greek *thea*, see), often behind-the-scenes performances have been ignored by the general public. I tried to create a different approach to the quality of technical work. This pursuit of meanings escapes univocal definitions, but we should not cease to explore the construction of the dramaturgical space as a place of

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<sup>1</sup> The program of this "occupation" included other productions, directed to different age groups and themes.

compromise between technical knowledge and artistic sensitivity where every member of the production is an active and significant participant. This study, in fact, is not comprehensive of all theatre professions and I hope that it could open the analysis to the other members of the community that are not discussed here.

In Chapter 1, I lay the methodological premises of this study, the first and foremost being the avoidance of any judgment on the aesthetics of the plays whose production was under study. The other fundamental intention behind this discourse on theatre technicians is to divert the perspective and apply "re-theatricalization" (Fischer-Lichte 1997) to backstage labour. The definition of theatre is then reflected upon and counterposed to avant-gardists such as Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook, whose theories have developed a divide between technical theatre and the actors' performance and public reception. Relations between theatre practice and society are then tackled, for the former is an occasion for gathering and reflecting on our own vision of the world, both as a community and as individual. With essential contributions from Vera Borges and Idalina Conde, the chapter closes with a presentation of contemporary Portuguese theatre world.

Chapter 2 provides an overall view on theatre as an embodied practice. The spatial context is first considered, as it frames the interpretation and response of the *social actors*. The stage is here compared to an altar where sacrifices are performed and a terrain of threshold for participants. Also, theatre communities are defined as *localities* (Appadurai 1996) and *taskapes* (Ingold 1993), in that they are groups that share a common goal and that are bounded to specific settings. Theatre practice borrows some features that are attributed to rituals. While other figures of theatre are not visible to the audience during the performance, they are credited as the creative minds behind it. Theirs is a different *visibility*, possibly in a more mundane sense, than that of actors, whose presence is one of the essential elements of theatre, together with the audience, also bearing an invisibility of a different nature.

Chapter 3 serves as an illustration on the controversy between *ars* and *technē*, although I am aware that it is a tight knot to untangle, thus this section of the study will only touch upon it. The investigation on the nature of art is soon overcome to favour the concept of autonomy and intentionality. Here it is introduced the concept of craft (Sennett 2008) coupled with Tim Ingold's works on skills as engagement with the world and the necessity of *feeling*. Our knowledge and intervention in the world is mediated through tools, and the pursuit of

quality in our actions is to be attributed to that set of connections with the environment. In this sense, objects acquire performative qualities from the context. At the same time, the use of technology in theatre has changed staging modes and became an autonomous element of the performance carrying its own aesthetics.

Chapter 4 is centered on the definition of theatre technician. I will articulate my discourse on a production timeline to determine who is to be considered a technician. Although categories are not clear-cut, in general we can affirm that technicians are those who enter the production in a later stage than anyone else. According to the size of a theatre company, financial means and deliberate aesthetic choices, technicians can assume other roles, or designers can also execute a plan and/or operate the show. The chapter also presents an overview on the concept of hierarchy applied to theatre companies, mostly from a socio-historical perspective, and considerations on the internal division of roles.

Chapter 5 gathers considerations from my fieldwork, thus interviews and observations, in a more systematic fashion. I collected testimonials and impressions in macro-themes that I had noticed were the most frequent, but I also felt that it was important to address topics that did not appear often, but were relevant to the overall picture of the profession of theatre technician. The themes addressed are related to career and corporativism, women, encounters between theatre companies, negotiations on space, hierarchical organization, creative involvement and invisibility, safety, personal participation, "maionese", public and peer recognition. For each of these subjects, I provide examples from my fieldwork and commentary supported by the theory presented in this study. This record is also intended to substantiate the hypothesis that theatre technicians are indeed part of a broader community and participate in the sharing of meanings.

Inspired by Christin Essin's work on backstage labour, Chapter 6 presents pictures from the production of *Os Doze Pares de França*. The images serve to show some of the concepts discussed earlier in the study, such as territorial appropriation and space adaptation, or the liminal nature of the stage. Another source of inspiration for the change in perspective is the "second gaze" theorised by Dean MacCannell (2001: 36), which focuses the attention to what is unexpected, in this case concealed. This perspective promotes the idea that we should put our suspension of disbelief on hold for a moment and consider the community involved in a production as a unity of intentions, each one carrying its voice in the performance. The individuals that participate in a production live in spaces that are seldom shown to the public and the stage is only one of them, though the most significant. Those spaces frame their

experience, consequently that embodiment will influence the performance and public's reception of it. I followed Christin Essin's idea that "[t]he photographer/filmmaker who takes a camera backstage has the potential to not just represent, but *aestheticize* backstage labor, asking a viewer to consider the beauty and worth of a subject previously deemed insignificant or undeserving attention" (Essin 2011: 35). Technical theatre ought to be accounted as an aesthetic component of the performance and technicians valued as emotional and intellectual participants who, although not visible to the public, project their body and mind through instruments.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Methodological premises.*

During my research, I sought to maintain my deductions distant from any qualitative judgement of the plays whose production was under study. In this perspective, I believe that following theatre productions from rehearsals to first night facilitated this detachment, while the latter was, I must admit, counter-weighted by a growing fondness for the subjects of my research. However, I always tried to evaluate the assumptions made during the observation keeping this latent bias in mind. Upon the investigation on the *actors*<sup>2</sup> involved in the production of theatrical performances, I focused on the relationships between the contributors to the plays, thus I approached various members of the cast. That is, the whole theatre community was included - technicians and creative crew<sup>3</sup>, yet with specific attention to backstage labour.

My methodological premises in this study borrow those of an essay by Alfred Gell from 1992 titled *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology*, where he states:

"If I were about to discuss some exotic religious belief-system, from the standpoint of methodological atheism, that would present no problem even to non-atheists, simply because nobody expects a sociologist of religion to adopt the premises of the religion he discusses [...]. The equivalent of methodological atheism in the religious domain would, in the domain of art, be *methodological philistinism* [...]. Methodological philistinism consists of taking an attitude of resolute indifference towards the aesthetic value of works of art - the aesthetic value that they have, either indigenously, or from the standpoint of universal aestheticism." (Gell 1992: 42, emphasis in original)

From the very early stages of my investigation I noticed that there is not considerable documentation produced by scholars about the dynamics of production as seen from the technicians' point of view - it has been indeed quite neglected. Literature on the aesthetic value of backstage labour and on the creative contributions of technical crews is, in fact, rather scant. When approaching the topic of the bodies in action before, during and after the performance, there are very few examples in theatre critic that reflect on technical work from

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<sup>2</sup> Here playing on the ambivalence of the term.

<sup>3</sup> I am here dividing between technical and creative crew, but we will see later on that those two groups are not strictly circumscribed.

an aesthetical perspective. It is the subject of instructional books (e.g. lighting, sound, machinery, costumes), although they only provide practical indications rather than insights on the creative process entailed in technical work or, even less, on the artistic and human involvement of those working behind the curtains.

The theoretical and methodological point of view usually employed in theatre studies is situated in the audience, therefore it is projected from an outside observer and pointed to the stage, or from within the creative crew. Scholars' attention, upon the analysis of theatre productions, has been concerned with the sensuous elements presented onstage, while failing to include in their analysis the invisible and silent force of technical crews. When Erika Fischer-Lichte sustained that "[theatre] can be described and defined as the place in which space, body, and language meet in their various specific materialities" (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 10), she laid the premises to her question: "[how] are the different art forms interrelated within a performance such that they do not play a role as fixed artifacts but as elements in a performative process?" (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 13-14)

Fischer-Lichte states that there are different, though concurrent, factors that compose a play and that their incidence depends on their specificities. That is the core issue here, since understanding what turns what is regarded as operational tasks into voices with an aesthetical stance on their own would allow us to regard the role of technicians in theatre company as creative elements. I believe that incorporating the members of technical crews in the qualitative spectrum of a performance is the necessary first step to recognize their engagement. The conceptual premise to this inclusion is *re-theatricalization*, as Fischer-Lichte theorised, which would foster a reflection on "theatre materiality and its permanent, demonstrative display" (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 111), this time including the most *material* aspect of theatre, backstage labour.

### *Defining theatre.*

The word *theatre* is a kaleidoscope that can be twisted to generate multiple images. Generally speaking, a theatre is a venue where rehearsals and theatrical performances occur. However, while we can easily identify institutionalized venues as theatres, drawing a line between a theatrical performance and other kinds of performance is not as obvious, hence our need for markers. Attending a play is an activity that not only produces the entertainment of

the audience, but also social critics and the recognition of some sort of fulfilment in the mirroring and identity-building process. A theatrical performance provokes in the spectator self-recognition of human passions and drives experienced through other people's bodies, the actors'. We then understand how presence is crucial to theatrical performances, since on those occasions bodies are not mediated and can be directly experienced by the audience, who is compelled to have empathy for the characters<sup>4</sup>.

An event is labeled "theatre" when it responds to a recognized structure of production<sup>5</sup> and is bounded to socio-cultural "playfulness" - and, as said, such events are, in most cases, hosted in a specifically identified venue. Theatre displays one of the most disputed characteristics of play, that is its being directed by the principle of *utility*, whether religious (salvation) or political (cultural hegemony), and it is dependent on social context<sup>6</sup>.

"[...] play is [...] defined here as behavior, resting upon a biologically inherited stimulus or proclivity, which is distinguished by a combination of traits: play is voluntary, somehow pleasurable, distinct temporally from other behavior, and distinct in having a make-believe or transcendental quality. Many definitions of play have included the view that the goals of play are non-utilitarian, but this statement needs qualification. Except among professional players, such as artists and baseball players, forms of play are often primarily expressive and play is pursued for its own sake. The question of utility is clouded, however, by the distinction between manifest goals and covert, unconscious or subconscious goals. Moreover, many interpretations of the implicit functions of specific forms of play, such as wit and humour, see them as being socially and psychologically supportive in ways that might readily be called utilitarian. Perhaps it is acceptable to say that, at least among non-professional players, the goals of play are usually not consciously utilitarian." (Norbeck 1974: 1-2)

Thus, we have seen that theatre is a label that is conventionally assigned to an event that takes place in an *as-if* fashion and that occurs in a circumscribed space where actions are recognized as fictitious by the audience. As one can observe, definitions are complex and fail to embrace all nuances of theatrical performances. So, performances hosted in the institutional buildings named *theatre* might distance themselves from what has been traditionally considered Theatre, or be a hybrid of various genres, such as the perfinst *Ilhas*. One should abstain from narrowing the concepts of theatre (seen as fictional representation and narrativity) and performance art (which would focus on presence and metacritic) to fixed

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<sup>4</sup> Character and actor are indissoluble during the course of the play - it is this very transfiguration that allows us to believe stage fiction.

<sup>5</sup> This structure of production includes director, actors, designers, theatre crew, administration, and, last but not least, the audience.

<sup>6</sup> Garvey, Catherine, 1990 (1977), *Play*, Cambridge (USA), Harvar University Press.

definitions. The two terms can only be applied to bare concepts, while it is a much diversified world, composed by multiple forms flowing into the broader denomination of performance (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 222).

"[...] «Théâtre» est un terme abstrait qui, dans la réalité, recouvre des phénomènes qui n'ont pas d'homogénéité, chacun ayant les frontières qu'il s'est données ou que le contexte a créées. Des frontières étroites engendrent parfois un complexe de supériorité; mais elles peuvent, dans d'autres cas, susciter le besoin d'échanger, de creuser et de s'aventurer dans un univers différent." (Barba 1993: 215)

Let us say, for the sake of brevity, that on a theatrical event the audience disregards fiction in favour of the suspension of disbelief, while performance art tends to foster the attendees' metacritical aptitude. The categories we tend to use are conditioned by historical and geographical factors, and they are thus susceptible to transformation across the lines of time and space. This could echo Richard Schechner's timeline of Western theatre<sup>7</sup>, where efficacy and entertainment are factors that shift the definition of performances between ritual and theatre<sup>8</sup>. Also, Schechner affirmed that,

"Despite the similarities, there are no universal themes, narratives, or archetypes of performance. But there are universal ethological and neurological processes shaping the formal qualities of performances; these processes yield unique experiences to those making performances and to those participating in them. The similarity of the ritual process to the training -workshop- rehearsal process is evidence of the close and indeed indissoluble links between ritual, aesthetics, and social performances."<sup>9</sup>

We know that places are spaces molded by the community who inhabits them and the outside, and that those places imply an inside/outside dichotomy. This produces the tension that is required for rituals, and the liminal space. Furthermore, contemporary Western society is imbued by "theatricalization"<sup>10</sup>, which is the continuous display of one's own lifestyle before an audience, which yields to and reproduces shared cultural codes in order to achieve group recognition and identity, in other words acts of performativity in everyday life (Goffman 1959). In fact, theatre *sensu lato* has also been employed as the key to interpret

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<sup>7</sup> Drawing from the "loop" between social and aesthetic drama theorized by Victor Turner.

<sup>8</sup> Schechner, Richard, 'Ritual and performance', in Ingold, Tim, 2002 (1994), *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 622-626.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 645.

<sup>10</sup> With the essential contribution of media.

social interactions<sup>11</sup>. This social interpretation broadens up the spectrum of analysis to a more psycho-social field of study. However, that perspective will not be strictly employed in my study, as I find that my bibliographic references should be circumscribed so that they would be relevant to the community where my research is situated, that is theatre workers.<sup>12</sup> Although fascinating, I ought to leave ontological, or merely taxonomical, issues aside, as it will conduce to a path where the focus of this discourse, the human engagement, might be lost. As stressed before, theatre here is to be understood as the whole process of production (and reproduction) of a play.

*Avant-gardes of the second half of the XX century.*

Avant-guardists from the Sixties claimed that the set was only functional to the action and that the text should cease to be the core of the performance, while actors and their instinctual interaction with the audience shifted into its place<sup>13</sup>. Peter Brook affirmed, and Jerzy Grotowski would agree, that "[if] you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound" (Brook 1968: 43). Grotowski's conception of theatre laid on the engagement of the spectator in the battle of instinct and socially-constructed inhibitions. The pursuit of aesthetic authenticity led avant-garde theorists to remove all *unnecessary* elements from theatre, declaring that technique would have kept the expressive capacity of the actors' bodies from emerging. Their claim was that their aesthetic revolution would foster introspection digging into the core of human behaviours and summon the perfect beauty that resides in our inner drives. Technical elements would deprive the actors' performance of effectiveness and they would be an element of distraction for the audience. That would cause interference in the dialogue between actors and spectators, resulting in artistic corruption.

It is not a coincidence that their most famous books were both published in 1968, a year that was soon to be known as the prelude to great social change carried about by protests against pre-existent systems and aimed at deconstructing institutions and replacing them with "free" - more instinctual, thus *natural* - behaviours. Grotowski, like Brook's Holy Theatre,

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<sup>11</sup> Turner (1969), Schechner (1985), Goffman (1959), et al.

<sup>12</sup> More specifically, backstage labourers located in Lisbon.

<sup>13</sup> In the first half of the century, Antonin Artaud had suggested that text should waive to the "spectacle total" (1938: 104).

theorised a Poor theatre, which only requires actor and spectator<sup>14</sup> to exist and considers the other elements as unnecessary or even corrupting the nature of the performance. Rich and Deadly Theatre, respectively Grotowski's and Brook's concepts, are the ways of making theatre that they aimed at eradicating. I borrow Grotowski's words to enunciate the formula for creating their new theatre,

"Can the theatre exist without costumes and sets? Yes, it can. / Can it exist without music to accompany the plot? Yes. / Can it exist without lighting effects? Of course. / And without a text? Yes, the history of the theatre confirms this [*referring to the Commedia dell'Arte and improvisation*]. But can the theatre exist without actors? I know no example of this. [...] / Can the theatre exist without the audience? At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance. So we are left with the actor and the spectator. We can thus define the theatre as «what takes place between spectator and actor». All the other things are supplementary - perhaps necessary, but nevertheless supplementary." (Grotowski 1968: 32-33)

If we follow a canon that can be traced back to Aristotle, at the top of the hierarchy stands the actor, while the stage is the place that enables the actor/spectator relationship to be constructed and emerge<sup>15</sup>.

"Grotowski transferred the atavistic hunger for a foundational and primal theatre into a twentieth-century scientific analysis and an exploitation of minimal materials - the floor, the texture and the light. This was an analysis, of course, that precisely matched the primacy of focus upon the activity of acting - the voice, its resonance in and through the body, the journey of the actor into a daring internal space." (Baugh 2005: 197)

Avant-gardes from the Sixties have proclaimed that the body is an aesthetic material that does not merely translate the mind, on the contrary "acting [was] a physical and simultaneously creative activity that brought forth new meanings on its own" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 80). The choice of not using technology is in itself a bearer of meanings, as it is the indication of the "counter-culture" of those years. As said, we might interpret Grotowski's efforts to dismantle Rich Theatre in the light of the cultural and historical context where he worked. Perhaps the theatre he conceived was the product of his time, when intellectuals were

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<sup>14</sup> Let us briefly consider the terms actor and spectator. Suppose we are left with those two, as Grotowski and Brook proposed, why should that event be labeled theatre instead of life occurrence, or interaction? We will see later in this study that any interaction between individuals is performative (Goffman 1959). If the sufficient condition for theatre is that it must take place between an actor and a spectator, then theatre could be any event in life where that interaction occurs. We need a marker for theatre, which entails a third-way mode of perception, a notion borrowed from scholar Maaïke Bleeker (see Chapter 6).

<sup>15</sup> Appia 1996: 29.

polarized between those publicly against authority and those who defended the preservation of institutions. A few years prior to the outburst of the Movements of 1968, Roland Barthes suggested that,

"On peut dire qu'entre l'avant-garde et la bourgeoisie (au sens éthique du terme) il y a comme un jeu, d'ailleurs bien plus dangereux pour l'une que pour l'autre: l'avant-garde est à la merci de son adversaire." (Barthes 1961: 299-300)

By relegating technical theatre to a rather negative means, they might not have broken bourgeois conventions, on the contrary they could have reproduced the same hierarchical scheme that they aimed at debunking. The way they looked at the process of creation, namely denying aesthetic quality to technical theatre, could have been an offspring of their milieu, thus of the élites who financed and consumed their theatre. Grotowski also stated that "theatre must be a national one" (1968: 52), for it would spur out of specific nationalities bringing up their own instances. He was referring to his theatre, which would allow us to go back to the roots of our behaviours through introspection, considered a characteristic lacking in Rich theatre. At the same time, Grotowski raised the topic of the "sacred" (that is, pure and purifying) when he affirmed that the crisis in religion is one of the causes of the loss of the *sacrum* in theatre. The *sacrum*, in his view, had to be recreated in the form of secular consciousness by a new theatre and eventually substitute religious consciousness that had had inevitably faded away (Grotowski 1968: 49). Thus, theatre is seen as a substitute for religions through which we are able to find salvation - in other words, theatre must hold cathartic charge. It is interesting to notice that the innate form of theatre that Grotowski promoted would be moulded by nationalities and, at the same time, chase a sense of the sacred, as this view can be inserted in the comparison between ritual and theatre.

The aspects of technical theatre that were most criticized by the two directors were bound to "cheap thrills", while the focus of the attention of the spectator had to be the actors and their instinctual actions in space. The set should not "become" anything, it should not undergo any transformation. The space needed to be functional to the actors' movements, and the same could have been said for light and sound, which also were denied "meanings" other than their bare use for making the actors visible and audible. Their aesthetics opened new perspectives on the way theatre had been conceived, as it sponsored the idea of the event as a flux of dramatic energy, that will later be emphasized by Fischer-Lichte's autopoietic-feedback loop (2008).

*Social context.*

Following the principle of *methodological philistinism*, this research was oriented to investigate the necessary mutual relationship of the practical and the aesthetical, eventually demonstrating that the so-called "practical" has nevertheless aesthetic value per se, also considered as our processes of knowing the world through our senses. When it comes to theatre, scholars have often failed to consider all its components. This study agrees with Bruce McConachie that,

"[t]heater historians in general have been much more attentive to the means rather than the relations of theatrical production. [...] While some of this ignorance is due to the paucity of the historical record, the general tendency to focus on means rather than relations has to do with the predilection of many historians of artistic practice to separate the aesthetic from the practical." (McConachie 1992: 169)

The act of reflecting upon the interrelations between theatre and society can lead scholars to reconsider their notion of theatre historiography and aesthetic perception. In my study I hope to add an interpretative layer to the analysis of Portuguese theatre productions.

"The theoretical approach is usually founded on the results of both historical studies and performance analysis. However, it may happen that the theoretical involvement with the concrete historical and aesthetic materials yields new insights on the historical or aesthetic phenomenon which not only shake the theory they were meant to support (or affirm a theory they were meant to disprove), but, moreover, challenge the state of theatre historiography altogether or identify a new mode of aesthetic perception." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 11)

Anthropology is as a tool to analyze the processes of production (encoding) and reception (decoding) of theatrical performances.<sup>16</sup> Portuguese scholar Vera Borges, who has been studying the dynamics within and between theatre groups, advised that what we call theatre is the product of multiple individual experiences of a theatrical performance on different levels: production, presentation and reception (Borges 2001: 2). Considering the

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<sup>16</sup> I must here draw a line with theatre anthropology as Eugenio Barba conceived it. That is, the analysis of the theatrical event from the perspective of the relationship between actor/audience based on the actors' work on themselves as "pre-expressive" individuals (Barba 1993: 29).

involvement of each participant in their socio-cultural context, one should thus take into account the,

"«political unconscious» for productions that is more or less invisible to audiences and taken for granted by theatre workers themselves. [S]uch training and such traditional wisdom also most often mask naturalized assumptions about theatrical representation - character, action, focus, and audience perception - that are consequently mystified in productions whose meanings these assumptions help to shape or subvert." (Knowles 2004: 24)

Theatre can be considered in the light of the cultural materialism, as theorised by Marvin Harris<sup>17</sup>. Theatre productions, as mentioned above, participate in the process of encoding/decoding (Hall 1973)<sup>18</sup> of cultural meanings. Yet, for an audience to read meanings in a performance, it requires a socio-cultural frame against which to interpret it. Conversely, context is shaped by the representations that community members produce and share with each other, that are, by themselves, performances (Goffman 1959: 85). In other words, "context are present in performances: performances, while happening, are processes of performing contexts, since the latter are present in them not only in their subject matter - implicit, explicit, subtextual, supratextual, parallel or imbricated - but in the very way that they are done" (Shevtsova 1997: 46-47). While we attend a performance, we are able to reflect on the codes employed and the way we create and re-establish them. The analysis of the social and economical context of theatre productions serves to understand how performances are constructed and presented to the public, and it can also help us recognize how technical crews can be integrated in this discourse. Marvin Carlson affirmed,

"Without denying the importance either of the physical body or of presence, two other related concerns seem to me even more important in defining the particular quality and power of «theatrical» performance. One is that such performance is experienced by an individual who is also part of a group, so that the social relations are built into the experience itself. [...] Closely related to this is another concern, that of the particular way we become involved in this sort of performance. It is a specific event with its liminoid nature foregrounded, almost invariably clearly separated from the rest of life,

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17 Harris, Marvin, 2001 (1979), *Cultural Materialism: the Struggle for a Science of Culture*, New York, Altamira Press.

<sup>18</sup> Neo-Marxist scholar Stuart Hall states that encoding (production) and decoding (reception, or *reading*) are bounded yet relatively distinct moments of the production of meanings. Through the four stages of the process that he identifies (production, circulation, use, reproduction), a determinant role is played by the different cultural and social contexts that receive and use those signs.

presented by performers and attended by audiences both of whom regard the experience as made up of material to be interpreted [...]" (Carlson 1996: 215)

### *Portuguese framework.*

"Rather than attempting to isolate the art object and, in Kantian fashion, separate out its inherent components, the historian should investigate the nature and conditions of its historical practice. For the theater historian this means close attention to the social relations and means of producing the material realities of historical theaters (scripts, acting companies, playhouses, scenery, etc.) as well as to the nonmaterial response of situated audiences in historical periods." (McConachie 1992: 173)

I believe that it is necessary to here describe the Portuguese theatre world. The economic situation of small and medium size theatre companies does not allow the sustainment of many members and, even when hiring occasional participants, verbal agreements are common practice. In national and municipal theatres, cast members are usually of a higher number, but they have suffered cuts in many areas during the last decade<sup>19</sup>. Theatre practitioners, whether they are part of a company or freelancer, often need to maintain another job, sometimes their main job, to integrate the income provided by working in theatre, while few manage to live of that only. What is crucial then is the net of relations between them, built on previous experiences and reputation, which facilitate stability and selection, as well as salary negotiation, which can reduce the total costs of productions (Borges 2002: 93). Thus, this co-dependence between theatre practitioners shapes their working framework and it is inextricably connected to their survival in the field.

"[D]ependence has to be seen within the art worlds. First as interdependence, both personal and functional, in a division of labor that goes from production to reception. [...] A double chain with necessary cooperation as well competition, and inescapable negotiations in several dimensions, in particular those connected with the authority of authorship and the making of valuable/vulnerable reputations. Except in the case of more bureaucratic and formal institutions, this frequently takes place in small, cosy artistic spheres where relationships mix functionality, affection and power, under charismatic leaders. Trust, inter-knowledge and personal ties brought about in earlier work experiences are usually a factor in the professional commitment, management and recruitment of workers." (Conde 2009: 9)

This interdependence is also nurtured by physical proximity, as most theatre companies are city-based, thus attracting practitioners and creating exchange and profitable

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, electricians, voice coaches and firefighters.

communication. These factors also contribute to the construction of power relations within the community and the pursuit of peer recognition to secure future work opportunities.

"[A]rtists are vulnerable workers not only on account of professional contingencies (underemployment, intermittent and multiple jobs, freelance work, precarious contracts, low salaries in certain categories and great inequality in rewards and reputation), but also on account of their dependent identities, which are exposed to specific forms of symbolic power, competition and gatekeeping processes in the search for recognition." (Conde 2009: 3)

Borges applied the notion of career as formulated by Goffman<sup>20</sup> to theatre practitioners, as they can seek professional satisfaction and seek the definition of the identity of the self and of others (Borges 2002: 89). In this perspective, she defended that theatre companies have maintained guild-like characteristics, in that they help their members learn by proximity with older fellows and that it also contributes to their professional and aesthetic identity. Furthermore, the last two decades have seen a growth in institutionalized courses on technical theatre which promote personal and professional bonds, although many declare to have started as self-taught, especially amongst actors<sup>21</sup>.

The scant amount of funding given to theatre companies in Portugal can lead to lack of cooperation between them, as it would instill distrust and competition. However, that is usually not the case, only theatre houses employ "uma lógica de produção endogâmica de modo a rentabilizar os seus poucos recursos" (Antunes 2010: 2). Also, the funding distribution favouring Lisbon and Vale do Tejo - and, in a minor way, Porto -, produces a concentration of practitioners in that area, which turns into the highest percentage of theatre companies in the country (around 50%). The two national theatres are in Lisbon<sup>22</sup>, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II, and Porto, Teatro São João, while in the rest of the territory municipal theatres are scattered - in Lisbon, those are Taborda, Maria Matos and São Luiz - along with multipurpose venues like Culturgest, Fundação Gulbenkian and Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon. Independent companies add other ways of thinking theatre to the landscape, populating it with different organizational patterns although still tending to institutionalization because of the need for funding. For the most part they were born as a reaction to April 25th revolution and in that they have kept identity values. Many were also created in the 90s with vanguardist

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<sup>20</sup> As image of the self and one's identity and, at the same time, as official situation of an individual.

<sup>21</sup> Also, directors for the most part have started as actors.

<sup>22</sup> Plus, São Carlos opera house.

spirit and attempting to differentiate themselves from the "tradition", while in the last decade we have seen theatre companies emerge with a new aesthetics that refuses classifications and that makes use of media-mixing and digital communication for promotion. In addition to that, in the Eighties the figure of the *freelancer* came to the scene, bringing forth a new stance, that of aesthetic and professional independence from institutions (Antunes 2010).

Now I will briefly describe the internal organization of the productions I encountered during my observations, as I believe it is illustrative of the different types of career paths technicians could follow. For *Ilhas*, independent company K.A.R.N.A.R.T. arrives at São Luiz with director, a sound designer, a light designer and two interns, one for stage management and one for light design. The director is also an actor and the founder of the company, which is oriented to experimentation and media-mixing. The sound designer also works for events other than theatre, such as conferences, while the light designer is building up his portfolio. The two interns seem a little detached, and are not proactive in their participation, especially the one for stage management.

Mundo Perfeito is a company founded by an actor and director, his wife is the producer, while the technical director worked an actor before starting a career in backstage. The company has chosen not to have any "headquarters" as a political statement, for they believe that there are many venues that can fulfil the demand for theatrical events. Also, that would carry along heavy costs to sustain, and, in any case, they prefer to invest the revenues in their new productions. Technicians and designers are hired on specific productions, along with actors, which at times can be difficult to manage, especially when the play is touring. The nucleus of the company is made up by artistic director/director/actor, producer and technical director.

Comédias do Minho is a company where roles shift depending on the production, as many of its members can work as actor, designer, operator and director. The artistic director of the company is an actor and a director, as in the case of *Os Doze Pares de França*. During the "Ocupação Minhota", other productions by Comédias do Minho are running at TNDMII and they are directed by different members of the company that are actors in *Os Doze Pares de França*. On a regional level, the company, other than its own shows, produces activities addressed to all age groups, with a focus on pedagogical actions and promotion of amateur theatre. Given the versatile nature of its members and the variety of events created, the internal organization of this company is flexible.

Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II and São Luiz Teatro Municipal are large-sized theatre companies that are structured in various departments and employ professionals for each area. A recurrent element of difference in internal organization that was detected during my fieldwork, and related to the subject this research, was in schedules - while in São Luiz operating technicians have shifts and they rotate regardless of the nights of a show, technicians in TNDMII operate all the runs and have days off after the last night. In both institutions, they have varied backgrounds, often non-curricular, and are rather permanent in each institution.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Space*

Actors have a role of primary importance and their interactions with the audience are crucial for a theatre pièce to be created. Nonetheless it is relevant to highlight that, through processes of embodiment, it is also the theatrical space that shapes the perception of all participants, including the audience, and delimits the moments of "play". Thus, it is the perception of and the response to the place<sup>23</sup> that allows the production and frames the interpretation of aesthetic and social meanings.

"An interaction may be defined as all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's continuous presence; the term 'an encounter' would do as well. A 'performance' may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a 'part' or 'routine'." (Goffman 1959: 26-27)

Victor Turner<sup>24</sup> and Richard Schechner told us that whether to define a performance as ritual or as theatre depends on its function and context, while the elements of efficacy and entertainment are shared in variable proportions. One of the factors I would like to consider here is the physical context of the event, which frames the experience. We shall reflect on the physical coordinates of theatre, the space, and then further the analysis with the investigation of the relation between practitioners and the setting, including the individuals that act behind the curtain and the audience<sup>25</sup>. I believe it is crucial to start from the *physical* space, that is the institutional building itself<sup>26</sup>. However, as Fischer-Lichte stated, "[t]here simply is no place

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<sup>23</sup> That is, the space and its uses, the actions.

<sup>24</sup> Although Turner, it must be noticed, separated obligatory rites of passage, to which he attributed the term "liminal", from voluntary "liminoid" moments of leisure. Schechner would then relate the two as fulfil a similar social function, respectively, in pre-industrial and post-industrial societies.

<sup>25</sup> To accommodate action and audience, the space has to change, or reshape according to the needs of the play.

<sup>26</sup> Note that theatrical performances can take place in potentially infinite locations. I am not overlooking this occurrence now, however I stress that the subjects of my study are backstage labour and technical crew, which is mostly evident when there is also a physical delimitation of the space. Also, I had little opportunity to observe outside theatre, as it is not a common type of production where this research was carried, the city of Lisbon.

where, in principle, theatre could not be performed" (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 56)<sup>27</sup>. In regard to the spatial condition of theatre, it is useful to add that the scholar also affirms that "[...] the space in which a performance takes place represents an architectural-geometric space that pre-dates the performance and endures after it has ended." (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 107)

However, *spatiality* is not pre-existent, but it comes into being along with the performance itself, the two mutually shaping, given the characteristic of performativity of the space. The physical space, for the most part, exists before the performance and will continue on after it. The term spatiality refers to the nature of the space, to its embodiment. That is, acting according to supposed conventions of the place (reproducing) and transforming them (producing). All participants in the performance are involved in the process of encoding/decoding the space, for "each individual use constitutes the performative space and brings forth a specific spatiality" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 108).

The stage could assume the role of the altar, being the place where a sacrifice is carried out. The notion of sacrifice has been applied to theatre as a "transitory experience for both the participants [those who sacrifice] and the audience, [...] in which their identity within society and in relation to the gods was reconstructed and reinforced [...]"<sup>28</sup>. The position of the altar also implicitly imposes a hierarchy, which for its "architectural form promoted a tension between inclusion and exclusion during the post-execution rituals"<sup>29</sup>.

"[T]he interface between stage and auditorium, practitioner and audience space, has been dramatized and elaborated through numerous conventions over the theatre's long history. The other interface, the one between stage and offstage, is even more fraught with meaning, especially when considered in its relation to the stage-auditorium interface. [...] It is the creation of a division between on and off, inside and outside, that permits the interplay of seen and unseen, revealed and hidden, and it is the interplay that has proved such a powerfully expressive tool in terms of the fictional worlds constructed through the performance. The fictional world onstage is connected to a further fictional domain via the offstage, and [...] the modalities of the connection relate to the physical reality of the stage and its offstage." (McAuley 2000: 86-87)

The stage is a junction and a border at the same time. It is the ultimate liminal space of theatre, for it is the gathering point of all gazes, but also a threshold for the public and the

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<sup>27</sup> The creation of locality in Appadurai's words can be described as "the transformation of spaces into place" (Appadurai 1996: 183).

<sup>28</sup> Balthis, Christy, 'Built altars and religious ritual in Hellenistic East Greece', in Werts, Julia (ed.), 2008, *Visualizing Rituals: Critical Analysis of Art and Ritual Practice*, UK, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 34-43.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

technical crew once the play starts. It is a space where practitioners' status changes and hierarchy shifts according to the needs of the growing play (Francisco Leal defined it as "a hierarquia do tempo"). The public is not allowed to the backstage space since, if they wanted to access it, theatre structure would obligate them to walk up and across the stage, and that would necessarily change their status. Besides, from the moment they start dress rehearsals, actors must abandon the audience area where they once could sit and move freely, and enter the stage passing through their private space.

Avant-gardists like Brook or Grotowski, added to the definition of the spatial and conceptual perimeter of the stage that, apart from actors and audience, the rest is not only redundant but counterproductive. Their claim was that people "need to stage true rituals, but for rituals that could make theatre-going an experience that feeds our lives true forms are needed" (Brook 1968: 51). Thus, what McAuley defines presentational space could be condensed to the area where actors and audience place themselves: their physical occupation of the space and, in the audience's case, spectrum of gaze. The rest would only distract from the true gist, or "true forms", and detract meaning from the performance. The stage would cease to be pre-existent and it would be generated only by the movements of the bodies. Bertolt Brecht thought otherwise, as he focused on the very revelation of the stage in its materiality, overexposing its contingency. However, both denying the materiality of the stage or exhibiting it are ways to foster our reflection upon our own construction of reality.

"[...] in the contemporary theatre seems to be the lighting, for not only are batteries of lights hung on the front of galleries and boxes in even the most illusionistic theatres, but the lighting operator is often visibly situated in the auditorium with all his or her associated high-tech equipment. The intrusive presence of modern theatre lights can be somewhat disconcerting in a carefully restored eighteenth- or nineteenth-century theatre such as the Comédie Française or the Deutsches Theater, though much less so in the functionalist theatre buildings of the 1960s onward. Revealing the source of the lights was part of Brecht's attempt to demystify the theatre, to show that the performance was the result of work, not magic, and his practice has been so influential that the lighting grid has come to form an accepted part of the decor in modern theatres." (McAuley 2000: 64)

Antonin Artaud theorised the "langage concret du théâtre" as the objects that compound the theatrical experience and frame it by their sensorial qualities.

"[Le langage concret du théâtre] consiste dans tout ce qui occupe la scène, dans tout ce qui peut se manifester et s'exprimer matériellement sur une scène, et qui s'adresse d'abord aux sens au lieu de s'adresser d'abord à l'esprit comme le langage de la parole. [...] Ce langage fait pour les sens doit au préalable s'occuper de les satisfaire. Cela ne l'empêche pas de développer ensuite toutes ses conséquences intellectuelles sur tous les plans possibles et dans toutes les directions." (Artaud 1938: 46)

What are the frontiers of the stage then? It seems to be generally recognized as the space in front of the audience, which is delimited by the wings and the so-called fourth wall. Or, more generally, every place where the action takes place and therefore attracts the spectators' attention. Thus, we can affirm that the stage can be the space that is touched by the audience's gaze. McAuley sustains that the stage is a place of compromise, where the tension between the audience and the theatre building as a whole resides (McAuley 2000).

Along with the actors' movements and the physical structure of the stage, sound is thus a component of the coming-into-being of the stage. We find an example in the pièce *Ilhas* by K.A.R.N.A.R.T., where the story is told by a recorded voice which directs the course of events, pouring narrative substance into the actors and props onstage. The *materiality* of sound concurs in the production of theatre spatiality and, at the same time, in its negation by absorbing the visual space. The sound, being a recorded monologue/narration of the director/playwright's voice, interposed with musical bites, not only leads the movements on stage, but it also works in synergy with the lights - to the point that the living and inanimate bodies onstage are of the same nature and interpreted as pieces of the scenography functional to the story. On the same level, silence is also part of the making of the space, creating the vacuum and sense of suspension that is needed for the attention to be focused on the actors. Before the play begins, we are aware of the backstage even if we cannot hear any sound or perceive any movement. As soon as it starts, the silence is on our side as spectators and on the backstage side. That silence gives depth to what happens onstage and creates the fiction, which allows us to forget about the surroundings and immerse into the story that is being narrated.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, we have seen that the stage comprehends several factors and cannot be circumscribed, and that each play requires adaptation to the physical space where it is hosted. We can observe this when actors move from the rehearsal room to the actual stage where they

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<sup>30</sup> There is to note that the audience can walk onstage between the props and actors, a feature that represents a rupture of the traditional spatial divide. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the event is described as a "perfinst", which is a mix of performance and installation.

will perform before the audience<sup>31</sup>, or when a pièce is on tour. On that occasion, directors are thus called to present their product under new conditions and be confident in what they have created. Also, technicians believe that their contribution must too be creative in order to find new ways to "say almost the same thing", as Umberto Eco described translation<sup>32</sup>.

(Sérgio Melo) "Ensaíamos uma peça, faz-se um desenho de luzes para aquela peça e esse desenho de luzes passa a funcionar como uma base que tem depois de ser adaptada a cada espaço onde essa peça vai ser apresentada. Nunca se consegue fazer duas vezes igual."

(Sílvia de Sá) "[...] E aí também vai a tua criatividade. Porque se não tens onde pendurar os projetores o que é que vais fazer? Não fazes a peça porque não tens onde pendurá-los? Não, vais ter que agarrar nos teus conhecimentos técnicos e na tua criatividade para voltares a recriar mais ou menos a cena como tínhamos desenhado, mais ou menos, para não saíres daquele ambiente, mas com outras condições. E aí vem outra vez a parte criativa, é indispensável."

(Sérgio Melo) "O som é menos crítico em termos de espaço [...]. O som é só para amplificar, tens que fazer com que o som chegue a todos. Tem que se ouvir bem, ser inteligível, mas essas são regras bastante mais quadradas, não há muito que inventar. [...] Enquanto que na luz é muito diferente, há muito mais maneiras diferentes de se chegar ao mesmo fim."

(Sílvia de Sá) "[...] Porque tudo tem o seu peso: tem peso a iluminação que nós vamos fazer, que pode variar de sítio para sítio, como tem peso o texto, a forma como está encenado, tudo isso vai ter peso. Por isso, não podes dizer «[...] o espetáculo, se não tiver exatamente como estava lá no espaço, não vai funcionar». Tu tens de ter confiança no que estás a fazer, não é? Tu sabes que a tua peça não se resume àquilo que foi naquele espaço. A tua peça pode continuar a ter o mesmo peso, em termos de textos, em termos de encenação, em termos de luz, mas está noutra espaço, está adaptada a outro espaço."

For this adaptation to be successful, the visiting crew must work with the residents. In this encounter, the divide between technicians and creative crew becomes more evident, as the visiting crew requires roles to be defined in order to accommodate in the new theatre, and the residents need to know whom to refer to. Mapping the stage by ownership is rather complex, as it is a territory that is subject to continuous negotiation and roles shift according to each production. Resident crews are the guardians and keepers of their theatre, which they only temporarily *lend*, yet considering the stage as the actors' domain. The stage is "um terreno constantemente invadido [onde os conflitos] só acontecem se houver realmente um problema" (José Grande).

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<sup>31</sup> I have noticed that many actors' first acquaintance with a new stage is by lying down on it, as physical contact could provide them with an immediate feeling of emotional ownership of the space, a sense of comfort and intimacy.

<sup>32</sup> Eco, Umberto, 2003, *Dire Quasi la Stessa Cosa*, Milano, Bompiani.

"Quando as coisas são bem organizadas e com hierarquias bem definidas, com as funções bem definidas é difícil haver espaço para isto, para as coisas correrem mal."  
(José Grande)

"Ao ocupar um território que não é teu, se fores um técnico experiente, vais ocupar uma posição neutra. [...] No território em comum, que é o palco, há sub-territórios que não são todos comuns, não é? Não tens um ator a ir à teia, a não ser que faça parte do espetáculo ir à teia e aí gera-se uma ponte porque o ator vai ter que aprender com o técnico como ir à teia por exemplo. Mas há sem dúvida o território comum que é o palco e depois tens alguns territórios específicos. [...] Quando não estás no teu território deves estar noutra, não é, e o técnico por default atribui o território do palco aos artistas, sendo deles. Depois há uma relação quase maternal ou paternal em que o técnico cuida do palco: o palco é dele, ele empresta-o aos artistas. Mas o território é dos artistas." (Rui Gato)

Considered in their structural entirety, theatres have complex architectural designs, built to accommodate to their various uses. Therefore, even for experienced theatre practitioners, a new theatre is a world to be discovered, hence they need what the community calls "baby-sitting", which is the assistance provided by resident technical crew to the visiting crew during the first phases of stage setup. Without spectators, theatre resembles a haunted house, where people appear and disappear seemingly from nowhere - doors, stairs and "secret passages". The bigger the theatre, the more intricate is their plan, to the point that they are often perceived as a labyrinth by a neophyte or newcomer.

"[The labyrinth's] purpose as a maze was to arrest and confuse the intruder who was faced with [liminal spaces]. [...] As soon as it was solved, i.e. with the thread of Ariadne, and transformed into an experience or creation, regardless of its medium, it became clear and legible. In order to re-make the Labyrinth in another medium, one would need the *episteme*, the knowledge as skill and the *sophia* of Daedalus, that is the skill in craft, which helped Daedalus to craft the *choros*, the dancing floor."<sup>33</sup>

In order to move in the labyrinth, one has to master the "skill in craft" and be able to "[transform the maze] into an experience of creation". That is, from that unusual space, backstage crew moulds their own experience of theatres and prepares the space for the rest of the cast that enters the theatre.

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<sup>33</sup> Soyoz, Ufuk, 'The labyrinth as a metaphor for the ritual of oracle in temples of Apollo in Asia Minor', in Werts 2008, pp. 10-21.

"[Practitioners' places] are private, inaccessible to the public. [...] Backstage is the world of work, of craft, it belongs to those who have the skill to make it work, and it seems that their power to do this is in part dependent on keeping the working reality of the theatre carefully hidden from the eyes of the profane." (McAuley 2000: 64)

Backstage labour is carried out in a maze of doors and halls wrapped in silence, where shared signs and roles cement human interactions. Whoever finds themselves "on the other side" of the stage should follow the rules and never risk being caught in the wrong place. Backstage labour is a delicate choreography, and if you do not have a job to do on that grid, you probably are in somebody's way. Theatre technicians work onstage only *before* and *after* the performance, when they create the space where actors could feel safe and comfortable. They not only keep the space, but also set the conditions for the performance to take place, both material (providing tools and guiding through the different areas) and personal (by their relationship with the cast).

### *Community*

People working in theatres are part of a community, or "tribe" (Barba 1993: 215), a net of tight and loose relationships that takes shape in the various phases of production, and that is also independent from one single production. Freelances, residents, occasional participation of professionals from other areas (e.g. video installation, live music, painting) can all gather together to build a play. Theatre practitioners may be involved in multiple productions at the same time. They often have more than one job and they can work in various fields, not always linked to the so-called "art world". Also, those collaborations build up the net of relations in- and outside theatres.<sup>34</sup>

"[P]oderia pensar-se que os processos de construção de um espetáculo de teatro estão estruturalmente definidos pelo seu encenador, cabendo a cada equipa o cumprimento sistemático destas etapas. Na realidade, estes processos artísticos funcionam como microcosmos sociais abertos, sujeitos a uma sucessão de escolhas individuais, regidas não só pela orientação comum do projecto como também pelo acaso, inseparável de qualquer contexto de produção artística." (Borges 2001: 35)

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<sup>34</sup> That can be a safety net for professional stability, as the network allows them to communicate about job opportunities and supports the community.

The perspective I employ for my discourse is opposite to, for instance, Eugenio Barba's, as he conceives theatre anthropology as a discipline developed from the front of the stage and, most importantly, from within the stage<sup>35</sup>. I look at it from behind and sometimes from a high standpoint.<sup>36</sup> In order to carry my observation of theatre technicians, I followed their steps and seized the theatrical space. At the same time, it was the theatre itself that imposed its rules and shaped by sensorial experience of it. This embodiment of the space also draws the line between resident and visiting crews. Resident technicians form a community that shares the space and shapes it, though continuously subject to exogenous modification, while they can also facilitate the integration of the visiting crew with their intervention.

Grotowski, and we can here recall his discourse on national theatre, sustained that the participants in a theatrical event should have a common ground to understand each other. This means that the recipient-community and the one where the members of the cast have been nurtured must share cultural meanings to carry out what he called "social psycho-therapy" (Grotowski 1968: 46).

"In order that the spectator may be stimulated into self-analysis when confronted with the actor, there must be some common ground already existing in both of them [...]. Therefore the theatre must attack what might be called the collective complexes of society [...], the myths which are not an invention of the mind but are, so to speak, inherited through one's blood, religion, culture and climate." (Grotowski 1968: 42)

However, human communication is based on the interpretations of the messages we exchange.<sup>37</sup> Grotowski's assumption entails the idea that the message exists independently of its medium, and that its content is fixed and not interpretable, however we know that it is not so. I believe that the one parameter that is necessary for dramatic appreciation is *pre-expressiveness*, a term coined by Barba that is here attributed to all the participants to the theatrical event, while originally it was only the actors. Pre-expressiveness, in fact, generates the markers we need to place ourselves in the right mindset for theatre and attracts our attention. We can consider pre-expressiveness as the creator of a sense of readiness to welcome as true what will be presented onstage, in the same way as rituals are perceived as sacred.

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<sup>35</sup> "L'antropologie théâtrale est un étude *sur* l'acteur et *pour* l'acteur" (Barba 1993: 37).

<sup>36</sup> My fieldwork has involved spending some time walking on the grid above the stage and learning to master the labyrinth of doors and stairs.

<sup>37</sup> The first interpretation being the very one happening within the sender.

What differentiates theatre and ritual in the participants' eye is their interpretation of the nature of the event and sense of religious value they attribute to it. People believe that rituals are those codified and presented as such and usually link them with religion, while we ignore our own masks and conventions (Goffman 1959) - that is the reason why we need markers. Thus, a theatrical event is not straightforwardly conceived as a ritual, as we do not distinguish the patterns and do not feel a sense of sacred and transformation. Somehow, people see rituals as a part of society, not only integrated but also a necessary step to participate in it. A theatrical event is relegated to the sphere of entertainment or social critic, though it will not be regarded as a sacredness and most significant moment in society<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, theatrical events can be organized outside institutional buildings, which means we ought to find indicators to mark them as an "extra-daily" experiences. The label we assign would derive from the fact that actions are marked as "play" and the pre-expressive behaviour of the practitioners.

A more fluid definition of theatre thus needs to be constructed by merging two factors together, although they are not co-dependent and necessary. The first and more evident factor is, as seen earlier, the existence of physical institutions called theatres, so that the community can frame the events from their spacial context<sup>39</sup>. The second element is quite general, thus more flexible and relying on the concept of play, which irradiates meaning to the place where it occurs. Theatre space is thus conceived as *locality* for it is "primarily relational and contextual rather than scalar or spatial" (Appadurai 1996: 178)<sup>40</sup>. We can deduce that locality, other than being created by social interactions, also generates them, or theatre constitutes "the physical framing of the practitioners' experience" (McAuley 2000: 71). Arjun Appadurai defines locality as,

"A phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects. Yet this dimensional aspect of locality cannot be separated from the actual settings in and through which social life is reproduced." (Appadurai 1996: 182)

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<sup>38</sup> As mentioned earlier, Turner made a difference between liminoid, recreational and leisure events, and liminal, obligatory and often religious occasions of society.

<sup>39</sup> Note that theatres are polyvalent venues, so other events can take place in those institutions (e.g. conferences, concerts, guided tours).

<sup>40</sup> Also, the definition of locality entails the public, the place and the contextualization of the event given by press coverage, cast, settings and text (when applicable).

We want to focus on the importance the scholar attributes to something impalpable like feelings, and sustain that they are the cement of social relations, thus forming communities. As we encountered many times in our interviews, what drives theatre practitioners is the love and pride for their job. Theatre practitioners work long hours together, make their workplace as comfortable as they can for them and for others, often work for multiple productions at the same time, but most of all they share a sense of responsibility towards the audience and the art of theatre. This creates bonds that overcome the single community living and working in a theatre. The attachment to the whole theatre community lies in the awareness of their mission: the enjoyment of the audience.

"O facto de haver uma envolvimento e [...] ter uma paixão pelo trabalho faz com que haja um companheirismo que noutros trabalhos não existe [...]. Normalmente as pessoas ajudam-se e a equipa é cada vez mais pequena [...], e sempre aconteceu isto." (Francisco Leal)

The feeling of belonging of a resident crew, for instance, is so deep that they often consider the theatre their second home, mainly because of the sense of familiarity between them. Erving Goffman suggested that the familiarity between members of a community is bound to the "frequency with which they act as a team", and that it is "automatically extended and received" to the newcomers of the team.

"When members of a team have different formal statuses and rank in a social establishment, as is often the case, then we can see that the mutual dependence created by membership in the team is likely to cut across structural or social cleavages in the establishment and thus provide a source of cohesion for the establishment. Where staff and line statuses tend to divide an organization, performance teams may tend to integrate the divisions. [...] Team-mates, then, in proportion to the frequency with which they act as a team and the number of matters that fall within impressional protectiveness, tend to be bound by rights of what might be called 'familiarity'. Among team-mates, the privilege of familiarity - which may constitute a kind of intimacy without warmth - need not be something of an organic kind, slowly developing with the passage of time spent together, but rather a formal relationship that is automatically extended and received as soon as the individual takes a place on the team." (Goffman 1959: 88)

Appadurai sustains that one must take into account the relational settings where these groups are situated, which, for technicians, is not only the theatre but the socio-political frame of the theatre professionals. Habits and values shared by the *theatre locality* are consequences

of the specificities of the socio-cultural background and we ought to investigate the community from this viewpoint. The scholar related *situated community* to rites of passage, thus stressing the importance of the background,

"[...] a great deal of what have been termed rites of passage is concerned with the production of what we might call local subjects, actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbors, friends, and enemies." (Appadurai 1996: 179)

A theatre group involved in a production can also be regarded as a *taskape*, drawing the definition from Ingold's article "The Temporality of the Landscape" (1993). The scholar described a taskape as an ensemble of activities (tasks) performed by many individuals whose labour is inscribed within sociality. According to his argument, time is dictated by society, not in a prescribed fashion, rather as the result of our mutual involvement in on another's activity. This definition evokes the notion of *duration*, as a temporal continuum based on our intuition, our perception. It is also interesting to notice that Ingold compares social life to the movements of an orchestra, as one's performance within society is intertwined to the others'. From this perspective, it can be inferred that the tasks performed by theatre technicians are embedded in the taskape of a theatrical production and, at the same time, the theatre community as a whole, in itself part of the society. Ingold sustained that,

"Every task takes its meaning from its position within an ensemble of tasks, performed in series of parallel, and usually by many people working together. [O]ne of the outstanding features of human technical practices lies in their embeddedness in the current of sociality." (1993: 158)

The structure of the theatre group involved in a production reflects that of the society where it dwells, and so are the aesthetic outcomes of the performance itself. From this standpoint, one may infer that performance and community act like a double mirror infinitely reflecting each other, and that one can change the dynamics between them.

"Nous pourrions dire que le théâtre peut préserver la semence de la révolte, du refus, de l'opposition. Il suffit peut-être de se remémorer le vieux précepte: le théâtre doit être un miroir. Mais le miroir n'est pas seulement le spectacle; il est l'île tout entière les hommes et les femmes qui la cultivent, leurs relations, leur audace. [...] Ce qui était à droite se trouve à gauche dans le miroir. Le monde peut être renversé." (Barba 1993: 221)

Roles are reinforced and imposed on the members of the theatre community, but they can still be altered. Theatre acquires meaning in virtue of the whole preparation and social framework. Indeed, it is the process of rehearsals that gives interpretative layers to the play<sup>41</sup>. Besides, a significant part of the relationships are built up thanks to the time spent together by the cast<sup>42</sup>, yet always in relation to the outside world. Imitation and proximity substantiate roles or subvert them.

"Theatre is a communal institution, representing and establishing relationships which fulfil social functions. The drama, the production and the location of the performance all contribute to these functions. [...] Thus, we may say that not only the drama, which expresses in words and actions certain ideas and values of the society, but all the various cultural systems in the theatre contribute to its social functions. The theatre historian's challenge is to understand these interpretative cultural systems, to assess how the theatre shapes and is shaped by the fundamental ways of being and doing which constitute historical cultures." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 25-26)

By embodying the theatrical space, the "comunidade que habita o teatro" (José Grande) is being formed. Human relationships, the bond of familiarity and mutual recognition between members of the cast, contribute to the flow of the performance as well as to the necessary suspension of disbelief of the audience. A factor of great importance for the social structure of a theatre group is the recognition of know-how and division of roles, features that are highly demanded by practitioners. Also, it is crucial to stress a few aspects of communitarian life of theatre crews. Schedules seldom fixed and dusty darkness of intricate theatres, cold and shared facilities, all cultivate a sense of family amongst people, as much as they can generate tension and discomfort. What is more evident, however, is the ease in sharing and the confidence they show to each others, as theatres have this incredible characteristic of being both open and intimate, vast and cosy at the same time. The more the theatre group is united the denser will be the energy conveyed, and received in return from the audience during performances.

"The need for privacy and seclusion during both performance and the work process leading up to it can be justified on many grounds, but it must be acknowledged that this privacy also serves to hide the sordid nature of the working conditions provided for actors and production staff. [...] While such lack of privacy can be stressful, it can

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<sup>41</sup> On a general basis, improv is an impromptu form of theatre that is prominently based on the actors/audience interaction and their imaginative capacity, while the set is mostly bare to accommodate to the performance's openness.

<sup>42</sup> Often in quite uneasy conditions, e.g. unpaid overtime, cold theatres and rehearsal rooms, frugal meals.

also provide a sense of community, and the energy that this generates can be palpable in the subsequent performances." (McAuley 2000: 65)

### *Theatre as ritual.*

"The geography of performance is both produced by and produces the cultural landscape and the social organization of the space in which it «takes place», and to shift physical and/or social space is to shift meaning." (Knowles 2004: 63)

All participants who dwell in the performative space transform and are transformed by it. The production of a theatrical performance features relevant aspects of the ritual itself<sup>43</sup>. The community is re-established (or questioned) by its members, who share cultural meanings acquired by proximity with older generations. The people I interviewed have, for the most part, come across each other while working and that is how, together with the heritage from their masters, that common ground has taken shape. The process of embodiment is the frame to my understanding of the relationships between practitioners, therefore also the conception they have of their role in the production. Max Hermann affirms that theatre is a "social play - played by all for all. [...] Theatre always involves the social community"<sup>44</sup>. Backstage labour can be interpreted as a ritual of preparation for the community, and it is in itself a performance.

"[W]hile perhaps not consciously performed as such, individual personal routines before a performance can constitute a ritual of preparation."<sup>45</sup>

Upon the analysis of a ritualistic event, scholars have investigated the distribution and cultural values of the roles played by the members of the group of people in study as evidence of the patterns of that community. Roles and relationships of the people involved in rituals have been considered fundamental data for the interpretation and contextualization of a community, as it refers to the "historicization" of its members. The analysis of theatre practice as ritual can function as a Trojan horse for backstage labour.

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<sup>43</sup> Whether embracing the idea that theatre had its direct origins in rituals (as the school of Cambridge would claim) or considering the two as separate yet intertwined elements of society (Turner, Schechner, among others), scholars agree that they both have the "as-if" quality of play and they share tools: masks, transformation, community gathering, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Fischer-Lichte 1997: 20.

<sup>45</sup> Carlson, Sarah, 'Ecstatic motion revealed: an exploration of altered mental states in ritual and aesthetic dance performance', in Werts 2008, pp. 60-74

Arnold Van Gennep's notions of rite of passage and liminality have been useful interpretative tools for theatre practice. Like rituals, theatre most condenses the codes of a community and enables its members to undergo a transformation. In theatre's case, this transformation has been intended as Aristotelian political good or hypothetical personal liberation from societal restriction and dehumanization. The way to *catharsis*, purification, entails the collective ritual of purification from the corruptions of the soul and body caused by one's society. I believe we should interpret this power in theatre as a potential path for the insertion of backstage labourers, as it can lead to question the stratification of society, including the onstage/offstage divide.

The dynamics of inclusion/exclusion apply to the separation between onstage and offstage, and this difference can be traced through the interpretative lenses of rituals. In fact, in order for a ritual to be accepted by the community, it has to be led by an authorized person, a member of the group whose sacred status has been legitimated. That legitimated person acts before the community, who would reflect themselves through their senses and undergo catharsis. We accept a ritual if it is guided by someone that has earned authority and is legitimized by the community for their powers. Technicians are not considered to have powers, as only what is present is regarded as a bearer of meanings, because it is "sacrificed" before our eyes. The actor has indeed been described as "a man who works in public with his body, offering it publicly" (Grotowski 1968: 33). Vulnerable and sacred at the same time, actors sacrifice themselves to the greater end of our own identification and interpretation.

"[T]he act of performance is an act of sacrifice, of sacrificing what most men prefer to hide - this sacrifice is his gift to the spectator. Here there is a similar relation between actor and audience to the one between priest and worshipper." (Brook 1968: 67)

From this viewpoint, technicians and audience are involved in the liminal state, since they are decentred subjects whose "locus of identity is always somewhere outside the subject" (Werts 2008: 5). However, the spectators' state is of a different nature for technicians are "invisible", but also, and more importantly, *not* to be acknowledged<sup>46</sup>. It is important to introduce the topic of visibility when approaching the comparison between spectators and technicians. The audience are onlookers, which emphasizes the essential dichotomy of exclusion/inclusion. Their gaze upon what is onstage automatically excludes what is not. The

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<sup>46</sup> Audience is not visible but it is nevertheless essential for the dialogic nature of human interactions, amongst which there is theatre.

word "theatre", in fact, derives from the Greek *théa*, the act of looking, hence the idea that what is not seen is not there at all. Also, the audience is the recipient of the message and the ultimate goal is their entertainment, while technicians set the conditions for it to be possible.

### *Invisibility*

The presence of theatre technicians is transferred into the product of their work, which is framed in space-time coordinates, while they remain hidden.

"Sempre tem que haver criatividade para existir o objeto, [a arte] acaba sempre por se materializar. Nós acabamos por materializar a luz, não é palpável, mas ela está lá e foi criada, materializada ali em projetores [...]." (Sílvia de Sá)

However, disappearing behind the curtains is expected from technicians in most theatre practice. As Fischer-Lichte put it, though she only considered actors,

"generating and perceiving corporeality in performance depend on two phenomena in particular: processes of embodiment and the phenomenon of presence." (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 77)

That does not entail the presence of anyone but actors. Although theatre technicians participate in the process of embodiment, they lack the second condition, presence. They are nevertheless present, but they are not seen by the audience which makes them absent against the theatrical event. Fischer-Lichte traces back the transformative power of performance as a result of presence, when she stated,

"Through the performer's presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming - he perceives the circulating energy as a transformative and vital energy. I would like to call this the radical concept of presence." (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 99)

While one of our interviewees, Rui Gato, affirmed,

"[O espetáculo] funciona como um ser humano ou um ser vivo de várias cabeças [...] porque tem a abertura para respirar [...] Eu acredito que é transformativo. Se for bem

feito, consegue transformar todas as pessoas que estão envolvidas naquele momento, como qualquer momento da vida. [Se] for forte, significativo, tem o poder de transformar, de alterar, não a genética, mas o Eu de cada um." (Rui Gato)

As we can see, Fischer-Lichte only identified the actors and the public as participants in the performance, and she sustained that presence is a concept that overcomes the dichotomy body/mind. Rui Gato extended this discourse to everyone that is involved in a performance, by stating that they all undergo this process of transformation. In fact, presence should not exclusively entail visibility, and I argue that the necessary condition for it lies in the fact that the product of one's acts is phenomenal in some way: the product of the technicians' work is perceivable, though their bodies are not. That does not make them less involved in the event, since they are active contributors to its creation and part of the social structure that sustains the production of the event.

The way we attend a theatrical performance could have changed over the last century, after the diffusion of movie theatre. The unilateral vision and sound of movie theatres create a centre of attention in the action on screen so that the spectator is completely immersed in it and unaware of their surroundings and of themselves. Kevin Robins affirmed that «we have come to see the world by means of mediatised vision, and, as we have done so, we have increasingly been able to distance and detach ourselves from contact with its reality» (1996: 21). We are attracted by the stage as a transcendent place and, at the same time, intimidated by it because its very sacredness, and secrecy.

"A theatre building [...] is centripetal, and it is the stage that is at the center, seeming to exert a magnetic force on everyone entering the building, whether it is approached from the auditorium or from the practitioners' domain. [T]he stage is both stage space and presentational space (a notion that includes the scenographic arrangement of the stage in any particular performance and its occupation by the actors), and it possesses a rather ambivalent status in that it is both very definitely practitioner space and yet in a certain way is also part of the audience space. [...] The spectators possess the stage by virtue of their intensive watching, but, of course, this possession is dependent upon the stage being revealed to them, and the theatre is an art form in which the process of revelation has been exploited in every conceivable way." (McAuley 2000: 74)

The "profane" can only see what is presented intentionally, whereas the rest has to remain unknown and unacknowledged. At the same time the public chooses to look and what to look at, that is not only the object but also, and most importantly, its relations with the society (Berger 1972). In fact, in order for the "magic" to be effective, theatre workers have to

disappear from the stage. It is important to add that, in contemporary times, technicians have been placed onstage, but that is nonetheless a theatrical expedient that entails aesthetic choices made by the director.

Theatre technicians' invisibility is essential to the effect of the play, which, if backstage was introduced in the narrative, would lose its characteristic of *necessity*. That is, the events onstage are presented as if they could not occur otherwise, opposite to what would happen in case technicians and the mechanics of backstage were shown, since that would instil in the spectator's mind that "things are said and done for the way they are *made* happen".<sup>47</sup> Characters revealed as actors, sun as a spotlight, and castle as a painted canvas in the background - not to mention that spectators would become aware of their own presence<sup>48</sup>.

"Drama is «absolute» in that it presents itself as a coherent, unitary world with an autonomous existence. The audience looks into this other world of the drama from a position outside it and is invited to forget its own position as seer in relation to what is presented in order to be completely drawn into the world of drama [...]." (Bleeker 2008: 42)

Despite the opposition between visible (actors) and invisible (technicians), a point of convergence of the two is to be identified in the "magical element", which is created by what Gell called "magic-standard", that is "the possibility that the same product might be produced effortlessly" (Gell 1992: 58). The scholar continued stating that "magic is the baseline against which the concept of work as a cost takes shape"<sup>49</sup>. We compare the productive process, in our understanding, of an object to our ability to reproduce it. The effect of the object on us, its "magic" power, is inversely proportional to our possibility to create it. For actors, that would be the transmutation of their bodies into the characters' before the eyes of the audience, thus transcendent, while the technicians' action is a contingency experienced through media (light, sound, etc.). It is not questioned but also not recognized, remaining an invisible and necessary force to the spectators.

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<sup>47</sup> The other *invisibilities* during the live event (producer, director, designer, for example) do not fall into the scope of this study, yet they can be a very interesting subject for future research.

<sup>48</sup> Opposite to Brecht's *V-Effekt*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* For this formula, Gell recalled the concept of *value* coined by Georg Simmel, who stated that people determine the value of an object based on how difficult to make they perceive that object to be.

"[...] the theatre is constantly playing with the possibilities of revelation, with the relationship between the shown and the not-shown, the shown and the partially shown." (McAuley 2000: 75)

We have seen that avantgardes from the XX century affirmed that technical theatre was a wall of distortion between the true meanings of the performance and the audience, who could not participate with *authenticity*. Those that are considered bearer of the sacred essence are the actors: ever-changing entities that lend their body to the characters for the sake of art. Audiences see the courage in their physical and spiritual commitment to their job. The sense of integrity, and purity, of the actors lies upon the fact that they are thought to live of Art. They bear a sort of bohemian aura for the general public of Western theatre, embracing a life that is devoted to theatre. This study argues that the so-called "material" theatre possesses intrinsic aesthetic value.

"[A] general tendency to distinguish intellectual from manual labour, along the common axis of a more fundamental series of oppositions between mind and body, creativity and repetition, and freedom and determination. [T]echnology works, art signifies: technical action is aimed to produce results in a mechanically determined way, whereas the purpose of art is to communicate ideas. In short, art has been split from technology along the lines of an opposition between the mental and the material, and between semiotics and mechanics." (Ingold 2000: 350-351)

Technicians' commitment is not only professional, but also personal. Thus, by exercising their profession, they are seeking "their own truth" in that the commitment is intended as a challenge to reveal one's self by means of technology, or proxy arrangements. Their contributions are animated by a sincere desire for self-expression, whether it is through their own exposed body or operating technological devices. Also, the act of sculpting the actor's body can be described too as craft.

"The word research implies that we approach our profession rather like the mediaeval carver who sought to recreate in his block of wood a form which already existed." (Grotowski 1968: 27)

Or, as Fischer-Lichte pointed out, though referring to performances with exposed physical pain,<sup>50</sup>

"[...] subjective constructions resulting in a physical performance and its recollection appear to be the principal modes of cultural production, and it is only the moment of physical performance that is endowed with a power to transform subjective construction into sensually perceivable realizations that, in their turn, become the point of departure for other subjective constructions." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 254)

That is, as the author stated later in the book, "a symbolization of the actor's body. For in order to enact the role the actor's body must be transformed [...] into something significant." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 294) She drew a line between the body in performance art and the body in theatre, for in the latter "the symbolical order of language and the body meet and work upon each other" (*ibid.*) through *action*. Actors in performance "transform their sensual body into a semiotic one which would serve as a material carrier for textual meaning" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 78). Quoting Johann Jakob Engel (1804) and Wolfgang Iser (1983), Fischer-Lichte argued that actors make themselves unreal to maintain the illusion, which would be spoiled if they revealed themselves with self-reflection. This can be applied to theatre technicians, for they too must hide behind the fiction. What they conceal, however, is their own bodies in action.

Grotowski stated that "[a]cting is a particularly thankless art" (1968: 44). It is interesting to note that, during our interviews and observations, we have often come across the idea that "a técnica teatral é um trabalho ingrato" (Rui Gato). Technicians, actors and the rest of the creative crew all believe that they share the condition of sacrifice and ephemerality dictated by the very nature of working in theatre. If we take a closer look, we can see that they interpret this condition in different ways: the actors using it to their advantage together with the audience's suspension of disbelief, the technicians "make things work" on a delicate balance of time and sensibility.

If the body, forged by technique and situated in time and space, is the original material of theatre, then it must be the body that is seen, the actors', and to the body that is hidden, audience and technicians. Fischer-Lichte points out that,

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<sup>50</sup> For instance, performance artist Marina Abramović's *The Lips of Thomas* (1975) or Stelarc's *Suspension* series.

"[t]he simultaneous physical presence of the actors and the spectators in the same room, the *sine qua non* of theatre, [...] appears to mark the special condition of the possibility of aesthetic perception altogether - theatre becomes the paradigm of aesthetic experience as sensuous, bodily experience." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 109)

The scholar mentions only the physical presence of the ones seen and of those who see them, and excludes the technicians from the picture. I argue that the conditions of aesthetic perception are also made possible by backstage labourers. The analysis of the aesthetical experience of theatre must comprehend them as integral parts of the performance as they bear meanings as much as the masks onstage interacting with the audience<sup>51</sup>. Showing lighting grids and projectors served to Bertolt Brecht as an aesthetic and political statement to unveil the work and the people behind a performance and to show that the event is not being created by a magical force, but by human intentions - work-force in its "sensuous, bodily" material.

I argue that all participants in the performance are transformed by it and transform it, provided that we regard them as actors *sensu lato*. Their agency allows them to make their own conscious choices, though it is nevertheless limited by the liquid structure of the milieu.

"The enactment, as a partial desymbolization of the symbolic order formed by the language of the play, is performed as an actualization, whereas the symbolization of the actor's body takes place as its *historization*. Therefore, the identity of the dramatic character onstage, as the result of this process, necessarily points to and participates in two different discourses: that of the culture (epoch/society) within which the play was written and that of the contemporary culture." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 302, author's emphasis)

That *historization* is denied to technicians, for their acts are not considered in the context of performance. On one side, we see exposed symbolic bodies, the actors, while on the other side stand the concealed material body of the technicians. As we have seen, one of the elements that differentiate technicians and actors is visibility, for "the simple act of being watched can generate an increased sense of awareness."<sup>52</sup> Invisibility is a process of embodiment and it is interpreted distinctly whether it is applied to operating technicians and stagehands or directors and designers. The latter are unseen, though their authorship is recognized; the former's invisibility is constant, and their job includes remaining hidden to the

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<sup>51</sup> Mind that I am not going to investigate the audience's capacity of interpretation.

<sup>52</sup> Carlson, S. in Werts 2008: 73.

public. Since technicians are not recognised as active participants in the performance, their intellectual and emotional commitment is neglected by the general public and critics.

## CHAPTER 3

"Cosí a l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi  
di soavi licor gli orli del vaso:  
succhi amari ingannato intanto ei beve,  
e da l'inganno suo vita riceve."<sup>53</sup>

Tasso's 'Proemio' to *Gerusalemme Liberata*

### *What is Art?*

Let us focus on the notion of technology, and the seemingly inevitable debate about the dichotomy art/technology. *Technē* and *ars*, respectively Greek and Latin words, used to have the same meaning, that of skill or craftsmanship. However, words can change through time and even assume opposite connotations. Such is the case of *technē* and *ars*, born from the same mother, they then took different paths. An example of this phenomenon is the adjective "artificial", which was used to define the artistically skilled, whereas in modern times it evokes soulless and squalid products of contemporary massive distribution<sup>54</sup>. Lately, *technology* has suffered a further stratification: from defining the *study* of productive practices to being the *tools* employed to exercise those practices (Ingold 2001: 18). And this shifts affected the academic world as well, as we see that,

"Until fairly recently, the literatures in the anthropology of art and in the anthropology of technology remained almost completely isolated from one another. Technology was located within the sphere of ecological adaptation, mediating the material relations between human populations and their environments. [...] Art, by contrast, along with such forms as myth and ritual, is supposed to comprise the patterns on the walls, the world of sensory experience as it is refracted through the filters and lenses of the cultural imagination. It mediates a dialogue, not between human beings and nature, but amongst persons in society. Like language, it encodes meanings." (Ingold 2000: 350-351)

This correspondence between the studies of art and technology is very useful to my investigation, as it builds an academic bridge that allows joint research. Those who are more

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<sup>53</sup> "So we, if children young diseased we find, / Anoint with sweets the vessel's foremost parts / To make them taste the potions sharp we give; / They drink deceived, and so deceived, they live." Translation by Edward Fairfax first published in London, in 1600.

<sup>54</sup> Example from Ingold 2000: 349.

conservative amongst practitioners may argue that digital technologies should be reduced to the dimension of the sensational, although one might still appreciate the skills behind them. This sensual dimension could create awe and admiration, yet it would not be able to reach the emotional and intellectual peak of a poem or painting.

"The use of sophisticated technology has been most frequently associated with spectacle, and spectacle has been consistently associated with extravagance, waste and courtly indulgence [...]. But in its commercialized and commodified form, in the sensation melodrama of the nineteenth century for example, spectacle is also associated with cheap thrills, visual indulgence and the commercial pandering to an audience who were supposedly too unlettered to follow or understand fine dramatic poetry and diction." (Baugh 2005: 7)

Technē would be bound to practiced movements of the body, whereas ars would have assumed characteristics of transcendence and divine inspiration. Human beings would use the former to shape nature and fulfill their needs and the latter to produce and exchange meanings. The crucial question is: without employing any judgment of *emotional* quality, are we able to define Art? Does it entail a special attitude in the ones who create, or is it only in the eye of the onlookers? That implies that art would either mean being skilful at doing something that no one else is able to produce or, opposite to that, it could be restricted to the idea sparking off creation. If we take it to the extreme, then the act of thinking could easily become a craft, whereas reproducing a model would not (e.g. copying a painting). I argue that the concept of craftsmanship appears to be valid not only for the act of making, but also to what Richard Schechner named "restored behaviours" (Schechner 1985), which indeed are socially recognizable acts. We employ a technique also when constructing the mask, or our own social identity and creating relations with others, although we might not be conscious of it.

"Artistic merit itself is both broader and narrower than beauty: broader, in that it may be based on other properties, such as expressiveness (e.g. power) or originality, that may not confer beauty on their objects; and narrower, in that is possessed only by artworks, whereas natural phenomena can be beautiful as well. [...] Artistic merit may require study and understanding to be appreciated; beauty may seem more immediately accessible, although this is not always the case." (Goldman 1990: 23)

The idea that artistic merit is a property exclusive to an artwork needs clarification. The term *artwork* itself requires a definition independent from the attribute of bearing artistic

merit, or we would be stuck with a rather empty tautology. Artworks, in fact, do not hold constant values which univocally identify them, rather the term is applied to an object or event which is regarded as *artistic* depending on the social, historical and geographical context of production and fruition, as the «evocation of complex intentionalities is in fact what serves to define artworks» (Gell 1996: 29)<sup>55</sup>. Objects produced and used for *artistic* purposes are imbued with significance drawn from the context rather than from an intrinsic value (Werts 2008: 3-4).

"Performance does not consist of fixed, transferable, and material artifacts; it is fleeting, transient, and exists only in the present. It is made up of the continuous becoming and passing of the autopoietic feedback loop. This is not to say that material objects - decorations, props, costumes - aren't put to good use in performances." (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 75)

In theatre, scenography, machinery, props and costumes can only be handed down to us deprived of their context. They are present in their material substance, but their original meaning can only be inferred from their records: art books, videos, photographs, narrations. Even if reproduced in the form of video or audio recordings, a performance has less impact, due to the lack of bodily presence<sup>56</sup>. Also, any medium inevitably adds an extra-layer of interpretation, which implies cultural negotiation in order to attain identification between the "looker", the subject, and the object.<sup>57</sup> Human events acquire the status of Theatre - thus, occasions belonging to the sphere of Art - when they respond to conditions established and imposed on the theatrical object by an external eye which confers artistic merit to it. We ought to explore for a moment the question of defining Art thanks to the words of another source of inspiration to our study, Richard Sennett's *Craftsman* (2008),

"Though «what is art?» is a serious and endless question, lurking in this particular definition worry may be something else: we are trying to figure out what autonomous means - autonomy as a drive from within that impels us to work in an expressive way, by ourselves." (Sennett 2008: 65)

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<sup>55</sup> Alfred Gell proposed a definition of the work of art found in the convergence between those mutated from *interpretative* theory (the object is a work of art because it can be situated in the line drawn by art-historical tradition), and *institutional* theory (the object is a work of art because that is how it is presented to the public).

<sup>56</sup> Also, the recorded live act causes a sense of estrangement. This is not always unwanted, as for Samuel Beckett's experimentation with the expressive possibilities of technology in his poetics.

<sup>57</sup> However, I maintain that archives are undoubtedly valuable, and a great source for academic analysis, such as this study.

This shift in perspective is crucial in our understanding of artistic merit, as it creates the basis of a discussion on technical work as an active and creative component of theatre.

Adolphe Appia considered "the art of stage production [as] the art of projecting into Space what the original author was only able to project in Time" (Appia 1996: 29). Following Appia's argument, the performance would be the actualization of the directors' initial concept, while actors and crew stand a means to embody ideas either before an audience (actors) or behind the curtains (technical crew). We can recall Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* ("total work of art")<sup>58</sup>. The conceptual friction with Wagner's total work of art is detected in Appia's assumption that the author's aesthetics, his *vision*, would find its exact correspondence in the production. Wagner regarded theatrical performances as the product of the union of its parts<sup>59</sup>, each carrying their own aesthetics, which flows into the process and create the artwork in its entirety. We shall start by going back to the origins of theatre and see it as a *chorus*<sup>60</sup>: a convergence of voices, a harmony that is at the same time strong and fragile. It has a structure made of subject, designs and rehearsals, on which the cast builds up the event every night with the contribution of the public. Rather than asking what Art is, I want to focus on how the artwork is created and, by doing so, draw attention to the participants in this process and their roles.

"[P]ractitioners' engagement with the material with which they work is an attentive engagement, rather than a mere mechanical coupling, that skilled activity carries its own intrinsic intentionality, quite apart from any designs or plans that it may be supposed to implement [...]. [T]o refer to an action as one of making is to refer back to the prior intention that motivates it. It is as though the form of the manufactured object were already prefigured, as a design, in the mind of its maker, such as the activity of making issued directly from the design and served only to transcribe it onto the material. [...] To take this view, however, is to deny the creativity of the very process of environmentally situated and perceptually engaged activity, that is of *use*, through which real forms emerge and are held in place. It is the activity itself - of regular, controlled movement - that generates the form, not the design that precedes it. Making, in short, arises within the process of use, rather than use disclosing what is, ideally if not materially, ready-made." (Ingold 2000: 354, emphasis in original)

The main difference between the common conceptions of art and craft is that the former is inspired by invisible hands to an almost transcendent genius' mind; whereas, the

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<sup>58</sup> Although Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* stressed the merging of all the elements into one homogeneous piece of art, where they cannot be analyzed separately.

<sup>59</sup> The *actors* in the broader sense of the word.

<sup>60</sup> We have seen that Ingold too used for social life a metaphor drawn from the music field.

latter can be taught and the processes can be reproduced. Art is always presented as inexplicable and instinctual to the public. In fact, the state of trance of the actors<sup>61</sup> is opposite to the great level of self-awareness of the technicians during a performance. A common notion is that of the separation between the stereotype of the genius, distant from the common man for his extraordinary sensibility and temperament (as for Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*), and the craftsman, whose actions are controlled and prescribed.

"It is often the case that art objects are regarded as transcending the technical schemas of their creators, as well as those of mere spectators, as when the art object is considered to arise, not from the activities of the individual physically responsible for it, but from the divine inspiration or ancestral spirit with which he is filled." (Gell 1992: 59)

Theatre operation, for instance, as any other human interaction, should be interpreted as a performance in itself (Goffman 1959). However, the creative and emotional intentionality of such practice is mostly ignored. On the contrary, fieldwork experience demonstrated it demands high concentration and emotional response. Besides, the origins of the word *poiesis* (*poiein*, to do) indicates to notice that poetry is all that is made with engagement, which is after all *craftsmanship*.

#### *The value of technology.*

"Ici se place la notion, très importante en psychologie comme en sociologie, d'adresse. Mais en français nous n'avons qu'un mauvais terme, «habile», qui traduit mal le mot latin «habilis», bien meilleur pour désigner les gens qui ont le sens de l'adaptation de tous leurs mouvements bien coordonnés aux buts, qui ont des habitudes, qui «savent y faire». C'est la notion anglaise de «craft», de «clever» (adresse et présence d'esprit et habitude), c'est l'habileté à quelque chose. Encore une fois nous sommes bien dans le domaine technique." (Mauss 1936)

Craft is to be related to the skilful adaptation to the environment, thus it belongs to the domain of technology. Mutuating Ingold's argument against the dichotomy between art and technology (Ingold 2000: 351), it can be inferred that the latter are components of an inclusive process of embodiment and that the difference between the two is nuanced, the scholar stated,

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<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Grotowski 1968 or Artaud 1938.

as in the case of music and language. From this perspective, art and technology should be part of a skill set that is inherently ascribed to mankind and their social life.

"[W]hether I speak, swear, shout, cry or sing, I do so with feeling, but feeling - as the tactile metaphor implies - is a mode of active and responsive engagement in the world, it is not a passive, interior reaction of the organism to external disturbance [...]. We 'feel' each other's presence in verbal discourse as the craftsman feels, with his tools, the material on which he works; and as with the craftsman's handling of tools, so is our handling of words sensitive to the nuances of our relationships with the felt environment." (Ingold 2000: 413)

Our mastery of those tools produces objects that participate in our *feel* of the environment in return, which recalls the autopoietic feedback loop theorised by Erika Fischer-Lichte. The scholar suggested that the objects we use during performances are not recognized as artefacts *per se* during the event, rather it is their power, which presents itself. Without the embodied space of theatre, the elements of a performance, if avulsed from their context, cannot constitute the premise of transformative act.

"Performance does not consist of fixed, transferable, and material artifacts; it is fleeting, transient, and exists only in the present. It is made up of the continuous becoming and passing of the autopoietic feedback loop. This is not to say that material objects - decorations, props, costumes - aren't put to good use in performances." (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 75)

In theatre practice this can be linked to the state of transcendence that is required for the audience to assume the event as extraordinary. Thus the object has to merge with the other elements of the performance and waive its aesthetic qualities to the event.

"[I]n many cultural performances some kind of artifacts are needed, are partly even essential for the realization of the performance. However, they only function or are able to display their special power as elements of a performative process, and not as artifacts. Therefore the use of artifacts in a cultural performance by no means entails a reduction of its performativity." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 240-241)

Fischer-Lichte sustained that the insertion of an artefact in cultural performances does not produce a loss in its performativity, though, at the same time, its significance is subjected to the social context shaped by the creation and sharing of the work of art (Gell 1992: 52).

They are products of that adaptation to the environment driven by necessity, social restraints and aesthetic sensibility, in other words technology.

"Technologies may have meanings in and of themselves, and are not simple servants to the mechanistic needs of scenic representation. They are an expression of a relationship with the world and reflect complex human values and beliefs." (Baugh 2005: 8)

Technical theatre thus needs to enter the academic discourse and be interpreted in the light of its *performative* quality. As Gell points out,

"Technique is supposed to be dull and mechanical, actually opposed to true creativity and authentic values of the kind art is supposed to represent. But this distorted vision is a by-product of the quasi-religious status of art in our culture, and the fact that the art cult, like all other cults, is under a stringent requirement to conceal its real origins, as far as possible." (Gell 1992: 56)

About that, one should consider that,

"[...] the intersection of practice and talent poses a general question about agency: we are minded to believe that engagement is better than passivity. The pursuit of quality is also a matter of agency, the craftsman's driving motive. But agency does not happen in a social or emotional vacuum, particularly good-quality work." (Sennett 2008: 97)

"[...] skill is not an attribute of the individual body in isolation but of the whole system of relations constituted by the presence of the artisan in his or her environment." (Ingold 2000: 219)

We recall here Ingold's interpretation of our social life as an orchestra. Each individual contributes with their tone and timber, expertly played by its musician who must be in harmony with the rest. McAuley defined the very stage as an instrument that practitioners need to master to make it sound.

"Any stage is an instrument: some are very complex in what they can offer and what they demand, others are much simpler, but all require the creative input of a number of artists and artisans, skilled in different but related techniques, and all these practitioners need to learn to play his instrument. Knowledge of a particular form of stage can be lost, especially where so little craft knowledge is written down, for in an

oral culture like that of the theatre it takes only a couple of generations for knowledge to be lost." (McAuley 1999)<sup>62</sup>

While McAuley referred to artisans, technical director Prata Ramos, when, during the interview, he made a theatre company/jazz band analogy, opted for a definition that is closer to "skilful operators". Not only because the latter might seem more applicable to contemporary theatre technique, but also because he had previously discarded the hypothesis that technical theatre could have maintained guild-like characteristics of communal life and apprenticeship. An hypothesis that is, on the contrary, fostered by McAuley when referring to the oral knowledge that is handed down from one generation to the next. The technicians I interviewed agreed that they work like an orchestra, in that they are interpreting with their technique and sensibility.

(Sérgio Melo) "É como estar a ouvir uma série de interpretes a interpretar uma música clássica: cada um tem o seu toque, tem a sua interpretação. Eu acho que o nosso tipo de arte é mais dentro deste estilo, nós somos interpretes. Nós agarramos naquilo que o artista, artista mesmo, o encenador neste caso, quer passar para o público e, a partir daí, fazemos com que seja possível passar essa mensagem ao público."

(Sílvia de Sá) "O nosso instrumento são os projetores, os nossos filtros, tudo aquilo são os nossos instrumentos, e depois cada um tem a sensibilidade que tem que utilizar e o conhecimento técnico que tem para os tocar."

It is notable that the variety of media employed in theatrical performance nowadays has changed the perception of what we define artistic. Modern technologies have seen an extensive use in performance, not only theatrical, of the last decades, and have been a reminder of the idea of the artist that is also a skilful technician who masters tools. In fact, in contemporary times, as digital technologies have entered the art world, literature on theatre has also started considering their weight in the performance, often as an additional and enriching voice that possesses its own poetics. Baugh affirmed that,

"[technologies] create a form of narrative dramaturgy that is propelled forwards by technical effect, and that generates an enhanced intensity of emotional experience in the theatre. [N]ew technologies and their scenographic applications have participated significantly in the generation of a new 'poetics' of performance that has in turn enabled new forms and new paradigms of what has been called postdramatic theatre." (Baugh 2005: 209-212)

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<sup>62</sup> Gay McAuley, 1999, "Space in performance: making meaning in the theatre", quoted in Low, Jennifer, 2016, *Dramatic Spaces: Scenography and Spectatorial Perception*, London, Routledge, p. 1.

Baugh added that the computer "has done so much to enable scenography to explore its own vocabulary and, through the duration of movement, to become a performer within performance" (Baugh 2005: 212), as he compared it to the introduction of perspective in scenography during the Renaissance (*ibid.* 215). Contemporary Western theatre has been showing an increasing taste for mixing with other art forms and be more open to questioning political positions, including the playwright's and director's. In fact, we observe a growing tendency for inclusion of elements from dance and music, video art and painting, up to technodrama. So, technology is not only used for practical reasons in contemporary theatre, but it is an active expressive voice that contributes to the performance, constructing a new form independent from drama and technology - a reflection of our world that is increasingly more open to virtuality and hyperlinks.

"[...] the concept of intermediality today can be more or less closely associated with the Bühnenkompositionen (stage compositions) of Wassily Kandinsky (1912/1923) as opposed to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Richard Wagner (1850) because Wagner strived with his music dramas for a reunification and reintegration of the arts under the primacy of music. Wagner's aim for the «artwork of the future» of his day was for the spectator to be immersed into the represented world. Kandinsky on the contrary strived with his stage compositions for a theatre that could function again as «a hidden magnet» that makes the different arts affect each other." (Kattenbelt 2008: 26)

The development of digital technology has increased the chances of making objects and changing our world, thus the theatrical representation of it. While props and costumes have always been part of theatre as the crucial constituent to the building-up of masks, electrical lighting and sound<sup>63</sup> have become almost praxis only lately in the history of theatre, but to the extent that we can hardly think of a theatrical performance without them. Despite that, we do not distinguish them as separate elements of the performance in favour of the overall experience.

Backstage does not represent the same space to every person working in the production. From a theoretical viewpoint, I maintain that every activity embodies an intentionality and does not strictly respond to a design, a plan. From this perspective, technical work could be driven by the same intentionality as design, since,

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<sup>63</sup> And other newer technologies, such as digital.

"[...] imagining is an activity: it is something people do. And as an activity it carries forward an intentionality, a quality of attention that is embodied in the activity itself. Were it otherwise, were every instance of planning supposed to be prefixed by a prior intention in the form of a plan, we would at once be led into the absurdity of an infinite regress [...]. [S]killed practice cannot be understood as the mechanical execution of prefigured design; it is now clear that the same applies to the design process itself. Where this process of imagination differs from other forms of activity, and what makes it so special, is that attention is turned inwards on the self: in other words, it becomes reflexive. I dwell, in my imagination, in a virtual world populated by the products of my own imagination." (Ingold 2000: 418)

For operators, being immersed in the moment does not imply lack of self-reflection. On the contrary, as Sennett repeatedly points out,

"At his higher reaches, technique is no longer a mechanical activity; people can feel fully and think deeply what they are doing once they do it well. It is at the level of mastery [...] that ethical problems of craft appear." (Sennett 2008: 20)

Ethics is at the basis of the contributions of operators and the other members of the backstage crew actually running the performance, their personal sensibility to comprehend the event and respond as an additional voice to the actors and audience. It is the ability to react quickly and to foresee the outcomes. It is a mixture of sedimented knowledge and responsiveness, which does not ignore self-awareness. Sennett adds,

"In the higher stages of skill, there is a constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness, the tacit knowledge serving as an anchor, the explicit awareness serving as critique and corrective. Craft quality emerges from this higher stage, in judgement made on tacit habits and suppositions." (Sennett 2008: 50)

## CHAPTER 4

*But, wait. What is a theatre technician?*

So far I have used "theatre technician" quite loosely due to the nature of the word *technē*, which allows its employment in the most varied contexts. I must now clarify what I mean and give it a practical framework. Generally speaking, technical theatre is intended to be the use of crafts directed towards a sensuous product that is employed during a performance. With these premises in mind, let us try to find guidelines on how to describe technical and creative crew. Technicians are considered those who *re-produce* a given model, while the creative crew is made of those who *produce* that model: playwright, director and designers.<sup>64</sup> In my pursuit of a definition for the term theatre technician, I will proceed by gradually narrowing the spectrum from a more abstract (and inclusive) to an operational (and circumscribed) definition.

On a broader scale, we can match "technician" with Sennett's *craftsman*, a definition that embraces any person who performs a task consciously framing their actions in a result-driven process. It follows that, in the field of theatre, anyone can be considered a technician by placing themselves in the performance as a participant, though on different levels of awareness and recognition by others. I am thus extending my discourse and including as technicians (or craftsmen) actors, directors and audience<sup>65</sup> who are all contributors in the *life* of the production. Spectators are makers and onlookers at the same time, not knowing what will happen and yet generating it. This echoes Erika Fischer-Lichte's autopoietic feedback loop in that the structure is permanently constructed through the interactions between participants who are also changed in the process.

My purpose in this section of the chapter, however, is to reach a factual conclusion. I aim at finding an *operational* definition of the theatre technician. So, by exclusion, I will continue my investigation and apply the term only to those involved in backstage labour. When addressing backstage labour, the most relevant parameter is the distinction between visible and invisible, and this would situate the actors in the creative range and the rest as technical crew. We see that the descriptive range of "theatre technician" will decrease if

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<sup>64</sup> Note that there are many other possible contributors to the production, depending on its needs.

<sup>65</sup> I am now considering the audience as individuals who are conscious about the act of "going to theatre". Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that they interpret themselves on different levels of active participations.

compared to our first hypotheses, yet remaining quite shady and raising numerous questions. Do we mean *every* person who participates in the production and in the framing of the audience's experience? Or do we draw a line between those who create the designs and those who reproduce them (stagehands and operating technicians)? In the first case, we are looking at an immense "theatre crew" that ranges from the playwright to the doorkeeper, including operators, designers, director and producer, and the list is potentially unlimited, depending on the dimension, financial means and specificities of the play. If, however, we consider the second option, we are attributing creative skills to those who are involved in the early stages of production and *interpretative* qualities to those who join in later in the production timeline.

"[A]uthorship and «interpretation» distinguish cultural employment within overall employment in the cultural sector, which includes various non-artistic profiles: technical, operational, administrative, and others linked to training, intermediation and leadership or the management of projects and organizations." (Conde 2009: 4)

Can producers be considered part of the creative crew? Although they are involved in decisions about the performance, their duties are mainly of a financial and administrative nature. Despite that, Magda Bizarro, producer in a small-size theatre company, could also participate in the conception of the scenography. The same can be said of stage managers, as they are not conventionally part of the "creative crew", and fall under the category of stagecraft - though they usually do not have direct contact with tools, boards, costumes, etc. Stage managers make sure that everything is into place and that the director's vision is being followed, which implies that they must have a clear idea of what the show needs and will look like when presented to the audience.

"Não há um técnico, há vários técnicos de teatro. Técnico de teatro pode ser que envolva tudo - eu também seria um técnico de teatro." (José Grande)

I want to consider the main categories I encountered during my fieldwork. There are many other possible contributors, but theatre productions in Portugal seldom allow large financial effort in order to hire those figures<sup>66</sup>, which can also limit the possibility for experimentation. In any case, also the second hypothesis here discussed does not seem to offer a satisfying definition.

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<sup>66</sup> I am not considering musical theatre in this study.

"[N]ormalmente quem acompanha os ensaios, ou seja a criação toda do projeto é a direção de cena e os criadores: o desenhador de luz, o desenhador de som, se houver, ou a música, ou um músico (o som é sempre mais vário), o figurinista." (José Grande)

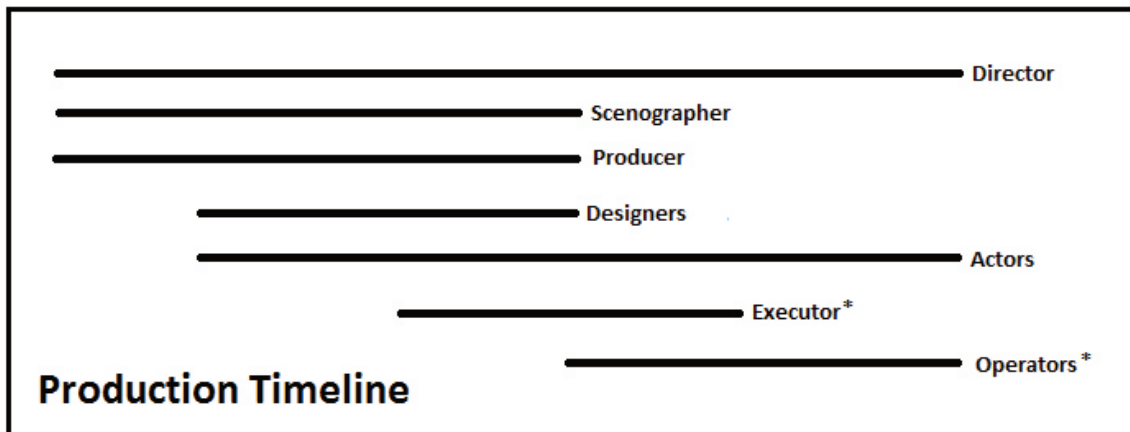
As a third possibility, I propose to analyse the time factor. Time is a crucial element when approaching theatre analysis, as one of the most significant aspects of a production. We can distinguish three phases of theatre production: design, execution and operation, even though these moments may be quite blurred in reality. Directors have the idea and start the production, provided that they have funding (agreed with the producer). Designers discuss with directors and contribute with their own vision during the first stages of the conception of the play. Those who mount the scenography, set up light and sound system are considered executors and take part in the second stage of production. Operating technicians follow cues and, by interacting with audience and actors, participate in the life of the pièce. In this chronological framework, I can now roughly identify the people involved. A factual division is determined thus by the moment of insertion in the production. As mentioned above, those three phases are undefined in many cases, both for the nature of each production and for the versatility of the people involved. For instance, a front of house technician in one theatre can be hired by an external production to design a piece of scenography<sup>67</sup>; as well as one sound designer can work under the direction of another if the play requires so, as it often happens for resident crew members. So we can see how designer and operator are, in the end, only a fleeting status. Many of the people I interviewed could be both depending on the occasion. In case of a large scale production, roles are usually distributed and defined. Most likely when we are facing a small production, the two occupations will merge into one. It must be noted that operating technicians, executors and designers are to here be intended as the roles performed in a specific production, though we know that those who work in a theatre that mostly receives external plays will fall into the first two categories.

Going back to the aforementioned timeline, we see that, far before the cast enters the theatre, designers are working with directors and producer to generate the world where actors will move. That is an early stage of the production, when they discuss on how to render the director's vision, offering their skills and experience. Besides that, designers and producer

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<sup>67</sup> As, for instance, Paulo Araújo and José Grande confirmed during my interviews.

rarely follow the play unless there is an alteration to make or to solve an issue.<sup>68</sup> They participate at different times during the production, and we have seen how time in theatre corresponds to different stages and involvement of each member of the cast and technical crew. The timeline can be represented as follows.<sup>69</sup>



I would like to insist that this is a generalization, and that the discussion is open to endless analysis. Categorizations can have many conceptual starting points, and the matter never ceases to be a complex one, plus mostly related to the aforementioned question of what Art is. In fact, as we have seen, we tend to conceive artistic intuition, attributed to the creative crew, as a force moved by *genius*. It is a traditional image that is related to creative processes, as opposed to artisanal work, which would only be the result of crafting skills and repetition. Thus, time responds to a similar reasoning here to that applied to the production timeline, considering the creative value of technical theatre - the intuition, the sparkle, is the genius revealing itself, whereas the actualization is the product of instructions performed by a skilled person, but disciplined nonetheless. This perspective would imply the loss of the characteristics of independency and self-sufficiency for theatre technicians<sup>70</sup>, their autonomy (Sennett 2008).

"Quando uma peça está em cena durante muitos dias, os espetáculos são sempre diferentes. Os atores podem improvisar enquanto os técnicos «mecanizam»." (Paulo Prata Ramos)

<sup>68</sup> Although this division of roles is useful in this study, I would like to remind that, given the cuts in funding to theatre in Portugal, very few productions can afford commissioned jobs as such.

<sup>69</sup> Paulo Prata Ramos.

<sup>70</sup> Here restricting my discourse to operators and stagehands.

The division of roles within a production, other than being an explicit aesthetic choice, often depends on its funding. That becomes more evident as we go from small to larger productions, that is with more financial means<sup>71</sup>. This stratification brings along hierarchy between departments and *technician* eventually becomes a term that describes backstage labourers as those who merely "make things work". From this standpoint, operating consoles, setting up the scenery and props, tailoring costumes, are subject to be seen as parts of a production line, a clockwork mechanism in which people are merely functional.

"O teatro é gerido como uma fábrica em que cada um tem o seu papel na cadeia de montagem." (Paulo Prata Ramos)

"É como em qualquer fábrica [...]. [Os técnicos] são os mais necessários, são quem executa, são quem na verdade faz andar ou não faz. E, como em qualquer fábrica [...], os de cima, se souberem conquistar essa massa que faz [...], têm uma relação ótima e conseguem tudo o que querem deles: os favores, a disponibilidade, essa coisa toda. [...] Às vezes, [os técnicos] não percebem muito bem esta coisa da experimentação porquê eles são instrumentos da experimentação. E, às vezes, tem que se ter muito cuidado com isso. [...] Nunca lidaram com uma coisa dessas na vida, como o ter de experimentar. Praticamente foram executantes. Mas hoje-em-dia há muitos técnicos que fazem a parte artística." (José Grande)

The idea of a theatre production running as a factory can be related to the interviewees' status. In fact, they were directors<sup>72</sup>, thus higher in the hierarchy than technicians. Their role in that factory was that of a coordinator, hence their emphasis on organization. Furthermore, the institutions where they worked mostly receive *pièces* and what is requested in that case is the use of space and tools, without much artistic involvement asked from the hosting theatre. Theatre technicians, however, accept that the preparation of a play needs to be set on a strict plan and often pride themselves for their ability to work under those conditions, and still take it with good spirit.

"Isso faz parte de uma das vertentes artísticas do nosso trabalho: a arte do desenrasque. O tempo é sempre pouco, o dinheiro é sempre pouco, os meios quase sempre são poucos." (Sérgio Melo)

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<sup>71</sup> Note that I am leaving aside the question of theatre companies *deliberately* opting for a small group with more blended roles for aesthetic choice.

<sup>72</sup> Namely, Paulo Prata Ramos was a technical director and José Grande was a stage manager.

*Hierarchy: identity and taboos.*

In two occasions during my fieldwork, I was not allowed to observe a production because the focus of my investigation was backstage labour, or finding out, upon my conversations with front of house members, their artistic directors' distance from the technical crew. In general, when I approached members that were higher in the hierarchy, I felt some resistance to discuss the participation of technicians, or lack of curiosity towards their vocation. An extensive lack of concern for backstage labourers was also detected in academic studies on theatre, despite the number of volumes written on "how to make a play" is considerable. However, I want to call attention to those who opened their doors and showed interest in the topic of my research, who welcomed me in their group and shared essential information and experience.

The attribution of decisional power within a theatre company could be slightly different according to each theatre theorist and practitioner. The most commonly conceived structure of the "creative crew" sees the director on top, then the scene designer followed by the light and sound designers, then costumes and property (props) designers<sup>73</sup>.

"A hierarquia no teatro existe. Em primeiro lugar, há o encenador e o cenógrafo. Em segundo lugar os criativos da técnica. Em terceiro lugar, os técnicos que executam."  
(Paulo Prata Ramos)

Technicians are described as members performing tasks which require skills in the *reproduction* of a given model or in the administration/organization of the performance<sup>74</sup>. The place taken by occasional participants, like video artists or live musicians, considered also the irregular nature of the collaboration, does not fall into the hierarchy, together with professional figures seldom seen in Portuguese theatre productions.<sup>75</sup> This stratification has been interpreted as a phenomenon that can be traced back to last decades of the XIX century.

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<sup>73</sup> The actors' efforts are concentrated on building the character, a job that requires great introspection and work on the self, added to physical and vocal training - they commit to the director's vision and trust their judgment, hence I will not be including them in these considerations on hierarchy.

<sup>74</sup> In theatre companies, "the technical director is a craftsman and, if possible, an engineer, in the service of the scene designer, and together they serve the director and the playwright" (Cole 1950: 222). Now, during the last decades we have seen a great advancement in technology and its insertion in theatres, consequently complexifying this picture.

<sup>75</sup> See for instance Barbara Baker, 2007, *Backstage Stories*, UK, Continuum International Publishing Group.

"Until the 1890s theater making was considered to be a group activity involving several crafts: play writing, acting, scene painting, etc. To be sure, managing was thought necessary to coordinate these crafts for performance, but a manager was not a «producer»; though usually controlling the affair of a stock company, the manager remained more of a master craftsman than a capitalist, as nineteenth-century writers understood these words. The shift in usage from manager to producer and the emergence of production to denote the producer's actions consequently marked a significant stage in the transformation of dramatic entertainment under capitalism." (McConachie 1992: 170)

Thus, until the post-industrial era, all the components of a performance were on the same level and labelled "crafts", and the emergence of the figure of the producer would have caused the corruption of those crafts in order to create profit. The change suggested by McConachie is the result of the shift from a patronage system to a new market system supported by consumers, which has also altered the way we approach artworks (Berger 1972). We may here also draw a parallel between theatre and tourism. In a few words, theatre and tourism can be related based on the fact that they are both dramatically tied to their cultural background to convey and shape their meanings, and that that also involves the relation observer/observed, or wanderer/authentic<sup>76</sup>. We can indeed find a relevant comparison in Christopher Baugh, who mentions "an international globalized 'tourist' audience" (Baugh 2005: 211). Like tourism, Baugh argues, theatre has become a commodity with the advent of new technologies (*ibid.* 209). New technologies allow easy transportability, which may be the reason behind the idea that they have brought forth a commodization of theatre.

The concept of authenticity<sup>77</sup>, bound to the object of pursuit of the "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990)<sup>78</sup>, can be related to what Walter Benjamin identified in *genuineness*, as he affirmed that,

"The genuineness of a thing is the quintessence of everything about it since its creation that can be handed down, from its material duration to the historical witness that it

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<sup>76</sup> The first playing on wander/wonder, a mixture between the Grand Tour traveler's stereotype or adventurer and the one who is subject to awe; and the second, providing the tourists with representation of their habits and believes in a way that is presented as necessary.

<sup>77</sup> The pursuit of authenticity is a core topic of anthropology, and it is the source for a considerable controversy between scholars. Its definition has long been the goal of anthropological research until realizing that there is no such thing as authenticity. It is a utopia, a vacuum where we dwell for a sort of self-delusional drive. Or, opposite to that, all acts are authentic, as well as their interpretation (in itself, an act). This only to say that, though avant-gardes from the Sixties attempted to provide "authenticity" (which echoes that old "back-to-the-origins" riddle so dear to primitivism), what the audience perceived was the product of both the director's and actors' interpretation of the subject, added to their own interpretation of the performance.

<sup>78</sup> Urry affirmed that the "tourist gaze" is made up by the expectations that tourists have about a place/population when traveling in search of "authentic" experiences.

bears. The latter (material duration and historical witness) being grounded in the former (the thing's genuineness), what happens in the reproduction, where the former has been removed from human perception, is that the latter also starts to wobble. Nothing else, admittedly; however, what starts to wobble thus is the authority of the thing." (Benjamin 1935: 7)

The reproducibility brought forth by technology would annihilate the characteristic of authenticity and social urge, which is the need people have to represent the world they live in and reflect upon it while doing it. In other words, reproducibility «frees the work of art [...] from its existence as a parasite upon ritual» (Benjamin 1935: 12), by abandoning its spiritual significance and consequently acquiring *display* value. Theatre, as a "reproducible" object that makes profit, would then only exist because of the wealth it could produce rather than being a need to express one's self.

"Artistic and audience desire for aesthetically unified performances and the complexities of staging realistic plays required greater coordination of all the theatrical elements, especially acting, scenery, and lighting, and this led to the emergence of dictatorial, innovative producer-directors. This explanation constructs a causal relation linking changes in demand and productive means to a fundamental alteration in the social relations of theatrical production: aesthetic desires and new technologies cause producers to centralize theater-making under their own control. [O]ne alternative explanation might be that capitalists, seeing new opportunities for profit, constituted themselves as producers and rationalized their empowerment on the grounds that they could best offer the public what they wanted." (McConachie 1992: 169-170)

McConachie affirmed that the root cause of hierarchy in theatre is its complexity of roles brought forth by capitalistic needs. In that case, theatre technicians, by expressing the need of a clear distinction and a division of tasks, would also indirectly impose on themselves the role of mere executors holding no creative value. While it is true that we tend to reproduce what we acquire from our context, including self-oppressive behaviours<sup>79</sup>, the idea that hierarchy stemmed from "the emergence of dictatorial, innovative producer-directors" to control profit seems to disregard that theatre requires a stratified society to be meaningful, and that the expansion of the possibilities of a production causes even informal theatre companies to employ new organizational practices (Borges 2001: 120). Also, new technologies always introduce new practical exigencies, therefore structure. As Borges stated,

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<sup>79</sup> See Freire, Paulo, 2002 (1968), *La Pedagogia degli Oppressi*, Torino, Gruppo Abele.

"A conformização negocial de certas práticas artísticas, a definição formal da situação, cálculo ajustado dos tempos de criação, facilitam a construção de um espetáculo de teatro, minimizam os tempos de discussão e produção, porém, dificultam a incursão por novos caminhos." (Borges 2001: 31)

Thus, although I will follow McConachie's method of research by studying the context of production and agree with some of the inferences, I believe that the emergence of the producer figure was also caused by the increasing complexity of theatrical productions. Also, humans had long before started using theatre as a means to acquire power through consensus and admiration of one's wealth, by patronage indeed, or collect money by touring with a play, often even moral<sup>80</sup>.

"[The theatre-goer who cherishes cultural aspirations] must show that he belongs to the best society where «Art» is guarantee and, on the other, he wants to experience certain emotions which give him a sense of self-satisfaction. [...] For him it is a question of being able to feel noble." (Grotowski 1968: 29)

That is the description of someone that goes to the theatre for entertainment and that seeks intellectual stimuli in a way that is socially recognizable. Grotowski reckoned that spectators attend a theatrical performance for self-fulfilment and "to feel noble". Here he seems to trust only partially the spectator's reasons to participate in the performance, thus questioning their very pursuit of authenticity. It could follow that the search for "self-satisfaction" ought to be exercised before an external eye that validates it, as the act of going to the theatre is in itself an affirmation of one's own identity.

"We are concerned with the spectator who has genuine spiritual needs and who really wishes, through confrontation with the performance, to analyse himself." (Grotowski 1968: 40)

In regards to the idea that reproducibility would have caused a commoditization of theatre, I would like to maintain that no replica resembles another. Theatre is not chemistry: there is no laboratory where the experiment can be repeated under the same circumstances. Aiming at reproducibility in theatre is not only to be averted but also impossible: negotiation and dialogue between the parts are essential to the coming-into-being of the performance,

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<sup>80</sup> Also, this is valid when treating theatre on a broader level, that is all human interactions which lead to social recognition and consequent construction of one's identity (Goffman 1959).

which necessarily changes along with its *context*. As Brook puts it, "theatre is always a self-destructive art, and it is always written on the wind." (Brook 1968: 18) For as much as one can go by the book, there will not be a production of the same play like the other, not even a night like the other. Theatre has got an ephemeral nature, for it is a work of art that is created and dissolved right after by its very participants, including the audience.

Also, my observation has showed that, in general, the opinion on the use of new technologies of those I interviewed was positive. Technologies, in fact, were considered as a means to compensate for the lack of economic possibilities, so their use in Portugal would not be driven by profit but by the need to find alternative solutions - besides, their application could foster experimentation. Although it cannot be denied that contemporary theatre possesses aspects of the business industry, money matters are much rather a hindrance than a drive to produce for theatre in Portugal, as the area suffers from scarce public funding and often strives to survive.

### *Division of roles*

Baugh described theatre companies as groups that, in contemporary times, are no longer "building-based" and, therefore, would not yield to hierarchy.

"The shifting of the paradigm from one of theatre to one of performance that occurred over the last twenty or so years of the twentieth century, has involved a movement away from a culture of theatre based within an architecture that was designed and called a 'theatre'. This paradigm is that of a building-based company of theatre artists who operated within an artistic hierarchy at whose pinnacle was a writer of plays and on the company of actors supported by a team of scenic and technical artists and artisans who realized a theatrical presentation of the play. [T]he concern for the establishment of an ordered hierarchy (either in terms of artistic personnel, or in terms of the artistic role of individual component parts within a performance) no longer has the priority it once had." (Baugh 2005: 217)

I would like to argue that the scholar's vision only eliminates technicians from the picture, not the hierarchy. I admit that the theatre world is populated by numerous professional figures, many of those untied from any institution or company, or even not conventionally belonging to the field. Those loose relationships create a net that is not building-based, but nevertheless suffers the same distribution only on a broader scale, or at

least it does for many theatre practitioners. I therefore find that we should now listen to those who actually live in theatre communities and collect what they think of their structure.

"Os membros da equipa da casa e da equipa visitante comem juntos no seu teatro, mas quando se encontram as luzes vão com as luzes e o som vai com o som." (Paulo Prata Ramos)

"A relação estabelecida entre técnicos visitantes e técnicos da casa de áreas distintas tem a ver com o horário e com a disciplina de trabalho, essencialmente. E depois, também tem a ver com as necessidades profissionais de cada uma das atividades, sendo que essas necessidades normalmente desenham alguns tratos da personalidade." (Rui Gato)

Distinctions are considered to be intrinsic in the profession, and depending on its needs in terms of schedule and type of job required. Also, it may be linked to traits of personality, as Gato suggested, which can be peculiar to one profession or another. That is open to discussion indeed, but an interesting viewpoint nonetheless, as it opens to the possibility of describing technical theatre as a career chosen because it resonates with one's personal drives and predisposition. Also, Gato linked the nature of a theatre company to a specific production, as each carries its own peculiarities and relationships, which create what he defined "substrate" of mutual understanding - or, in contrast, of dislike.

"A identidade das companhias está também ligada às peças específicas. É curioso que até agora eu fiz sete peças com o João Garcia Miguel e nessas sete peças algumas coisas ficam como [...] substrato de conhecimento aplicado, outras são postas em estado de upgrade." (Rui Gato)

"Há pessoas com quem os técnicos não gostam de trabalhar, mas fazem, como é óbvio. E normalmente fazem-no com brio, até sempre julgando que fazem melhor do que o desenhador que fez. [...] Os técnicos têm sempre a ideia que eles sabem fazer melhor [...] e muitas vezes é verdade." (José Grande)

(Sérgio Melo) "A gente às vezes consegue enganá-los [os encenadores] um bocadinho. Eles dizem «Sobe aí a luz» e a gente faz assim no botão... «Então, agora está bom?» «Ah, agora tá muito melhor!» E não mexemos em nada."

(Sílvia de Sá) "Há uns que percebem, mas a maioria não percebe. [Mas] quando há uma boa relação, acabamos todos por estar mais ou menos em sintonia e fazemos umas cedências... a não ser que o encenador já tenha também grandes conhecimentos e perceba que lhe está a dar uma ganda tanga porque não quer trabalhar, que também acontece."

What technicians, and the discourse can be extended to all participants in the group, value the most is the directors' confidence in their vision and respect towards the other cast members' professionalism and competences. If the creative crew fails to be concerned with who executes their designs, a fracture will occur, and that is going to reverberate onto the production.

"Por norma, é difícil encontrar um criativo que aceite de bom grado a opinião de um técnico. Para os artistas, os técnicos são técnicos. Não têm que criar nada daquilo que é artístico. O técnico tem de executar." (Jorge Esteves)

"Primeiro tens de saber manter o diálogo com os técnicos da casa e, normalmente, a coisa consegue. [...] Demora um bocado para ganhar a confiança deles." (Sílvia de Sá)

Members of the technical crew mostly consider hierarchy as bound to responsibility. In fact, there are specific conditions of invisibility in play, and each one has its nature depending on the position in the hierarchy of those who embody it. The final signature is what will be remembered by the general public, who will respond to the *mise-en-scène* regardless of whoever was working backstage, while the latter seeks peer recognition. Public responsibility is what defines internal hierarchy for technicians, while members of the creative crew often relate it to artistic contribution.

"É uma rede [de pessoas] mas é uma rede a alto risco porque tem o tempo real associado, portanto tem que continuar sempre, não pode parar. Portanto, cabe ao diretor nesse caso assumir os riscos e decidir quais riscos se há de tomar [...]. Ou seja, há uma espécie de safety net de decisão que o diretor não tem, mas que os outros têm. [...] É confortável que assim seja." (Rui Gato)

## CHAPTER 5

### *How technicians see themselves, or Considerations from the fieldwork*

Until now, I have only presented glimpses of my fieldwork to substantiate theoretical analysis, and it is time to describe in a more systematic structure the aspects of backstage labour I have touched upon, as well as those that have not been particularly recurrent but seem noteworthy nonetheless - some of them in virtue of their very absence. Many were the gradations in the spectrum of the following subjects, and my report will try to exhaust the nuances that seemed the most repeated. I will provide factual examples and extracts from the interviews conducted to illustrate each entry of the following record.

#### Guild-like life

In larger institutions, usually corresponding to older ones, technical theatre can still be seen as a *métier*.

"Esse prazer que eu identifico nos técnicos mais antigos atribuo-o à experiência e ao facto deles conhecerem bem, tão confortáveis com o seu *métier* técnico que conseguem, ao conhecer bem a sua técnica, expandir a sua ação para o campo criativo." (Rui Gato)

Small and medium size theatre companies might alter their dominant formations according to the needs and characteristics of each production, in terms of finances, aesthetic choice and personnel availability (Magda Bizarro), as, for instance, in the case of Comédias do Minho. Aspects of guild life and conventions, however, can still be found in municipal and national theatres, or older companies, that have maintained a more structured and defined organization. Also, in those institutions, we can find the *velha guarda* (old guard), who mostly did not undergo official training as we know it now, in professional courses and schools, but whose knowledge was handed down by the previous generations and their skills practiced by imitation and experience.

"As gerações, que nós chamamos «velha guarda», que existem já há muitos anos e são muito experientes no que fazem [...], muitas vezes existem choques geracionais de estilo de formação e estilo técnico. [...] Por um lado, existe uma reação das equipas técnicas mais velhas de defesa, um bocado de arrogância em relação às equipas técnicas mais novas [...]. Tal como acontece as equipas técnicas mais novas defenderem-se também disso com alguma arrogância também da sua parte [...]. Existe mais no teatro [...] este tipo de hierarquização pela idade e mais pela velha guarda [...] e isso às vezes gera conflitos. Por exemplo, quando entrei aqui no teatro havia um técnico de som que estava cá há muitos anos e que é um gajo [...] muito experiente, muito bom naquilo que faz. No entanto, por estar aqui há muitos anos, havia um posicionamento de tentar [...] mandar, mesmo apesar de dentro da equipa não haver hierarquias." (Ricardo Fernandes)

"Antes de haver o curso de direção de cena [...] era assim que se fazia: aprendias com os mais velhos, passavam-te a experiência, aprendias no terreno. [...] Nessa altura [quando dei um estágio aos primeiros finalistas do curso de direção de cena] senti que não tinham preparação nenhuma. Senti que tinham preparação académica, tipo sabiam um bocadinho de cada área [...], sabiam organizar as tabelas e essas coisas, mas depois o que é o principal, que é gerir emoções, gerir vontades [...], aí essa parte não. Essa parte só se aprende no terreno, não há volta a dar." (José Grande)

The approach that older generations of theatre technicians can assume is, according to the words of Rui Gato, "normalmente o ninja, a atitude é de observação".

"Um teste silencioso, um teste que não vai modificar. É um bocado como aquela questão quântica dos átomos: não podes mexer neles, mas também não podes observá-los sem mexer neles [...]. Nesse caso, eles são queridos nisso, em observar e avaliar, claro. [...] A avaliação, na verdade, do próprio técnico, é reflexiva e de crescimento, e o mais velho, se começar a perceber para onde ele quer ir, sabe antecipar as necessidades e torna-se ainda mais invisível." (Rui Gato)

This knowledge is silent yet still persistent in small, and more evident, practices and broader structural patterns. Rules and conventions do not exist in manuals and are only passed on from one generation to the other, who repeats those behaviours and codes, like Schechner's "restored behaviours", as much as it can also be challenge and subvert them.

"Não te é comunicado, não há manual de instruções [...]. Tu vais descobrindo, faz parte da descoberta do trabalhar no teatro. Portanto é algo que, se estiveres muito atento, consegues investigar e consegues procurar respostas a isso podes ligar se quiseres. Se não quiseres, também não precisas de ligar a isso." (Rui Gato)

For someone who has not experienced that apprenticeship, those tacit rules might not even make sense, but they will follow them anyways, because that is the structure on which that theatre lives and that community is used to. Sometimes this can cause friction between older and younger generation, and from insiders and outsiders. Also, older generation technicians often make references to the age gap, either to point out a lack of ability and know-how or as a joke fostering camaraderie amongst the members of the group.

"Já chegou o moço da luz?"

(An in-house technician from São Luiz to another referring to the young light technician from the visiting company)

"Oh, jovem!"

(In-house technician from TNDMII to the young light designer/technician from the visiting company)

"Vais tu que és elegante e mais novo!"

(In-house technician from TNDMII telling a young colleague to climb a ladder)

"Isto vai demorar..."

(In-house technician from São Luiz commenting on the hesitancy of the young light technician from the visiting company before climbing a ladder)

"É o que querias fazer quando eras novo, não é?"

"Quando era mais novo, eu queria ir à praia!"

(Dialogue between younger and older in-house technicians from TNDMII while focusing lights)

This last extract highlights the aforementioned difference in career paths, as professional schools did not exist when the older technician started, while the other studied for the profession.

"Na [...] velha guarda os técnicos eram pessoas que foram parar ao teatro um bocadinho por acaso. Hoje em dia é um bocado um universo complexo [...]." (Ricardo Fernandes)

### Career and professionalization

Along with the emergence of new figures, others might disappear. For instance, producer Magda Bizarro admitted that young actors do not need *pontos* (prompters), and that

her company employs them mainly because they are part of the cast made available by the hosting theatre. Indeed, they are not part of the *curriculum* of professional schools. The latter allow theatres to employ interns and new hires that have been specifically trained for the profession. It is important to notice that I also met practitioners that had started a career in one area and changed to another because they had grown interested in it while they were working. Or, others that went the opposite direction, leaving one area because they realized that it was not what they wanted and moved to another. Such is the case of André Calado, at the time technical director for Mundo Perfeito, who had studied cinema, then became an actor and, after four years, move to the technical area.

That change was made possible by the experience he had acquired and by the net of relations that exists amongst the community members. For many theatre practitioners, relations are fundamental for their career progression, as hiring processes are, for the most part, carried out via word of mouth and based on previous works (Borges 2002, Conde 2009).

"No caso da criação de espetáculo, é muito importante [o técnico] ter boas competências para a sua função isoladamente [...], mas é igualmente importante, ou até mais importante do que isso [...], a relação que ele estabelece com as outras competências. Ou seja, ele, independentemente de ser bom músico ou não, entrega na hora certa com o material organizado e pronto para as operações necessárias [...]. Acho que é relativamente comum acontecer em espetáculos haver técnicos [...] que não são propriamente muito bons no que fazem mas que são eficazes a comunicar com a direção artísticas, são eficazes a comunicar com o encenador, são eficazes a comunicar com as equipas da casa e a organizar a informação no momento certo com a linguagem certa. E isso às vezes acaba por ser mais determinante para um desenhador de luz ou um desenhador de som para ter uma trabalho ou uma carreira mais construtiva [...] do que ser muito bom, mas depois ter dificuldades em relacionar-se com outros, com a equipa de trabalho. Porque basta uma equipa de trabalho desorganizar-se na montagem de um espetáculo e isso compromete todas as equipas [...]." (Ricardo Fernandes)

Relations are, also on a personal level, decisive for a career in the theatre world, as it cannot count on large finances and there are many practitioners in the job market, which favours a recruitment process based on previous collaborations. The sensibility required to move in an uncertain area is what José Grande described as "gerir emoções, gerir vontades". Also, collaborations are the ground of what Rui Gato defined *substrato* of mutual knowledge, which is another factor of choice when hiring the cast for a production. Sara Vieira Marques, also, had worked with director João Pedro Vaz before she was called to design the scenography for *Os Doze Pares de França*. Practitioners meet in several occasions because of

the mobility of the theatre world. Lisbon-based sound technician Sérgio Henriques (TNDMII) had already worked with Vasco Ferreira, light designer at Comédias do Minho, before *Os Doze Pares de França*. Or, Abel Fernando, in-house at Teatro da Cornucópia, collaborated with designers for an external production in virtue of the recognition of their skills and friendship between them. The same applies to those who were co-opted onto the theatre troupe, like Carlos Freitas, who was hired as a Stage Manager for TNDMII after working as a bar tender for the theatre.

"Há uma relação de conhecimento e de amizade que é importante depois também para o trabalho" (Filipe Crawford)

### Women in technical theatre

Women are a minority amongst theatre technicians, although the number is very much tied to the area that we consider. When I asked technical crew members at TNDMII, they responded that it depended on what I meant for theatre technicians, and that there are in fact some women amongst stage managers. It is worth noticing that TNDMII counted a female technical director in its board.

The technicians I met during fieldwork showed receptiveness and did not seem to oppose resistance or prejudice against it. Some of them, however, believed that the scant number of women was to be related to the fact that the job requires intense physical strength that women would not have, and that one interviewee affirmed that women could be a distraction. Again, schools nowadays can open job possibilities and be an entrance door for women. In the future the situation can change because female students are approaching areas of study that have been considered to be suitable for men only.

### When resident community and visiting theatre company meet

When a play is on tour, audience reception is always different, and so is the relationship between resident and visiting theatre community. Normally, the receiving theatre has a rider of the play and is prepared to set up and make everything available for the visiting crew. The in-house crew does not directly intervene in creative choices if they are not asked to by the director, but there can be personal involvement, especially when members have met

before in previous work and, in virtue of their mutual understanding, company members can have preferences.

"A criação começa muito antes. E, normalmente, as equipas que estão no teatro, estão lá para nos ajudar a construir as ideias que nós já trazemos. [...] As equipas não têm tempo para de repente entrarem no grupo. Claro que há caso, como nós fazemos muitos espetáculos, por exemplo no teatro Maria Matos, há uma relação com aquela equipa técnica que é diferente da relação que eu tenho com uma equipa do CCB, que só fiz lá dois ou três espetáculos. Eu claro que às vezes estou à procura da solução para qualquer coisa, e a primeira pessoa que eu me lembro de telefonar é o diretor técnico do Maria Matos porque é a pessoa que eu sei «certeza que vai ter uma solução porque já há uma relação de confiança muito grande». Mas não é uma intervenção artística, isso não há. É mais uma intervenção de «olha, eu queria fazer uma alavanca aqui para cair [...], uma estrutura igual a um palco, como é que eu faço isso?» E ele diz, «Ah olha, se calhar fazemos isso, vamos experimentar fazer assim». Ou seja, é mais mesmo em termos técnicos, não em termos artísticos. Isso eu acho que é muito difícil, porque o grupo quando vai, normalmente são sempre, depende do espetáculo, mas dentro um mês ou dois meses de ensaios, portanto o grupo quando chega ao teatro já vem muito coeso, muito fechado e já com o espetáculo normalmente quase finalizado." (Magda Bizarro)

In some cases, in-house technicians might disagree with the aesthetic choices taken by the incoming company, but they are likely not to express their difference of opinion if they do not feel personally involved. José Grande affirmed that rarely the technical crew is not taken into consideration as "quem está a criar está entregue". Also, technicians are integrated in the group in order to "ganhar a relação, para os pôr no projeto" (José Grande) and employ their knowledge of the theatre space.

"Acho que há um código de ética qualquer que eu acho que nunca ninguém assinou, mas que existe. Que os técnicos nunca dizem mal dum espetáculo aos artistas, ao encenador. [...] São muito mais críticos do que nos achamos, porquê vêem muita coisa, montam muito, sabem imenso do que estão a fazer e acabam por ser muito mais críticos e nós não damos conta. [...] Por exemplo, nós tivemos agora um caso em que houve uma diretora de cena que quando eu disse «Olha, afinal vamos cortar aquela cena.» Ela disse «Ah que bom!», e depois «Ah desculpa», e eu «Não faz mal, tens razão, tantos que vamos cortar», mas ela nunca foi capaz de dizer «Aquela cena não é boa», mas ela estava a ver e dizia «Naquela cena ia tudo muito abaixo...», mas como diretora de cena ela sentia que não devia dizer. [...] Mas como havia uma relação de muitos anos, saiu-lhe. E eu acho isso muito bonito, de alguém ter criado esta relação que tem a ver com essa tal confiança, até que não pode dizer a uma atriz «estás a acanastrar, estás a fazer muito mal o teu trabalho» porque tem que estar a apoiá-la, e portanto está a apoiá-la o mais possível para estar correr bem. Claro que entre eles na sala de convívio são capazes, se calhar, de estar a dizer de raios e coriscos sobre o

espetáculo, mas isso nós já não ouvimos, portanto acho que é bom, é libertador." (Magda Bizarro)

Yet, it is a delicate balance, for in-house technical crew members can feel exploited by a director that does not have a clear vision and wants to experiment, an occurrence that is sometimes caused by the possibilities available in bigger theatres. During the process of building up the scenography, an in-house light technician sarcastically pointed out that the visiting director did not know how to use the theatre equipment, and his demands were seen as lack of conviction and preparation. The loss of trust can make the technicians impatient and less confident in the director's vision, which may result in detachment. In this sense, it is crucial for a director or designer to show poise and self-assurance, also when a theatre is putting on its own shows.

"Uma coisa que acontece imenso em relação às equipas de fora, [...] é que as equipas quando vêm uma casa como o São Luiz, por exemplo, é normal que seja um espetáculo muito importante por aquele ano [...]. E isso faz com que eles partam muitas vezes do princípio que a equipa da casa pode saltar as refeições ou podem abusar dos horários, ou esticar o horário à vontade [...], porque para eles é muito importante e não lhes passa pela cabeça que essa importância não seja a mesma para todos. E não têm muitas vezes noção de que a equipa da casa trabalhou neste espetáculo com esta importância, mas ontem trabalharam num outro espetáculo com outra importância para outro e amanhã vem outro de seguida. Portanto temos sempre que gerir um bocado [...] essas ansiedades dos criadores. Também existe no processo de criação uma coisa: a maionese. [...] Que é quando começam a fazer muitas experiências... as equipas da casa, as equipas técnicas não gostam quando os criadores estão a fazer muitas experiências. Muitas vezes não têm noção do trabalho que dá fazer essas experiências, o tempo que demora a preparar [...]. É normal haver alguma resistência quando se percebe que um criador está a fazer experiências por ele próprio ainda não saber bem o que é que quer [...]. Isso sente-se de certa forma... acho que as equipas técnicas sentem que estão a ser um bocado abusadas [...]. Perde-se confiança no encenador e perde-se acima de tudo vontade. Deixa de se estar muito disponível para tudo [...]." (Ricardo Fernandes)

It is indeed a balance between the demand of the visiting company and the necessities of in-house tech crew. The latter sets boundaries and makes the visiting director aware of their needs. Stage manager Carlos Freitas called the attention of the visiting director to stick to schedules and for the actors to handle equipment carefully, as he stood as the front-of-house defendant of the theatre space. At the same time, for instance during the rehearsals of *Os Doze Pares de França*, while light designer Vasco Ferreira apologized for being "picuinhas", he also acted in a way that let the crew know that he had clear designs and that his plans had to

be followed, thus gaining their trust. I could notice this negotiation in several moments during my observation, and I believe that, as another example, the dialogue between the director of an independent theatre company and Ricardo Fernandes, sound technician from São Luiz, is significant.

Visiting director: "É mais da luz ou mais do som?"

Ricardo Fernandes: "Eu sou unicamente do som, mas se quiser posso ir chamar alguém."

This dialogue evidences the difference between the organization of small companies and big institutions, while it also highlights the negotiation and internal "posicionamento" of the in-house crew. Ricardo Fernandes will later help his colleague with light focusing, however he still clarified his position towards the incoming company. This posture was mostly found when dealing with directors, while amongst technicians the attitude is composed and helpful, especially when it comes to younger colleagues<sup>81</sup>. On the opening night of *Ilhas*, in-house and visiting technicians recorded the entire lighting plot again only two hours before the play started because it had been lost. Despite the urgency, Daniel, resident technician, did not show signs of impatience and offered to do it himself as he knew the board better and could be faster ("Nesta mesa é difícil, mas não faz mal"). Then, as Magda Bizarro admitted, he could have still commented the event with his colleagues, as the role of in-house technicians is supposed to be that of "baby-sitting" the visiting crew and make available for them all the equipments and advice they need<sup>82</sup>.

"Ok, eu pensava que estava tudo bem feito e que podia descansar, mas afinal não, afinal tenho de ficar aqui a tomar conta dele porque não tem a menor ideia do que é que está aqui a fazer." (Ricardo Fernandes)

In-house tech crew is usually more familiar with their fellow in-house actors than the visiting tech crew, which confutes the idea referenced earlier in this study by Paulo Prata Ramos that sees clear-cut divisions between tech and creative crew, and even a splitting up between sound and light technicians. His vision is perhaps to be linked to the type of structure where he is Technical Director. *Culturgest* is a polyfunctional equipment that, in the case of theatrical performances, mostly co-produces or receives, which nurtures a type of dynamics

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<sup>81</sup> However, as mentioned earlier, there can be some friction at times.

<sup>82</sup> Unless they are also part of the run crew.

amongst the departments that can create divisions and may indeed have technicians less involved in the production of the show.

"Depende muito da organização dos teatro. Cada estrutura tem uma forma de funcionamento diferente, felizmente, eu acho. [...] A grande diferença está num teatro nacional como o Dona Maria ou o São João que são produtores de espetáculos e o CCB, por exemplo, que também faz teatro mas é mais como co-produtora ou como acolhimento e portanto tem uma intervenção menos ativa. É só no fundo dizer «Temos isto disponível, temos estas pessoas aqui, os horários que praticamos são estes [...]», depois tenta-se encontrar algumas coisas que possam ser necessárias da parte do espetáculo [...]. Mas é uma relação um bocadinho menos envolvente. É uma coisa mais «Vamos fazer com que isto aconteça», é diferente do que estar a participar e a criar uma coisa de raiz. E o empenho das pessoas varia muito de acordo com essa questão do criar um espetáculo de raiz." (Francisco Leal)

Ricardo Fernandes stated, "a nossa equipa, encaramos de certa forma um bocadinho como uma ilha". This leads me to believe that the dynamics between in-house members can depend on the production that is being created, rehearsed and running in the theatre, rather than fixed, and that this attitude does not apply to the technical crew only. During the rehearsals for *Os Doze Pares de França*, I assisted to exchanges of glances between in-house tech crew and actors which demonstrated complicity, an impression reinforced by the dinner before the night rehearsal, where I participated together with members of the resident tech crew, in-house actors and only one member of the visiting company, the musician/actor. Discomfort and detachment can also affect actors when they do not feel involved in the project, as, for instance, they might not be called for rehearsals with the others or not appear in the production poster.

Indeed, directors do not discuss with in-house technicians directly, and let designers handle the technical aspects of the show.

"Eu quando vou para fora não intervenho diretamente propriamente com os técnicos. Quem fala com eles é o meu técnico, ele é que resolve as coisas. E depois quando eu intervenho já está tudo montado [...]. Os técnicos lá da sala está lá para dar apoio, não estão lá para trabalharem comigo. Estão lá para dizer onde é que está o material, para dizer o que é que se pode fazer, o que é que não se pode fazer, a disponibilizar. [...] Os técnicos da casa, a função deles é facilitar o trabalho a quem vem." (Filipe Crawford)

This is an expected behaviour and it translates in the aforementioned "baby-sitting" part of the job. In fact, I could detect the same pattern in the productions I observed, and none

of the participants expressed distress or uneasiness about it. What I also would like to mention is that in many interviews with both non-technicians and technicians, remarks were made about people from tech crews unwilling to work or not collaborative, which was in a few occasions corroborated by my observations. Indeed, there were differences of personal involvement from one crew member to the other, in terms of extending work time or supporting the visiting crew.

### Adaptation to the space

(Sérgio Melo) "A coisa nunca é o que a gente queria mesmo."

(Sílvia de Sá) "Isso só acontece em grandes produções que são coisas muito bem definidas, que não são vendidas para qualquer sala porque têm de ter um X de espectadores para poder pagar aquela produção toda"

(Sérgio Melo) "Eu acho, nem todos os nossos colegas estão de acordo, mas eu acho que tens de te adaptar aos meios que há. E com os meios que há, fazer o melhor possível. Aí há um trabalho de criatividade bastante grande."

(Sílvia de Sá) "Não é o espaço que se tem de adaptar a ti, mas tu ao espaço."

This is true for new productions, and even more when productions go on tour, as they need to be transportable on (possibly) a low budget. There is always some "ginástica" (Filipe Crawford) when it comes to adapting the play to new settings, and that is handled by visiting and resident crew, who work in synergy to, respectively, use current conditions and make available equipment and knowledge. Designers may face obstacles in the reproductions of their plans and discuss with tech crews on how to solve them, negotiating between efficacy and aesthetics, not to mention the paramount concern for safety: the *artistic* has to come to terms with the *functional*. Designers and technicians worked together to achieve organic solutions that can fulfill aesthetic demands and be safe for the actors to move around. Sérgio, sound technician, added baffles and a suspended directional microphone to better the acoustic of the play, thus also manipulating the stage space.

The initial design for the scenography of *Os Doze Pares de França* was altered to adapt to the space. Mainly, it was some stairs to climb up and down the structure that created an issue, which was solved by using stairs that the theatre had in stock. Once faced with the problem, resident technicians provided an item that was safe to use and, at the same time, close to the initial idea of the designer and director. Designers might also ask technicians for

second opinions on aesthetic choices, like Vasco Ferreira, who was worried that the lights in one scene could give the idea of "carrinhos de choque". Usually, when unrequested, comments can be the cause of conflict. However, they are mostly overcome for the benefit of the play and the group. When rehearsing onstage, sound technician Sérgio said that the echo produced by the structure reminded him of a cathedral, causing Sara, set designer, to respond «Valeu».

As mentioned above, for a play to be transportable set pieces and technical equipment must be versatile. The adaptation to a new space requires creativity in finding ways to reproduce the designs, although it cannot be identical to the original.

"Se um espetáculo for para circular [...], não pode ser muito complicado em termos de luz ou em termos de som porque muitas vezes não estamos em condições para estar a fazer grandes luzes ou grandes montagens de som." (Filipe Crawford)

"Nós, normalmente, não temos marcações dos nossos espetáculos, exceto algumas pontuais e isso faz com que, por exemplo, quando o espetáculo vai em digressão a sala para onde ele vai é diferente. Portanto adaptamos o desenho de luz a essa sala e é um trabalho criativo também. Nós acreditamos muito que o diretor técnico [...] tem que fazer uma adaptação das luzes criativa e não apenas fazer uma cópia, reproduzir o melhor possível o desenho de alguém." (Magda Bizarro)

Actors too adjust their movements to the set, which includes their voice that ought to be projected according to the dimensions of the venue. Movements and voice call sound and light to action in order to develop a plan to correct positions and regulate intensities. However, this does not stop with the light and sound designs, and grows along with the play, while it travels and is presented to different audiences, who also contribute to its transformation. The play, in fact, changes after the first night and its transformation continues while it travels from one theatre to another, also under the action of the different audiences.

"A criação continua depois da estreia [...], vai continuar a crescer com o público. E então, quando se vai para fora, quando se leva a peça para outras casas que não é a casa de criação, há outro processo de criação que provoca uma continuidade nesta criação." (Rui Gato)

Magda Bizarro affirmed that moving can be beneficial for the play, both in terms of reception and production. Indeed, mobility for an independent theatre company can be a means to acquire co-producers and save money that could be invested in future performances.

"A Mundo Perfeito tem esta característica: nós acreditamos que [quando] um espetáculo está criado, não termina a sua criação. Ou seja, nós fazemos hoje, amanhã vamos repeti-lo, mas o público é diferente, portanto a repetição não é a mesma. O público de Lisboa é tão diferente do público de Bragança, que para nos é importante chegar e mostrar em Bragança. O espetáculo vai ser diferente, a leitura que as pessoas vão fazer do espetáculo é diferente. [...] Para nós é muito importante fazer digressão. E o facto de fazer digressão faz com que exista muita entrada de dinheiro e isso aí faz com que a gente consiga muitos coprodutores [...], e isso faz com que a gente consiga manter os projetos." (Magda Bizarro)

### Territorial appropriation

To illustrate this theme we can use the allegory provided by *Os Doze Pares de França*, as the very program of TNDMII presents it as an "Ocupação Minhota". In this play, based on the *chansons de geste*, the army of Charlemagne, or what is left of it, invades the "terra dos Mouros". Charlemagne could be interpreted as the director that is marching into the theatre with his company to convert the Mouros, significantly all in-house actors, as his crusade starts from the back of the audience and continues by attacking the stage. During rehearsals, the director expressed many times the idea that the Sala Garrett would be the meeting area, or the war field<sup>83</sup>. Without going too deep into the synopsis of the play, I want to focus on the fact that, while the visiting community stood as the "invaders", in-house crew and actors did not seem to feel the same pressure, as their theatre is indeed constantly invaded (Rui Gato).

Carlos Freitas established the moments of production, when he reminded the director of the length of dinner and breaks after the visiting actors' delay on night rehearsal. Besides, the stage manager also told the actors, a few days prior to the opening night, that, from that day onwards, they could not leave their jackets and bags and, pointing at the stage, he said "a vossa área é esta" - temporal limits results in spatial limits. Another occasion when I could witness "territorial defense", occurred after the curtain had been found ripped. There was a scene in the play where actors hit the curtain with sticks, and that possibly could have torn it. One of the in-house actors commented that the visiting company "vieram a Lisboa fazer a fúria", and he had also complained of the force they used during fight scenes. The same care, although of a more common nature, was shown for costumes and props by the dresser and the stage manager.

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<sup>83</sup> "Mouros, cristãos e a Sala Garrett transformada em arena" (from the theatre program).

## Decisional power

"To recognize designers as respected artistic collaborators with a wide range of representational strategies is also to recognize their capacity for embedding cultural commentary within a production." (Essin 2012: 53)

An important aspect that regulates the dynamics of a theatre community is the power of decision. The possibility to intervene in the production with one's own choices and to take responsibility for one's decisions is regarded as a crucial factor to identify who is a member of the creative crew and who would not qualify as such, being an executor with little or no influence.

"Não há uma hierarquia de importância, importante mesmo é o espetáculo, a segurança do espetáculo e a segurança do público. E há várias equipas a trabalhar para isso todos os dias." (Francisco Leal)

"Normalmente no teatro o encenador tem a última palavra. [...] Dentro disso há muita liberdade criativa. O encenador funciona um bocado como o responsável pela ideia do espetáculo." (Filipe Crawford)

"Quanta mais responsabilidade, tanto mais controlo ou liberdade." (Rui Gato)

"Hierarquia é assumir responsabilidade." (Jorge Esteves)

Decisional power necessitates constant negotiation in a theatre company with a flexible structure, such as Comédias do Minho, where roles shift and members can be designers, dramaturges, directors or actors from play to play. Compromise is always present in the minds of all theatre practitioners, and definition of roles stands as a prerequisite for effective leadership, as well as a way to set boundaries for the participants in a production on every level.

"O respeito que se conquista, não é só por mérito próprio, tem que ser conquistado. O respeito que se conquista faz com que os colegas compreendam o trabalho e que respeitem, e faz com que o meu trabalho seja imposto quando é a tempo disso." (Francisco Leal)

The following exchange portrays, in the form of irony, one of these moments of negotiation between members of the company<sup>84</sup>.

Actor: "Tenho uma sugestão para dar."

Director: "A tua cara diz que não."

It was interesting to notice that technicians might not notice the hierarchy within their theatre, but recognize a hierarchical structure in another, sometimes through opposite reasoning. Both João Paulo Araújo and Abel Fernando (Teatro da Cornucópia), during the interview, affirmed that hierarchy is more likely to be found in large theatre companies, like TNDMII or São Luiz. However, Ricardo Fernandes (São Luiz) sustained the opposite and even mentioned Teatro da Cornucópia as an equipment with a solid hierarchy.

"Eu não sei se haja uma hierarquia entre os próprios técnicos [...]... no caso de uma casa como o São Luiz, que é uma casa multiusos, é uma casa que faz vários tipos de espetáculos de todas as áreas, depois na área da música o som é muito mais importante do que o uso da luz [...]. Portanto, no caso de uma casa como o São Luiz não existe esta hierarquia, acho eu: uma coisa compensa-se com a outra. Eu não sei até que ponto é que no seio das companhias de teatro [...] como os Artistas Unidos ou a Cornucópia, e aí sem dúvida, dentro da equipa deles acho muito provável que exista, em que o técnico de luz é de facto mais importante que o técnico do som, sem dúvida. Mas eu não tenho insights sobre essas companhias." (Ricardo Fernandes)

This can be linked to the fact that backstage labourers conceive their job as one that aims at a further objective than simply executing someone else's orders: the audience. One may be led to think that the less technicians can make choices, the less they will feel involved in the process. Yet, they would rather not see themselves as subjugated to any other member of the cast, as their role aims at the same goal as the rest of the participants, only it is not visible and entails less risk of failing in the public eye.

"Se calhar é por ser freelance, mas eu nunca me vi subjugada a ninguém: eu vejo tudo como igual. Eu sou técnica, tenho a minha importância, o encenador tem a sua importância, o ator tem a sua importância. Para mim, estamos todos no mesmo patamar. O nosso patrão é o público. [...] Nós somos uma equipa [...]. Às vezes, misturamo-nos um pouco, às vezes metemos um dedinho na encenação, se houver abertura para isso também, depende da ligação que tens com o encenador. Mas à

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<sup>84</sup> Mind that the director is also the artistic director of the company, thus he stands in a higher rank of the internal hierarchy.

partida é suposto, quando te envolves num projeto, criar um certo espírito de equipa. Não têm que ser todos amigos, mas convém que estejamos todos em sintonia para levarmos aquele projeto a um bom porto." (Sílvia de Sá)

"Digamos que nós, os técnicos, trabalhamos para os artistas, mas na realidade ninguém gosta de ver a coisa assim: nós trabalhamos para o público, como toda a gente que está ali está a trabalhar para o público." (Sérgio Melo)

When we give our contribution to the production of an object, we consider ourselves responsible towards its success, provided that we feel personally involved. In technicians' case, the participation can be independent from the power to intervene, though it still has to be counterweighted by regard and admiration for the director's competences and a sense of belonging to the group<sup>85</sup>. Motivational techniques are employed in workplaces of every sort and theatre is no exception. As said before, decisions imply responsibility and that is also a net that members of the cast rely on. During the dress rehearsals for *Os Doze Pares de França*, after sound technician Sérgio pointed out a delay in a spot, light technician Daniel protested that only Vasco, the light designer, could tell him that he had made a mistake: the responsibility lies with the member of the creative crew that has designed and will sign the lights of the show.

Therefore, in an ordered structure such as a municipal and national theatre, division of roles and attribution of tasks is also highly demanded by the members.

"Ninguém gosta de ter papéis mal definidos. Ou seja, eu não me importo minimamente de estar a executar ordens muito rígidas e muito definidas de alguém que me diz o que é que há para fazer. Tal como não me importo de estar eu a definir e decidir e desenhar e dizer aos outros o que é eles têm para fazer. Mas gosto que, seja uma coisa seja a outra, gosto que esteja definido. [...] Isto acho que é transversal em todas as áreas. [...] Quando acontece vir um desenhador de luz ou de som que depois na verdade não te faz um desenho de som ou de luz e começa um bocado a deixar pontas soltas para equipa técnica fazer montagem e resolver questões que implicam critério artístico, isso cai mal [...] e cria logo alguma resistência, alguma rejeição." (Ricardo Fernandes)

### Creative involvement

"Há várias categorias de técnico. Em teatro, nós dividimos os criativos e os técnicos. Os criativos são o autor, o encenador, o cenógrafo, o figurinista, o designer de luz, o designer do som, esses são os criativos, são os que criam o espetáculo. Os técnicos

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<sup>85</sup> As we have seen for instance upon discussing about the idea of theatre as a factory (José Grande, Paulo Prata Ramos).

normalmente são as pessoas que executam, portanto há os técnicos de palco que montam, carpintaria, não é? Há os técnicos de luz que montam os projetores e fazem portanto a operação depois da luz de acordo com o design de luz e há os técnicos de som que fazem a operação do som de acordo com aquilo que foi definido pelo criativo do som. Agora, como geralmente isso acontece nas companhias que são grandes [...], quando as companhias são mais pequenas, como é o caso da minha, muitas vezes o que acontece é que os técnicos acumulam funções criativas também." (Filipe Crawford)

Depending on the scale of a theatre company, its members will assume different roles that are regarded as artistic or technical. Upon speaking with theatre technicians, what is remarkable is their refusal of the name "artist", since they would rather be *creative* worker. Plus, the definition of "artist" is often linked to presumptuousness and narcissism (Jorge Esteves), and even those who shift between artistic and technical positions are keen on stressing that they are mainly technicians or a hybrid (Vasco Ferreira, Rui Gato). After my observation of *Ilhas*, I sent an e-mail to the director, with whom I had been in contact before, asking if I could talk to the technicians from that production, and he significantly replied "Quais são os «técnicos» com quem gostava de falar?" He did not see his collaborators as technicians and, being in an early stage of my research, this gave me a new perspective on the topic. Indeed, they operated the light and sound board, but had also made the designs, thus their position was ambivalent in my eyes.

"A criatividade existe sempre na execução e na mente de cada um. [...] O que interessa depois é a conotação que cada um dá às coisas." (Jorge Esteves)

"A participação intelectual e emotiva não falta, mas é proporcional ao esforço criativo. Também os carpinteiros têm. [...] Podes ter entrega artística por dinheiro, pelo prazer de fazer coisas ou pelo prazer de aprender [...] ou mesmo só para dizer alguma coisa, tudo isso funciona para teres vontade artística." (Rui Gato)

"Todos os objetos são obras de arte. A arte não tem de ser muito requintada, é suficiente que haja uma peça. Nem é preciso o conhecimento, apenas vontade: todos podem fazer arte." (Abel Fernando)

Creative aspects can be found in every job as they depend on how much one chooses to be personally committed to the product of their work. In this sense, we can recall the idea of the commoditization of theatre mentioned earlier in this study, as the process would imply the alienation of those who produce it, especially of technicians who follow a design and

supposedly do not participate with creativity and *autonomy*. We have seen that it is not the case, as theatre professionals, regardless of the area, have a sense of pride for working in something significant for the society and love for their job, despite the instability and, often, the lack of recognition.<sup>86</sup>

"Eu acho que este é um trabalho específico que tu tens de fazer por gosto. [...] O técnico de teatro é uma profissão muito especial, em que as pessoas estão por amor."  
(Jorge Esteves)

"Quando entrei no teatro, comecei a amá-lo." (Abel Fernando)

"O que move é o amor para o seu trabalho, o gosto para o que fazem, mesmo que não sejam especializados ou que a função não seja qualificada. [...] E eu acho que nos técnicos a experiência [...] pega bastante nesta fruição. [...] Eu acho que [...] a entrega artística, eu acho que está muito associada ao prazer [...]" (Rui Gato)

As we have seen earlier in this section, technicians perceive their work as creative according to how involved they feel towards the production. The rest of the company displays various attitudes towards this topic, and their opinions range from more inclusive to sceptical, especially if we broaden up the spectrum by including the different ways of exercising the profession (freelancer, casuals, in-house tech). Sérgio Henriques, in-house sound technician, expressed his care for the product of his work when he stressed the importance of being the same group of in-house technicians during the whole run of a play, as alternate shifts would affect the show ("O espetáculo sofre muito com isso").

"A vertente artística não é assim tão forte, mas é conforme as áreas. Freelancers, pessoal da casa e companhias acabam por ter posições diferentes, dedicação diferente." (José Grande)

"Eu acho que um técnico é também um criativo. [...] Se estiver a dar assistência a alguém, aí poderá ser simplesmente uma pessoa que executa ou que opera, mas um técnico é tão criativo como um ator ou como os criativos do espetáculo, geralmente tem que ser, não é? Até mesmo para fazer a operação, tem que ser uma pessoa com uma sensibilidade especial, não é só carregar nos botões. E os técnicos acompanham, acompanham os ensaios, os espetáculos, e acompanham a preparação, e muitas vezes podem dizer o que está bem e o que não está bem, mesmo não seja só na parte técnica. [...] Têm voz activa." (Filipe Crawford)

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<sup>86</sup> For those who run a show, audience is another element of inclusion, as they receive an immediate feedback that furthers their involvement in the product of their work.

"Acho que as pessoa que construíram aquilo [o palco que cá], mesmo desde a construção do palcozinho de madeirazinha, também sentem que há uma relação artística com a obra e sentem que foram importantes para a obra. Nós para os *Três dedos* construímos um painel em que temos uma serie de documentos, de documentação, e isto foi criado por uma artista que é a Rita Barbosa e ela criou, [...], mas o André [Calado] teve que construir a estrutura para aquilo ficar feito. E eu sinto que aquilo é tanto do André como da Rita." (Magda Bizarro)

Backstage work is one of interpretation, of the explicit (or implicit) requests of designer and director, of the play and the audience. Interpreting is considered as a job that entails sensibility, though this sensibility may or may not hold an artistic value according to my interviewees.

"O técnico afinal é isso que faz, tem que decodificar. [...] Trabalhamos com o espetáculo, trabalhamos com emoções e com [...] energias e com sensibilidades, não é? Portanto, o ideal é, na verdade, toda a gente ter uma sensibilidade artística. Agora, não é o principal para ser um bom técnico [...]. Tens que ter uma boa sensibilidade artística porque senão não és capaz de perceber que está um erro que está a acontecer, mesmo que não seja teu. Mas és capaz de perceber que está uma coisa que podes resolver em termos de sensibilidade. Mas não é o principal. Porque às vezes a parte artística é deixada para o criador e as dúvidas artísticas são postas ao criador e o técnico só executa." (José Grande)

"[T]u, como participante no ato criativo, tens o teu nível de risco que geres interiormente, quanto queres dar de ti. É uma questão de desgaste, de intensidade ou de gozo [...]. Interpretação implica comunicação, implica uma linguagem, implica haver de ambos os lados uma base comum, a interpretação passa por um ponto de vista mais subjetivo e aí a responsabilidade é sempre a mesma, dos técnicos e dos artistas é sempre igual, não muda." (Rui Gato)

"A técnica é um meio para conseguir um fim; a arte, para além disso, a parte artística da nossa profissão é o conjunto de opções que a gente tem para conseguir transmitir a mensagem que nos é pedido transmitir." (Sérgio Melo)

### Invisibility

"Há uma linha que diz [...] que a boa iluminação é aquela que não se vê e, em geral, eu estou de acordo [...], a não ser aquele que a gente chama *efeitos especiais* [...]. De resto, a luz só deve acompanhar a história. Se uma cena é de noite e outra é de dia, tem que haver uma mudança de luz, como é óbvio. Mas essa mudança não tem que ser óbvia para o público, o que tem que ser óbvio para o espetador é que antes era noite e agora é dia, eles não têm que estar a pensar «ah agora acendeu-se aquele projetor e

aquele e aquele e aquele...» Para os espectadores, isso não tem que acontecer, não têm que haver projetores a acenderem-se. E isso, às vezes, é uma coisa difícil de fazer, que a parte técnica seja o mais transparente possível, ou seja não digo invisível porque não é invisível, mas que o público nem perceba que o técnico está lá. Nós somos os fantasmas que andam ali, que não é suposto estarmos lá, ou seja não é suposto que se saiba que estamos lá." (Sérgio Melo)

We have analysed this aspect of backstage labour earlier in this study, however it is such a characterizing aspect of backstage labour that I feel it should show in this section and it must be corroborated by examples. Technicians are those participants whose presence ought to be ignored for the show to run smoothly. Some directors can nonetheless make aesthetic choices that require technicians to show themselves to the public, or actors to interact with the theatre equipment. The technicians I interviewed did not find these requests to be particularly uncomfortable, although they usually prefer their "cantinho" (Sílvia de Sá, Abel Fernando). In any case, when they started their career, whether enrolling in professional schools or coming from other areas of theatre, technicians also voluntarily decided to stay invisible to the public (Filipe Crawford).

"Interessa-me o anonimato." (Jorge Esteves)

"As equipas técnicas têm um orgulho que está relacionado com [o facto de ser] as pessoas mais importantes para um espetáculo ser operado sendo aquelas não vistas. [...] E isso é uma forma de ter um protagonismo importante sem aparecer, sem dar nas vistas, sem ter visibilidade pessoal." (Ricardo Fernandes)

This invisibility also allows them to develop a high sensibility to the reactions of the audience, as their position is similar to the spectators', but their perception is enhanced by experience and knowledge of the play, which can also distance them from qualitative judgment of it.

"Quando nos perguntam se os espetáculos são bons, eu digo «Eu sinceramente não faço a menor ideia! Eu já o vi cinquenta vezes, como é que eu hei-de saber se é bom ou não. Já estou a ver camadas de informação e subtextos e pormenores que não têm nada a ver o que o público normal deve ver quando vê os espetáculos.»" (Ricardo Fernandes)

In this section, I would like to open a digression about the sound department. Interestingly, one of the sound technicians interviewed, Sérgio Henriques, attributed this

disregard to the *invisible* nature of sound ("Como é invisível..."). Sound technicians usually work autonomously, if there is no sound designer or the director does not have specific requirements, and they adjust sound settings during rehearsals on their own, even though sometimes expressing some discomfort about this condition. When the play does not include live music, sound is most likely to be left to the technician's discretion, as directors might not show much interest in that element of the production. He also informed me that cuts in funding forced theatres to dismiss important figures, such as electricians or voice coaches, who were a great help for sound technicians as they trained actors to project their voice and make it more comprehensible to the audience.

"A luz e o som são coisas diferentes, porque são menos palpáveis, e o som ainda menos que tudo, portanto há muitos poucos encenadores que saibam o que querem do som, e como é que o querem." (Francisco Leal)

"Existe uma necessidade de valorização do nosso trabalho. Ou seja, eu quero sentir que o meu trabalho é considerado, é bem visto, e que é visto justamente. Mas no caso do teatro... Por exemplo, a relação das equipas técnica na criação, no caso do teatro o som é sempre a arte menor, porque [...] a mecânica de cena, com o desenho de luz, são as coisas mais importantes, e são aquelas coisas que, no geral, os realizadores têm um desenhador de luz que trabalha com eles, e para o som muitas das vezes confiam na equipa da casa. Portanto, isso também posiciona a relação que o som e a luz têm com os espetáculos de teatro, é bastante diferente por causa disso." (Ricardo Fernandes)

"Novidade, sou sempre o último a saber as coisas."  
(Sérgio, sound technician, after some actors used a microphone that he had positioned onstage for the successive scene)

## Safety

Safety is extremely important for theatre practitioners, and the main concern for technical directors, who are the members of the house who possess the highest knowledge of the possibilities of the equipment in terms of electricity, resistance to weight and pressure, etc. Generally, at the time of my observations, each theatre set its own safety norms, using examples from outside of Portugal and adapting those models to the structure. The lack of standardized norms was linked, by one of the interviewee, to the fact that associativism was not widely present in Portugal as it was abroad.

"A direção técnica é uma área de grande responsabilidade e que requer um conhecimento que deveria ser mais profundo, porque no fundo põem questões de segurança não só por quem está no palco, para os técnicos que estão nos bastidores, para os atores que estão de baixo de cenários que descem e que têm não sei quantos kilos, portanto têm que saber que o palco tem um peso que por máximo pode ter 500 kilos por metro quadrado, por exemplo, [...] e não pode ultrapassar essas margens de segurança, e que há muitas, mas não existe nenhuma norma para espetáculos em Portugal. [...] Essas normas de segurança, as referências internacionais, nos Estados Unidos, em Inglaterra e em França, em que a parte técnica tem um associativismo maior, existem várias associações de técnicos de diferentes áreas e existem regras que têm que ser cumpridas em termos de segurança e em termos de funcionamento e que cada um adapta um pouco de acordo com o que acha plausível, mas não nenhuma supervisão de facto a esse nível. Ainda." (Francisco Leal)

Safety is also the reason of negotiations between creative and technical crew. The latter is concerned with providing the best conditions for actors to feel safe onstage during rehearsals, and night over night. This is not to say that the creative crew disregards the importance of safety, but that those concerns are mostly responsibility of backstage crew members. For instance, during the rehearsals of *Os Doze Pares de França*, Carlos Freitas kept on changing the chairs actors were walking or sitting on (or using as prison bars), as not all of them seemed sturdy enough to him, which caused the director to complain about the shuffling and interruptions.

"Os atores precisam de não ter erros de quem está invisível a fazer com que quem está visível se sintam seguros." (Ricardo Fernandes)

During rehearsal, all members of the backstage crew, particularly the stage manager, follow the movements of the actors onstage and backstage in order to help or prevent accidents and practical difficulties. We have an example in the story told by Magda Bizarro during the interview and see how stage managers made the difference when an issue with an actor's piece of costume occurred. One night the trousers of an actor tore up, but the stage manager was watching a football match and did not notice it: the actor had to carry on with ripped pants and, Magda told me, "ficou traumatizado". The same thing happened on another night, but with a different stage manager, this time paying attention to the stage: she fetched some trousers, called the actor when she knew he could leave the stage without the audience notice and they were able to make a quick change. This may not specifically fall into the category of safety issue, however in the first case the stage manager caused discomfort in the

actor who was then distressed, while the second solved an issue with promptness and the actor was happy and relieved.

"«O que é que tu precisas para te sentires bem em palco?» «Então vamos fazer isso para tu te sentires bem em palco.» Saber que está ali uma pessoa que está mesmo preocupada e está a ver o espetáculo de princípio ao fim com super-atenção e que pode-te ajudar em qualquer momento, dá-te uma confiança e faz com que tu possas fazer e arriscar mais do que estar a fazer qualquer coisa em cena e estar a ver alguém do lado completamente distante do espetáculo." (Magda Bizarro)

Safety onstage is also fundamental, not only to obviously preserve the actors' physical state, but to reassure them that they could feel at ease and "take risks". Carlos Freitas, for instance, would always move close to the stairs when actors used it, as to make sure that they did it in security, also that they could feel comfortable he would be there to intervene if anything happened.

#### Intimacy and theatre as a second home

"Quando está a se criar um espetáculo [...], passas tanto tempo com as pessoas e é uma ligação tão grande entre as pessoas, que de repente é tão íntimo aquele momento da criação que acaba-se mesmo para criar um grupo. Eu própria sinto, às vezes, como produtora não posso, por exemplo, acompanhar as residências artísticas todos os dias e estar lá todo o tempo [...], e às vezes quando eu volto passada uma semana eu digo «eh lá, já não faço parte deste grupo!» Porque durante aquela semana estiveram juntos durante tantas horas, tanto tempo, partilharam tanta coisa, que cria-se mesmo um grupo que é difícil entrar. [...] E é importante que isso aconteça, eu acho, para o espetáculo. Quando isso não acontece, normalmente corre mal. A ligação mantém-se sempre. Nós vamos trabalhando e depois estamos muito tempo sem nos encontrar [...]. É muito engraçado, também, quando encontras alguém na rua, [...] esta ligação próxima [...] mantém-se, nunca desaparece essa intimidade." (Magda Bizarro)

Each production is a community that works towards the same objective. In this perspective, everyone involved in the production at any stage will be part of it and add a layer to the final result. Also, theatre community on a large-scale is made by a net of groups, more or less fixed, and "satellites", that are casuals/freelancers. So familiarity can also grow between in-house crew and an external company mounting the scene - members of the two groups might have worked together in the past for other productions. Proximity and frequency create a sense of intimacy that lasts after a production is over.

"A direção de cena e os técnicos que estão por trás ajudam as pessoas a vestirem-se ou, às vezes, uma pessoa está doente e precisa de tomar um medicamento qualquer e está alguém com um copo e com o medicamento à espera que a pessoa saia para tomar [do palco]. [...] Há coisas que se fazem com aquele tipo de pessoal que tem que haver confiança [...]. É como se houvesse um código." (Magda Bizarro)

This applies from large to small scale companies, with the difference that the members of the former are most likely to be resident and the latter touring, which changes the dynamics amongst them. In small companies, besides tech crew members being necessarily versatile, actors might help them voluntarily with their tasks. While this used to be the normality in the past, nowadays tasks are generally well-defined (Filipe Crawford).

Communication is regulated through codes, which vary from theatre to theatre and play to play. For instance, one equipment can have its fly system structured in ways that are not immediately intelligible to someone from another theatre. Despite the fact that theatres have a recognizable structure to a trained eye, blocks and lines can be different from one to the other (*Ilhas*). Or, within a group rehearsing for a play, some words can be the signs to indicate specific scenes, so when the director says "fazemos *jantar*", nobody interprets that as an invitation to dinner, but they know he is referring to a scene whose first line is indeed "jantar" (*Os Doze Pares de França*). One habit detected during fieldwork is the perspective employed by theatre technicians, that is, even when looking at the stage from the audience's side, they will call what is on their left "right" and vice versa. Also, the use of intercoms demands communication to be highly condensed and efficacy in the signs shared. All these elements contribute to the sense of belonging and also to the resulting divide us/them (or inside/outside) divide - new members have to adapt to the host routines and hierarchy to be accepted by the group.

"Isto aqui funciona como uma família e nas famílias também há zangas. Não há propriamente uma hierarquia assumida, mas existe. Portanto, a gente sabe quem é o nosso patrão, quem é o nosso diretor, a gente sabe quem é que tem o poder de decisão. Todos os técnicos sabem quem é o diretor técnico, toda a gente tem esta consciência. Mas, no fundo, não há protocolos, não há reuniões marcadas. É quase como se a gente vem para a nossa casa e tem que fazer a vida da casa." (Jorge Esteves)

"O sentido de família é muito presente, com tudo que as famílias têm de bom e de mau. No S. Luiz a equipa foi criada de raiz há 9 anos. [...] Aqui são muitas horas de contato uns com os outros, a precisarmos uns dos outros, a fazermos, ensaiarmos [...],

a zangarmos, a puxarmos as vontades uns dos outros. É esgotante nesse aspeto." (José Grande)

"O teatro é quase uma primeira casa." (Abel Fernando)

Residents feel that their theatre is like a second house, and that they have a sense of protection and affection towards it, which recalls the "territorial defense" discussed earlier in this chapter. During my interviews, theatre was compared to circus<sup>87</sup>, because of its touring lifestyle and closeness amongst the cast and crew, who, in the case of circus, are often members of a family, but who also defend their traditional way of living towards an *outside* that does not fully understand theirs.<sup>88</sup> Despite loving their job and feeling pride for their mission, practitioners admit that the very reasons behind the bond between them (long hours together, a circumscribed workplace and obligatory closeness) are also what makes the profession tiresome at times, especially because time spent in theatre, often on flexible shifts, is time removed from one's family.

"Trabalhar no espetáculo em geral não é um ambiente muito favorável a uma vida familiar. [...] É uma área mais apelativa quando se tem menos vida familiar ou se é mais jovem [...]." (Ricardo Fernandes)

"Para quem tem família é complicado e também é muito desgastante." (José Grande)

Touring for a theatre company imposes on its members to work for days in close contact, and, when the transfer is to another city or country, they live together, often with common spaces, as it can be the case for artist residencies (*Tristeza e Alegria na Vida das Girafas*).

"While such lack of privacy can be stressful, it can also provide a sense of community, and the energy that this generates can be palpable in the subsequent performances." (McAuley 2000: 65)

"O único que tem assim mais relação com [os atores] já é o operador, [...] que tem de operar o espetáculo a nível da luz e a nível do som. Esse durante a carreira do espetáculo tem uma proximidade já maior a nível relacional com os atores do que nós.

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<sup>87</sup> Francisco Leal, Jorge Esteves, André Calado.

<sup>88</sup> Also, as mentioned earlier, a director presenting his play in a new theatre was once compared to a merchant at a fair, carrying his load of equipments, props and scenery and laying them before an audience on display.

[...] Em tournée estamos todos juntos, então aproveitamos e convivemos uns com os outros." (Jorge Esteves)

Being away from home fosters contact with the hosting community, as they help in the adaptation to the new space, and these relations often remain after the nights the show runs in that theatre.

"Os técnicos que estão porque querem ser técnicos têm tanto pique e ficam tão alegres e tão contentes quando há uma estreia de um espetáculo como a equipa que está em palco que cria o espetáculo, e há uma recompensa também logo imediata [...]. Quando um espetáculo corre bem, os técnicos vêm ter contigo aos camarins e dizem «Wow, foi muito bom!» Porque é tão bom para eles como para nós criar o espetáculo. Claro que eles não têm uma ligação desde o início [...], mas estão aí para isso, para servir. E sentem que é muito importante sentir a coisa do sucesso, não é? [...] E é muito giro quando voltas a um sítio e há uns técnicos com que já trabalhaste não sei quantas vezes e sentires que essa confiança ou que essa relação se mantém." (Magda Bizarro)

During my stay with Mundo Perfeito at the artist residency O Espaço do Tempo (*Tristeza e Alegria na Vida das Girafas*), I was able to assist to many occasions where familiarity emerged, possibly increased by the fact that artistic director and producer were in fact a couple and their daughter was there, as she had a part in the show. Before the show, André (light tech/designer) and Alex (musician) onstage played music with her, as they had done earlier during dinnertime, when, joined by the actors, they had playfully improvised some blues for the director's birthday. While mounting up the scenery for *Ilhas*, members of the tech crew of São Luiz also showed confidence amongst them, knowing each other's families as, for instance, one of them offered to bring a toy for a colleague's newborn baby; or, in one occasion, they had organized a barbecue for the crew.

"É um ambiente muito tenso [...] e é normal haver muito pouco tempo. Às vezes acontece, quando há muito pouco tempo, este tipo de separação [de papéis] não poder ser tão nítida. Às vezes, temos mesmo que trabalhar todos juntos e ter o encenador a pressionar-nos porque quer já estar em cena àquela hora [...], e nós temos que ter aquilo preparado, e, por muito que sejamos profissionais, essa pressão é pessoal, é uma coisa sentida bastante pessoalmente." (Ricardo Fernandes)

Another characteristic found within tech crews members, and that can be extended to the rest of the group, is their propensity to humour. Perhaps a stress-relieving technique,

humour cements bonds between the members of the community and facilitates communal life, especially before the opening of a show, when time is scarce and the workload is high.

### "Maionese"

"Cansativo mas é bom, [...] seria mais aborrecido e cansativo não ter nada para fazer."  
(Abel Fernando)

"Outra coisa que às vezes é difícil de lidar, mas que faz parte, [...] é as mudanças de ritmo. Ou seja, entramos no teatro, fazemos uma coisa qualquer, temos de a deixar organizada e depois temos seis horas em que não fazemos nada, temos seis horas em que estamos completamente estáticos em que nem sequer podemos fazer barulho para não estar a incomodar o que se está a passar em palco. E depois, ao fim de seis horas, temos de repente uma hora a trabalhar muito rápido, e ter o corpo e cabeça a trabalhar muito de pressa [...]. E essa mudança de ritmo às vezes é o que custa mais no início."  
(Ricardo Fernandes)

Each of the components of a theatrical production requires distinct moments in the timeline, which causes long waits for practitioners but also room for experimentation. These intervals are expected by theatre technicians and they mostly do not create friction, unless they start to feel exploited. Some of the interviewees lamented that technicians were impatient and unwilling to collaborate, while the latter often protested that directors were unaware of the effort their requests would require.

"Na verdade, num processo de criação é difícil organizares tudo. E, se organizares, eu tenho a minha opinião, se for tudo tão organizado e tão certinho [...], é porque deixaste uma margem muito grande que ainda podias usar. [...] Trata-se de criação, trata-se de experimentar coisas que pode haver sempre a hipótese de não derem bons resultados. Acima de tudo, isto é um trabalho que é exposto [...]. E o que eu respeito o máximo e quem nos justifica a nossa existência é o público que entra e vê." (José Grande)

"Os encenadores acham que é mais fácil mudar os atores de sítio e depois os técnicos que vão lá e mudam os projetores do que fazer o contrário." (Sérgio Melo)

### Recognition

"Em 2003 quando nós [Mundo Perfeito] fizemos lá um espetáculo, mostraram-nos a folha de sala e eu achei muito estranho não estar lá a equipa técnica do teatro. [...] Eu fui falar com a comunicação e disse «Porquê é que não está a ficha do teatro? Não percebo.» E entretanto eles receberam a notícia que iam fechar e então vieram

despedir. Para terem no currículo ter trabalhado no Maria Matos e ter um comprovativo para mostrar, pô a ficha técnica do teatro... eu disse «Claro que sim, eu para mim estava desde o início!» E portanto havia muito esta visão que acho que agora já não acontece, qualquer folha de sala tem a ficha de quem trabalha no teatro, mas em 2003 ainda se fazia à antiga, que era só ficha artística do espetáculo e o pessoal técnico era [...] um pessoal que trabalhava lá. Eu acho que já há uma alteração, eu acho que hoje já se dá mais valor à equipa que está a trabalhar num teatro. Eu acho que há uma diferença. E não foi assim há tanto tempo, passaram nove anos." (Magda Bizarro)

Recent changes in the way of presenting the members of the theatre company "à antiga" could respond to the professionalization of personnel in institutions, schools and courses, which demands external recognition. Older generation learnt skills and gained knowledge "on the job", thus they did not undergo the processes of qualification and obtainment of a certificate/degree in specific disciplines, which might have not classified them as professionals in their field in the public eye, a condition calcified by the invisibility of their job. However, one factor that is recurrent in most of the interviews is their preference for peer recognition above that of the public, as it can also open professional opportunities for future collaboration.

"A visibilidade é através do trabalho. Neste sentido a visibilidade e o reconhecimento público não interessa: o importante é a consideração das pessoas do meio." (João Paulo Araújo)

"Por norma, a ideia está mais nas mãos do encenador do que nas nossas. Mas se dessa última palavra havia um erro, nós não vamos colaborar... A menos que não esteja ali só pelo dinheiro e que não liguês à mínima à tua carreira e àquilo que vais assinar no final. Queres construir uma carreira como deve ser neste meio que é tão pequeno, não convém que assines muitos erros, que isso te vai sair caro. Toda a gente vai saber, «Quem é que fez a luz?» «Ah foi o Sérgio ou foi a Sílvia.» «Eh bem, olha, esquece: aquilo está uma ganda merda. Nunca mais...» Pronto, já foste." (Sílvia de Sá)

"Ver a obra criada às vezes é uma recompensa suficiente, e, quando a equipa te trata com carinho e reconhece o teu valor, sentes-te recompensada." (Magda Bizarro)

Indeed, disappointment occurs when peers do not acknowledge the work that has been done by those in the backstage. The same can happen to actors that do not feel that they are being considered at the same level as their colleagues, as I could see during the aforementioned dinner, when an actress complained that her and her colleagues from TNDMII did not appear in the production poster of *Os Doze Pares de França*.

"Acaba uma estreia e não haver aquela coisa «Eh parabéns!», e abraçinhos e beijinhos para toda a gente, e haver aquela coisa de «Acabou, vamos para casa...», a equipa técnica sente-se: «Eh pá, estivemos aqui também a noite toda. Tudo bem, não fomos para a cena, mas fizemos o nosso papel. Se não estivéssemos estado aqui isto não tinha acontecido.» Pode ser problemático." (Magda Bizarro)

"Eu também prefiro estar escondida no meu canto e que as coisas corram bem e ninguém se lembre que eu estou lá, gosto que se lembrem de mim no final, nos agradecimentos cai sempre bem lembrar que nós lá no nosso cantinho fizemos bem e que o trabalho deles acabou por correr bem também porque nós os acompanhámos e seguimos as deixas que nos deram, entrámos nos sítios certo onde era suposto entrarmos... Porque às vezes há efeitos de luz que nós seguimos as deixas do texto, é inevitável, nós temos que estar a seguir o texto e a entrar com a luz no sítio certo, e muitas vezes os atores até se guiam por isso, o timing deles é a entrada da nossa luz, se nós não entramos eles esperam por nós. Portanto, é bom quando no final nos agradecem e dizem «Correu tudo bem», isso quer dizer que nós estivemos em sintonia o tempo todo e que a coisa realmente se deu como nós tínhamos planificado desde o início." (Sílvia de Sá)

Nevertheless, that does not imply that they ignore public recognition, only that that of their peers is often favoured. Abel Fernando claimed that there should be a sort of Golden Globe for tech crews, as they also participate in the final product. Indeed, technicians see themselves as an integral part of the preparation and of the live event, and they value their role in an institution that is important for the city, also because of the civil significance it holds in society.

"Quem trabalha [...] em teatro [...] penso que tem um bocadinho de sentido cívico e de orgulho por trabalhar num equipamento que é importante para a cidade." (Abel Fernando)

"É uma carga inversa de atenção, e acaba por ser um bocado ingrata às vezes do ponto de vista do técnico porque quanto menos for visto o trabalho melhor está feito. [...] É a intensidade do drive da peça é que define se está tecnicamente perfeita ou não." (Rui Gato)

"As equipas técnicas todas [...], o que [elas] valorizam no público é espetáculos que têm muita gente e uma boa energia." (Ricardo Fernandes)

## CHAPTER 6

### *Use of images*

Technicians' work provides the performance onstage, and the event as a whole, with layers of meaning, while disappearing behind the curtains. The images in this chapter are a visual support to this study and a contribution to the inversion of the point of view aiming at deepening our understanding of the mechanism through which we perceive, and the ways we interpret and are affected by a theatrical performance. I here want to recall the "second gaze" theorised by Dean MacCannell, which aims at exalting "the unexpected"<sup>89</sup>. In Chapter 4, it was discussed how theatre could be compared to tourism and how the tourist/audience seeks authenticity in what is presented to them, which would be annihilated by commoditization of cultural objects and theatre productions. The purpose of this section is to open the possibility to construct a "second gaze" on theatre practice, in this case by drawing attention to the work of those who are most likely to remain unknown to the public.

"[The second gaze] looks for openings and gaps in the cultural unconscious. It looks for the unexpected, not the extraordinary, objects and events that may open a window in structure, a chance to glimpse the real." (MacCannell 2001: 36)

Maaïke Bleeker suggested a three-way mode of perception of the self in the field of vision. The scholar sustained that, for one to gain perception of the self, to identify with one's own self, he or she must be subjected to the look of the other that "validates" his or her idea of the self.

"There is no existential connection between the screen image and the subject who is defined through it, and no necessary analogy. The screen can invite identification with images that are rather different from a mirror image in the literal sense. This distance, however, does not imply freedom. To be able to successfully invite identification, the image must possess a certain ideality. It must appeal to a desire, just as the mirror image appeals to a child who identifies with it. What can appear as ideal, is culturally mediated. Furthermore, what is culturally mediated is not only what can appear as an ideal image, but also who is allowed to identify with it. It is not enough that the subject (mis)recognizes him or herself within an image. In the Lacanian model of the field of vision, the (mis)recognition can only be successful if the subject is

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<sup>89</sup> Thus inverting the initial perspective employed by John Urry on the tourists' expectations of authenticity (1990).

apprehended in that guise by the other. The alignment of the proprioceptive with the exteroceptive ego involves more than the look of the body seeing and feeling. It involves the look of others, the look of the other. Identification, it turns out, is a three-way rather than a two-way transaction." (Bleeker 2008: 130)

The works of Christin Essin on backstage labour, where she captured the life of the people unseen by the public, have been a great source of inspiration to my analysis of theatre technicians within the community. The author casted a light on what happens behind the curtains of theatre productions. For instance, she emphasized the community's gestures and codes, the technical "choreography" enacted, parallel to that of the actors on stage, or the relations between technicians with other members of the cast and the theatre company. Essin gave examples from earlier projects in her essay "An Aesthetic of Backstage Labour" (2011), along with photographs taken by her: a collection of pictures of technicians hired by the Federal Theatre Project (1935-39), *Focus Tape* (a YouTube video featuring Santa Fe Opera electricians), and the documentary *Sing Faster: the Stagehands' Ring Cycle* from 1999, where we follow the technical crew of San Francisco Opera. These projects "[require] viewers to shift perspectives and consider whether the beauty onstage can compete with the offstage spectacle of skill" (Essin 2011: 41).

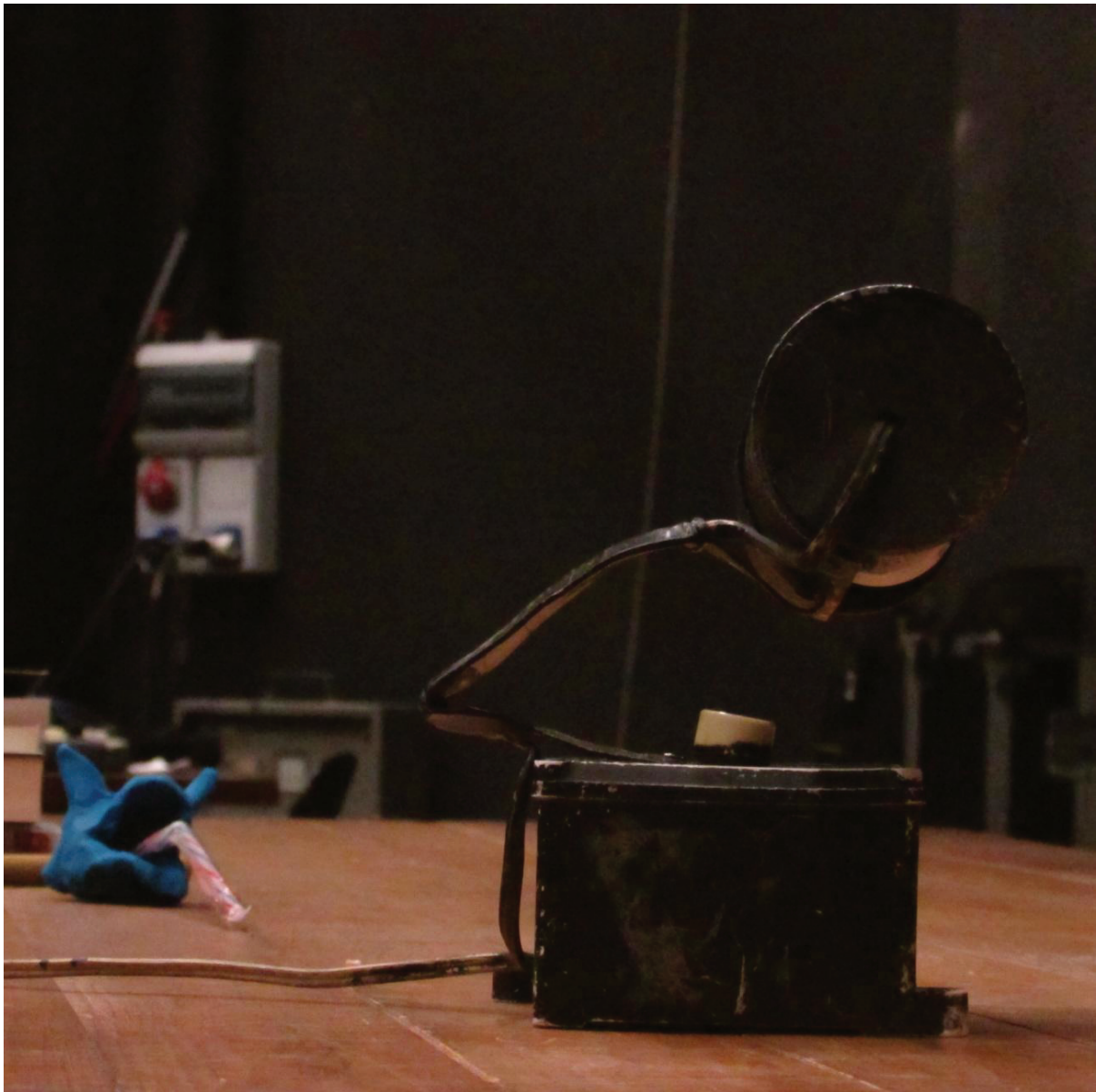
The angle chosen for this research integrates backstage into the space-time continuum of performance by forcing the look of the spectator to "secret" practitioner spaces. In fact, the spectator's gaze can shatter the imposition of the stage by shifting the focus of their attention.

"[T]he path of the spectator's gaze, the points where it rests, and the length of these rests are decided by the interaction of the material presented onstage with the spectator's individual, subjective capacities to perceive, to memorize, and to fantasize, with the spectator's own particular structure of needs." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 110)

By addressing the focus on what is hidden behind the curtains, the images can reveal the poetic aspects of backstage theatre and uncover its invisible *actors* contributing to the production of symbols that frame the audience's experience. The crucial element when judging the power that works of art have on us is to detect in its "coming-into-being", rather than its appearance (Gell 1992: 46). That is, showing the productive process would make technical theatre acquire aesthetic value. Overcoming the dramatic frame implies the insertion of backstage labour in our own vision of the theatre world, which may cost us to lose our

suspension of disbelief in order to see those "signs" as they are constructed, thus ceasing to be *necessary*.

"The dramatic frame provides unity and coherence in view of purpose and reason and shows the world according to invisible beliefs about world order, history and reality. These beliefs are not represented on stage in the sense that they are being made present or visible by means of theatre signs. Instead, they speak through, or are implicated within, the structure of the representation itself." (Bleeker 2008: 41)



*Fig. 1, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II - Rehearsal room*

What is the object in the close-up above (*Fig. 1*)? Since the pictures were taken during a theatre production, one may be in doubt whether it is a prop for a show. It can be old or can be made to *look* old, we don't exactly know, as its nature will be defined by the context of use. That is one aspect of the transformative power of theatre, which transfigures objects into signs as part of an aesthetic project, where everything has its weight. Now, that object is an actual desk lamp for prompters.

"The skilled photographer/filmmaker can transform backstage work into a choreographed spectacle of beauty and grace. Such work, executed above, below, beside, and behind onstage performers, requires strength, balance, and sensitivity to bodies moving in space learned from intense training and repeated practice. The artistic representations under analysis interpret technicians' labor as a type of choreography, both as functional *and* aesthetic practice. Stage hands, the photographers and filmmaker suggest, not only produce artistic results through backstage activities, but they also perform their tasks in a manner that conveys meaning beyond that conveyed by onstage artistry." (Essin 2011: 35)

I am not a skilled photographer, but I believe the mystery behind the nature of an object should not cease to exist when we reveal its name. The same reasoning is applied to theatrical events, as they do not have to lose their suggestive power over the audience because we reveal the work behind them. Also, it is interesting to notice that the author mentioned "intense training and repeated practice" to describe technical work. I am aware that interpreting her words through Schechner's restored behaviours could be quite a stretch, nonetheless some points of contact can be found. For instance, Essin stressed that those activities are framed in a space where movements are "coreographed", meaning that they are the result of practice and they are inserted in a coral movement, thus attributing performative qualities to them.

By drawing attention to their participation, theatre technicians can also reflect on the way the community shares and create its meanings. I strongly agree with Essin when she states,

"Having an artistic language to describe their labor helps the technicians find more commonalities with the other artistic laborers and, ideally, prompts them to build stronger community support for their contributions." (Essin 2011: 42)

In the post-brechtian era, much experimentation has been made to reveal theatre, in a political effort to dismantle the conventions of bourgeois theatre. Essin, about Brett Warren's *Power* (1937)<sup>90</sup>, commented that the play "[g]ives the technician a knowable identity, thus providing the spectators with an empathetic understanding of backstage labor and technology as more than just the mechanism behind the performance" (Essin 2012: 126).

"Most scholars agree with the premise that a medial transformation cannot be described in terms of a process which transfers «content» from one medium to another without changing it [...], for it results in a totally new product which is to be understood as a work *sui generis*, which can only be created under the conditions set by the specific medium." (Fischer-Lichte 1997: 21, emphasis in original)

There is a friction between the ephemerality of the performance and the tendency to document it through photographs, videos, etc., for "the specific materiality of the performance itself simply vanishes" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 76). Plus, the objects used during a performance possess performative value only during its production and presentation. Any analysis of a theatre performances assisted in video recordings or documented in photographs can only be the result of one's perceptions through media "of a rather provisional nature" (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 188). The process of re-theatricalization is thus deepened through the extra-layer of media reproduction that brings to the surface a theatrical form that questions its own means of production and representation.

The images that follow here were taken during my observation as an attempt to document my look on the theatrical space as a place of compromise between the three levels of onstage, backstage and audience. My objective was to highlight the continuum created by those levels in both the practitioners' and the spectators' experience, and to define the theatre as a structure where potentially everything can be a stage, when occupied by actors and audience, as well as the stage can in itself contain a workshop. The negotiation between the *technical* and the *creative* occurs during all phases of production and within all members, whose tasks participate to the production, each carrying their own weight and interacting with the others in a "choreography".

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<sup>90</sup> In this pièce, actors play the role of technicians.

*Images from fieldwork*



*Fig. 2, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II - Stage Left*



*Fig. 3, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II - Stage Left (Wing)*



*Fig. 4, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II - Rehearsal room*



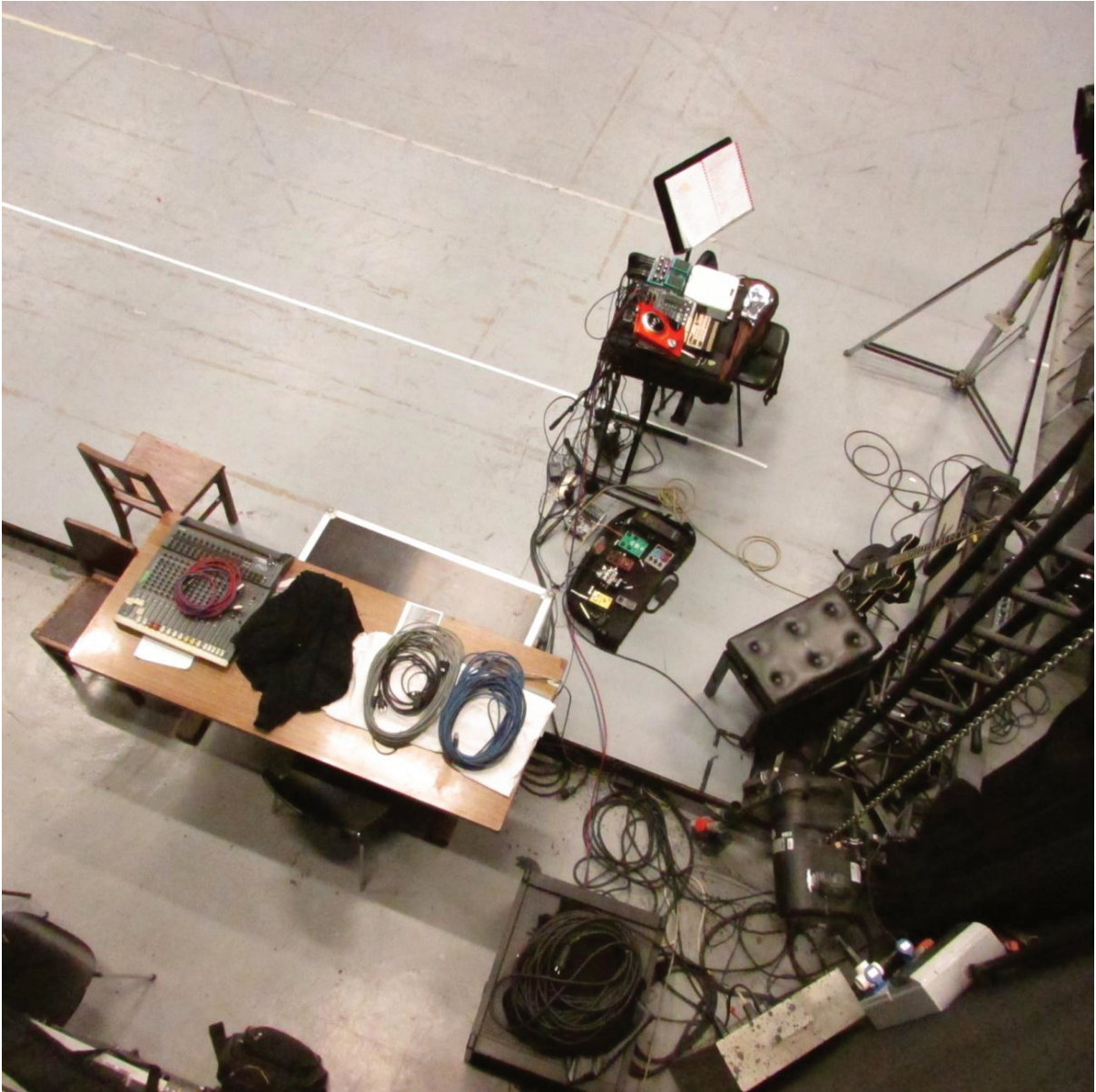
*Fig. 5, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II - Rehearsal room*



*Fig. 6, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II - Stage (picture taken from the first row of seats)*



*Fig. 7, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II - Stage ("ground floor" looking at the trapdoor)*



*Fig. 8, Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II - Rehearsal room (view from the balcony)*

"[T]he sense of separation between the workday world of production and the glamour/leisure framing of the spectator's experience" (McAuley 2000: 69) can be recognized in the contrast portrayed in *Fig. 2*, where the division between the behind-the-scene and the audience is evidenced by the opposition caused by the sense of materiality on one side and the splendour on the other. The difference is enhanced by the lights, which cast a shadow on us watching from the stage and exalt the audience space. However, the lights that are gleaming above the audience seats are functional to the technicians onstage working on the scenography.

"Rather than reiterate the onstage/offstage workplace divisions reinforced by the commercial industry's financial structure, a materialist backstage history helps demystify specialized practices of theatrical labor and advance notions of a united theatrical labor force with mutual professional goals, economic investments, and political interests. [Essin's] analysis identifies stagehands' choreographic work as a kind of «representational movement» - not merely «purposeful», but also able to signify sociocultural meanings." (Essin 2015a: 199)

We have seen that the dualism between onstage and offstage is functional to the fiction (McAuley 2000: 87). The passage photographed in *Fig. 3* represents the work of backstage labourers, for it is their territory before the performance; at the same time, it is an indication of the presence of actors, as that will become a threshold once the show is running. There is no actual division between the two workplaces, there is no defined border, and every part of a theatre is a negotiable ground. We now recall Fischer-Lichte's formula "[t]here simply is no place where, in principle, theatre could not be performed" (1997: 56), and affirm that indeed every place is potentially a stage as much as the stage is also the place of technicians. Essin suggested that the divide between the offstage and the onstage workplaces, or the two professional categories of creative and technical crew, should be overcome as the two perform in unison "with mutual professional goals". Her idea recalls Ingold's notion of *taskape*, that stressed the importance of the interrelations amongst people working together and whose acts are permeated in the social fabric, hence also the "economic investments [...] and political interests" of the production that they are involved in.

The rehearsal room of TNDMII (*Fig. 4, 5*) shapes the actors' performance, thus also their future experience, as they will move to the actual stage and adapt actions and speeches to the new space. Their spatial perception will impact their movements onstage as well as their interactions with each other.

"Que estranho, estamos tão próximos! Quase parece outra coisa!"

(Actor from *Ilhas* during the first rehearsal at São Luiz)

When considering rehearsal rooms, the circularity of theatre productions becomes evident. In fact, this space provided by the theatre will be emptied when the cast moves to the stage, and another group of actors will enter it. While their actions are moulded by the environment, the group of actors rehearsing in the room can change its layout to accommodate to their needs. Thus, that terrain is assumed as temporary and, at the same time, it is the first place where actors will act and whose impact will reverberate on the performance "upstairs" (often rehearsal rooms, when they are not outside the theatre, are below the stage level).

The pictures presented in this section were taken during the production of *Os Doze Pares de França*. It was a new production, hence the need for a rehearsal room and for temporary props provided by the house before the definite props were ready. Those props also contributed to the movements and gestures of the actors, who then had to become familiar with new ones. For instance, the mask in *Fig. 4* changed when the cast moved to the stage, and the actor had to adapt his speech to it, by moving his head in a different direction to be understandable for the audience. Besides, sound technician Sérgio placed a microphone in it, which enhanced the possibility of voice projection and clarity. Also, in *Fig. 5* you can see the chairs mentioned earlier in this study, which caused some distress in the director of the play for being repeatedly changed by the stage manager. We can also spot the sticks used as swords during fight scenes and which possibly had torn the curtains.

While actors were rehearsing, the scenography was being set up. During the phase of set construction photographed in *Fig. 6*, members of an external company were building up the main structure that compounded the set design. Scene designer Sara Vieira Marques will later have to discard the door on the "first floor", as it will prove to be an obstacle to the actors' movements. She had been inspired by the barns of the countryside of Minho when she designed the structure, which functioned as the Moor stronghold and prison during the play. The scene is illuminated by spots that can be moved and used for productions, thus they are not only working lights, as much as those we referred earlier here in this chapter (*Fig. 2*).

In *Fig. 7* we see another angle of the process, where a builder is making the trapdoor that connects the first floor to the ground floor. As we can notice from *Fig. 6*, it is a

considerable height to climb up and down. In-house technicians, together with set designer and dramaturge will find a stairs that can help the actors feel comfortable. In *Fig. 8* we are again in the rehearsal room, where are disposed the sound consoles. In fact, there will be live music during the show and that implies rehearsing sound distribution and volumes earlier on in the production. The adaptation to the stage will be conducted by Sérgio and the two musicians from the visiting theatre company, Samuel and Vasco (within the production he is also the light designer and an actor). Sérgio, in particular, will have to find ways to contrast the echo produced by the structure.

Stage composition and actors' movements influence technical arrangements, as we have seen in the case of the door, the stairs and now the sound consoles and live music. Indeed, the negotiation occurs on many levels and it is an intricate plan that will be put into practice to accommodate to all the play's practical and aesthetic requirements, according to the director's vision and the space and tools made available by the theatre, which is often the stage manager's duty, along with coordinating the schedule and supporting the actors, director and dramaturge, and in general always having an overall view on the necessities of the play and the members of the cast and tech crew. However, the theatre also imposes on the actors its structure and affects their movements, onto which the audience's own embodiment of the space will be added when the theatre opens its doors.

Theatre, as discussed earlier in this study, can be interpreted as a labyrinth, a structure made inaccessible to the intruder, that only those who possess the "knowledge" and "skill in crafts", the technical crew, can solve, hence setting the conditions of experience. We have also seen that theatre plans induce three levels of perception for the participants, including the audience, and the live event, which is still part of the process of production. The first level is compounded by the interplay audience/stage and the second is made up by the onstage/offstage. Then, it is the dialectic between these two levels that create what McAuley suggested to be the source of fiction, of *play*.

Elinor Fuchs (1905) sustained that "according to their nature and their origin, player and spectator, stage and auditorium are not in opposition. They are one unity"<sup>91</sup> - a unity that is created for the duration of the performance and that concentrates its energy towards the stage and back from it in a flux. I believe that including the people involved in backstage labour in this flux may open a new perspective on the transformative power of Theatre. The actions performed by theatre technicians, by participate in the framing of the event, ought to

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Fischer-Lichte 1997: 45.

be integrated in the analysis of theatre performances as a means to deepen our understanding of our own embodiment of the theatre space, hence our sense-making practices.

## *CONCLUSION*

This study analysed the participation of theatre technicians within productions, that is their contribution both as one of the creative voices in the performance and as part of the community of theatre practitioners. This statement raises many questions, which were tackled in the various sections of the research. Fieldwork allowed me to observe multiple areas of theatre and the interviews deepened my understanding of how technicians see themselves and how they are seen by other members of the cast and backstage crew. In fact, finding a univocal definition of technician was the first challenge encountered. As I proceeded in my readings and observations, the idea of the profession of theatre technician, that I had before starting the research, jagged, and that carried along other considerations on the creative quality and personal engagement required to those who work behind the scenes. My observations provided me with an overall view of the choreography that occurs also before the live event, while the interviews broadened up the discourse to considerations on what remains when the performance is over. In this sense, it could be affirmed that the insertion of theatre technicians is significant for the qualitative analysis of the aesthetic and social outcomes of performance. Reviewing their role can open perspectives on the ways theatre performances are produced and perceived.

My research aimed at finding a definition of theatre technician that would take into account their function within the production, their relationships with the other members of the community and the audience, and the value attributed to their participation. While bibliography sustained theoretical analysis, fieldwork was essential to the collection and the narration of personal stories and feelings about theatre life as a microcosm that seems so far from the rest of the world and yet that is permeated by it. The dimension of physical theatres is beyond space, for they are polymorph and a permanent independent colony, and time, as it is commanded by duration. To grasp it, I needed to live the life of a theatre production in its "coming-into-being" and talk to the individuals who were participating in it. That also meant feeling the theatre space and learning its "secret passages", together with its codes and conventions.

A theatre production involves many people from different areas, which work together for an objective - the enjoyment of an audience. Their acts compound the fabric of the

taskape, as conceived by Tim Ingold, which is the product of the intentionality and mutual sensibility of individuals whose acts tend toward the same goal. Taskape also implies the aforementioned idea of a community being bound to duration, as the interconnections of people through their "constitutive acts of dwelling" (Ingold 1993: 158). In the research, as we recognized space related to time, feelings entered the discourse. Appadurai's idea of locality, which is connected to taskapes, is also based on common intentions guided by a shared purpose and inextricably related to a social context based on "a structure of feelings" (1996: 182).

It was deduced that people feel their environment and, through that *felt* knowledge, in itself ascribable to the domain of aesthetics, they are able to transform and be transformed by it. In this sense, skill (Ingold 2001), or "habilité" (Mauss 1934), allows us to participate in that transformation, as it gathers in itself the concepts of "adresse et présence d'esprit et habitude" (Mauss). Theatre practitioners exercise craft, considered as the embodiment of skills, as they engage in a production, constituting the net of relations that forms the community. The way theatre is embodied and performed by practitioners' action influence the audience, whose reactions contribute to the live event they are attending (Fischer-Lichte 2008). The loop thus theorised has its focus on the stage, which stands as the place where relations are renegotiated and status changes. However, stage has a rather flexible nature, for it can be anything that is touched by the audience's gaze. The theme of invisibility, as opposite to the visibility of actors, plays an essential role in the definition of roles and hierarchy within theatre groups, although it is of a different nature for each area of production. We also know that other invisibilities are at play, which can be an interesting subject for further investigation. Indeed, while the creative crew is only invisible during the performance, that of technicians is permanent - that is, their active insertion in the production remains unseen, opposite to the "mark" imposed by the members of the creative team.

Theatre practitioners are not isolated, and the society where the "production community" is inserted will be reflected on the patterns of their interactions (Carlson 1996). Theatre can thus become a means to understand what Knowles defined "political unconscious" (2004: 24), which may be interpreted as the drive behind the modes of inhabiting our society. The experience of theatre is therefore not only framed spatially, but socially - which, on a larger scale, takes us back to the idea of locality. The very interrelation between practitioners and their co-dependence (Conde 2009, Borges 2001) sustains the whole system of theatre professionals embedded in society, and fuels the sense of familiarity

between its members. That same familiarity is nurtured, on a smaller scale, within a theatre company, that my observation evidenced on many occasions.

Goffman's arguments demonstrated that performative quality (1959) can be applied to all social behaviours. One of the crucial elements to determine our interactions is the agreement on the definition of the situation, thus we demand markers such as *play*. Play is a semantically rich term that can be employed in many contexts, and it is here particularly fitting: we have seen that our life in society has been compared many times to the movements of an orchestra; we, as individuals, play a role toward the others; and play is a practice with a social *utility*. We have seen that play and ritual share some features, especially when we apply the former to the field of theatre (Turner 1982, Schechner 1985). However, theatre, as a form of social practice, has been investigated from a standpoint mostly situated in the audience or in the actors' training: Artaud wished for a trance status in actors (1938); Barba, who can be considered the founder of theatre anthropology, focused his attention on the actors' pre-expressiveness (1993); Grotowski (1968) and Brook (1968) claimed that theatre could be made by actor and audience only, and deemed technology as detrimental and an imitation of television and cinema.

The division between the practical and the aesthetical has favoured the latter also in academic discourse until recently. That separation, translated in the dichotomy between technology and art, has been reviewed in the last decades, when scholars published works that made the case for applied skills. Sennett discarded the concept of "artistic" to support the "autonomous" (2008), Gell highlighted the relevance of the way an object is presented for its definition as a work of art (1996), to name a few examples. The proposition of this research was to focus on how a work of art is produced and offered to the public, and provisionally abandon the idea that technique is the result practice and repetition, and that art can be only the product of a transcendent force, an inspiration.

Technology, especially digital technology, has acquired a status of its own within theatre practice, yet not without resistance. It has been described as a voice with its own language, a "performer within the performance" (Baugh 2005: 212). In general, it is accepted that the use of tools is bound to our everyday life, being our own body the first tool with which we know and alter our environment. This vision finds its correspondence in the example of music and language provided by Ingold (2000), as the scholar sustained that the line between the two is drawn by our engagement with the environment, our *agency* (Sennett 2008). It is noticeable that some scholars and interviewees used the analogy of the musician in

an orchestra to identify their role within the theatre company or the relations in a community, thus stressing the necessary unison amongst participants. The performative quality of technical theatre should be taken into consideration when one reflects on theatre production as a work of art containing the "evocation of complex intentionalities" (Gell 1996: 29).

Collaboration is not only essential to the creation of a specific production, it is as well the cement of the larger community made up by theatre practitioners in Portugal. The aforementioned relations of co-dependence between them are a crucial factor in one's career in the area, along with skilfulness and also being "in the right place at the right time". The net of contacts and recognition are an important part of the job for those who are not resident. The people met during my observations had the most varied background, particularly those that have been in theatre for more than a decade. The recently created professional schools are starting to change the entrance to the job market for new generations, which at times can be the source of some conflicts between them and the "old guard" of theatre. In any case, often practitioners have a second occupation beside theatre - limited funding does not allow the sustainment of large cast and crews, which has brought forth "endogamic" organizational patterns to support the costs of theatre production (Antunes 2010).

The people met during fieldwork were mostly positive that the work of technicians entails sensibility and creativity, as it participates in the making of something significant, and they do so with pleasure. Their work, recalling Sennett, could be defined as "autonomous". Even though they follow a design, the involvement is also of an intellectual and expressive nature. The division between the practical and the artistic, or technology and art, coupled with their invisibility to the general public, has attributed technical theatre a secondary role in the hierarchy within theatres - for instance, until a few years ago, tech crews did not appear in theatre booklets. In many cases, technicians consider responsibility the reason of the higher place in the hierarchy for the members of the creative crew, whose job entails a risk and courage in exposing one's self, characteristics that are highly valued by backstage workers. Indeed, technicians usually prefer peer recognition over public acknowledgment, as the appreciation of their colleagues can thrust their personal involvement in a production, and it can also open job opportunities in the future, and also because.

The definition of theatre technician is bound to the tasks one performs within a specific production, which could be classified as those of executing and operating. During the

course of this research, I was able to observe that roles are nuanced and that "technician" is a term that may condense various activities. However, while admitting the flexibility of the definition, I chose to restrict the study to those who fall into the category of technician according to parameters that did not allow the insertion of other participants. The research on individual contributors to a theatre production could thus be extended to other figures involved, like that of the producer or stage manager, that have only been mentioned here. Many people work together to reach the same objective, each one bearing its specificities, and investigation should continue on the path traced by the fundamental studies on performance that have enlightened our processes of construction of identity, both as a society and individual, and include all aspects of theatre practice, backstage labour being only one of the elements that construct the event.

That "choreography" of intentionalities is, in fact, an essential part of social life, and the paradigm is even more suitable when applied to theatre (Essin 2011), as one of the most defining aspects of this practice lies in presence and coordination between participants, along with an exchange, or flux, of creative power - as we have seen with the analogy of playing an instrument in an orchestra. Theatre is embedded in the society where it is created. Reflecting on the way internal roles are structured within a theatre production and the aesthetic value attributed to each of them, could further the investigation on the processes of construction of identity of those involved in the theatre community and, on a larger scale, on the segregation of human activities between artistic and functional.

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## ***LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS***

TNDMII - Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II