

Creative Production and Management in the Performing Arts

Modus Operandi

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Conclusion

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Conclusion

Another place for cultural management

Since this is a journey that began with the perplexities and dilemmas revealed by my daily routine of production and management in the performing arts, it is on the side of uncertainty that I wish to remain faithful. Certainty, after all, is a ‘disease of knowledge’ (Coutinho, 2021).

What follows in this concluding segment are thus transitory dispositions: they record a timestamp in a field undergoing accelerated change, subject to enormous internal and external challenges and deeply shaken by the occurrence of the pandemic; they echo the experiences and discourses of real people, including myself, in their inconstancy and incessant transformation; they reflect a work that sought to strike a precarious balance between epistemological exploration and consideration of the practical implications of the knowledge it was accumulating. Transitional dispositions, moreover, because the field of research in which this work is inscribed remains frankly underexplored, in need of further analysis and a deeper critical dialogue. With this proviso in mind, let us now muse on the conclusive contributions we have reached, which are fundamentally based on two levels: the first is related to the characterisation and problematisation of the current place of production and management professions, including their articulation with the organisational dimension, that is, with the working modes and models in performing arts structures; the second concerns the interpretation of the contemporary challenges of arts management, pointing to the need for an epistemological and critical (re)configuration of the field and to the urgency of an ethically informed discourse of practice.

Redefining the work of producers and managers in the arts

The broad processes of the constitution of the modern state, in general, and the developments towards the institutionalisation of culture, in particular, have progressively led to the professionalisation of cultural occupations. In different geographies and socio-political contexts, the 1990s decisively triggered the professionalisation of artistic intermediation activities, namely

those corresponding to production and arts management professions. In Portugal, the professionalisation of this field was particularly evident from this decisive decade onwards due to three concurrent, mutually influencing and reinforcing elements: (1) the expansion and consolidation of cultural policies and a set of public institutions and initiatives; (2) the cycle of major cultural events held between 1991 and 2001; and (3) the correlated growth in the supply of specialised professional and higher education training. Despite the weaknesses related to the sector's severe economic constraints and the debilities and discontinuities of national cultural policies, the trajectory towards professionalisation of artistic structures is unequivocal. This trend towards professionalisation has led to a division and specialisation of roles, encompassing organisational activities related to artistic creation, which, after being initially carried out by the artists themselves or by volunteers, have become increasingly specialised, leading to the development of a professional milieu. The constellation of agents involved in producing and managing artistic projects and structures has largely become professionalised on the job, accessing specialised training late and taking time to consolidate characteristics commonly associated with 'professions'. This professional galaxy corresponds to a set of functions and activities that have undoubtedly gained importance in the face of the complexification of the cultural and artistic field. However, they remain weakly objectified, and their process of legitimisation presents significant flaws, translated into difficulties of recognition by the administrative, statistical, and legal systems, in a tepid internal cohesion expressed in diminished associative activity and, overall, in a deficit of reflexivity in the field. According to a variety of criteria established to determine the process of formation and legitimisation of professions in contemporary times, it can be said that the professionalisation of producers and arts managers is an incomplete process, given the pluri-activity and overlapping of functions which still categorically define working in the cultural sector; given the incipient associative dynamics; and given the dynamics of recruitment, which show signs of a low level of appreciation of the specific competencies and the importance of specialised training required for these functions. This situation is also influenced by the fact that the education offered in the area, although well developed, is still scattered across various disciplinary areas, which makes it difficult to establish and specialise, as well as the dispersion of producers and managers across a vast spectrum of activity arenas, with their activities translating into such a diversity of operational and conceptual realities that any attempt at systematisation is complicated. The *lack of professionalisation and specialisation* in the area is clearly pointed out by the agents, who at the same time emphasise the need to overcome it, with their discourses showing an unequivocal appreciation, particularly among the younger generation, of the importance of these professions in the context of artistic

activities and structures. However, the objective working conditions of producers and managers, and the (lack of) social recognition and critical discussion of their role in the arts ecosystem indicate that this valorisation corresponds more to a discursive appropriation than a substantive one. It is even possible to argue that the *professionalisation* of this field is not only *unfinished* but also still *contested*, insofar as there are discernible public discourses that do not endorse the specialisation of production and management functions, either because they believe they are integral to an artist's activity or because they associate these professions with a mercantilist drift of art. Along the same lines, production and management functions are often valued only to the extent that they generally represent mechanisms for enabling/facilitating artistic practice rather than for the specific contribution they can make. The *accentuated instrumentalisation* of these professions in favour of their skills in fundraising, in a context of scarcity and hyper-competition, contributes to devaluing the contribution that these professionals can bring to artistic projects, making them easily dispensable or keeping them in the category of 'necessary evil' (to deal with the boring or 'dirty' aspects, such as administrative dealings with the state or the pursuit of money). This may have been due to the specific historical timing of the emergence and growth of the production and management professions, which, in the Portuguese case (and in several other European and non-European territories), led them to be indelibly associated, on a symbolic level, with policies and guidelines that favoured efficiency, and results and market orientation. The resulting misunderstandings are therefore quite notorious today, particularly in the *mismatch* between a legitimisation of the field based on a supposedly universal and post-ideological technical and instrumental rationality, and the concrete practices, dispositions, motivations, and ambitions of its professionals. Another fairly certain indicator that the field's legitimisation trajectory (social, labour, epistemological) is incomplete is the difficulties, hesitations and divergences regarding professional designations. Public discourses reveal tendencies of *vagueness*, *interpenetration*, and *dispute* regarding the appropriate nomenclatures and designations. If, on the one hand, the language used generally shows signs of greater awareness of the diversity and interdependence of the various agents and professions that effectively make up and sustain the artistic ecosystem, on the other hand, the difficulties of definition and discomfort reported by professionals remain, a trend that is also noticeable in other geographies and apparently independent of the specific timing for the introduction of these professions into the arts lexicon in each place, effectively denouncing the lack of sedimentation of designations and the terminological instability of the field. This situation may be partly attributable to the time variable (the relatively recent nature of these professions) or to the specificities of work in the area, which is characterised by its breadth,

diversity, pluri-activity, and precariousness. We also note the persistence of blurred lines between 'production' and 'management' which, although not based on obviously heterogeneous skills profiles, will nevertheless contribute to the difficulties of (self) designation and the corresponding construction of a professional identity, in a climate in which there is also some turbulence and mutations in the boundaries between various professions in the artistic field, with signs of *hybridisation* between the organisational sphere and the artistic and curatorial spheres. Finally, it is argued that these impasses are also related to the *double deficit of reflexivity (individual and of the field)*, verifiable both from the difficulties reported by the agents and from the 'class amnesia' in which they seem to operate. In fact, the producers and managers seem to engage above all in a type of 'functional reflexivity', oriented towards problem-solving and decision-making, to the detriment of maturing a 'self-awareness' as professionals, which is also due to the fact that they recognise (in the context of the interviews carried out) that their daily practices are poorly supported on a theoretical level, and insufficiently discussed and problematised among peers.

In terms of working conditions, these professionals align with the general profile of artistic work in the current era of late capitalism, characterised by acceleration and precariousness. They face comparable vulnerabilities as they undertake flexible, immaterial work while managing temporary or unstable projects, constantly engaging in *multitasking*, *networking*, and permanent *stand-by*. In addition, there is a notable prevalence of intense professional nomadism, exploitative practices towards young professionals, and a relentless pace of work that contribute to a challenging experience of projective temporality and frequent burnout situations.

The producers' and managers' personal, family, social, and educational backgrounds reveal a multiplicity of paths to entering the profession, the 'choice' of which may have been determined by the socialisation contexts (family and school) and the possibilities of early contact with the artistic sphere. This does not, though, result in a one-size-fits-all social recruitment process, with different ways of approaching the cultural field being discernible from the point of view of personal and socio-economic dispositions, as well as a broad recruitment base in terms of the education and training routes for access to the profession, which are highly multidisciplinary and predominantly focussed on artistic areas and the social sciences and humanities. In accordance with this range of approaches and qualifications, the discourse of producers and managers often extols their 'calling' to work in the industry, with the artistic element being prominently cited as what defines their profession and what undoubtedly influenced their decision to enter this professional field. From a knowledge perspective, the appreciation of artistic and technical knowledge as equally important and intertwined is prominent. Additionally,

the utilisation of *organisational*, *relational*, and *critical* skills results in a complex and hybrid professional configuration. The strong dedication they exhibit towards the arts, coupled with their motivations and fundamental qualifications, firmly establishes these professions within the artistic realm, much more so than in the sphere of economics, administration, or management, the locus of various practical and symbolic disagreements in terms of the representations and possibilities of the professions in question. The characterisation of these professions, as well as the dispositions and aspirations of those who exercise them, seem to be somewhat at odds with the 'place' – effective and symbolic – that the professions occupy in terms of practices and representations; with the different 'roles' they are called upon to fulfil; and, to a certain extent, in conflict with the more common and tendentially objective nomenclatures ('producer' and 'manager' suggesting more of a technical and pragmatic role than the complexity they actually involve).

Our analysis of the place that production and management typically occupy in the organisational models prevalent in the performing arts sector pointed to three defining dynamics: *invisibility*, *subordination* and *pragmatism*.

As far as *invisibility* is concerned, this is expressed in a very particular way by female producers and managers: on the one hand, pointing out 'backstage' as their 'comfort zone' and 'discretion' as the 'modus operandi' necessary for certain tasks associated with their professions, on the other, pointing out that the recognition they deserve for their contribution to the projects in which they are involved is far below what they would consider fair. The ambivalence portrayed is equivalent to the distinction we make between invisibility and 'being rendered invisible'. Diverse in their contexts and detailed in the experiences they recount, the interviews nevertheless reveal some patterns of response that can be grouped, in which invisibility emerges (a) associated with a devaluation of the profession/its role, (b) associated with the difficulty in associating the contribution of production and management with the 'success' of a project, and also (c) as a sign and symptom of a lack of professionalisation. The discussion of invisibility also includes consideration of the problematic definition of 'success' and the relative lack of questioning about the historiographies of artistic and intellectual consecration that hide the work of various agents who contribute to it.

As far as *subordination* is concerned, we found the existence of strong hierarchical relationships in the context of artistic organisations, with many producers working in a quite pronounced logic of direct subordination to artists and artistic directors and reporting low levels of autonomy. Most of the responses fell into one of two streams of meaning: (a) either they had to do with the vertical organisation of work or (b) they related to issues of discrepancy of power.

Regarding pragmatism, a large majority of respondents feel that it is overvalued in relation to the complexity of their duties and potential work opportunities. This sentiment is reflected by the predominant focus on production as “executive production” in recruitment advertisements, highlighting both the pragmatic bias and a lack of specialisation. Specifically, three lines of argument can be discerned in their discourses: (a) that their responsibilities and capabilities are often reduced to the financial sphere; (b) that their time is disproportionately occupied with administrative-bureaucratic tasks; and (c) that they often feel that the complexity associated with the exercise of their functions is undervalued. The epithet of ‘hybrid’ regarding the nature of production and management professions does seem more appropriate than the more commonly used ways of characterising them, which overemphasise the divergence from the artistic dimension. It will also give a fairer expression to the complexity that was systematically pointed out throughout the research in different ways, namely: (a) complexity in terms of the difficulty of defining the role; (b) complexity arising from the multiplicity, overlap and constant alternation of roles/types of tasks/dimensions; (c) complexity in terms of the intellectual demands of the role, i.e. the range of knowledge and skills needed to perform it; and (d) complexity in terms of the emotional demands of the profession.

The triad of *invisibility*, *subordination*, and *pragmatism* is dominant not only in the practices and representations of the production and management professions but also in how they are treated in the dedicated literature and academia. While the documentation tasks associated with the stages of emergence and consolidation of these professions seem to have been reasonably fulfilled (it is now possible to find various publications describing and systematising the technical and interpersonal skills needed to perform them), it can be seen that their development has not resulted in a routine of problematisation or even public discussion about the constitution of a dedicated field of reflection. The bibliography is insufficient; the limited publications dedicated to them exhibit an evident operational bias, primarily comprising of ‘how to’ approaches. Within the scope of specialised publications in theatre studies or art history, it is extremely rare to find references to the material and immaterial modes of production of artistic creation and even rarer to include the voices of producers and managers – voices that are scarcely documented and analysed, and therefore seldom included in the history of the performing arts, with the bias remaining in favour of the works and authors, due to the persistence of the romantic myth of the artist as genius, and *obliterating the modes of production and the producers and managers as subjects of that history*.

The unequivocal trajectory of professionalisation, standardisation, or legitimisation of the production and management professions thus seems to have been achieved despite the reinforcement of a set of negative

characteristics – invisibility, subordination and pragmatism – without considering either the alternatives or the consequences of applying this regime of collaboration between creation and production. Contradictions and fissures in the relationship between artists and producers/managers are pointed out, illuminating discursive and practical discrepancies in the concrete application of the concept of ‘collaboration’, emphatically omnipresent in the portraits of work in the cultural and artistic sector.

In Portugal, as in other geographies, artistic trajectories and structures have ‘slimmed down’ and atomised, becoming increasingly precarious, but the ‘one artist, one structure’ model remains the paradigmatic organisational model in the arts, apparently not having been annulled by the extraordinary corrosion caused by the project economy accentuated by neoliberal individualism. Thus, one can argue that the symbolic weight of the ‘company’ has diminished, but various forms of collective organisation regarding artistic practice continue to operate. This includes the custom of artists creating ‘companies’, ‘associations’, and ‘structures’ among themselves, which may later involve employing producers if financial resources permit. Analysing the persistence of these organisational dynamics and the discourses of professionals and students in the area, we argue that the lack of reflexivity, professionalisation, and specialisation that we previously noted regarding the identification and exercise of cultural production and management professions also applies to the organisational dimension, both in terms of practices and representations. This situation can be seen in the incipient reflection on the suitability or unsuitability of a given organisational model for a given artistic project. In fact, it is concluded that among the artists who are now starting or have recently started their trajectories, the decision on how to organise themselves (a) is often devalued, depending on the proximity and friendship ties that unite the initiators of a project; (b) is often precipitated according to public funding opportunities that presuppose or oblige the formal constitution of the proponents in an entity with legal personality; (c) is mainly taken for instrumental reasons (such as the need to create their own job) and operational reasons (such as the most favourable tax regime, for example) and, above all, (d) does not benefit from the expertise of producers and managers, insofar as artists continue, for the most part, to create structures among themselves, composed almost exclusively of artists, with producers not appearing at the founding stage of the structures.

Hence, we contend that the relationship between creation and production, even among recent collectives, predominantly operates on a *transactional* basis as a form of *service*. This may involve *internal service* if there exists the opportunity for hiring/ having permanent support or *external service* for more occasional collaborations. In other words, regardless of the nature of the labour relationship – whether production/management

is contractual or freelance – production/management, being something *acquired* by the artistic collective and not an integral part of it, is condemned to being something outside the artistic ‘thing’. The relevance of this situation ties in with various aspects that emerged from our research: the fact that creation and production are not very convergent; the contradiction between the recognition of the importance of the production/management component and its relative absence of substantive knowledge; the lack of knowledge and investment in the organisational dimension on the part of cultural and artistic structures; and, above all, the risks that such a distancing from management and organisational matters entails for artists and producers/managers working together. We deduce from these patterns of organisational and operating modes, and from the characteristics of invisibility, subordination and pragmatism of intra-organisational ties between creation and production, a clear obstacle to the organisation of emancipatory strategies towards the constitution of artistic collectives as real or pragmatic utopias, and we question whether the conditions – of collaboration, specialisation and reflexivity – are in place for cultural and artistic organisations to be the embodiment of the values of political change in the name of which, not infrequently, they also operate. So there seems to be little correspondence between collaborative rhetoric and the place of production, or between the *discourses and desires for ‘communality’ and ‘horizontality’*, that surfaced and became more vocal during the pandemic, and *differentiated organisational models* that could constitute contexts for reconfiguring the relationship between creation and production.

Having pointed out the organisation and organisational permanencies and the corresponding practical and symbolic ‘place’ that the production and management professions occupy in them, we looked at possible variations depending on the organisational models adopted. To achieve this, we compared the individual experiences analysed with organisations that deviated from the *standard* model. These included production or creative structures managed collaboratively by artists and producers or structures that attempted to implement alternative organisational models less anchored in the dynamics of ‘creative collectives’ or the ‘charismatic leadership’ typical of author-focused companies.

Indeed, as previously mentioned, while the concept of a ‘company’ has lost significance and usefulness in the current political-economic climate, the quest for a ‘collective’ ideal remains ongoing. We point out significant discursive and practical reconfigurations underway, translated into philosophical-practical approaches to the universe and practices of cooperatives and mutuals. Somewhat paradoxically, it is noted that today’s dynamics of strong individualisation and hyper-competition, leading to an atomised and fragile artistic fabric, end up generating, by virtue of the profound economic, social and political changes in progress, a desire to

rethink the forms of organisation, in a transition from a logic of 'DIY' to 'DIT', thus signalling a shift from individualistic models to (new) forms of collective. In particular, there is a trend towards increasing the rationale for sharing projects and resources (not limited to the cultural sector), resulting in reinterpreting and reconfiguring collective practices and the very idea of 'company'. In the cases we have analysed, these tendencies are embodied in structures that, while assuming distinct characteristics of a 'company' (namely in the fact that they are not organised around a single artistic practice, nor an authorial programme or repertoire, nor a charismatic leadership, nor correspond to 'creative collectives', nor have fixed casts), effectively prolong some of their 'ethos', practising a certain type of *communality*. In these structures/experiences, we identify the manifestation of the idea of the collective as a *shield*, *ecology*, and *ongoing project*. *Shield*, in that they admit to organising collectively, in the first instance, not for artistic reasons or affinities but as a way of (trying to) defend themselves against job precariousness; as *ecology*, given that they correspond to practices situated in the specific challenges of contemporaneity (of social and environmental justice, for example), declaring themselves acutely aware of the social and economic context in which they operate and, therefore, willing to subordinate their 'aesthetic fetishes' to ambitions of internal solidarity and collective well-being; and, finally, an *ongoing project*, because it reflects experiences marked by *temporality* which, on the one hand, do not reproduce rigid contractual and collaborative models and, on the other, do not conform to precarious flexibility, but rather try out various changing forms of 'impermanent permanence'.

In some cases, this *ethos* materialises in collectives that share resources (administrative, management, production and even financial) but follow autonomous artistic paths, not collaborating artistically – 'working apart together' (WAT) in a process of 'collective autonomy' in which artistic practices remain autonomous but all converge to take care of the organisation together. This is another of the prominent aspects of some of the cases we have analysed: that it is the organisation, the 'boring' and almost 'extra-artistic' side that justifies their collective practice. These are new structures, which no longer follow the previous model of company or 'group-projects' or 'one artist, one structure', but rather try to navigate a more fragmented and insecure world by creating other platforms and languages. In some cases, they correspond to structures of production that offer a range of services and expertise, which constitute support systems in-between projects and during periods of research and experimentation, and as a foundation for continuity in an increasingly fragmented work environment. In other cases, they are hybrid structures jointly managed by artists and producers/managers, rejecting the creative versus managerial dichotomies prevalent in the field and recognising the multidimensionality

of professional trajectories and identities. What is interesting about these experiments is not their potential to replace the more traditional company or collective models but the fact that they propose changes to the creation and production regimes; that they diversify the dialogue with funding bodies; that they experiment with less hierarchical working models – and that, almost always, they embody an understanding of the place of production and management that is far removed from the invisible, subordinate, and eminently pragmatic place that they recognise and refute.

In these experiments in alternative configurations, the sphere of production and management is reconfigured, providing relevant evidence for considering different organisational models and internal practices, namely:

- a there is a greater appreciation, knowledge, creativity, and problematisation of the organisational dimension, i.e. a consideration of the organisational structure and *modes of production as an axis of action* and not only as a legal platform for interacting with the system that finances artistic work, thus carrying out a kind of *(re)politicisation of modes of production*;
- b they reveal a greater coherence between the discursive element (the ethical and political values they proclaim) and the practical element (the concrete ways they find to implement them), as far as participatory and horizontalist practices are concerned;
- c they reflect systems of complex interactions based on the sharing, more than just resources, of a common purpose of collective responsibility – an effective ‘politics of care’, which in some cases even corresponds to advanced practices of triple mutualisation;
- d as a corollary and inseparable feature of the whole process, they are organised in a non-hierarchical way, among the artists and between them and the producers and managers, creating the conditions for a reconfiguration and renegotiation of the relationships between artists and producers, who can then work *with* the artists and not just *for* the artists;
- e they give greater relevance to production and management (in the definition of the organisational layout; through participation in the very running of the structure; or even through the more involved participation of production in the artistic aspects).

So these cases/experiences:

- a confirm that the subordinate, pragmatic, and invisible or invisibilised place of production is neither a fatality nor an inextricable characteristic of the arts production and management professions, but rather the result of a set of constraints, combined with the prevalence of dual and non-integrative organisational models, which can be challenged;

- b allow a clear understanding of the risks of simplifying ideas of professionalisation that sometimes value the logic of externalisation and corporatisation (favouring structures professionally geared towards the production and management dimension and/or the logic of bureaucratic appropriation), and sometimes value the traditional organisational logic, according to which building an artistic practice is almost always equivalent, from a certain point in an artist's career, to establishing an artistic organisation, as well as the idea that a structure must gradually add sub-areas of specialisation to be seen as 'evolving';
- c offer resistance to the constraints of cultural policy, both by resisting the phenomenon of institutional isomorphism (opposing the dominant 'one artist, one structure' model) and by attempting to oppose the pressures of neoliberal capitalism towards individualism, atomisation, competition, and growth as a paradigm;
- d question the conservative tendencies of cultural policy by shining a light on the weaknesses of traditional models for organising and funding the arts, and by engaging in dialogue with politics of the commons that advocate a paradigm shift towards more sustainable models;
- e reject the homogenisation of art and the methods of producing and managing it, reconceptualising production as an 'artisanal' activity, through a permanent and very precise adjustment between the requirements of creation and the modes and role of production and management, underlining the acting power of producers and managers and highlighting their subjectivities, reflexive capacities, and contributions (both in terms of efficiency and experimentality);
- f favour the emergence and strengthening of various forms of practice, and the specialisation and sub-specialisation of production and management, in particular allowing for the *consolidation of creative production* and other derivations strongly implicated in the artistic dimension.

All these potentially contribute to a more plural and better prepared artistic field, in which the coexistence of differentiated and specific organisational and production models according to artistic languages and intentions is more important than the replication of any 'best practices'.

Towards a discourse of practice

Constructed based on the models prevailing in the management practices of the business world, infected by the enthusiasm generated by the creative industries agenda and the political dazzle with entrepreneurship, trapped in binary conceptions, and strongly conditioned by the exponential increase in public scrutiny and the demand for accountability, production and arts management began by asserting themselves mainly in the technical field:

they comprised a mastery of marketing tools, a knowledge of the legislation applicable to the sector, required familiarity with the basic principles of human resources and financial management and, of course, a sensitivity and predisposition to accompany artistic processes. However, with the field's global evolution and its agents' progressive qualification, we are witnessing a trajectory of professionalisation now reaching a decisive phase. A phase where the profession's technical and instrumental dominance is challenged and deemed inadequate for defining and justifying it.

Effectively – despite the flaws and inconsistencies that we have pointed out, signalling the deficits in *reflexivity*, *professionalisation*, and *specialisation* that remain, and the persistent tendencies that place production in a place of *invisibility*, *subordination*, and *pragmatism* – we are gradually beginning to see the consolidation of a universe of professionals, in which peers acknowledge each other and work together; in which specialised training is on the rise; and in which individual and collective processes of awareness are taking place. In addition, various tensions have been accumulating in the external context, inviting paradigm shifts in the cultural and artistic sector. Moreover, the increasing significance of contrasting organisational experiences is notable; in such cases, production and management often assume new roles, calling upon diverse identities. The practice of production and management in the framework of performing arts structures is currently subject to contradictory dynamics, in which we glimpse an impasse corresponding to what we call the *pivotal point*. We label the current stage as 'pivotal' in a double nexus. It is a pivotal point because it is potentially decisive for the future direction of these professions, either by asserting themselves as tools of cultural technocracy or, in the opposite direction, by emancipating themselves as critical practices.

The uncertainties regarding these professions' nature, relevance, and spectrum of intervention are becoming harder to justify with their 'novelty' character, having passed the phase of their emergence and integration into the artistic field. Equally – and this is the second motivation for pointing out the pivotal point in the field – it is no longer tenable for it to continue operating in the absence of a system of collectively discussed and defined values, and for difficulties to persist in meaningfully engaging with a field of knowledge of its own. In addition to this, two phenomena reinforce the epithet we have given to the current moment: on the one hand, the emergence of reflections based on the empirical experience of professionals who have completed a professional career in the field and are willing to reflect on it; and on the other hand, the emergence of discourses of dissatisfaction and criticism of the *status quo* and the *modus operandi*, from very different angles, such as working conditions, inequalities, barriers, and institutional-organisational problems, among others. These discourses are not necessarily presented as meta-reflections on the field but rather, most of

the time, as criticisms of situated practices. This is understandable because the field, addicted to excessive pragmatism, has failed to conceptualise and systematise its epistemological core, so that it is the combined approach that we propose that allows us to hypothesise that these scattered critiques of the operational circumstances of arts production and management, combined with the tensions and contradictions that we have pointed out in their exercise, indicate or can be interpreted as converging to compose a *critical discourse of arts management*. Finally, the strength of this pivotal point also lies in the fact that it does not appear to be geographically circumscribed. With varying effects, this critical point can be observed at different locations (in Portugal, as in other European countries, but also in Latin America and the United States). This is due, on one side, to the fact that the processes of professionalisation in the field (with very different start dates between countries and continents) are now practically complete or mature enough to begin their own self-criticism, and, on the other side, to the impact of various global challenges on the practice of the profession, which, precisely because they are global phenomena, affect arts management as a practice, regardless of the stage of consolidation of the field in this or that territory.

The pivotal point of arts management is characterised by a shift in the concerns of producers and managers: no longer primarily focused on clarifying *what they do*, but interested in discussing *why they do it*, i.e., finding and debating the ethical and critical foundations of their daily practice. It is therefore argued that the pivotal point of arts management corresponds, above all, to an evolution from *ontological* concerns about arts management to *deontological* ones. Even though they still face significant deficits in professionalisation and reflexivity, opportunities are being created (in the context of training courses, meetings, conferences, proto-associative dynamics...) for the informal constitution of 'epistemic communities' (Haas, 1992) that probe the ethical problems and critical forces facing these professionals. We believe that it is essential to support these efforts, to systematise them given their dispersal, and to frame them in a favourable climate for a reconceptualization of the field, overcoming its 'methodological confusion' (Suteu, 2006) or its 'pre-paradigmatic' phase, as Mercer (2006) called it. Strictly speaking, this concluding section corresponds to that task, but also, indirectly, to the whole of the research we have undertaken, aligning with the starting point of encouraging individual reflexivity for contributions to our professional field.

Once we have become aware of the historical processes of emergence and the circumstances of social legitimisation of the organisational professions of culture, it becomes possible to question the approximation of the practices and models of 'professionalism' of arts management to the ideology of growth and success, questioning their connections with

the excesses of neoliberalism that place these professionals as facilitating agents of the commodification of artistic creation and consumerist participation in its fruition. The rhetoric of consecration based exclusively on talent is dismantled, making visible the complex web of interdependencies that supports the cultural and artistic ecosystem both in creative/experimental processes and in their public manifestations. Conceptions of leadership and efficiency borrowed from other organisational contexts are questioned. The individualist logics that insidiously impose themselves on formally collective configurations are problematised. It becomes possible to question the legacies that the practices and tools used by these professions have been handed down from the end of the 20th century. The critique expressed by various 'southern voices' points precisely to the need to critically confront these legacies, whose colonialist, mercantilist, developmentalist, and technocratic remnants are still visible and operative in the *modi operandi* of production and management. The feminist critique of cultural management draws attention to *modes of production* in the sense of the ethics of their inner operations, that is, valuing the political potency of caring, listening, and paying attention to vulnerabilities and inequalities. The signs of tension and even exhaustion of some current modes of production and management, such as those operating in internationalisation and transnational cooperation practices, are becoming undeniable. In this context – the arena of action par excellence for producers and managers – the social and environmental sustainability dilemmas push cultural management towards reviewing its assumptions (expansionist) and processes (high mobility, for example). Indeed, the challenge of sustainability might well be the challenge of the next generation of arts managers. Current times call for arts managers to be able to develop sensitive and creative responses to democratic agendas, committed to diversity, ecological well-being, and cultural rights. We conjecture that these professions, once freed from pragmatic reductionism, can engage in their reflexive processes and even constitute themselves as platforms for institutional criticism.

All these elements, summarised here, correspond to a conceptual broadening of the field of production and management; they justify a review of its foundations and *modi operandi*; and they potentially lead to strengthening its knowledge base. For this to happen, it is essential that a 'reflexive theory', in the words of Kettner (2014) or a 'discourse of practice', in the sense of DeVereaux (2009), emerges and strengthens. Kettner (2014) contrasts a 'de facto' professionalisation (i.e. associated with the set of markers that traditionally denote it, to which we have resorted earlier to examine the professionalisation trajectory of the field) with a 'genuine' professionalisation, which would imply a systematic questioning of the conditions of practice (a questioning that we incorporate as an epistemological starting

point). According to the author, this questioning should lead to the development of a *reflexive theory* that would be for cultural management what constitutional theory represents for politics, or pedagogical theories for the education system (Kettner, 2014:96). One of the most obvious reasons for the delay in the emergence of a reflexive theory such as the one advocated by Kettner is the invisibilised, subordinate, and pragmatic place in which production and management so often operate, and that we have partially covered in our research. Without reconfiguring these professions as part of the creative process, duly considering the possibilities of their intervention in the artistic sphere, it will be difficult to build a reflexive theory. But that is not all. Another determining factor for this situation of critical and epistemological underdevelopment is something we have been alluding to throughout this book: the fact that arts management is an interdisciplinary field par excellence, combining knowledge from different domains and crossing, not without discomfort, various established disciplines spanning the social sciences, the humanities, the arts or management. Its nature as a patchwork or borrowed field, as well as its terminological and conceptual imprecision, the diversity and fragmentation of the practices to which it refers, and the very hypertrophy of its area of application ('culture') will also contribute to explaining its difficulty in fitting into the predefined configurations of academic and scientific field.¹

At this pivotal point, a possible outcome is that this situation will finally change without necessarily having to decide on a monodisciplinary approach, which is contrary to the multidisciplinary and intersectional tendencies of contemporary social and scientific constructs. More decisive than its disciplinary inscription, we argue, is its full inclusion in academia and consolidation as an autonomous and emancipated field of research on an intellectual level, that is, freed from the conditions of invisibility, subordination and pragmatism. We have indeed seen that the co-optation of this area by universities has been linked to external agendas for the 'professionalisation' of teaching, which in itself has not guaranteed this area critical autonomy. Umbelino Brasil even denounces a "separatism between theory and practice" that has, in the teaching of cultural production and management at university level, condemned teachers of these subjects to being a kind of "subordinate workforce, characterised as practical and [which] seems to be prohibited from abstractions because (...) it has to be didactically concrete" (Brasil, 2005:121). The emergence of a 'discourse of practice' is contingent upon the ability to generate knowledge and critical thinking within the field, particularly through the guidance and involvement of its practitioners.

The concept of discourse and the possibilities and circumstances for its production were a cornerstone of our research. Through our adopted

methodology,² we recognised the emergence of a consciousness among producers and managers of their subjectivity(ies) that, when added to those of the artists and other agents, can be mobilised to challenge the conventions of the field, organisational and otherwise. It is inevitable that we allude to Bourdieu's very definition of the artistic field, whereby it is formalised through its disputes. Suppose Bourdieu refers above all to artistic concepts and to the instances and processes of their legitimisation in a struggle for discursive power. In that case, it seems plausible to include in this formulation the disputes we have mentioned between the sphere of creation and production/management. The *discursive capacity of producers and managers* thus appears to be doubly decisive for this pivotal point: on the one hand, this discursiveness generates legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1996); on the other, it is a *condition for the emergence of a 'discourse of practice'* (DeVereaux, 2009).

The growth of specialised agents committed to supporting artistic activity can have a beneficial impact on the professionalisation of the sector, and it is certainly interesting that these professions have been maturing and gaining legitimacy. However, considering the deficits we have detected and the emerging criticisms, a vigilant attitude towards this development seems advisable. For DeVereaux, cultural management "is becoming a field in which reaction is the norm, with little reflection on how its practices relate to wider challenges" (DeVereaux, 2009:156). DeVereaux makes a very important distinction between a type of discourse of practice "focused on the how-to, and what would constitute a true discourse of practice" (2009:156), which is capable of reflecting, in addition to the how-to, on the why-to, and in doing so invokes a comprehensive set of conceptual issues. The 'how-to' would be the predominant way of thinking – and teaching – about cultural management: how to write a grant application or how to organise an international tour. It is above all a question of considering the practical skills that can be easily mobilised and capitalised on, which clearly facilitate artistic expression. On the contrary, a discourse of practice would endeavour to scrutinise these habitual cultural management practices in order to identify the established practices and understand the ethical and epistemological assumptions on which they are based. This would entail being equally invested in mastering the mechanisms of action as in dismantling them, that is to say, comprehending the standards and favoured methods of operation and the factors that render them permissible, all while potentially casting light upon the fundamental structures unearthed by such operating modes. Both of these forms of knowledge are undoubtedly valuable for the advancement of cultural management. However, only a thorough analysis from a discourse of practice provides individuals with the ability to truly comprehend how cultural management practices function within their respective contexts and within society.

While a discourse of practice would be fundamentally concerned with the *why-do* dimension, this does not mean that the more prosaic dimension of *knowing how to do* is resolved. It is, in fact, another dimension that needs intellectual deepening.

I have experienced dozens of times this dissonance between ‘knowing how to do’ and the complete notion of ‘knowing’. To date, I have made more than fifty formal grant applications. Some were simpler, like filling in a pre-existing form, others more complex, implying a detailed description of the entire project or idea in question; some whose approval would mean ‘only’ the viability of a particular project or performance, others whose financial sums would ensure the survival of an artistic structure over several years. Fortunately, I ‘won’ most of them. But I lost many others. What do these winning applications say about me, about my specific competence as a cultural manager? How much of their success is attributable to my ability to prepare them? How much of its success doesn’t actually begin to be built long before the application is written, in the way it is thought out, how certain conversations around projects are carried out, or the aims and ambitions of a group of artists or an artistic structure? How much of the ‘secret’ doesn’t lie in the imperceptible weaving of relationships that constantly takes place, with partners, co-funders, artistic accomplices, and audiences? In other words: what does a cultural manager really ‘know’?

If it is true that the rules on how to prepare an application competently are not entirely explicit, it is equally true that there are a series of rules implicit in the values, habits and procedures of a given cultural and artistic ecosystem, and that knowing and mastering them effectively corresponds to a specific ‘know-how’, that is difficult to describe and share – because it is transitory and, to a certain extent, subjective. Just as the criteria that determine the warm, indifferent or negative reception of a work of art are the complex expression of the desires and value system of a given society in a given period of time, the criteria for what constitutes an inadequate, competent, or excellent cultural management also vary, evolve, and remain largely debatable. This does not mean that they cannot be systematised – in the same way that art ‘can’ be taught – but bearing this in mind is an absolutely crucial reminder of the hybrid nature of cultural management and, to that extent, should be constitutive of its own epistemology.

It seems clear to us that the field of cultural management must move towards asserting itself not only as a set of action-oriented and problem-solving skills but also as an intellectual practice and, certainly,

as a field of research and experimentation. The urgency of establishing this emerging field professionally may have justified an excessively results-oriented perspective, but the time may have come to correct this imbalance. Cultural managers urgently need to free themselves from the excesses of managerial orientation, question the excessive subordination and invisibilisation to which they are often subjected, and become actively involved in overcoming the epistemological and critical underdevelopment of their specific area of activity. For this purpose, the various critical discourses we have analysed make an invaluable contribution. They remind us that, until now, the field has depended disproportionately on established forms of knowledge – and that the time has come to reflect on, incorporate, and emphasise lived experiences and marginal practices. They demand that an effectively decolonised knowledge base be used, and that female, trans and queer subjectivities be included in order to bring about social and political change. They remind us that if cultural management emerged with modernity, its pivotal point and the construction of a ‘discourse of practice’ will have to be based on a post-modern rupture – refusing that its professionalisation corresponds to any linear, universal or post-ideological civilising process. They suggest that if the historical origins of the cultural ‘organising’ professions are inextricably linked to their institutionalisation, this historical fact does not condemn contemporary professionals to institutionalised ways of doing. Producers and cultural managers can continue to respect and incorporate elements of rationality that clearly define these professions, while at the same time making a powerful appropriation of management principles and institutional models, acting in a *civil disobedience* way towards this model, in order to guarantee the non-subjection of the individuals, objectives, and meanings of artistic creation. By considering the criticisms in these discourses and committing to the elaboration of a discourse of practice, cultural management would re-emerge as a political process – loaded with technical sophistication, yes, but also with ethical tension capable of challenging the very system that legitimises its action.

I don't know if you also have, like me, the memory of spending an entire Saturday afternoon readying the playroom, that is, ‘organising’ the fun. When my cousin Ana Isabel arrived at the house, we usually started by emptying a huge wooden chest full of toys. It needed to be empty so that we could have all our dolls and props ready to set up camp, or a supermarket. That would take a couple of joyful hours. But when we had finally (un)tidied up the room and could start playing, our parents, much to our frustration, would call us for dinner or say that it was time for my cousin to leave. It was the same with this book. By the time I'd finished ‘sorting things out’, I was finally ready to start playing.

Notes

- 1 This point is, however, contentious: while some argue that as long as cultural management “remains an interdisciplinary programme that brings together various departments, it will continue to be threatened” (Dustin, cited by DeVereaux, 2009), others see this issue as outdated in postmodernity (Vartiainen, cited by DeVereaux, 2009:42).
- 2 Especially of the biographical interviews, but also of the publication of the book that marked the fieldwork phase.

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