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Subtheme 50: The power of performing in performing arts organisations

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Relationships between power and agency: The role of the 'theatre designer' in performance-making processes

Abstract

In 2013, the Contemporary Theatre Review dedicated an issue to 'Alphabet: A Lexicon of Theatre and Performance'. The entry for 'M' is 'mise en scéne' which reflects on the invisible creativity of the 'unseen work that led to the production's first night' (Singleton, 2013). This paper considers how the professional identities and creative practices of performance designers are shaped by performance-making practices. Performance design pedagogy has been selected as the site of investigation because it provides a means by which normative beliefs and practices about being a designer and doing design may be examined. I consider how designers' agency is expressed and/or implied in pedagogy and the relationship of this to power. I conclude that differences between dramatic or 'texted' performance (Schechner, 1968) and 'postdramatic' performance (Lehmann, 2006) shape conceptions and expression of agency in different ways. In particular, I focus on three notions of agency, which are 'authorial agency' (Isackes, 2012), 'professional agency' (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013) and 'identity agency' (Hitlin and Elder, 2007).

Key words

Performance design, theatre design, agency, structure, power.

Introduction

The following comment emerged from an interview with a course leader of a theatre design course in a British Higher Education Institution (HEI):

> Interviewer: There is that quote where Pamela Howard describes a theatre designer as being 'like a wife', in that traditional sense:
>
> *[A theatre] designer had to be like a wife – supportive, a friend and a partner, ready to co-operate at all times and on all occasions, good with money, decorative, good sense of humour, and accepting that no relationship is finite and when someone else came along, you would be passed over.* (Howard, 2006, p.26)
>
> What do you think of that?
>
> Interviewee: Yes! That's rather good. In that traditional model you are. And of course, that's what students resist! They don't want to be the missus! Who does? Exactly, they don't want to pick up the kids [LAUGH] Yeah, that's great, she's right.

The interviews were conducted for a doctoral study which considers how designers' professional identities are created and enacted and the quote is emblematic of how power has shaped (and is shaping) the expression and enactment of agency by performance designers in performance making. In this paper I consider how designers' agency is expressed and/or implied in contemporary performance design pedagogies, and the relationship of this to the ways in which power operates in dramatic or 'texted' performance (Schechner, 1968) and 'postdramatic' performance (Lehmann, 2006).

Pedagogy provides the focus for this exploration for two reasons. In (Richmond, 2014) I propose that the model of the integrated theatre company and school in British theatre in the 1930's, represented by The London Theatre Studio and the Motley Theatre Design Course, repositioned the role of the performance designer as a collaborative partner alongside the director. The notion of a company of 'ensembliers' (Saint-Denis, 1960) that worked towards a unity of concept in theatrical production, united around an 'an authorial imprimatur' (Lacey, 1996) professionalised the job of performance design by expressing this through pedagogy which prescribed ways of doing design and ways of being a designer. In this way, pedagogy and curriculum could be said to be sites of 'social practices' (Kaspersen, 2000) constituting social life, forming agents and realising structure.

The research aims to contribute to a limited body of literature concerned with the position of performance designers in performance-making (Isackes, 2008). In theatrical performance, the relative visibility of the mise en scéne or 'that which is placed on the stage' (Singleton, 2013), compared to behind the scenes is reflected in the absence of backstage work and workers from theatre histories (Essin, 2011). Furthermore, backstage work, in some forms of performance (in what the interviewee in the opening quote referred to as 'That traditional model') can be seen to have a relational and support function, augmenting and facilitating a director's vision, a playwright's concept or actors' performances. (Fletcher, 1999) suggests that job roles that have relational and support characteristics 'get disappeared' because they are associated with the feminine ('Like a wife'). Achievement is treated as 'an individual phenomenon' but 'relational and support activities, although essential, [are] commonly devalued.' (Fletcher, 1999). Therefore, the research questions that the paper will address are:

- How is designer agency expressed and/or implied in contemporary theatre design pedagogies?
- How does power shape conceptions and enactment of agency in different forms of performance-making, namely dramatic and postdramatic performance?

These questions are addressed through analysis of interviews with UK performance design course leaders in Higher Education.

Theoretical Background

In the literature review, I provide a context for the exploration of the position of the performance designer in dramatic and post dramatic forms of performance, by summarising how these forms have been defined. Then I identify key debates about the interrelationship of structure and agency before considering the relationship between power, agency and structure. Finally, the review will focus in on three examples of agentic practices; 'identity agency' (Hitlin and Elder, 2007), 'professional agency' (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013) and 'authorial agency' (Isackes, 2012). These three dimensions of agency provide the focus for the analysis of interviews with design course leaders.

Dramatic and Postdramatic Performance

> A western obsession never ceases to torment us: the relationship of text to performance, the 'fidelity' of a mise en scéne to its text...How does theatre practice effect change in this infernal couple and does it still need them? (Pavis, 2008)

The relationship between text and performance is at the heart of debates concerning differences between dramatic performance and postdramatic performance. The term postdramatic was coined by the German performance theorist Hans Thies Lehmann. In *Postdramatic Theatre* (Lehmann, 2006), he argues that the terms drama and theatre are readily conflated but refer to two different understandings of performance. Drama, he suggests, is characterised by narrative or dialectics. In dramatic theatre the director presupposes that the text has 'a coherance that must be recovered or established' (Pavis, 2008) in order to accurately reflect 'the authentic vitality of the author's voice' (Rebellato, 1999). In this way all elements of performance are subjugated to the 'primacy of the text' (Lehmann, 2006).

Lehmann describes the features of dramatic theatre as 'Wholeness, illusion and world representation' (Lehmann, 2006). Wholeness is achieved through an organising principle where all elements of theatrical production are united around a written text. Illusion refers to the feature of mimesis in dramatic theatre which is the attempt to represent reality. For example, where a dramatic text refers to a particular location the audience expects to see a set that resembles that location. Furthermore, actors might aim to become as close to the character they are performing *as if* their real feelings and emotions are somehow meshed with the illusion of representation. (Barnett, 2008) suggests that although dramatic theatre may aim to give the illusion of reality, representation is not neutral because it is both highly selective and subjective (Barnett, 2008). Furthermore, time and plot is highly structured in order to produce dramatic tension and progression (Barnett, 2016).

(Thomas, 2011) argues that the organizing principle in dramatic performance is plot and this defines the hierarchy that surrounds it: 'kinship to plot determined the order of their importance in the dramatic work/production as a whole' (Thomas, 2011). Because of this the visual dimension of dramatic performance is expected to compliment, and/or to cede to the text. Dramatic productions that lean towards design and away from the primacy of the text are often criticised for being too 'theatrical' or 'ostentatious' and 'lacking in artistic seriousness' (Thomas, 2011). Similarly, Pavis suggests that the emphasis on the primacy of the text within

dramatic theatre creates the conditions for 'an implicit conception of mise-en-scene considered as a superfluous and harmful additive, as a useless supplement' (Pavis, 2008).

Lehmann provides a definition of postdramatic theatre:

> [P]ostdramatic theatre is not simply a new kind of text of staging – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside down through the structurally changed quality of the performance text: it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than signification, more energetic impulse than information. (Lehmann, 2006)

Lehmann uses Roger Planchon's expression 'écriture scénique' (Carmody, 1990) to describe a new 'scenically orientated' theatre (Lehmann, 2006) where a text-based dramaturgy is replaced by a 'visual dramaturgy' (Lehmann, 2006). (Leff, 1991) categories of design predate Lehmann's notion of visual dramaturgy but have much in common. 'Literary space' (Leff, 1991) is the term he uses to describe stage designs that emerge from the meaning residing in a literary text. In contrast, 'didactic space' (Leff, 1991) refers to design that provides 'a wealth of signification' which stands apart from the literary text. Postdramatic theatre has been described as 'Not a theatre with production values but a theatre of production values' (Thomas, 2011). However, (Klich, 2013) suggests that postdramatic performance is not anti-narrative. Instead, the emphasis is away from narrative as simulation to narrative as an outcome of the interaction between text and viewer ((Klich, 2013). Postdramatic performance does not seek to represent reality, in the same way that dramatic performance does. Instead it aims to demonstrate the flawed project of theatrical mimesis by engaging with problems of representation in performance by using techniques of fragmentation, juxtaposition, repetition, duplication and temporal disturbance (Kattenbelt, 2010).

Lehmann uses the term 'parataxis' to describe the non-hierarchical, pluralistic approach towards performance-making in postdramatic performance (Lehmann, 2006). The organising principle of the dramatic text is put to one side, in favour of collaborative assembly of 'material' (Pavis, 2008). The impact of a non-hierarchical approach to organising performance in postdramatic performance is perhaps reflected in the changing terminology used to describe design and designers. (McKinney and Butterworth, 2009) define 'theatre design' as 'the creation of theatre design by its designer'. Increasingly the word scenography is being used to

describe a range of practices associated with performance design, but it resists 'singular identities' (McKinney and Butterworth, 2009).

Beyond Eastern Europe, the practice of scenography was relatively unknown until the early 2000's, as (Howard, 2010) observes 'Some thought it was a spelling mistake, others a grandiose word for set design'. It has been defined as 'the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators' (Howard, 2002) and 'an intricate matrix of overlapping practices' (Collins and Nisbet, 2010). Although there is general consensus about what scenography is, there is less consensus about the job of the scenographer. The dehierarchisation of means in performance has led to something of an identity crisis for designers. Sophie Jump, a designer (Crawley *et al.*, 2011) describes this identity crisis:

> One of the struggles faced in our line of work is labelling. Do we call ourselves theatre designers or scenographers? Is it craft or art? Can I call myself a theatre designer if I don't design performances that take place in a theatre? Am I a designer if I organise the performance space and its use but don't design anything that is physically placed in that space? Am I a scenographer if I only design one aspect of the performance?

The account of dramatic and postdramatic forms I have given here may appear dualistic because the aim is to compare and contrast these forms. However, it is important to recognise that these forms are contested and fluid. For example, Lehmann stresses that some playwrights may also be described as postdramatic. He gives the example of Samuel Beckett as being a postdramatic playwright because it is no longer the story but the game which provides a narrative focus within Beckett's plays (Lehmann, 2006). It is important to note that the 'post' in postdramatic does not refer to a chronological 'new' theatre that contrasts with the 'old' dramatic forms (Jürs-Munby in (Lehmann, 2006)p.2). However, it may be possible to claim that the ways of organising performance in dramatic compared to postdramatic performance emphasise the role of visual in performance and in so doing, provide the possibility for a reconceptualisation of the role of the designer/scenographer in performance making. In this paper I have chosen to use the term performance designer for consistency, and the term 'theatre designer' in the title of this paper to recognise the common use of this term. However, this is done in recognition that the terms are contested.

In the next part of the literature review, I will summarise the key debates about the relationship of structure to agency before considering the relationships between power, agency

and structure. I do this in order to situate designer agency in the context of power in dramatic and postdramatic performance-making.

Agency, Structure, Power

Agency has been described as a 'slippery' (Hitlin and Elder, 2007), 'elusive' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) and 'abstract' (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013) concept. Slippery because agency is often expressed in paradigmatic terms, 'as a placeholder for some vague sense of human freedom or individual volition within a broader model' (Hitlin and Elder, 2007). Elusive, because the act of defining or fixing agency extracts it from the flow of time and relations with social structure (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Finally, the term is described as abstract because it involves 'various assumptions of reality' (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013). The literature highlights how these assumptions of reality shape the ways in which agents and structures are perceived to be related to each other in a duality of agency versus structure rather than being seen as a dualism or structuration process, whereby human actions simultaneously structure and are structured by society (Giddens, 2013). Agency then, may be conceptualised in the context of either/ or/ and separable, inseparable, subservient, dominant or interdependent relations with social structure (Hayward and Lukes, 2008)(King, 2010).

As a property of individuals, agency has been described as being 'a faculty of free-will and choice' (Kockelman, 2007) or 'existential agency' (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013). Existential agency distinguishes the capacity to act from an individual's perception of the capacity to act. An individual's perception of the capacity to act is related to notions of self-efficacy and control. Self-efficacy has been described as being at the heart of agency because it is concerned with 'the personal agency of causality' (Bandura, 1982)(Bandura, 2012). Belief in one's own self-efficacy may also shape the extent to which individuals experience either 'low or active agency' in influencing one's own life (Bandura, 2006). (Haggard and Chambon, 2012) use the phrase 'a sense of agency' to describe the feelings of being 'able to control one's own actions and, through them, events in the outside world'.

(Broadfoot and Munshi, 2015) suggest that agency is more often associated with the person who acts, with little recognition of the agency of the person who is acted upon. However, individuals may assert their capacity to act in order to resist the domination of another agent (Scott, 1985)(Kockelman, 2007). However, the existential notion of agency is not concerned with agents asserting resistance, but suggests that agents have a causal effect on the world

through refraining from action. This is what Giddens calls ‘counter-power’ (Giddens, 2013). Therefore, agency can be seen to be related to power, both in the production of agents, i.e., those who have the power to act, and subjects, i.e., those who are acted upon and who become agents through either asserting resistance or refraining from action. As (Hewson, 2010) observes: ‘Power produces things — indeed it is the active producer of subjects. Agents are products of power. Power causes things to happen. Power acts.’

(Hayward and Lukes, 2008) in a dialogue on agency and power, make the observation that ‘the twin concerns of power and structure and agency have developed in parallel rarely engaging one another’ (Hayward and Lukes, 2008) but there appear to be clear parallels in the ways in which both agency and power are conceptualised. As I have already suggested, there is a debate at the heart of social theory which is concerned with the emphasis given to the influence of social structures and their influence on enactment of agency, and the degree to which individuals are able to enact agency within social structures (Hitlin and Elder, 2007) (King, 2010). In essence ‘we make ourselves, but not under conditions of our own choosing’ (Kockelman, 2007). Similarly, (Hayward and Lukes, 2008) describe the debate which is at the heart of much of the power literature, which is the contrast between a voluntaristic view of agency which reduces power to the conscious and intentional actions of agents and a determinist position which excludes human agency, rendering individuals powerless (Hayward and Lukes, 2008). A relational definition of ‘power over’ conceives of power as being a product of social causation. Whereas an ability-based definition of ‘power to’ refers to the ability of individuals to act (Pansardi, 2012). These positions conceive of power as domination or power as empowerment (Haugaard, 2012). As with concepts of agency and structure, treating the concepts of concepts of power over and to as a duality may obscure their interdependence and interrelatedness. It is perhaps by further considering this interrelatedness that the factors shaping personal causality may be better understood.

Lukes (Hayward and Lukes, 2008) proposes in the idea of the ‘third dimension’ of power, that power does not just work on subjects but through subjects, shaping individuals’ perception of their self-efficacy:

> [P]ower consists, not in prevailing over the opposition of others, nor in imposing an agenda on them, but in influencing their desires, beliefs and judgments in ways that work against their interests. (Hayward and Lukes, 2008)

Because of this quality, he argues that structures are highly durable making some forms of action 'highly improbable…and others…exceedingly likely'. (Pansardi, 2012) suggests that power should be thought of as a relational concept rather than as two separate notions of power over and to. She brings together the two concepts in a notion of 'social power':

> [P]ower to and power over refer to the same social facts, they both consist in the changing of someone else's incentive structure and in the obtainment of a specific outcome, no matter whether they refer to something I can do by myself, having obtained the non-interference of others, or in the specific product of someone else's action. Accordingly, no distinction, and consequently, no priority, can be applied between power to and power over (Pansardi, 2012).

In these conceptualisations, power is understood to be intrinsically relational and social, working through as well as on individuals. In much the same way as Pansardi argues that the separation of power over and to, is unhelpfully dualistic, (Evans, 2007) suggests that agency and structure are socially situated, simultaneously enabled and constrained by social structures which, in turn, shape an individual's perception of own agency; a phenomenon she refers to as 'bounded agency'. This notion moves away from the sometimes tacit assumption in the literature that agents act in isolation from one another. (Bandura, 2012) recognises this assumption, suggesting that agency and power operate through a complex network of social relations, which he calls 'proxy agency':

> In personal agency exercised individually, people bring their influence to bear on what they can control directly. However, in many spheres of functioning, people do not have direct control over conditions that affect their lives. They exercise proxy agency. This requires influencing others who have the resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf to secure the outcomes they desire. People do not live their lives in social isolation (Bandura, 2012).

Proxy agency then could be described as a network-centric concept where social reality is seen as 'multiple participants negotiating as they interact with and co-operate or struggle with each other.' (King, 2010) described as 'social agency' (Meyer and Jepperson, 2000) or 'collective agency' (Hewson, 2010). An individual's perception of the capacity to act, and therefore their enactment of proxy agency, is shaped by the operation of social power within a socially situated network.

There are some themes within the agency literature that are problematic. The first is that there is an assumption that agency is visible through its tangible impact on the world.

(Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) suggest that agency is temporally situated. There is a moment before and after action. The moment before action they call 'the projective element' of agency This relates to 'the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). This is similar to (Winch, 2014) notion of agency as the capacity for imagining or anticipating agentic practices, drawing on Marx's observation that 'the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.' (Marx, 1970). The second assumption in much of the the literature is that agency may only be a property of individuals. However (Gell, 1998) suggests that art objects may carry 'residual agency' (Gell, 1998), because they continue to 'act' in the world as 'secondary agents that have effect by virtue of being enmeshed in social relationships' (Layton, 2003).

So far, the review of literature has highlighted how agency has been conceptualised in the context of either/ or/ and separable, inseparable, subservient, dominant or interdependent relations with social structure. Similarly, I have suggested that power has been conceptualised in much the same way in the concepts of power over, power to and social power. Given that performance making, enactment and reception almost always involves others (Osipovich, 2006) (Carlson, 2004), I take the position that a designer's perception of the capacity to act, and to either resist, refrain or act in one's own interests, is shaped by proxy agency where power over and to, and agency and structure are seen as interdependent. I will now briefly summarise three definitions of agency from which to explore these themes in more detail in the analysis section of the paper.

Authorial, Professional and Identity Agency

(Isackes, 2012) uses the term 'authorial agency' which he explains is the 'impact of hierarchical power in some forms of theatre making that privilege some authors over others'. He suggests that this power is manifested in the ways that the designer moves from the position of being a 'generative artist' to a 'reactive artist'. Isackes associates the generative with notions of authorship. He suggests that the hierarchical notion of power over designers in dramatic performance, shape designers' ability to generate or author work. Isackes identifies a paradox in design pedagogies that prepare performance designers 'to participate in economies that often serve other interests at the expense of their own.' In the analysis section of this paper, I suggest that authorial agency is expressed differently in dramatic and postdramatic performance.

The idea of 'professional agency' proposed by (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013) is used to describe 'professional subjects and/or communities of influence' and how they 'influence, make choices, and take stances on their work and professional identities'. They suggest that agency, in this context, is closely related to power because 'power both constrains and resources professional agency at work' (Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2013). In the analysis, I explore the importance of what I call director patronage in sustaining designers' careers in some forms of performance. I also reflect upon the phenomenon of designers creating spaces away from performance, through national and international design competitions, in which to assert their professional and authorial agency.

(Hitlin and Elder, 2007) describe a notion of 'identity agency' which is concerned with repetition of 'role enactment or identity performance…concerned with achieving social or substantive ends' (Hitlin and Elder, 2007). I argue later in this paper that it is this dimension of agency that is changing in postdramatic processes of performance making, as role boundaries are redrawn and destabilised. On the face of it, there appears to be potential here for a liberation of the visual in performance and of the designer from the creative hierarchy in dramatic performance. However, the increasing trend towards precarious employment in the performing arts does not appear to fulfil the promise of empowerment that liberation from a hierarchy might appear to offer.

Research Methods

Fourteen performance design course leaders were invited to participate in an interview, with eight of these subsequently being interviewed. They represent a purposive sample, selected by way of a maximum variation sampling technique, which aimed to represent different philosophies, practices and educational contexts. For example, some courses emphasise some aspects of designer identity over another, e.g. scenography over set design or set design over costume design. Furthermore, some courses may or may not expect students to be performers, writers and directors as well as designers. The sample aimed to capture different types of higher education settings, reflecting provision in drama schools, art schools and universities. Of the eight course leaders interviewed, two were from post-1992 universities, one from an 'arts' university, two from drama schools, one from a conservatoire, one from an arts school and finally, one from a performing arts college in partnership with a 'plate glass' HEI. The names of interviewees have been anonymised. Interviews were semi-structured, lasting for between an hour and an hour and a half. The interviews included an element of photo novella, meaning

‘picture stories’ (Hurworth, 2003), where interviewees were invited to use the image to tell a story which reflected the philosophy of the course they were leading.

Before embarking on the analysis of designer agency, I will illustrate the photo novella technique by discussing two images that were chosen by course leaders for their interviews. The two images I have chosen illustrate broad contrasts between a conceptualisation of design in both dramatic and postdramatic performance.

Examples of Images Using the Photo Novella Technique

Image 1: Design for *The Innocents* by William Archibald

Image 2: Designs for *The Innocents* by William Archibald

Images 1 and 2 represent the philosophy of a course in which students are predominantly trained in preparation for design for dramatic theatre in a drama school environment. The design is for the play *The Innocents* by William Archibald. The course leader, Jonathan, stressed the importance of the design 'not drawing attention to itself for any other reason than it serves the play'. For example, image 1 notes important props required for the scene, e.g. 'Letter' and clues in the text as to the appearance of scenery '(entrance was so grand)'. Image 2 shows locations in the play such as 'Lake', 'Window', 'Lesson', 'At Night'. Notes on the design demonstrate close reading of the text addressing textual challenges and transitions:

> How does he appear and disappear…This window…She's fussily putting things in order when notices him, leaves through centre door reenters + enter Grose.

Jonathan highlighted the importance of 'negative pregnant space' within the draft design, the function of which is to anticipate narrative. Here designer agency is expressed as projective or anticipatory(Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Jonathan explained that the aim of the design was to create an environment in which the audience see 'a mirror of themselves', reflecting the function of mimesis in dramatic performance. Furthermore, image 2 creates a boundary around the image which is a proscenium arch, a type of theatre architecture which gives the impression that the audience are observers of reality because the 'fourth wall' has been removed. This

perhaps presupposes that the performance will be taking place in the kind of theatre space traditionally associated with dramatic performance.

Image 3: Street performance with bananas

Image 3 is a photograph of a street performance by first year undergraduate students in an Art School. Their brief for the performance was that they should respond to the space:

> [T]heir response to the space was to do this rather humorous thing with bananas and the reason they did it is because they wanted to see if anybody even realised that they were performance and so they were playing between the borders of real life and performance

The students did not seek to imitate reality but instead were attempting to draw attention to the performative act. In this way the performance might be described as postdramatic. As David, the course leader, observes:

> [I]t looked at a lot of the questions we're looking at on the course, you know, when is performance, performance?…when is it…how does it relate to real life?

The performance did not have a pre-structured plot or narrative and, as designers, their role was not to design a set or props but to decide upon a concept and then perform. The concept of designers as performers disrupts ways of organising that one might expect in dramatic performance:

> This non-hierarchical structure blatantly contradicts tradition, which has preferred a hypotactical way of connection that governs the super and subordination of elements,

> in order to avoid confusion and to produce harmony and comprehensibility. (Lehmann, 2008, p.87)

In this example, design is not conceptualised as a mise en scéne (items placed on a stage), but as a 'mise en perf'(Pavis, 2008) or scenography that performs.

Findings

(Isackes, 2012) describes the impact of hierarchy in performance making on the enactment of authorial agency in designers. He suggests it frames designers as reactive artists, defined as 'one who responds to a playwright's text only through the mediation of the director's primary vision'. One interviewee explained that the curriculum was specifically structured around the process of designing with a text:

> [B]reak down the text so that you can put what you need to do, that's the next thing…you might list locations…amounts of rooms whatever and then from that work what research you need to do. So from the script, everything goes to research…so that can be anything from the architecture to the small props to the characters and then when they come back with the research they would normally start a ground plan, say its one space to design in and an elevation sheet in a model.

Other interviewees described designers as 'the go between' and 'the 'interpreter' between text and performance or director and stage space. One interviewee suggested that the designer should 'love the text, be sensitive to the text'. Another argued that the dramatic text was central to what it means to design and be a designer:

> If I'm proud of anything that this school has…it is that it's a school that believes in the language on the page that the playwright delivers and in a way you can't change it. You can cut it but you generally can't change it and that, I like and I believe in.

However, some of the interviewees recognised that there could be different notions of design and authorship, reminiscent of (Isackes, 2012) contrast between generative and reactive artists:

> [There are] differences between authoring work and theatre design which is not the same as authoring your own work. Theatre design is a very particular thing and way of being…and dealing with…certainly in theatre design in a sense of the dramatic theatre is a very particular thing. One is dealing with a text, one is interpreting a text…and a director to interpret that text but performance design which is like theatre design only broader because it is film and other forms involved.

Similarly, another interviewee expressed a more expansive view, describing designers as 'theatre makers'. Here, notions of the postdramatic expand the conceptualisation of authorship and of the field of what is being authored by authoring work in a range of media, beyond set and costume.

There appears to be a relationship between dramatic performance, hierarchy, power and enactment of authorial agency. As one interviewee observed 'Designers always tend to be subservient to directors'. Another reflected on the tacit assumptions made about approaches to performance making, and the impact of the extent to which designers could make choices about the work that they did and who they chose to work with:

> I asked Grandage once, with Oram, why would you not as a producer ask the designer what they would like to do and with whom they would like to work? Why is it always the director making, in a sense, the first decision? There's no example of the producer asking "Which play do you really want to do? Which piece do you really want to do and which director do you really want to do it with? and I'll make that happen". Grandage first says "No, no, no"…But he did consider it more later after I proposed it but **I don't think they want to remove themselves from that seat of power** [My emphasis]

This interviewee equates the hierarchy that arises out of dramatic performance with a lack of power and in turn, constrained authorial agency.

There is a relationship between hierarchy, power and visibility, which is important in the context of who is perceived as having authored a performance, as one interviewee observes:

> [W]hat we still have at the end of the day is more of the press supporting the director into promoting their production as their production…the one thing that we have got to constantly fight for is the fact that when a director talks, he isn't just talking about him and his or her production…You could say at the end of the day "Nobody owns those ideas, it's through collaboration that those ideas are brought to fruition"

Visibility, then, is afforded to those who have power in a hierarchy and it seems visibility may also be associated with authorship. This relationship was expressed in the opening quote to this paper, where designers in 'that traditional model' i.e., dramatic performance, were perceived to have a relational and support role ('Like a wife'). (Conway, Pizzamiglio and Mount, 1996) propose that those with high power and status are believed to be agentic, whereas low power and status people were considered 'communal'. They suggest that notions of

communal behaviour includes warmth as well as concern for others, indicating a relational and support role.

One interviewee reflects on the impact of 'losing touch' with directors they would normally work with and the impact of this on their ability to 'do work':

> Of course, things change and people move on as relationships with directors are paramount, that changes but however I think there's still enough work there and I also think that maybe because of my experience teaching it, I feel more confident that I can generate some of that work myself, in terms of my own company and my own work.

Another reflects on the impact of a director changing careers and the subsequent impact of that on their decisions about professional direction:

> [S]he [The director in the collaborative partnership] decided to go into radio and writing drama books and so radio does not involve a lot of design! And so I kind of had to diversify…

The arrangement of hierarchy around a text, appears to have created a tradition of patronage of designers by directors, in long-term collaborative partnerships. This appears to be a necessary condition of the enactment of professional agency in dramatic performance.

During the course of the interviews, it became clear that there were other spaces where designers were choosing to participate in 'communities of influence' as an expression of their professional agency. There are a range of National and International design competitions which play an important role in recognising the authorial agency of designers and by providing a forum in which their professional agency may be expressed. All interviewees referred to the importance of students attending and participating in design competitions as a way of gaining entry to the profession, and as an important focus for networking. These exhibtions initially occupied a space away from performance and this is something which has changed in the last ten years. I explore the phenomenon of these shifts - from performance to artefacts of design, and then back to performance - later in this section.

There are three main competitions and exhibitions which UK designer/scenographers participate in. The Linbury Prize is described by organisers as the 'UK's most prestigious award for Stage Design' (*The Linbury Prize*, no date) and is primarily a forum for early career

designers, rather than professional designers. The 'World Stage Design' exhibition and competition (*World Stage Design 2017*, no date) is organised by OISTAT: The International Organisation of Scenographers, Theatre Architects and Technicians (OISTAT, 2013). In the case of the Linbury, a cash prize and design commission is awarded and in the case of the World Stage Design competition, a gold, silver or bronze medal. Finally, The Prague Quadrennial (*Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space | PQ*, 2015) (also organised through OISTAT) is an international competition but would perhaps be better described as a kind of 'Eurovision contest' for performance designers, with countries competing against one another. Prizes are ultimately awarded to individual designers representing countries. Through this, designers receive public recognition and attribution for their designs. These forums paradoxically occupy a space away from the site of theatrical performance, with one interviewee describing them as being 'the very secret kind of world of design competitions'.

In the case of the Linbury Prize, the separation of design from performance provides designers with the opportunity to give full voice to their authorship, without that authorship being compromised or appropriated by others in the performance making process. As one interviewee explained:

> [T]he Linbury allows a kind of nirvana like situation where there's a certain amount of budget that's allocated for the set and that cannot be compromised into something else like the actors, the programme, you know. It's Nirvana!

The focus in the Linbury Prize has typically been on dramatic performance:

> [S]tudents, that might want to be the classic theatre designer and perform that role…they have a model and a text… and it probably will happen for them…you can see the sort of, when you look at the Linbury prize, you can see it in the Linbury prize.

However, this may now be changing. As one interviewee reflected on a conversation with one of the Linbury prize judges:

> She said "I've seen all the portfolios that applied to the Linbury this year and I'm slightly...I'm worried about the lack of text-based work". There is a split, which is interesting.

The history of the PQ is important because it appears to have emerged from very early conceptualisations of the kind of visual dramaturgy that Lehmann associates with postdramatic

performance. The PQ arose out of a particular set of geographical and political circumstances in communist Czechoslovakia. Theatres were subject to strict censorship rules (Brockett, Mitchell and Hardberger, 2010) but theatre censors were primarily concerned with script rather than performance. This created a climate in which Czech performance designers used design to articulate an alternative visual text. A definition of this form of 'action design' is given by (Christilles and Unruh, 1996):

> These elements of design do not subvert the role or power of the actor, but instead create a kind of "other" actor--another voice and a richer web of signs, all reacting with and against one another.

Although still grounded in dramatic performance, this approach favoured a 'complex metaphorical structure' in the meaning of design, and an awareness of theatricality through the use of 'intense irony' ((Christilles and Unruh, 1996). The international profile of Czech design was such that it led to the creation of the Prague Quadrennial (PQ) in 1967. The PQ has taken place every four years since its inception and continues to provide an international focus for scenography. The shifts away from texted performance in the Linbury Prize have been slight in comparison with changes to the PQ. The PQ Symposium in March 2016, took as its title 'Transformations of the Prague Quadrennial since 1999'. One panel discussion that I observed discussed the reasons why in early exhibitions, design was initially separated from performance. The aim was to recognize the work of designers. However, this separation brought its own challenges. As one panel member observed: 'Some designs just had one bulb hanging from a ceiling and so how do you present this in an exhibition in a way that captures the context of performance?'. As Michael Spencer observes:

> In Fine Art, the object usually is the thing, but scenography is not Fine Art, despite the fact that the boundaries of the disciplines are shifting…Scenography may want to be Fine Art because of the accompanying gravitas...perhaps that's another reason for scenography's desire to display objects? (Spencer, 2013)

Here, Spencer refers to the potential of objects in an exhibition setting to carry the residual agency (Gell, 1998) of their creators bestowing 'gravitas' and authorial agency on their makers. However, although postdramatic performance is concerned with visual dramaturgy, this does not necessarily equate to replacing one author (playwright/ director) with another author (designer). This tension between authorship and scenography seems to have been played out in

the way that these exhibitions were changing, which reflected the dehierarchisation of means in performance. As one interviewee comments about the 2007 exhibition:

> [I]n that exhibition you could see it in some of the things…you went around the exhibition and anything that looked like a box set or something like that or within a proscenium stage looked ridiculously old fashioned… There were more and more, slowly – and I don't want to exaggerate it – there were more and more theatre designers that were also directing, lighting maybe even writing, maybe even performing and this whole thing called theatre design, or scenography or design for performance was slowly eroding and breaking up.

In 2007 Pamela Howard complained that there were no prizes for collaborators or for collaborators working across borders (Robinson, 2007). Similarly, at the PQ Symposium, Michael Spencer asked the question: 'Could it be that the professionalisation of scenography is a hindrance to its democratisation?'. Education about, and training in, specialised forms of knowledge is central to the process of professionalisation. Knowledge has a symbolic value because it is the mechanism that controls and regulates entry to a 'profession' for which those skills and knowledge are deemed essential (Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990). The act of defining what it means to be a designer through pedagogy may limit the possibilities for democratisation afforded through postdramatic performance.

Therefore, the act of creating a forum in which the authorial agency of individual performance designers may be enacted and recognised, creates new challenges. First, how to express performance as an intrinsic element of scenography and second, how to recognise collective authorship. The PQ 2016 was guided by the following conceptualisation of scenography:

> [A] trans-disciplinary practice of the design of performative spaces can no longer be assigned to a singular genre – set design comes to mind - and a singular author (Dehlholm, 2016).

In this conceptualisation of scenography the singular author disappears but creative work is not subjugated to the primacy of the text. However, some panel members gave a contrasting view that challenges the notion of a disempowered designer in a hierarchy:

> It's not about theatre anymore…this is not about Czech stage design, this is about something strange…It is controlled anarchy. I enjoy hierarchy, a solid team of people.

> In my life I have worked with many directors. None of them said this is what I think now go and do it. It was about trust. He has trust in me and I had trust in him.

The tension between different conceptualisations of performance, and the designer's role within these, is echoed in a comment from one of the interviewees:

> I think the whole of theatre is on a kind of knife-edge at the moment...there's definitely a change going on…If you are the old school maybe people are trying to cling onto that a bit...cling on to the old school but the new work...I mean I'm clinging onto the old school…there's going to be a revolution in that I think and it is happening in site specific work where students aren't interested in traditional theatre…they're also interested in the new spaces for theatre…the political power of theatre.

In dramatic performance, the expression and enactment of designers' authorial agency has largely been shaped in relation to the text and the traditional hierarchy of performance making. The attempt to separate design from performance as an expression of professional and authorial agency did, momentarily, provide spaces for recognition and attribution of authorial agency. However, the act of separating design from performance decontextualised design *as performance*. Furthermore, recognition of individual authorship failed to recognise collaborative forms of authorship. However, the contemporary condition of flux in the professional identities of designer/scenographers presents particular challenges for contemporary pedagogies in shaping the 'identity agency' of designers.

(Hitlin and Elder, 2007) notion of identity agency presupposes a stable set of conditions that produce the same role enactment or identity performance. They describe the analytical scope of the concept of identity agency as being 'routine situations' where individuals have the capacity to act 'within socially prescribed role expectations' (Hitlin and Elder, 2007). This dimension of agency is of interest in the context of designers precisely because the role of design and designers is in flux. One interviewee reflected on the changing and contested status of the designer and the ways in which identities change over time:

> [I]t changes all the time, almost day to day…it takes them [undergraduate students] three years to work out what a theatre designer is, let alone what you actually do…and once again even though they might become clearer as regards what that means to them and that might be different things to different people. There will also be added confusions because the staff have different ideas and different definitions quite rightly.

Another compared his early career experiences with his students, noting the contemporary instability in career roles:

> I can see it in some of my students…the barriers between theatre design and design for performance and directing and lighting design and all the other aspects of theatre making, those barriers have broken down to a certain extent but unfortunately I am of the age where you carve out a career in a particular area and that's what you did.

All of the interviewees commented on the impact of this changing coceptualisation of performance design on the naming of course programmes:

> [W]e firstly called it theatre design for performance. That was a conscious thing of trying to say we're not just theatre design anymore…it was an acknowledgement that the students were doing that…we had these students saying "I want to make a piece in the space", "Oh, right" and "Oh God" you know, and we started to realise that theatre practice was changing.

The dehierarchisation of means in postdramatic performance may be playing a role in destabilising identity agency. However, there are a number of other factors which are destabilising in general terms to those working in the performing arts. Interviewees cited the precarious nature of performance design work, caused in part by Government cuts to arts funding since 2010, and the impact of arts funding policies which favour small-scale touring companies over regional theatres and companies:

> All work is freelance and they're [students] amazed that there used to be the REP system where you would have a designer and a deputy designer and Head of a whole team and you would learn that way but I don't think there's one theatre…nowhere...that does that.

> [T]hose jobs have not existed for a long time anyway. I suppose the reality of what we're dealing with is…I suppose what I'm saying is that this problem has been there for some time but was slightly masked…there's no longer any masking now. There is literally nothing. I know that sounds really apocalyptic and doom laden but I think it is that bad!

Creative work is increasingly precarious (Murray and Gollmitzer, 2012) (Loacker, 2013)(Gill, 2014) and is typified by 'insecure patterns of employment…freelancing and self-employment' (Neilson and Coté, 2014). Many of the interviewees cited this as the reason why they had made the transition from designers to design-educators themselves:

> I was a freelance designer for many years [LAUGH] um...must have been twenty-five years but there was a point where I started thinking I should pick up some better paid work...um.. by becoming a visiting tutor

> Yes – having children and being fully focused on a freelance theatre design career are a little incompatible!

However, paradoxically, the expression of this in design pedagogies appears to treat precariousness as a structural aspect that needs skills to navigate and which is grounded in professional experience, rather than an exception that has the potential to be remedied:

> What happens now we bury in discussions we have with them in courses...we encourage them to actually create their own work and not just sit waiting for a telephone to come through or a message to come through or whatever.

The notion of the constantly changing entrepreneurial self is reflected in the curriculum of design courses, where the emphasis is on self-discipline, self-regulation, and developing individual skills in networking and business management skills. (Kunst, 2015) questions whether the common-sense notion of the individual entrepreneurial self is empowering, given the way that it appears to constrain agency, disempowers individuals, and creates the conditions in which social connectedness becomes problematic:

> Even if it looks at first sight that contemporary subjectivity is independent and always intentional (pure entrepreneurial self, which is managing herself or himself through projects into perfection), this subjectivity is actually governed through strong mechanisms of dependence and subjugation to the structural power of governing…this is a particular sort of dependence that shifted from the ontological condition of dependence enabling us to be with others, from the very fact that lives are inter-dependent to the mode of governing through the vulnerability that constantly protects the subjectivity from the other/ another one…the only possible way to sustain the heavy burden of the normalization of precarity seems to be today the utter protection of the self: the protection from the others who are actually ontologically constitutive for our very being. (Kunst, 2015)

However, it is not the purpose of this paper to address precarity in great depth but rather to note the possibility of a relationship between flux in identity agency, which may in part be due to ways of working in postdramatic performance, but also to precarious conditions of work.

Conclusion.

The first question I set out to address in this paper is: How is agency expressed and/or implied in contemporary performance design pedagogies, in the role of performance designer? I have focused on three types of designer agency (authorial, professional and identity) and have demonstrated the ways in which the interconnectedness of these types of agency present a

narrative which is about how designers are positioned in dramatic and postdramatic performance. I conclude that differences between dramatic and post-dramatic performance have shaped and continue to shape, the ways in which professional identities and creative practices of performance designers are expressed through pedagogy. The second question that I aimed to address is: How does power shape conceptions and enactment of agency in different forms of performance? My analysis supports Isackes' proposal that dramatic performance positions the role of designer as 'one who responds to a playwright's text only through the mediation of the director's primary vision', in what Pavis calls the 'dogma of necessary fidelity' (Pavis, 2008) in performance design. This places the designer in a position of service, to dramatic text and director. In this context, I argue that designers are positioned as having 'relational and support' value, where power operates as a 'gendered phenomenon' ('Like a wife') and prone to 'disappearing acts' (Fletcher, 1999). Arnold Aronson reflects on the fifty years of PQ (Aronson, 2016). He explains that the event started as a way for designers compare and exhibit their practice but once the design was separated from performance, this prompted a wider discussion about what it meant to be a designer and also what it meant to design. The new conceptualisation of designer as author meant that design moved from the theatre to the street but in doing so returned to performance once more. When it became performance, he suggests, designers again felt excluded. However, as my interviewee quoted at the start of this paper observes, a new generation of designers resist returning to the old hierarchies: '[T]hat's what students resist! They don't want to be the missus!' but the consequence of this shift away from 'power over' is not necessarily emancipatory in improving designers' 'power to' act because of the precarious nature of employment and conditions of work. In this context it is interesting to reflect on Tatjana Dadic Dinulovic's suggestion that:

> Scenography is no longer owned by the theatre. Instead we should treat scenography as a quality of a designer, for example scenographic awareness, scenographic working and so on. We are witnessing a scenographic turn. (Dinulovic, 2016)

Here Dinulovic locates scenography as a quality of individuals rather than institutions or social structures. From this perspective, the experience of contemporary subjectivity of a performance designer could be described as 'the peculiar experience of a socialized isolation' (Kunst, 2015). I have aimed to document the current state of expression and enactment of designer agency in performance by examining contemporary pedagogies and conclude that stable concepts of designer agency are in flux, in part to different approaches to performance and in part, due to the condition of precariousness in performing arts employment. Therefore,

future research could consider what might constitute a notion of ‘scenographic agency’, considering the ways in which power operates in a network of collaborative agents engaged in making performance.

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