



How Support Personnel Shape Artworks: The case of stage managers

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ABSTRACT

It is commonly accepted in the sociology of art that artworks are created in collaboration. In an attempt to take artworks seriously from a sociological perspective, this paper explores how the collaboration of all the members of an art world affect the artwork that is created. By employing in-depth interviewing, participant observation, and qualitative content analysis, I focus on one kind of support personnel in the theater art world - stage managers. I find two distinct ways in which stage managers affect the artistic outcomes of plays: making artistic choices and affecting the work that others do through non-artistic inputs.

KEYWORDS

Theater; stage manager; production of culture

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INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental insights that has emerged in the sociology of art is that individuals do not create art in isolation; rather, art is the result of collaboration between many different individuals (Becker, 1982). These studies often take the perspective that researchers can study art worlds like any other world of work. The problem with doing so, in the words of Rothenberg and Fine (2008), is that “they rarely address the aspects of this social world that distinguish it from, say, those of auto-workers, public-housing dwellers, or stock-brokers.” (p. 31) If the solution is, as they suggest, taking artworks seriously from a sociological perspective, one way to do so is to explore how the collaboration of all the members of the art world affect the artwork that is created.

This paper explores how work processes affect the creation of artworks, seeking to understand how the division of labor in art worlds affects the creations that come out of those art worlds. In doing so, it demonstrates one way that researchers can use previous methods of studying art worlds to explain not only those worlds, but artworks as well. Using data from semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and qualitative documentary analysis from the world of professional theatre, I study stage managers and their effects on the plays on which they work. I find that art world personnel, in this case stage managers, affect the artworks in two main ways: by directly making artistic choices and by adding non-artistic inputs that affect the artistic work others do.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Becker (2006) argues that one way in which the sociology of art can profitably engage the question of the work itself is by taking a genetic approach, by which he means conceiving of artworks as the result of choices, both conventional and unusual, made by individuals and groups. Sociologists can then analyze the choices that these individuals and groups make in the creation of a work of art and the ways that a work of art might otherwise have proceeded (p. 25). The genetic approach does not treat artworks as cohesive wholes for researchers to analyze according to their own internal logics; rather, it aims to open up the black box of artistic creation, laying bare the steps that went into its creation. As Jeremy McCarter writes on the creation of the musical *Hamilton*, “[W]hile *Hamilton* looks seamless and effortless and inevitable, it was none of those things. It could have been – and at several points was – a very different show.” (Miranda and McCarter, 2016, p.11) The same could be said of any particular work of art. By thinking of artworks as the product of an ongoing process, instead of as products of individual genius frozen in space and time, sociologists can illuminate the social conditions that constrain some choices and open up others within that process, thus studying works of art from a sociological point of view. This perspective is particularly important in analyzing the performing arts in which, as Atkinson (2010) points out, the rehearsal process consists of a negotiation of how best to perform the piece between actors and directors.

Yet artists do not make decisions on how to create their art under conditions of their choosing. Any number of aspects of the art world can constrain the choices made by creators. This insight echoes that of Acord and DeNora (2008), who, inspired by actor-network-theory, expand the web of influences to include all potential actants – including artistic objects themselves. An example of this is given by Hennion (1997) who traces the effects of technological change on different genres of music, and Acord (2010) examines how curators deal with the physical presence of artworks themselves when putting together an exhibit. This idea is also implicit in some more traditional studies of how constraints affect artworks. Lyon (1974), for instance, traces the effect of one new resource (a new performing space) on the play the company that she studied produced:

Each resource interacted with the others (as shown, the new place led to a new kind of script, new stage, new time constraints, greater expenditure, greater centralization of responsibility in the director, and increased conflict) to limit and define organization leading to performance, and hence the performance aesthetic. (ibid., pp. 94-95)

In the context of her larger piece on the effects of resource constraints on the creation of theatre, Lyon uses this one example to show how the changes in available resources influence the overall artistic output. By taking insights gleaned from more traditional studies of art worlds – that they are interconnected and resource-contingent – we can better understand how decision-making processes affect the final artistic outcome.

Becker (1982) in attempting to study the collaborative nature of art worlds, divides the inhabitants into two groups – artists and support personnel. In turn, he defines these groups by the kind of work that they do – that artists perform those tasks at the core of the creation of art which require artistic abilities, while support personnel perform those tasks that are not unique to that world, and often display skills common to occupational worlds outside of the arts. Further research into artists and artistic work has shown that it is often hard to draw a clear distinction between artists and non-artists in the art world. Bourdieu's (1993; 1996) framework of the field of cultural production reveals the ways in which artists contend with both market and artistic logics, serving multiple audiences and actors. He finds that, paradoxically, pursuing artistic success (as measured by the approbation of one's peers) often means shunning economic success, and vice versa ("selling out"). Lena and Lindemann (2014) show that significant numbers of individuals claim simultaneously that they are not professional artists but that they have worked in artistic occupations. They attempt to explain this paradox by arguing that many of these individuals are on the periphery of art worlds. Bain (2005) explains that because most artists do not make their living by selling their art, they must construct artistic identities based on Romantic myths of what it means to be an artist. Kordsmeier (2011) documents how art world members see support personnel as artistic if not artists. To some extent, this difficulty in distinguishing between artists and support personnel stems from the fact that both artists and support personnel engage in work that is both artistic and non-artistic in nature.

Drawing on Becker's definition, I define the activities at the center of art worlds that directly affect the artwork itself (displays of artistic judgment and virtuosity) as artistic work and the work that is not unique to art worlds or does not directly affect the artwork (the work of management, communication) as non-artistic work. This distinction parallels the distinction set out by Fine (1992) in his study of the role of aesthetic choices in the work of chefs. Fine notes that culinary work consists of bundles of creative work (coming up with aesthetically pleasing dishes) and non-creative work (managing the resources of the kitchen.) All work, Fine argues, consists of these kinds of tasks, no matter what the field of endeavor, just in different proportions based on the field and the particular social context.

Even though all personnel in art worlds engage in both kinds of activities, it is still useful to study support personnel as individuals who are crucial to the creation of art and to explore the effects they have on the ultimate artistic outcome. In order to explore these topics, I chose stage managers in the theatre as my case to study. Stage managers, as support personnel, demonstrate two ways in which support personnel affect artistic outcomes. They demonstrate that support personnel can affect artistic outcomes both by making artistic choices and by affecting the work that others do by adding non-artistic inputs.

METHODS

I employed qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and qualitative documentary analysis. I obtained my sample by cold-calling or emailing production directors of theatre companies and theatre programs in two Midwestern cities and one Southern city and expanded my sample through snowball sampling. I interviewed thirty-seven theatre world members, including twenty-three stage managers. In addition to interviewing stage managers, I interviewed actors, directors, and stagehands affiliated with the productions I observed. Interviews ranged anywhere from forty-five minutes to two hours, with interviews with stage managers typically being one and a half to two times longer than those with other theatre professionals.

I also conducted extensive participant observation of two full productions, following (in both cases) a three-person stage management team through their activities at work, arriving when they arrived, and leaving when they left. As a part of these observations, I accumulated several documents that I analyzed along with my interview and field note transcripts. Stage managers, as a part of their jobs, generate an enormous amount of paperwork. For every day of rehearsal, for every production meeting, and for every day of performances, a stage manager generally writes and distributes, via email, a rehearsal or performance report to all of the different personnel involved in the production. I was able to obtain all of these reports for both productions that I observed.

Guided by the Grounded Theory methods developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967; Strauss 1987) and further developed by other theorists (Charmaz, 2006), I coded my data thematically, with few pre-existing theoretical ideas, and looked for themes to

emerge as I compared my interviews, field notes, and other documents to each other. I did this coding iteratively throughout the process, developing my focus in both interviews and observations based upon the emergent themes.

THE PHASES OF PRODUCTION AND THE WORK OF THE STAGE MANAGER

This paper will now explain the work of the stage manager and how that work affects the final product: the play the audience sees each night. The next section describes the actual work that the stage manager does, and importantly, how that work varies depending on the phase of production. In particular, I focus on the distinct roles the stage manager undertakes during rehearsals, technical rehearsals, and performances. The following section describes three ways that the work stage managers carry out can have an impact on the play. Following Fine (1992), I distinguish between artistic and non-artistic aspects of stage managers' jobs. Within the realm of artistic aspects of their jobs, I argue that stage managers display both artistic judgment, evaluating and managing the aesthetic elements of the play, and artistic virtuosity, direct artistic contributions to the play that require artistic ability. I also find that stage managers affect the play through their non-artistic inputs; they do so by shaping the context in which actors display artistic virtuosity.

The use of stage managers has become widespread in professional theatre and is reflected in the fact that any show in the United States that employs Equity¹ actors must employ an Equity stage manager. Stage managers have altered the ways in which theatre is performed, which in turn affects artistic outcomes, allowing for greater technical innovation and role specialization within the theatre art world.

Few authors have written about the historical changes in the theatre that led to the creation of the role of the stage manager. Most stage management guidebooks do not mention its history or are murky as to its origin², pinning its emergence to sometime in the late Renaissance as a position that had similarities to both the modern director and modern stage manager, while stage management's modern incarnation is traced to the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. A typical treatment is Fazio (2000), who writes, "With the advent of elaborate sets, multiple costume changes, mechanical scenery and devices, gas lighting, and the lime-light spotlight, the SM's job split into the two positions as we know them today – the director and the SM." (ibid., p. 5) The position of stage manager grew out of the increasing division of labor associated with the expanding technical complexity and specialization of the modern theatre. As stage management exists today, that role changes depending on the phase of production.

THE REHEARSAL PHASE

As its name suggests, the focus of the rehearsal phase is acting rehearsals. There, the actors and director work together to create the actors' portion of the production³. This starts with having the cast read the script aloud together, and eventually

¹ Actors Equity Association, the union for actors and stage managers in the theatre.

² One author (Ciccarone 2007) suggests that it might be fitting that stage management's history is as "behind-the-scenes" as the job itself.

³ For a discussion of rehearsals from the perspective of actors and directors, see Lyon 1982.

proceeds to the collaboration of actors and the director to create the blocking⁴ and all of the other elements of the acting for the show – characterization and relationships between actors, primarily.

Stage managers are present for all acting rehearsals, serving a few primary functions. First, stage managers work to prepare the space for rehearsals, ensuring that essentials like water and coffee are available, and that certain tasks that are key to the rehearsal itself, like taping an outline of the set on the floor, are done. Stage managers also serve as a second-in-command to the director in the rehearsal hall, taking on the more organizational-oriented tasks, such as calling actors if they are late and keeping track of time for breaks.

Rehearsals are not the only activities during this stage of production. While the actors and director are working together to create the acted elements of the play, the technical designers and shops are busy producing the other elements. Stage managers figure in this process in two major ways, which are both centered on communicating information between the rehearsal hall and all of the other aspects of the production. The first way in which this information is communicated is through weekly production meetings⁵, which gather together all of the individuals involved with the technical aspects of the show. In general, this includes all the designers and shop heads, along with the director, the stage management team, and a production manager. While the production manager generally chairs these meetings, stage managers are key members of the meeting, working with the director to communicate how things are proceeding that week in rehearsals (if rehearsals have started), and what issues may have developed since the last meeting. At production meetings, the stage managers generally take notes and fill in information about rehearsals as needed.

The other way in which stage managers keep in contact with the production team during the rehearsal process is by creating rehearsal reports. These standardized forms include a general description of what had occurred at the day's rehearsals, as well as specific notes for each department based upon what had happened in rehearsals that day⁶. According to stage managers, these two ways of communicating are among their most important roles in the rehearsal process.

THE TECHNICAL REHEARSAL PHASE

The next phase of the production process is technical rehearsals. This is marked by the move of rehearsals from a rehearsal hall to the actual stage. The main purpose of technical rehearsals is to combine all the elements of production so that they begin to take the shape of the show as it will exist on opening night. This is a rehearsal for more than just the actors, as the stage manager must begin to develop a rapport with the technicians in order to determine when to call cues. This is also the first opportunity for the director and all of the designers to see all the elements working

⁴ All of the movement that actors do onstage, including both movement around the stage and gestures.

⁵ In some cases, these meetings actually start before rehearsals, at which time they tend to meet less often.

⁶ These notes were about things like new blocking and how it might affect sets or costumes, new props that the actors were using, and new sound cues or light cues that a director might want – like a short section of a song playing from a radio or a lighting effect to indicate sunrise.

together, and they will often adjust them in order to create a cohesive production. The technical rehearsals build to full dress rehearsal runs of the show and previews, where the cast and crew run the show as if it were a performance. The stage manager's job changes in technical rehearsals in that they must work out the timing of the show, constantly adjusting how they will call the cues, based upon notes from the director or designer.

THE PERFORMANCE PHASE

The last phase of the production process is performances. In most theatres, the director leaves after opening night. Occasionally, the director might come back in order to make sure everything is still in good order for a long-running show, or might come back for major cast changes in shows with open-ended runs. In the vast majority of cases, however, a director moves on once a play has opened, and the stage manager then becomes the main authority for both cast and crew. The stage manager employs this power in a variety of ways. They call cues for the show, continuing the work that they started during technical rehearsals. Every time the lights change or the sound system is used, a stage manager is directing that to happen, cuing someone on the communication system to do so.

The stage manager also is in charge of how both the crew and the actors carry out their jobs, oftentimes referred to as “maintaining a show.” Stage managers do this through a notes process, where they offer notes to all of the actors and crewmembers after every performance, usually as a part of performance reports. Performance reports are similar to rehearsal reports in that they are standardized reports that cover all of the elements of the play, this time including the acting performances. They are different in that they not only report what happened, but also instruct the actors or technicians as to the changes that they need to make.

Stage managers are involved in every step of the process of creating a play, from the beginning of rehearsals to closing night. They spend as much time in collaboration as anyone else involved in the play and are in communication with every other aspect of the production. Their centrality to the creation of a play makes them a key element of the production team and valued support personnel in theatre worlds.

HOW STAGE MANAGERS AFFECT ARTISTIC OUTCOMES

There are two major ways through which support personnel affect artistic outcomes in the creation of a work of art. The first way is by making artistic choices. While not typically thought of as being artistic (hence their classification as support personnel), they often are called upon to make choices that are artistic in nature. For instance, as Pardo (2010) points out, film producers make key decisions about personnel and projects that have a great effect on the final product. These choices reflect one kind of creative input: displaying *artistic judgment*. At the same time, Pardo argues that producers rarely make direct creative contributions to the final film itself, what I call displaying *artistic virtuosity*. As will be shown next, stage managers in the theatre art world, unlike film producers, must make both kinds of artistic

choices, corresponding to two key elements of their jobs: *maintaining a show* and *calling a show*. Maintaining a show requires a stage manager to exercise artistic judgment, while calling a show requires a stage manager to display artistic virtuosity.

DISPLAYING ARTISTIC JUDGMENT: MAINTAINING A SHOW

Part of the stage manager's job is to maintain the integrity of the show, displaying artistic judgment in determining whether the cast and crew remain true to the vision agreed upon during rehearsals. Stage managers do this in part by managing the tempo of the show as set by the director; much like a conductor maintains the tempo of an orchestra that was set by the composer. It also means ensuring that performances stay within the artistic spirit of the show. Stern and O'Grady (2012), in their guidebook for stage managers, write, "The most difficult problem in a long-running production is keeping the quality of each performance as good as it was on opening night." (ibid., p. 199). They then go on to list all of the ways that actors might try to change their performance by adding in new blocking, lines, pauses, etc., sometimes by accident and sometimes in an effort to get a bigger reaction from the audience (ibid.). They caution that stage managers need to remain vigilant in light of these breaches.

At the same time, there may be occasions when the stage manager decides that changes to the performance are entirely in keeping with the original intent established in rehearsals. For example, in one show, the director and actors had lengthened the amount of time two characters took saying goodbye to each other in order to accommodate a quick change⁷ that another actor had to make. After a few weeks of running the show, the quick change got much more efficient, leading to the following excerpt from a performance report from the stage manager:

We're looking into tightening what's happening onstage during Bethany's⁸ quick change at the end of the show. They took a full 5 seconds off of the time of the change tonight!

In response to this improvement in the quick change timing, the stage manager has an acting note for the actors who are onstage during this exchange, which she includes later in the performance report:

Thomas/Barry: You can tighten the goodbye.

The stage manager used her discretion to change the blocking in order to keep the show running at a good clip. Because the drawn-out goodbye between two characters had been put in place to cover the quick change, this stage manager reasoned that although changing the pace at which the two said goodbye would affect the overall artistic product, it would still be within the original artistic intent of the director. In other words, the stage manager changes the way the actors portray the scene onstage in order to bring an ever-changing show more in line with the artistic spirit established by the director and cast during rehearsals.

⁷ A costume change that has to be done in a short period of time. In this case, the change took about a minute.

⁸ All names used are pseudonyms, and other identifying information about the people and plays has been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Maintaining a show requires that the stage manager is able to understand the artistic nuance that is established during rehearsals so that they can know what constitutes “good” or “bad” runs of the show – which here means performances that correspond to the artistic intentions of the director. As stage manager Dorothy puts it:

The stage manager is responsible for maintaining the artistic intentions of the director after the opening. This is the largest task because the SM needs to judge between what the actor’s brought to the role between rehearsal and opening and the growth that the cast will experience with the opening, with the actor’s experience of the role due to the added tech and the ever-changing reaction of the audience. This is where intuition comes in handy. Artistic intention does not mean that it is frozen in time like a film, artistic intention means that this stage manager better have a good feel for the road that this piece is to travel.

For Dorothy, maintaining the show means relying on “intuition” in order to ensure that the actors maintain the director’s artistic intentions. The stage manager must understand what the director’s intentions were and then extrapolate to the ways in which a show will naturally change and develop over time. This helps to explain the artistic importance of the stage manager at rehearsals. Even though they are not the individuals responsible for making the artistic decisions at this stage of the process, stage managers must be present to observe the artistic development of the show to maintain the artistic integrity of the show.

It is difficult for a stage manager who has not been present from the beginning of rehearsals to understand this development if they join the process at a later date. One stage manager, Wendy, relates the difficulty this presents:

Maintaining a show is hard, especially for ... the show I’m doing now, we didn’t rehearse it ‘cause they’ve done it a million times, so we just had a couple days of tech and it opened. Which is fine, but it’s hard for me to give notes because the rehearsal process wasn’t there and that’s how I respond to things. Even as they change things as they grow [over the course of the performances], you can go back to what happened in rehearsal and say, “Oh right, well now they’re just finding a pattern that they hadn’t got to with the director, great, and that’s exactly what he wanted.” And then you can have a conversation with them about it and say, “I see what you’re doing – it’s great.” So that’s been a challenge for this show, ‘cause I’m like, “It’s very funny.” So I just have very little to say, except for “Don’t get out of your light.”

This stage manager is at a disadvantage because she did not get the opportunity to be there throughout the rehearsal process, and feels this has compromised her ability to carry out her artistic duty. It is impossible for her to maintain the director’s vision, when the director ended the rehearsal process long before she began her duties. Instead, she can only focus on the technical aspects of the show. In other words, she is not able to perform the job that she would like to be doing, because she does not have the necessary experience to display her artistic judgment.

DISPLAYING ARTISTIC VIRTUOSITY: CALLING A SHOW

Calling a show, on the other hand, is less a display of artistic judgment than it is a display of artistic virtuosity. As mentioned above, calling a show involves giving cues

to the appropriate person offstage that they should do whatever is expected of them. Stage managers cue light and sound board operators to push buttons and create light and sound effects, cue stagehands to take objects on or offstage, and cue assistant stage managers to tell actors to enter, among many other things. They may base these cues on lines in the script, movements by the actors onstage, or even subtle changes in the music underscoring a scene. The key to calling a show is maintaining the rhythm of that show. One stage manager, Dana, reports:

It is artistic in that – I’m going to go and sound all egotistical here, but it’s true – I can make or break a show with the way that I sense the rhythms of the calling on a nightly basis. I can call badly and ruin the best of shows. There is an art to calling a show, and that is very artistic.

For this stage manager and others, calling a show is not only about making sure that things happen when they are supposed to happen technically. It also means that the stage manager has a feel for how the show is supposed to flow, and controls that to a large degree with the rhythm with which she calls the show.

The ability to maintain this flow in the calling of a show is crucial, especially when the conditions make it impossible for the stage manager to call cues in their accustomed fashion. Most stage managers call cues by verifying with board operators, stagehands, or assistant stage managers what is going to happen before it actually does. A typical exchange between a stage manager and lighting board operator goes:

Stage Manager: Standby, light cue 47.

Light Board Operator: Light cue 47, standing by.

Stage Manager: Light cue 47, go.

On “Go” the board operator pushes a button, causing the intended effect. The cuing of lights, sounds, and other effects also demonstrates how aesthetic materials can affect the mediation that is an artwork. The invention of a new material technology (the complex, computerized systems that control the lights and sounds in a theater) required a new social technology (the system described above).

This new technology allowed the complexity of light and sound cues to grow as well, sometimes outstripping the conventionalized language available to stage managers and forcing them to adapt it to new circumstances. On one production, the stage manager had a series of sound and light cues that occurred so quickly, one after the other, that the traditional way of calling cues would have made all but the first one or two cues late. Instead, she worked hard with her sound and light technicians to recognize exactly where these cues occurred during the course of the play and what the specific cue numbers were during technical rehearsals. During the actual run of the show, she would call the cues by saying, “Next up, we have thirteen light and sound cues that happen together and three light cues that happen on their own.” Her next call would be, “Sound and lights – go”, followed by twelve “Go” cues in quick succession; several of them based not upon the lines the actors were speaking, but based upon the visual picture that their movement was forming onstage. Then she would cue “Now, just lights – go – go – go,” based upon the movement of the actors

on the stage. Getting just one of these cues too early or too late would take away from the intricate dance and scene that were going on concurrently. Calling a show well is of the utmost importance to a good stage manager. This task, along with the task of maintaining a show, is one of the two ways whereby stage managers directly affect the artistic outcome of a show.

THE ARTISTIC EFFECTS OF NON-ARTISTIC INPUTS

Just like any other job (Fine, 1992), not everything that workers in culture industries do is driven by artistic intentions. Actors may weigh economic considerations more heavily than artistic ones when selecting a job (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007). Actors also engage in activities that do not require artistic sensibilities – for instance, in almost all theatrical productions, actors must memorize their lines. Yet this does not mean that these non-artistic inputs are not without their own aesthetic effects, since actors, in order to fully immerse themselves in the artistic work of fully portraying a character, first needed to have their lines memorized. As Lyon (1982) writes, “the details and nuances of character and action were only approached after actors no longer carried their scripts.” (ibid., p. 82)

For stage managers there are many non-artistic tasks associated with the job, from sweeping the rehearsal room and making coffee, to writing up extensive rehearsal reports that communicate the work that goes on to the rest of the company, to personnel management. Yet how a stage manager goes about these tasks can have a strong impact on the artistic outcomes of the show. Even then, it may be difficult to define any particular activity as purely creative or non-creative. As Essin (2011) writes, “[stage] technicians’ labor [is] a type of choreography, both a functional *and* aesthetic practice.” (p. 35, emphasis his). Work practices often have both functional and creative impacts. One of the key ways in which stage managers affect artistic outcomes through functional work is in how they manage actors.

Stage managers use emotion work to display to actors that their first priority is the overall success of the show (Kordsmeier, 2011). By demonstrating a commitment to the show, the stage manager can make it clear to actors that the decisions that they make are not capricious or driven by ego. Yet this emotion work has artistic consequences beyond allowing them to maintain the show. The emotion work of stage managers when preparing a safe psychological space not only makes actors feel that stage managers care for them; it also has an impact on the characters that the actors create.

Stage managers feel that the ways in which they manage actors can have an effect on their artistic performances. They believe that in order to create emotionally resonant, complex characters, actors must be able to enter an almost altered state of consciousness. Stage managers try to prevent actors from coming out of character, because actors must exert a tremendous effort to get into character in the first place (ibid.; Orzechowicz, 2008). As Orzechowicz (2008) notes, they play a key role in providing an institutional resource that allows actors to perform as what he calls privileged emotion managers. He argues that because so much of an actor’s job

consists of managing their own emotions and evoking emotions in others, they rely on structural resources, the social arrangements in which they are embedded, to create fully lived-in, believable performances. One such resource is an emotional division of labor. Sometimes acting as a structural resource involves confronting the emotions expressed by actors head-on. As Orzechowicz writes, “When actors voice concerns, frustration, confusion, or any other stressful response, the stage manager often works to address the issue(s) and calm the actors” (ibid., p. 147). Other times, the work of the stage manager is to take care of any technical concerns that might interfere with the work that actors accomplish. Take, for instance, line memorization:

In rehearsals, I guess, the most important thing I think [I do] is the line calling, if the actor is going along saying their lines and they forget one, they call out “Line”, and one of the stage management team gives it to them, “loud and clear” [she says this as if repeating something by rote], so that they don’t have to come out of whatever place they’re in to think of this line. You know, that way they can just keep going. I guess if it’s a difficult role to get into, you don’t want them to have to come out of it and go into it again, all that stuff, it slows down rehearsal and what they’re doing.

In this case, Alex, another stage manager, identifies the psychological protection of the actors as not only an important function of her job as stage manager, but also as the most important function. It is clear this is not only her interpretation of the job. The way that she singsongs “loud and clear” as if she is repeating something by rote, indicates that this is a phrase that she has heard repeatedly in her training. Her teachers or mentors must have felt that this is a crucial duty of the stage manager.

The importance of understanding how actors call for their lines and how best to offer these was emphasized by a conversation that I observed between a stage manager and an assistant stage manager during my fieldwork. My field notes read:

James [lead actor]: This is, this is, this is – Line.

Alice [stage manager]: This is what they call a change of heart.

(Pause) Becky [assistant stage manager]: This is what they call a change of heart.

At the next break, Alice turns to Becky, and says, in a whisper:

Alice: Becky, you’re still being a little too soft with being on book and even if you need to follow along with your pencil, you need to be much quicker.

Becky: Well, I’m getting it when they call for lines, but it’s hard to tell when they need me.

Alice: Well, even when they’re calling for lines, you need to be faster. And there were times when James was [makes a c’mon gesture] and you came in too late.

Becky: I just can’t tell when they need help, especially Benny [another actor].

Alice: Well, you need to learn their process, and you should probably give him more time in his process. Doing.

Alice is trying to explain to Becky, an inexperienced stage manager, that the way in which she is offering the lines is interfering with the way in which the actors are working, something that affects their artistic process. Becky is overwhelmed with learning how each actor calls for a line differently, as some actors will call for a line,

others will repeat the same line a few times, and others will just pause. Alice, however, argues that it is Becky's job to adjust the way that she offers lines to each particular actor, instead of the actors needing to call for their lines in a consistent manner.

Learning the way each actor calls for lines is important because if the stage manager takes too long to offer the next line, the whole process slows down and the actors cannot establish any flow in their scenes. Becky had interfered to the point that the next night, when I arrived at the theater and went to Alice's office, the following scene took place:

Alice and Karen [the other assistant stage manager] are talking about Karen taking over being on book for tonight. Alice says that she wanted to give Becky time to develop but that she is slowing us down so much that she doesn't want it to be done anymore.

Becky's inability to keep up with the pace that the actors were trying to establish led to her losing that part of her job. On the other hand, an overzealous stage manager can cause problems if they do not pay attention to the way in which an actor is playing a particular line. That same night that Karen took over on book for Becky, my notes read:

Hannah [actress]: Letter?

Karen [assistant stage manager]: For Madame Eloise.

Alice [stage manager]: Actually, I think he was just pausing there.

After the scene, Karen grabs Jack [an actor].

Karen: I'm sorry that I jumped your line. You were pausing, not stumbling.

Jack: It's okay.

Because she was not paying enough attention to what was happening in the scene, Karen thought that when Jack did not immediately offer the line, "For Madame Eloise" after Hannah had offered her line, "Letter?", that he had forgotten his line. This was compounded by the puzzled manner in which Jack reacted to the line, "Letter?" Yet Jack's apparent confusion and his pause were both products of the fact that his character was confused by the question that Hannah's character had asked him – he knew perfectly well what his next line was, and had, in fact portrayed that confusion in previous rehearsals. Karen did not understand that he did, in fact, know his lines, and in the process of offering Jack his line, interrupted the flow of the scene. Doing a good job of being on book is a way that a stage manager can demonstrate that they respect the process that actors go through to get into character. It might even be argued that by understanding the timing and characterizations performed by the actors this input is just as artistic as calling a show, as stage managers play a key role in the mediations that are constitutive of a work of art, whether they recognize that aspect as artistic or not.

CONCLUSION

Stage managers offer a powerful example of two ways in which support personnel can affect the artistic outcomes of a work of art. They have a direct impact on the artworks by making decisions that are artistic in nature. I found that stage managers do this through displays of artistic judgment when they maintain shows and displays of artistic virtuosity when they call shows. Yet stage managers, as support personnel, also have indirect impact on artistic outcomes. They affect the emotional quality of actors' performances by serving as emotional buffers and creating a safe psychological space. This not only serves as a base of power for stage managers, it also allows actors to give performances that they consider richer and more fully realized.

By combining a theory of art worlds that rests on a division of labor between artists and support personnel, and a genetic theory of artworks, I am able to not only demonstrate how support personnel are necessary to the creation of artworks but also that they play an important role in shaping the final product. I am also able to demonstrate how sociologists can combine Becker's genetic theory of artistic production with other research in the sociology of art to explicate all of the various factors that can affect the creation of a work of art. Furthermore, by considering the processes of mediation (which constitute art) that are performed by stage managers themselves, I have shown how their skills are intertwined with words, emotions, actions, and the technologies involved in the preparation of the performance as well as the performance itself. Further research should explore other connections between the production of art and the artworks themselves, as well as other social forces that may influence their creation. For instance, sociologists should examine the social institutions that are key elements of art worlds, including cultural institutions, government agencies, schools, and commercial institutions, for the effects that they have on artworks. Additionally, researchers should study larger social forces, including markets and cultural movements, to understand how they could affect artworks. I suggest that researchers should incorporate the agency of aesthetic materials affecting the mediations that constitute art, examining how new material and social technologies reconfigure the web of interactions that influence the final work. Finally, researchers should examine smaller interpersonal interactions to determine how they affect artworks as well. The genetic theory of art allows sociologists of art to take all the knowledge that they have accumulated about the production of art, from large social forces to interpersonal interaction, and use it to understand not only the contexts in which artists work, but the mediations that constitute the artworks themselves.

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