Is Portuguese theatre criticism still relevant?

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Debates recentes indicam que o jornalismo cultural em Portugal está atualmente a passar por uma profunda crise. O que é certo é que as páginas dedicadas à Cultura estão a tornar-se progressivamente diminutas, ao passo que as notícias e o entretenimento se tornam peças centrais na maior parte dos jornais e revistas nacionais. Esta alteração de paradigma produziu um ainda maior impacto no campo específico da crítica de teatro. Será ainda relevante a crítica de teatro em Portugal? Serão os críticos de teatro portugueses uma espécie em vias de extinção? No presente artigo, examinamos o lugar e a importância da crítica de teatro e dos críticos no atual panorama jornalístico português. Neste sentido, os dados do presente estudo compreenderam uma série de entrevistas em profundidade, feitas a 12 individualidades relacionadas com o teatro, o que nos possibilitou obter pareceres inovadores acerca da crítica de teatro e dos seus críticos. Tendo isto em conta, no presente artigo procuramos argumentar e sustentar a ideia de que a crítica de teatro compreende dimensões jornalísticas, estéticas, culturais, artísticas, sociológicas, históricas e até mesmo económicas, muito específicas e de grande relevância, só passíveis de serem reveladas através dos críticos de teatro e do seu papel duplo enquanto jornalistas e estetas.

CRÍTICA DE TEATRO / CRÍTICOS DE TEATRO / CRÍTICA / JORNALISMO DE ARTES / JORNALISMO CULTURAL

INTRODUCTION

This article looks at the place and importance of Portuguese theatre criticism and its critics in the present-day journalism context. It is grounded on interviews with 12 theatre experts that approach not only the critic's perspective but also the artist's understanding. These individual's ideas deserve to be studied because of their exceptional professional and cultural backgrounds and roles, which shed a new light on the understanding of theatre criticism.

This article is based on a two-year research that was intentionally focused on the analysis of Portuguese theatre criticism as an arts journalism subgenre, tracing its historical origins and evolution throughout the times and assessing its value and place in today's society. This article gives particular attention to the contrast between theatre criticism as an increasingly scarce practice within major newspapers and magazines (Matos, 2014; Melo, 2011), and theatre criticism as a journalistic an indispensable means for the understanding of a society's cultural and artistic proprieties and values (Garcia, 2004; Ertel, 2008; Pavis, 1996; Porto, 1971).

We argue and determine that theatre criticism encompasses fundamental and complex implications and values that are worthy of consideration, which can only be articulated and conveyed by skilled theatre critics who go beyond conventional news reporting. Therefore, this article begins with an overview of literature regarding the concepts of criticism (Garcia, 2004) and theatre criticism (Ertel, 2008; Pavis, 1996; Porto, 1971; Matos, 2007). Secondly, it examines the general research design adopted to conduct the study, as well as the specific methodological techniques undertaken to select the interviewees, conduct the interviews, and analyse the collected data. It then presents an overview of the results obtained through the interviews, as well as a discussion on how these results provide explanations and corroborate our argument. Finally, it suggests opportunities to further our understanding of what theatre criticism is and could become in this world of mass(ive) communication and cultural convergence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DEFINING CRITICISM AND THEATRE CRITICISM

Theatre criticism as subgenre of cultural journalism ought to be approached within the larger context of journalism research. Traditionally, journalism research focuses its attention on the fields of political and news journalism. This tendency is deeply linked with Western journalism ideals and practices, where media performs the role of society's watchdog (Deuze, 2005), and political journalism is considered to be "the real journalism" (Deuze, 2005: 444).

Thus, arts journalism, by not addressing the "real" issues, could be considered as a minor cog within newsrooms. However, it can be argued that arts and cultural critics play a significant journalistic role that goes

beyond the conventional news journalism, because of "their ability to pass judgment on cultural products … their role in mediating the arts" (Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007: 621) and the capacity of conferring status on the matters they assess (Klein, 2005). Furthermore, it can be argued that art and cultural critics not only have and master conventional journalistic skills, but also possess exceptional artistic and cultural knowledge and understanding, which embodies them with an extra dimension of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1984).

The fact is that research concerning arts and cultural journalism is very scarce (Forde, 2001; Jones, 2002). Nevertheless, new research on arts and cultural journalism, as well as on cultural critique is now emerging (Hanusch, 2012; Hellman and Jaakkola, 2012; Jaakkola, 2014; Janssen, Kuipers, and Verboord, 2008; Janssen, Verboord, and Kuipers, 2011; Knapskog and Larsen, 2008; Kristensen, 2010; Kristensen and From, 2011, 2012). Most emerging studies are focused on arts and cultural journalism as general research topics. Some studies narrow their focus and address issues like film criticism or music criticism, but theatre criticism and its critics have received even less attention from scholars (Miller, 1981), and although many academic theatre reviews can be found in scientific journals, studies on theatre criticism *per se* are quite rare. This sets a unique opportunity to study theatre criticism, especially having into account that arts journalism is currently an emergent field with substantial public importance.

Having said that, in the following two sections we highlight two essential concepts in order to theoretically frame our study: criticism (*lato sensu*) and theatre criticism (*stricto sensu*).

DEFINING CRITICISM

The word criticism has roots in the Greek term *krinein*, which literally means separating out. Thus, criticism can be considered as an exercise of separating out and analyzing the various elements of a theatre performance in order to truly understand a performance's essence. Throughout the centuries, the concept of criticism evolved since its Greek etymological meaning and nowadays we can consider criticism a much wider concept. In this study's context we took into account as a working definition of criticism the one given to us by Garcia:

> Criticism is usually considered as a literary genre but perhaps it is more adequate to classify it as a literary-journalistic genre because criticism as we know it since the nineteenth century … has been closely related to journalism. Reviews are written to be published in newspapers and magazines. Thus, we differentiate reviews from other texts published in newspapers; reviews are neither news nor reports with the clear objective of informing the reader, … but texts both informative and opinionated that take advantage from the language's expressive function to attract readers towards artistic works. (Garcia, 2004: 71)

Taking this definition into consideration, criticism can be bluntly defined as a literary-journalistic text, published in newspapers or magazines, concerning information and opinions about certain artistic and cultural works or events.

DEFINING THEATRE CRITICISM

There are countless definitions for theatre criticism, some broader and some more precise and practical. We have chosen to reflect on four distinct definitions: two from Theatre Studies scholars (Ertel, 2008; Pavis, 1996), and two from theatre critics (Porto, 1971; Matos, 2007). We believe that a better understanding of theatre criticism's definition is found both in the more scholarly reflections and with the theatre critics. The first provide us with a rich theoretical insight, grounded on a profound knowledge about theatre history and its various entanglements. The second allows us to obtain a more pragmatic and empirical perspective, grounded on the actual experience of producing theatre reviews and the intimate notion of theatre criticism's practical and professional dynamics.

According to Ertel (2008: 383), theatre criticism is an "activity that consists on reporting about the new theatrical shows as well as it is a chronicle about theatre life … it is also a study and reflection about Art and theatre practices". Pavis tells us that theatre criticism is a:

> type of criticism done mainly by journalists in immediate response to a particular production and published in the press or broadcast over radio and television. The informational aspect is just as important as the critical aspect of the message, the purpose being to indicate what plays may/

should be seen, while giving the opinion of a critic who represents his readership more than his own aesthetic or ideological opinions. (Pavis, 1996: 81)

According to Porto:

[theatre criticism] like any other form of expression, only exists as far as it represents more than itself, thus representing the artists and spec-tators needs, not only the ones existing and subsisting, but the ones yet to come. In a certain way, and without bragging, any self-respecting the-atre critic must be an interpreter of a collective consciousness. (Porto, 1973: 14)

In the opinion of Matos:

When we talk about performing arts we must understand with precision our relative position. If we are discussing the criticism conveyed by the press, we are talking about texts with well-defined characteristics, opi-nion articles that can be categorized side by side with existing journalis-tic subgenres, therefore sharing with them even their juridical restrictions. In this case the quick response and immediate effect it has on a theatre performance's creative team, as well as on the performance's public per-ception has to deal with the inevitable lack of time and range that shapes these texts. (Matos, 2007: 6)

Considering the above definitions, theatre criticism can be basically defined as the activity of producing texts about theatre performances, usually published in newspapers and magazines and with the main pur-pose of informing a certain readership. Moreover, theatre criticism can also be considered as a critical reflection about current theatre practices, ideas and phenomena, a link between theatre and audience, a particular set of analytical observations with the main goal of finding a theatre per-formance's main thrusts that translates artistic languages into languages accessible to the public's understanding.

METHODOLOGY: AN ABDUCTIVE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR ACCESSING THEATRE EXPERTS UNDERSTANDING OF THEATRE CRITICISM

This study was methodologically conducted according to Dubois and Gadde's (2002) systematic combining approach:

> Systematic combining is a process where theoretical framework and empirical fieldwork evolve simultaneously... We discuss systematic combining in terms of two processes: The first is matching theory and reality, while the second deals with direction and redirection ... These processes affect, and are affected, by four factors: what is going on , available theories, the case that gradually evolves, and the analytical framework. (Dubois and Gadde, 2002: 554)

Systematic combining is a qualitative methodology that takes on an abductive approach to allow theory and empirical research to develop simultaneously. In order for this to happen, systematic combining lays on two processes: the first is identifying links between theory and empirical data; the second deals with direction and redirection by going "back and forth" when we come across certain demanding issues. Systematic combining allowed us to associate in a structured way both the deductive and inductive reasoning, letting us define paths that start within theory and end up in empirical reality and vice-versa. Considering that the focus of the present study is quite specific – understanding the place and importance of theatre criticism and its critics in today's world – systematic combining provided a dynamic and useful means for defining and conducting this study's interviews, as well as analysing the collected data.

Therefore, we draw on data from in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews to Portuguese theatre experts for gaining rich insights about theatre criticism. The theatre experts interviewed sample included four women and eight men. Interviews were conducted between March and June 2015, in person, and lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. Our aim was to select interviewees with different professional/artistic perspectives and experiences, but with related orientations to the arts and to theatre criticism practices. Additionally, and to provide an accurate representation of the most important key elements within a theatre performance that could also be portrayed in theatre reviews, we have identified, according to Pavis (1999), the following theatre performance's main elements: actor's performance, directing, sound design,

light design, scenography, costume design, makeup & masques, text in performance, audience, and production. Ten interviewees directly correspond to these ten elements. The two last interviews were done to a theatre scholar and a theatre critic. Finally, we transcribed all interviews and conducted a thorough content analysis to the collected data using the RQDA software (Huang, 2014), which allowed us to properly and objectively organize data into theme categories. Although the interviewees may not represent all of the theatre critics, scholars and artists, they provide a new and fresh insight about Portuguese theatre criticism and its critics. We therefore propose that they are part of a shared professional and artistic culture.

PROFILING PORTUGUESE THEATRE CRITICISM AND ITS CRITICS

The views on the status of Portuguese theatre criticism fall into two major ideas:

1. Theatre criticism is a declining practice within print newspapers and magazines.
2. Theatre criticism is a flourishing phenomenon on the Internet.

Most of the interviewees, when asked about theatre criticism's current status, discussed that it is a fading practice within print publications: "Theatre criticism is dying … on the contrary, film and music criticism are still a strong practice, which can be explained by the support these critics get from film and music festivals" (theatre writer); "Theatre criticism is dead. There is no place for theatre reviews within newspapers. Theatre critics are no longer essential and arts journalism is led by inexperience interns" (theatre producer); "Theatre criticism is struggling because it is not an independent and specialized practice" (theatre studies scholar); "The space for theatre reviews in newspapers and magazines is very limited … I believe that theatre criticism will become an increasingly less autonomous and relevant phenomenon" (theatre critic); "Theatre criticism is almost a non-existing thing, theatre shows became less important within newspapers' agendas" (theatre actor); "Theatre reviews are becoming rarer and smaller within print media. I remember a time when a theatre review was written to each and every one of my theatre shows. Nowadays, it seems that only certain selected shows are

mentioned" (theatre director). These somewhat demoralizing statements consider that theatre criticism is becoming a residual phenomenon within most newspapers and magazines and that this is partly due to certain media editorial strategies driven by particular economic interests. This economic argument is becoming dominant to journalistic discourses (McManus, 1994; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002).

The same interviewees who vigorously stated theatre criticism's current perils, firmly argued about the importance of theatre criticism not only to the arts, but also to the world, acknowledging its particular relevance within digital environments: "Today there are theatre reviews on the Internet that I believe to be equally legit and good as the ones published on print newspapers and magazines" (theatre writer); "I have read very well-structured and thoughtful online theatre reviews" (theatre actor); "I believe theatre criticism is becoming an integral part of the digital media world … newspapers and magazines are no longer interested in publishing theatre reviews" (theatre director). Furthermore, social media has softened the frontiers between professional theatre critics and amateur opinions (Kammer, 2015; Kristensen and From, 2015; Verboord, 2014).

Thus, most of the interviewees believe that Portuguese theatre criticism is currently going through a crisis, yet they also suggest that digital media may become the perfect setup for the revitalization of arts journalism. This presents us with a paradigm in which the current specific dynamics of digital and newspaper-based criticism are defining the future of arts and cultural journalism. On the one side, newspaper-based criticism seems to be struggling to survive in a traditional media landscape that is increasingly losing ground to a new digital media ecosystem. On the other side, digital based criticism is redefining who writes about theatre and how theatre criticism is made, mostly and inherently letting everyone write about theatre without any kind of editorial conundrums attached. But how exactly can we distinguish between these two different formats within today's world? According to Radosavljevic (2016):

> [Newspaper criticism can be seen as an] hybrid genre between literature and journalism – that is: between creative and factual writing, the latter function being determined by the nature of the medium itself. In the English-speaking world [as much as in the Portuguese context] theatre critics have often been graduates of English – and in the UK, they have tended to be Oxbridge educated. As a result of their training, twentieth--century newspaper theatre critics, like many of their predecessors,

could be seen to have displayed a literary bias in their appreciation of theatre. (Radosavljevic, 2016: 18)

So, it might be said that newspaper-based criticism is basically a format that – even in today's changing media landscape – still dwells in a twentieth-century, industrial journalism fashion. A format that Shenton (2015) defines as "formal criticism", which according to this author is the only type of criticism that has the authority to be called as such, in a "world where there's a relentless, unmediated din" (Shenton, 2015), this being an obvious reference to the rise of digital criticism and its informal nature. Although Shelton's (2015) statement might seem a bit radical, it reveals us the idea that newspaper-based criticism is a genre defined by a balance between writing in an objective way – providing clear information about theatre shows – and expressing a measured, literally alike opinion about theatrical performances, naturally limited to strict publishing timings. Moreover, and within the Portuguese context, the scarce number of newspapers and magazines that still publish theatre reviews – around five, according to the Portuguese Association for the Drawing and Circulation Control (2015) – supports the idea that newspaper-based criticism hasn't changed much in the past few decades.

On the flip side, digital based criticism was born out of the tremendous disruption caused by the emergence and massification of Internet, thus becoming a "place" – in its various expressions – for public, undifferentiated artistic deliberation. Drawing again on Radosavljevic:

> Online criticism must be understood as belonging to the realm of digital communication as a paradigm ... this realm operates according to its own ethical, economic and epistemological forces. For this reason, it cannot be subjected to the value system which had governed the print media. (Radosavljevic, 2016: 23)

Therefore, one could argue that digital based criticism is a phenomenon defined by its intrinsic struggle to be legitimized as a valid format by contrast to newspaper criticism, especially considering the many criticisms around legitimacy, rigour and expertise that digital criticism gets mostly from newspaper-based critics (*vide* McDonald, 2007; Billington, 2007; Rosenfield, 2015). Moreover, digital based criticism is defined as a phenomenon that, due to the democratization of Internet, has "enabled many intelligent, thoughtful people to share their ideas

and insights on countless things" (Horwitz, 2012), an evident manifestation of the writers "seizing the means of production, [in a place of both] self-expression and community development" (Miller and Shepherd, 2004). Ultimately, online criticism can be seen as "distinctly emancipatory, community-oriented, performative and potentially non-literary in its nature" (Radosavljevic, 2016: 17).

In a nutshell, it seems quite clear that both newspaper and online based criticism, despite their differences, remain essential in some key aspects (Radosavljevic, 2016), i.e., the reviewer should:

> "define his/her relationship to the reader";
> "define his/her relationship to the piece being reviewed";
> "express his/her considered opinion by giving appropriate evidence for it and do it all with style".

Radosavljevic (2016) is basically suggesting that theatre reviews must be well written, unveiling the the many aspects within a performance, and refusing the mere, ego-oriented display of the writer him/herself.

Indeed, all of the interviewees described and asserted theatre criticism as an essential and important phenomenon for the arts and society. Such a strong position is mostly revealed when interviewees were asked about the specific uses and values of theatre criticism, as well as their opinion about the importance of theatre critics. Five key ideas arose:

1. Theatre criticism promotes the arts, which increases the number of theatregoers.
2. Theatre criticism is an in-depth reflection about current theatre practices, as well as means of understanding and interpreting the arts and society.
3. Theatre reviews are the ultimate historical records of theatre performances.
4. Theatre critics are different from news journalists due to their expert knowledge about theatre history and practices.
5. Theatre critics find it difficult to be professionally and financially autonomous.

These ideas suggest that theatre criticism and its critics embody various significant dimensions. The first described idea encompasses the understanding that theatre criticism, by promoting theatre performances,

leads more people to attend theatre shows, therefore contributing to the economic development of the performing arts industry. A study conducted by Ian Senior (2003: 68), suggests that "theatre critics have a positive impact on theatres in the West End of London". Moreover, the same study states that "consumers spent some £18.7 million attending West End shows that would otherwise have been spent elsewhere as a result of reading reviews".

Secondly, theatre criticism is seen by the interviewees as a phenomenon with relevant cultural, artistic, and social impact. In terms of artistic impact, theatre criticism, "by analysing a theatre performance, adds something to the theatre performance itself" (theatre writer); furthermore, theatre criticism "assesses the degree of distance between what is initially proposed by artists and what is actually presented in theatre performances" (theatre critic). So, theatre criticism can be considered itself as an artistic part of theatre performances, not only because it adds a new aesthetic dimension to the performances by analysing it, but also because the act of writing a theatre review is a creative act itself, different from the objectivity within news reporting. By analysing theatre performances, theatre criticism also acts as a tool for placing theatre within the arts world, which additionally contributes for a better understanding about particular national or international artistic setups, as well as it is, most of the times, the only formal acknowledgement, recognition and appreciation of the work performed by theatre artists. In terms of impact on society, our interviewees consider that theatre criticism "establishes a relation between theatre and the public, which can lead theatre reviews readership to learn and reflect about theatre performances" (theatre writer); "theatre criticism seeks to translate theatrical images by creating and identifying its relations with our lives and daily routines, as well as with the big philosophical and universal questions" (theatre makeup artist). Theatre, like any other form of artistic expression, is most of the times a reflection of our society's worries and apprehensions. Therefore, theatre criticism can act as a clarifying medium between people and the world's critical issues, portrayed in theatrical performances. In terms of cultural impact, theatre criticism can serve as a valuable instrument for mapping the performing arts within a given cultural landscape, contributing to the progress and expansion of performing arts as "intangible cultural heritage … playing a crucial role in ensuring the viability of traditional forms of performing arts by developing audiences and raising awareness amongst the general public" (UNESCO, 2003). Additionally,

theatre criticism can also serve as an instrument to enhance the development of "transnational cultural cooperation networks" (Gama, 2016). Thus, one could say that theatre criticism is a phenomenon of cultural valuation in a form that is, for instance, fundamentally different to economic valuation, more of a "processual activity of meaning-making" rather than something commensurable to a market assigned monetary value (Pröpper and Haupts, 2014; Winthrop, 2014; Schnegg *et al.*, 2014). In other words, performances are momentary, but the writings about them are not. By encapsulating performances in time and space, theatre reviews are artifacts that enrich culture in its wider, civilizational perception. Furthermore, theatre criticism can also be considered through the lens of cultural analysis, i.e., a theatre review is not only a mere description of a given performance, but it also encompasses the creation and interpretation of a dialogue between theatre phenomena and social beliefs and value systems, underpinning social, political and aesthetic dimensions and the ways they manifest themselves in a wider cultural spectrum.

Thirdly, theatre reviews are, most of the times, the only historical record of a performance. "A theatre review is useful as an historical document because it has the ability to immortalize a performance" (theatregoer); "Theatre performances are ephemeral, so the only everlasting things are theatre reviews" (theatre studies scholar). Therefore, theatre reviews not only serve as valuable historical records within theatre's broader memory context, but as well as rich and thorough sources that provide various information and insights about society throughout the times.

Fourthly, interviewees stated that theatre critics are different from conventional news journalists because of their expert knowledge about theatre practices and history. Furthermore, they expressed the idea that theatre critics don't write for mass audiences, but instead for a particular readership, a section of society which consumes the high arts. This also influences the various ways critics are shaped by the interactions with that specific readership, as well as it stimulates their self-awareness and self-understanding in relation to a "public of equals". This idea is largely explored by Bourdieu:

> The writer, the artist, or even the scientist writes not only for a public, but for a public of equals who are also competitors. Few people depend as much as artists and intellectuals do for their self-image upon the image of others, and particularly other writers and artists, have of them. (Bourdieu, 1993: 116)

Furthermore, a theatre critic must have a "good knowledge about the contemporary theatre environment, as well as a certain aesthetical sensitivity" (theatregoer), but also some degree of "theatre practice, having experienced dramatic narratives, theatrical characters" (theatre actor). Ultimately, this allows a theatre critic to analyse a performance with particular technical detail and write a review by using specific theatrical notions and lexica.

Ultimately, one must try to understand what exactly are the requirements of a theatre critic in terms of knowledge or expertise, i.e., is this journalistic, scholarly or practical expertise? This might be better answered if we try to define these expertise requirements within both newspaper and digital based criticism.

A theatre critic that writes for a newspaper must, inevitably, understand how journalism in print media operates, e.g., the limits in terms of time and space, how editorial decisions might influence their work, and sometimes even the choice of performances to be reviewed. So, in print media, a certain knowledge about journalistic practices is expected to be part of the critic's mindset and workflow. In a certain degree, this might be the only clear frontier between newspaper and online-based criticism in terms of the expertise requirements. Moreover, it can be argued that theatre critics might embody journalistic, scholarly and practical expertise, but those categorizations might fail to provide an objective understanding of what a theatre critic should know or be. A critic must be passionate about his subject, he must "love his subject more than he loves his reader" (Mendelsohn, 2012), a critic must be passionate about the work he covers, wanting to share it with intelligent, engaged audiences (Horwitz, 2012). A critic must also be "deeply informed and widely accessible ... acknowledging the need for intellectual rigor" (*idem*). Hence, scholarly expertise, for instance, is more related to intellectual knowledge *per se*, independently of where it was acquired. In what concerns practical expertise, digitally-oriented critics and scholars clearly affirm that "criticism is a creative practice unto itself and the writer exists in subjective relation to the work of the artist" (*idem*).

Eventually, when we talk about expertise, we are referring to, firstly, an understanding of how newspapers or digital platforms work (that being journalistic and/or formal knowledge), secondly, having knowledge about theatre (obtained in the academia and/or empirically), and finally, a practical insight on theatre (whether through theatrical *praxis* or observing experience). Thus, this so-called expertise can be found both

in newspaper and digital critics. The assessment of a critic's expertise is, therefore, not defined by the fact that a given critic works for a newspaper or writes a blog, but instead by the quality of his/her work. Moreover, expertise must be considered within different historical contexts. Before digital criticism, it could be argued that theatre critics were a small community of experts, defined as professionals if employed in a newspaper or magazine, and obviously considered as true *connoisseurs* of the theatre scene. With the rise of digital criticism, many people started writing about theatre. In this context, they could be considered as amateurs for not having a degree on theatre studies or performing arts. But the fact is that expertise may also be considered as something within people that "are artists and former artists … friends and families of artists … people who grew up or into an appreciation of the arts for any number of reasons" (*idem*). Thus, it can be said that expertise is a result of the many shifts within a global cultural ecology and the subsequent changes in critical form that may arise.

Finally, some of the interviewees expressed the fact that theatre critics find it difficult to be professionally and financially autonomous: "theatre critics should be financially supported so that they could do their job with dignity" (theatre writer); "Theatre criticism is a very low-paid job. Theatre critics need to combine theatre criticism with other jobs to survive" (theatre studies scholar). As Rosenfield (2015) stated: "once upon a time, the rules were clear. The critic, employed full-time at a major newspaper, attended a show on opening night with tickets paid by the publications". Nowadays, and according to the insights provided by our interviewees, newspaper critics are no longer full-time employers. Now, they are being paid by piece work, with piece rates increasingly lower, which justifies the need for them to have other jobs. In contrast, most digital theatre critics are *pro bono* workers, they pay for their own tickets and that does not seem to affect the quality of their work. This leaves a question to be answered: is the future of theatre criticism more dependent on financial aspects (more aligned with mainstream, print media criticism) or wider structural conditions, being the latter related, e.g., with the emancipation and acceptance of digital criticism as a practice as valid as newspaper criticism? The answer to this concern might just be in combining and finding a common ground and balance between traditional and online based criticism, creating conditions that are valid for both formats and expressions.

CONCLUSIONS

Is Portuguese theatre criticism still relevant? Our study led us to believe that theatre criticism will last as long as theatre performances exist. Although this seems quite a logical statement, one must understand that we as individuals belonging to a certain cultural community have an eminent need to observe and reflect about art and its various manifestations. Theatre, as well as any other art form, is primordially driven to generate polysemy, therefore stating the idea that theatre criticism plays an important role in the creation of a more collective structured understanding about contemporary theatre practices. So why are there less and less theatre reviews published in print newspapers and magazines? This matter has nothing to do with cultural or intellectual issues, but more with certain editorial policies and economical dynamics within the media corporations, which show a growing tendency towards news "tabloidization".

Our study also led us to believe that theatre criticism can be invigorated if theatregoers, artists and critics find a common ground in which to develop new ways and forms to allow criticism to flourish. The growing arenas of digital media may constitute a valid approach to revitalize theatre criticism. Moreover, we believe that a theatre review is much more than a mere description of a performance. The act of writing about theatre is a creative act itself. If theatre reviews go beyond mere descriptions, they will contribute to a profound reflection about theatre, consequently becoming more interesting for existing and potential readers.

Furthermore, theatre criticism and its critics may prove to be valuable in assessing a society's cultural and artistic practices and manifestations, contributing to the specific enhancement of performing arts, not only as an unquestionable and important intangible cultural heritage domain, but as well as a practical and conceptual instrument within the specific context of transnational cultural cooperation networks.

Finally, we have demonstrated that theatre critics are a specific type of professionals within the context of arts journalism. Their particular knowledge about theatre history and practices, allied with an accurate aesthetic insight about theatre technicalities, but also certain journalistic skills that are necessary to observe, understand and write a good story, reinforce the importance of theatre critics as "cultural intermediaries" (Bourdieu, 1984), as they work between the journalistic and the artistic fields, and as "creators, guides, producers of text

and historical arbiters" (Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2007), helping theatre in its crusade to provide an artistic possibility for understanding the world and the human condition, a purpose very divergent from typical news reporting.

Furthermore, and elaborating on Bourdieu's (1984) notion of "cultural intermediaries", we argue that theatre critics are intermediaries in terms of "where they are located (working in media); the means of accomplishing their role (working with media); and their economic role in promoting consumption (the work of mediation)" (Maguire and Matthews, 2010: 1). In other words, and firstly, theatre critics are "working in media" because "cultural intermediaries are most typically … the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of 'quality' newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers" (Bourdieu, 1984: 325). This definition does not comprehend digital based critics, but as producers of culture, online critics can be essentially included in Bourdieu's (1983) notion of intermediaries. Secondly, theatre critics are "working with media" in the sense that newspapers and magazines, but also blogs and other online formats, maybe be considered as indirect cultural mechanisms for the reproduction of the social order. In the case of theatre criticism, it has more to do with pedagogical work, i.e., the media and its producers contribute to diffuse education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), thus shaping tastes and dispositions for the theatre world, but also for particular lifestyles. Thirdly, theatre criticism does, to a certain degree, "the work of mediation", i.e., critics write, talk and present about cultural forms as a way to popularize them, assisting in the "objective orchestration … of the fields of production and that of the field of consumption" (*ibidem*: 230). In other words, critics contribute to the "production of the value of the work or, what amounts to the same thing, of the belief in the value of the work" (Bourdieu, 1996: 229). In a nutshell, it might be argued that theatre critics encompass, not only a role as intermediaries within an objective, small, dynamic landscape that comprehends what Bourdieu (1993) defines as a "public of equals" – i.e., other critics, theatre artists and people with a direct or strong connection with theatre – but also a role as intermediaries within a wider social and cultural context, inherently subjective and where cultural intermediaries offer themselves as "role models and guarantors" (Bourdieu, 1984).

We have also noticed that theatre critics find it difficult to be professionally and financially autonomous, which lead us to believe that further

studies and public debates should be undertaken in order to approach this particular matter, as well as this article can and should be used as a starting point for future academic endeavours regarding theatre and cultural criticism within journalism, cultural and artistic studies.

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