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Being actors in contemporary times: work, subjectivities and resistance in the Italian context

Doctoral dissertation

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Introduction

During the last decades, the labour market has been at the centre of processes of social and technological transformation that radically changed its material articulations and its discursive features, in Italy and Europe. On the one hand, following neoliberal policies, labour and employment relations have been invested by processes of flexibilization and precarisation (Armano et al., 2017; Kalleberg, 2009; Pulignano, 2017) that led, at least in Italy, to a consistent reduction of what was considered a standard employment relation and to an increase in short term project based work and autonomous work especially for younger generations. In this context, work seems to have lost its capacity to attribute meaning to the private and social dimensions of workers' life experiences (Beck, 2014; Sennett, 1998, 2008; Weeks, 2011). On the other hand, neoliberal discourses promote the application of economic reasons to all domains of social life, building subjects in entrepreneurial terms (Brown, 2003; Foucault, 1978; Rose, 2005). Nowadays, work appears to be the ideal arena for reflexive struggles aimed at self-realisation which characterise individualisation processes of late modernity (Farrugia, 2021; Honneth, 2004). The present thesis aims at contributing to current debates on young cultural workers' experiences of life and work in neoliberal and pandemic times.

Considering the economic and societal aspects in which cultural production is embedded, the context of creative and cultural industries has been central to study contemporary labour markets dynamics (de Peuter, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; RD Lloyd, 2010). In the last thirty years, there has been a growing interest in analysing working conditions and life experiences of creatives in different workplaces, from new media workers (Gill, 2002) to music (Umney and Kretsos, 2014) and fashion (McRobbie, 2016; Mensitieri, 2020). Navigating uncertain careers and labour markets, artists have often been considered by

sociologists of work and employment an ideal study group to describe contemporary shifts in work and employment relations (Menger, 1999, 2006). At the same time, sociologists of culture have regarded creative workers' passions and motivations in relation to processes of precarisation and dynamics of exclusion (Gill, 2014; McRobbie, 2002a). Creativity seems to be, at the same time, a prerequisite for individual self-expression (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007; Du Gay, 1996), a fundamental quality for managerial discourses on risk taking and innovation (Menger, 2014) and an organisational resource to orient worker towards autonomy and flexibility (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006). The short term and project-based structure of several branches of cultural work has often led scholars to underline the uncertainty of working conditions and the lack of social security benefits (Dex et al., 2000; Morgan et al., 2013) as well as the difficulty to construct collective identities on the workplace (McRobbie, 2011b). Moreover, the desire for self-expression that characterises workers' narratives in the cultural and creative industries has been defined as an "uncritical romance" that attracts middle class youth towards precarised jobs (McRobbie, 2011a). For these reasons, several scholars have regarded the study of creative and cultural work as a privileged point of observation of emerging trends on subjectivation processes that are taking place in the realm of work (Gill, 2014; McRobbie, 2016). Despite scholars underlined the individualised and entrepreneurial nature of workers in the creative sectors (Scharff, 2015, 2016; Ursell, 2000), recent studies have looked at the community oriented possibilities offered by cooperative instruments (Mondon-Navazo et al., 2021; Murgia and de Heusch, 2020), social engaged activities (Alacovska, 2020), and the emergence of collective practices of resistance to a neoliberalised working environment (d'Ovidio and Cossu, 2017; Maddanu, 2018). Furthermore, following the outburst of Covid-19, creative and cultural working environments are among the sectors that suffered the most from the consequences of the

pandemic where old and new inequalities have been spreading, urging scholars for a renewed analytical attention (Comunian and England, 2020).

Regarding performing arts workers, the academic production in the field of sociology has been narrowing in recent years. In the French context, scholars have focused on the relation between project-work and social benefits (Corsani and Lazzarato, 2008; Pilmis, 2010) and on collective political and social mobilization (Sinigaglia, 2007). In the United Kingdom, the relation between professional acting and exclusionary dynamics have been considered (Dean, 2008; Friedman et al., 2017) while, in the Italian context, the contributions of Sonia Bertolini (Bertolini et al., 2019; Bertolini and Vallero, 2011) analyse the limitations and peculiarities of performing arts careers in the Italian labour market. Academic contributions in the sociology of culture have observed the aura of exceptionality of a nomadic, artistic and precarious occupation and the narrative framing of cultural work as a life choice more than a working activity, pointing to the problematic relation between passion, identity and consumption (Arvidsson et al., 2010; McRobbie, 2004). Among the creative and cultural industries, theatre work emerges to be peculiar since workers craft based physical and emotional activities are the centre of the artistic product. As cultural workers, actors appear to be marginal to the economy of culture, and to the world of work in a broader sense, in terms of number, negotiation power, economic and social positioning (Di Nunzio et al., 2017). However, as artists they are positioned at the core of romanticised discourses on passion and professional activity. With the outbreak of Covid-19, live performers have been among the working categories mostly affected by the restrictions of social life enacted and have started to develop cooperative networks and collective mobilisation.

Drawing on theoretical debates concerning creative work and social theorists' reflection on the subject's positions in the contemporary neoliberal frame of work, a first aim of the

research is to observe how, in the Italian context, cultural workers' subjectivities are constructed and how they embed, negotiate or contrast an entrepreneurial ethos of work. Secondly, the study considers how workers' affects, body and emotions are inserted into power relations at the workplace and how actors can challenge those practices. Lastly, the research considers how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, workers engaged in practices of collective resistance to an individualised framework of work, and how workers' positionings have been affected by the pandemic. A qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews and ethnography was adopted with the intent to access the ways in which research participants construct and narrate their experiences of life and work. By considering workers' accounts of passion, precarisation dynamics and entrepreneurial discourses alongside with the configurations of power dynamics on the workplace, the thesis expands current knowledge on subjectivity formation in the context of performing arts. The interrelation between discursive formations and material articulations permeating the field of contemporary work are regarded through a discourse analytical approach. The workers' talks are analysed in a multidimensional way: i) at the level of motivation and educational path, ii) the professional experiences and discursive articulations about work, iii) the role of body, emotions and relationships on the workplace, iv) dynamics of power and subjects' individual and collective instances of resistance.

The fieldwork was chosen to be carried out in Milan because of the city's relevance to the Italian creative and cultural sector and theatre environment. Here, in the past decades, one third of the city's population was directly employed in creative and cultural industries (Bonomi, 2012) and the vivacity of cultural production is directly reflected in the performing arts' sector. The theatrical vocation of the city is not only due to Teatro alla Scala's presence. The first Italian public theatre, Piccolo Teatro, opened in Milan in 1947 with the intent to

provide the citizens not with mere entertainment but with artistic and socially valuable cultural productions (Colbert, 2005; Locatelli, 2015). The development of the theatre offer has been sustained by the City Council through a network of conventions and funding opportunities aimed at generating a fertile environment for the growth of theatre projects (Calbi, 2011; Gallina, 2013).

The present research expands the literature's contribution on cultural work in neoliberal capitalist scenarios considering the case of performing artists, whose experience is often overlooked in international studies. Since the core of this thesis revolves around subjectivities, the study employs a qualitative methodology of research based on in-depth interviews and ethnography to access research participants narratives and discourses about life and work. The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in offline and, during Covid-19 restrictions to social life in online spaces of interaction. In the case of in presence encounters, they were carried out in public spaces such university campus, parks, theatres' foyers and lasted between one and two hours. Following the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic and the necessity for physical distancing, several research participants were recruited and interviewed in online spaces of interaction (Skype, Zoom). The in-depth interviews were recorded with audio and/or video support with the written consent of the research participants. Following a first open-ended and colloquial part, the interactions were led by a topic guide that considered education, working practices, personal satisfaction and future expectations. With the intent of comprehending the structure and functioning of the Italian theatrical field, contextual interviews with field experts were also conducted and quantitative data on the sector from different sources was considered (I.N.P.S. Italian National Social Welfare; C.G.I.L. union). The majority of research participants are aged between 29 and 36 years old and have less than 10 years of working experience in the performing arts. Thus, the

generational category of young adults is constructed around both biographical age and career experience. Embracing the diversity of the sector, the sampling choice was open to actors performing in various theatre genres, with specificities in production processes and regulations. During Covid-19, apart from in-depth interviews, the fieldwork entailed an online ethnography that followed two informal collectives of actors involved in the national mobilisation of the sector.

Despite considering generalisability beyond the aims of qualitative interpretive research, the study provides a thick description of young adults' experiences of cultural work which can be "transferrable" and enrich the present and future academic reflection (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The research participants are exemplary representatives of the Millennial Generation, of cultural workers in Western urban environments, of a group of workers that particularly suffered from Covid-19's effects on employment opportunities. Thus, without aiming at identifying universal processes and considering the research and data interpretation as context-specific, the study findings can, to a certain extent, be useful for understanding other situations where similar typicalities are involved (Schofield, 1993). In addition, analysing the experiences of workers in the performing arts can provide fruitful insights into contemporary processes of re-signification that are investing the realm of work. On the one hand, performing artists are cultural workers and therefore at the core of present mechanisms of the aestheticization and romanticisation of work; on the other hand, as emerged during the pandemic, they are positioned at the periphery of the world of work, in terms of number, negotiation power, and economic and social positioning. Starting from March 2020, the research had the opportunity to explore the collective mobilisation that invested the Italian performing arts during the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. Taking into account a previously non-mobilised category of workers, disaffected towards collective action, the research had

the opportunity to analyse how fragmented experiences of work can be recomposed, and cooperation can be enacted in a moment of unexpected crisis.

The first chapter is devoted to defining the theoretical framework of artistic and creative production accounting for the different approaches that have been developed during the last century. From the work of the Frankfurt School to the rise of postmodern trends, the need for an analysis that takes into account both the economic and cultural aspects in which cultural production is embedded, is underlined. The position of cultural producers is then considered in relation to contributions in the sociology of the arts and culture, focusing on the role of artistic and creative imaginaries and of institutionalisation processes in forming the contemporary field of cultural production. Thus, the tension between creative autonomy and economic needs in the studies of cultural labour is deepen alongside with those theoretical contributions that have discussed workers' position in production and reproduction processes.

The second chapter illustrates scholars' approaches and theoretical framework that inform the presented analysis and clarifies the definition and use of sociological concepts along the thesis. Literatures' contributions on the concept of subjectivity and the related themes of agency, power and resistance are engaged with. Contemporary individualisation processes in the context of neoliberal capitalist environment are explored alongside with dynamics arising from the configuration of contemporary cultural labour, such as entrepreneurialism and precariousness, with reference to scholars' contribution in different theoretical traditions. The construction of contemporary careers and work ethos is then considered in its connection with notions of passion and aspirations, and emotional and affective labour. Lastly, we reflect on neoliberal and post-feminist's systems of feeling rules, exclusionary dynamics and subjects' possibilities for individual and collective resistance.

The third and the fourth chapters aims at describing the research context where the fieldwork took place and to detail the methodological stance adopted in the research. After having considered the position of theatre in the ensemble of creative and cultural industries, we focus on the Italian sector. Elaborating on 2019's data from Italian Ministry of Culture and from I.N.P.S. as well as from data collected in sector's specific surveys (Di Nunzio et al. 2017; Amleta 2020), we delineate the characteristics of Milan's theatrical environments and of actors' career trajectories before the outbreak of Covid-19. Lastly, the chapter considers the role of union, cooperatives and informal collectives during the last decades alongside with the wave of collective protests that invested the sector in Spring 2020. The fourth chapter deepens the research structure and design, the epistemological stance and the methodology adopted. Doing qualitative research during Covid-19 outbreak is thematised alongside with the necessity to adapt the design in order to follow emerging trends on the fieldwork. Lastly, we elaborate on the issue of reflexivity in qualitative research and detail the epistemological adopted.

The fifth chapter starts to deep into the textual data collected, considering the research participants' narratives of beginnings in the theatre world and of their educational experiences. Accounts of the encounter with the world of acting are analysed as well as actors first steps into the artistic field. Considering research participants motivation in undertaking an artistic career and the role of educational trajectories, the chapter looks at the interplay between processes of artistic socialisation and contemporary discourses on cultural work, self-expression and economic rewards.

The sixth chapter focus on the affective role of self-realisation and on research participants' narratives of artistic aims and economic security with issues of control over their career path. Aiming at contributing to the literature on passionate workers' subjectivities in creative and

artistic environments, the chapter takes into account the blurring of traditional borders between working and non-working activities in their relation to subjects' engagement in ongoing self-cultivation activities and aspirational constructions. Actors' accounts are analysed in their discursive contents alongside with narrative formations structuring the field of the performing arts. With this aim, narratives of everyday working experiences and data about research participants working condition are inserted in a dialogic relation.

The seventh chapter takes into account the relational environment of actors and actresses working activities, considering the power relations at stake as well as subjects' individual practices of resistance. In this regard, categorisations such as gender, sexuality, ethnic origin and education are taken into account both singularly and in their interrelated effects through an intersectional approach. The analytical frame looks at how research participants discuss their social positionings and their actions with regard to existing structural constraints. The chapter aims at contributing to current reflection on power inequalities and individual practices of resistance to neoliberal subjectivising instances, taking into account subjects' accounts of compliance, non-compliance and negotiation with dominant practices as well as subjects' elaboration of future expectations and individual achievements.

The eight chapter adds to contemporary debates on individualisation and emerging form of cooperation in precarious and pandemic times by considering the case of Italian performing artists during Spring 2020. With this aim, the activities of two informal groups, "Attrici e Attori Uniti – A2U" and "Amleta", are analysed. Despite dominants interpretations of cultural work as an entrepreneurial and solitary project, in a context of extended crisis, fragmented experiences of work can be recomposed, and cooperation can be enacted. In the months that followed Covid-19 outbreak, performing artists' emotional and affective ties

result to be central in exiting social isolation and to project individualised experiences of work into a collective understanding.

In the conclusions, the main contributions of the work are enucleated and discussed in relation with the existing literature. The research results contribute to the analysis of how subjects are created in and respond to contemporary discursive formations on passionate work, precariousness and entrepreneurship. On the one hand, working activities are increasingly conceived as an intimate space for self-realisation and traditional boundaries between working and non-working time seem to be loosen in favour of an all-rounded, work devoted, subject. On the other hand, despite subjects' possibilities of self-fulfilment through activities of care are often silenced and excluded from normalised discursive spaces, it emerges the relevance of affective and relational network as subjectivising instances. Everyday experiences of the world generate a dynamic and creative potential that affects both individual and collective experiences of the profession.

I The cultural industries and artistic labour

1. Introduction

In this chapter, our aim is to illustrate the main theories that have characterised scholars' reflections on creative industries and artistic labour. Starting from a historical perspective on the birth of the concept of "cultural industries", we describe the rise of cultural industries in contemporary discourse and engage with different approaches that have been developed during the last century. In the second section, we deal with the artistic myth and the growing importance of creativity in nonartistic and economic domains. In the third section, we treat the studies that thematise aesthetic and professional autonomy in artistic and cultural labour. Following the work of Mark Banks (2007), we illustrate three main approaches to the study of cultural work, focusing on their theoretical premises, differences and analogies. Finally, we consider the social, political and community-oriented practices that have been studied in relation to cultural work in the past twenty years.

The first section follows the work of David Hesmondhalgh (2007) and is concerned with the theoretical shifts that have characterised the studies on the intersection between cultural and economic domains. It begins by illustrating Adorno and Horkheimer's critical positions towards modern ways of production, reproduction and consumption of cultural artefacts that led them to polemically coin the term "culture industry". If their positions do not allow for redemption spaces, the work of Herbert Marcuse, although stemming from a similar philosophical background, underlines the ambivalence of cultural phenomena. Marcuse's theory of radical aesthetics fosters the idea of art and culture as triggers of social transformation and became world famous during the European cultural movements of 1968.

Furthermore, the events and the avant-gardes of 1968 led to a reconceptualisation of Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the culture industry in the 1970s. Even if their position towards contemporary culture was considered pessimistic, old fashioned and elitist, different scholars from different streams of literature began approaching culture and media industries reflecting on Adornian perspectives. Several scholars, following Marcuse's and others critiques of capitalist society, developed countercultural reflections that pointed to the importance of symbols and emotions in the production and circulation of cultural goods (Debord, 1970) as well as to the globalised aspects of contemporary cultural industries (Harvey, 1989). At the same time, a number of studies considered the fallacies of Adornian economic considerations and devoted their attention to the study of economic dynamics that characterise the production of cultural goods, highlighting the contradictions and ambiguities of the culture industry system (Garnham, 2005; Miège, 1989). In opposing positions are those scholars who reflect primarily on the cultural processes involved in cultural industry activities. In this case, Adorno is criticised for his elitist positions and for the dismissal of popular and working-class culture potentialities. The approach of British cultural studies is concerned with the analysis of cultural hegemony in contemporary societies and with the possibility for culture to promote novel content that opposes dominant cultural configurations (Hall, 1982; Thompson, 1963). Grounded in opposing epistemological stances, studies on the political economy of culture and those of British culture have mainly been described by virtue of their differences in the approach to the analysis of culture and society. In this section, we follow the work of Graeme Turner (2003), David Hesmondhalgh (2007) and Jim McGuigan (1992) and describe the main features of the contributions to the study of culture and society. In the discussion, attention is given to the different interpretations and uses of Marxian theories and to the relationship between economic and cultural determinants by the two analytical streams. Having illustrated the theories that have been employed, we illustrate the major

critiques of political economy and cultural study approaches. The rise of postmodern trends and of a post-Fordist economic organisation have urged an analysis that takes into account both the economic and the cultural aspects in which cultural production is embedded, underlying the need for a convergence of the two research streams.

The second section illustrates the reflections developed in the sociology of art and culture focusing on the role of cultural producers. In the first part, using the work of Janet Wolff (1993) and Jim McGuigan (2009), we trace a brief history of the artists' position in the Western social imagination, from craftmanship to Romantic genius. During the 18th century, following the end of the patronage system, artists had to deal with the uncertainty derived from being art sellers in the market and with the rising institutionalisation of aesthetic criteria in academies and conservatoires. In modern societies dominated by economic and technological rationality, several artistic movements have raised questions concerning artistic autonomy and authenticity, and they have made claims about the uniqueness of their activity through an "art for arts' sake" doctrine and anti-bourgeoise bohemian lifestyles. Following the Romantic movement's stances, autonomy from market dynamics and traditional institutions became central for the narration of authentic artistic activity and for the creation of the isolated artistic genius myth. During the 19th century, critiques were recognised as an ordinary quality involved in human activities, and the idea of the extraordinarily talented genius was heavily criticised. Nevertheless, contemporary discourses are still loaded with rhetoric on artistic and creative activities (Wolff, 1993). The second section focuses on studies on the sociology of art and culture that point to the social nature of the artistic creation process. The Marxist tradition started a theoretical reflection on the ideological nature of the arts where artists are seen as mere executors of a cultural scheme of domination. During the 1970s, Howard Becker's work "Art Worlds" (1976) applied the Chicago school's

approach to the study of sociological interactions in the domain of artistic production. Considering art primarily as someone's work, Becker focuses on the professionals that make the production and circulation of artwork possible; in this system, the artist is considered as one among a collective of social actors. The role of social institutions in shaping and selecting oeuvres that are available to the public emerges strongly from Becker's analysis as well as the relevance of the relation between production and consumption. Attention to the social nature of artistic activity is also central to the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Employing a constructionist and historical approach, Bourdieu, in "The field of cultural production", systematised his field theory in relation to the artistic domain (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993). Considering the vicissitudes of the French literary field as exemplary, the French author shows how different social and institutional actors compete for legitimacy in the cultural arena and how the work of art always needs to be related to the sociohistorical determinants operating in the field. The last part is concerned with the role of creativity in late modern societies through the work of Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) and McGuigan (2009). Beginning in the 1970s, an artistic-related concept that pointed at flexible and risk-taking features of cultural work became increasingly present in enterprises' managerial economic discourses (Ross, 2004). In late modernity, creativity is transformed into a personal and institutional asset that harmonises particularly with contemporary capitalist's values of autonomy and self-control (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Furthermore, the role of cultural industries has become an object of interest by policy-makers (Florida, 2002), a passage that marked the importance of culture and creativity for post-Fordist organisational changes (McGuigan, 2009).

In the third section, we consider the studies of labour in the cultural industries that have been developed in the past twenty years and that have taken into account the tension between

creative autonomy and economic needs. Following Banks (2007), we divide those approaches into three groups. The first stream of studies follows critical theorists' reflections on the relation between art, culture and industry. Here, the focus is explicitly on structural dynamics, and cultural workers' experiences are often left aside. Contemporary cultural production is conceptualised as an alienating activity affected by an ongoing loss of authenticity and innovation capacity (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002; Rifkin, 2001). Craft production processes appear to be a relevant exception, allowing the maintenance of some spaces of autonomy and emancipation for the artist (Miège, 1989), even if endangered by the continuous expansion of industrial and technological ways of production. A second stream of literature refers to Foucault's reflections on government and power in neoliberal societies (Foucault, 1978) and focuses on workers' positions in contemporary cultural production and reproduction processes (Du Gay, 1996). In this context, workers internalize values of individualisation and competition and become the reproductive core of neoliberal disciplinary mechanisms (Rose, 2005). Considering the sector's emphasis on autonomy and creativity, scholars have recognised workers' roles in the dynamics of self-exploitation and self-commodification (Ursell, 2000). Thus, creative workers become the model of contemporary ethos of work (McNay, 2009) and the exquisite bearers of a capitalist entrepreneurial selfhood (Scharff, 2016). The third approach to the study of cultural producers in contemporary times questions both the negative and desocialised conceptualisation of culture industries that characterise critical theory's approaches and the powerlessness of creative workers sustained by Foucauldian-inspired analysis. Following Beck's thesis of ambivalent individualisation (Beck, 1992), scholars in this tradition explore the possibilities for the emergence of an alternative ethos characterised by a positive relation between individual needs of expression and economic imperatives (Banks, 2006; Hesmondhalgh, 2010). In this sense, noninstrumental networking practices, in live and digital

interactions, are central for the analysis of cultural and creative workers' communitarian and relational instances (Alacovska, 2018; Graham and Gandini, 2017). The last section of the chapter is focused on considering social and political practices that have characterised cultural workers' mobilisations in the past twenty years. During this period, cultural workers have shown evidence of egalitarian and community-oriented practices, as happens in the case of artists' cooperative constructions (Murgia and de Heusch, 2020; Sandoval, 2018) and in artistic and political communities (d'Ovidio and Cossu, 2017; Hracs and Leslie, 2014; Maddanu, 2018). In fact, contrary to common belief about individualisation, cultural workers' tendencies towards the construction of alternative socialities have led some scholars to define cultural work as a compassionate and caring activity (Alacovska, 2020; Sandoval, 2018). Furthermore, the role of artistic activism has been particularly important for the European movement against precarity and austerity. Following the 2008 global financial crisis, cultural workers were particularly active in mobilising their creative knowledge to generate symbolic resources to sustain self-employed and precarious workers' social and political movements (Armano et al., 2017; de Peuter, 2014a).

2. Culture and industry

In this section, we analyse how the relationship between culture and industry was first considered at the beginning of the last century by theorists in the Frankfurt School tradition. In this sense, we underline the aspects proposed by German scholars that shaped the debate during the following decades. Subsequently, we describe two research streams that consider the role of culture and economy in modern societies. First, we refer to the work of scholars in the political economy of culture and point to relations with Adornian theorisations and Marxist positions. Second, we consider the work by scholars in cultural studies, pointing to

the influence of Gramscian thought and to their attention to popular subcultures. Last, we consider possible points of connection between the two traditions.

2.1 The Frankfurt School and its critiques

The term "culture industry" was first found in the work of German scholars Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the chapter "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" of their collection of essays first published in 1947, "The dialectic of Enlightenment" (2002). The German authors formed their philosophical thoughts along the lines of the Frankfurt School. Scholars in this tradition aimed to construct a critical theory of society and were particularly concerned with the contemporary debate on mass culture and ideology. After fleeing Nazi Germany and reaching the US, they reflected on the forms of social domination characteristic of industrial modernisation and on their relationship with the artistic and cultural domains. They structured their contribution around rationalised mass cultural production and pointed to processes of commodification and standardisation. In individualised industrial modernity, artistic and cultural production is subject to a progressive loss of autonomy and uniqueness in favour of economic dynamics. Following this movement, Adorno and Horkheimer juxtaposed "culture" and "industry" and coined the term "culture industry" that highlighted the paradox of the relationship between culture and economics (Hesmondhalgh, 2007).

> "Films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce. They call themselves industries, and the published figures for their directors' incomes quell any doubts about the social necessity of their finished products." (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002: 95)

Influenced by Hegel's dialectic idealism and Marx's materialism, it is the authors' view that the arts hold both the possibility for a social critique of society and the role of expressing its highest values. In contrast, industry-related goods are commodities produced in market economies under capitalist relations. The very essence of the work of art is nullified in the encounter between cultural production and industrial logics. Cultural goods, deprived of their enlightening potential, become mere entertainment goods, characterised by "unending sameness" (ibidem, p.106) and are affected by the impossibility of novelty, where "amusement congeals into boredom" (id., p.109). In this context, both consumers and producers in the capitalist corporative industry of culture are alienated and standardised, as the degeneration of the artistic and cultural product takes place not only at the production level but also affects the whole cultural experience. In Adorno's work, an exception to the irredeemable loss of the social and aesthetic function of the arts could still be found in the aesthetic expression of the avant-gardes (Adorno, 2020).

A second position that stems from Frankfurt School's reflection on culture and mass society is that of Hebert Marcuse. In his view, capitalist cultural production is, undoubtedly, oppressive and intended to perpetuate inequalities; nevertheless, the artistic and aesthetic dimensions can still offer a valuable space of resistance and emancipation (Marcuse, 2007). In the essay "The Affirmative Character of Culture", first published in 1937, Marcuse describes bourgeoise culture as characterised by repressive instances as well as by open spaces for "humanity, goodness, joy, truth and solidarity" (p.100). The development of his critique of contemporary culture is expressed in the 1964 essay "The One-Dimensional Man", where the author reports how previous subversive attempts to break with social norms have been absorbed by mainstream culture and deprived of their radical potential. In this sense, he contested Marxists' appreciation for aesthetic realism and claims that art has

to break conventional aesthetic forms. The author supported the 1968 movements and, in his writings, stressed the radical potential of artistic practice in an increasingly modernised society. Furthermore, in Marcuse's opinion, technology is not negative *per se* but is the historical process that characterises it as an instrument of domination. Despite displaying a generally pessimistic view, Marcuse distances his thought from other Frankfurt School philosophers and looks at technology's potential union with art and culture to break the current language of domination.

In the decades that preceded the cultural movements of the late 1960s, Frankfurt School's pessimism towards culture and society was dismissed as old and elitist, not suitable to describe and comprehend the cultural and technological trends of modern society, but during the 1970s, the concept of the "culture industry" reappeared in its plural form. According to Nicholas Garnham (2005), the reconsideration of Frankfurt School's contribution was partly due to the May 1968 countercultural and anticapitalist movements but was also attributable to a renewed and growing interest in Marxist analysis of economic and cultural matters. In this sense, philosophical considerations of culture and society became central for the work of academics concerned with the emerging field of communication studies, political economy of culture and cultural studies. Frankfurt School's reflection on the interplay between technology, culture and the economy has been particularly fruitful for the following years' debate in culture and media studies. Despite considering technology as mainly an instrument of domination, the work of German scholars provided theoretical and conceptual tools "that make possible a critical theory of technology that articulates both emancipatory and oppressive aspects" (Kellner, 1997: 24).

A number of scholars integrated Adorno's considerations on commodification and loss of autonomy of the arts when subordinate to economic logics. The analysis of capitalist cultural

industries underscored, on the one hand, the growing importance of symbols and emotions in the production and consumption of cultural goods (Debord, 1970; Rifkin, 2001) and, on the other hand, the increasingly central role of globalised corporations in cultural production (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993; Harvey, 1989). A second stream of literature has focused on the weaknesses of Adorno's theorisation, especially in developing a quantitative economic analysis of cultural industries. The works of Garnham (1990) and Miège (1989) highlight the ambivalence and complexity of cultural industries against Adorno's unified analysis, pointing at the differences—and difficulties—in producing and selling cultural goods and the need for a sector-specific analysis. A third critique of Adorno addresses his elitist and nostalgic positions with regard to culture and society. Furthermore, in Adorno's opinion, the ideological element is embedded in the cultural form and pre-existing production and commercialisation processes. The cultural studies tradition dignifies popular and everyday culture and focuses on the study of cultural structures that characterise contemporary systems of domination (Hall, 1971; Williams, 1977), looking at popular cultures' potential for social change against mainstream mass culture (Hall and Jefferson, 1975).

2.2 Political Economy of Culture and British Cultural Studies

The relationship between culture and industry has been developed during the last fifty years by a number of research streams that have used different methodologies, epistemologies and theoretical frameworks. After the Second World War, the growing role of private and globalised corporations in cultural business became increasingly clear to media and communication scholars. In Europe, critical scholars' engagement with unequal power relations that permeate, and structure cultural industries is strictly connected with Adornian theorisations. In this section, we focus on two traditions that have been particularly

important in structuring the studies of artistic and cultural labour, paying particular attention to questions of power and social justice (Hesmondhalgh, 2007).

Stemming from the "political economy of culture approach", some scholars have reproached Adornian pessimism about the outcomes of culture and market relations as well as his inadequate attention to the economic mechanisms governing cultural industries. Nevertheless, British media sociologists referred to a Marxian framework, considering, on the one hand, the possession of means of cultural production as the determining factor of the relation between society and mass culture and, on the other hand, the behaviour of cultural markets as similar to commodity markets (Murdock and Golding, 1977). During the period of deregulation policies in the 1980s, scholars became increasingly concerned with ethical and normative questions concerning the role of private business in the cultural domain and looked at symbolic aspects of culture in relation to social justice. The dichotomy between art and the cultural industry was overcome alongside a shift towards the engagement of cultural industries in policy matters. In fact, scholars' reflections converged on the need for a systematic and quantitative approach to cultural industry analysis to reach cultural and economic goals in terms of policy matters. Among those scholars, the "cultural industries approach" started following the works of Miège (1989) and Garnham (1990) and considers the structural dynamics of cultural production. In "The Capitalization of Cultural Production" (1989), Bernard Miège elaborates a critique of the culture industry's concept and underlines the need to study the field not as a unified territory but as a heterogeneous domain that follows specific logics and that is, therefore, best captured by the plural form "culture industries". While Adornian theorisations privileged the analysis of market dynamics of cultural consumption, the work of Miège put the productive logics characteristic of culture industries at the centre. The contribution of Nicholas Garnham (1987, 1990) considers

cultural sector elements of similarity and difference from other domains of mass production. In this sense, the higher expenditures needed in the moment of the production of cultural commodities and the low cost of the reproduction of goods are recognised as the main features of the cultural production process. Furthermore, Garnham considers the diffusion of the cultural product and recognises a structural difficulty of the sector in the products' saleability. The rapidly changing audience's tastes call for the need for strong investments in marketing, and at the same time, consumer studies are vital for cultural producers to be and remain competitive in the market.

Studies in the political economy of culture have marked the path of contemporary media and communication studies and have been characterised by epistemological realism, the belief that it is possible to know and understand the external reality, and the effort to shed light on the economic significance of cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Even if inspired by a Marxian heritage, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2011) note that, in this tradition of study, questions about cultural work tend to be left aside.

Scholars in cultural studies have critiqued the nonemancipatory view of technology and popular culture promoted by Frankfurt tradition studies, but as Kellner (1997) points out, both traditions "insist that culture must be studied within the social relations and the system through which is produced and consumed" (p.18). Epistemologically, British cultural studies approach the analysis of contemporary culture from a constructivist point of view, influenced by subjectivist and postmodern stances (Hesmondhalgh, 2007), and focus on the analysis of structures of domination that characterise contemporary societies. The reflection on working class culture relations with dominant ideology is influenced by European critical Marxist thought and, in particular, by Althusser's work (2006), which underlines the autonomy of culture from economic relations. Thus, culture is not a mere reduction of the economy but

needs to be studied at the level of social practices that replicate it (Williams, 1961). Althusser's view of the relation between the economy and ideology stimulates scholars in cultural studies to leave aside orthodox Marxist explanations of power relations (Hall, 1985). However, it is in the Gramscian theory of hegemony that cultural studies' scholars find the best articulation of subaltern groups' cultural possibilities. In this sense, while Althusser tends to consider ideology and domination as not passible of being influenced by subalterns' moves, Gramsci's theory allows for the analysis of the interplay between structure and agency in the cultural process (Bennett, 2006). The culture and ideology of subaltern and dominant classes are both involved in a continuous struggle for hegemony, the result of which is never fixed but always related to a particular and ongoing negotiation (Gramsci and Hoare, 1971). Through Gramscian thought, the cultural studies tradition manages to overcome its internal tensions between culturalist stances, which highlight the role of human agency in cultural processes, and the more determinist structuralist side (Turner, 2003). Starting from the late 1980s, the focus shifted from the reproduction of dominant ideologies to the possibilities of resistance offered to subcultural groups, highlighting subalterns noncomplying cultural practices. Furthermore, attention to the dynamics of domination has led some scholars to openly challenge the gendered analysis produced by the discipline, thus advocating the need for a renewed analysis of culture open to feminist insights (McRobbie, 1990). During the same years, cultural studies have been criticised because of their optimistic view of popular culture and for their preference for the study of cultural consumption over production (McGuigan, 1992). Similarly, cultural studies' interdisciplinary approach raises methodological doubts from scholars in other fields that, in particular, questioned the rigorousness of the use of ethnography by cultural studies scholars (Turner, 2003).

Bringing two opposite epistemological stances to the study of culture and society, over the decades, cultural studies and studies in the political economy of culture have been the first critics of each other's work. On the one hand, cultural study scholars condemned the primacy of the economic domain and the idea that cultural conditions are a reflex of economic relations (Hall, 1982). On the other hand, cultural studies are criticised because of their lack of attention to economic factors (Murdock and Golding, 2005) and have been accused of being politically ambiguous. Nevertheless, there have been several points of contact between the two approaches (Murdock, 1989), and following the rise of post-Fordism and postmodernism, the traditions have become closer (McGuigan, 1992). During recent years, cultural research has been directed on the economic and political conditions of cultural production, involving a renewed reflection on the economic aspects involved and a rigorous use of sociological research methods in the case of cultural studies (Turner, 2003). Nevertheless, despite the Marxist and neo-Marxist heritage and the work done by Miège (1989), only in recent decades have the borders between production and consumption blurred, bringing cultural work to the front stage of academic reflection on cultural production (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011).

3. The place of the arts

In this section, we reflect on the formation of the "artistic myth" during the 18th century and on the critique carried by scholars in the sociology of art and culture during the 19th century. Furthermore, we deepen the account of Howard Becker's and Pierre Bourdieu's sociological contribution to the study of the artistic domain that shed light on the social nature of artistic practice. Last, we consider the centrality of creativity for contemporary capitalists' discourses

and the contemporary increasing attention devoted to creative and cultural industries from policymakers, urbanists and economists.

3.1 (Questioning) The artistic myth

Raymond Williams dedicates the first chapter of "The Long Revolution" (1961), titled "The Creative Mind", to cultural producers' social position over time. Western ideas surrounding artistic and creative production are the results of a peculiar sequence of historical conditions whose discursive origins are grounded in the Romantic notion of the artists (Wolff, 1993). Scholars in the sociology of artistic production agree in considering the Renaissance period as the historical moment when artistic activities start to differentiate themselves from the domain of craft (Becker, 1982; Sennett, 2008). Under the influence of the Church and State, artistic canons were institutionalised subsequently to the creation of academies and conservatories. The relevance of artistic activities grew over the centuries, and the labour market for artistic producers gradually shifted from the system of patronage, where the artist perceived a wage from its patron to artist positioning as sellers on the market. In this movement, artists gained intellectual and artistic autonomy but lost employment security (Wolff, 1993). During the 19th century, the opposition between the market and the arts became a central node of Western aesthetic theorisations. While the economic interest in the arts by the European bourgeoisie was increasing, the Romantic movement promoted ideals of rebellion against modern art institutions. The rise of industrial capitalism and instrumental rationality alongside the institutionalisation of the arts were challenged by oppositional movements that stated the necessity of producing art works free from concerns of profits and institutional formalities. This resistance gave birth to a dualistic structure in the artistic field (Bourdieu, 1996), bring to the emergence of "art for arts' sake" claims and bohemian

lifestyles. The unbounded creative genius starts to be considered representative of "true" artistic production. On the one hand, "art for arts' sake" claims are structured in opposition to market dynamics, around the higher consideration of cultural values over economic activities. On the other hand, the bohemian attitude promoted a universe of values alternative to the bourgeoise lifestyle. In particular, autonomy from market dynamics is configured as a central value in the conceptualisation of artistic activity. The artisanal way of production, endangered by the combination of economic and technological stances, begins to be claimed as the process where the autonomy and authenticity of the arts are truly manifested. In the Western social narration of the arts, the centrality of the 18th century refusal to submit aesthetic significance to economic dynamics structures the debates that follow culture and industry. The first analysts of modernity (Marx and Engels, 1970; Weber, 2002) questioned the arts' freedom, autonomy and authenticity in societies oriented towards economic and technological rationalisation.

The myth of the decadence of true art in the face of technological and economic rationality has been challenged in various ways. First, scholars recognise that not all cultural production, even in contemporary times, has been absorbed by industrial dynamics and that there are still some cultural activities that operate on a craft basis (Adorno, 1981; Miège, 1989; Williams, 1981) that will not be easily switched to another mode of production (Garnham, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Similarly, market dynamics have always been present in artists' lives, and there have been spaces in artistic production that exceeded economic logics (Banks, 2006; Williams, 1981). Following Marxist aesthetic reflection, several scholars challenged the association of creativity with the arts and stated that creativity is an ordinary quality of human beings, not a divine gift, and that it has always been a part of human activities (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; William, 1961; Wolff, 1993). What

differentiates creative and artistic work from other human occupations is the content of the activity and the creation of symbols (Williams, 1961). Cultural products are, in the first instance, "symbolic, aesthetic, expressive and/or informational" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2013: 60). In the past century, although it has become increasingly clear that it is possible for artistic work to be exploited and alienated as it happens in other domains, the Romantic idea that positions the artist outside of economic constraints is still present in contemporary discourses (Wolff, 1993).

3.2 Art as human creation

While art and humanities studies have often privileged the work of art in aesthetic terms, scholars in the sociology of art and culture have pointed to the social nature of artistic creation and aesthetic ideals (Zolberg, 1990). Following Marx's theories, it has emerged that artists' production does not take place in a cultural void. The relation between arts, technological innovation and social change has been a central topic of investigation for the intellectual left and beyond (Adorno, 1981; Marcuse, 2007; McGuigan, 2009). Until the mid-1980s, reflections in the literature were essentially theoretical and directed at the analysis of the ideological domination of upper classes, while the role of the artists, considered mere executors of class relationships, often remained in the background (Wolff, 1993).

In contrast, scholars in the "production of culture tradition" have focused on the complex articulation of labour that characterises cultural production. Against the myth of the artist as individual genius, art is configured as a social process. Reflections in this line of thought are grounded in the United States sociological environment and, particularly, in the Chicago School tradition. Following the sociological approach of Everett C. Hughes, Howard Becker

considers art, in the first instance, as someone's work and concentrates his attention neither on the artist nor on the oeuvre but on the surrounding "art worlds" (Becker, 1982). In "Art Worlds" (1982), the author analyses the social organisation of different art forms: from pop and classical music to poetry and modern photography. Grounded in the interactionist and empiricist tradition, he focuses on the complex system that surrounds and makes possible the production, circulation and consumption of art works. Against the sociological approach to art that produces aesthetic judgements, Becker aims at renewing the discipline, producing "an understanding of the complexity of the cooperative networks through which art happens, of the way the activities of both Trollope and his groom meshed" (p.1). In this sense, Becker's analysis acknowledges, on the one hand, the role of social institutions in producing and reproducing the work of art and, on the other hand, the intrinsically social nature of artistic activity. In this panorama, the artist loses their divine potential and becomes one of the many actors that contribute to the birth of the artistic product, a "sub- group of the world's participants who, by common agreement, possess a special gift, therefore make a unique and indispensable contribution to the work, and thereby make it art" (p.35). The contributions of Peterson (1976) and Di Maggio (1987) further expand and delineate the American reflection on the sociology of art and culture, bringing attention to the relations between production and consumption in the contemporary artistic domain.

In Europe, the analysis of Pierre Bourdieu (1996) on the genesis and evolution of artistic fields in France questions the mystical character of culture and its extrasocial origin. Using a constructionist and historical approach, Bourdieu analyses the artistic domain and systematises his "field theory", which considers human activities divided into systems of rule-specific environments. Focusing on the birth of the literary field at the end of the 18th century, the author describes the oppositional dynamics that characterised the struggle for artistic

legitimacy. In the competitional arena, on the one hand, actors' and institutions' positioning structures the field, but in turn, the composition of forces in the field determines the actor's position in an ongoing relational dynamic. In this sense, every cultural product, avant-gardes included, is linked to the contingent configuration of the field in a precise historical moment. Furthermore, Bourdieu's contribution considers the field's condition to be simultaneously autonomous and dependent on other fields, such as political and economic, and focuses on the historical movements that granted autonomy to the artistic and literary field in France from others. In Bourdieu's theory, a central role is occupied by the notion of symbolic capital, which is considered the core aspect of social worlds. In fact, according to the author, the result of the dynamics of competition that animate the field is not determined by sole economic factors, but instead, different types of capital concur in structuring the field. Art is a symbolic good, not solely dependent on a socioeconomic basis, whose space of production is formed by a struggle between social forces (Bourdieu, 1996). In this sense, the analysis of the field of production needs to be accompanied by a reflection on the reception of cultural products. According to the thesis of "Distinction"(Bourdieu, 1984) on cultural consumption, the author recognises a homology,

> established today between the space of production and the space of consumption is the basis of a permanent dialectic which means that the most diverse tastes find that they can be satisfied by works on offer, which appear as if they were their objectification, while the fields of production find the conditions of their constitution and of their functioning in the tastes which ensure – immediately or in due course – a market for their different products. (Bourdieu, 1996: 250)

Developing a parallel between inner dispositions of art producers and audiences in the French artistic field, the author shows both the profound embedding of the cultural field in sociohistorical contingent dynamics and its deep relationship with economically led dynamics.

During the past century, contributions to the sociology of cultural production demystified common beliefs related to art and culture. On the one hand, Bourdieu develops, through the analysis of French cultural fields, a general theory of power, but his studies report a lack of attention to popular and mass culture (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). On the other hand, Becker approaches the world of art from an empiricist approach devoted to an interactionist microsociology. Nevertheless, through their different theoretical approaches, both Becker and Bourdieu shed light on the social nature of artistic practice and brought the analysis of art to the main stage of sociological reflections on culture.

3.3 The role of creativity in late modernity

According to Boltanski and Chiapello (2007), the translation of artistic concepts into the managerial discursive domain started during the 1970s and the 1980s. In the growing competition, managers were looking for investments in flexible psychological and cultural assets, and creativity became increasingly valuable to organisational needs. This attention in economic and managerial studies became a matter of policy during the 1990s, when creativity seemed to be indispensable for economic growth (McGuigan, 2009; O'Connor, 2010). Being creative was then conceptualised as a crucial resource not only in professional and managerial terms but also a personal and private matter of growth (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999), becoming a resource to mobilise and a contemporary value (Rifkin, 2001), connected to the social duty to self-express that characterises late modernity's ethos (Beck, 1992; Du Gay, 1996).

The idea of creativity constructed during this period exploits certain qualities traditionally associated with artistic activity, especially those connected with risk taking and intuitive

decisions. As scholars have underlined, those qualities are typical of a modernist and avant-gardist aesthetic specific to certain arts whose ideological reference is the Romantic artistic genius (McGuigan, 2009; O'Connor, 2010).

Starting in the 1980s, culture and creativity became increasingly important for economic policy action (Hesmondhalgh, 2007) and for the organisational post-Fordist change. Cultural industries, from a marginalised position, are now considered exemplary of fresh and flexible managerial control, where employers are involved in building the enterprise's values (Florida, 2002; Ross, 2004). During the 1990s, the new policies celebrating cultural industries' way of functioning met urbanists' need to regenerate the deindustrialized urban milieus of Western cities. Richard Florida (2002), among others, promoted a model that aimed at the reconfiguration of cities through creative districts, providing municipalities with low investment urban regeneration plans (McRobbie, 2004). During this period, cultural and creative areas seemed to impact the real estate sector directly. Sharon Zukin (1989), using Bourdieu's notion of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), analyses the transformation of previous urban manufacturing areas into trendy neighbourhoods inhabited by the educated and extravagant middle and upper classes. The relations between urbanism, economy and creative industries have been scrutinised by Andy C. Pratt (2000, 2004), who considers, in his empirical investigations, critical stances from the cultural studies perspective.

Several scholars have recognised that the interest in cultural and creative industries from sectors traditionally detached from the cultural domain follows a series of changes in the structure of contemporary capitalism (McGuigan, 2009; Rifkin, 2001). Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007) assert in "The New Spirit of Capitalism" that organised capitalism that characterised the postwar period has left its space to a novel capitalism based on the notion of autonomy and self-control. In their view, society's critique of 1968 plays a central role in

the transformations of contemporary capitalism. At the end of the 1960s, the authors recognised a social critique of capitalism that advocates equality and solidarity and an artistic critique that contested oppressive cultural institutions and called for liberation, creativity and autonomy from social structures. While the social critique remains excluded and disappeared from hegemonic discourses in the following years, the artistic critique started to become embedded by managerial and capitalist discourses. The rhetoric on autonomy has become a central part of capitalist values, and several scholars have noted that creative and bohemian lifestyles fit particularly with individualistic stances and the need for flexibility of postindustrial capitalism (R Lloyd, 2010; McRobbie, 2004; Menger, 2014).

4. Studies of labour in the cultural industries

Since the last decades, the study of cultural work has been largely absent from scholars' reflections on cultural industries (Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Traditionally, creative work has been absent from studies in employment and industrial relations, but recently, the analysis of cultural work has seen rapid growth in different theoretical traditions, from cultural studies (McRobbie, 1998) and political economy of culture (McGuigan, 2010) to labour process studies (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). Scholarly analysis has focused on the tension between creative autonomy and economic needs that structures the field of cultural production. In this section, I follow the work of Mark Banks (2007) and illustrate three approaches to the study of cultural work that deal differently with issues related to workers' power and autonomy. The first approach develops Adornian ideas about "culture industry" and adopts a Marxian point of view on the production processes, relegating workers to the background. The second approach stems from Foucault's reflection on self-governing disciplined subjects and considers cultural workers to be active agents of

their own exploitation. Third, a critique of the desocialising tendency associated with cultural work by the previously illustrated study's traditions is considered alongside those studies that have taken into account the collective stances present among cultural workers. In this sense, the possibilities offered by the increased reflexivity of individualisation and by alternative forms of cultural production that prioritise art over commercial needs are exalted. Finally, I will consider the literature's considerations on the relationship between artistic and cultural work and collective mobilisation processes.

4.1 Critical Theory approaches

Scholars adopting the critical theory tradition developed Adorno's ideas about culture and industry. This field of studies is characterised by a positive conceptualisation of culture, considered to be the space for authentic human expression, and by a negative view of the social processes that characterise industrial modernity. Cultural industries are studied in Marxian and neo-Marxian frameworks and are treated as examples of capitalist production's impact on social and cultural domains (Banks, 2007). In such a context, workers and their subjective experience of work are often disregarded by analyses that privilege the study of economic forces shaping the cultural production system. Through the years, some of Adorno's assumptions have been reconsidered and adapted to the contemporary changing environment. In the studies that followed his analysis of culture industry, on the one hand, the economic dynamics are considered a primary factor—if not the only one—in creating the cultural production's environment (Murdock and Golding, 1977), while on the other hand, elements of unpredictability, complexity and differentiation are introduced in the analysis of cultural industries (Miège, 1989). At the same time, post-Adornian critics in aesthetic and social theory have underlined that cultural and aesthetic domains have gained

a privileged position in contemporary societies, making cultural industries increasingly powerful in shaping social imaginaries and tastes over the years (Baudrillard, 1994; Debord, 1970).

Scholars who work within the critical theory framework have followed a Marxist and structuralist approach and have tended to overlook the study of production and to take for granted its alienating effects. The absence of a critical reflection on the working subject in Marxist and post-Marxists theorisations affects post-Adornian cultural and media studies that often leave aside the study of social relations of production (Banks, 2007). Following Marxist's aesthetic reflection, writers in this tradition have deconstructed the mythical uniqueness of artists, considering creativity a bourgeoise concept and artists to be ordinary workers (Bourdieu and Johnson, 1993; Wolff, 1993). Nevertheless, according to Miège (1989), artisanal ways of production are still present in cultural industries, and precisely in this space, workers have the possibility of exerting a certain degree of autonomy in artistic production. In this regard, several scholars recognise that it is necessary to allow workers to maintain an emotional connection with the oeuvre to generate valuable products. (Garnham, 1990; Ryan, 1992). It appears that, despite Adorno's thesis, the rationalisation and industrialisation of creative work is not complete, and, in this sense, it is difficult to conceptualise a completely alienated cultural worker. Nevertheless, according to critical theorists, artisanal spaces of production have been sieged by industrial-led dynamics (Sennett, 2008; Williams, 1961), and the crafted way of production *per se* does not assure art authenticity or workers' creative potential (McRobbie, 2002b). Employment in the cultural sector appears to function as a golden cage that perpetuates exploitative working relations under the promise of creativity and self-fulfilment (Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011).

The reflections of scholars in this tradition focus on structural dynamics that characterise the relation between economy and culture and has been considered inadequate to understand the subjective level and the specific power relations that permeate the field of cultural production (Banks, 2007). Cultural work is considered to be embedded in oppressive relations, subjected to top-down power dynamics where workers are vexed by commercial imperatives and without any possibility of agency to challenge capitalist production. Furthermore, it seems to be assumed that preindustrial ways of production granted creative freedom and autonomy, while in industrial and contemporary times, workers have lost their "inner" authenticity and have witnessed an ongoing reduction of their spaces of emancipation (Rifkin, 2001).

4.2 Governmental approaches

Scholars that approach the study of cultural work from a governmental perspective employ notions of power derived from Foucauldian theories, referring in particular to the collection of essays "The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79" (Foucault, 1978). In this book, Michel Foucault describes a competitive neoliberal discursive environment within which he traces the evolution of the classical "homo oeconomicus" into a subject oriented to grow its human capital entrepreneurially (p.226).

In dealing with issues of power and autonomy in cultural industries, scholars in this tradition consider cultural workers at the centre of productive mechanisms and are explicitly concerned with theorising workers' experience of cultural work (Du Gay, 1996; McRobbie, 2002b). Starting in the 1970s, notions of performance, autonomy and competition have been increasingly present in private and public enterprises' policies, giving birth to a novel regime

of work (Donzelot, 1991; Knights and Willmott, 1989). In this context, workers are asked to become masters of their own career through autonomous decision-making processes and carry the responsibility to be "capable of bearing the burdens of liberty" (Rose, 2005: viii). The tight relation between artistic work and self-expression as well as the talent-driven and short-term nature of the sector has configured cultural work as a privileged place for the study of entrepreneurial dynamics of work (Du Gay, 1996). Angela McRobbie (1998, 2004), in her extensive analysis of the fashion sector, reflects on how young workers internalise the system's request for creativity and flexibility and become responsible for making real their dreams of future fame. A new work ethos has emerged that functions as a "dispositif" (Foucault, 2012), pushing workers towards self-exploitation and hyperperformative ways of production (McNay, 2009). In this sense, according to Foucauldian scholars, power does not operate as a top-down coercive force that drains authenticity from creative workers. Instead, working subjects are actively engaged in the reproduction of subjectivizing enterprises' discourses. Thus, disciplinary power is internalized in everyday working life and shapes the subjective experiences of work (Rose, 2005). The birth of an "entrepreneurial selfhood", devoted to self-monitoring and enhancing its competitive potential, is a consequence of the contemporary work values focused on performance, autonomy and competition (Ross, 2008). Isabell Lorey (2015) considers how contemporary subjects are free to realise their aspirations but at the same time are enslaved by risk and uncertainty surrounding their personal and working lives. Analysing workers in the broadcast sector, Gillian Ursell (2000) noted that, along with the responsibility of self-governing, workers enjoy a certain degree of creative autonomy, within the limits allowed by the dominant discourse. Recently, Christina Scharff (2016) delineated the emergence of an "entrepreneurial subjectivity" among young female workers in the classical music sector, describing research participants' efforts to improve and manage themselves as a business. Furthermore, young women's compliance

with the neoliberal values of work has been approached as a peculiar characteristic that connects work-, age- and gender-specific behaviours (Gill, 2014; Gill and Scharff, 2011). Scholars in the governmental approach reflect on how the imperative of creativity and the promise of future rewards give birth to an individualised understanding of failure and success that can lead workers to experience victimisation and anxiety (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010; McRobbie, 2002b, 2015a). In this regard, Angela McRobbie (2002a) pointed to the difficulties in developing collective identities and alternative working configurations in a context where professional networks are celebrated as novel forms of sociality and support against traditional forms of solidarity (Wittel, 2001). In this context, it emerges how social actors embody and reproduce governmental discourse, underlying that power is not a univocal but a multifocal mechanism that is embedded in workers' subjectivation processes. The Foucauldian-inspired analysis of cultural work has been accused of overlooking actors' agency when directed towards noninstrumental factors (Banks, 2006). In fact, several scholars have argued for the possibility for social actors to challenge and resist power reproduction (Knights and McCabe, 2003); but, even when present, workers agency appears unable to reach a systemic level that could trigger social change (Du Gay, 1996).

4.3 Collaborative labour practices and the critique of desocialisation theories

The approaches to the study of cultural work treated in the previous sections have tended to leave collective workers' interests aside. In the first case, considerations about the alienating and commodified nature of contemporary culture labour have been privileged over the analysis of workers' possibilities of agency, while in the second case, workers' complicity with dominant discourses of entrepreneurialism only allows for the pursuit of individualised logics

of professional growth. Nevertheless, it has become increasingly clear that cultural work needs to be analysed considering both individualistic and collective perspectives.

Several scholars have criticised the tendency in governmental studies to overlook the possibility for social actors to act against market values and have advocated for a novel consideration of the communitarian and anti-economic instances embedded in cultural work (Banks, 2017; Hesmondhalgh, 2017). Foucauldian-inspired analyses are accused of discharging the possibility for a positive relation between workers' subjectivity and the creative labour process too quickly (Born, 2002) and have also considered cultural workers as being dominated by the pursuit of profits. In addition, the search for socially oriented projects has only been considered part of an instrumental ethic dedicated to developing professional networks and social capital (Bourdieu, 1996; Wittel, 2001). The idea that cultural workers tolerate exploitative working conditions to have the possibility of some creative autonomy and self-expression "is surely too dismissive of the genuinely positive experiences that some creative workers have in their jobs and careers" (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011: 221). Following the literature's reflection on artisanal cultural productions, Mark Banks draws on the work of Russel Keat (2000) and of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), focusing on the philosophic concept of "practice" to underline "the plural value(s) of work" (2017, p. 2). Furthermore, he states that there has been a "neglect of morality" (Banks, 2006: 457) in cultural industry research. In his opinion, neoliberal logics are not pervasive and have left space for noninstrumental dynamics; in this regard, he adapts the economic concept of the "moral economy" (Sayer, 2000) to the domain of cultural work to describe noninstrumental aspects of cultural entrepreneurship. Even in capitalist contexts, there are economies that enjoy relative autonomy from market imperatives and that can benefit from artisanal production and dissemination processes (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Heelas, 2002).

Going against Richard Sennett's idea of the "corrosion of character" (Sennett, 1998), the idea that enhanced processes of reflexivity could pave the way for an alternative ethos at work (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) is considered. The critics of the desocialisation of cultural work sustain that the identification between personal and professional identity can lead to self-exploitation but can also allow the subject to pursue noneconomic rationales and communitarian stances (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999). Without "the intention to recast cultural work as inherently progressive" (Banks, 2006: 466), the ambiguity of creative work needs to be preserved and brought to the core of the analysis.

During the past ten years, a growing body of studies has considered the broad range of collaborative and relational practices that characterise the working environment of cultural and creative industries (Graham and Gandini, 2017) and their relationship with workers' subjective experience of work (Bandinelli, 2020). Susan Coulson (2012) studies the relation between the understanding of entrepreneurial activities among musicians working in cultural cooperatives and moves the meaning of "active networking" (Blair, 2001) from the original instrumental domain towards indicating a shared sense of community and belonging. Interpersonal worker relations are central for the study of Ana Alacovska (2018) on creative workers based in Southeast Europe. In this study, the author recognises how "in precarious conditions, creative workers go about their work relationally rather than strictly calculably or economically", therefore transforming labour practices into "relational practices" (p.3). Furthermore, in the last decade, the importance of networks and relations for cultural practitioners has not been restricted to physical spaces but has also considered the growth of digital and virtual relations (D'Ovidio and Gandini, 2019), a tendence that has become central especially after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.4 Community building, social and political practices

Following Boltanski and Chiapello's (2007) reflection on social and artistic critiques, while artistic critique has been absorbed in the novel capitalist ethos of creativity (McGuigan, 2009), social critique was relegated outside of the dominant discourses. On the one hand, at the beginning of the 2000s, the growing attention on anti-capitalists' social movements and alternative social and economic relations pointed scholars' analysis towards the development of ethical enterprises (Amin et al., 2002). On the other hand, in the last twenty years, artists have joined the struggles of other vulnerable occupational groups, giving birth to the "anti-precarity" movement across Europe (Banks, 2007; Holmes, 2004).

During the last ten years, several scholars have begun to deepen their study of egalitarian and communitarian behaviour among cultural workers. Starting from the work of Mark Banks (2006) on moral economy, Charles Umney (2017) recognises the presence of community activities but highlights the limits and tensions of cultural workers' social practices in terms of space and time. Other scholars followed Angela McRobbie's call for "a renewal of radical social enterprise and cooperatives" (2011b: 33) and analysed independent artistic group sharing and building collaborative noncapitalist spaces of production. Annalisa Murgia and Sarah De Heusch (2020) consider the case of a freelance cooperative of creative workers, "Smart", founded in Belgium but currently operating in several European countries and its work to support artists' precarious careers through solidarity practices and collective representation. Similarly, Marisol Sandoval (2018) considers workers in the cultural cooperative sector's experience to challenge the idea of individualised "passionate work" (McRobbie, 2002b) towards a collective practice of "compassion at work" (p.12). The role of "care" practices is also key for Ana Alacovska's work (2020) that challenges the individualised conceptualisation of cultural work through a "phenomenological caring

inquiry" (p.14). In her study on Southeastern European artists, the author highlights the relevance of socially engaged arts and community ties in a context that lacks welfare provisions for workers. The role of activism and solidarity is also the object of Neil Percival and David Hesmondhalgh's work (2014), which considers workers' resistance against unpaid work in the UK media industry, pointing at workers' shared belief on the efficacy of collective action. Artistic and creative collectives have been active in challenging cultural neoliberal markets and in generating spaces for resistance and solidarity. Alison Bain and Heather McLean (2013) have considered the case of artistic collectives in Toronto and their effort to promote a culture of reciprocity capable of challenging work precarity. From a cultural geography's point of view, the work of John Vail and Robert Hollands (2013a, 2013b) considers the case of "Amber Film and Photography Collective" efforts to develop innovative and noncommodified practices of cultural economy.

Concerning artists' and creatives' participation in the mobilisation against neoliberal policies of austerity, scholars in movements and collective actions' studies have considered artistic mobilisations as temporary collective actions, looking at its organisational aspects and leadership networks. In the European context, cultural workers' communitarian stances to confront precarious lives and careers have been widely analysed in recent decades by scholars in the field of organisation theory and labour sociology (Armano et al., 2017; de Peuter, 2014b). In France, the efforts of workers in the performance sector to protect the welfare allowance of "intermittence" from deregulatory interventions have been extensively analysed in their relations with precarisation processes (Bodnar, 2006; Corsani and Lazzarato, 2008; Sinigaglia, 2007) and with collective mobilisation (Bureau and Corsani, 2012; Sinigaglia, 2013). In the Italian context, artists and creators were among the promoters of the San Precario network (Murgia, 2014; Vanni and Tarì, 2005) with the intent of making the

precarisation of working conditions visible. The experimental artistical practice was a characteristic feature of the anti-precarity struggles that took place in Italy and in Europe at the beginning of the 2000s and that reunited various souls of social movement constellations. In this context, artist and creative collectives experimented with new ways of practising art, culture and politics (De Sario, 2007; Mattoni and Doerr, 2007). In Italy, between 2011 and 2016, several artistic and political collectives localised their activities in occupied spaces, connecting artistic workers' instances with a radical questioning of the contemporary creative city and the aim of articulating culture as a common good (Borchi, 2018; Giorgi, 2014). The experience of "Teatro Valle" in Rome aimed at directly challenging the neoliberal system, proposed an alternative model of cultural production structured around notions of commons, participation and direct democracy (Maddanu, 2018). In Milan, the collective of "Macao" pointed to the need for an alternative conception of the creative city and denounced the precarious living condition of Milan's creative workforce (d'Ovidio and Cossu, 2017). Combining a radical leftist political culture with creative political actions, Macao's activists connected cultural workers' exploitation with urban dynamics such as gentrification and criticised the Milan municipality's cultural policies (Valli, 2015). In Naples, in 2012, artistic workers occupied the "Ex-Asilo Filangieri" with the intent of constructing a nonprofit-oriented cultural hub open to the contribution of citizenships in the framework of common goods (Vittoria and Mazzarella, 2021). Benefitting from a favourable institutional environment that contributed to the regularisation of its juridical position (Capone, 2019), the Ex-Asilo Filangieri in Naples is the only autonomous cultural space of the 2011–2016 movement that has survived until now. In fact, Teatro Valle's occupants were forced to

evacuate in 2014, and, while we are writing, activists are abandoning Macao in Milan following a situation of physical and social danger in the neighbourhood.[1]

During the past months, the artistic sector, along with many others, has been affected by a completely unexpected crisis tied to the Covid-19 regulations enacted by most countries in the world. In the artists' cases, in Italy and elsewhere, the pandemic has affected working and life experiences that were already characterised by vulnerabilities and opened novel possibilities for community practice and collective identity building (Eikhof 2020). In particular, the absence of social protections and the lack of a clear vision of the future have shown the historical weakness of the field (Comunian and England, 2020), calling for renewed attention to collective instances and mobilisation processes in creative and cultural sectors. For this reason, practices of solidarity and community construction are the subject of Chapter 8 of the present work, where workers' mobilisations during Covid-19 are considered in relation to subjectivation processes.

[1] https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/21_novembre_05/ex-macello-viale-molise-milano-macao-chiude-centro-sociale-sbandati-violenze-troppi-rischi-be69bfec-3e1d-11ec-b8f4-254f69e7c034.shtml

II The subjective experience of workers: theoretical concepts

1. Introduction

The present chapter aims to illustrate the theoretical concepts that inform our analysis of cultural workers in the theatrical sector. In the following pages, we identify and describe a number of concepts that have a strong tradition in the social sciences and often have multiple definitions and uses. First, we engage with the concept of subjectivity and the related themes of agency, power and resistance. Subsequently, we describe contemporary individualisation processes in the context of a neoliberal capitalist environment. Following this reflection, the theoretical background engages with the dynamics arising from the peculiar configuration of contemporary cultural labour, entrepreneurialism and precariousness, referring to scholars' contributions in different traditions. Furthermore, the roles of passion and aspiration are considered in their relationship with the construction of contemporary careers and work ethos. Successively, the literature's contribution to emotional and affective labour is taken into account and developed in its relationship with experiences of cultural work. The last section is devoted to reflection on neoliberal and postfeminist systems of feeling rules and their relationship with exclusionary dynamics and to considering subjects' possibilities for individual and collective resistance.

In the first section, following Paola Rebughini's work (2014, 2018), we consider how the question of the subject has been approached in social theory and, in particular, the tension between autonomy and constraints. In this sense, the reflection of Pierre Bourdieu (1990) explicitly aims to go beyond subjective and objective positions by looking at the embodied nature of the subject. Although this position has been criticised because of its lack of

attention to processes of changing (McNay, 1999), it has been central for those streams of thought that have looked at phenomenological insights on the body as central experience of the world (Shilling, 1993). The reflections of Michel Foucault (2005, 2012) place power relations at the core of subjectivation processes where discourses both shape and are shaped by the subject. Inside power configurations it is nevertheless possible to find spaces of resistance. In this view, the body is one of the main sites wherein subjectivity is created. However, Foucault's theoretical stances have been criticised by some scholars who have claimed the core of subjective experience to be in collective processes (Touraine, 1980, 1985) and intersubjective relations (Habermas, 1984). The contribution of feminist scholars is particularly important for the theoretical analysis of the subject, and alongside postcolonial theorists, feminist scholars have questioned the gendered and raced assumptions of European social theorists (Irigaray, 1985; Rubin, 1975). Furthermore, feminist scholarship has been fundamental in directing the analysis towards the body and the private dimensions of social experiences (Bordo, 2004; Grosz, 1994). In recent years, following feminist insights and Deleuzian's non-Cartesian and anti-humanistic philosophy, a neo materialist stance (Braidotti, 2006a, 2013) emerged with the intention of surpassing the attention on discourses to move towards an analysis that takes into account the embodied subjects as the centre of affective and relational structures (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008).

The second section of this chapter is devoted to tracing the features of the contemporary individualisation process in neoliberal environments. Recognised by early social theorists as core tendencies of modernisation (Bellah, 1973; Durkheim, 2002), individualisation processes have expanded individuals' possibilities of choices in the social environment while at the same time endangering the social structure cohesion. In postindustrial societies, constructing a meaningful biographical path results to be an institutional demand for

individuals who engage in ongoing self-reflexive projects (Giddens, 1991) and bear the consequences of their daily choices in a context that exalts the role of self-responsibility over structural constraints. Furthermore, in current times, the centrality of individualisation processes is fostered by a discursive neoliberal environment that emphasises the qualities of competition and personal skills (Du Gay, 1996). The sociocultural transformations that Western society have undergone in recent decades have resulted in a radical transformation of the meaning of work as well as an increasingly insecure working environment. In this regard, several scholars deem neoliberal tendencies as having a pivotal role in the ongoing transformation and demobilisation of working environments (Bourdieu, 1999; Sennett, 1998) and in erasing sociocultural differences (McRobbie, 2016). On the one hand, contemporary subjects are involved in self-reflexive activities to develop meaningful biographical paths (Beck, 1992), while on the other hand, they have to face an increasingly precarious environment that can possibly undermine subjects' self-realisation (Butler, 2004). In such a context, the construction of the contemporary subject as an entrepreneur of the self has been considered not only a structural injunction but also a subjectivising instance (Foucault, 1978), where skill acquisition and flexibility have become moral values (Skeggs, 2005). In this context, neoliberal capitalist instances and individualisation processes at the same time create spaces for subjects' self-actualisation but also pose structural constraints on the subjects' action that are developed in a context of radical insecurity (Beck, 1992). In contemporary times, individualisation processes bring a paradox: while freeing the subject from structural constraints, they themselves become institutionalised, therefore losing their emancipatory force and resulting in an oppressive force for individuals (Honneth, 2004). However, despite the neoliberal emphasis on competition and autonomy, individualised subjects have the possibility of going beyond individualistic stances and open spaces to engage in cooperation (Colombo et al., 2022). In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic is

considered as a collective moment of self-reflection that has been taking place among individualised subjects and that could open new spaces for practices of community and solidarity.

The third section of this chapter is devoted to detailing and operationalising a number of concepts related to the subject's individualised experiences in neoliberal times and to consider how they have been employed in the study of contemporary cultural work. First, we reflect on the notion of entrepreneurialism and on its relations with long-established ideas of creativity and individual self-expression in cultural industries. Several scholars have identified cultural work as a peculiar space for the practice of neoliberal imperatives of individual responsibility (Brown, 2003) and of investments in personal human capital (Feher, 2009). The contemporary ethos of work seems to couple particularly well with creatives' emphasis on symbolic remuneration and competition and with the blurring of the borders between life and work (R Lloyd, 2010; McRobbie, 2004; Taylor and Littleton, 2012). Furthermore, critical scholars have pointed to how the focus on meritocracy and entrepreneurial attitudes risks obscuring structural inequalities in the labour market (Gill, 2002; Scharff, 2015). Furthermore, feminist scholars have recognised a narrative shift from a discourse that considered the ideal entrepreneurial figure to be a bearer of masculine traits (Gherardi, 1995) to a renewed gendered configuration of entrepreneurial ideals (McRobbie, 2011a). Despite postfeminist imperatives on autonomy and self-expression (Rottenberg, 2014), it has been noted that women's work in deregulated environments risks being involved in "retraditionalisation processes" (Adkins, 1995). Structural inequalities and generalised insecurity have, in fact, been judged to be peculiar features of creative work environments. During the past years, following the popular mobilisations against austerity politics, scholars in employment relations and collective mobilisation have studied processes of precarisation

that were taking place in Europe. In this sense, the notion of precarity has been widely used to indicate a socioeconomic category, a characteristic of labour conditions and a mobilising force, rising doubts about the concept's explanatory power (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011) and on its relation with other axes of vulnerability (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017). Other scholars working on Foucault's theories have spoken about precariousness indicating an ontological condition (Butler, 2004) that can be regarded as an instrument of governmentality (Lorey, 2015). To overcome the limits of analyses that overlook the multiplicity and relationality of precarious experiences, Annalisa Murgia (Murgia, 2010; Murgia and Pulignano, 2019) proposed looking at precariousness beyond employment conditions in relation to the subject's positioning in the social space.

Subsequently, we consider the role of passion and aspiration in the construction of cultural workers' subjectivities. In this sense, a tendency in creative workers' narrations to disregard the uncertainties of the labour market in favour of an "uncritical romance" fed by Romantic ideals of artistic activities has been recognised (McRobbie, 2016; Sandiford and Green, 2021). Current discourses of aestheticization of work suppose labour activity as an act that stems from personal passion and tend to disregard the role of economic and social capital in the career's construction (Duffy and Hund, 2015). In this context, individual aspiration occupies a key position in the subject's formation, alongside postfeminist and entrepreneurial ideals (Duffy, 2016; Lamberg, 2021). Other scholars pointed to the literature's tendency to either glorify or pity cultural workers' passionate attitudes, thereby patronising the subject's capacity to choose their own life (Alacovska, 2019; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). In recent years, academic work has devoted increasing attention to sociopsychic aspects of working activities. In a context where risks are normalised, social and emotional efforts need to be understood in relation to both precarisation processes and entrepreneurial discourses (Ashton, 2021).

Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labour (1979, 1983) has been used to tackle workers' emotional responses to the demand for compulsory networking practices and precarious short-term working activities (Grindstaff, 2002; Wittel, 2001). Moreover, in the context of creative work, the term aesthetic labour has been employed to describe the body practices required of freelance workers, especially in the case of display professions (Mears, 2008, 2011).

In the last section, we consider recent studies that have shed light on both feelings and affective practices involved in the formation of the neoliberal subject and acknowledged the central role played by happiness and positive psychology (Binkley, 2011). Furthermore, the cultivation of a specific set of feeling rules is considered a gendered practice in which women are invited to enhance their skills and become an employable self (Gill and Kanai, 2018). In a context where crises are ordinary (Berlant, 2011), developing resilience and confidence is promoted in apps and coaching practices as a way to cope with uncertainties, but as critical scholars have pointed out, these practices carry demobilising and individualising power (Gill and Orgad, 2018; McRobbie, 2020). Despite scholars' emphasis on processes of desocialisation in neoliberal capitalist environments of work, recent studies have pointed to subjects possibilities of enacting individual (Norbäck, 2021) and collective practices of resistance to entrepreneurial stances in institutionalised frameworks (Mondon-Navazo et al., 2021) or informal settings (d'Ovidio and Cossu, 2017; Maddanu, 2018). Even if scholars in the Foucauldian stream of thought have often underlined the deep connection that ties power and resistance (McNay, 2009), research on cultural workers has often overlooked the ways in which subjects challenge neoliberal discourses (Alacovska, 2020; Banks, 2017). The outcomes of entrepreneurial subjectivising instances are borne by the individual subjects, but

practices of resistance, even if often ambiguous and uncoherent, are central to comprehending how subjects survive in neoliberal times.

2. The subject's position in social theory

Starting from a Weberian reflection, the question of the subject has become a topic increasingly central to and debated on in sociological investigations. The discussion is developed around the position of the subject in autonomous and heteronomous dynamics. In contrast to sociological theories that consider social actors in an ontological relation with social structures (Durkheim, 2008; Parsons, 2013), the constructivist analysis that stems from Weberian writings regards the subject as involved in interpretative processes that are themselves part of social reality. The complex process of meaning attribution to human action has been at the centre of philosophical existentialism, whose heritage for social theory revolves around the difficult equilibrium of emancipation's struggles and constraints of social structure (Rebughini, 2014). The works of existentialist thinkers (Heidegger, 2002; Sartre, 2001) has been criticised because of their abstract and metaphysical concept of the subject (Bourdieu, 1990).

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1972, 1984, 1986, 1990) is devoted to overcoming the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism through the development of theoretical concepts able to mediate between agent and structure. Inspired by the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, he constructs the concept of habitus to indicate the embodied dispositions through which social actors act, experience and modify the environment. Bourdieu's social theory takes shape in the articulation of the notions of practice, habitus and field. In this sense, the structure and conditions of the field inform habitus and practices

(Bourdieu, 1972). Bourdieu's theoretical elaborations have been criticised because of their difficulties in describing transformative processes (McNay, 1999). Georgina Born (2010: 181) refers to Bourdieu's concept of habitus as generating an "account of subjectivity which fails to probe its complexities".

For authors in the poststructuralist stream of thought, the first objective was to deconstruct the idea of the subject that stemmed from the 18th century philosophical tradition that identified the subject as a European bourgeoise male driven by an enlightened rationale. Starting from this critique, the work of Michel Foucault focused on the production of the subject through subjectivation processes that are embedded in social reality (Foucault, 1990). Foucault's subject is embedded in the social world and is defined by the characteristic of being "subject to someone else by control and dependence and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 1982: 781). Foucault's subject is built through operating power relations and, therefore, subjectivity is open ended, since it cannot be defined *a priori* independently from the analysis of the immanent power structures and of a subject's individual and collective experience of the world.

Assuming that power is the core of subjectivation processes, this conception has been questioned because of the limits imposed on the subject's emancipation and because of the absence of intersubjective meaningful relations (Habermas, 1984). If, in Foucault's opinion, modern socialisation is the primary form of domination, for Beck and Giddens, it can be a source of self-realisation through processes of detraditionalization of social forms (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991).

The intellectual debates on the epistemological and ontological position of the subject that followed cultural movements of 1968 set the uniqueness and the singularity of the subject that is, at this point, estranged from a single immovable cultural landscape and rather

embedded in the multiplicity of the social and cultural processes of a globalised world. In this sense, feminist reflections played a central role in deconstructing and challenging Western male categories of thought (Spivak, 1988) and in defining a new place for the subject, outside of traditional dualisms and essentialisms (Irigaray, 1985; Rubin, 1975). Judith Butler's (1997) study followed the late Foucault's reflections on the technologies of the self (Foucault, 2005) and considered subjectivity as both enacted and acted upon by power structures. The subject is rooted in the ambivalence of assuming elements imposed by the socionormative constructions and, given the circumstances, in the capacity to exceed "precisely that to which it is bound" (Butler, 1997: 17). Nevertheless, Butler and Foucault's theories of the subject have been criticised because of their abstract conceptualisations of the subject as a subject of ethereal norms and discourses, without paying attention to the concrete and material aspects of interdependence and intersubjectivity (Burkitt, 2008). In the debate on intersubjectivity and the subject's formation, several scholars have sustained the importance of collective oriented processes (Melucci, 1980; Touraine, 1980). In Alberto Melucci's work (1980, 1996a), the possibility of practising alternative paths from the given social structure is connected to everyday life through the cultural networks of political movements, therefore configuring subjects in an open relationship with intersubjective influences. In Alain Touraine's sociology of action, the sense of justice allows subjects to reflexively produce changes against systems of domination (Touraine, 2002). Theorisations in the feminist stream of thought have had a central role in the analysis of the "embodied, private and emotional" dimensions of subjectivity (Rebughini, 2014: 5). In the early 1990s, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) criticised the tendency in feminism "to remain uninterested in or unconvinced about the relevance of refocusing on bodies in accounts of subjectivity" (p. vii) and inscribed the body at the core of the analysis on subjectivity as the space where different discourses, e.g., medical, sexual, and political, meet and battle.

During the past twenty years, feminist scholars have taken into account post structural insights in looking for a nuanced and shaded conceptualisation of subjectivity outside of rigid categorisations (Brown, 2009). The constructivist focus on productive discursive practices has been criticised by feminist scholars, social theorists and social psychologists because of its incapacity to take into account what is not present in the discourses, that is, what is "not yet realised in nature" (Papadopoulos, 2008: 148). In the past twenty years, following Deleuzian's (1987) interpretation of Spinoza's anti-anthropocentric ideals, social theory has experienced a renewed conceptualisation of the subject and the environment whose generative core of reciprocal experience is identified in their processes of interaction. At the beginning of the century, Bruno Latour (2004) explored the material aspects of existence of the subject as living being existing only in connection with other entities. Around the same period, Rosi Braidotti (2007: 156) advocated for the necessity to "recode or rename the female feminist subject not as yet another sovereign, hierarchical, and exclusionary subject but rather as a multiple, open-ended, interconnected entity". Following the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2004) and of Haraway (1988), the author detailed the birth of a "new materialist" stance that aims at overcoming the superiority of culture with regard to nature and at looking at the subject from a non-Cartesian perspective (Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010). Thus, the subject is an embodied entity, and the body is its first location in the world (Braidotti, 2013). The consideration of the embodied structure of human subjectivity has paved the way for a further expansion of the subject's conceptualisation towards an increased focus on emotions and affects (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 7). Thus, the new materialist stance (Braidotti, 2013) takes shape overcoming, on the one hand, poststructuralist deconstruction and, on the other hand, neo-Marxist analysis of subjectivity that tends to get stuck in power and resistance dynamics. In the neo-Deleuzian interpretation, both critique and resistance arise from the union between subject and object (Rebughini, 2018). Here, the

notion of becoming is central to describing the creative potential of the knowledge that arises from the localised material experience of the world (Braidotti, 2006b).

Having described the main positions that social theorists have taken with respect to the issue of the subject, in this work, the ways in which cultural workers' subjectivities take shape in an environment influenced by neoliberal logics of self-government are considered. Taking into account constructivist notions that locate the emergence of subjectivity in ambiguous and contingent discursive practices and deeming feminist upholding of the need to take into account the productive role of intersubjective relations, affects and imaginations, subjectivity is regarded as emerging at the intersection between different axes of power relations without being reduced to its positionality. Relational conduct and self-reflexive stances are considered and how, through them, discourses become embodied and how embodiment becomes discourse. Processes of subjectivation are here intended as comprehensive of both instances of freedom and of domination within a given map of power relations where subjects' agency takes shape in the spaces of negotiation between lines of power and lines of flight.

3. Individualisation in the context of neoliberal capitalism

In exploring the subject's position in contemporary times, the concept of individualisation, intended as the structural injunction to pursue autonomy and self-realisation outside of traditional social bounds (Durkheim, 2002), assumes a central analytical position. Throughout history, individualisation has been recognised as a core characteristic of modern societies and has been considered as a two-fold process. On the one hand, individualisation processes grant subjects an expanded possibility of choices, while on the other hand, this same growth in autonomy can lead to an increase in social isolation and the loss of societal

bonds (Bauman, 2013). The contemporary form assumed by individualisation is the result of sociocultural processes in Western societies that massively expanded the subjects' possibilities for expression, education, and consumption. Detraditionalization processes have resulted in a decline in traditional identities and, in turn, have opened the possibilities for subjects' self-realisation (Giddens, 1991). In this context, the work of Ulrich Beck (1992, 2002) on the concept of reflexivity and second modernity has led social theorists to reflect on the ambivalent nature of the consequences of subjects' reflexive work. In this sense, the author highlights that the conditions of structural insecurity that characterise late modernity require subjects to engage in ongoing biographical work to construct personal meaning (Lash, 2003). Thus, reflexivity is not an activity that *per se* grants subjects a more significant life over which they can exert more control but rather concerns subjects' engagement with structure negotiation (Farrugia, 2013). In this context, the work of Alex Honneth pointed to the paradoxes of current individualisation processes, where subjects seem to be trapped in an institutional environment that promises freedom and self-realisation at the cost of an increase in social suffering (2004). In this sense, self-reflexivity becomes an expectancy posed on the individual subject, and self-realisation is a normative aim that, alongside neoliberal capitalist demands, transforms claims for authenticity into productive forces (Honneth, 2004: 473). In fact, in a context where notions of failure and success are individualised and detached from their structural determinants, the subject needs to engage in continuous cultivation of the self (Farrugia, 2020; Scharff, 2016).

Following Max Weber's reflection on the relation between Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism (Weber, 2002), Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007) analyse the relationship between management manuals in the 1960s and what they identify as a new, emerging, spirit of capitalism. The authors traced increasing attention given to competitive efficiency in both

political and economic matters. According to various scholars, the transition from an "organised capitalism" (Lash and Urry, 1987) to a late or advanced stage of capitalism has been accompanied not only by political and economic changes but also by an enhanced centrality of individualisation (Honneth, 2004). In such a context, the process of becoming an individual takes place through a "reflexive project of the self" (Giddens, 1991), which has also resulted in a radical transformation in the meaning of work (Du Gay, 1996; Rose, 2005; Sennett, 1998). In this scenario, the domain of work results in being configured as the elective space for reflexive and individualised projects that seem to pair particularly well with contemporary capitalism's demands (Sennett, 1998). In a context that emphasises subjects' autonomy and personal skills in a meritocratic environment, individuals have no option other than to engage in self-monitoring activities and to understand their biographical path as a consequence of their choices (Colombo et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the extension of economic rationales to all domains of life is a characteristic of the entrepreneurial stance promoted by neoliberalist practices and discourse. In these circumstances, working lives have undergone a transformation both in what concerns workplace relations and in the subjective meaning of work. According to Michel Foucault, the anthropological shift that characterises neoliberalism resides in the fact that individuals are constituted as subjects by their capital in the competition, becoming entrepreneurs of themselves (Foucault, 1978). In this sense, for Foucault, neoliberal ideals are essentially "a new way in which people are made subjects" (Read, 2009: 28) through technologies of power and modes of thought. The study of subjectivation mechanisms at work is central in Foucauldian-inspired literature. Using cultural theory's theoretical instruments, Paul Du Gay (1996) analysed the retail sector and shed light on the new relation between work, consumption and identity in forming consumer subjects. He argued that consumer culture

encounters work-based identities in the discourse of organisational governance, making workers personally involved in working activities and requiring that "they conduct themselves in accordance with a particular model of action – that of the enterprise form" (Du Gay, 1996: 191). According to Foucauldian-inspired analysis, neoliberal governmentality is therefore naturalised in everyday life while normatively constructing individuals in entrepreneurial terms (Brown, 2003).

In a working environment characterised by discourses on competition and individual self-reliance, Richard Sennett (1998) traces radical changes in subjects' workplace experiences as well as in their emotional universe. Bourdieu (1999) recognised the erosion of social and class cohesion among French workers impoverished by privatisation policies. Furthermore, neoliberalism, with its emphasis on individualisation and competition, has been considered a powerful demobilising force (McRobbie, 2011b), summarised in the Thatcherian slogan *There Is No Alternative* that was "designed to engender a demobilising sense of historical inevitability among opponents"(Lafferty, 2020: 155) concerning possible alternative social and political practices. The result is a discursive condition where the "neoliberal subject" is simultaneously told that "it is within every individual's power to make themselves whatever they want to be" (Fisher, 2014) and that the (neoliberal) world is the only possible one. Several scholars noted that the mantra of "magic voluntarism" (Fisher, 2014) and the values of competition attached to work tend to erase both sociocultural differences and structural conditions, individualising the responsibilities for success and failure (McRobbie, 2016) in a quest for "biographical solutions to systemic contradictions" (Beck, 1992: 137) where subjects' psychological resources assume a central role (Gill and Orgad, 2018). Individualisation therefore emerges as a form of discipline that cannot be separated from the conditions of structural insecurity that characterise neoliberal capitalist environments and

that, to a certain extent, interfere with subjects' possibilities of constructing independent life paths (Sennett, 1998). In this sense, neoliberal capitalist instances and individualisation processes create spaces for subjects' self-actualisation but, at the same time, also pose normative constraints on the subjects' action.

However, following the work of Ong (2006) and Larner (2000), neoliberalism is considered a plural and contradictory phenomenon, and the study of its mechanisms should take into account discourses, positions and practices as emerging in the context (Walkerdine and Bansel, 2010) and therefore possibly being challenged and affected by counter discourses and practices that are present in the field. Furthermore, Foucauldian studies have considered the subject's position to be built upon both power and resistance (Butler, 1997; McNay, 2009) and, therefore, able to be actively counteracted. Despite being "entrepreneurial subjects par excellence" (Scharff, 2016: 3), recent studies have pointed to how cultural workers challenge entrepreneurial subjectivising instances (Alacovska, 2020; Norbäck, 2021). Furthermore, the intrinsic ambivalence of individualisation processes can open spaces for possibilities of cooperation and experimentation of alternative solidarities (Melucci, 1996a; Touraine, 1980, 1985) in a context where subject's reflexivity can entail the questioning of dominant discursive configurations. Thus, subjectivities are produced inside plural discursive practices that are often contradictory and where the subject, even if their social position is defined by power relations, has the possibility of practicing self-reflection and of creatively reimagining themselves in a condition of radical becoming.

The present research aims to observe, on the one hand, how the individualisation process and neoliberal practices are embedded into the context of theatre work and compete with nonneoliberal and nonindividualised stances and, on the other hand, to understand the making of subjectivities in a cultural context where the meaning of work is particularly

intertwined with identity making. The individualised position of individual workers in a neoliberal environment is taken into account along with the possibilities opened by collective reflexive processes. In this sense, subjectivities are regarded in their ambivalent nature, inserted in an ongoing process of becoming where activities of self-construction and desires of self-realisation are shaped, and in turn shape, power relations.

4. Contemporary subjectivities at work

In this section, we illustrate a number of social processes embedded in the neoliberal discursive environment that concur in the making of contemporary subjectivities on the workplace. Considering subjectivation processes as resulting from an ongoing negotiation between technologies of the self and technologies of power (Foucault, 1978), the analysis looks at the circular dynamics between workers' agency and structural constraints. The study of work in cultural industries has often been judged as a privileged point of observation on the contemporary transformation of working environments and subjectivities (McGuigan, 2010; McRobbie, 1998). The contemporary work ethos of entrepreneurialism is considered in its relations with processes of labour aestheticization, precariousness and dynamics of exclusion. In this regard, the gendered structure of neoliberal subjectivity is acknowledged. Passion has been recognised as an imperative of contemporary discourses about work, leading to the construction of aspirational subjects. In relation to precarisation and entrepreneurial processes, scholars have considered emotional and aesthetic workers' efforts, and in recent times, the role of noncognitive and affective experiences has been increasingly taken into account.

4.1 Entrepreneurialism and precariousness

The notion of entrepreneurship has been protagonist of the political and economic policies that have structured the field of cultural production since its debut (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999). According to Angela McRobbie's critique (2016), the policies that lead the growth of creative industries offered the possibility of growing one's inner talent and of bring passionate about one's work but also tested on the ground the possibility of enlarging nonstandard employment relations. The "romance of creativity" (McRobbie, 2016) appears to be a central characteristic of the entrepreneurial myth alongside a normative configuration of being passionate about one's work, rendering cultural work a unique discursive space of neoliberal subject formation.

The accent on the necessity to increase personal human capital (Feher, 2009) and the emphasis on individual responsibility (Brown, 2003) seem to couple particularly well with the emphasis on creativity and artistic self-expression of creative work (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2006; R Lloyd, 2010). Angela McRobbie (1998), in her analysis of fashion designers' career experiences, discusses the power relations at stake in configuring creative work "as a field of pleasure and reward" (p.13) and considers the "aestheticization of labour" as giving substance and meaning to workers' entrepreneurial positions (p.83). Several scholars recognised that gaining symbolic remuneration at work, alongside the desire for self-expression, are central for the creative entrepreneurial mindset (Neff et al., 2005; Taylor and Littleton, 2012). The current set of values tied to work, based on the desire for self-realisation, witness an increasing blurring of traditional boundaries of time and space and sets the perfect conditions for the actualisation of work intensification and extensification practices.

Reflecting on the relationship between entrepreneurship and human capital, Michel Feher (2009) views neoliberal subjects not as owners of their own human capital, as it was in liberal times, but rather as "investing on it" (p.34). In this sense, work-related coaching activities oriented to enhance mental and physical capital and to transform the individual into a "better self" are emerging in contemporary working experiences at the intersection between subjectivity and individuality (Mäkinen, 2016). Christina Scharff (2016) analyses the experience of young women in the classical music profession and explores the neoliberal subjectivizing processes in place, identifying a series of entrepreneurial features. In this picture, workers express a certain reluctance to compete with peers and appear rather willing to direct competition towards themselves, in a continuous individual leap towards self-improvement (Scharff, 2015).

In a context where competition is believed to be the legitimate rule for resource allocation (Rosa, 2013), power relations are often obscured by entrepreneurial rhetoric (McRobbie, 2011a). Rosalind Gill (2014) takes into account the neutralising power of entrepreneurial discourses based on meritocracy that, linking the reach of success to individual hard work, refuses to take into account structural inequalities. Even if the cultural sector appears to be structured around narratives of equality, coolness and diversity (Gill, 2002; McRobbie, 2002b), working practices that reproduce gender, race and class inequalities are widespread in cultural working environments (Banks and Milestone, 2011; Dean, 2008; Friedman et al., 2017). The studies that have been devoted to the analysis of inequalities in the workplace marked how workers' multiple positionings and unequal possibilities are reproduced in working environments (Acker, 1990, 2006).

The work of Rosalind Gill (2002, 2014) on the gendered nature of creative labour notes how gender inequalities are often cast off by neoliberal discourse on creativity and meritocracy.

In a context where equality at work appears to be achieved, the contemporary emphasis of feminist discourses on women's autonomy and self-expression has been identified as particularly close to that of neoliberal entrepreneurial ideals (Ghigi and Rottenberg, 2019). The call addressed to women to become confident and resilient has often obscured the operativity of the gender inequality system (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). In recent years, successful entrepreneurs have been considered bearers of masculine traits (Bruni et al., 2004), as ideal creative artists have been associated with male romantic and heroic ideal types (Bain, 2004; Taylor and Littleton, 2012). Nevertheless, several authors argued that contemporary neoliberalism constructs its ideal entrepreneurial subject through a gendered structure that posits young women at the centre of the subjectivizing processes, emphasising personal traits of aspirations, competition and resilience (Conor et al., 2015; Elias et al., 2017). Painting a social world where gender equality has been achieved, (post-)feminist neoliberal narratives incentivize young women to pursue their dreams, work hard on themselves and succeed, meritocratically, at having both their desired career and a fulfilling personal life (McRobbie, 2015b; Rottenberg, 2014). Furthermore, feminist scholars have argued that "new types of "empowered" agency that have emerged for women over the last thirty years or so are simultaneously bound up with new forms of social precariousness"(Mcnay, 2016: 57). In a social environment that provides loose and individualised ties, missing institutional support may lead to mechanisms of gender "retraditionalisation" in the labour market (Adkins, 1999).

During the past twenty years, labour scholars and cultural theorists have been increasingly interested in cultural industries, and cultural workers have been considered a paradigmatic example of contemporary capitalism's demands (McRobbie, 2011a; Menger, 2001). The institutional discourse about cultural work has been filled with desirable narratives of passion and creativity, but workers in the creative and cultural industries experience careers'

insecurity and inequalities in the workplace. Several scholars have analysed cultural workers' position in working environments characterised by generalised precarity and low institutional protection and the consequent vulnerability that is generated in social and personal life (de Peuter, 2014b; Ross, 2008).

In recent decades, the concept of precarity has been increasingly central in scholars' debates on both labour and employment relations and collective mobilisation processes, often leading to analytical and methodological questions about its explanatory power. In the English-speaking academic world, interest in precarity first appeared following the experience of Southern European social movements mobilising against austerity (Alberti et al., 2018) and the work of Italian radical thinkers (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Lazzarato et al., 1996). In academic reflection, precarity has been considered both a socioeconomic category (Standing, 2014) and a labour condition (Choonara, 2019), and its emergence has been related to a series of changes in the labour policies and organisations that took place in Europe at the beginning of the century (Pulignano, 2017). Several scholars have noted that precarious work has been the norm over time and space in capitalist societies and have pointed to the ambiguous relations that the term has with other axes of vulnerability. Access to what in European terms is regarded as standard employment has always functioned along lines of race and gender privilege (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017) to the extent that the concept of precarity emerges when Western white male workers "began feeling the negative effects of the new postindustrial flexible job market" (Fantone, 2007: 7). In this sense, Kathleen M. Millar (2017: 7) proposes the idea that precarity "might say less about the novelty of this condition than it does about hegemonic concerns over security and the attachment to privileges once held by certain populations".

Working on Judith Butler's reflection (2004) on precariousness as an ontological condition of social life and on Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality (Foucault, 1978), Isabel Lorey (2015) reflects on both the contemporary distributions of insecurity and its normalisation as a governmental mode in contemporary societies. The need to expand the borders of the concept beyond the objective condition related to work and employment structure is explored in the work of Annalisa Murgia (Murgia, 2010; Murgia and Pulignano, 2019), which considers precariousness "an experiential condition to do with the person's life as a quality inherent to that person and his/her specific positioning" (Armano and Murgia, 2013: 488), therefore emphasising the relation between the experience of precariousness and the subjects' positions in the social space. Other authors have highlighted the processual aspect of precarisation in an attempt to conjugate both objective conditions and subjective experiences and to describe the contemporary movement of growing insecurity, whose effects are not relegated to the workplace but rather concern "the nature of social life more generally" (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017: 2). Furthermore, the role of neoliberal capitalist governance has emerged strongly in recent times, not only in relation to the expansion of social vulnerability but also in relation to planetary issues of uncertainty related to climate issues and environmental degradation.

In this work, precariousness and entrepreneurial ethos are considered to be two subjectivizing instances that entertain an ambiguous relationship in a contemporary neoliberal capitalist environment. Far from being two opposite poles, their relationship is multifaceted and is elaborated on in different shapes by different subjects. Originally, both terms are related to the study of working environments and describe a relationship that working subjects entertain with the labour market and organisations. Currently, the concepts' boundaries are extended beyond their original space of reference and have come to affect

the ways in which subjects relate, perceive and imagine each other and themselves. The discursive emphasis on self-realisation and self-fulfilment in work and life cannot be analysed without referencing the experiences of precariousness that affect contemporary societies.

4.2 Passion and aspirations

In working environments characterised by high levels of competition and uncertainty, it has been argued that subjective ideas of self-expression and self-fulfilment at work play a central role in the construction of professional creative identities (Arvidsson et al., 2010), and in recent years, scholars have been increasingly directing attention to the psychosocial experiences of workers in creative industries (Alacovska, 2019; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008).

Elaborating on the idea of pleasure at work (Donzelot, 1991), Angela McRobbie (2004, 2016) underlines how creative work is deeply connected with the desire for self-expression, intended as a way for escaping conventional and repetitive occupations is often part of an "uncritical romance" (2016: 38) that misunderstands the difficulties related to the risk and uncertainties of creative careers. The Romantic ideals of autonomy and creativity, alongside educational institutions such as art schools and universities, generate a new working subjectivity for whom passion becomes a normative requirement (McRobbie, 2016: 195). In this sense, work is the protagonist of a double movement that witnesses its material articulations increasingly precarised while at the same time, its discursive features are being romanticised. The centrality of passion and love in the contemporary discourses on work has paved the way for an understanding of working activities that goes beyond the monetary compensation towards the realm of the intimate understanding of one's place in the world.

The aestheticization of work, exemplified by the "Do What You Love" ideology, has been traced back to managerial discourses that make labour appear to be "not something one does for compensation, but an act of self-love"(Tokumitsu, 2014: 2), hinting at the idea that "those who are not successful are simply not passionate enough" (Duffy and Hund, 2015: 7). In harmony with neoliberal discourses on entrepreneurialism, a great emphasis is placed on individual workers who are the bearers of their own economic and emotional realisation, while the economic and social capitals needed to pursue a fulfilling and successful career as significatively obscured. In contemporary times, the idea of pleasure at work has entered the field of cultural production through the main door and has found a field that was already permeated by Romantic rhetoric of self-expression, becoming a form of labour discipline and a way to expand unprotected educated workforce (McRobbie, 2016). Several scholars have framed creative work in terms of the entanglement between passion and future expectations, underlining the relevance of future-oriented reward systems (Arvidsson et al., 2010; Duffy, 2016; Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013; Neff, 2012). In this sense, creative work resonates with Lauren Berlant's idea of "cruel optimism" (2011), where social actors derive positive meanings from objects or social processes when, in fact, those object or social process are the very obstacles preventing them from being happy. Assuming that perfect labour activity is a natural consequence of well-expressed and well-cultivated personal passions is crucial to forming aspirational workers who pursue productive activities with the promise of future rewards. Brooke Erin Duffy (2016; Duffy and Hund, 2015) describes the contours of aspirational subjects in the digital social media environment and its relation with postfeminist and gendered entrepreneurial ideals of femininity. Regarding aspirational work as a gendered and classed process that has been fuelled by institutional policies, Kim Allen (Allen, 2014: 201; Allen et al., 2013) sees young women as "subject to an intensified gaze" (p.762) that defines success and failure in moralised terms (Skeggs, 2005).

The literature's reflection has often described cultural and creative workers' experiences in terms of either "grandiose fantasies of future stardom or illusory projections of autonomous, passionate labour" (Alacovska, 2019: 3). In this sense, the work of Ana Alacovska (2018, 2019, 2020), looking at creative workers' practices from the perspective of post-Soviet countries, has criticised Western reflections on cultural work and has put at the centre of her analysis the relational and social activities that workers develop in response to structural precarity. Given that work is a fundamental pillar of contemporary self-realisation, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) point to the need to overcome the conceptualisation of passion and self-expression as sugar pills of workers' precarious experiences and to contest the framing of creative work as self-exploitative activity, considering that workers' choices "are partly the result of structural forces shaping the values that people hold about how best to live their lives" (p.226).

In this sense, the need to overcome the idea that being passionate about work leads to some kind of "false consciousness" that obscures workers' judgment abilities in regard to accepting poor working conditions in exchange for the freedom of self-expression has emerged. Rather, it is necessary acknowledge workers' agency within the given discursive context, traversed by narratives of neoliberal subjectification.

4.3 Emotional and aesthetic labour

The literature's analysis of the entrepreneurial stance required in working contexts where risks are normalised has revealed the amount of workers' efforts in social and emotional terms. If the model of Weberian rationality had kept nonbureaucratic and nonrational forms of government outside of the workplace, then the concept of emotional labour (Hochschild,

1979, 1983) puts workers' emotions in the forefront, shedding light on their constructed nature and on their economic and social value. In this sense, Arlie Hochschild's intention aimed at moving the study of work beyond the Marxist attention to factory and manual labour and to turn the focus towards those emotional performances that are a consistent part of service labour and that happen to be traditionally associated with femininity (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Hochschild's reflection has been traditionally applied to the working domain of care and services (James, 1989; Pringle, 1988), but in the past twenty years, it has become increasingly present in scholars' reflections on cultural industries (Ashton, 2021). During the same period, several scholars have spoken about "immaterial labour" (Lazzarato et al., 1996) and "affective labour" (Hardt and Negri, 2000) to point to the informational and cultural characteristics of contemporary work and to the importance that care and emotions have assumed in post-Fordist environments. However, these perspectives have been criticised by sociologists and cultural theorists because of their lack of attention to gender-based and feminist perspectives (McRobbie, 2011a), for their abstract conceptualisation of the terms and for failing to consider the specificity of cultural production (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008). Attention to the sociopsychological dynamics of cultural work has been at the centre of an increasing number of cultural work analyses in recent years that have underlined emotional labour's relation with both entrepreneurial stances and precarisation processes (Ashton, 2021). Laura Grindstaff (2002) investigated the production of TV shows and underlined the emotional labour undertaken by workers and participants both in front of and behind the cameras. In the same tradition, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008) employ emotional labour to describe television workers' need to perform certain emotional responses when working on teams under stressful conditions and tight timetables. These feeling rules are central to the deployment of the "correct" emotional response at work (Hochschild, 1979), and their structure is related to the needs that arouse

from an insecure working environment. In this sense, several authors have reflected on the role of project-based working and informality in creative environments in the development of instrumental social relations (Neff, 2012; Wittel, 2001), speaking about "compulsory networking" (Neff et al., 2005). Incorporating into the analysis an increased attention to bodily practices, the concept of aesthetic labour has been used in the attempt to overcome the notion of emotional labour's distinction between internal and external dispositions (Witz et al., 2003) and with the intention of describing a style or a manner of working in which workers are trained to "look good and sound right for the job"(Williams and Connell, 2010: 350). In the context of creative work, aesthetic labour has been particularly considered in relation to the experiences of freelance workers in the display profession, in the study of actresses' recruitment practices (Dean, 2005) and of professional fashion modelling (Entwistle and Wissinger, 2006; Mears, 2011) and its relation with identity formation (Holla, 2016). Pointing to the structures of power and inequality at stake in different contemporary sectors, Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff in the edited collection of essays "Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism" (2017) introduce the term aesthetic entrepreneurship to indicate the increased attention of aesthetic normative values and on its entanglement with entrepreneurial and neoliberal ideals in women's experiences of life and work.

In the analytical context of the past twenty years, the necessity of developing theoretical constructs that allow scholars to take into account the noncognitive and affective movements of working subjectivities' experiences has emerged (Gregg, 2009; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010). In this sense, governmental-inspired studies have been accused of focusing on rational and instrumental aspects while misconsidering "micropractices of self-government" (Binkley, 2011: 327).

5. Can the subject survive in neoliberal times?

In recent years, in the context of a broader "turn to affect" (Gregg et al., 2010) in social theory, scholarly debates have been interested in describing contemporary experiences through notions of feelings, desires and affects, considering these "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1961) and the everyday emotion work everyone engages in as embedded in the cultural and social world (Wharton, 2009).

In recent decades, it has been noted that contemporary logics of neoliberal subjectification are particularly connected with ideas of happiness and positive thinking (Binkley, 2011). In this sense, happiness appears to be not just the desired status but also at the very core of the process for achieving it (Ahmed, 2014). To succeed in neoliberal competition, it is necessary to craft an employable self not only through skills acquisition but also through the cultivation of particular attitudes and personal characters (Binkley, 2011), engaging in an ongoing emotion work. Contemporary sensibilities operate on emotions and subjectivities as a set of "feeling rules" (Gill and Kanai, 2018; Hochschild, 1983) enabling the subject to survive in neoliberal times.

Feminist scholars have regarded the entanglement between neoliberal discourses and postfeminist sensibility in its "affective, cultural and psychic life" (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020; Gill, 2017). In particular, the postfeminist ethos is intended as "a common sense that operates as a kind of gendered neoliberalism" (Gill, 2017: 609) concerned with the cultivation of regulatory dispositions such as confidence and resilience. In this sense, Angela McRobbie (2020: 52) describes the ideal of a perfect feminine as "a dispositif of contemporary biopolitics", which aims at changing the feminine value system towards a shift from altruistic care notions to career-led ambitions.

Furthermore, the analysis of contemporary dispositions cannot be separated from the considerations of entrepreneurial stances and precarisation processes at stake in current times. On the one hand, confidence emerges as a fundamental disposition to navigate the labour market and enhance employability (Lamberg, 2021), while on the other hand, resilience becomes a core attitude (Gill and Orgad, 2015) to survive the "crisis of ordinariness" of contemporary times (Berlant, 2011). In this regard, several scholars have recognised a "turn to character" in contemporary societies (Bull and Allen, 2018) and studied the role of self-help manuals (Salmenniemi and Adamson, 2015), apps (Gill and Orgad, 2018), magazines (McRobbie, 2020) and coaching practices (Mäkinen, 2016) in promoting "optimal human emotional performance or flourishing" (Binkley, 2011: 384). Thus, psychology emerges in the landscape of neoliberal subjectivation processes as an increasingly popular social science that is playing a central role, particularly in regard to self-managing discursive practices (Rose, 2005).

Critical scholars have underlined that contemporary discourses on resilience and positive thinking, highlighting the role of subjects' individual efforts in reaching emotional and economic well-being, are central to restricting the need for social transformation (Duffy, 2016; Gill and Orgad, 2018; Scharff, 2017). The emphasis on developing resilience points to enhancing individual emotional and affective possibilities of confronting precariousness "rather than on challenging the conditions that created precarity and inequality in the first place" (Gill and Orgad, 2018: 484). Moreover, the necessity of building confidence risks obscuring gender and race discriminatory dynamics in the labour market (Lamberg, 2021; Scharff, 2015). In this sense, discourses that relate individual attitudes to successful careers erase social inequalities in terms of capital distribution in the opportunity to well manage neoliberal uncertainties. In the case of influencers in digital environments, Duffy (2015)

considers that the opportunity to engage in network sociality and build affective relations with the online community requires a significant amount of economic, social and emotional capital that is unevenly distributed despite influencers' claims to be "regular people" (p.8). Furthermore, several scholars noted that aspirational discourses as well as strategies to improve resilience target vulnerable groups and young women (Allen, 2014; Skeggs, 2005), therefore confirming the particular position that women assume in neoliberal discourses (McRobbie, 2009, 2016).

Nevertheless, neoliberal and postfeminist discursive instances need to be understood in localised contexts where their explanatory power is juxtaposed alongside other competing claims for meaning (Walkerdine and Bansel, 2010). In this sense, Emma Lamberg (2021) thematizes the ambivalence of young women's responses to postfeminist invitations to cultivate aspirational selves. As previously mentioned, the subjects' assumptions of neoliberal values needs to be problematised at the level of the subjective experience, taking into account the multiplicities that characterise individual accounts (Skeggs, 2014). Despite scholars' focus on creative workers' embeddedness in neoliberal practices, recent studies have been examining subjects' microresistances and collective activities aimed at refusing and contrasting contemporary individualised work ethics. The study by Maria Norbäck (2021) on Swedish freelance journalists points to the ambiguous practices of individual resistance that workers enact and which, even if unsystematic and often contradictory, challenge entrepreneurial subjectivation processes. Recent studies have shown that, distancing themselves from the logics of professional competition, creative workers have organised professional networks of solidarity and alternative organisation (Mondon-Navazo et al., 2021; Murgia and de Heusch, 2020). In the framework of Italian mobilisations against austerity and precarity, between 2011 and 2016, creative and cultural workers were central in

giving birth to alternative experiences of conceiving work and community. Combining Italian radical leftist thought (Negri, 2012), juridical reflections on the common good (Rodotà, 2012) and the critique of the system of artistic and creative production, activists managed to construct and disseminate an alternative cultural and political imaginary that transcended the creative field towards including issues related to urban gentrification, migration and gender matters. In this framework, the collective of Macao in Milan, according to Chiara Valli (2015: 657), gave birth to a process of subjectivation, questioning the cultural industry's work ethic and "performing radical democratic practices in both cultural production and organisational models". The construction of an alternative model to one of the creative cities directly challenged both the precarious conditions of workers in the cultural sector and the neoliberal model of growth applied to urban environments (d'Ovidio and Cossu, 2017). During those years, artistic activists not only radically criticised neoliberal models of cultural production but also practised alternative systems based on solidarity and direct democracy. In the case of Teatro Valle in Rome, activists constructed an alternative cultural market economy, autonomous from institutional networks, actively practising alternative subjectivation processes (Maddanu, 2018).

However, subjects' practices of resistance against the neoliberal subjectivisation process are still being overlooked by the literature. As mentioned, interest in individual (micro)-practices of resistance has been growing in recent times, while Covid-19 has brought the need to reconsider the role of cooperation and solidarity among workers as well as their collective actions to the forefront. For this reason, Chapter 8 of the present work is devoted to the collective mobilisations that have been permeating the Italian performing arts sector since the first closure of theatre and show venues at the end of February 2020, analysing collectivisation processes and their challenge to neoliberal instances in the cultural sector.

III The context of work in the Italian theatre industry

1. Introduction

In this chapter, we describe the characteristics of the research context in which the fieldwork took place. After considering the position of the theatre industry in the ensemble of creative and cultural industries, we focus on the Italian sector. Elaborating on 2019 data from the Italian Ministry of Culture and from I.N.P.S., we delineate the characteristics of Milan's theatrical environments and of actors' career trajectories before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the first section, we consider scholars' reflections on the peculiar features and functioning of cultural and creative industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2007; McKinlay and Smith, 2009), and we reflect on theatre activities in relation to the characteristics traditionally ascribed to cultural industries.

In the second section, building on the work of Sonia Bertolini and Adriana Luciano (2011) and on the reflection of Mimma Gallina (2014, 2018), the function of the Italian theatre system is described. Using 2019 data from the Italian Ministry of Culture, we consider the theatrical sector's relation with state funding, and we highlight the geographical distribution of funding opportunities and theatrical activities. In the national territory, the Lombardy Region and the city of Milan emerge as locations of relevance regarding the presence of theatrical activities. Furthermore, we consider the organisational features of the theatrical sector and the configuration of theatre production in Italy. Finally, we describe the actors' employment position in this system.

The third section is devoted to tracing the contours of actors' careers considering the processes of institutionalisation that have taken place in the theatrical sector during the past century. Using data from three different surveys to consider women's presence in the acting profession alongside unemployment, irregular working conditions and poverty. Presenting data on inequalities in the sector, age and gender emerge as particularly relevant variables in this scenario since young women make up the majority of the labour force and compete for positions over which adult males hold power, as directors and playwriters. Furthermore, the relation between recruitment practices and social networks in a context where formal qualifications are often not required to apply for acting positions is detailed. As can be seen from Sonia Bertolini's reflection (2011; 2011) and from the presented quantitative data on working days and salaries in 2019, actors' careers are highly diversified, intensively and extensively, reflecting the sector's instability. The project-based nature of the work and the possibility of diversifying within the same sector or other creative working environments has led some scholars to define these career trajectories as "portfolio careers" (Fraser and Gold, 2001) or "protean careers" (Hall, 2004).

The last section of this chapter is devoted to delineating actors' collective experiences and takes into account cooperative and associative work in the sector. Although the creative working environment is usually considered to be highly individualised and strongly competitive (Menger, 2014), in recent years, collective experiences have been central in developing new and cooperative instruments for confronting workers' challenges (Murgia and de Heusch, 2020). Operating with the intention of both representing atypical working experiences and practising emotional and economic solidarity, actors' community networks have been particularly active since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. In recent years, in fact, traditional unions and established organisations have stood with self-organised,

grassroot, and informal groups, opening a unique opportunity for debating the present and future of the working category.

2. Theatre in the context of cultural industries

Since the 1990s, cultural industries have been the focus of increasing attention by scholars and policy-makers interested in the relationship between the production and consumption of cultural symbols and wider economic growth. Crucial for policy-makers' implementations, the definition of cultural and creative industries has been highly debated over the years (O'Connor, 2010) and has come to define those activities that have at their core the creation and manipulation of symbols (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). In this context, artistic activities have been regarded as pivotal sectors of the post-Fordist transformation, where atypical labour markets and production logics have long been in place (Bataille et al., 2020).

Considering the distinctive features of cultural industries as stated in Hesmondhalgh's work (Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011), the theatre industry shares several of the identified characteristics. As is typical of artistic projects, the outcome of theatre production is indetermined and hard to monitor, as it is difficult to predict the public's appreciation for it (Menger, 2014). In this sense, the commissioner of the oeuvre does not have the power to intervene in artistic productions but can control workers' recruitment and the oeuvre's distribution (Haunschild, 2003). Furthermore, as happens in several creative and artistic industries, the absence of formal qualifications to access the job market has led to an excess of aspirants competing for a dearth of positions (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). To minimise the risk of losing favour with the public and of examining an excessive number of job applications, theatre, cinema and television strongly rely on the "star system" with the

intention of enhancing production sustainability (Abbing 2002; Hesmondhalgh 2007). These recruitment practices produce a vertical segmentation of the labour force along lines of reputation, prestige and social capital, where a few workers have a high occupational value corresponding to high salaries, while the majority of workers have limited power with which to bargain for better working conditions. The presence of gatekeepers that select and valorise emergent talent has been a characteristic of artistic domains for a long time (Becker, 1982). Similar to what happens in other creative occupations, informal recruitment practices and strong competition foster an organised use of social capital and networking strategies to enhance employment chances (Bourdieu, 1996; Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009). As often happens in the television and movie sector, it is common to encounter informal configurations of workers that are used to work together and are hired as a team by the different commissioners.

Having examined several features that the theatre system shares with what have been considered the cultural and creative industries' peculiarities, it is possible to trace several characteristic features of live performances. In fact, in economic terms, theatre production and distribution have a reduced impact compared to other cultural industries and other sectors of showbusiness, such as television and commercial music (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). The impact of reproduction technologies on live performance is particularly low, and as a consequence, production and dissemination costs are particularly high (McKinlay and Smith, 2009).

3. Italian theatre's production system

Currently, according to the description "Io Sono Cultura 2019" developed by UnionCamere and Symbola in 2018, the creative and cultural industries together represented 6.1% of Italian GDP and registered stable tax growth over the preceding year with 1.55 million workers employed (*Io sono cultura: l'Italia della qualità e della bellezza sfida la crisi*, 2019: 36). In this sense, the ongoing growth of the relevance of cultural productions and manipulation over the past 20 years impacted the Italian context both in terms of the employed workforce and economic impact.

The Italian theatre has historically been dominated by a touring system where nomadic ensembles travel from town to town for the larger part of the year representing their repertoire. In this context, actors are grouped into *compagnie,* whose success or failure is determined by the market and audience, making employment instability as the main characteristic of artists' careers (Gallina et al., 2018). Theatre and dance activities are often considered "craft work" because of the relevance and unique role of the human element in the making of live shows (Bertolini and Luciano, 2011). Directors usually have the opportunity to choose their collaborators, a practice that forms strong bonds and closes professional networks where, as a consequence, informal rules and social networks are often used to distribute work along reputational lines that somehow guarantee the production side on the possible outcomes and professional behaviour of the workers (Bertolini and Vallero, 2011).

During the 20th century, the theatre sector went through a process of institutionalisation that shaped actors' training and career trajectories (Serino, 2020). While the first government grant for performing arts dates to 1921, it was after the Second World War that cultural

production and theatre received substantial and institutionalised public economic support and that public theatres were funded in the main Italian cities. Currently, the Italian theatre system is funded by a combination of state, local and private sources on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative criteria (Bertolini and Luciano, 2011).

3.1 The role of state financing and the geographical distribution of theatre shows

During the past twenty years, despite the growth in the demand for cultural products not only by consumers but also by public and private entities, the activities related to the show business sector have suffered from the contraction of state economic support for entertainment industries (*FUS – Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo*), which has narrowed over the years (Ferrazza, 2019: 36–37). According to data elaborated by the Italian Ministry of Culture[2], the public subsidy for theatre activities in 2019 was 21.1% of the total amount of the fund, and the cultural enterprises that received the fund were located mainly in the Lombardy Region (18.91%) and the Lazio Region (15.59%). Considering data from 2019, collected and elaborated by the Italian Authors' and Publishers' Association (*SIAE – Società Italiana degli Autori e degli Editori*), the Lombardy Region was the area where the majority of the theatre business was concentrated (*Annuario Dello Spettacolo*, 2019). **Table 1** considers the number of shows performed in 2019 in the Italian regions where Lombardy's activity (*Lombardia*) leads the national scale.

[2] http://www.spettacolodalvivo.beniculturali.it/index.php/osservatorio-dello-spettacolo

Region	Number of shows (2019)	Percentage over total number of shows in Italy (2019)
Lombardia	21,589	16.3%
Lazio	17,149	13%
Emilia-Romagna	13,661	10.3%

Table 1: First three Italian regions per number of theatre shows in 2019. Author's elaboration on SIAE data 2019.

In the Lombardy region, the city of Milan is particularly relevant in regard to the theatrical system and occupies a leading position in the regional cultural offerings. According to Gallina (2013: 22), A.G.I.S., The Association of Italian Entertaining Industries, has gather 128 *compagnie* in Lombardy, 79 of which are located in the Milan area, and over a total of 30 theatres financed by the state, 21 of which are in Milan. The cultural vocation of the city is not only due to the presence of La Scala. The first Italian public theatre, Piccolo Teatro, was opened in 1947 with the intent of providing citizens not with mere entertainment but with artistic and socially valuable cultural productions (Colbert, 2005; Locatelli, 2015). Starting with the work of Giorgio Strehler, the director's artistic tradition found a fertile space to grow. In fact, the development of theatre productions has been facilitated by the city council through a network of conventions and funding opportunities that generate a fertile environment for the growth of theatre projects (Calbi, 2011). While established organisations managed to navigate the crisis, in the past ten years, new proposals and experimental projects have had difficulties flourishing in Milan (Gallina, 2013).

3.2 The system of theatre production

Until the 1950s, the tradition of the *compagnia* was at the heart of the Italian theatrical system. The work of these ensembles of actors was characterised by a nomadic and seasonal structure and by dramaturgical choices oriented to please wide audiences. Usually, as is common in circus ensembles, actors in *compagnia* are related or tied by strong bonds that exceed working relations. After the Second World War, the theatrical system underwent several organisational changes, and today, *campagnie* no longer hold a monopoly over theatre productions. Instead, public theatres funded by the state and the Ministry of Culture have occupied the leading symbolic, economic and artistic position in the field.

Currently, several stakeholders operate in the production of theatre shows: i) publicly funded entities and private (or cofunded) enterprises that act both as producers of theatre shows and as hosting venues for touring shows located in the main cities, ii) publicly funded theatres in small cities that schedule different shows every season without handling any production activities, iii) medium and small private (or cofunded) *compagnie* that produce theatre shows with or without having access to a home production venue, and iv) small enterprises that offers cultural services and small shows together with local municipalities. In the following image, starting from Mimma Gallina's reflections (2014), the system of Italian theatre production is elaborated with regard to its organisational models, artistic and management activities, access to theatrical venues and the role of public funding.

<table>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="6">THEATRE PRODUCTION IN ITALY</td></tr>
<tr><td>Typology</td><td colspan="3">THEATRES</td><td colspan="3">COMPAGNIE</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Organisational model / Legal status</td><td colspan="3">Mixed Public/ Private Enterprise model (e.g. Foundations)</td><td colspan="2">Participatory model</td><td>Entrepreneurial model</td></tr>
<tr><td>National Theatres</td><td>TRIC: Theatres of National Interest</td><td>Production centres</td><td>Cooperatives</td><td>Associations</td><td>Ltd.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Artistic Team</td><td colspan="3">Changing</td><td colspan="3">Stable</td></tr>
<tr><td>Organisational and Management Team</td><td colspan="3">Stable</td><td colspan="3">Reduced, externalised or not present</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Access to exclusive theatrical venues</td><td colspan="3" rowspan="2">YES: ONE OR MORE VENUES</td><td colspan="2">NO</td><td rowspan="2">YES</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Grant or Rent</td></tr>
<tr><td>Public funding</td><td colspan="6">ESSENTIAL ---------- OCCASIONAL</td></tr>
</table>

Image 1: Characteristics of theatre production in Italy, author's elaboration.

In relation to budget size and artistic aims, theatre production is extremely variable in terms of duration, the size of the workforce and the number of professionals involved, and the complexity of scenic materials. Despite being subject to monetary constraints, theatre productions are defined by an artistic ideation followed by teamwork and collaboration between artistic and technical teams. In this sense, both highly complex and less complex organisational environments plan their production activities among the same lines.

Currently, the production of a theatre production lasts approximately 40 days, during which dramaturgical and artistic input materializes in the performance work of art. In this time span, a recursive structure of ideation and rehearsals, where the performers' unique characteristics and experiences are central, takes place behind closed doors (Bassetti, 2014, 2019). The show debut is usually followed by a period of encore performances; in a large city context, it can last up to three or four weeks, showing in the same theatre that solidifies the oeuvre's representation in relation to the audience. At this point, in the Italian tradition, the show should start touring, being hosted by theatres in small towns (one to three shows) and

cities (up to one or two weeks of encore performances). The contracts that regulate the shows can include an appearance fee or be based on ticket fees that are divided between the hosting venue and the production or, again, they can involve a guaranteed minimum amount (Gallina et al., 2014). While the system of *tournées* had, in a certain way, survived the institutionalisation and stabilisation processes that characterised the Italian scene in the past century, during the past twenty years, the length of both *tournées* and encore performances has been diminishing. In this sense, experts in the sector have been noting an increasing disconnect between distribution and production that generates a system where distribution, the potentially remunerative part of cultural production, is minimised while, despite the high costs, new productions are always taking place (Gallina et al., 2014).

3.3 Actors' employment position

In the present context, the show results from the collective creation of the crew that takes place during the rehearsal period. The final product is a mix of technical, craft and artistic contributions that is hard to preview and evaluate before the date of the debut and that will need a continuous process of maintenance from the crew during the following presentations of the performance. The employment contracts for actors and performers are temporary and cover the rehearsal period, the debut and the following shows' performances. The wage is the result of a negotiation between the actor and the producer in the role of employer and employee and is defined as a daily amount (Gallina et al., 2014). Traditionally, the actor is considered to be employee that rents his or her ability to the employer for the length of the contract (CCNL, 2018). Nevertheless, it has been argued that acting cannot be considered simply subordinate work because of actors' creative autonomy on the stage (Menger, 2006). In this sense, the employer's control is present mainly in the moment of the audition and in

the distribution of the show (McKinlay and Smith, 2009). In contrast, in the case of self-productions, the workers are usually acting as self-employed, bringing the need to acquire a set of nonartistic skills related to the management and distribution of the show. Beyond the debate over actors being employees, employers or self-employed, their work experiences are characterised by discontinuity and vulnerability (Bureau and Corsani, 2016). In recent years, both the length of the *tournée* and the time dedicated to the production of the show have suffered a consistent reduction that has impacted the length of actors' engagements (Serino, 2020). Furthermore, recent labour market reforms paved the way for the spread of hybrid employment relations (Armano and Murgia, 2017) where semidependent or formally autonomous contracts are opened and closed on a fixed term basis. Consistent with these tendencies, performers have been increasingly hired not only as employees but also as independent workers, and semidependent or formally autonomous contracts are becoming increasingly common in the sector (Bertolini and Luciano, 2011). While the labour content remains the same, since the Italian welfare system is based on dependent employment, the uncertainty of social protections during periods of unemployment or underemployment can expose workers to hardship and blackmail (Bertolini et al., 2019). According to the survey "Vita da artista" [3], in 2015, among the artists who did not benefit from unemployment indemnity, 43% did not meet the fiscal criteria required to be eligible for an unemployment allowance (Di Nunzio et al., 2017: 23). If, in the past, medium-high daily salaries used to

[3] "Vita da Artista" is a national research study on the living and working conditions of workers in the performing art sector promoted and financed by the Fondazione Di Vittorio and SLC-CGIL Union. The research is devoted to mapping the main aspects of artists' experiences and to support the intervention of union and workers' associations. The results were presented in 2017 and are based on 2,090 questionnaires of a nonprobabilistic sample of respondents, collected during 2016 and 2017 through an online survey (Di Nunzio et al., 2017).

compensate for moments of unemployment, then after the 2008 crisis Italian performers' earnings were just above the poverty line (Turrini and Chicchi, 2013).

Table 2 presents data from 2019 INPS data[4] on the category of actors divided by age groups and considers the number of workers, the cumulative remuneration and the total number of worked days. Considering the mean of the yearly salary per worker and the mean of yearly days worked, it identified an occupation characterised by underemployment and economic vulnerability where multiple job holdings and irregular employment need to be taken into account. Furthermore, acting emerges as an occupation that employs primarily young people, with people aged from younger than 19 to 29 years old representing 42.3% of the total number of actors in 2019.

Age Cohorts	Number of workers in 2019	Cumulative remuneration of 2019	Mean remuneration per worker in 2019	Total number of worked Days 2019	Mean of worked days per worker in 2019
≤19	10.230	7.062.281 €	690 €	47.444	4,6
20-24	13.918	11.418.202 €	820 €	111.095	8,0
25-29	11.070	17.696.867 €	1.599 €	157.808	14,3
30-34	8.218	24.131.482 €	2.936 €	168.749	20,5
35-39	7.052	22.681.016 €	3.216 €	155.524	22,1
40-44	6.839	27.803.016 €	4.065 €	136.902	20,0
45-49	6.699	31.384.750 €	4.685 €	132.931	19,8
50-54	5.773	26.062.687 €	4.515 €	112.836	19,5
55-59	4.734	24.357.930 €	5.145 €	98.056	20,7

[4] I.N.P.S. National Social Welfare's Observatory on performing artists occupations is a statistical dataset made available to the general public by I.N.P.S.; data are updated every year. Data are gathered from the administrative archive of monthly taxes paid by employers (Uniemens) and contains information regarding i) workers' identification; ii) workers' working contracts; iii) maternity leave, unemployment and other indemnities. https://www.inps.it/osservatoristatistici/api/getAllegato/?idAllegato=1016.

60-64	3.441	20.945.349 €	6.087 €	77.892	22,6
65>	5.416	21.454.598 €	3.961 €	69.733	12,9
Total	83.390	234.998.178 €	2.818 €	1.268.970	15,2

Table 2: Number of actors that contributed at least one tax payment to the actor's social security in 2019. Author's elaboration on INPS data (2019).

4. Actors' career paths

Prior to the last century, the actor was often an actor manager, the *capocomico*, who, occupying a senior position in the ensemble, was in charge of the artistic and economic aspects of the activity. In the 1900s, the theatre sector went through a process of institutionalisation (Serino, 2020) that entailed a division of the traditional *capocomico*'s spaces of operation: i) economic supervision over the production expenses and distribution of the oeuvre became the theatre producer's responsibility, ii) responsibility over the quality of the artistic idea was in the hands of the director, and iii) execution and acting were configured as the proper domain of actors. In this sense, the director emerges in the leading artistic role responsible for generating the artistic value of the oeuvre and to whom every worker in theatre production is subordinate (Alonge, 2014). Although the actor's role has been strongly reconfigured by the rise of directors and despite the institutional differentiation of career paths through academic education curricula, the borders between acting and directing are often porous and it is not unusual to encounter directors who are former actors nor to find actors in charge of ensuring the artistic quality and economic sustainability of theatre projects (Gallina et al., 2014).

Following the institutionalisation of the theatre system's organisation, theatre academies started to have a central role in training the new élite generation of actors. The first

academies, *Accademia Nazionale d'Arte Drammatica Silvio D'Amico* and *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*, located in Rome, were funded at the end of 1930 and were financed by the Italian state. In Milan, the *Civica Scuola di Teatro Paolo Grassi* was funded in 1951 and has traditionally been administered by the Municipality of Milan. Other institutional academies have been funded in other cities during the years, especially connected to the activities of national theatres such as *Scuola del Piccolo Teatro*, *Scuola del Teatro Stabile di Genova*, and others. They are publicly funded but are not recognised by the Ministry of Education as providing secondary education. The admission procedures consist of one or two auditions, usually followed by a probationary period of a week for the applicants. Due to the high number of applicants, the chances of admission to nationally funded academies are usually low, e.g., *Civica Scuola di Teatro Paolo Grassi* selects 20 students out of 500 applicants every year (Gallina et al., 2018: 163). The courses span a length of three years and are equivalent to a university bachelor's degree. The classes usually have a maximum of 20 students that are evaluated at the end of each academic year. Apart from institutionally and publicly funded academies, a vast number of private schools have been established over the years, creating a diverse landscape where aspirants may find it difficult to recognise quality education programs. Furthermore, despite the high number of theatre schools, holding an acting diploma, whether recognised by the state or not, is not a formal requirement to work in an acting position.

The absence of a formal qualification to access the job market alongside the growth in the number of aspirants has caused a prevalence of informal rules and professional networks (Bertolini and Vallero, 2011). The difficulty in evaluating and quantifying the notion of artistic talent is such that the recruitment process is highly volatile when compared to that of nonartistic domains. Scholars have underlined that the system of auditions relies on relational

mechanisms to reduce the costs of the process of aspirants' selection (Menger, 2006). Furthermore, the use of networks guarantees the trustworthiness of the aspirants and their relational skills and vouches for the positive outcome of the artistic process that is intrinsically difficult to control (Menger, 2001). In this process, schools and academies have the role of connecting former students with employment opportunities. As happens in many creative environments, social and professional networks have emerged as a means to validate actors' reputation and trustworthiness and, ultimately, to distribute work (Alacovska, 2018; Gandini, 2015). A consistent amount of effort needs to be devoted to enhancing personal and professional relations and to maintain and improve professional skills; these economic and relational investments are particularly onerous for young workers at the beginning of their career (Bertolini et al., 2019).

Furthermore, with regard to showing informal business recruiting systems, several scholars have focused on issues related to discriminatory practices. Deborah Dean (2005, 2008) considers the interrelation between characteristics of race, gender and age in structuring the possibilities of accessing a highly segmented working environment for the female workforce. Starting from a practice that is widespread in the sector, an analysis of the opportunities of access to the theatrical sector in Britain confirms that actors from privileged family backgrounds not only have fewer difficulties than working class colleagues in accessing the job market but are also granted more favourable economic treatment (Friedman et al., 2017). In the U.S.-based cinema industry, the work of Samantha J. Simon (2019) takes into account the work of talent agencies and shows how it reproduces inequalities of race and gender. Considering the Italian institutional context of classical music, Clementina Casula (2019a) considers female musicians' professional trajectories and reflects on the gendered inequalities that characterise education and career paths.

Looking at the mean remuneration per worker and the mean number of worked days in 2019, as reported in **Table 2**, actors' careers emerge to be extremely diversified. So as to handle the instability, theatre workers often pursue double careers that can provide economic rewards (Robinson and Montgomery, 2000) while also allowing emotional and symbolic satisfaction from working in the arts (Bureau et al., 2009). According to Sonia Bertolini and Manuel Vallero (2011), actors are involved in extensive and intensive diversification. The first case regards those actors that move across different artistic sectors, choosing activities less prestigious but more economically rewarding, for example dubbing or advertising. In the second case, workers remain in the same artistic sector but engage in different activities, such as actors who work as managers or teachers, and sometimes this diversification can lead to workers' being reinstated. Furthermore, it has been argued that the employment discontinuity that workers have experienced in the past twenty years has led to an organisational change characterised by entrepreneurial attitudes. Lacking the features of traditional careers, creative careers have been characterised by several scholars as portfolio careers (Fraser and Gold, 2001), where multiple jobs and skills are fundamental to the artists' working life. According to the reflections of Douglas T. Hall (2004) and Kerr Inkson (2006), artistic careers that entail multiple employers, develop outside traditional hierarchies and do not follow the typical career progression of an industry are best defined by the term "protean career". In this case, the focus is on the necessity of changing and developing new skills to remain employable. According to Dawn Bennet (2009: 311), "this pattern of self-managed career pre-empts general labour force trends and makes artists an ideal study group".

In recent decades, scholars who have analysed women's participation in the Italian work context have underscored the persistence of occupational exclusion and gendered pay gaps in different sectors (Bertolini, 2010; Bozzon, 2008; Gaiaschi, 2019; Reyneri, 2009).

Furthermore, where careers and working environments are constructed and run through a specific masculine structure (Gherardi, 1995), the problematic relationship between gender, flexible work and life-course patterns has also been highlighted (Saraceno, 1991, 2002). In this section, we present an overview of women's experiences of work in the performing arts using quantitative data collected in three sector's specific surveys[5].

According to the survey "Vita da artista", in 2015, the number of women working in the live performance sector who experienced periods of unemployment of more than six months was higher than the number of male colleagues who experienced the same (16.4% female over 11.5% male; p.23). Furthermore, irregular working conditions are more likely to be experienced by young people (50.7% of workers aged less than 30 years old define it "fairly common") and by women (39.4% of women over 35% of men). In 2015, 83.4% of female workers engaged in the survey declared earning less than 10,000 euros per year, and the same situation was found by 93.9% of the respondents aged under 30 and by 78.4% of the actors contacted (Di Nunzio et al., 2017: 18). In this sense, if the overall experience of actors' work is considered precarious and discontinuous, women and young workers seem to be particularly exposed to economic and career vulnerability in the context of the performing arts.

The data collected by the I.N.P.S. Observatory on performing artist occupations can be utilised to deepen the contours of inequalities in actors' and actresses' employment experiences. According to 2019 data, before the COVID-19 outburst, there were 16.4% less women working in the acting profession than men. With the intention of collecting data on gender experiences in the performing arts, the feminist collective of actresses "Amleta"

[5] Ethnicity is not considered in this study due to a lack of available data. In fact, Italy does not collect statistical data on race or ethnic origin of the population (Ambrosetti and Cela, 2015).

analysed performers' presence on the main Italian theatre stages between 2017 and 2020 and stated that actresses made up 37.5% while actors represented 62.5% of the total number of workers[6].

Figure 1 presents the cumulative number of worked days of actors and actresses in 2019 divided by age groups, which allows for further reflections on gender inequalities and career trajectories. The overall career pattern appears to be similar for men and women; it demonstrates a peak of opportunities between 25 and 34 years old and then a decrease over the years, a trend that can be compared to what happens in other occupations where body capital is central (Bertolini and Vallero, 2011; Mears, 2011; Wacquant, 1995). Nevertheless, in every age cohort, women are shown to be working less than male colleagues, and the gender gap that originates during the late twenties remains in each age group. In addition, looking at the number of worked days for each cohort also provides insights into society's dominant cultural representations, since we are considering a working activity strictly tied to media and communication narrative choices.

[6] "Amleta" is a collective of actresses born in 2020 to evidence and contrast gender inequalities and discriminations in the entertainment industry. The survey that is referenced is available at: https://www.amleta.org/mappatura/ . To elaborate the survey, according to my fieldwork notes, the group scraped the data on gender participation in theatrical ensembles from Italian theatres' websites during April and May 2020.

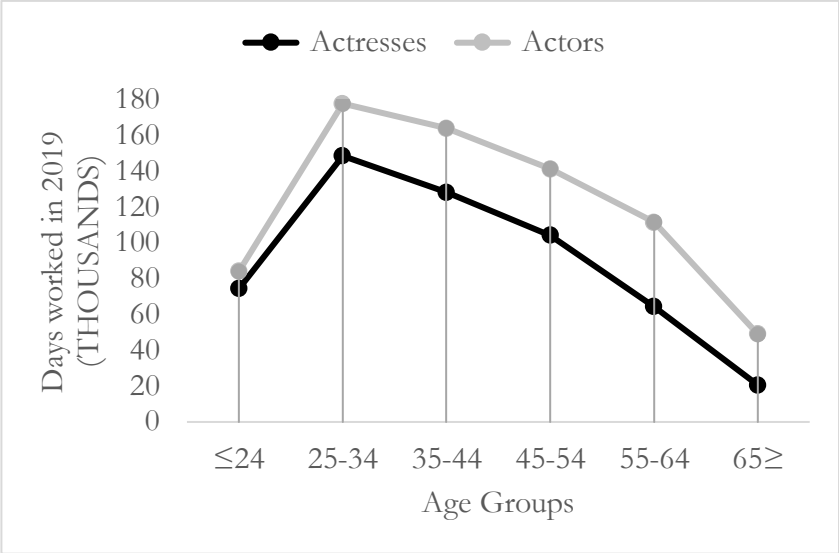


Figure 1: Cumulative number of worked days (in thousands) in 2019 (professional category of actors) by gender and age cohort. Author's elaboration. Source: I.N.P.S, 2019.

According to the I.N.P.S. data, considering the total amount of remuneration of actors in 2019, women earned 41.8% less than their male counterparts. In relation to the following **Figure 2**, which shows the gender pay-gap in relation to age cohorts, it appears that differences in wages start to be more defined in the cohort encompassing 35 to 44 years old and then peaks for workers in the following age group, reaching 47.1%. In the case of young actresses aged 25 to 34, the figure shows that, in 2019, they cumulatively earned 6.2% more that male colleagues in the same cohort, a feature that has been characteristic of display professions where gender and sexuality are traditionally intertwined (Mears and Connell, 2016).

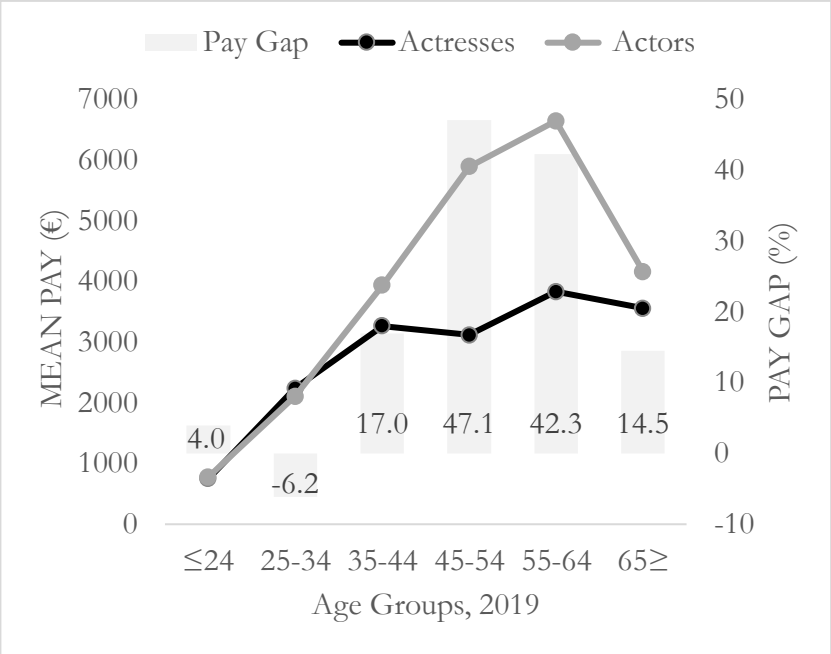


Figure 2: Gender wage-gap (percentage). Author's elaboration. The figure reports the gender wage gap, i.e., the average differences between the mean of remunerations of actors and actresses in 2019. Source: I.N.P.S., 2019.

In this context, power inequalities appear to bear a specific connotation in terms of age and gender. According to data gathered by Amleta's survey, 76% of theatre's artistic and administrative directors are men, as it is for 78,4% of playwriters. Considering I.N.P.S. 2019 data, the cumulative earnings of actresses were 38% less than the total amount earned by male directors and playwriters. At the same time, actresses aged between 20 and 24 years old were the most represented cohort of the total number of actresses employed in 2019, at 18.4%, while the largest director cohort was of males between 40 and 44 years old.

5. Cooperatives, associations and informal groups

In the essay "La communauté théâtrale", Serge Proust (2003) considers the theatrical community that grows around a *compagnia*, an artistic ensemble, as the first collective

organisation that, despite its diminished role in the system, still occupies the centre of ideal artistic practice. However, in a context where self-entrepreneurship, voluntary work and competition are widely present, especially among early career subjects (Chicchi et al., 2014; Menger, 2006; Terranova, 2000), it can be difficult for workers to find common identities and claims (Bologna, 2018). The rise of autonomous work and the reconfiguration of traditional employment relations that followed the 2007–2008 crisis led traditional worker organisations to reconfigure their roles and their actions (Pulignano et al., 2016). On the one hand, new consortia have been created to gather different actors in the theatrical sector and promote collaboration and good practices. For example, *C.Re.S. Co – Coordinamento delle Realtà della Scena Contemporanea* is a self-financed association created in 2010 that assembles both employers and employees with the objective of creating a network of shared ethical working practices[7]. New cooperative organisations have also been created with the intention of representing cultural workers and performing artists whose demands and needs are often far from the traditional union agendas. Smart[8] (Murgia and de Heusch, 2020) and Doc Servizi[9] (Chiappa and Martinelli, 2019) are cooperatives that aim to provide mutual aid to professionals in cultural industries, joining the benefits of autonomous employment with the protections and rights usually reserved for more conventional employment.

Furthermore, the need to improve workers' conditions and to question neoliberal models of the cultural sector has been increasingly clear to workers in the performing arts that gave birth, all around Italy, to artistic and political mobilisations during 2011 and 2016 (Cossu, 2018; Giorgi, 2014). In this period, informal groups of cultural workers framed their actions

[7] https://www.progettocresco.it/mission/

[8] https://smart-it.org/

[9] https://docservizi.retedoc.net/valori/

in terms of "culture as a common good" and claimed the right to use occupied spaces, such as Macao in Milan and Teatro Valle in Rome, in democratic and participatory ways (Maddanu, 2018).

In Italy, starting from the last days of February, the closure of all show venues and of the majority of television and cinema production sets has led many workers to experience forced unemployment. In particular, the absence of social protections and the lack of a clear vision of the future have exposed the historical weakness of the sector. During the beginning of March 2020, workers were dismissed, often without subsidies, showing the effects of the absence of labour protections for this category of employment and the consequences of the sector's informality. Furthermore, since performing artists are fragmented under multiple types of employment contracts, it has been particularly complicated to negotiate extraordinary unemployment subsidies during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this framework, the number of self-organised groups working on strengthening the position and enhancing community practices among actors and actresses has started to grow. According to a list published on the 30th of April 2020, at the time, more than 50 groups, formal and informal, were working actively on protections of live show business workers.[10] Furthermore, several online encounters between geographically and politically diverse collectives were organised during March and April 2020. Thus, the collective activities of the performing arts sector during the Covid-19 pandemic have been particularly relevant, especially if compared to the past few years. In Milan, the self-organised group "A2U - Attrici e attori uniti" has been working to strengthen and expand awareness of actors and actresses with the support of the SLC-CGIL union. Such activity has, on the one hand, facilitated contact between younger

[10] https://webzine.theatronduepuntozero.it/2020/04/30/tutela-dei-lavoratori-e-delle-lavoratrici-dello-spettacolo-una-mappatura/

workers and the union and, on the other hand, strengthened the bond between the union and workers' instances. In this sense, the outbreak of Covid-19 and its impact on the performing arts sector has caused a period of transition in the industry's mobilisation and collectivisation history that, ultimately, may be able to shape long-standing ideas and professional culture values.

IV Methodology and research design

1. Introduction

The present chapter thematises the methodological stance adopted in the research and goes into detail about the research structure and design. The previous sections traced the contours of the theoretical background that sustains the research and the context where the research is grounded and developed. With the aim of exploring performing artists' experiences of life and work, an epistemological interpretive stance has been adopted alongside a qualitative research methodology. From February 2020 to April 2021, I collected 40 in-depth qualitative interviews with actors and actresses based in Milan, Italy, aged between 27 and 49 years old. From March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic deeply and unexpectedly changed the research context and workers' conditions in the entertainment sector. In fact, mobilisation and collective actions start to grow across the professional category. Both artists, organisers and technicians entered an undetermined period of unemployment that stimulated a renewed dialogue in the sector and led to the emergence of several collective mobilisations. During the spring of 2020, several research participants who were not mobilised at the time of my interviews started to be involved in collective actions and the research followed the evolution of the extraordinary circumstances brought by the Covid-19 pandemic in the workers' sector. Moving the fieldwork online has, of course, impacted on the ways in which ethnography was conducted. However, stories and experiences of work have not changed, "but the ways they were told have changed" (Murthy, 2008: 838). Thus, the research design followed the changed conditions of the fieldwork and integrated the emergent collective digital practices.

In the first section, I resume the study's aims and methodological choices and describe the sample design and composition and reflect on the comparative potential of the presented research. In the second section, I elaborate on the recruitment process. The next section is devoted to describing the ethnographic practices on the fieldwork and the research participants' role in the co-construction of meanings that characterises in-depth interviews and ethnographic practices. The fourth section is devoted to describing the process of data analysis and to detailing the use of coding. The last section of the chapter is dedicated to elaborating on the issue of reflexivity in qualitative research. I present an account of my research experience, detailing my positioning in relation to the fieldwork. Lastly, the ethical practices followed in the research process are explained.

2. Research aims and case selection

Following the theoretical debates on cultural industries and creative work considered in the first chapter and the reflection on the subject's positions in the contemporary neoliberal frame of work, a first aim of the research is to observe how, in the Italian context, cultural workers' subjectivities are constructed and how they embed and negotiate with a neoliberal ethos of work. Secondly, the study considers how subjects' affects, body and emotions are inserted into power relations in the workplace and how subjects can challenge those practices. Lastly, the research considers how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, workers engaged in practices of collective resistance to the neoliberal framework of work and considers how Covid-19 has affected workers' positionings. A qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews and ethnography has been adopted with the intent to access the ways in which research participants construct and narrate their experiences of life and work.

The case selection was guided by the research aims and considered the research context described in Chapter 3. Thus, the consideration of previous surveys, the elaboration of the descriptive statistics base on I.N.P.S. and the Ministry of Culture's data provided the main axis along which the case selection's criteria were developed. Milan's area was identified as leading the Italian theatrical sector and providing the majority of educational and working opportunities for young actors. To include as much diversity as possible and considering an occupational category characterised by particularly fluid borders, the selection took into account several aspects.

The first point of reflection was the research participants' positioning in terms of age and career experience. On the one hand, age emerged as a relevant factor in relation to career construction and personal aspirations. Referring to I.N.P.S. data from 2019 (see Chapter 3 at p.10), people aged 19 to 29 made up the majority of the actors employed and the number of actors seemed to decline steadily following the workers' increased age. Nevertheless, following insights from the sociology of profession, the years of career experience were also considered alongside the actors' age. Since there are no formal qualifications required to access the job market, age and career experience of Italian actors can be variable. In addition, the vast number of semi-professional workers in the sector, along with widespread underemployment and double careers, makes the quantitative consideration of the career experience in terms of years difficult to determine. A second point of speculation regards the sample composition in terms of educational paths. In recent years, the numbers of theatre schools and aspirants have been growing steadily (see Chapter 3). To tackle the variety of experiences in the field, actors who graduated from the most prestigious theatre academies, recognised and financed by the Italian State and actors educated in private school or self-taught were considered as research participants. In addition, the choice of avoiding selecting

the research participants along educational trajectories allowed for increasing the variety of workers' acting experiences and working environments. A third theme of reflection in the selection criteria regarded the issue of gender. While the selection of research participants considered reaching a gender balance to be desirable, the statistics presented in the previous chapter point at the gendered structure of the sector. Here gender matters intersect with social stratifications of age and earnings and depict an unfavourable working environment for young (and older) women (see Chapter 3). Thus, considering both young men's and women's experiences of work can shed light on career trajectories' gender differences. In terms of age, the younger interviewees are Chiara and Roberto (27 years old), the oldest are Maura (44 years old) and Sybilla (49 years old) while the vast majority of the participants are aged between 29 and 36 years old. The following tables and figure provide further details on research participants' characteristics in terms of age, theatre sector and career experience.

Age group	Total	Female	Male	Milan	Other City
Under 30	8	5	3	7	1
30 to 35	16	9	7	7	7
36 to 40	14	7	7	11	3
Over 40	2	2	0	2	0
Total	40	23	17	27	11

*one not applicable

Table 3: Research participants' characteristics by age group

Years of career	Total	Percentage
Up to 5	14	36%
More than 5	13	33%
10 or more	12	31%
Total	39	100%

*one not applicable

Table 4: Research participants' years in their career

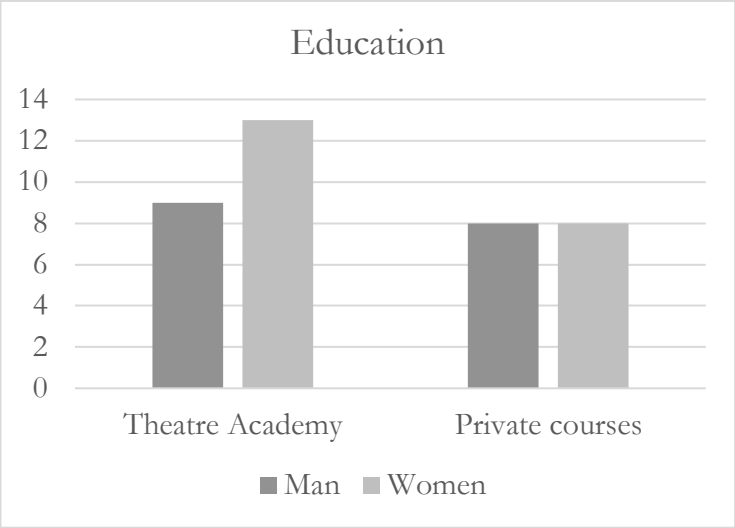


Figure 3: Research participants' artistic education by gender

The social characteristics mentioned above are just a portion of the axis of differences that characterise the subjects' experiences of the social world. Considering that "although all women's experiences are gendered, no two women's experiences are identical" (Reinharz and Chase, 2001: 221), the research acknowledged, at every stage, the complexity of subjects' social positioning (Moore, 1994). In an attempt to avoid the risk of subjectivity in terms of positionalities and of considering its performative and embodied aspects (Braidotti, 2012), research participants' experiences are understood in regard to their relationship with race, class and sexual orientation without them being part of the selection criteria. Two research participants explicitly discussed their ethnic background in relation to the workplace, as two other research participants did with regard to their sexual orientation. Thus, interviewees' positionings have been considered as a central part of workers' experiences when the interviewees thematised and brought these matters to light.

By virtue of its relevance for the Italian theatrical production (see Chapter 3), the case selection is anchored to the geographical criterion of living or working in the area of Milan.

Nevertheless, the research design took into account the changes in the research context brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic in order to consider emerging trends. The workers' forced unemployment was followed by the emergence of collective digital mobilising practices across the performing arts' sector. The research welcomed the nascent online practices of community that characterised the months from March to June 2020. Following digital encounters organised by actors based in Milan, the move online and the cohort of respondents was broadened to include actor-activists who were taking an active part in the mobilisation, both residing and not residing in Milan. Furthermore, when Covid-19 restrictions on social life were lifted, the I took part in live mobilisation activities organised in Milan, such as meetings and demonstrations. Some actors who were interviewed before the pandemic were re-contacted to collect their latest experiences. Thus, both sampling techniques and participant selection criteria were adapted following unexpected changes to the research context and researchers' considerations of relevance (Flick, 2009).

Furthermore, before starting the fieldwork, to map and understand the theatrical sector and its functioning, six institutional gatekeepers were interviewed, whose organisational positions are detailed in **Table 5**. They were contacted via my institutional email and were provided with informative documents about the research and informed consent was sought before our meetings. The interviews were audio recorded and discursively guided by a list of bullet points prepared ad hoc for the interaction. The materials collected helped not only to map the field but were important in providing possible contacts for research participants.

Name	Gatekeeper position	Organisation
Silvano	Coordinator	Public-funded theatre academy
Sam	Director	Private theatre school

Louise	Director	Private theatre school
Laura	Coordinator	Management and casting agency
Pamela	Coordinator and funder	Online activist community
Ariel	Coordinator	Local workers' union

Table 5: Gatekeepers' descriptors

3. Recruitment processes

During the two years of fieldwork, in order to represent the heterogeneity of the occupational sector, the recruitment of research participants followed several strategies, and, in almost all cases, personal contacts played a facilitating role. The selection of research participants aimed to reach the maximum variation within the selection criteria defined in the previous section and resulted in a stratified sample composed of extreme and typical cases (Patton, 1990).

Concerning research participants' recruitment for in-depth interviews, different strategies were adopted. Firstly, interviewees were contacted following gatekeepers' suggestions. It was common for gatekeepers, at the end of their interviews, to indicate some former students to contact. In this case, a social desirability bias was in force since the gatekeeper wished to promote the good name and quality of their organisation and therefore would suggest a successful or promising actor.

A second recruiting strategy that the research used was snowball sampling. In this sense, research participants either proposed or were asked to suggest some colleagues who might be interested in participating in the study. After having inquired, jointly with the first contact, into their willingness to be involved, I usually approached the potential interviewee through a Facebook or WhatsApp message that briefly explained the research and the researcher's

institutional frame. This first communication started a conversation that ended with the exchange email addresses followed by the forwarding of the research's informative documentation and informed consent paperwork. If the interview was to be conducted online, only after the email receipt of the informed consent had been signed was the appointment for the interview set. Otherwise, the documentation was transmitted, at first, via email, but the documents were also printed and brought on the day of the interview and discussed and signed contextually. In the case of snowball sampling, the research participants tended to suggest co-workers and collaborators, making real the risk of gathering uniform accounts (Merkens, 2004). To avoid clustering, apart from combining this technique of sampling with others, I asked for more than one suggested contact and avoided interviewing co-workers or business partners of former research participants. To this end, the online observation of research participants' future and past advertised activities was particularly helpful.

Aiming to avoid mechanisms of autoreferentiality and to enrich the variety of research participants' experiences with different theatre organisations and genres, the winners of recent years' Italian prizes for young actors were contacted through social media. With the same purpose of ensuring diversity, some research participants were the researcher's personal acquaintances and were contacted in informal settings.

Following the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, all the fieldwork activities necessarily moved into the digital space. In this context, growing communities of actors and actresses were established online and became a favourable environment for research participants' recruitment. Both the forced unemployment of actors and the pandemic context opened up a moment of personal and collective self-reflection that facilitated actors' engagement and willingness to take part in the research process. In this context, actors and activists were

directly contacted during the navigation of online communities and invited to the interview. Knowing that community recruitment tends to privilege politically active and visible activists, it was a particularly accessible and direct strategy to contact potential interviewees that was balanced by the contribution of other sampling techniques in the case selection process. All the recruitment strategies adopted benefitted to a certain extent from my personal contacts and knowledge of the research environments as detailed in the next section. Discussion about the case selection and the research participants' engagement in the research project would be incomplete without mentioning the role of my social and relational capital in the research context. Some personal contacts became key informants and not only suggested possible interviewees but also sustained the research project and opened new interview possibilities (Whyte, 2012). Sometimes first contacts through social media were facilitated by the number of shared friends on Facebook that, in a certain way, vouched for my position in the community and, in online interactions, provided a topic of conversation to break the ice. If, on the one hand, common acquaintances could have pushed some workers towards engaging in the interviews, on the other hand, some of the actors and actresses contacted declined my invitation. They adduced either time-related motivations or difficulties in talking about themselves, or again mentioned a moment of crisis in their personal and professional identity that prevented them from participating in the study. The research excluded the possibility of providing a monetary reward for research participants, even if some of them would have surely benefitted from economic compensation, especially during the pandemic. On the one hand, in a working environment dominated by informality and favours, relational contacts are key for job opportunities and being interviewed in a research project is part of the networking game. On the other hand, taking part in an interview, particularly during the Covid-19 emergency, was a way to build a connection of care, sharing personal difficulties and sectorial complaints. Even if research participants are part of a working category that is

used to receiving public attention and talking about themselves, the emotional reward of having the possibility of sharing and reflecting on their personal and professional paths was still present in the interviewees' feedback (Cardano, 2011: 149).

4. In-depth interviews and ethnography

The method of data collection chosen to answer the research questions entailed in-depth interviews as well as online and offline ethnographic practices. The use of qualitative interviews and ethnography is considered favourably by scholars in the field of social research methodology when wishing to access subjective viewpoints (Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Cardano, 2011). In the present research's case, it was necessary to get to know the research participants' world of work in their own words (Flick et al., 2004). The in-depth interviews allowed for an inquiry into subjectivity construction in relation to participants' career paths and solicited a reflexive posture (Gubrium et al., 2012).

A total of 40 interviews were realised between February 2020 and June 2021 in offline and, following Covid-19 regulations, online environments. When the interview was planned to take place online (21 interviews), the participants were asked to select their preferred interaction environment. A similar question was asked when the interactions happened in person (19 interviews). In this case, the organisation of the encounters took place in public parks, bars and on the university campus, aiming to maintain a fair and professional environment. The interviews lasted between 40 and 130 minutes and were audio recorded with the explicit and written consent of the interviewees. After the encounter, the interviews were transcribed and anonymised according to the research's ethical procedures. The collection of ethnographic notes aimed at comprehending and observing social dynamics in

the field and researching participants' working routines. Thus, before the Covid-19 outbreak, and when possible, afterward, I attended to theatre shows where research participants performed. During Covid-19 restrictions, the ethnographic observation was conducted online in actors' online communities (Telegram channel, Facebook pages) and online meetings. Starting from May 2020, following the lifting of restrictions, I took part in live demonstration events organised by a network of performing arts' groups in Duomo Square, Milan.

If, on the one hand, qualitative research has epistemological issues in adhering to a pre-determined research protocol, on the other hand, Dvora Yanow underlines that not everything is improvised, describing a movement that recalls actors' improvisation where the contents are adapted to the context of interaction without losing methodological rigor (Yanow, 2015). Following this reflection, the discursive nature of the interview resulted in an interview guide (**Annex 1**) that represented a catalogue of the issues to be ideally covered in the interactions with research participants rather than questions to be asked. Thus, the interviews were based on a double movement between a first open part where the participants introduced their education and experience in the performing arts, and a second part guided by a topic list that took into consideration everyday working practices and future desires with the help of direct, interpretative and probing questions.

Participating in an interview on a topic related to their career and artistic path is a common experience for both mature and emergent actors. Thus, because of the peculiar characteristics of their occupation, actors are used to reflect and elaborate a narration over their biographical path. If, on the one hand, being used to the "interview format" helped in producing a relaxed atmosphere during the exchange, on the other hand, several difficulties related to the definition of the context had to be addressed.

In the majority of cases, after the introductory part where the interviewees had the space to reproduce their – more or less – standardised self-presentation, an authentic exchange was achieved with the progression of the interview and the progressive definition – and embodiment – of the interaction context. Nevertheless, in some of the interactions, it was particularly difficult to guide the research participants in new narrative territories, outside of standardised and stereotyped discourses about the self. Each interviewee constructed a particular self in their relation with the interviewer (Riessman, 1990), thus, standardised narrations were read and analysed starting from their performative positioning. In this sense, the most challenging interviews turned out to be the ones involving particularly vulnerable research participants, either representing minorities or those in need of reshaping their professional goals. A second issue concerned the definition of the interview's context and its relationship with everyday dynamics that characterises research participants' working environment. The interviewees often reproduced what, in their view, was desirable for the researcher to hear, and sometimes their apprehension was explicitly assessed at the end of the interview by them asking: "Have I answered correctly?" Indeed, research participants made a strategic use of their narratives, especially when gatekeepers were involved in the organisation of the encounter, providing what they thought would be an "acceptable" self-representation. In the mentioned cases, the produced "biased" narrative is not rejected as "unauthentic" but rather, the strategic use of the interview gives insights into how power relations operate in the theatrical sector and is, therefore, considered in the phase of analysis and interpretation (Flick, 2009: 400). The issues reported in this section appear to be particularly linked to the public nature of acting and to the relevance of informal relations in the working environment. Despite being a professional category that is used to be routinely interviewed, several research participants expressed at the end of their interview, when the audio recorder was turned off, their appreciation and surprise for the exchange alongside a

certain sense of fatigue. A case where similar feelings were captured is seen in Fulvio's interview:

> E: "I ask you if there is something that you wish to add, thinking back to our conversation..."
> I: "No, at the moment no, I am fine with that. In fact, I liked our talk, I hope to have answered exhaustively… sometimes some questions were a bit uneasy, and rightly so, therefore sometimes it hasn't been easy for me to answer immediately."

Furthermore, as happens in several interviews settings, being interviewed and talking about their professional environment, the research participants often tended to shift from a protagonist to an expert role (Cardano, 2011: 168). In this kind of situation, I used to intervene with questions aimed at including the research participants' direct experience of the event told in the narrative or undertaking a naïve stance (Flick, 2018; Kvale, 2007). Assuming an expert posture and telling what "The people say" about an issue was especially common when the development of the interviews intercepted themes that were problematic, in terms of narrative, for the occupational sector. Thus, the absence, in the performing arts sector and among the workers, of a collective reflection and public confrontation on matters such as gender pay gap, sexual and psychological harassment, and informal working arrangements often resulted in research participants telling other people's stories and avoiding the use of the first person. In this context, the emotional impact of the interview sometimes required a moment of debriefing. The following excerpt reports an example of participants' reticence, in this case talking about an episode of injury that happened in the context of undeclared work where the worker had to deal alone with a physically and emotionally demanding situation.

> E: "Did you get hurt on the stage? How it went?"
> I: "I got hurt on the stage […] No, with them [this production], I couldn't benefit from the sick insurance, no…"
> E: "With them you didn't use the sick insurance…"
> I: "No, because no… no, at the end they gave me a forfeit [monetary compensation] …"

E: "Oh, really…" (Rosanna)

In these cases, depending on the situation, I proposed to take a break and start again in a few minutes, giving room for more colloquial interactions. Generally, research participants who had been involved in unions and collective organisations were more at ease in speaking of their experiences of the dark sides of their occupational activities and working category but not everyone was relaxed in discussing their first-hand experiences of it. Furthermore, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, asking actors to reflect on their career and on their perspective has been, for the researcher's point of view, a fruitful occasion to tackle a moment of disruption in the sector but it has also been for some research participants an intense report in and of a difficult moment from both private and professional points of view.

5. Data analysis

The data analysis began soon after the interviews, when I compiled a thematic summary and biographical notes based on the research participants' talks. The data collected were treated accordingly to the University's ethical procedures and transcribed and pseudonymised, with all the information that could possibly identify the research participants being omitted. During the process of analysis, the data was handled in the original language (Italian) and only the excerpts quoted in the following chapters have been translated into English. In the texts, apart from research participants' quotes, fieldnotes that were transcribed as annotations are also reported. In this case, they have to be considered, if into brackets, as quasi-literal transcriptions or, if in the text, as paraphrasis of contents expressed by activists and research participants on the fieldwork.

The analysis entailed an extensive reading of the interviews, during which notes were taken, followed by a broad coding process that was inductive and reiterative. The process of analysis was inspired by grounded theory's presuppositions (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012) and research participants' discussions about key topics were regarded as an important resource in the analytic process (Weatherell et al., 2001). Codes were used to organise the analysis around topics and subsequently used in their relations (Cardano, 2011). The interviews were input into NVivo software for qualitative analysis; coded with digital support helped the research to maintain an overall view of the coding process. Furthermore, the software permitted the construction of a classification system where socio-demographic variables were inserted for every research participant.

Considering language as a social practice and discourses as a form of action (Gill, 2000), the organisation of research participants' talks, their rhetorical choices as well as contradictions and incoherences have been taken into account as significative events. Furthermore, research participants' texts were regarded in relation to dominant cultural narratives about work and aspirations, with the intent to tackle the elements of various discursive resources that research participants combined. Acknowledging that words can describe just a portion of the world (Polanyi, 2009), body, feelings and emotions were regarded as central in the subjectivation processes. Thus, the analysis and the interpretation benefitted from a tacit knowledge shared with research participants, on the collective dimension of personal experiences (Yanow, 2015) and focused on those features of actors' experiences that the researcher believed to be relevant in the framework of the research aims (Whyte, 2012).

The present thesis is organised around four thematic areas: i) research participants' account of their artistic socialisation and its implications in term of subjectivation; ii) actors' professional experiences between precariousness and entrepreneurship; iii) research

participants' positions between neoliberal subjectivising instances and individual micro-resistances; and iv) collective experiences of mobilisation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. Reflexivity and ethics

Considering social research as deeply embedded in its cultural context and the act of knowing and interpreting as a subjective process (Yanow, 2015), it is fundamental for the research process to describe the researcher's positioning in the field (Atkinson, 1990). Following the epistemological stance of socio-constructionist research where knowledge is always related to a context, the aim of the researcher is to generate the best possible representation of the research and the research process in order to contribute to knowing something more about the social world (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

It is necessary to problematise the relation between researcher and research participants in terms of power, authority and access to the "truth". If critical social research has often been aimed at deconstructing what is taken for granted in a given social reality, anthropologists have pointed out that the diminishing of experiences of the world generated by an everyday knowledge poses questions of asymmetries of power that need to be addressed (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Harding, 2004). The tension between scientific knowledge, that has presented itself as a direct reflection of the world, and relativistic stances need to be considered at every stage of the research process. Thus, reflexivity is fundamental to problematise knowledge production as a contingent, related to the researcher and research participants' positions and experiences in/of the world (Haraway, 1988). If, during the research process, it is inevitable to produce context-dependent texts, the relations of power and authority that are embedded in social research need to be described and made explicit alongside other (known) relations

that shape the knowledge produced (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). To this regard, methodologists that adopted a phenomenological stance underlined that researchers themselves, even if engaging in a reflexive activity, cannot be aware, at a conscious level, of every possible bias that influences their research practice (Haraway, 1988; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2015). Failing to produce "unbiased" knowledge, interpretivist research and the attention that is granted on experience, subjectivity and emotions in qualitative research, have often been considered unsystematic and not rigorous because of the unique centrality of people in the research processes and of processes of knowledge that are often hard to explain (Yanow, 2015).

If the researcher's personal experience is inextricably mixed up with the research, the account of the fieldwork can explain the research process (Whyte, 2012). Thus, a certain knowledge of the Italian theatrical sector allowed me to share with the research participants both a technical jargon and systems of classification while remaining aware of the situatedness of the social knowledge (Haraway, 1988). At the same time, my social positioning in terms of language, race and cultural background enabled me to insert the ethnographic relation some everyday experiences potentially shared with the research participants (Riessman, 1987). The data presented in this thesis have to be considered as the result of the encounter between my positioning and the positionings of the research participants and therefore reflecting the co-constructions of meaning that took place during the discursive space of the interview (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012). Several feminist scholars have reported how the interview process and data analysis affected them personally (Reinharz and Chase, 2001; Riessman, 1990); in the present study several experiences were shared between the researcher and the participants. Being part of the same generation and experiencing a common condition of precariousness made possible an affective and emotional comprehension of several issues

discussed during the interviews. The relevance of informal relations, peer recognition and power relations in the actors' working environments had, in some cases, a central role in balancing the volume of exposition/protection that the research participant granted themselves. Thus, despite the informed consent being clear about data protection and anonymity, several interviewees preferred to avoid mentioning any names of colleagues, directors and producers during our exchanges. In this case, being young and occupying a precarious working position allowed for a shared feeling of vulnerability between researcher and research participants. Nevertheless, a certain cultural homogeneity does not dissolve unequal power relations embedded in the interview practice (Oakley, 2016) but the described field's configuration stimulated a reflexive posture both on the researcher's side and on the research participants'.

In February 2020, the research project was granted the approval of the ethical committee of the University of Milan. The procedure entailed a written presentation of the research project and an oral discussion of its ethical aspects during the presentation of the research in the presence of the Ethical Committee of the University of Milan. In this context, the ethical matters were discussed with the Committee, which provided written feedback and some remarks that were subsequently integrated into the project development and informed consent form.

In a context where the researcher is in a position of power and holds the possibility to produce scientific knowledge based on the data gathered during the fieldwork, feminist methodology has underlined the importance of sharing research outcomes and giving research feedback to the field (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). Thus, when the fieldwork "moved" online following Covid-19 restrictions, I opened a personal Instagram page where she shared the first research outputs. With the same aim, in December 2020, research

participants were emailed with some updates about the research project and new year's greetings. Furthermore, drafts of the first research output have been shared with one of the key informants with whom I discussed the first interpretations and analysis.

Annex 1

INTERVISTA

Domanda introduttiva

- Come sei arrivato/a qui? Abiti a Milano da molto?
  - Cosa rappresenta da un punto di vista professionale?

Percorso artistico

- In termini di formazione, mi racconteresti qual è stato il tuo percorso?
- Se pensi al tuo percorso fino ad oggi, come lo descriveresti?
- Come è cambiato nel tempo il rapporto che hai con il tuo lavoro?
  - Ci sono stati dei punti di riferimento che hanno avuto un significato particolare per te?
  - Ci sono stati dei punti di svolta nel corso degli anni?
- Ti sei mai ritrovata a fare altri lavori oltre all'attrice? Come è successo?
- Come hai cercato di garantirti una continuità economica?
  - Hai mai avuto bisogno di un sostegno esterno?
- Con che tipo di contratti hai lavorato?
- Ti è mai capitato di accedere a forme di protezione sociale? (es. malattia, maternità/congedi parentali, ferie, pensione)
- Hai mai fatto parte di associazioni o sindacati?

Vita lavorativa quotidiana

- Come percepisci la tua figura professionale oggi?
- Senti di appartenere a una particolare comunità o stile professionale?
- Che ruolo ha il tuo corpo nel tuo lavoro?
- Quali sono i principali obiettivi che ti poni?
- Come ti muovi per cercare nuove collaborazioni?
  - Come costruisci i tuoi contatti?
  - Che ruolo hanno i social media?
- Quali sono oggi le tue principali soddisfazioni professionali?
- Quali invece le principali difficoltà? Come cerchi di affrontarle?
- Nella tua vita lavorativa quotidiana come influisce il fatto che sia una donna/uomo?
- Come pensi invece che influisca la tua provenienza geografica?
- Come percepisci la tua attuale situazione economica?

Vita privata

- In che modo la tua vita lavorativa ha influenzato la tua vita privata?
- In che modo la tua vita privata ha influenzato la tua carriera professionale?

Futuro

- Quali sono le tue aspettative per il futuro?
- Quali i tuoi desideri?

Conclusione

- C'è qualcosa che non ti ho chiesto e che vorresti aggiungere?

Annex 1: Interview guide and probes

V Entering the art world

1. Introduction

The present chapter starts to delve into the textual data collected and considers the research participants' narratives of their beginnings in the theatre world and their educational experiences. The following sections approach the actors' world of life and work considering their motivation in beginning an artistic career and their educational experiences.

In the following pages, the 40 interviews collected with 17 actors and 23 actresses are categorised into two types based on the subjects' narrative of their interest in theatre work, professionally oriented motivations and vocational oriented motivations. During the first interviews, the research participants spontaneously started describing themselves and their occupational experiences from the moment where they started to practice and study theatre in formal and informal settings. In this context, the description of the educational path appeared to be somehow related to the actors' artistic and professional identity and, at the same time, to have an ice-breaking function in the interview, allowing the research participants to perform a more or less stereotyped self-narrative in the first fifteen minutes of interaction. Considering the relevance of opening remarks in accounts (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001), it became customary that the interviews started with a general question such as: "Could you please tell me about what brought you to your current position?" or "How did you become an actor?". Considering the importance of narratives in identity sense-making work (Riessman, 2008) and the performative role of accounts in reinforcing and consolidating subjects' positions in the world (Czarniawska, 2004), this section takes into account the first steps of actors on the theatrical stage and relates the performers' educational experiences to their artistic career paths. Furthermore, using the concept of "narrations"

allows for the underlining of the dialogical and negotiated nature of the accounts, which, far from being a precise mirroring of reality, are the result of an interpretive process that ordinates symbolically and attributes meaning to the events (Poggio, 2004).

The following analysis is grounded in the research participants' self-explanatory discourses aimed at motivating their working path. In the first section, actors' narratives are grouped into i) professional motivations and ii) vocational oriented motivations, on the basis of the prevalence of motives regarding everyday work's practical issues or individual and self-expressive instances. The participants' descriptions of their motivations in approaching acting communicates their self-understanding of the artistic world of work and the ways in which they wish their experience to be contextualised. The identified groups shed light on two different ways of legitimising research participants' tension towards professional acting and to explain subjects' choices. While the first group accounts foresee the possibility of future economic rewards and reflects on the practical aspects of the work of performing, the second group does not describe acting as a way of sustenance but rather as an activity motivated by personal growth and emotional satisfaction, in a narrative where the everyday aspects of the work are absent.

In the second section, the context of education and participants' first steps into the art world are taken into account. In the research participants' accounts, the experience of theatre academies emerges to be crucial in the construction of personal and professional narratives and is characterised by the report of strongly felt emotions. To shed light on the meaning of the academic training, the chapter uses the classical metaphor of the Hero's Journey. This metaphor is useful because, from the construction of the actors' narratives, it permits the emergence of a transformative storyline articulated in a three-stage process: the audition with its resulting emotional efforts; the academic life made of teamwork, hurdles, and

satisfactions; and eventually the entrance into the art world alongside acknowledgement of the artistic and personal path travelled. The actors' accounts are, in this context, analysed through the symbolic categories of initiation rituals (Turner, 1982; Van Gennep, 2013). Using this metaphor to approach actors' narratives of academic training allows to consider subjects' experiences of professional education and its implications in terms of self-making and identity-making but also with regard to the complex process of socialisation in the professional environment. In the following section, the chapter confronts the significance of academic education for those research participants who did not have the opportunity to enrol in higher artistic education. In this sense, the relevance of institutional training emerges not only from narratives of actors that undertake such education but also from the accounts of those that were excluded from it. Lastly, considering the theoretical framework, I draw some concluding remarks concerning the relationship of actors' narratives with contemporary discourses on creative and artistic work. From the empirical analysis emerges a contrast between the rhetorical aspects permeating creative and artistic professions and the reality of the subjects' experiences. The encounter between the societal narratives around artistic work and the subjective everyday practice of it, starts to emerge in the educational path, considered in the present chapter, but is a *fil rouge* that characterises the complexity of actors' experiences and is transversal to the themes considered in the following chapters.

From the interviews collected, it emerges that research participants consider their experiences of work as professional experiences. Having gathered and analysed field data in a language other than English brings the need for some terminological notes. In the sociology of professions there has been much debate among Anglo-Saxon scholars on the distinction between professions and occupations – where profession describes an expert labour and occupation an activity performed in exchange for payment – and on its effectiveness to

describe the current world of work (Abbott, 1993; Evetts, 2003; Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011). In the past twenty years, even if lacking formal entrance barriers, artistic works have been considered professional activities by most European scholars (Buscatto, 2007; Casula, 2019b; Chafe and Kaida, 2020; Scharff, 2015; Tessarolo, 2014). In the following paragraphs, words such as "profession", "professional world" and "professional career" are used to describe actors' careers with reference to the Italian meaning of the term.[11] In addition, research participants not only use the term profession but also the Italian word "*mestiere*" that can be translated into English terms such as "job" and "work" but also "craft". To avoid losing meaning in translation, a specific decision needs to be made about the terminology employed. According to the Treccani online dictionary, "*mestiere*" indicates "Every activity, that has a mainly manual nature and apprehended, generally, through practice and apprenticeship, which is exercised daily for profit" but also "The practical side of every activity, not only manual, but also professional, artistic, intellectual; the ensemble of the theoretical and technical notions that, independently from talent, personal taste or creative style, are fundamental in order to carry out a job and that facilitate its execution". The research participants' use of the word "*mestiere*" in the following pages is underlined by the original Italian word into brackets.

[11] The Italian dictionary "Treccani", under the definition of the word "*professione*" quotes the following meanings: 1- A public and open declaration on something, and especially about an idea, an opinion, a sentiment, one's affiliation with a religious faith, an ideological stream of though […]; 2- Intellectual or manual activity exercised continuously with the aim of gaining an advantage. In particular: 2.1- In a broad sense, any customary working activity, including jobs and craft-ships (from which derives the distinction in "liberal profession" and "manual profession") […]; 2.2- In a stricter sense, intellectual activity which to be exercised requires a university degree or a peculiar license […]. The English translations of this paragraph are from the author. For reference see: https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/professione and https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/mestiere

2. Actors' narratives of motivations

The analysed case is examined in a contemporary context where passion and desire for self-realisation at work are characteristic of a growing number of occupations that extent beyond the artistic and creative domain (Giddens, 1991; Taylor and Littleton, 2012). In narrating the beginning of their acting story, research participants tended to produce a temporary linear account that spans the discovery of the theatrical arts during high school, elaborates on their apprenticeship years, and ends with a report of their first gigs. Descriptions of the personal motivation and artistic needs of self-expression when present in the opening remarks of the accounts are very short and highly stereotyped. However, statements aimed at explaining actors' commitment to the job through reference to childhood and teenage attitudes are found in other narrative places of the interviews. Considering the relevance of what a text does not say (Poggio, 2004), the interviewees missed accounts – in the opening of their narratives – of their artistic call can be interpreted as being in line with the normalisation of discourses around the ethics of passion and self-expression at work (Weeks, 2011). A vast majority mentioned that they liked acting and that their attitude was fit for the stage without going into romanticised discourses of artistic vocation. Thus, the interviewees' narratives about the subject's approach to professional acting can be grouped around the prevailing elements recognised: narratives where economic motivations are mentioned and/or there is a conceptualisation of acting as a profession, an actual working activity, a movement towards skill acquisition – which we define as "professionally oriented motivations" – and narratives where economic motivations are not mentioned and/or acting is framed in intimate, self-reflexive, personal and affective terms – defined as "vocational oriented motivations".

2.1. Professionally oriented motivations

A first group comprises research participants who approached theatre work from a perspective related to the professional side of acting and its economic recognition, either choosing to enrol in theatre school or starting their career learning the job on the stage. Among this first identified group are Rosanna and Carla, who displayed practical attitudes towards the job, developing a narrative line where passion is present and recognised but business-like matters assume a central role.

> During the seminars that I did during High School, they started to pay me for working and then I said "Wow!" I wanted to study psychology but then I thought acting is fun and gives me money, let's invest in it! (Rosanna)

> I was fully aware that actors' work is work and that, beyond dreams, it has to do with economics, with job contracts […] and this gave me a lot of strength, the fact that I needed to make a living out of it, I don't come from a rich family. (Carla)

In Giacomo and Masha's accounts, the discovery of acting and becoming a professional is conceptualised as something "natural" and inserted in a quasi-mistic lexicon of pre-determination where actors must recognise and acknowledge their attitudes, talents and the consequent economic opportunities.

> I very soon grabbed the professional aspect of acting, it was my luck. […] While performing […] all my energies directed together, and I liked doing it. It's like someone that discovers a computer and discovers himself a programmer […] I was like a fish in the water. (Giacomo)

> For me it has been something like a destiny that came to take me. (Masha)

In those cases, the interviewees emphasised the everyday practical side of their approach to professional acting, either constructing their discourse around down-to-earth matters, as with for Rosanna and Carla, or around the fulfilment of a pre-determined fate. Here, artistic and

self-expressive desires seem to have a secondary role while the presented excerpts are far from reproducing vocational discourses of artistic activity as an end in itself. Rosanna's motivations – "acting is fun and gives me money, let's invest in it" – appear to be removed from the discursive constructions of the Romantic artist animated by the desire for self-expression but closer to contemporary discourses on self-investment. Similarly, Giacomo points at his discovery as "natural" to justify his entrance in this world of work. Through the words "it was my luck", he explicitly disregards and constructs a distance from the dominant discourses that aestheticize the subjects' passion in undertaking a career in the artistic field, as well as from colleagues animated by artistic ideals. Lastly, Carla not only conceptualises her economic background as a motivation that drew her understanding of artistic activity away from idealisations and towards the necessity of material rewards but also constructs her economic needs as key to her professional success. If those motivations were what moved Rosanna, Giacomo and Carla to decide to engage in acting through academic training, it is not the case for all the research participants. For other actors, as with Luciano, Gerardo and Erminia, becoming a professional actor was something that happened more or less by chance, because and while they were already working as paid actors.

> Parallelly to University, I started to work as professional actor […] I started to work very young, I was 19 years old […] my education was on the stage boards, on the field. Later on, I had to study by myself. (Luciano)

> In general, at the beginning, I didn't think that… I didn't have theatre as a landscape, I was a STEM teacher and I was planning my life around those subjects […] But it happened that I started working (in theatre) very soon […] At a certain point I decided to quit teaching STEM, I realised that this was my life, but it is like it has happened. (Gerardo)

> I started doing theatre when I was at University. After graduation I decided to do a private theatre course. It was 100% professionalising […] we were paid as students and since then I carried on working in theatre shows […] When I was younger, maybe because I was unaware or presumptuous, I thought that I could have done both theatre and translation work. Then, after some time, I understood that they were both two very totalising paths, it was one or the other. (Erminia)

The excerpt presented proposes a self-narrative that frames the subjects' professional experience as actors as something that happened casually, emphasising the practical and economic aspects of the job. On the one hand, Erminia and Gerardo started working as actors in their 20s, while working in fields they had studied for, translation and STEM. On the other hand, acting was Luciano's first paid work, and his understanding of the profession is closely related to day-by-day practice. In these cases, the subjects describe their motivation work as actors as something that simply happened. It does not entail a lack of passion or emotional commitment, but it rather creates a narrative of the subjects' selves and their professional choices that is embedded in and stems from their working practice. In line with characteristics considered peculiar to artistic and creative activities, the research participants who approached acting from the side of monetary compensation reported feelings of self-efficacy and self-realisation at work and chose to emphasise the commercial side of the work over the non-commercial, presenting their motivation as led by entrepreneurial stances over self-expressive needs. In these narratives, the theme of the initial investment on the career is narrated in a framework that exalts subjects' "natural" or "predestined" qualities or their practical orientation or, lastly, the casualty of the occupation and the role of monetary compensation in their career choice. Furthermore, it emerges how research participants' hint at their entrepreneurial attitudes as a strong point of the career, distancing their experiences and their positioning in the profession from actors who were led to engage in an acting career by self-expressive motivations.

2.2. Vocational oriented motivations

In describing their initial approach to theatrical practice, the second group gathers the narratives of those interviewees that privileged mentioning their intimate and affective stances as the motivations that fuelled their desire to become professional actors.

> Parallel [to University] theatre was there at an amateur level. I did those theatre afternoons that filled my heart, my soul and my life of certainties so much that at a certain point […] I got myself fired at work and tried the auditions for the theatre academies. (Rosaria)

> During wintertime, I remember having done several shows, at the beginning shaking for the cold but, at the end, performing the show had warmed up my soul and my body, [acting] engaged me so much that I started to think that it could have been a profession [*mestiere*]. (Riccardo)

> The type of work that you do in the seminar, if you are lucky enough to do a good seminar with a good *maestro*, is a work on yourself, fundamentally, this is what. For me it was something unknown, I started to like it, after three years of seminars it was everyday clearer to me that I wanted to do it as a profession [*mestiere*]. (Caterina)

In these cases, the role of personal motivation in the decision to undertake a professional artistic path is clearly expressed. As happened with Rosaria, Riccardo and Caterina, acting is framed into an individual need, a form of self-discovering and self-care close to a therapeutic oriented practice that Silvia Cinque recognises as a dominant driver of actors' experiences (2021). In other cases, the research participants' accounts refer to the subjects' attitudes and desires during childhood to construct a linear narrative oriented towards presenting the need for self-expression as the driving motivation for their artistic career.

> I had always felt an expressive need, I didn't know that it would have been concretised in theatre. When I was a kid, I really had the need to draw, to make people laugh. (Biagio)

> I really liked the theatre seminar […] It engaged me so much that, since I've always been introverted, since then I started to feel the possibility to communicate myself and my passion to other people towards theatre. (Riccardo)

The research participants who referred to passionate commitments usually did not mention economic stances and, if mentioned at all, they reported sentiments of surprise when discovering that acting could be economically rewarding. Thus, it is possible to see that, at least in the younger years, artistic activity is not considered to be a means for generating economic value but rather as a way to create personal growth and emotional satisfaction.

> When I was a kid, being an actress was something like saying I want to be a princess and therefore not exactly a profession that I could have realistically been doing and that I could have been sustained with […] Once in the theatre academy I understood that it was a profession like others, maybe more complex, maybe different. (Masha)

However, it emerges from the excerpt that, once enrolled in the academy, Masha discovers that acting is an ordinary profession, dissolving the aura of exceptionality she previously attached to it. Being in the condition to transform one's idealised passion into actual working practices emerges, among the research participants that had an intimate motivation for embarking in the profession, as an unexpected condition related to privilege and luck. There appears to be a difference between an idealised projection of the self in the position of being an actor and the contours of the actual self at work. As happens in other artistic domains, it seems that the performing arts suffer from not being considered a proper job at a societal level and contemporarily, and consequently, from an ideal romanticisation to the detriment of the concrete working practice. Apart for Masha, other actors, such as Gabriella and Roberto, pointed to this discrepancy that seems to be solved during the years of training.

> [Acting] was something that I used to breathe [at home], it was something very idealised, it had little in common with what is practically involved in being an actor, with training, with everything that I discovered during the academy, being there eight hours per day, being physically able, singing, dancing, substantially with being a soldier. (Gabriella)

> R: Once there, it was clear that what started as a passion could become a true job [*mestiere*] with all the pros and cons of making your passion your professional activity from which your means depends.
> E: What do you mean with pros and cons?

> R: I started to realise when I was at school, theatre is not made only out of passion; the theatre world is not always made of artistic and social tension. (Roberto)

In theatre schools, the aura of exceptionality granted to acting and to self-expression, as a spontaneous creative activity, appears to vanish in the face of strict physical and emotional discipline that is required of students. Roberto's motivations towards enrolling at theatre school are presented in the previous paragraphs and are deeply linked to his desire for self-expression. In the presented excerpt, he talks about the disenchantment that he experienced while studying in one of the most prestigious Italian theatre schools with regard to the artistic and ethical aims of theatrical practice.

The discrepancy between the idea of the profession and the concrete experience of it traces the contours of the aestheticization that characterises contemporary discourses on artistic and creative work. The aspirants' initial conceptualisation of acting as a romanticised activity implies its exclusion from the domain of working activities and retraces the traditional imaginary border between artistic and commercial practices. In this case, the initial investment in a professional acting career is justified through narratives of self-expression and self-discovery, where choosing a working career emerges as an act of self-love aimed at the subject's self-realisation.

3. A metaphor for the academic formation: the hero's journey

3.1. The analytical elaboration

In the data collected, theatre schools appear as a fundamental milestone in the actors' personal and professional paths. The following pages analyse the research participants' formative experiences and consider theatre school or academy courses where: i) aspirants

enrol after a strict selection process of two or three auditions; ii) students are provided with three years' intensive formation; iii) traditional training in disciplines of acting and performing arts is provided; iv) they were funded or cofounded by public agencies (Ministry of Arts, Regions, Municipalities). The research participants who had the opportunity to take part in this kind of educational path are considered the top performers in the actor category. During their school years, they had the chance to build their personal contacts and encounter directors, colleagues, and journalists; they could also benefit on the labour market from reserved auditions and special calls for academically trained actors. The research participants' talks of their experiences in prestigious theatre schools seem to foster a certain myth of dance and performers' academies as places of strict physical discipline and emotional sufferance that prepare the artist to face the art world.

Considering the relevance of interpretation in grasping significances (Schutz, 1972), research participants' narratives – or missed narratives – of their academic years, shed light not only on the relevance of the educational experience for the object of study but also on the process of meaning construction that goes with narrative processes. Methodologically, the codes that emerged during the analysis of the research participants' educational experience in theatre academies were grouped into units. The inductive analysis of the units collected pointed to the emergence of a transformative process undertaken by the subjects involved. Once identified, this transformation was interpreted through anthropological insights into initiation rituals (Turner, 1982; Van Gennep, 2013) and described through the metaphor of the "hero's journey". Much has been written about the narrative and performative power of archetypical representations (Campbell, 2008; Greimas and Porter, 1977) and especially in an educational context (Goldstein, 2005; Mayes, 2010; Salter, 2019). The actors' academic educational path is considered as an initiation road and the chapter investigates the

interpretive practices and how subjects organise and represent their experiences (Holstein and Gubrium, 2013; Poggio, 2004: 109). The process of becoming an actor involves a transformation of the subject that concerns not only the transmission of artistic practices but also a socialisation of the subject into the art world. For analytical purposes, the basic storyline of the hero's journey has been synthetised into three stages which are coherent with Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner's conceptualisation of initiation rituals (1982; 2013). The following chart illustrates the scheme of the initiation rituals as elaborated in anthropology and its semiotic correspondences in the narrative construction around the hero's journey.

Analytical trope			Narrative Trope	
Initiation Ritual (Van Gennep 2013; Turner 1998)			**Hero's journey (Pearson 1986)**	
First Phase	Pre-liminal or separation	The subject is removed from its social place, and crosses a symbolic access that leads to the "novice" condition.	Call to begin the journey	The hero's departure follows a necessity or a call. Heros are unprepared but full of row potentialities that will eventually come to light.
Second Phase	Liminal or transition	Subjects that crossed the symbolic line are grouped together and separated from the social world, where they submit to a new set of rules. They do not have a defined identity but are in a quest for their place in the world.	The hero's initiation path	The hero has to discover rules and functioning of the new environment, finding new friends and allies. Along the path, the confrontation with enemies and trials test and increase the protagonist endurance and strength.
Third Phase	Post-liminal or incorporation	The community celebrates the renewed identity of the subject that has embodied new attributes changing its role in the social world.	The Hero's prize and return to the world	After a last trial, the hero's goal is accomplished and they receive a symbolic validation from gatekeepers. The community welcomes back the hero acknowledging their new social role.

Considering the hero's story and initiation rituals as a guiding metaphor for the analysis of actors' experiences of academic art education does not entail a reductionist reading of the variety of research participant narratives. Thus, each subject has a unique path which depends on the combination of personal background and character, social categorisations and inner expectations that generate spaces of negotiation and creativity. With this assumption in mind,

the interpretation of actors' experiences of institutional education was elaborated around three phases, in the light of the hero's narrative and of initiation rituals' analytical tropes. These stages are summarised in the next table and are detailed in the following section.

First Stage	**Admission audition** - Disagreement with family - Help of older actors
Second Stage	**Academic life** - Military or monastic rules - Self-discovery, sociality
Third Stage	**Embedding the professional role** - Last year's recital - First steps into the art world

3.2. The admission audition

The beginning of the journey could be considered taking its first narrative steps in the motivation that pushes the actor towards seeking professional training, considered in the previous chapter. In this context, this passage corresponds to an actor's attempts to pass their admission exams. The aspirants' auditions are performed in front of a commission composed of directors and teachers that evaluates the aspirant on the basis of three dramatic pieces: usually a monologue, a dialogue and a poem. The first selection is often followed by a second and a third one. The competition is fierce, since the number of aspirants has been growing over recent years. In 2019, one academy in Milan received 700 applications for 15 places in the class, therefore admitting only 2% of the aspirants.[12] In this context, the

[12] The information provided in this section derives from the fieldnotes and interviews collected while interacting with gatekeepers.

academic training is recounted to be highly desired so that the subject directs its efforts towards getting enrolled in the best theatre school. As explored in the last section, the reasons driving aspirants towards an artistic career are various and described by research participants in multiple ways, thus, while the auditions and the educational path are the same, all aspirants bring a unique background in term of motivations and expectancies. While some described their encounters with acting work as an activity that they embraced as their "natural destiny" and therefore their admission to prestigious schools is often presumed and omitted from the narrative, for others going through the process of auditioning was a much more complicated experience that might entail a conflict with family, a guiding encounter with older actors, or a sequence of misses and fails that needs to be narratively accounted for. Thus, if the first attempt is not successful, it is common to re-apply, every year, for auditions at different schools. Success eventually comes after some attempts and the storyline underlines the stubbornness and the eagerness of the aspirant.

> At first it was very difficult with them; I don't come from a family of artists […] when I told them I had just finished my first year of University, I told them that I wanted to move to City and become an actress, they weren't happy at all […] I tried the audition at School: they didn't accept me. Then, I enrolled at University in City, but I decided to continue with theatre, and I subscribed to an evening course […] I tried again at School, and they didn't take me, in the meantime I graduated. For the third attempt, I was super ready and super determined and then they accepted me […] An older actor helped me to prepare the monologue […] When I tried the second time, I realised that so many people tried and that I had to come more prepared. I tried the last time when I was 24 years old […] I really wanted to do it [acting] so the last time I said, "Either they accept me, or I'll act without an academic training", I was very convinced. (Carla)

> The first time, I didn't make it; today I say that it was better this way. I moved to the city and started doing courses and seminars […] I chose not to enrol at University – not being admitted in the Academy, University, I thought, could have been a solution. But no, at the end I didn't, I had to be admitted in the Academy. The next year I tried again and, again, I wasn't admitted. I carried on my path with laboratories and seminars […] The year after this, I eventually entered the Academy […] It was a triumph; I attach to this moment the best [feelings]. I have been longing to enter and I was in. (Angela)

> It wasn't easy for them, I started the Academy when I was 24 and there were three years of monastic seclusion; I had already finished University, I had a master's degree and I could have started working, instead… They were worried about me, that I was still studying something that in their opinion was useless […] my mother kept sending me open calls for positions in the public sector for years. (Fedora)

During their auditions, an aspirant's artistic potential is evaluated by the gatekeepers of the artistic institutional field. Teachers and directors act as "guardians" of the artistic world that, through their judgement, recognises and selects artistic talent. Once the audition is passed, the subject enters a novel condition as a novice or pupil, which corresponds to the Italian word "*allievo/a*". Different from the more common Italian word for students ("*studente/ssa*"), that generically indicates someone who is studying, the word "*allievo/a*" denotes the position of someone involved in a structured and institutionalised path of learning in a well-established field.[13] The beginning of the new path is often followed by a physic relocation of the subject in an urban environment in order to attend the courses.

3.3. The academic life

The hero's initiation path, in this case, symbolises the actor's admission to the academy. In the context of the school, the cohort of actors follows a strict series of seminars. The training is physical, with classes oriented towards performing arts body techniques, but also emotional and relational. Aspirants experience both competition and support from their classmates as well as negative critiques and inspiring artistic insights from their teachers. In the academy, pupils experience a totalising environment where they work, for three years, long hours during the day and, at night, they attend theatre shows and art exhibitions to

[13] The word "*allievo/a*" is used mainly in the artistic domains, indicating students of music or dance in conservatories, but also in military and sport related fields.

broaden their artistic tastes and creative horizons. In this new world of art, they must undertake physical, emotional and relational efforts that will eventually transform the ways in which they look at and see themselves and their artistic practice. The uniqueness and liminality of the novice group's condition is underlined by the tight control that the teaching body has on the students' professional and personal paths.[14] The new experience is a totalising one where the previous way of living needs to be left behind.

> Classes were at a top level: dance, mimic, opera singing, acrobatics… You stay for eight or nine hours per day, five and a half days out of seven and this is the beginning. Either you resist or you fall. This is the reality of academies, even more at the time when I did it. (Tim)

> The theatre school puts you in connection with working for three years, ten hours a day, knowing people, connecting links. (Rosanna)

> In the academy you have a forced coexistence with a group of people, you enter classical social mechanisms and then you have a little role. (Carla)

Working late hours with a restrict group of colleagues is a practice aimed at bringing the aspirant to the physical embodiment of their future professional role and to train relational attitudes of group working. A parallel step is emotional training aimed at testing and forging the aspirants' self-esteem and endurance in their will to enter the artistic field.

> There was a continuous ruthlessness from some teachers; you were always being judged. Judgement was constant, everywhere, this pressure sticks to you and somehow it inhibits [your possibilities of expression]. (Angela)

> E: Which are your main gains on a professional level?
> P: Surviving the School [laughs] […] Bearing an extreme competition and an external will to destroy you that didn't make it. (Patrizia)

[14] In this context, external artistic working activities are not prohibited but discouraged. Students need to informally ask permission of the course director before taking gigs, permission which is often granted during the last years of school or after an evaluation of the subject's educational performances. Students with the necessity to perform ordinary working activities to sustain themselves while enrolled in the academy are often hired, with the help of the teaching body, as ticket-collectors in the city's theatres.

The use of a lexicon related to life and death was common for several interviewees when describing their experience in theatre academies; it gives an idea of the training's relevance, even years later, for the person who undertook it. A third theme that recurs in the hero's journey and in the actors' training are the frequent attempts made by teachers and directors to discourage aspirant's careers in the performing arts, both on the basis of their artistic and personal unsuitableness for the field and on the grounds of the fierce competition that permeates the labour market.

> In the meantime, you think "Will I ever make it?" […] During the school you are constantly told that there is a horrible situation out there, there is no work; of one group of students just one or two will succeed. An educational path where you are constantly given this kind of anxiety will effectively make you sink. (Angela)

The training is intense on the emotional, relational, and physical sides. While some research participants described their educational experiences using a lexicon related to military order or monastic discipline, other interviewees underlined semantic areas related to personal growth, expressive flourishing and convivial experiences. Thus, the academic experience needs to be contextualised in the unique life path that all the pupils undergo. During the school years, through the school environment and the city's cultural opportunities, research participants underlined the widening of their horizons and growth of new possibilities of self-expression.

> I moved to Milan when I was 19 years old, for the Theatre Academy. It was there that I started to feel alive, that I was truly living my life, I discovered my homosexuality […] In a theatre school there is a different freedom […] Gradually, I opened myself to what I liked most as a way of living, a way of being. (Sara)

> I had stimuli, an incredible plurality. I was 18 years old and coming from a remote Italian Region, for me even only the aperitivo… it was an extraordinary experience, I could see things, a vernissage, a concert. (Tim)

> My school years were beautiful, it was a school where everyone was bare footing around, there was a big garden […] for me it was a good way of growing up, a breath of fresh air. (Rosanna)

In parallel to learning theatrical conventions and body techniques, students are in search of themselves, and of their peculiar poetical and artistic attitude. Thus, the school years occupy the students during their early 20s, overlapping a moment of life where teenagers are called to become young adults. Several students moved from the countryside to Milan, discovering a big city lifestyle and taking part in social and cultural events, practices that emerge as an important part of the academic experience, central to the novices' transformative processes. Of course, not every student has the same experience in their academic years: some emphasised memories related to the encounter with previously unknown possibilities of self-expression and the construction of strong relational bonds with classmates, while others shared bad memories of the unbearable competition and of the rigid discipline that was required. However, research participants' memories of their academic years configure a space where the aspirant discovers the professional environment and working practice in their most hated – such competition and judgement – and more appreciable features – such as peers' solidarity and freedom of self-expression.

3.4. Embedding the professional role

The end of the academic educational path and the first steps into the world of work correspond to the narrative of the flourishing of the hero and to their return into the outside world after having proved their worth. In this case, the end of the educational path is celebrated in the performance of the so-called "third year recital", which is the ritual that symbolises the end of the educational path and the entrance into the art world. The articulation of the event starts several months before when the group of students begins working on a theatrical piece and everyone receives a dramaturgical part from the director. During the next weeks, the show is produced from the school's budget as a proper theatrical

show. At the end of the academic year, the show is presented, usually in the school's theatre, to family and friends, but the designated target of the show is the artistic community.

> I did three years where I was praised in everything I did, then the director came to prepare us for the last year's show and he hated me from the first day […] I worked very badly for the show, it was my last year's show, it was the most important moment, the conclusion and the start into the world of work […] for me it was a complete failure, he made me do the tree, silent, in a choir, I was desperate. (Rosaria)

> The production of a very important theatre was looking for an actress, they came to see my last year's show and they decided to call me [for the role] […] the fact that I did quality work had been useful in the following years […] I had the opportunity to join big productions and to start working very soon. (Federica)

From the research participants' recollections, it emerges that the significance of their performance in the "third year recital" related to both their future artistic career in the field and for their personal and artistic growth. At this point, the trained actor is recognised as a professional by the artistic community and their peers. The educational path has led the subject into a process of transformation and growth that resulted in them becoming an actor. At the end of the narrative timespan, despite the catastrophic previsions that accompanied the years at school, actors manage to both find their place in the labour market and to express their artistic creativity. Thus, the research participants report their surprise at discovering that they can actually work in the field. Describing their flourishing and their satisfaction in having achieved their dream job and in sustaining their needs, despite the adversities, is a great emotional reward for the participants.

> When I finished the School, [my experience of working as an actress] it was way better than I thought. (Federica)

> I had always had a talent for stand-up comedy, at School it wasn't considered, it was regarded as less important […] I had left aside my comedy talent during the three years of School, I even felt ashamed about my comic attitude; when I started working it exploded and everyone liked it a lot. […] My jobs are now driving me in this direction. […] When I finished School, I was afraid and in the world of work I had much more satisfaction. (Carla)

Thus, it emerges from the interviews collected that some actors managed to find their artistic place while being at school, as happened with Gabriella and Federica, who started to work with prestigious directors while enrolled on their courses. However, in other cases, the path towards the self-discovery of artistic attitudes is described as turbulent. To conclude, it emerges from the narratives that the asperities that the apprentice had to face are part of a wider picture whose formative power and educational methods are, in the end, endorsed and sometimes replicated as the – at this point former – student entered the art world.

> Look, the School is nothing when compared to what is out there. The School is a cuddle, not joking, the world of work is cruel, School is like kindergarten. If you can't manage School, if you can't withstand those three years, then don't even try [to work as a professional]. (Federica)

> The beautiful thing is that School is not only a vipers' nest but there are also nice people. School allows you to have a place to come back to if you need it. (Chiara)

Thus, the function of the academy – to form a new cohort of actors who embody the habitus of the field, able not only to recognise and play by the field's rules and conventions but also to reproduce them – is accomplished. The apprenticeships are narrated as a path full of relational and emotional trials that eventually forge the aspirants' attitude and character in a way that is suitable for navigating the context.

4. Navigating the artistic field without the hero's ship

In the presented case, schools emerge to be a fundamental and foundational part of the art world (Becker, 1982). Former students, once passed through the asperities of academic training, stand as defenders of the educational path, of its irreplaceable relevance in forming the elite of the artistic field. Even in the absence of formal barriers to enter the labour market,

academic training traces a dividing line in everyday working practices between the actors who did undertake an institutional education and those who did not.

> There is a huge problem that we should face […] the recognition of our professional category, creating a register of actors that are recognised as such and completely block cheaters that sell crap laboratories, seminars, bad theatre school – fake academies that every year pop out thousands of "actors"; our job-market is full. (Pierpaolo)

Pierpaolo's comments feature several widely known problems in the artistic fields concerning the oversupply of aspirants and the absence of occupational barriers. Thus, without going deeply into the functioning of the theatrical sector (which is considered in Chapter 3), academic training seems to be considered, per se, a legitimising condition for the practice of the artistic profession. Experiences of deviation from what is considered a desirable standard of excellence can shed further light on the significance of academic training in the present context; the case of Roberto is atypical:

> R: I started performing auditions, but I didn't have any experience, any education, but you know one thing led to another and I started a school and I started to learn several things.
>
> E: Could you tell me how it went?
>
> R: Yes. My path is anomalous from this point of view. I did several auditions and I enrolled in two academies, but I decided to quit.
>
> E: … You enrolled and then quit?
>
> R: The first time […] they accepted me but then, maybe because of a form of fear of jumping into this thing, I renounced before starting. Then I begin to follow courses in a small private school […] and I decided to try again to enrol in the academy. I was admitted but, even this time, there was something like a clash. I was feeling that this kind of education, of formation, had something that clashed with how I was, with how I am. I started and then quit; this wasn't for me. I was very stressed by this experience because I really wanted to do this job but […] I felt that something was hurting me. […] With the help of time, I discovered that, in fact, there are several ways […] I built a path that was mine, looking for experiences that I liked. (Roberto)

In the quoted excerpt, it is possible to grasp a certain reticence of the participant towards going into details about the motivations that drove him away from academic education. As

shown in the previous section, academic training in the performing arts is shown not only to be extremely demanding and requiring effort but also a normative part of institutional artistic education. When narrating his refusal to adapt to the norms of the art world, Roberto's impression management (Goffman, 1950) communicates, through reticence and vagueness, his discomfort in presenting an unconventional experience which could possibly be less desirable for the researcher. As happens in other domains of highly standardise training (Allen et al., 2013), subjects who not compliant with the field rules experience internal and external conflicts that can lead to abandonment of the educational path. During the dialogues that I had with field experts and school directors, a discourse about the dropouts of the academic education was never developed. Even if aware that the academic educational event can replicate exclusionary dynamics, and even if some participants had a direct experience of a deep emotional discomfort, apart from Roberto, the actors who went through this type of training replicate, as seen in the previous sections, discourses oriented towards confirming the unique formative and professional value of institutional education. The relevance of the academies in the art field is validated also by those research participants who, for various reasons, did not undertake such training. In this case, interviewees longed for the possibility to study in prestigious institutions and reported feelings of uneasiness and shame at the workplace because of the missed opportunity to construct their personal and professional path in a context of excellence.

> I did a short course of acting where I started to have some of the basics, but not at all comparable with an academy […] With time, I realised that there were some gaps, even simply technical, with respect to other colleagues; I didn't attend an academic training, I didn't have the academic imprinting. At the time, when I was in my 20s, I was proud to be an auto-didact, but later on I started to miss not having done some choices […] from an educational point of view, I missed the academic world. (Luciano)

> At this point, I had been working for nine years […] I was unsatisfied, disappointed because I didn't do an academy, I couldn't apply for the restricted auditions, from big theatres, I was out. (Tiziano)

Both Luciano and Tiziano started to miss having had academic training after several years of working in theatre, at the beginning of their 30s, when they expected a phase of stabilisation in their career that was not happening. If, on the one hand, academic training delays the entrance of young actors on the job market, on the other hand, it seems to provide more professional contacts and more of the technical skills needed to navigate the professional world.

> G: I didn't think that I would have become an actor […] in the first years, this gave me strength.
>
> E: What do you mean?
>
> G: I didn't have that tension of saying "My God, I have to make it, I absolutely I have to do it" that people that did an academy could have, as a way of thinking. […] I was in an environment where I was allowed to explore, without haste […] In my opinion starting [to work] with different presuppositions and different interests from theatre, it had a positive impact. Simply having broader views: I know less about theatre than someone that studied theatre from the beginning of their lives, but I have other instruments, that's fundamental. (Gerardo)

In Gerardo's case, the absence of institutional training is described as something that not only had a positive influence on the beginning of the subject's career but also contributed to his understanding and experience of the artistic profession. Gerardo's comments construct two polarities. On one side, the academic training is depicted as a stressful space, full of emotional tension and intense study oriented towards having fast results. On the other side, a more relaxed artistic path, where the subject does not feel the pressure to succeed in the profession but has time to explore itself in and out the theatre world without emotional distress is preferred. Thus, the research participant constructs his position outside of the narrative of deep affective and emotional involvement for the performing arts that characterises academically trained interviewees' experiences. The possibility of having a positive experience of profession and work seems to be possible also for actors who had a heterogeneous path outside of institutionalised career schemes.

5. Discussion: The subjectivising effects of motivations and training

The present chapter is devoted to the analysis of actors' first steps into the world of artistic work and to encounter research participants' self-narratives and analytical themes that recur in the next chapters.

Firstly, from the analysis conducted, it emerges that contemporary injunctions of self-realisation operates as subjectivising discourses, driving aspirants towards creative careers. Aiming to build a future perspective where labour and leisure can coexist and where the subject can be fully actualised is part of contemporary dominant discourses on work (Farrugia, 2021; McRobbie, 2004). Actors' motivational accounts are divided into professionally oriented – where the career choice is structured around practical notions of work – and vocationally oriented – where an artistic career is framed by the research participant in self-reflexive and affective terms. This distinction is based on the prevailing narrative elements traced in the interviews but is not a universal observation. Considering different and competing ways of presenting the self, it emerges that the first group needs to mark a discursive distance from the second group of actors who came to acting out of a place of emotional need. The ways in which actors' narratives of motivation are structured allude to their understanding of actors' professional place and express their vision of the artistic world of work. While the professionally oriented motivated actors glimpsed the down-to-earth side of the work of art, those who were motivated by the need for self-expression and personal growth reported feelings of disenchantment when facing the actual routine nature of work. The aestheticization and romanticisation of the art practice emerged in the aspirants' narratives of motivation and were confirmed as central narrative tropes in the arts-based careers. However, it emerges from the analysis that subjects' ideal self-

projections in the artistic world often clash with actual working practices, shedding light on the effects of societal discourses on the work of art as a quasi-work and the construction of subjects' aspirations and disillusions. Furthermore, apart from a romanticised vision of art worlds, it seems that competing discourses of self-presentation are present in the field, especially those that hint at a commercial and entrepreneurial vision of the artistic profession. Thus, aspirants moved by entrepreneurial motives can represent a seed of critique towards both a conceptualisation of the arts as the domain of passionate impulses disconnected from economic aspects (Becker, 1982) and towards "the romance of creativity" that has been considered characteristic of contemporary constructions of creative careers (McRobbie, 2016). However, both tropes are still characteristic of dominant discourses on creative work. On the one hand, passion and self-expression are constructed as central elements of artistic experiences and, on the other hand, creative work's intimate consubstantiality with neoliberal entrepreneurial constructions emerges.

The research participants' accounts of academic education have been analysed using narrative analysis elements that consider the actors' path as a metaphorical journey, aimed at preparing the subject to be successful in the art world. Considering the rhetorical use and intentionality of narratives (Bruner, 1990), theatre academies occupy a central place in the field narratives of education and training, presented as coherent with subjects' future career advancement (Bennett, 2009). The metaphor of the hero's journey allows the analysis to explore research participants' academic experience in its diverse forms. Narratives regarding admission auditions are differently crafted by aspirants who reported the feeling of being predestined for theatre work, to those who had to confront their families' expectations in order to follow their artistic dreams, or to the artistic journeys that started from encounters with older actors and mentors. The narrative elaboration of misses and failures in the

audition process is organised by research participants to transmit their stubbornness and eagerness to enter the art world. The academic experience is variously narrated by former pupils either along lines that accentuate the military and monastic discipline required or through emphasising convivial experiences with peers and personal growth and self-discovery. The academic formation's functioning allows the aspirant to experience the labour discipline required in the working environment but is also aimed at making sure that students are following an artistic path for the "right" reasons (Allen et al., 2013), that resonate with the dominant discourses around creative work, hard work and success. Through educational training, aspirants mutate into actors, receive the field's knowledge of previous artistic generations, and come to embody technically, relationally, and emotionally their place in the artistic world. Lack of success and unfitness in the academic world are removed from the narratives presented, while self-realisation and satisfaction are reported as the outcome of aspirants' hard work and efforts. Thus, academic formation through a constant competitive evaluation of both the teaching body and the same aspirants emerges as the first site where subjects are formed as aspirational and entrepreneurial (Houghton, 2019). From the analysis conducted it emerges how, since the academy is the ideal path for the profession, it exercises a normative and regulative power on those career trajectories that do not comply with the norm. Even though having undergone institutional training does not guarantee personal satisfaction and professional success, the subjectivising power of the academic formation is not limited to the actors who actually attended the courses but also influences the imaginaries and self-perceptions of subjects who were excluded from them. Throughout their career, the latter would have to construct a narrative to explain their original miss and to elaborate their position in the artistic field outside of the institutional artistic and relational field. However, it also emerges that actors who studied in theatre academies can have a positive experience of their professional world, pointing to the existence of personal and professional

achievement outside of conventional paths and to the need to consider the variability and originality of each educational and motivational path.

VI Actors and work: the unfolding of passions and instabilities

1. Introduction

Creative and cultural workers have been considered ideal examples of contemporary neoliberal and entrepreneurial subjects (Gill, 2014; Scharff, 2016) by virtue of their passionate attachment to working activities that takes place in a structured environment characterised by low social protection and high competition (McRobbie, 2016). While the previous chapter discussed actors' motivations in approaching performing arts and the role of institutionalised educational paths in socialising aspirants in the professional environment, the following pages focus on the affective role of self-realisation and on the subjects' articulation of artistic aims and economic security with issues of control over their career path. This chapter aims to contribute to the literature on passionate workers' subjectivities in creative and artistic environments, taking into account the blurring of traditional borders between working and non-working activities in their relation to subjects' engagement in ongoing self-cultivation activities and aspirational constructions (Farrugia, 2021; McRobbie, 2016). Furthermore, contemporary individualisation processes and subjects' reflexive aims for self-realisation are considered in their regulatory effects on workers career choices. Different from the previous chapter, where actors' talks were considered in terms of their narrative and motivational effects, in the present chapter, actors' accounts are analysed in their discursive contents and put into relation with narrative formations that structure the field of the performing arts. With the aim of shedding light on professional paths, research participants' opportunity to benefit from a supportive family background, in economic and emotional terms, is taken into account. In addition, data on research participants' working conditions are presented, among which unemployment subsidy is taken into account along with internal and external

diversification and educational background. Data about interviewees' working conditions are interrelated with their accounts of their everyday working experiences.

The first section explores the role of passionate commitment and self-actualisation in the actors' accounts of their work. Looking at its intimate and affective implications, this section details the relevance and nature of those processes triggered by the central role of passion in career development with the role of reflexivity in the everyday dynamics engaged by workers in the creative domain. The second section is devoted to detailing research participants' opportunities to construct careers perceived as being coherent with their personal desires of self-realisation. In this case, the relevance of age and personal resources, such as education and family background, are explored alongside subjects' lived experiences and affective stances. Three key postures are identified and detailed with regard to actors' articulation of artistic self-realisation and economic recognition. The third section explores actors' positions in an employment context and considers practices enacted by the subjects to construct a satisfying professional and private life in a highly insecure environment. Internal and external diversification coexist with self-entrepreneurial projects in the configuration of heterogeneous careers where the alternance of paid and unpaid work, security and vulnerability is structural. In this context, subjects' negotiation of symbolic and economic rewards allows for a consideration of discursive formations alternative to the contemporary emphasis on neoliberal values. The last section is devoted to a discussion of analysed data and some concluding remarks.

2. Passion, aspiration, and the contemporary ethos of work

2.1. Work and self-actualisation

In the textual data collected, actors often refer to the irrational and intimate involvement that links them to their working activity. The narrative tropes are scattered with semantic vocabulary that characterises strongly felt emotions. Passion and desire for acting are described by the interviewees as something outside the rational domain, a need that is impossible to fully comprehend and control, at least in the first years of a career.

> Being on the stage is a beastly experience, you want to be there, you feel bad when you are not there […] it is like if you had a little spirit inside you that drives you to be on the stage, everything else, unfortunately, is worth less. (Tim)

> At first this job and your passion are corresponding, it's what burns inside you, obviously it conditions your choices. In my experience, from a certain point of view, the fact that my work is my passion saved me, this is what keeps me alive. (Tiziano)

Tim's and Tiziano's feelings towards acting are similar and describe passion as the major motivation behind professional choices and life trajectories, but their working experiences and careers differ in terms of professional recognition, economic rewards and working opportunities. In the context analysed, the actor's relation to passionate desires of self-realisation and self-expression is narratively constructed as a subaltern position where it seems that the subject has no other choice than to be involved in artistic activities. This type of discourse can be traced back to a Romantic vision of the artist that, in traditional Western tropes, is gifted with artistic creativity, understood as an ethic and transcendental matter (Becker, 1982). Narrative constructions of the artistic and creative activity as inevitable resonate with a contemporary emphasis on the subject's self-realisation in working activities (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Being work the realm where the subject actualises itself, the

traditional relationship that the subject entertains with working and non-working time needs to be reconceptualised.

> R: Also on vacation, I assure you that there is something related to work…
> E: What do you mean?
> R: I don't know… you go to Greece, and you don't go to Epidaurus theatre? You are off in Milan and your friend offers you a ticket for La Scala, don't you go? Everything [is work] … even your vacation, you go to London, and don't you want to see a musical? Everything is part of that. (Rosanna)

Rosanna's excerpt illustrates the extent to which the borders between leisure and working space are blurred in actors' everyday lives. Here, the goal of the subject's self-realisation is pursued beyond the margins of productive and unproductive activities, configuring a space where every experience can, potentially, expand the subjects' possibilities for self-actualisation (McRobbie, 2016).

> [My personal and professional path] coincide, I don't know if it is something good to say but this is it. Maybe because I don't consider my artistic path in the professional domain but rather in my private sphere, the life one. Then, it is a job, there are rights, economic matters […] but it is an existential path, not only a professional one. (Romina)

> Work isn't related just to the moment in which you set foot on the stage, of course this is what makes the job [*mestiere*], but it is a job that it is, how to say, it is how you get by in this world. (Rosanna)

Rosanna's and Romina's excerpts show that the inner affective involvement that ties the subject to the artistic activity expands the borders of the working activity towards investing in the domain of private life. Similar mechanisms of border extension seem to entwine with the distinction between working time, where the subject is usually paid to perform an activity, and leisure time, where the subject aim is personal enjoyment. Thus, private and professional life are not distinct domains of the subject activities, and the existence of their distinction is questioned. While the aestheticist motto "art into life and life into art", made popular during

the 19th century, describes a romanticised vision of connection between life and work that characterises artistic and creative occupations, in our case, rather than a fusion, it seems that passion and self-involvement reveal an intrinsic consubstantiality between research participants' lives and artistic activity. Thus, the language of affect and emotion is used to describe work and careers, configuring the contours of the hybrid environment where subjectivation processes take shape (Gregg, 2011).

The collapse of the difference between working and non-working time and personal life and professional life is followed by the legitimisation of unpaid work. Thus, traditional structures connecting working activities with a paid performance dissolve in the face of the conceptualisation of work as personal satisfaction (Farrugia, 2021). In the actors' accounts, passion emerges in the form of a deep personal and affective investment which binds the actors to their working activities, an involvement that goes beyond the workers' need for economic compensation.

> In my view it isn't a matter of being young or old [in career terms], it is the situation where you work, what you want to do, if you perform your show in a pub, you can't ask a lot [of money] but maybe you are satisfied on another point of view, you performed your show, that you built, in an environment that you like; for me this is the point. (Davide)

> I worked in the National Radio, there are people that dream all their life to do that, or even prizes that I won as an actress, I don't experience those things as cornerstones. My cornerstone was the day when I presented my first dramaturgy. (Masha)

In the excerpts above, work emerges as an activity detached from both monetary rewards and career advancements but oriented towards the subject self-actualisation. Masha and Davide point to the inner affective rewards that performing a job out of passion can provide, in the face of which monetary rewards become less relevant. Thus, working activities appear to be conceived primarily as a method of self-realisation. In some cases, research participants'

conceptualisations of passion at work go further, configured explicitly in opposition to the economic domain.

> From a creative point of view […] I'd never go into the compulsive dynamics of production at all costs […] I work when I find something that creates stimuli for me, something that opens an imaginary. (Bruno)

> I was happy about the fact that in the touristic village they paid us just a little, because colleagues were committed, people that didn't do it for money but for passion. (Tiziano)

In the accounts of Bruno and Tiziano, passion, and consequent self-actualisation, are posited in an epistemological domain that transcends the world of working activities. On the one hand, for Bruno, the prerequisite for engagement in performing a job is the possibility of an intellectual and creative involvement of the self in the act of working. On the other hand, Tiziano points out the intrinsic value of being passionate that manifests itself in poorly paid working environments where subjects motivated only by economic need are excluded.

2.2. The affective role of passionate commitment

Passion is configured not only as the motivation that drives the subject towards a specific creative activity, but it is called into question with the intent to describe the vast array of the subject's affective relationship with its profession. Considering work as a source of personal realisation, passion is often framed as a tool to navigate the professional labour market, orienting the subject's choices in the direction of an affective involvement.

> Professionally, I want to do things that I like; it seems banal, but it is not. It happened to see again my performances and say: "I wouldn't follow myself; I wouldn't go to see something like this". Nowadays I ask myself: "Do I like this? Is this carrying on my path, also at a social level, things that I believe in?" (Leonardo)

> I have to do something that I like and in which I believe in, because if not it doesn't deliver, I have to find a situation. My answer is yes [I'd like to perform in online formats], but I am prepared to wait until an opportunity that I like arrives. (Patrizia)

From the textual data collected, it emerges that research participants are keen to follow their attitudes and desires in accepting gigs. Furthermore, they seem to be prepared to abide the absence of such opportunities in the present in order to achieve a desired result in the future. Thus, it seems that self-actualisation does not pertain to all domains of artistic working activities but is instead restricted to those occupations that stimulate a deep involvement of the subject in the action. However, Tiziano's and Erminia's excerpts suggest a conceptualisation of passion at work that goes beyond the canonical borders of the acting profession.

> Once I performed with a huge clown costume on the beaches, I've studied mime which is one of my big passions, I studied the costume. For me, in this moment, even if it was something ridiculous, I studied how I could make people laugh […] I'd always take things seriously, because I think that it is you who gives dignity to the work, "performing the entertainer at parties is for losers", [no], it depends on how you do it. (Tiziano)

> My personal satisfaction, in this moment, doesn't derive from acting but from the passion that I cultivated over time, which is writing. I write theatrical pieces […] It gives me a lot of [creative] lifeblood. (Erminia)

Thus, passion and commitment are configured as the inner attributes of the working subject rather than something pertinent to a specific working activity. Thus, passionate engagement is narrated as a necessary and fundamental pre-requisite for the subject's self-realisation at work, becoming both the starting point and the outcome of actors' working activities (McRobbie, 2020).

> I knew a few people that were filled with doubt [about this profession], at it wasn't, or not only, for emotional distress or weakness, but it was because they didn't want to do it profoundly [this job] […] if you believe that you could do theatre, or be an artist, but you could also do something else, then do something else. (Federica)

> If you are committed, with passion, you go on [in the profession], keep calm. (Carla)

While passion appears to have a deep connection with workers' motivation, in the presented excerpts, research participants further expand the attributes of the relationship between passion and work. In the words of Federica and Carla, passion emerges as an affect, not only a personal characteristic of the worker but a disposition conditioning the subject's possibilities of success in the professional environment. Thus, passion is framed not only as a motivational requirement but also as a prerequisite for a successful career, a quality that constructs the subject's potential. Furthermore, the discursive construction presented – building passion as a normative requirement for success – tends to diminish the role of economic, social and personal capitals in career experiences. Evidencing the role of resilience and perseverance on the road to success, narratives characteristic of neoliberal working environments are thus reproduced while structural inequalities are marginalised.

> There is talent, there is luck and there is the fact that people see [you] […] I've always been serious, diligent, always ready […] Because everything can be – it is just a matter of having the courage to go straight, discover things without planning them first, I am like this, letting the unexpected happen […] I can see that people recognise this [attitude] in me. (Fedora)

> I try to be creative; I feel that creativity is not only on the stage but also… especially when you are not there, we need to be creative, listen to ourselves, what you want to do, what you don't want to do, trying not to accumulate frustrations because those don't lead to anything creative but to a dreadful end. (Carla)

> When you start actualising yourself, you feel that you are doing what you choose […] it is a job where you need to have your mind full, creative, your body reactive and automatically, you shine, and other people, they can see your light, the light creates attraction, has a magnetic power. (Angela)

Fedora's account further expands on the necessity of being endowed with an inner disposition oriented towards passion, resilience, and aspiration in order to navigate career aspirations. Only a complete devotion of the subject towards the working activity can lead

to self-realisation. Also emerging is the (optimistic) expectation that, once present, the subject's qualities will be adequately recognised and rewarded. Carla's elaboration connects the role of passion in career choices with themes of optimism and positive thinking, presented as fundamental attitudes to possess in the creative sector. As is further developed in the next chapter, the individual psychological construction emerges as a central characteristic that should be cultivated to succeed in the working environment (Binkley, 2011; Gill and Orgad, 2015). Lastly, the words of Angela elaborate on the affective relation that is perceived to bond self-actualisation, creative energies, and social recognition, and where success can be achieved only through the cultivation of personal qualities (Colombo and Rebughini, 2019). In the discursive formations presented, future oriented reward systems appear to function as disciplinary mechanisms, projecting subjects' fulfilment in the future as long as certain qualities and dispositions are maintained and enhanced. Thus, actors' subjectivities share traits of what scholars have identified as aspirational subjectivities (Allen, 2014; Duffy, 2016). As is further explored in the next section, optimism, creativity and the same passion are not dispositions that can be achieved just once, but they need to be cultivated through continuous reflexive work performed by the subject. In this context, women's narratives appear to be particularly willing to advocate in favour of the need to adopt affective and personal dispositions that are discursively required to reach professional success and personal realisation. Women's emphasis on self-transformation and adaptation to the system of work can match the literature's reflection on contemporary discourses on femininity that aim to construct working women as exemplary subjects' of neoliberal requests (Gill and Scharff, 2011).

The necessity for continuous cultivation of affects and dispositions seems to be judged as fundamental during a subject's career progression. The participants reported having dealt

with moments of personal and creative crisis during their professional paths. The artistic crisis that follows the loss of creative energies and personal enthusiasm shapes career progression and, in some cases, it can bring radical changes to the subject's path.

> I worked a lot during that year, and from there, I realised that I was suffering, I wasn't having fun; the actors' work is based on a game, on a serious game, but we have to play, to have fun […] It was a turning point, not just for my career but for my life […] Actors' life is totalising, it's a life choice, instead, I needed other stuff. (Caterina)

> Theatre had always been what motivated me in difficult situations […] I don't fear to remain without work and without motivation, without ideas, and therefore without life, I don't fear it. (Valeria)

From these excerpts, it seems that creativity is not intended to be an inner quality of the subject but rather a disposition or an affect, that only under certain conditions can produce value and self-actualisation. On the one hand, Caterina detailed a situation that eventually led her to abandon the work of acting and moved her professional objectives closer to the sphere of directing and producing in the theatrical and artistic field. On the other hand, Valeria seems to have embedded the totalising role of theatre work and her affective position towards it when talking from a position of self-confidence about her artistic perspectives. However, it seems that the self-actualisation can be easily lost by the subject if the premises of passion and motivation are missing. In a sort of chain reaction, considering passion both as a prerequisite for success and as a tool in the labour market, once trapped in the process, subjects are in danger of losing not only their possibilities for self-realisation but also their career position. The need for continuous training through seminars and workshops is underlined by almost all research participants and moves on a tight line between individual desires of expression and normative requests of self-improvement in order to meet labour market demands (Du Gay, 1996).

> I'd always tried to cultivate many skills, but I've also suffered because of that: I can play the guitar, but I am not a guitarist […] I know how to juggle but I am not a juggler […] However all these things were useful in my working activity. (Tiziano)

> F: Every day I wake up, I train, I try to eat best as I can, I take sing classes, I learn how to play a new instrument […] I don't know if it is useful but, in several shows, they actually want me to play and sing […] I don't know if they call me because I know how to play and sing.
> E: You told me before that you learn to play a new instrument every year…
> F: Yes, I try […] Of course in order to play in a show you don't need a conservatory knowledge […] I can see that there are skills that are useful in theatre work, I like the fact that they want me to play.
> E: What do you mean? Are these competences required?
> F: No, I don't think they are but, who knows, if I couldn't play the piano, I don't know if they [the production] would have wanted me for this show. (Fedora)

As the participant suggests, the accent on the ongoing enhancement of personal qualities seems to pair with contemporary discursive formations that point to the key role of developing entrepreneurial dispositions in the world of work (Taylor, 2015). Thus, all the abilities that the subject possesses appear to be possibly of use in the realm of work. This conceptual hybridisation is in place to the extent that the research participants themselves are often unable to differentiate between leisure activities that can lead to a skill acquisition and the acquisition of skills with the purpose of enhancing employment opportunities (Feher, 2009).

2.3. The position of reflexivity

The previous section considered the ongoing practices of self-cultivation that actors engage with. The possibility to experiment with new forms of corporeal and creative expression can encourage workers to engage in activities aimed at skills acquisition. Research participants tend to privilege discourses of pleasure and passion, where the mobilisation of the same resources in the realm of work is presented as a contingent consequence. Thus, the desire

for self-discovery seems to be configured as the affective engine pushing subjects to engage in continuous activities of self-improvement (Neff et al., 2005).

> The only thing that I really would like to do is exploring the possibilities that are in me; every work that I do, it leads me to discover small or big things […] this is for me the biggest richness of this work. (Michelle)

As Michelle suggests, it was common during the fieldwork to encounter narrative constructions aimed at explaining personal commitment to artistic activities through discourses on the therapeutic use of theatre work (Cinque et al., 2021; Taylor, 2015). Thus, the exploration of the self emerges as a main aim of the working activity.

> You realise at a certain point, sadly, that is a job that where your work is constant, it adheres to you as a person […] You are your work, it has to do with how you appear, how you speak, how you look, how you feel, how you think… all of your experience […] When you start realising that, you discover a treasure, it gives you a sense of yourself in the world and, at the same time, you start taking care of yourself, a lot. (Angela)

> It is a kind of activity very focused on yourself. Planning […] is inserted in a logic of a personal and artistic path […] which is pervasive, in a certain sense it is also the beautiful part, you grab stimuli and suggestions that become something else, but it is like you never stop, without exaggerating, I am not particularly extremist, but it is like this. It revolves around this because it's a creative activity, doing an artistic job means being always in contact with your limits […] you are always there, searching for something, for a solution, for something that proves that you are good at it and that you will make it. (Gerardo)

The profession of acting is configured as a central part of the reflexive project of the self that workers undertake (Giddens, 1991). In this case, theatre work is depicted as a totalising reflexive experience where self-care and self-improvement are part of a wider dynamic in which value is generated in and through subjectivising processes. Thus, in the narratives collected, personal development and professional development exist in a circular dynamic. They cannot be separated since they both aim at increasing the subject's capacities to inhabit – and enjoy – the surrounding world. The traditional division between working and leisure

activities and between productive and non-productive time does not apply to the context of work analysed here. Reflexive practices of self-care and self-disclosure are fundamental in order to discover and enhance the subject's qualities that are not aimed at being useful in the workplace even if, eventually, they will turn out to be. From the research conducted, it emerges that the whole complexity of the subject is involved in the act of working but also that the subject is engaged in a continuous self-reflexive activity in the same act. The totalising nature of the artistic activity is acknowledged by the research participants who often felt the need to maintain a distance, as happened with Gerardo, or express their unhappiness, as Angela does. Feelings of discomfort related to this all-embracing constitution were reported by the interviewees, especially in relation to experiences of overwork.

> I didn't need all this money for my well-being, at the time it was a matter of pure enthusiasm and passion, of exaltation if you want, you are happy that they call you for a show and […] you feel good. The sense of precarity wasn't material, in this case, but was generated by this way of working that was becoming toxic for my health and my relationships. (Riccardo)

> Nowadays if I don't work for two days, I start to feel an incredible sense of guilt… then I try to find solutions, going to the park, forcing myself to do nothing for some hours… life is also a fight against yourself. (Biagio)

In the excerpts above, the participants enacted reflexive practices in order to deal with overwork, configured as related to the desire for self-actualisation and social recognition. In this case, the interviewees contextualised precariousness outside the economic domain, as the effect of an overburdening way of working on personal well-being and work rhythms are detached from monetary compensation. Both Riccardo and Biagio seem aware that passion at work can be the trigger for processes of self-exploitation and that it entertains an ambiguous relationship with workers' physical and affective comfort. In this context, the ongoing desire for self-improvement and social recognition, achieved through overburdening working hours, draws actors' experiences near logics of self-

entrepreneurialism characteristic of the neoliberal values of work. Thus, reflexivity appears again to be central both at the origin of the subjects' overworking and as a resource for the elaboration of personal strategies to master working conditions. The intimate relation between the subject and the demands of a contemporary artistic working environment is continuously reflexively elaborated. Participants also construct narratives of professional experience that give meaning to the everyday consequences of being engaged in a working activity that defines and shapes their experience of the world. Thus, the ontological meaning of work goes far beyond monetary compensation towards a broader affective system where workers' subjectivities are embedded in the artistic elaboration of value.

3. Balancing artistic aspirations and economic security: three attitudes

The last section showed how discourses of aestheticization and romanticisation of the profession are central to constructing subjects' paths towards the working environment. The need to find a balance between the aim of self-realisation and economic recognition have been configured during the fieldwork as a substantial matter for aspirants to face. In this section, research participants' positions are analysed in relation to notions of artistic self-realisation and economic needs and are categorised into three groups. This division has an heuristic and idealtypical nature, since there are overlaps and blurred borders between the groups which, however, we treat as distinct groups to highlight research participants' attitudes. Firstly, we describe actors who value self-expression over monetary rewards; secondly, those actors who favour economic motivations; and lastly, actors who engage in contextual practices of negotiation. In this context, the years spent in an artistic career, the

actor's resources and educational background emerge to play a key role in the articulation of subjects' positionings, as well as subjects' lived experiences.

The first attitude traced in participants' narratives reproduces the main conceptual lines of "art for art's sake". Preferring artistic motivations over economic ones involves a discursive trope that inserts artistic activity in an ethical context of practices, where economic rewards assume a marginal role. Shared by young actors that were educated in prestigious theatre schools, this disposition goes behind the separation between arts and commerce found in Western traditions. In this case, working engagements considered to be incompatible with participants' artistic goals are rejected not because of a conceptual ideological distance between art and money. Instead, actors refer to a range of negative effects possibly affecting workers' subjectivities when engaging in artistic activities considered to be not coherent with intimate goals.

> It happened that I performed shows that I didn't like, and I suffered a lot; then I started to make choices […] If they call me for a role in a big theatre, I could be happy, but if it is directed by someone that I don't appreciate artistically, that works just to please the public, I am not happy, because I feel putting myself into such a project does not contain the reasons why I do this job. (Sara)

> I feel very lucky to have found my dimension, that I contribute to building […] it is very difficult because it is a route that if I had periodically abandoned it to do other experiences, it would have stopped, because it is like growing a little plant – if you are distracted the plant does not grow strong. (Romina)

Thus, work appears to be contextualised as the means of a subject's self-realisation and strong sentiments of disempowerment are reported when the correspondence between artistic desires and working engagements is missed. Furthermore, making choices in open contrast with economic logics reinforces the subject's artistic identity and purpose in their professional career. Choosing the type of job that gratifies or displeases is reported as a

fundamental step in the construction of a fulfilling artistic path but is strictly related to structural conditions and biographical trajectories. On the one hand, personal motivation in approaching the performing arts world described in the past chapter appears to have a relevance in directing the subject's career choices. Aspirants who were attracted by the possibilities of self-expression and self-actualisation provided by a creative career are inclined to orient their career path towards artistic realisation. On the other hand, the possibility of relying on external economic resources has been configured during the fieldwork as a fundamental asset in pursuing a fulfilling artistic career.

> I have many economic difficulties, I do not have secure incomes, I have just a few revenues even when they are certain; I could do what I do because of my parents. (Romina)

> I'd always considered personal artistic projects, I'd never waited for the call of a director, never. Also, because I was lucky in coming from a family that if I hadn't earned enough would have had the possibility to help me. (Rosaria)

Benefitting from a favourable family background can allow the subject to pursue artistic goals without depending on immediate economic rewards in their choice of gigs. Participants' thoughts on this subject are vague and leave space for interpreting familial support not only as economic but also emotional. Being in the condition to invest in a dreamed of artistic career is reported as particularly important for both future career progression and for the subject's perceptions of efficacy.

The second category groups actors who tend to structure their artistic career around the possibility of gaining economic rewards. Considering that the act of refusing a working engagement is strictly related to structural conditions such as personal economic safety, subjects are positioned in opposition to the first group. Thus, while actors previously described demonstrated agency and reinforced their professional identity through the act of refusing gigs considered incompatible with their personal artistic desires, in this group

professionals tend to be driven by contextual constraints regarding the acceptance of a job, reporting feelings of dissatisfaction.

> I'd like to have the possibility to choose what I like, namely not being forced to perform jobs that aren't exciting and that I do just because I have to. I'd like to reach the goal of choosing my way instead of the [career's] direction choosing me. (Fulvio)

In Fulvio's case, the conditions that could allow for increased power over his career remain absent – he feels no control over his career path and reports feelings of frustration. In this case, symbolic and emotional rewards are second to economic ones, seemingly leaving little room for the subject's actualisation. The potential to make professional choices that are compatible with personal desires is one of the discursive places in which the research participants place their agency.

> At a certain point I wanted to quit […] I'd been working for nine years but I was suffering […] I wasn't doing things that I liked anymore. […] In saying yes to everyone, I walked away, I embraced everything they offered me, but in doing that, a first delusion, a second delusion and I was completely disappointed. (Tiziano)

Tiziano's narrative marks a turning point towards a professional path that takes into account not only economic rewards but also artistic fulfilment, since passion is considered a major driver of subjects' choices. Thus, it emerges how a career driven by economic motivation is not emotionally sustainable in a context of work that is discoursively constructed around passionate engagement. In the narrative of Tiziano, putting his personal desires aside has brought his career to a dead end, characterised by feelings of dissatisfaction that were eventually overcome by a fresh start in a new theatre. Here, several differences arise between the opportunities of work that are available to subjects. Workers who studied in a professional art academy and workers who had heterogeneous or self-directed training appear to have different access to working engagements. Thus, while actors educated in prestigious art schools tend to encounter possibilities to build their career around artistic

needs, self-taught actors seem to face a harder path in finding work opportunities that they consider artistically desirable and often find themselves needing to accept all types of gigs in order to build professional contacts and to achieve economic compensation. Often, subjects who seem to be stuck in the impossibility of performing the jobs they would like, or who do not earn enough doing jobs they desire, tend to construct double career paths where they can combine economic and passionate recognition. Research participants' experiences of internal and external diversification of working activities can often be related to their educational path. If actors with academic training tend to be less exposed to the uncertainties of the labour market and, therefore, can avoid the need to diversify their working activity, workers who did not have an institutional education seem to be more inclined to engage in parallel careers both in and out of the artistic sector. Despite research participants' different possibilities of self-actualisation, it has been seen how discourses around passion and motivation are reproduced in both the first and second group. It is essential to consider the role of time and life frames in participants' attitudes towards artistic and economic rewards.

In the following diagram, the three different positionings illustrated in this section are visualised. The blue area represents the position of those actors who privilege remunerative over artistic engagements. The green area indicates those research participants' who value artistic expression over monetary compensation. In the space where the two spheres intersect are negotiated attitudes. The blue arrows indicate the increase in years spent in a career that, in both cases, tend to mark the desire to find a balance between artistic and economic motivations. Despite the differences between the first two groups, both careers led by artistic motives and those guided by economic reasons tend to converge over the course of a career, in the aspiration to reach a position that allows a balanced approach. While the first attitude characterises the narratives of young actors educated in theatre academies with middle class

backgrounds, the second position is occupied by workers who did not benefit from institutional training and needed to live through their work without benefitting from external economic support.

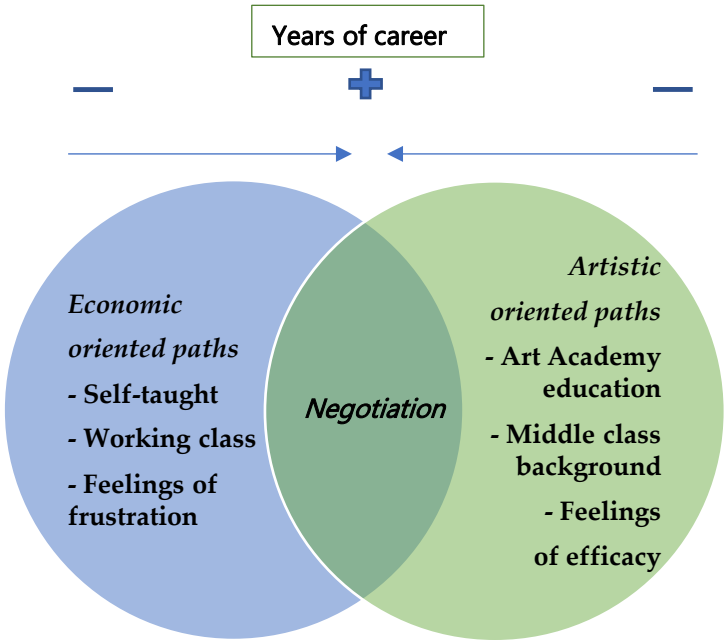


Diagram 1: Visualisation of actors' attitudes regarding career paths oriented towards economic need, artistic instances and negotiated practices.

A third attitude in balancing between artistic instances and commercial ends can be traced among the participants who engage in discourses and practices of negotiation. Here, the role of self-expressive motivations is acknowledged and inserted into a relation with the subject's economic needs. In everyday working life, research participants are continuously engaged in balancing revenues with the possibility of artistic expression given by every gig they are offered.

> If you come from a rich family, you can dedicate yourself to artistic research or only to do things that you like […] You can allow yourself not to get your hands dirty doing gigs for money […] I am a professional, I have to be willing to change, to be versatile, to do what they ask me to do. […] I spent all May on a train, Naples to Milan, for a TV advertisement and I spent more than

> I earned […] I earn from another point of view […] when I am with my shows, and I do it for love […] that is another story. (Rosanna)

> G: I refused gigs that didn't give me back something […] if the contract is bad and on top of that there isn't a fertile artistic terrain, I refuse. I have to say that I'd never refused good money… Do you understand?
> E: And what about a good production with few economic rewards?
> G: No, they actually are among the gigs that gave me more […] Some actors refuse those kinds of gigs in order to do more remunerative stuffs […] they gained more money at the beginning but now, they are still there, they didn't develop a fertile path between them and their profession, in my opinion. (Giacomo)

> I started a project with a director for a Festival; she couldn't pay the actors […] I liked the dramaturgy, the colleagues, the director and the Festival is very prestigious and I gave my availability […] we created a beautiful artistic path and I decided to stay. (Rosa)

The actors grouped above configured the importance of being aware of the economic side of the artistic job as a unique characteristic of professional actors, differing, as in the case of Rosanna, from amateurs who perform just for fun. Nevertheless, they admitted a certain flexibility while facing the possibility of working with low pay in a project considered desirable under non-economic standards. Actors' positions regarding fees seem to depend on the context and to be influenced by artistic, social and self-promotional motivations. In the excerpts quoted above, participants demonstrate a double standard regarding fees and working conditions that depends on a complex combination of desire to work, intended as expressing one's intellectual and emotional self, and economic compensation for performances. As emerged in the previous section, participants often reported the will to leave behind the economic and legal side of the job to pursue either artistic satisfaction or activities whose benefits are believed to be forthcoming in the future. Thus, the distinction between paid and unpaid work is problematic, since subjects engage in unpaid working activity in order to secure future paid work. Depending on the specific subject's positioning

in terms of artistic, social and cultural possibilities, economic and anti-economic stances can be embraced or refused in an ongoing self-reflexive process.

4. Professional experiences between precariousness and entrepreneurship

The previous sections underlined how the orientation of actors' experiences may differ but tend to converge on practices of negotiation that take into account actors' aspirations and economic security, allowing the subjects to feel in control of their career paths. The following pages focus on participants' efforts to construct satisfying professional trajectories in an institutional and social context that is pervaded by instabilities. A central difficulty detected in the research accounts is related to the discontinuity of short-term working engagements and with the low pay that characterises the performing arts sector.

> Continuity, it does not exist, we have a good number of gigs between January and June with seminars […] but there are many months where we do not work. (Maura)

> I am currently suffering from the "dark side", the fact that every job comes to an end, and you have to start again […] I am not happy, over the years, in order to avoid losing a job, I accepted compromises, very low fees, terms and agreements that you shouldn't accept under the point of view of a working contract. (Fulvio)

> D: It is not nice to talk about money in this work.
> E: What do you mean?
> D: This thing that everyone says "You shouldn't do this job for money, you should do it for the [artistic] quality" I do understand it but several times the quality didn't give me food. It would be nice that quality will be paid as such […] you have been working for two months, ten or eleven hours per day, because many times these are the timetables and at the end you don't bring home much. You can just pay the rent with that. This is a problem. (Davide)

Fulvio points to the "dark side" of the profession to indicate the range of features that create a space of vulnerability, in economic and emotional terms, that is occupied by the working

subject in the professional field. If performing arts are exalted because of their creative potential for self-expression and self-realisation, employment discontinuity, low pay and the absence of social security measures describe a different working environment, especially in the first years of a career. Thus, low paid engagements are often accepted with the aim of avoiding periods of unemployment and constructing future possibilities of work. Furthermore, young workers are particularly exposed to vulnerabilities as they are more prone to the acceptance of poor working conditions that could help them in constructing professional bonds and enhancing their careers. Thus, low paid jobs are regarded as a necessary condition to enter the world of work with the promise of increasing rewards in the future.

> At the beginning I looked at websites that promoted auditions, then through people that I knew, however, I had to look for an extra job. During my first two years of my career as an actor I had to work in a pub. (Davide)

> They sell you, to us young actors, the story of working your way up the ladder, therefore we accept the fact that our path starts with very low pay levels, and we also accept economically unfair situations. (Roberto)

During their years of academic training, actors have the opportunity to build professional contacts and social networks, in the early years of their career, actors who do not have an institutional background soon start to experience the difficulties of the job market. However, the professional environment is recurrently described as unstable, a context where nothing is achieved with finality. The necessity to continuously secure even low paid employment positions needs to be related to the characteristics of unemployment subsidies available in the category.

> E: Have you ever benefited from workers' social protections?
> P: I don't know what they are. The period when I could have had the requisites was when I worked at Big Theatre, because I was working intensively and I had many working days […]

> technically, during the summer, I could have asked for the unemployment subsidy, but Big Theatre wasn't obliged to make a contribution for the worker, it wasn't mandatory… (Patrizia)

> I tried once [to ask for unemployment subsidy] but the bureaucratic process is very long and I stopped soon. It is a peculiar matter because you can have it but once you start working you need to communicate it. But we work one day, then we stop for a month, then we start again for another month, well, you see… (Franco)

According to the fieldwork, actors appear to be a group that is largely missed by social security measures. Research participants who did not have the opportunity to benefit from social security measures, like Franco, pointed out the bureaucratic difficulties in the formal procedure to follow, or, as in the case of Patrizia, indicated gaps in the framework of rules allowing employers to avoid paying contributions to the worker. In both cases, sentiments of disempowerment towards the institutional environment are connected to the unemployment subsidy. Thus, research participants can be divided into two groups: workers who had at least once in their experience received the subsidy and workers who had not. That some workers once received compensation and their applications were successful does not assure that they would carry on meeting the requirements throughout their career or that they would be granted the salary again if asked. Furthermore, subjects with access to social benefits are often in the position of employees with regular contracts while subjects who do not have such access tend to either get their revenues from autonomous employment or informal working arrangements or be in a position of underwork.

On an individual level, subjects find themselves in the position to negotiate between the insecure structure of the working field and their career aspirations. Thus, internal and external diversification of working activities is a common practice among participants.

> It worked well, I formed a team and since then I started to have a parallel career as an entrepreneur and producer. Today, it's three years that I am very happy to start this other career in production, artistic career is always with me […] But if there is no work, I still have my work that, at the moment, is one in production. (Caterina)

> I'd always work autonomously, and it had always been difficult to sustain myself, doing other jobs in order to be able to dedicate myself to my main activity, it was hard because when you work as a waiter at night it was hard in the morning to try widening my opportunities and look for a gig. (Luciano)

> I would like to keep a foot in both camps in order to increase the number of strings to my bow, [doubling] it has been a way to arrive to the end of the year. […] consider that during these years, I've worked just as actor, thanks to doubling. (Paolo)

In the excerpts above, Paolo praises the diversification of working activity, which in his case takes place within the artistic sector. Following a double career can be contextualised in entrepreneurial terms and connected not only with the goal of economic independence but also with economic safety and creative autonomy. Pursuing a double career path is often framed by research participants inside the narrative line of their desired artistic activity, therefore maintaining an epistemological coherence. Caterina defines herself as an entrepreneur in pursuing a career outside of the artistic sector. She reports a reduction in her perception of insecurity related to her future prospects compared to what she used to experience in her artistic career. In this case, priorities can shift and a career that started in the background can become the primary source of income while, at the same time, the artistic activity emerges to be still central for subjectivity formation. On the other hand, in Luciano's account, working outside the subject's main professional goal is depicted as a necessary but unpleasant activity conducted while waiting for and actively constructing better employment opportunities in the arts. It seems that, moving the subject's energies outside of the artistic domain, the efforts to maintain a connection with the performing arts' environment are increasingly consuming. Pursuing working activities of another nature from the one desired can both generate dissatisfaction and loss of motivation but also expand the subject's economic security and feelings of control over their life. To conclude, holding multiple jobs can be coherent with professional aims and framed into an entrepreneurial ethos but can also, as seen in the previous section, entail activities that are incompatible with a theatre job,

perceived as less desirable by subjects involved, and therefore framed in the context of precariousness.

In a working environment characterised by insecurity, the articulation of personal aspirations and economic need has a central role for career construction. In this dynamic, the auto-production of solo shows emerges as a common practice for actors at every career stage. On the one hand, solo shows allow artists to express their full unique potential: for those actors who have an authorial streak, being on the stage with an original dramaturgic plan and *mis-en-scene* is considered a professional goal that reinforces creative and artistic identity. On the other hand, the auto-production of a solo show is an entrepreneurial operation that rests on the actor's means and whose outcomes are uncertain.

> If you depend on other people's production and in that moment, you don't have work, you are at home alone. I have my shows that I put on between one gig and another. Even if I hadn't a working contract for two months, I would be home working, organising, having meetings, I consider my time always full, I'd never experience the emptiness but also because I managed to bring on the stage my projects, therefore the time when I don't have a contract is not void. (Giacomo)

Solo entrepreneurial projects emerge from the fieldwork as a common operation through which actors manage to reduce employment insecurity by shortening the temporal gap between one dependent contract and the next and to gain feelings of control over their career paths. Furthermore, the quote above illustrates how times of employment and unemployment vanish in the face of the subject's entrepreneurial projects of artistic self-expression. Thus, Giacomo's choice to auto produce his shows sits in contrast and as a reaction to the absence of employment opportunities. The narrative presents the subject as agent, able to shape its professional destiny according to dominant discursive formations in creative work environments that valorise the subject's entrepreneurial characteristics. However, participants presented different discursive positionings in this regard.

> You have to try not depending on the employers, on who gives you work engagements, you should provide yourself work, as I am doing right now: I am writing a new project, obviously without expectations… (Tim)

> From one side it will be a liberation to know that I don't have to wait anymore for someone [to hire me] […] but then I am not sure if I will be able to do it [auto producing my shows] and I don't even know if it really interests me [artistically] […] I am more of a relational type [on the stage]. (Gaia)

In this case, Tim and Gaia acknowledge the advantages of self-employment in dealing with discontinuous engagements. Nevertheless, they also recognise difficulties related to the autonomous entrepreneurial art project. After stating the necessity of autonomy, Tim quickly declared scant enthusiasm about his likelihood of success. Gaia manifests appreciation towards the possibility of ending her dependency on employers but questions both her managerial capabilities and her artistic curiosity in the self-employment operation. At first, it appears that the interviewees are reproducing entrepreneurial discourses typical of creative environments but the same statements are then contradicted and questioned by the participants' experiences. The auto production of solo shows emerges as an operation of the entrepreneurial worker who has to confront their abilities not only with artistic demands but with technical and organisational queries. Once the production of the solo show is complete, the performer-entrepreneur looks for venues that can organise the show and pays a fee for representation. In this manner, workers can both reduce the length of unemployment periods and, once the production expenses are covered, increase their personal revenues by cutting management and organisational costs.

> I worked until midnight, I slept a few. This is the thing, you have your shows that you manage to perform in schools, theatres […] You have to follow the whole process from the beginning till the end, including charging the scenography, mounting, everything, unmounting. I broke my neck, you write emails, organise seminars and maybe on top of that you have other works where you perform just as the actor; the production fixes five performances where, once again, you are

> paid with the minimum salary and you bring home little or nothing but with a huge effort where one day you are in Sardinia and the day after at the opposite corner of Italy. (Riccardo)

> It wasn't the path that I was expecting while I was enrolled in the Academy. It has been different, facing circumstances of our work that are not strictly connected with acting on a stage […] activities that are not connected with the profession of actors but where I can insert my professionality, what I have learnt. (Bruno)

As Riccardo and Bruno point out, success in this kind of entrepreneurial operations is not assured since it implies a series of tasks that exceed pure acting techniques moving towards dramaturgical, managerial and commercial skills. Nevertheless, among the interviewees, this practice was often reported as one way to turn difficulties connected with intermittent working conditions into opportunities, allowing workers to increase employment chances and visibility and to fill periods of unemployment with artistic actions. In this context, working on solo entrepreneurial projects seems to operate as a double edged sword where, on the one hand, the actor has the chance to express their art and, eventually, to increase their revenues but, on the other hand, they have to bear high costs in terms of physical and mental effort, which the interviewees seem to be aware of. Thus, feelings of control and the perceived quality of the job, as Riccardo's excerpt suggests, can easily decrease following overwork and engagement in non-artistic practices. The possibility of exerting a certain amount of control over the professional path seems to miss the objective of enhancing job quality and research participants appear to be very aware of this. Thus, the centrality of reflexivity emerges in the subject's experiences of work. Avoiding the standardised replication of dichotomic discourses of entrepreneurialism and precariousness, research participants position themselves as conscious agents amidst the difficulties of attempting to exert control over their life and career path.

> I did one year's work in this theatre, I was relaxed. Then they sent me home, they didn't have enough money and I was the last one arrived, after that I was in a difficult position, I started working part-time in a bookshop, for one year or something. In the meanwhile, some money

> had arrived from my father, I was more relaxed, and I decided that it was ok to resign. I was starting to do several piece of work in theatre […] I had a lot to study and since then there have been better moments, worse moments, you work for a call for projects, other times you give it a go, you build your network; other times I worked in a pub two or three nights per week in order to have some money ready. (Gaia)

In Gaia's case, self-employment, external diversification and family revenues are variously combined during the years of her career to navigate the changing conditions of an intrinsically unstable context without losing the aim of self-realisation in work. Analysing actors' narratives of life and work, it seems that actors' careers are not monolithic structures but appear as hybrid careers, where internal and external diversification coexist with self-entrepreneurial projects and family revenues in order to allow subjects to stay afloat in a highly unpredictable job market. The auto-production of solo shows can be considered the quintessential part of self-entrepreneurial projects on the stage. Thus, it is revealed how precariousness and entrepreneurship are combined along lines of security and vulnerability, whose alternance represents a continuum in the subjects' experiences rather than a temporary condition related to working age. In this context, the process of decision making appears to be highly structured and articulated around an ongoing reflexive process involving the subject's creative desires, structural conditions of the field and the contingently available opportunities.

5. Discussion: Entrepreneurial and precarious subjectivities on the stage

The analysis takes into account performing artists' positionings in a working environment characterised by a strong emphasis on creativity and self-expression and pervaded by precarisation processes. In this context, workers' accounts have been considered in relation to structural conditions and discursive formations that permeate the contemporary

environment of creative work. Exploring actors' experiences of work and the meanings therein attached, this chapter makes three contributions to the contemporary debates on subjectivation processes in artistic working environments and radical insecurity.

Firstly, the analysis shows the intimate connection that links subjects to their working activity and the centrality of intimacy, ambition and commitment for their careers (Gregg, 2011). This posture us to a reconceptualization of working and non-working time, productive and unproductive activities and ultimately to a question about the borders between private and professional life. In a context where subjects' self-realisation lies in their creative working activity, every experience can possibly lead to an expansion in the possibilities of self-actualisation to the extent to which work becomes conceptually separated from its economic recognition (Farrugia, 2021; McRobbie, 2016). Furthermore, it emerges how passion does not only describe the subjects' relation with their profession, but a broader system of affective relationship where subjects' desires, dispositions and reflexivity are central. Therefore, in research participants' narratives, passion operates as: i) an affective tool to navigate the professional environment; ii) an inner attribute of the subject that operates as both the starting point and the outcome of professional activities; and iii) a personal disposition affecting the possibilities of professional success. Thus, the loss of passion and motivation lead to the impossibility of both self-realisation and of achieving professional success, conditions that can happen at any time if the "right" dispositions are not properly cultivated in an "endless idea of self-improvement" (Scharff, 2016: 112). Thus, interviewees' emphasis on individual hard work, recognition through meritocracy, and on the need to grow in personal and professional terms particularly resonate with scholars' reflections on entrepreneurial and neoliberal subjectification processes (Foucault, 1978; McNay, 2009). In this context, women appear to be particularly prone to narratively constructing the

cultivation of passion, optimism and positive thinking as a key asset for future success (Gill and Orgad, 2015; McRobbie, 2020), proposing themselves as "entrepreneurial subjects par excellence" (Scharff, 2016: 3). The value generated by the subject through the working activity is transformed, through a reflexive process, into a broader value for the subject and, vice versa, characteristics inherent of the subject, such corporeal appearance, affects and emotions are valuable in the working environment. Thus, subjects' reflexive activities are intimately related to the ways in which they and the resources they have can conceptualise themselves and the surrounding social world (Adkins, 2002; Crossley, 2001). Because of the inherent characteristics of the acting profession, the division between productive and unproductive self is difficult to sustain, since workers' entire subjectivity is engaged in the act of working. At the same time, it emerges that reducing subjectivity construction to economic logics is not enough to explain contemporary mechanisms at stake but it is necessary to take into account the productive effects that the cultural imperative of "do what you love" (Anderson, 2004; Tokumitsu, 2015) and individualisation processes have on subjects. Actors are conferred a privileged point of observation of social and cultural dynamics that are now characterising all working domains (Colombo and Rebughini, 2019; Farrugia, 2021).

Secondly, reaching a balance between artistic desires of self-expression and economic compensations emerges as a consistent part of the subjects' daily struggle in the profession. In this context, self-realisation is configured as a regulatory mechanism that orients subjects through an ongoing critical reflection aimed at operating coherent career choices. The subject's positionings in terms of family background, education and age seem to be relevant for their future perspectives (Dean, 2008; Friedman et al., 2017). Class background emerges as central in both its economic and emotional consequences. The vagueness of subjects'

accounts sheds light on the interconnected relationship between social capital and economic capital in the sense that they can either reinforce or weaken each other. It emerges from the analysis that some research participants were supported economically and emotionally in their artistic choices, while others experienced both economic and personal uncertainties that might result in a jagged and heterogeneous professional path. Workers who benefited from a privileged position tended to refuse working engagements with low possibilities of symbolic reward, considered detrimental to the consolidation and reinforcement of their artistic value. Thus, performing artists' discourses reinforce and legitimise the presence of non-economic interests in the field of cultural production. However, the choice is operated outside the traditional dichotomy between art and commerce and is invested in the reflexive meaning of cultural work, configured as worthy *per se* and not depending on economic recognition. On the other hand, self-educated professionals who cannot benefit from familial support often miss the possibility of assuming an active position in the job market and being in control of their artistic careers, reporting feelings of frustration. On the one hand, the possibility of structuring a career around artistic notions can resonate with entrepreneurial projects and, on the other hand, the need to pursue economic revenues in artistic activities can be associated with experiences of precariousness. However, the intertwining of those notions becomes more complex since, as professional experience grows, it has been shown that subjects' attitudes tend to converge towards an action informed by lived experience, aimed at negotiating between personal artistic aims and economic needs. Thus, artists accept, to a certain extent, the need to flexibly adapt to the labour market demands but remain attached to aesthetic and ethic ideals. The role of work as a central fulcrum of personal realisation is not questioned, nor is the subjectivation process that forms it. While being involved in an entrepreneurial subjectivation process, subjectivity construction, in creative work professionals, seems under certain conditions to be able to exceed the economic logic of

neoliberal capitalism (Banks, 2006). From the analysis, it emerges that traditional anti-economic values and ethics attached to artistic practice are surviving in contemporary times, some paired with entrepreneurial and individualised logics but others in the position to offer an alternative value system. Actors' trajectories, thus, take shape in the tension between personal ideals and material rewards (Duffy and Wissinger, 2017).

Thirdly, considering the articulation of actors' aspirations, possibilities of control over work and economic security, subjects' experiences appear to be permeated by precarious processes. Employment discontinuity, low pay and short-term engagements, along with the difficulty in accessing social security measures, configure an environment where the alternance of paid and unpaid work, employment and unemployment seems structural (Pulignano, 2019). Naturalising precariousness as a constitutive experience of life and work, subjects assume the individual responsibility to make the most out of the labour market and engage in entrepreneurial-led projects (McRobbie, 2002a). In this context, experiences of artistic work are configured as hybrid careers where internal and external diversification coexist with the effect of both increasing and decreasing subject's control over the professional path, attempting to maintain an epistemological coherence in a continuous process of self-reinvention and adaptation. In a context characterised by hybrid careers, the distinctions between self-employed, short-term employees and micro-entrepreneurs are blurring since subjects occupy all different positionings in their career. In the context of the diversification of working activities, the data points to the unfavourable position of self-educated actors, confirming the central role of education in the development of social and artistic capital (Allen et al., 2013; Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, the auto-production of solo shows emerges as the entrepreneurial activity par excellence where the subject becomes a factotum for its best interests, transcending the borders between employment and unemployment and

engaging ongoing skills acquisition. Despite embracing positive discourses on cultural entrepreneurialism and risk taking (Scharff, 2016), embarking on entrepreneurial activities is explicitly identified by the subjects themselves as a necessity for survival (McRobbie, 2016; Sennett, 2008). The analysis shows that entrepreneurialism is configured as a way through which actors try to re-gain control over career paths and economic rewards. Thus, workers' entrepreneurial auto-production of solo shows can be better framed in terms of "constrained choice" (Gill, 2002; Murgia and Pulignano, 2019; Smeaton, 2003) than as a neoliberal vital stance for freedom and autonomy (Florida, 2002; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999). As emerged from previous sections, feelings of precariousness and entrepreneurial attitudes do coexist in different discursive spaces and point to the multi-layered reflexive work that is continuously performed in the workers' everyday lives. In a context where non-economic interests are (still) constructed as legitimate, workers do recognise the discursive articulations of entrepreneuriality but their answer is complex not univocal and inserted in an ongoing reflexive project which also considers aesthetic and non-economic aims (Banks, 2006).

Considering the subjectivity construction of workers as taking place at the intersection between precariousness and entrepreneurial stances, the analysis points out the contradictions of contemporary discursive formations about work that are the cause of both emotional suffering and deep feelings of attachment. This ambiguity reflects the contradictions of individualisation processes, where the growth of individual autonomy allows individuals to enjoy greater freedom and opportunity but also to experience social suffering (Beck, 1992). Furthermore, in a contemporary capitalist economy, individualisation becomes a demand imposed on individuals that needs to engage in continuous reflexive dynamics in order to generate meaning and authenticity, where the emancipatory potential of individualisation is questioned (Honneth, 2004).

VII "My own person, my voice, my body": power, domination and individual resistance in relational dynamics in the workplace

1. Introduction

Relational practices and self-promotion activities are considered to be fundamental practices in the contemporary environment of creative and cultural work as well as core features of neoliberal and entrepreneurial subjectivising instances (Duffy and Pooley, 2019; Gill, 2008; Scharff, 2015). Having considered, in the previous chapter, research participants' positions in relation to notions of economic and emotional compensation, entrepreneurship and precariousness, the present chapter takes into account the relational environment of actors' and actresses' working activities, considering the power relations at stake as well as subjects' individual practices of resistance. In this regard categorisations such as gender, sexuality, ethnic origin and education emerge as being central from the materials collected and are taken into account both singularly and in their interrelated effects through an intersectional approach. Thus, while on the one hand, dimensions of gender and sexuality are linked to power differences along the lines of age and career experience, on the other hand, subjects' ethnic background is considered in its relationship with cultural representation of diversity as well as research participants' academic training and background education related to working opportunities. The analytical frame considers the situated position of subjects and how research participants discuss their social positionings and their actions accordingly or against such constraints. Thus, the chapter uses an intersectional frame to consider the interplay between subjects' agency and structural constraints (Colombo and Rebughini, 2016). Furthermore, in this chapter, issues related to categorisations are seen to be mainly lived – and solved – at an individual level while occasionally a reflection on their structural

nature can be found. However, as is considered extensively in Chapter 8, the emergence of Covid-19 has given time and space to workers in this case to collectively reflect on issues specific to their category. The research data are considered with regard to dominant discourses in the working environment and research participants' counternarratives. Thus, the present chapter aims to contribute to the literatures' reflection on power inequalities and individual practices of resistance to neoliberal subjectivising instances, taking into account subjects' accounts of compliance, non-compliance and negotiation with dominant practices as well as subjects' elaboration of future expectations and individual achievements.

The first section analyses power relations that permeate the performing arts field in their relations with axes of difference such as gender, age and professional role in the current neoliberal capitalist context. An intersectional approach is taken into account (Crenshaw, 1989) to highlight the relational and interactional nature of power (Choo and Ferree, 2010) with regard to the categorisations that emerges from the research participants' experience. In a working context where the look and appearance of the body are consubstantial with the labour itself and where recruitment practices are explicitly based on physical appearance, aesthetic canons and gendered norms are considered in their effects on research participants' career opportunities. Following both feminist thinkers (Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1994) and social interactionists (Goffman, 1976; Kessler and McKenna, 1985), aesthetic ideals are considered as being constructed in socio-cultural environments that, as a consequence, mirror the asymmetrical relations of race, class and gender. The second section takes into account actors' experiences of public relations and network building preformed in order to secure future working engagements. Self-promotion emerges as central in actors' professional environment and discursively constructed in relation to notions of entrepreneurialism, positivity and hope that engage the subjects in the ongoing work of emotional self-

cultivation. The third section considers the role of insecurity in interviewees' accounts about success and failure, job quality and future aspirations and their relationship with dominant discourses on youth and creative work. The last section is devoted to the discussion of analysed data and to concluding remarks.

2. Power relations on stage and backstage

In the context of the performing arts, work and career prospects are strictly connected with actors' visibility and body performance on the stage or in front of the camera. Furthermore, the public nature of the performance act transcends traditional gender boundaries that relegated women to the private sphere and has often led to culturally representing women's presence on the stage through both stereotyped and emancipatory narratives (Davis, 2002; Pullen, 2005). In the entertainment industry, actors are called on to represent and embody societal cultural representations where workers' physical appearance assumes a central communicative position. Institutionalised practices in the sector, theatrical tradition and scenic exigencies open and close actors' spaces of possibilities and define a standard in relation to both physical form and body adaptability and to the actor's emotional peculiarities. During our interactions, most of the interviewees, both men and women, openly criticised the unwritten beauty rules that dominate the labour market and the audition system.

> If you want to do television, the only offers were very barren, only based on a face type, they are looking for a type, as if the best American actors wouldn't have proved that with talent and acting you can overcome the "face question", the beginning of a career is very based on this matter, that I believe it is very stupid. (Giacomo)

In the excerpt above, Giacomo underlines how institutional canons define a standard space of action for the actor both in aesthetic and emotional terms, assigning some acting roles and excluding others, and structuring the actors' possibilities for a career.

> At school they often gave me roles of the mad, or the odd, this thing has stuck to me, maybe it was because of my homosexuality […] people believed that I could only play roles outside of the box and not for example Juliet […] I suffered a lot because of it […] Then, at a certain point I started to feel that I couldn't perform several things, I started as well to think "Oh, in effect, this is something that I can't do". (Sara)

> Maybe they didn't want me because I was too old or maybe too… it is something about the attitude that I had as a person more than on physical appearance and there I say, it is true, this is my personality. (Federica)

Sara's and Federica's excerpts illustrate a strict relation between institutionalised practices in the field and the subjects' perception and space of possibilities. Sara recounts the preclusion of certain roles which entail a particular performance of femininity, youth and innocence in the case of Juliet, to her affective and emotional positioning, her sexual orientation. Federica suggests that the constraint goes beyond physical appearance but involves the subject in its emotional and aesthetic features. Thus, it emerges how the artistic field's canons and normative gender systems condition a professional career, opening or precluding working opportunities for actors and actresses.

> It is work where your physical appearance tells a lot, if you look young people will see a young person, if you are fat, this would be what they'll notice […] I know very well that I am nice and that I look young, I am from City – this means a lot too – everything that is part of me, it is a great work of self-awareness, you need to understand what you communicate. (Angela)

As Angela's excerpt shows, actors are aware of structural limitations and of the centrality of every aspect of their person in their working practice. The excerpt quoted demonstrates the actors' need to know and explore their points of strength, the personal aspects that are valuable on the job market, in order to exploit those qualities on the labour market and

especially in the audio-visual industry where beauty canons are stronger. In the materials collected, beauty canons and field traditions are often questioned but rarely challenged, rather, participants seem to occupy an ambivalent positioning on this regard.

> One of my difficulties is linked to my origin. I am of Asian heritage, and this is a job [*mestiere*] where not only do your competencies and your talent matter but also your body; it is not that everyone has to be beautiful, but your body and your face tell something. […] When you bring something that is particular, exceptional to the canons, you have more difficulties. And I knew that since the beginning it was a challenge that I wanted to accept […] Indeed, it can become a blessing and a curse, you have this peculiarity, I would have love to do more cinema but it so much harder […] I take part only in auditions where it is specified that the actor has to have this nationality or this ethnic origin, well, all right, it is work and I have fun, but it is also a limitation. (Paolo)

> On the one hand, my skin colour gives me the possibility to access certain auditions, where there is less qualified competition but, on the other hand, it can also limit your professional growth. (Franco)

> They ask me to speak in my dialect and then say "No, make it sound more from the South" […] Well, for me, as a woman of 36 years old, with long brown hair, thick eyebrows – it can sound irrelevant, but I can assure you that proposals of collaboration are made also on these macro features – they offer me parts as a policewoman, wife of a mafia man, mother, housewife who cooks, these kinds of stuff […] I stopped getting sad about it, when it comes to the audition for the mother dressed in black, well, all right. (Erminia)

The presented excerpts report participants' thoughts on the impact of institutional canons and cultural stereotyped representations on their professional careers, emphasising how sentiments of sorrow for missed possibilities of expression are intertwined with an awareness that the same limitations are also opportunities. Both the experience of Franco and Paolo, actors with non-European ethnic backgrounds, and Erminia, an actress from Southern Italy, highlight issues of cultural representation of diversity and stereotyped cultural narratives not only in the performing arts environment but in the broader cultural industry production. Thus, physical and racialised aspects can, on the one hand, become "unique selling points" (Scharff, 2015: 101), but, on the other hand, it would be misleading to not consider subjects'

emotional and affective fatigue in coming to terms with the experience of embodying work and representing their own product.

During our interaction, interviewees have often underlined the necessity of taking care of their body as their working tool.

> I train every day and I can see the difference, then I am not a nerd, I eat what I want, and I see colleagues much more committed than I am, but it is very important to have a body ready, in order to feel confident yourself. If a director tells you, "dance for fifteen minutes" you need to be confident that you can do it […] Then we have to love our body because, it is tricky, when you are 30 you are strong but the career… […] at 70 years old, when I'll be famous, I want to arrive there healthy, I am very careful on that, on safeguarding myself as much as I can. (Fedora)

According to Fedora, having an active body is framed as a matter of confidence in her everyday working practice but also as an investment for her future career. From the excerpt quoted it emerges that the body needs to be continuously worked on in order to be and remain employable, especially with regard to the experience of ageing and its potentially disruptive consequences (Bassetti, 2021). Despite, in the beginning of her talk, Fedora appears to take a distance from dieting and other practices of body control, she is aware of her body's centrality, of its limitations and possibilities. Actors' awareness of embodying their working practice has a tangible meaning that invests their corporeal experience of the profession, as it has been noted in the case of other professionals for whom the relation between body and self in the workplace is central (Bassetti, 2014; Wacquant, 1995). Furthermore, despite men and women seeming to be involved in the same field dynamics regarding expressivity and physical traits, it is also true that the value brought by aestheticization processes is organised around gendered notions (Dean, 2005; Mears, 2011; Wolkowitz, 2006: 85). Thus, judgements about actresses' looks are based on asymmetric logics that make women's bodies more subject than men's to hash evaluations. Furthermore, a white, cisgender and middle-class ideal man seems to be taken as the reference point for

working practices and consumer tastes. The exposure of their body on the stage and the gendered structure of the aesthetic field are an important part of actresses' experiences of work and on the relation between their body and the profession.

> This constant request of being absolutely compliant with the beauty norm that is required to be an actress, but why? […] It is limiting and humiliating, we know that very well. (Filippa)

> I often wanted to be different, especially physically, sometimes even today I suffer for my shape […] later on it has also become my strength, because I was forced to but also because I wanted to […] If you are an actress you choose to expose yourself to other people's judgment […] I wouldn't have expected judgement to be so damaging for myself. (Valeria)

In the excerpts above, the actresses often associate the exposure of their body on the stage and issues related with aesthetic norms with feelings of vulnerability and shame. Again, as happens in most professional environments (Acker, 1992; Gherardi, 1995), the theatrical sector seems to be structured around an ideal male actor.

> The feminine voice, for example, […] is often higher while in theatre it is requested to perform deep voices […] it is like if the feminine body wasn't accepted, the feminine voice is shrill. (Rosanna)

In Rosanna's excerpt, it appears that actresses are trained to embody, through practice and exercise, bodily features that are canonically ascribed to male actors, hinting at the intrinsically masculine structure of the sector. Thus, the public nature of the actor's figure and the historical prevalence of male workers has set the standard not only for the technical skills required from actresses but also for what concerns employer's expectations in relation to working long hours in their debut (Bertolini and Luciano, 2011). Theatre and entertainment work is characterised by late evenings, social relationships with journalists or fans, and by the presence of working days during public holidays and festivals. All these features imply a structuring of public and private spaces, of working and non-working times, that excludes from its horizon possible care and domestic responsibilities. Therefore, it

requires working subjects to adapt their attitudes to an ideal worker who, in the absence of other activities, interests and duties apart from work, is allowed to dedicate themselves entirely to artistic and professional goals. Furthermore, women in the profession also suffer from being underrepresented, a fact that is widely known among the professionals of the sector, and that pertains to societal cultural representation of male and female characters, whose appearance on the screen and on the stage is not balanced.

> The issue for women is, unfortunately, related to the job market. There are more parts for men than for women and so on and so forth. This is the biggest problem for actresses; the competition is fiercer. (Antonio, actor and director of a private theatre school)

> It is a male's world therefore representations are predominantly of male characters, there are fewer [dramaturgical] parts for women. Women's difficulties in succeeding are enormous compared to male ones. Canonical beauty is still very important for women while for men obviously is less… for example ageing, a woman of 60 years old is old, but at 60 years old a man has become very interesting. (Alina, actors' manager)

During the fieldwork, gatekeepers recognised the impact of the canons of the entertainment industry on gender inequalities, where women's careers were shown to be highly impacted, starting from educational trajectories and later in terms of working opportunities and salary (see Chapter 3). While the media industries seem to prefer representing males over females and youth over older people, in the context of a job market where age and gender are central variables of employment opportunities, key issues also emerge about power inequalities between professional roles. In such a context, where adult males hold the majority of leading positions and the biggest part of the workforce is constituted by young women, power appears to be characterised in terms of age and gender. Coherently with what happens in project-based and freelance working activities, actors are responsible not only for finding new working opportunities but also for negotiating their personal salaries. During the interviews, Fedora, Carla and Valeria openly spoke about their emotional difficulties in the

phase of negotiation, marking them out as one of the places where asymmetrical relationships of power are manifested in the workplace.

> "Could you please respect me? Even though I am 30 year old women or are only 50 year old men respected?"… it is not easy at all. (Fedora)

> I am learning to be more pragmatic when it comes to money, to stand out, is not easy because at the end I'm always the one who gives up […] I think "After all they are doing me a favour in hiring me", I always have this thought, but it shouldn't be like this, it is not easy, but I'll learn step by step. (Carla)

> Each time, when my referent is the producer, I can't handle the negotiation moment […] I am always with a hanging head, I wish to be able to stand out more at a personal level; I could do it now, if someone sees my curriculum. But if the first impression is of fragility, it takes a moment to… especially with men… (Valeria)

In the excerpts above, interviewees reported feelings of discomfort related to the possibilities of being listened to and considered, directly or indirectly calling into question their age and gender. While Fedora and Valeria clearly acknowledge their positioning in terms of age and gender as the core of the question, Carla internalises her difficulties in her salary negotiation as the result of a personal attitude that needs to, and will, be changed in the future. Thus, it subjects are both able to recognise structural dynamics but also apply individualised solutions to systemic problems, investing in the cultivation of personal qualities and dispositions that can enhance employability and earnings, at the same time silencing workplace inequalities (Lamberg, 2021). Furthermore, directors and producers not only control the economic negotiation but, considering the informality of the sector's recruitment practices, they hold the power to select aspirants and to drive young actors' careers towards success or failure. In this context, emotions and stereotypes are constructed, refused and negotiated in relation to gendered dynamics, in an environment permeated by power asymmetries and where aesthetic appearance and workers' personalities are part of the selection process.

> In certain dynamics, the fact that I am a female and not stunner makes a difference […] Being, well not harsh but straight to the point, of course I am not stupid […] I try to make the minimum strategy in order to be at peace with my conscience […] this with Director, and everyone used to tell me that, which is a type of man of power, that you have to flatter… I am not the type, I believe that somehow not being adulatory and honeyed… it took away certain opportunities, right? That he doesn't truly like me or that in any case he will think "Well, Gaia is someone that potentially can give me a hard time". (Gaia)

> It happens that directors choose actresses because they are desirable. I told you before that often you need to be able to sell yourself also outside of the performative act. When you are in the theatre foyer, at the restaurant, women use seductive arms or have a certain feminine power over some men […] I feel completely deprived of this power just for being homosexual […] I feel less considered, less observed. (Sara)

> Concerning directors, before, if I had something to say, I used to argue… today I changed because making things hard for someone that had chosen you, well, it is not the best. (Rosanna)

The excerpts above show that displaying a non-canonical and opinionated femininity in the working environment can lead to exclusionary dynamics, the loss of employment opportunities and the basis of what is a male-dominated informal system of recruitment strongly based on personal relationships. Thus, once again, actresses are required to perform an emotional effort towards themselves aimed at cultivating those self-dispositions that harmonise the most with the working environment's requirements, negotiating their emotional positioning. Furthermore, it seems that in the working environment not only do personality and physical appearance matter, but also sexual orientation plays a role, especially in informal settings. In the context studied, the data indicate that the presence and relevance of power inequalities for a career are widely known issues in the professional environment. Several interviewees heavily criticised the absolute authority granted to directors in the field both on and off the stage.

> Theatre is beautiful but it is also sick; there is this figure of the director that is almost a prophet […] for me it doesn't matter, the technician, the actor, the director, all are on the same level. It

> bothers me when my colleagues call the director "*maestro*", maybe he taught you something, but this subjection disturbs me. (Leonardo)

> Do you know why we slaughter each other? It is their fault, our *maestri*, those assholes – I am sorry if I fire myself up – they told the art world that prima-donna behaviour and adulation was the law and we gush over them […] these people fed us with bread and competition, elbowing our way in, and we are not yet able to change the direction […] we wanted to emulate them but instead, our generation and the younger one have to assume a new discourse, at a human level. (Tim)

> It is the director's responsibility to put you in the condition to create without feeling constantly humiliated or judged because it is my person, my voice and my body. (Sara)

In the excerpt above, both Tim and Leonardo criticise actors' reverence towards directors, hinting at the fact that actors are not passive receivers of the field's rules but actively contribute to constructing and reinforcing them. Sara instead points out how things should be, the opposite of how they are. Thus, workers are able to recognise not only their subordinate position but also to consider those power dynamics and their individual contribution to the generation and replication, in the everyday working practice, of the power structure. Furthermore, as the Me Too movement brought to light (Hillstrom, 2018), the highly aestheticized and sexualised position of actresses' work entertains often an ambiguous relation with directors' central role in the professional community.

> Several times I thought that I had to be attractive, because this is how people behaved or maybe because I was afraid to say no. However, I'd never accepted compromises […], and maybe this is why my career has been so complicated, but it exists, it does exist the fact that someone tells you, "Why don't you take off your blouse, do you want me to take it off?" (Gabriella)

> I knew this director for a while. While we were trying the costumes, he took the liberty to make a very gross comment on my breast… on the spot I wasn't upset because I didn't think about it but afterwards I thought, "How dare you, we are working together…" (Filippa)

> It has happened to me to say no to people that presupposed that, how to say, they would have helped me and advantaged me after sexual intercourse – I chose not to do it. I remember, there was a producer, it was many years ago, I even find him enjoyable, and this is why I went out with him, he said that he wanted to introduce me to a director and I was happy about it, then, when I went to his place, I understood that there was a connection between what I would have done in this house and actually encountering the director. (Patrizia)

The excerpts above highlight the flourishing of sexism and sexual blackmail in environments where the recruitment practices are informal and permeated by employment insecurity. Thus, actresses find themselves in the condition of making intimate choices, accepting or refusing certain proposals, and considering the impact of those choices on their professional careers. Thus, both Gabriella and Patrizia assume personal responsibility for their career progression, in relation to such proposals, presupposing the individual solution of refusing powerful men's attentions. Furthermore, from the data gathered, it seems that encountering situations of sexual ambiguity in the workplace is also common for young men.

> I remember that once I was invited by a critic to have dinner at his place. Well, he came to see my show and invited me in a very slimy way, telling me that he wanted to cook for me and help me to deepen my knowledge of contemporary art. I refused this invitation and, as a consequence, he didn't write anything about me and my shows this time and in the following years. (Biagio)

> Sometimes I feel that just because I am a white male, I can't have my sufferings in the workplace […] There are power dynamics of a certain kind, it regards women but also homosexual situations […] I've felt sometimes that sexuality plays a role, that working relations sometimes are fishy because they are polluted by sexual matters […] Without going in depth, I am sad that my gender and my sexual orientation become an object at work. (Roberto)

Biagio and Roberto's accounts, unlike Patrizia's and Gabriella's, are generated from a different positioning, using an alternative vocabulary to describe unwanted sexual attention. Furthermore, probably because of my gender positioning, research participants were, on the one hand, more reticent in thematising and going in depth around the topic and, on the other hand, as Roberto states, careful in internalising discourses that are traditionally considered to

be a concern for women. However, what male and female accounts share is a common belonging and origin in what emerges as a masculine environment permeated by aesthetic and sexual matters and where domination is exercised and recreated every day in the workplace along lines of gender, age and power differentiation.

> I was working with this director of experimental cinema […] it required a nudity scene that was quite long and to pretend to have sex on stage. The way in which it was built was taking for granted several things […] I had already worked with nudity but in a very careful manner, with also a care for the person because in the end we are not robots. (Roberto)

> When they have power they behave exactly as men, […] they use the power in a masculine way […] women that have power exactly because they had to fight so hard, they are the worst enemy of other women […] with women in power you don't go along, with your colleagues there is competition, there isn't female solidarity, let's put it this way, maybe there is some but just when there is nothing to lose. (Rosanna)

In the quotes above, women in power positions seem to be very involved in the reproduction of the system's power dynamics. Coherently with the results previously illustrated, the core question concerns the ways in which power is enacted in the performing arts environment and on the violence or harassment that it generates. Considering women as less powerful than their male counterparts, this condition can be perpetuated by both men and women.

> At the beginning I was in awe of the *maestri*, then I had so many delusions that I came back to Earth […] in terms of work ethic, maybe they are very rigid with what regards themselves and then they exploit people that work with them, "they are young and inexpert, let's do what we want". (Filippa)

> I believe that I had a lot of luck in my encounters because for example I'd never find anyone that took advantage of me. (Maura)

The material presented sheds light on the pervasiveness of the power system: Maura feels the need to express her good luck in having avoiding being exploited or harassed in the workplace, while Filippa points out the double standard in place regarding young and old

actors and its interaction with age, gender and economic conditions. Thus, power seems to be enacted in an institutional environment where aesthetics and sexuality are particularly present, by reason of the centrality of body and aesthetic capital, where there is a strong gendered and generational structure sustained by both cultural (directors' glorification) and economic determinants (work insecurity). Furthermore, it appears that, on the one hand, subjects have an individualised experience of these categorisations but, on the other, they are also aware that, despite being lived out on an individual level, other colleagues experience the same issues. Since the Covid-19 pandemic obliged the sector to stop, workers have had occasion to share common difficulties in the workplace and to collectively reflect on their condition. In Chapter 8, we contextualise and discuss the deployment of collective auto-reflexivity among workers and the emergence of explicit discourses on common workers' difficulties.

3. Playing by the game's rules: public relations and cheerful dispositions

In a context pervaded by insecurity and short-term employment, professional networks have a central role in the construction of career continuity. The following pages focus on research participants' efforts to make the most out of a highly competitive labour market regulated by informal rules. Thus, scholars have noted that the oversupply of aspirants in the performing arts field leads to the impossibility of performing open auditions that would be too costly at the production site (Bertolini and Luciano, 2011), instead, informal contacts and word of mouth assume a regulatory position.

> At the beginning I used a newsletter, badly… A scant percentage of castings that I saw and that I took part in eventually called me. I don't remember exactly, but the majority were low-quality jobs; in this channel there weren't big theatres auditions […] I had my first serious contract with

> a company that graduated from a School, I had a positive experience […] we collaborate still today. (Riccardo)

> I've built my contacts knowing people, through the school. My first teacher had introduced me to the world of work and then I started to work and know people through seminars; I did a lot of laboratories where I've met colleagues that I worked with, or through advertised auditions, but I confess that over the years, word of mouth has been more useful, the fact of having worked together with someone that in the future has a contact for an engagement and makes your name, not as an intercession but simply to say, "Look I know about this audition, do it" and the same audition wasn't on the Internet. (Fulvio)

From the fieldwork, it emerges that only few calls for auditions are advertised on the Internet and that the majority of work opportunities are not publicly announced engagements. As happened to Riccardo and Fulvio, especially in the first years of their careers, auditions came from relationships with classmates and schoolteachers but, generally, word of mouth seems to be central in the working environment. In this context, the possibility of finding work appears to be closely related to actors' visibility in the working environment.

> It is a system where you go on, you work more if you start working, because people see you, your name starts to circulate and this is worth a lot, in every sector. For theatre and for dubbing it is useful for people to work and to have the possibility to make public relations but in a very genuine sense, you knock on a door, you show that you exist and that this is your CV. (Franco)

> The problem is that if you aren't seen, you not only don't set a foot on the stage but also don't exist. Do you understand what a horrible problem that is? This is it: if your face is not a face that is seen around it is like you don't exist, this is the harsh reality. (Tim)

Actors find themselves in a circular dynamic between work and the generation of new working opportunities that put workers in a particularly vulnerable position in the labour market, resulting in them being more prone to engaging in unpaid activities and exposed to employers' blackmail. In the described dynamics, the activity of public relations seems to occupy a central role. A discursive elaboration of this relevance is omnipresent in participants' comments and resonates with both entrepreneurial narratives about self-

branding and with a neoliberal emphasis on the role of attitude and dispositions in generating favourable opportunities.

> There are several ways, through social media, Internet, public calls, contracts that come from the academy that I did, and another way is chance, dialogue. I am out for the night, and I am talking with someone, I am speaking about a project of mine, a project that I love, that I am writing. And this person falls in love with the project and believes in the arts and maybe they can tell you, "Great, let's organise something together". (Pierpaolo)

> It is very important to build relations, going to the theatre, saying hi to people and being in contexts where you can speak with them. It is the networks of relations that in the end make the career and even if I don't say "wow" about it, it has to be done because people who work are people who have a net of relations that are vital for this job […] It can be for simple opportunism, or also something casual; I went to visit a director because I wanted to, without having something in mind […] I thought that if I hadn't been there that day she would have called someone else for the part. And I am afraid that it actually works this way, sometimes they choose you because they see you and remember about you. (Roberto)

The quoted excerpt echoes the previous chapter's analysis of the contemporary ethos of work and the construction of passion as an affective tool. In Pierpaolo's experience, if correctly exploited and situated in a passionate context, leisure and time off are reconfigured as having the potential to generate working opportunities and somewhat as part of the professional performance. In Roberto's case, his passion and commitment to the profession combine with entrepreneurial stances in leading him towards exploring the mechanisms of public relations. However, some participants contested the presented discursive formations by recurring to their everyday experiences.

> I am trying to go to see shows always when I can […] if you are often there, you are inserted in that environment, you never know if something can be born, there, out of nowhere, you speak with someone and something can be born, do you understand? Then, I am not very good at selling myself. I am not… I am afraid of being… of asking too much, I am not good at it, but I do realise that I am sociable enough and I try to follow this social part of mine in order to construct professional contacts and know people. Then, I have to say that it works but until now, I haven't had great results from my public relations, it is not that I went to parties, met people and worked as a consequence, for me it is a false myth. (Angela)

> There was a period where I became a good friend of an assistant director for a very famous cinema production. We organised events in her house with great bloggers, assistants etc. and I even performed – I did monologues, and I showed myself off – but it never brought me anything […] In my opinion this thing about parties does not work. (Rosaria)

On the one hand, research participants seem to produce a narrative coherent with discourses on entrepreneurialism and on fortunate occasions that permeate the cultural and creative field of work, while, on the other hand, when moving discourses to their everyday experience, they eventually end by refuting their previous statements. Thus, at first, Angela reproduces narratives about the need for public relations, but soon after declares her struggles in pursuing such activities, ending by disregarding public relations leitmotifs. Similarly, Rosaria, recounting her experience of soirees with directors and producers, arrived at the same conclusion as Angela. Furthermore, as emerges in Angela's excerpt, the subjects' affective position towards engaging in self-branding activities is not always one of positive passionate commitment.

> Power, success, fame, parties, contacts… I find those useful but also poisoning the path of someone who wants to pursue an artistic work and not an activity of marketing and selling. […] At the beginning, I didn't know that I could have done it, I felt discouraged because I saw that among my colleagues those who started working with a certain rhythm were those ones that best dominated this way of continuously self-promoting, at the beginning it was hard for me to work for work, unnatural, to work always in performance […] I wanted to act on the stage and not down here. (Riccardo)

> It is hard for me, I should go out more often with certain people and spend more time with them but I don't like it […] it is hard for me to go to place where actors go, going there, drink a glass and say, "You are great, you are so good" even if you don't think that […] I'd like to be called for my work, for what I can communicate on the stage and not for what I can express in front of a glass of wine. (Davide)

In the above excerpts, participants acknowledge the relevance of performing a certain type of sociability on their professional career. In these cases, interviewees recounted their difficulties and unwillingness to perform outside their space of authenticity. A dividing line

is traced between acting on the stage, considered desirable and legitimate, and acting behind the stage, in the everyday reality of social relationships. Thus, actors enact, at least at a discursive level, some sort of resistance not only to practices of self-branding and self-promotion that are central features of entrepreneurial work but also to a broader neoliberal discursive formation that pushes the subject to engage in activities of self-improvement in order to be deemed suitable for the labour markets' demands. Thus, subjects' emotions and inner dispositions have a central position both in the workplace and on the labour market.

> It is work made by relationships […] you can be the top, but you also need to have a good disposition, be a person that… you see… you need to be able to speak, you need to have a savoir faire. (Rosanna)

> In order to work as an actress somehow you have to expose yourself, and not only when you are on the stage. It is often required to be enjoyable, be confident, make public relations after the shows. (Sara)

In the excerpts above, Sara describes a space of interaction in which several emotional performances are required, while Rosanna points to a number of inner dispositions that are considered fundamental in order to obtain gigs and roles from producers. In a context where actors need to look continuously for employment opportunities, relational abilities are fundamental. Furthermore, research participants appear to be very aware that what is required from them is situated at the level of personal characters and dispositions and that developing these qualities, once considered part of the individual's private sphere, is a consistent part of their unpaid activities, emotional labour, conducted in order to secure future working engagements. The participants' account particularly resonate with what Mirta, a talent agent for cinema production, told us during our interview.

> Considering two actors with the same talent, it is common to choose one that, how to say it… is more collaborative, generates less problems, but I think it happens in all working environments […] they have to be people that know how to relate […] you have to understand what they ask

> you in that moment, and even if you do not agree, in the end you have to do it. You need to construct strong bonds where it is a pleasure to call you again. (Mirta)

Thus, actors seem to be aware of the need to develop cheerful dispositions where the notion of emotional labour sheds light on those aspects related to the work of public relations and networking that actors carry out behind the screen. Developing cheerful and positive dispositions is something that the working environment requires and expects from actors, despite the traditional popular emphasis on bonhomie and unconventional ways of life. However, actors not only consent and conform to the invitation to perform and cultivate an employable and desirable subjectivity, but reflexively engage with contextual requests and choose where to situate their everyday practice.

> This is objective data, it is not true that it doesn't matter, people that work the most are people that are able to sell themselves, even outside of the working environment […] in this sense, the market requires something from you, if you don't do it to be at peace with yourself, because of an ethic, because of a choice, there are consequences. (Sara)

> Well, not too good for me, in the past, I did things that were wrong, "wrong"… that did not help me… for example protesting for economic matters or saying fuck you to theatre directors that I didn't consider up to their role […] I tend to be a sincere person both in evaluating colleague's work and in talking, I don't like the fact that in order to have one of my shows in a theatre I have to go there 15 times and look at the theatre director's productions and wait outside after the show and say "Your work was amazing! It has changed the way I see things" […] There are things that I accept about my work and others that I don't […] I refused certain proposals and I didn't go to certain parties but with the awareness that doing ethical choices will not lead to a prize but probably to more difficulties in achieving certain results or maybe you won't even reach them, that's because ethical choices have a price. (Biagio)

Actors recognise the centrality of self-promotion and positivity for entrepreneurial work and are aware that not complying with what is required by the working environment can be costly. Thus, despite resisting the working environment's and labour market's pressures towards an emotional performance of willingness and collaboration, actors' efforts result in being framed and interpreted as an individual choice that has individual consequences. Thus,

adopting alternative dispositions and resisting the system's pressure can have negative consequences for the subjects' career, especially for actors who are most vulnerable in terms of age and gender, as in the case of Sara. Refusing to follow certain feeling rules requires another type of emotion management that is strictly related to the precarious working conditions and to the absence of working engagements, whose consideration needs to include the disciplinary force of labour market uncertainties (Vallas and Christin, 2018). Furthermore, realising the importance and the impact of public relations and emotion management on an artistic career often leads participants to express feelings of discomfort and discouragement towards the working environment's ability to recognise and valorise talent over cheerfulness.

> My work is done for the 50% by what you do on the stage and the other 50% depends on who you are going to dinner with, who you are going to greet, whom you sit by, how many compliments you send after a show… I can tell you this, the interview is anonymous […] there are people that have no talent, but they are so good at cheating that maybe they work more than other people that have a great talent. (Tim)

> There isn't a fair system for programming shows, there isn't for distribution of shows, it is all, almost all, determined by the type of relations that you are able to build with critics, theatre directors, producers, other artists. (Biagio)

> There is someone that says: "I need an actress like this, do you have someone in mind?" and then maybe someone knows you, thinks about you and can vouch for you. […] often there is someone above that says "Look, this girl needs work you have to call her". We are talking about things like this, often you find yourself working with people who are there to steal the pay, because there isn't a meritocratic system. Then, luckily, recognition functions. Maybe you are there because someone made your name but then you prove yourself worthy in the field, that you know how to work, what your character is, what your dispositions are in the workplace; if everything is positive you will be called back. But even this, is not, how to say, immediate, there are so many variables… (Caterina)

In the excerpts above, participants describe public relations not only as a compulsory activity that actors need to do to reach their professional goals but as an activity that determines their

artistic evaluation. Thus, the credibility of the system's evaluation of artistic activities is, as Tim points out in his consideration about anonymity, dangerously dismantled. Once working opportunities are determined by social relations, despite the sectors' narratives, the working environment can no longer be considered meritocratic. As a consequence, success is not determined by individual hard work and positive attitudes but rather by a combination of cheerful dispositions and cheating abilities. In the excerpts, Caterina's discourse is the only one that, after stating the absence of meritocracy, tries to reconfigure an agentic role for the subject that again refers to positivity and good disposition but, even in this case, it seems that the subject is not able to control the results of their performance. Considering the system as non-meritocratic is a powerful discourse that can lead to a deconstruction of entrepreneurial notions that constructs professional success as the outcome of a continuous self-improvement, passion and hard work. Similarly, subjects' rejection of performing certain emotional qualities and internal dispositions can be regarded as a form of resistance to neoliberal subjectivation instances.

4. The loss of the future and the eternal youth

In the previous chapter, subjects' aspirations for self-realisation, job quality and economic needs were considered in relation to the social and economic vulnerability experienced in the context of the performing arts. The blurring borders between paid and unpaid work, employment and unemployment are not a unique feature of early or unsuccessful careers but mark the very essence of actors' professional paths. In this context, the subject is required to engage in a continuous confrontation with insecurity and structural conditions which has been seen to be highly costly in emotional and social terms.

> Every time that you finish a job it is like you have to start from zero; the fact that I've been working for five years with a Theatre Company, that two of my shows were nominated for super prestigious prizes, it doesn't matter, it means nothing. (Biagio)

> Prizes are important, they do well, gratify, put a point in your path but everything passes. Truly, everything goes away in this world, the wheel spins very fast, all is very ephemeral. (Pino)

From the data collected, the performing arts' working environment appears to be ontologically uncertain, where both the presence and the absence of economic rewards and professional satisfaction are extremely temporary conditions. It seems that even having reached professional and social recognition, reflected in the winning of awards, cannot save the subject from an existential condition of insecurity. Above, Biagio describes his perception of the radical impossibility of building on the work previously done in a context constructed around project work and expresses feelings of disempowerment. The interviewees talk of the impossibility of reaching a point in their careers that would allow them increased economic and social security in the face of the everchanging and unpredictable nature of the working environment. Thus, instability seem to be similar to the same career in the performing arts where feelings of precariousness are related not only to economic and social rewards but which permeate and shape the very essence of the analysed world of work. Furthermore, rejecting the relevance of prizes for career progression can also be seen as a micro-practice of resistance that mines the connection between hard work, achievement and rewards. In such an unstable environment, exerting control over work seems to be impossible. Analysing the following excerpts, the role of luck in the narratives of career paths is detailed and placed in relation to the perceived impossibility of impacting on reality.

> The situation is catastrophic, I told you what I told you and I think that I am more than lucky and more than privileged […] there are colleagues who are great, they have nothing less than me and I don't understand why they don't work, why they have just small gigs. (Pierpaolo)

> E: How do you construct your working opportunities?

> F: I don't know… Well, I proceed a bit randomly; if there are auditions, I apply, and I am lucky because usually I win the position. (Fedora)

Fedora and Pierpaolo believe they have had a fortunate professional path but do not seem to have elaborated a rationale for their professional career in comparative or meritocratic terms. A reflection on career progression and personal attitudes seems to be missing from Fedora's account, while Pierpaolo appears unable to explain the differences between his professionality and those of his colleagues who have fewer working opportunities. Thus, having a satisfying career appears to be the result of a series of casualties. If success and failure are distributed randomly, trying to control and direct the career path could seem to be a useless endeavour. Furthermore, in the reported narratives, all actors are described as having the same possibilities of flourishing. Thus, differences in professional paths are not considered in relation to class, gender and education but are reduced to generic, unpredictable, and external factors such as good luck or the subject's intuition.

> Let's say that someone has the possibilities, the point is that this is your talent, is it not recognised by people who matter? The fact is that [some actors] they work a lot, are they good because they had an encounter [someone]? Someone gave them the possibility to do the beautiful things that they did. And what about when it does not happen? (Leonardo)

> This is the system, just being good at it doesn't matter, just talent doesn't matter, there are much more factors that matter, and for us, as women, those factors are even more of the ones usually at stake. (Caterina)

While Pierpaolo and Fedora articulated their thoughts from a position of success, on the opposite side of the spectrum are Caterina and Leonardo, whose professional careers are perceived to be unfortunate. Also in this case, actors point to the impossibility of being able to control the outcomes of their efforts in their working environments. Missing the opportunity to master one's life and career path brings feelings of disempowerment that are central to experiences of precariousness. While contextualising success and failure in a

sequence of casual events risks obscuring social and cultural capitals, Caterina explicitly acknowledges the role of gender in her career construction. She mentions gender, among other unspecified features that are impossible to control that increase the complexity of her professional path.

In a context in which the ingredients for success are obscure and where professional achievements vanish rapidly, the possibility of leaving insecurity behind seems to disappear from workers' horizons. The outcomes of today's efforts and the outlook for the future both remain unpredictable. During the fieldwork, when invited to talk about future projects or personal projections in the future, research participants were either uneasy, reacting to the question with questions, or they reported generic and standardise statements such as the wish to carry on working and be realised or the generic desire to earn more.

> E: What are your projects for the future, what would you like to do…
> S: I don't know… truly… (laughs) […] I don't know, at the moment I don't have a precise picture, but, well, I have to admit that I don't have even a blurred picture… I am proceeding little step by little step… it is already difficult to visualise myself in three months. (Sara)

> E: How do you see yourself in five years?
> V: No, no, no… I have no idea. I am too used to living day by day and maybe it is what saves me. Maybe you wanted to ask me what I desire but, even in this case, I don't know […] Maybe I tell you something now and in five years' time I'll be happy that it went differently. (Valeria)

In the excerpts above, the participants' difficulties in projecting themselves into the future appear evident alongside an unfamiliarity with this kind of reflection in their daily self-reflexive practices. In the midst of such tendency to focus on the present, the narratives of those interviewees who shared a reflection on their future focused on sentiments of disempowerment and fatigue that transcend issues of economic dependency or self-realisation, investing the everyday realities of their working practices and of subjects' self-perception.

> Today, I am starting to feel the fatigue of this work's structure, for example I pay a rent in City but today I pay a rent also in Other City, for two months, I can't leave the apartment in City, but I need a place in Other City because I need to rest. About this continuous moving, I am 32 now, I am starting to think about having a child, but it is impossible to think about it with this work, especially if your partner is an actor as well […] Maintaining sentimental relationships is very hard, I had a boyfriend that could have been the right one, but he wanted me to come back and I couldn't just move to a city and be there. (Fedora)

> F: If you work a lot, you also suffer a lot because you are away from home every day. I will move in with my boyfriend on 1st November and on 4th November I have to leave until May; is this life?
> E: You won't come back until May…
> F: I will come every two months, they don't pay me, it takes five months to get paid. I work, I swear, 360 days out of 365 and I earn a monthly stipend of 1,000 euros, and I worked in huge productions as a main character. Everyone calls me but I earn 1,000 euros per month and sometimes I think that I would be earning more if I worked in a supermarket […] I say, it is not true that at a certain point things start to go well, also Very Famous Actor has to stay months far away from his family and has his problems, even if he won Super Famous Prize […] it is not that at a certain point things take off. People tell me "You are lucky, you are working". Yes, it is but careful because things aren't easy for me. (Federica)

Above, Fedora and Federica report the difficulties that they encounter in constructing a satisfying private sphere due to their present economic conditions but mainly considering the structural characteristics of actors' work. Thus, acting is configured as an itinerant occupation where actors spend the majority of the year travelling and, while 50 years ago workers could enjoy longer engagements and higher pays, it is not the case for today's workforce (Gallina et al., 2018). Spending most of their time touring and travelling implies, in the interviewees' words, not only the emotional fatigue of being away from one's loved ones but also the physical effort that becomes increasingly difficult to manage over the years. These characteristics of the job, along with the low economic rewards, shape subject's aspirations and possibilities of starting a family life. Among the 23 actresses interviewed, aged between 27 and 49, just two had a child – one of which did not thematise maternity during the interview while the second explicitly connected her positive experience of being

a working mother with the economic possibilities of her partner. Women's position in the working environment, in particular, appears to encounter a roadblock during their 30s, when actresses experience the difficulty of reconciling their professional activity and the desire to build a family.

> My objective is realising myself, as a professional and as a woman. […] The two things are connected, I am almost 34 years old, and I'd like to have the possibility to form a family; unfortunately it is based on economic aspects. (Caterina)

While Fedora and Federica have set their foot on an artistic path that is leading them to work in big productions and to make a name for themselves in the working environment, Caterina had a more complex experience that eventually led here to undertake a double career in event production that could guarantee better revenues. Concerning women's careers in the performing arts, in Chapter 3, I.N.P.S. data was discussed with regard to the presence of women in acting in 2019, underlining a peak between workers aged 30-34 and a sharp decrease in the two successive cohorts of 35-39 and 40-44 year olds. As shown in Chapter 3, a similar trend can be traced in the actors' careers, but the decrease is less sharp.

The theme of physical and emotional fatigue is experienced and reported by both women and men. It emerges in different discursive places in the interviews and seems to be configured in terms of a counter narrative to the hegemonic discourses around creative work. Thus, creative work is often described through adjectives and attributes that characterise a certain Western idea of young people's attributes at work, such as enthusiasm, freshness, and energy. If this model seems to work in the first years of a career and is largely reproposed in the data collected, research participants' narratives report the impossibility of applying this system of values to adulthood.

> Sometimes we are crystallised in an eternal present, the future has sunk, and you can't clearly imagine it, you prefer not to go there with your thoughts […] It is an eternal present also as the

> season of youth, but we are becoming adults, not to say older […] When you open your eyes on the horizon line and you start projecting yourself […] Oh my God. […] The feeling of being in a world that despite your efforts, I work a lot, sometimes work rhythms are just crazy but it wouldn't cast away the anxiety of how I will live […] And it will become even worse because it will become increasingly difficult to maintain this workload, it is a biological matter […] We will never have retirement pensions, the future it is truly black but maybe something in between would happen. (Gerardo)

In Gerardo's account, the difficulty of facing the future appears to be related to a system where standard workloads become increasingly hard to bear after 35 years old, in both physical and emotional terms. In a professional system that seems does not recognise past achievements and career advancement, the subject is forced into a continuous performative effort in order to secure future working opportunities and economic revenues while, at the same time, they are requested to assume a discursive position that celebrates passion and commitment to artistic work. However, in research participants' accounts, the passage between youth and adulthood emerges as the painful gap in a substantial part of the subjects' existential experiences which remain unfulfilled. The impossibility of imagining an exit from a condition of precariousness, which encompasses economic dependency, few opportunities to exert control over career paths and a condition of emotional and physical fatigue, delineates for actors an ontologically insecure environment. In this discursive context, the subjects' possibilities for self-realisation as workers are exalted while the relevance to construct fulfilling caring and emotional relations for the subjects' realisation and well-being is silenced. Thus, subjects are required to perform as if they were in a never-ending youth, in a context where the dominant discursive formations omit future, adulthood, and the opportunity to construct a fulfilling family life from narratives on creative work.

5. Discussion: Negotiating neoliberal subjectivity in a context of radical insecurity

The present chapter has considered issues of power, domination and individual resistance in relational dynamics that take place in the performing arts working field. In this context, workers' accounts have been considered in relation to entrepreneurial discursive formations and precarious working trajectories identified in the previous chapter. Exploring participants' experiences and the results presented sheds light on subjectivation processes in neoliberal capitalist environments and makes several contributions to the current debate.

The first contribution of the chapter pertains to the close link between workers' subjectivities and the creation of value in the workplace – in the case of performing artists, the impossibility of separating the emotional and aesthetic positions of workers from what they sell on the labour market clearly stands out. In the working environment considered, aesthetic canons, gender norms and ethnic origins can both open and close professional opportunities, becoming subjects' unique selling points as well as personal burdens to be changed through disciplinary practices of self-cultivation. Previous literature's contributions have underlined the relevance of competitive discourses oriented to the maximisation of personal potential in order to gain a strategic position in the labour market (Duffy and Pooley, 2019; Scharff, 2015), while the results presented here point to a more nuanced position where subjects perform both compliance and resistance to dominant narratives and practices. In the context analysed, sexism and discrimination appear to be widespread and to transcend gender boundaries, becoming configured as operative methods of domination, whose functioning moves along lines of gender, age and power differentiation, questioning the ways in which power is enacted in a patriarchal working environment. However, even if some dynamics do not have a gendered connotation, the aesthetic and sexual value of male and female bodies

is different, and the judgement built on asymmetric logics is organised around the gaze of a white cisgender male. Thus, women's position in the labour market is particularly affected by their chronic underrepresentation in cultural production. The structuring of the working sectors in terms of long working hours, travelling rhythms affects both women and men possibilities of building a satisfying personal and family life but those inhibits desires appear to be reported by women in particular. The workplace environment appears to be characterised in terms of age and gender, where adult males hold positions of power, such as in direction and production, and young women are mostly represented in the role of actress. These power imbalances have several repercussions, especially in a precarious working context where actors' work is regulated by short term contracts. On the one hand, the salary negotiation between workers and producers generates feelings of disempowerment that actresses both recognise as the outcome of gendered dynamics but also plan to solve through the cultivation of confidence and, therefore, this partly confirms findings in the literatures on the role of confidence culture in obscuring structural inequality (Gill and Orgad, 2015, 2017).

The second contribution made by this chapter concerns the system of informal recruitment and workers' quest for visibility and its repercussions on actors' experiences of work in terms of exposure to poorly paid activities and employers' blackmail. Thus, the necessity for self-promotion causes subjects to engage in practices of emotional labour that are strictly related to both entrepreneurship and precariousness. In this context, participants reproduce a neoliberal discursive emphasis on the role of attitudes and disposition in generating favourable relational encounters and working opportunities, generating value not only through labour but also through relationships (Mäkinen, 2016). Highlighting the role of adaptation, cheerful attitudes and positivity draw participants' experiences close to

dispositions that have been considered feeling rules of neoliberal times (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Hochschild, 1979). However, research participants often assume ambiguous and contradictory discursive postures towards issues of compliance with the working environment's informal requirements. From the materials collected, apart from being reluctant to engage in public relations activities, subjects also seem to be able to engage in micro practices of resistance towards both the self-branding imperative and self-improvement discourses. The consequences of subjects' acts of micro-resistance have effects which differ in terms of age, gender, and career paths. Refusing to perform outside of their space of authenticity, subjects point to the need to reconsider the role of personal ethics, values and coherence as counter practices in the neoliberal context (Alacovska, 2020; Lamberg, 2021). Furthermore, the relevance of personal character in the professional system and in the quest for professional success is considered by research participants as problematic, especially when it comes to encountering the field's narratives around meritocracy. In this discursive encounter, neoliberal discursive constructions on meritocracy, hard work and talent fall out of credibility when juxtaposed with the system's difficulty in rewarding talent over cheerfulness, paving the way for questioning entrepreneurial notions of success and failure.

The third contribution of the chapter concerns subjects' discursive constructions on their future and aspirations, taking into account the role of emotional and physical fatigue. Thus, the perceived impossibility of manipulating reality appears central in subjects' experiences, as well as sentiments of disempowerment, which have been recognised as a peculiar feature of precarious experiences (Armano et al., 2017). Despite the accent posed by contemporary entrepreneurial discourses – considered to be hegemonic in the cultural work field (Gill, 2014) – on autonomy, hard work and meritocracy in order to construct workers' aspirational

subjectivities (Allen, 2014; Duffy, 2016), from the data collected subjects do not seem to perceive precariousness as a transitory problem but rather as an existential condition (Alacovska, 2018). In addition, the future orientation that scholars have ascribed to cultural workers (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013; Neff, 2012; Ross, 2004) seems to be absent from the context analysed where workers instead appear to avoid speculation and self-projection. It emerges instead that better living condition are not considered the natural outcome of a hard-working career path but, on the contrary, success appears to be randomly distributed. In a context where subjects seem to have no illusion of self-determined and autonomous careers, structures are invisible and opaque; luck and chance appear to have taken the role of meritocracy in justifying the distribution of rewards. As a consequence, contrary to what has been considered a characteristic feature of neoliberal entrepreneurial discourses (Scharff, 2016), subjects appear far from being bearers of positive attitudes towards their working activity. They display feelings of disaffection, disempowerment and a certain amount of rage which, however, is individualised and considered to be a private matter to resolve. Nevertheless, the characteristics described are part of a competing, non-hegemonic discourse that permeates the field of contemporary work and seems to stem from subjects' lived experiences and embodied understanding of the functioning of the professional field. While, in certain narrative spaces, research participants perform coherently with dominant narratives, in other places they adopt other, minoritarian discursive structures, revealing how different tensions are coexisting in the neoliberal space and how subjects' responses are complex and difficult to reduce to a single trait. Scholars in the creative working environment have underlined the changes involved in life transitions (Umney and Kretsos, 2015), but here, the construction and maintenance of caring relationships seems to be impossible to imagine both from a precarious positioning and in the structural organisation of the profession. Actresses report the desire to construct a family but the emotional and physical impossibility

being able to fulfil such a desire. Emotional fatigue and physical efforts are reported by both male and female actors in their 30s. Thus, the working environments seem to be discursively constructed around the idea of the eternal youthfulness of creative workers. Creative workers' attributes are those of youth and represent qualities increasingly requested outside of creative spaces (Farrugia, 2021). The system of values centred around subjects' passion, readiness and commitment that has been recognised as characteristic of creative occupations is not applicable to adulthood which, as a different time of life, requires its proper qualities (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008). Angela McRobbie (2020) describes contemporary neoliberal discourses on femininity as aiming to orient women's ambition from altruistic notions to professional oriented goals. In the case examined, contemporary discursive constructions of precariousness and entrepreneurship in creative work produce, on the one hand, subjectivities oriented to dedicating all time to working activities and, on the other hand, silences subjects' opportunities for self-realisation in the private sphere. Furthermore, in the presented context, self-reflexive operations aimed at self-monitoring and self-interpreting have some limitations. Thus, the radical indeterminacy in which subjects are immersed seem to represent an upper limit to the rational reflexive elaboration, embodying the impossibility of mastering a hypercomplex social reality (Lash, 1993), especially in aspects related to time discrepancies between life course and accelerated modernity (Rosa, 2013). The impossibility of structuring working activities on a temporal line and to experience every gig as an element that contributes to a broader project can undermine the role of self-discipline and imbue subjects with feelings of depression and unhappiness (Sennet, 2000). However, alternative subjectivation processes also take shape through practices of denaturalisation of entrepreneurial and meritocratic thinking which can entail the refusal to perform a promotional self, the assumption of anti-economic logics in professional activity, the reconceptualization of notions of success and failure, but also changing professional activity

(Norbäck, 2021). Those responses are enacted at the individual level, and, in the next chapter, we revise the opportunities for collective resistance that arose during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the absence of collective resistance matters from the fieldwork conducted before the pandemic, during March 2020 subjects who were not previously mobilised started to take part in collective processes across the working category.

VIII Collectivising individualised experiences: emerging practices of resistance during the Covid-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

At the time of writing, the artistic sector was afflicted, along many other sectors, by an unexpected crisis tied to Covid-19 regulations of public life enacted by most countries in Europe. In the case of Italian performers, the pandemic touched on life experiences that were already characterised by vulnerabilities in the Italian context (Di Nunzio et al. 2017) and abroad (Comunian and England, 2020), but it also opened novel possibilities of community practice. Having analysed, in the past chapters, individualised glimpses of resistance in research participants' discourses, the present section is devoted to considering performers' collective instances during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this regard, the activities of two informal groups are considered: "Attrici e Attori Uniti – A2U" and "Amleta".

Between 2011 and 2016, performing artists were central in the "artivists" mobilisation's wave, centred on the occupation and auto-organisation of cultural spaces (Giorgi 2014; Maddanu 2018). However, during recent years, workers have been struggling to stay afloat in the face of the contraction of public cultural expenditure that followed the 2008-2009 financial crisis and the increasing relevance of market demands in cultural offers (Gallina, 2013). Furthermore, compared to what happens in other European countries, performing artists in Italy are a scarcely unionised category of workers, often poorly aware of their rights, which works in a deregulated environment that has been defined as "post-wage" (Chicchi et al. 2014:47). In this context, the outbreak of Covid-19 and the forced unemployment that

affected the sector brought to the attention the structural misfunctioning of the sector and workers' lack of support, offering a possibility of individual and collective reflection about the profession. The results presented in this chapter are based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between March and June 2020 in both digital spaces of interaction and face-to-face events related to the activists' group "Attrici e Attori Uniti"; and between June 2020 and May 2021 on the activities of "Amleta". During these periods, we had the opportunity to take part in meetings, interview activists involved, and analyse online content shared on social media and through private channels.[15]

The first section re-traces the contours of the Covid-19 emergency in late February 2020 and the impact that social life restrictions had on the performing arts' sector and on workers' lives. The beginning of performers' mobilising wave is described through ethnographic documentation, fieldnotes and interviews conducted with sector experts during the past year. The second and third sections consider, respectively, the activities and the experience of the informal groups "A2U" and "Amleta" which were born together in the context of Milan's performers' mobilisation and subsequently separated. Activists' accounts and ethnographic notes of meetings are combined with the intent to analyse the collectivising power of the mobilisation and role of emotions and affect in shaping the observed mobilisation. Lastly, we discuss the research results presented in the chapter underlying the possibilities of collective self-reflection offered by the context of Covid-19 and the emergence of often unspoken issues of the working category being brought to public attention. The role of collective mobilisation in a highly individualised working environment is considered in

[15] The fieldnotes reported in this chapter are partly true quotations from recorded interviews and partly the researcher's annotations taken during meetings.

relation to the possibility of challenging neoliberal entrepreneurial stances through practices of solidarity.

2. The Covid-19 emergency as a trigger for mobilisation

Starting from the end of February 2020, the closure of all show venues and most television and cinema production sets led many workers to experience a condition of forced unemployment where the absence of social protection and the lack of a clear future perspective emphasised the weaknesses of the category. The fragmentation of employment contracts and informal working practices have, during this period, explicitly brought to light the absence of support of the category.

From 23rd February, in the Milan area and subsequently in all Italian territories, shows and live events were suspended for an undefined period. In this situation, workers who had an open contract on that day could benefit from the suspension of the contract due to force majeure and receive compensation. However, considering the short-term nature of performers contracts a great number of workers did not have an open contract at the time, but might have had one in the near future.

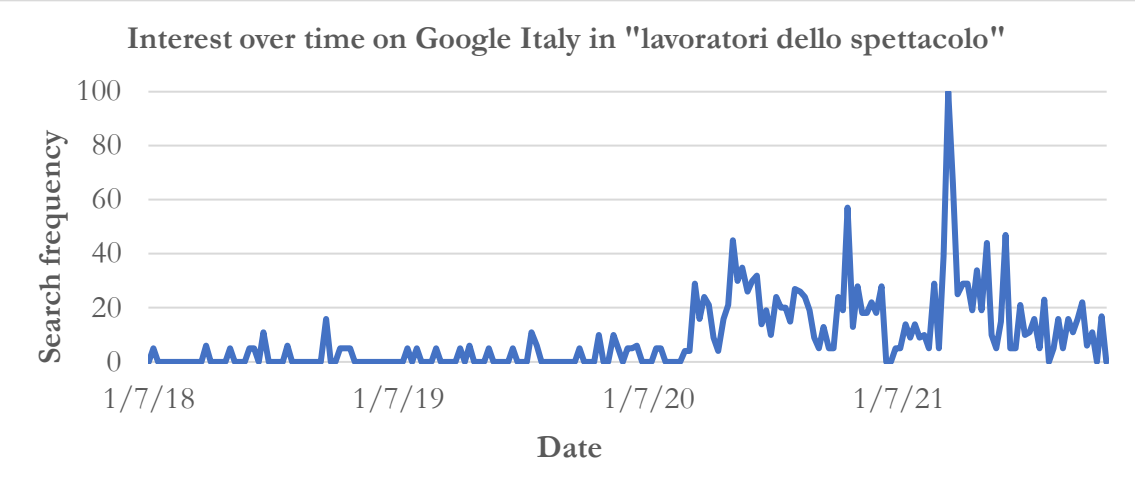
> They are covered if they were formally employed between 23rd February or until 7th March […] The problem is that shows are programmed but contracts are not even signed because they are not signed in advance, they are signed during the first day of rehearsals, sometimes even later on. […] These people are outside of the compensations. (Ariel, unionist)

If some workers were excluded from social security measures because of customary practices in the occupational environment, others were precluded by the structure of intermittent (zero hours) contracts under which workers are employed but, without working and pay, they cannot access emergency measures. Similarly, at this point, freelance workers with *Partita Iva*

were partly excluded because considered autonomous workers (Di Nunzio et al. 2011) as well as those workers with irregular and informal working arrangements, which is considered to be a common situation in the performing arts' world (Di Nunzio et al. 2017). Thus, during the first month of the pandemic, workers experienced the effects and consequences of the sector's employment fragmentation and its diffuse informal practices with a majority of workers being excluded from social benefits. Later, on 17th March 2020, the Government granted workers in showbusiness a bonus of 600 euros which, however, left out once again workers with zero hours contracts and workers with fewer than 30 days of recognisable work in the showbusiness workers' fund (I.N.P.S. ex E.N.P.A.L.S) accumulated during the previous year (2019). Thus, the 600 euros bonus did not include workers who had a diversified source of income, a widespread situation in the sector where it is common, for example, for actors to teach the arts and acting as private teachers or in schools (Bertolini and Luciano 2011). During the following months the number of worked days required to benefit from the 600 euros bonus was reduced and the bonus system become the major Government measure to sustain unemployed workers in the sector. In mid-June 2020, live events in the open air were allowed, under social distancing conditions that heavily conditioned the economic sustainability of the events – eventually live shows and concerts were banned again, in Autumn 2020.

During spring 2020, far from daily productive goals and without the perspective of returning to the stage, performing artists engaged in a collective reflection on their professional role and on their sector's regulation. According to a list collected by activists and published in April, more than 50 groups, formal and informal, were working on the support of live

showbusiness workers[16] and several online encounters between geographically and politically diverse collectives had been organised. The growth of digital and virtual relations, alongside the forced unemployment in the sector, allowed workers to engage in online community building and to construct moments of virtual encounter and exchange. The following chart uses Google Trend data in relation to the online research using the keywords *lavoratori dello spettacolo* on Google Search during the past four years (2018-2021).



Google users' interest in the keywords "showbusiness workers" has grown during the pandemic years, starting from the beginning of March 2020. However, while the Internet, digital tools and social media have become central for the mobilisation of actors, at the same time, traditional forms of collective action seem to have been rediscovered by the same workers.

> We have a lot of subscriptions, on the national territory but especially in Milan, it gives us a huge responsibility. On the other hand, it is a signal, if from this difficult situation we have to extract something positive, it is that eventually everyone acknowledged that in sticking together it is less probable to be crushed. (Ariel, unionist)

[16] https://webzine.theatronduepuntozero.it/2020/04/30/tutela-dei-lavoratori-e-delle-lavoratrici-dello-spettacolo-una-mappatura/

Not only had the number of members seemingly grown in the sectors' traditional equilibrium but so too had the relevance of the unions' work in the workers' perception. Thus, several research participants we encountered were not mobilised before the pandemic but decided to take part in collective actions and to become union members during the first months of the pandemic.

> I become a union member in these months, my position has always been sceptical towards the unions, I'd never felt them close, but then I have also questioned myself because unions are made by people and I said, "Well, it is time to enter in the union and maybe change or help the union to represent us". (Sybilla)

> My intention is to subscribe, there are colleagues who are working a lot and they convinced me to become a member. There has been a lot of attention lately, we are a desperate working category […] Eventually there seems to be a little renaissance. (Tim)

However, other participants – especially those who took part in the autonomous mobilisations of cultural workers in Italy between 2011 and 2016 – preferred to maintain a distance from unions and to pursue autonomous collective paths (Fieldnotes). Thus, during online meetings, workers' instances were often divided between sustaining a line of autonomous action or working in harmony with a union's programmes and operations. While independent and less independent groups tend to recognise the union's role in the implementation and recognition of worker's rights, they underlined the need for a further political effort. During online meetings, various activists remarked the need to think from a political perspective that encompassed current neoliberal trends: "working on the identity of our claims from a position of marginality to the economic system which nevertheless forces our system towards a hyper productivity of shows" (Fieldnotes).

The outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020 can be seen for workers in the performing arts as a moment of forced stoppage that opened a possibility of collective self-reflection for the sector in relation to its past and its future.

> Today is a moment where we do not perform a show but instead, we reflect […] What don't you like about how things were before? What do you want for the theatrical system of tomorrow? (Fieldnotes)

The quoted questions, collected during an online meeting, variously resonated in the online meetings of workers in the performing arts that we had the opportunity to follow, underlining the necessity not only of political action but also of birthing an imaginative effort to move beyond the Covid-19 crisis and to construct a more ethical cultural system and a fairer working environment.

During spring 2020, we had the chance to conduct in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation around the birth of the informal group of actors and actresses, "Attrici e attori uniti – A2U". In addition, we considered the experiences of the collective of actresses "Amleta" that was born as A2U's working group on gender inequalities in the sector and which later became an independent collective that was especially active in the digital sphere. Starting from the data collected during the mentioned period, the following sections consider how workers who were not organised before the pandemic collectively mobilised, how emotions contributed to the construction of collective practices, and which roles social media played in the pandemic context of mobilisations.

3. The case of "Attrici e attori uniti – A2U"

The birth of A2U is strictly related to the consequences felt by the performing arts' sector after the Covid-19 outbreak. During the first days of March 2020, a group of actors from Milan opened a Telegram channel which, in just a few weeks, reached more than 2000 members – mainly actors based in Milan but also in other Italian regions.

The channel was initially meant to be a space for self-help among workers on issues that had never been faced before. Thus, a large part of A2U's activities can be described as informational. At first, group members shared their experiences of unlawful dismissals or virtuous behaviour of production's enterprises in the Telegram channel. Later, participants started to collect and share documentation on the National Contract of Live Show Workers (CCNLS), along with journal articles talking about their conditions and quantitative data on the working days they had lost. Day after day, the Telegram channel witnessed the growth of a sort of pandemic archive of the sector that, subsequently, was re-organised and moved into a Google Drive folder. With the same aim of informing colleagues, two online encounters were organised with unionists to explain to workers about their rights and answer their questions. The emergency rules established by the National Contract and the difficulties in tackling the needs of self-employed and project-based workers – who were at this point excluded from social benefits – formed the core discussions on the chat. During my interviews with workers and activists emerged the need to raise awareness of labour related topics and the central work of informal groups during the pandemic.

> Sadly, I have to admit that I am discovering some rights and matters of my category only now […] I had done gigs where I could have spoken out more, let my voice be heard, but I wasn't able to do it, I was ashamed, I didn't know my rights. During this quarantine I am discovering those rights; it could sound funny because I am 30 years old. (Fulvio)

> Before it was the far-West and with few awareness. I have always delegated to our manager all the choices in term of contracts and so on. In this moment for me, and for everyone, is a moment of realisation, I had always hated those things, but I started to study. (Sybilla)

Thus, the condition of forced unemployment and the birth of informal groups that shared both workers' experiences and information about workers' rights and law rules through digital media had a strong impact on the self-perception of subjects who were used to living their working experience in an individualised way.

Apart from the mutual help on bureaucratic matters, the need to pursue a collective reflection among the workers' sector and to enact political actions in the public sphere also emerged. Thus, a second area of activities that we identify is related to communicative actions aimed at making performing artists' struggles visible in the public sphere. An initial digital campaign began on 18th April around an ad-hoc illustration of Zerocalcare, a well-known cartoonist in Italy, which drew attention on the issues faced by workers in the performing arts sector during the pandemic.

Picture 1: Zerocalcare's illustration published online on 23rd April 2020
https://m.facebook.com/momoedizioni/photos/a.616087665562675/858223294682443/?type=3&source=57&__tn__=EH-R

After a few days, the group opened a Facebook page and shared a public announcement about the birth of the group and its mission and collected more than 10,000 signatures on the website change.org to draw Government and institutional attention to the sector. At the beginning of May, the group launched their first digital campaign – in the activists' words a "flash mobile", playing with the meaning of flash mob – named *Tiriamo fuori la voce* where

actors and supporters could share a short video of themselves miming the Italian poem "*L'Infinito*" and sharing a paper sign asking the Ministry of Culture to be heard and listened to. The choice of the poem and the hashtag was deliberate to mock an initiative of the Ministry of Culture called *La cultura non si ferma* ('Culture does not stop') where performers were invited to conduct online activities, an initiative that the activists condemned and mocked with the intention of drawing attention to workers' issues. Allowing actors not involved in the group's organisation and their supporters to participate and prepare their video according to the preestablished format allowed the action to cross the borders of the sector.

Picture 2: "Tiriamo fuori la voce" campaign, image taken from A2U's public Facebook page https://it-it.facebook.com/attriciattoriuniti/photos/a.111184257241273/119353589757673/?type=3andtheater

The use of participatory practices is a characteristic of A2U's activities. Soon after its birth, activists constructed several sub-groups where they could meet in smaller groups with the

possibility to discuss specific themes such as gender-related matters, an under 30 years old discussion group, and relations and collaborations with other activists. Furthermore, A2U made use of auto-enquiries instruments such as Google Survey not only to map the profiles of the activists – as the Milanese collective Macao did during the mobilisation of the creative sector, 2011-2016 (Cossu and Murru 2015; Giorgi 2014) – but also as instrument of consensus investigation on hot topics in the absence of face to face encounters between activists. Thus, the surveys were shared on the Telegram channel and activists were requested to fill in the forms before a certain date. The results were then presented during plenary meetings and used as a basis for discussion, becoming an instrument for experimenting with direct democracy through digital practices. Furthermore, A2U openly reflected on democratic methods for organization and on consensus-led decision-making processes. Some issues emerged during coordinated actions with other activist groups since A2U's decision-making processes took longer due to the group's horizontal practices. As an activist reported with regard to the possibility of publishing a collective statement with other groups mobilised in the sector:

> It was born as actors united, a process of self-determination and awareness. We have 12 working groups and every time we have to go back, it takes a long time to publish our statements; collective writing it is hard but also a necessity. (Fieldnotes)

Therefore, as "A2U needs the timing of horizontality which other groups don't have" (Fieldnotes), A2U claims the need for a participatory approach that is carried on through collective writing processes on shared Google Docs, a horizontal decision-making process and the use of surveys among members. The choice of horizontal processes, as emerges from the quotations, presented some limitations, especially when the group worked together with other activist formations that did not need the same amount of time to evaluate and validate actions or political proposals.

> We were ready to sign a standard statement that was right for everyone. When even just one sentence is added, we need to talk about it, ask people to vote on it and then come back to the meeting; last time we managed to do it in 24 hours. (Interview with activist, S.)

Community building, cooperation and a horizontal approach therefore become central to distinguishing A2U's approach to political activities. The participatory approach transpires also from the absence of formal criteria for membership. Thus, self-presenting as an actor was enough to be admitted to working tables and to participate in the group's activities. However, some problems about membership arose, especially in such a widely fragmented sector. Several participants had double careers or diversified their activity in other sectors' of the performing arts, for example as technician or organisers, or even outside the sector, as several directors are also actors. Furthermore, the hybrid condition of actors who work as self-employed and employees also entails cases where actors are employers, of themselves or of other actors, as in the case of *compagnie* with the legal form of cooperatives or associations.

> I am also an employer, inside A2U, all the people like me, what are they? We are several and, in these discussions, we ask: "Should we go out since we also are employers?" (Interview with activist, S.)

> I started to participate in the meetings, then the worktables took off, then there were people sneaking in that don't do this job, self-styled actors and you say: "I can't fight for these people" and I had a moment of revulsion, and lastly, I started to work with the gender group. (Marianna)

Criteria for membership are inclusive and oriented in a direction of tolerance towards subjects who do not deviate from a perceived group standard. In the excerpts above, the tension around the coexistence of actors' employees and employers is explicit and there have also been moments of discussion for example around the presence of semi-professional actors and on the possibility of defining a criterion to only include professionals. Several activists, as Marianna remarks, considered the participation of semi-professional actors a

condition that could possibly weaken the sectors, but these positions remained in the minority.

> Well, last time there was this very funny thing… there was *** [*Famous Actress*] talking with a guy that does circus on the road. I find it something remarkable, I thought that it is something that I will tell to posterity because there has never been seen such heterogeneity, but it is a good thing. (Interview with funder, D.)

Thus, despite the difficulty of keeping a widely diversified group together, activists never chose to restrict entry and participation in the group's activities. As seen in the excerpt above, there is a tendency to prefer and value inclusivity over homogeneity and the possibility of including actors with different backgrounds appears to be seen as an added value to the groups' activities.

From the fieldwork emerged a generalised need for change, variously described through a critique of economic logics governing the cultural sector, approached from an ethical and philosophical point of view as well as from its material side. The following note was taken during an online meeting in the last days of March 2020:

> Besides speaking of money, this situation invites us to let emerge deep and hidden matters, to ask us what our purpose as human beings is and to question the 'normality' that we were used to before this emergency, because it was exactly that normality that was the problem. (Fieldnotes)

Since the first collective statement of the group published on 20th April, the mission of the activities conducted was intended to go beyond the emergency situation towards a generalised restructuring of the inequalities and unfairness of the sector.

> In our system, by now theatre are companies, act like enterprises and think about profit […] It is clear that it will continue to go on like this, but this moment can be a moment of reflection on several productive dynamics and a moment of new sights on a different future, I know that it wouldn't happen, but maybe a little different. (Interview with group funder, M.)

However, as emerged from the interviews, activists are often uncertain of the possibility of success and display a certain ambiguity towards the possibility of achieving their results.

> This work needs an ethic; we can't exclude it, or it becomes a jungle where everyone tries to obtain their small result, but this is what allowed the system to prosper on this individualism that is part of the actors. […] Now things are changing, and we must give ourselves a rule for the future, this is the occasion to reflect and concretely pose questions in order to change things. (Interview with group funder, P.)

> This feeling of isolation, of fragmentation, that everyone works for themselves, and the others are potentially enemies, or they aren't at your side, it does not help to create community, the intention to create community. (Interview with activist, V.)

Despite the ambiguity, the fieldwork underlines the challenge that A2U's practices pose to individualised processes at work. In the excerpts quoted, desocialisation instances characteristic of the contemporary ethos of work are explicitly rejected. It emerges that the community of colleagues and processes of solidarity are called into question in their potentiality to challenge and change practices that are considered "unethical". Although the group gathered around urgent emerging matters of the absence of work and subsidies, the reflection questioned the whole entertainment system in its exploitative mechanisms. Among the sub-groups, the young actors questioned the elitism of certain auditions and the role of agencies in determining aspirants' access to recruitment processes; the one dedicated to improving ethical practices in the sector reflected on fostering dialogue between employers and employees; and one was specifically dedicated to communicating with the unions to help them in their actions. Thus, the mobilisation was configured as an occasion to broadly reflect on the sector's practices, building awareness among members but also trying to reflect on how to forge a fairer working environment. From the personal refusal of individualistic logics of competition, collective demands for basic income for the sector and the opening of a bridge between unions and activists has been constructed during recent months.

During socially distanced times and forced unemployment, collective activities emerge as a way out of social isolation, especially for younger professional who had not yet been able to construct their own personal networks. Several participants and activists reported strong feelings of well-being in having the opportunity to share with colleagues personal experiences of work and discovering the collective nature of those same issues, generating a sense of community outside of individualisation.

> I entered the chat through a friend, he told me about this group. Several friends of mine from City were already part of the group and I decided to join as well. (Interview with activist, B.)

> Some friends and colleagues told me about this group […] I started step by step, with my timing a bit shy but I started to participate in the discussion, and I start to meet many women, many sisters that I really admire at a professional level […] It was a moment in my life where I felt lonely, especially in the professional field, without guidance […] This kind of path helps me to feel less lonely. (Philippa)

As the excerpts suggest, subjects entered the mobilisation for personal and professional relations. Activists mostly knew each other, sometimes from long associations, and sometimes they got to know each other during the meetings, which allowed the relevance of emotional ties and positive experiences of mobilisation to emerge.

> This time there is the occasion, everyone seems ready to participate, to be responsible for what is their work, their job, because they see it taken away, this is simple. But fine, maybe this time there will be the possibility to construct something durable, that will last, because people then turn off, when their problems seem solved […] but on this occasion, it seems to me that it has to be used to our advantage, to create an awareness in the working category. (Interview with founder, M.)

As the excerpt suggests, group members seemed to be aware of the contingent nature of the gathering and already imagined a slow dispersion among group members. Although it would be ideal to construct a long-lasting movement, as the interviewee remarks, the primary goal was to raise awareness in the sector. In the pandemic environment, digital technologies are

the medium that allow for the very existence of community instances and that provide the opportunity to reach people beyond the everyday circles of acquaintances.

> The fact the people were at home, the fact that they were losing money. This digital media, platforms for meeting, it has helped a lot, we had never seen as actors in the last years a similar assembly with 300 people. (Interview with group funder, P. 39)

Social media and communication networks such as Telegram and Instagram and online platforms for meeting have configured a digital space that not only facilitates the organisation of collective actions but also allows for the practise of care and community building in an exceptional moment of struggle. While the core of A2U's activities is connected to the weekly meetings among the thematic sub-groups, the Telegram chat remained an open and free space for members to share thoughts, reflections, and emotions about the present moment, either related or to the working category or not. Despite the centrality of digital tools, the construction of mobilisation did not get lost in the digital space but, in this case, was able to translate the community efforts (when restrictions permitted) into live encounters of demonstration. On 30th May, several groups of activists variously connected with the cultural world organised a live demonstration in Milan's Duomo Square without forgetting to enact practices of care and safety related to the need to avoid Covid-19 contagion.

Picture 3: Image of 30th May demonstration in Duomo Square, Milan taken by the author

In Picture 3, activists decided to draw a circle and to stand in it for the duration of the demonstration. While it could be seen as a practice in contradiction with the physical closeness of traditional parades, where individuals experience becoming a collective in physical terms, the activists negotiated a context changed by Covid-19, finding a way to conjugate collective demonstration and individual safety. Furthermore, the image of many small circles coming together can be regarded as a paradigmatic configuration of the present mobilisation where individualised experiences of workers, in their differences, managed to gather and construct collective spaces of cooperation and community.

4. The case of "Amleta"

Among the several working groups that activists constituted inside A2U, *tavolo di genere* was dedicated to thematising gender inequalities in the entertainment industry and constituted only by actresses. After a few months of encounters within A2U's structure, the group decided to become autonomous, although individual activists could still be involved in A2U's activities. After this separation, Amleta became an informal collective, subsequently constituted into association (in December 2020), devoted to challenging gender inequalities in the performing arts. The group was formed by 28 activists who were also in charge of the management committee; supporters were invited to become members of the association, and it collected more than 300 subscriptions in its first months of activity. The following reflection is based on an ethnographic observation of Amleta's digital activities on Instagram between October 2020 and June 2021 and on interviews with activists.

Amleta's activities can be divided into two strictly interrelated areas: i) external-oriented activities, which entails the elaboration of digital content on women in performing arts that is shared on social media and networking activities with other associations and groups active in the performing arts and against gender-based violence; and ii) internal activities, which consist of organisation and coordination of meetings, weekly encounters between members, an internal Telegram channel, the collection of data and materials on gender inequalities in performing arts, and the organisation of private seminars.

Post 1: 15th October 2020. Translation: Mapping of female presence in National Theatres and Theatres of relevant cultural interest: https://www.instagram.com/p/CGXCRMhBPa8/?igshid=1wr5o1h14pj86

When Covid-19 first appeared, Amleta's activists – at the time under the label of *tavolo di genere* – decided to devote their energies to mapping women's presence in Italian theatres and giving a brief preview of their results to A2U's plenary assembly. The complete survey was publicly announced in October 2020 when their IG page was opened (as shown in **Post 1**). Apart from producing and sharing auto-produced content on gender inequalities, activists elaborated biographical notes of women variously related with the entertainment industry and also disseminated news about women's achievements in the showbusiness industry (see **Post 2**). Such activities can be considered practices of informational activism and archiving from below, where activists acknowledge the lack of cultural elaboration surrounding women

in the professional field and decide to react by creating their own h(er)stories (McKinney 2020). Thus, Amleta produces and circulates knowledge on the sector from a feminist standpoint.

Post 2: 17th June 2021. Translation: We have directors! Lella Costa, Serena Sinigaglia and Mariangela Pitturru direct Carcano Theatre Centre for Contemporary Art: https://www.instagram.com/p/CQN5gjKIn60/?utm_medium=share_sheet

Adopting communicative actions from international feminist movements, Amleta launched an email address dedicated to collecting denunciations of sexual abuses in the workplace and dedicated a part of its IG activity to openly speaking out against discriminatory practices in the showbusiness environment. Thus, the Biennale Teatro 2021 was criticised because of its cultural proposals along lines of race – all white – and gender – all males.

As underlined in the case of A2U, in this case as well, the online encounters between activists during Covid-19 were deeply connected with positive feelings of community practice and virtual proximity.

> Nowadays I have every day something to do for Amleta and I am so very happy to do it, everything has more sense in this way. (Interview with activist, F.)

The changes brought by the pandemic pertained not only to the professional domain but have also invested women's intimate dimension and their experiences of care and domestic work (Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen 2020). Such sudden shifts in everyday life caused the group of actresses to start an intimate exchange online. Creating a mailing list and a weekly online encounter allowed women not only to share experiences of discrimination and violence in the workplace but also to create a sense of community and emotional support during the pandemic. Through the use of the Telegram chat and weekly online encounters, women had the opportunity not only to share experiences of discrimination and violence in the workplace but also to overcome individualised feelings of grief and shame.

> This activity [Amleta] directs my path, it is also a matter of an individual path that is becoming collective. (Interview with activist, M.)

If the present mobilisation of the category can be considered exceptional in terms of numbers and claims, the actresses' campaign created a genuine sense that something was happening : "We have always been aware of gender inequalities, but the theme is coming up now. As it is happening for work, it is thanks to the movement that has taken place in the last year and a half" (Fieldnotes). In this case, it seems that the perfect moment for the protest to emerge was made possible by the combination of digital infrastructures and by actresses' lack of ability to work. Moreover, Amleta's online campaign fighting for the use of inclusive language in the job market and the workplace and its commitment to denouncing sexist and discriminatory practices, along with other feminist-inspired activist groups, can be framed

into a broader struggle for equality and social justice. Producing and circulating their own information about the sector is a way to resist and challenge the ways in which showbusiness is depicted in current narratives as well as the dominant sexist organisational structure that characterises it. Thus, Amleta produced a handbook of ten rules for safe auditions in a labour market characterised by informal dynamics, where practices of harassment and cheating are normalised. This work is not only a valuable tool for workers and producers but also a direct challenge to the sexism that has permeated the sector. Thus, spreading awareness about malpractice in the workplace is a communicative and political action challenging the status quo and allowing women to move their experiences from an individualised understanding towards a systemic and collective level.

5. Discussion: Emotions and affect in artists' mobilisations during Covid-19

The present chapter has considered actors' practices of resistance that emerged during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through online and offline ethnographic observation and interviews has emerged the dramatic relevance of the changes that the performing arts' sector has been through since the beginning of March 2020. In this context, the mobilisation of a category of workers that was not mobilised prior to the pandemic has been taken into account. The analysis of A2U and Amleta's activities seeks to contribute to the study of collective mobilisations in cultural and creative work environments during Covid-19, underscoring the relevance of emotions and social media in shaping such mobilisation.

The first contribution of this chapter relates to the role of Covid-19 in triggering a novel type of mobilisation in the performing arts environment. During spring 2020, workers could share

their conditions of forced unemployment without any concrete prospect of returning to work soon and the consequences of the fragmentation of working contracts in the sector. The exploitative and precarising mechanisms of work that were well know but often publicly unspoken suddenly became openly discussed and challenged in a context whereby Covid-19 was highlighting various existing inequalities. The forced unemployment and the dramatic social impact of the pandemic formed the conditions for what Veronica Gago (2020) conceptualises as "assembly" which, in its aura of exceptionality, generates affective power. Workers' mobilisation collectively challenged neoliberal models of autonomy and competition and made an effort to give birth to cooperative practices. In recent years, the performing arts' sector has had the opportunity to provide space and time to open an internal confrontation and to engage with inequalities. Thus, collective mobilisation processes were gathered around the issue of work and subsidies, but the reflections that were carried out questioned the whole system of the entertainment industry and its mechanisms of exploitation. Both acts of collective resistance such the demand for a pandemic basic income and micro-practices of reconciliation with the unions have been employed with the intent to challenge current individualised and neoliberal working environment. Furthermore, the fieldwork conducted illustrated the role of democratic and horizontal practices as a method of community building, becoming a constitutive part of a group's action in political and social terms. Recent studies have underlined the role of horizontal decision-making in relation to workers' cooperatives (Mondon-Navazo et al. 2021; Murgia and de Heusch 2020) in activists' practices in Italy (Cossu 2018; Maddanu 2018) and abroad (Flesher Fominaya 2007), emphasising the organisational limitations of such approaches. From the analysis conducted, the group seems to be characterised by broad and tolerant criteria for membership, essentially being part of the entertainment industry and being willing to participate and contribute to the group's activities. To the extent that a certain degree of conflict and contrast seem to be

accepted, the experience of A2U resonates with scholars' reflection on collective identity as a network of immanent relations with loose entrance barriers (Melucci 1995). Thus emerges a mobilisation framework where individualised subjects gather together and, maintaining their specificity, can perform collective actions in an environment in which, in turn, individuals' identities are affected (Farro et al. 2014). Regarding individuals' stances, interviews with activists sometimes expressed the difficulty in imagining a different working environment, an ambiguous attitude peculiar to contemporary attempts of resistance (Norbäck 2021), but also marking the necessity of trying to act collectively.

The second contribution of the chapter pertains to the role of emotions in the construction of collective practices. Thus, the sudden changes in social conditions brought on by the pandemic have had a central role in fostering feelings of solidarity and emotional attachment to the community of reference. While Veronica Gago describes the assembly's functioning "as the specific site of the strike's formulation, time and again. It is the kitchen where it is prepared" (2020:155), in the case described, the Covid-19 outbreak – alongside the forced social distancing and unemployment experienced by actors and actresses – is the kitchen in which collective action has been prepared. On top of forced unemployment and the impossibility to foresee a return to work, feelings of loneliness, isolation and fear have also been fostered by the pandemic and by social distancing measures enacted by governments. Alongside the exclusion of a proportion of workers from social benefits, emotions can be considered part of subjective rationales for involvement in collective action. Community help and informational activists' practices have pushed individualised experiences to recognise their existence in collective and shared terms, pushing workers out of isolation into a chain of emotional contagion fundamental to recruit and involve new members (Castells, 2015; Gerbaudo, 2016). Thus, the emotional involvement of activists emerges as central to the

mobilisation (Melucci 1995). If, according to Richard Sennett (2000; 1998), contemporary fragmented workers have difficulties in seeing and narrating the commonality of their condition, it is possible to state that the Covid-19 pandemic – at least in the performing arts – has been a common narrative point for workers that allowed them to recognise themselves as part of the same history. Furthermore, the analysis conducted underlined the relevance of personal and professional ties and of a positive emotional experience for subjects in their mobilisation (Flesher Fominaya 2010). Thus, emotions are configured as resources both for mobilisation and for subjectivation processes, connecting private and collective everyday experiences (Melucci 1996; Rebughini and Scribano 2018).

A third contribution of the chapter pertains to a reflection on the role of digital spaces of interaction during current mobilisation processes. The fieldwork shows that digital environments allow for the encounter of activists and that digital tools help with participatory practices and the sharing of ideas. In the case of A2U, social media and digital environments are not only an instrument for internal activities of activist but also a mean to enhance the visibility of the protest in the public sphere. In this sense, digital campaigns contribute to both construct a sense of collective action and collective identity among activists behind the screens and to spread the protesters messages. Furthermore, activists were able to mobilise knowledge and expertise related with their professional activities in the cultural and creative sector in order to make the most out of their media communicative activities. However, as soon as it was possible, A2U's activities soon moved into live spaces of interaction enabling activists to experience physical proximity and materialise their protest. Together with other groups of performers mobilised in the city, collective actions have been elaborated into a more traditional field of struggle that saw the participation of unions and workers in a series of sit-in and live protest events. Thus, the analysis has shown where the experiences of A2U

and Amleta tend to diverge. If, in the first case, activists followed a mobilising path oriented towards building a synergy with unions and carrying on working category's demands, in the case of Amleta, digital communication became the main field of struggle for gender equality and social networks the medium through which awareness was raised in the professional field.

A last reflection pertains to the possible future of the presented collective effort. Given that we are still in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and that events are evolving rapidly, it is difficult to foresee what will happen next. The fieldwork demonstrated the contingent nature of the mobilisation as well as its heterogeneity as a constitutive element of the gathering alongside material difficulties connected with spontaneous and informal activism, such as the burden of voluntary work. However, the radical contingent of the protest, if framed in an everchanging context, does not diminish its value. Activists and workers who had the chance to join the mobilisation experienced solidarity and community, as well as the meaning of being part of a professional category, with the possibility of deepening their knowledge of the legislative framework behind their working activities and, moreover, they had the opportunity to distance themselves from individual responsibility and competition. Peer discussions emerge as key not only for the development of collective action but also for enhancing practices of solidarity (Hirsch, 1990). In this sense, during their time in the mobilisation, activists result to be transformed in their way of acting and interpreting the world (Zhelnina, 2021). All conditions that are exceptional in a neoliberalised and fragmented framework of work. Thus emerges the complementarity and the centrality, as Flesher Fominaya pointed out (2010), of both latent and visible moments of collective action in elaborating alternative subjectivities and social change. To conclude, the Covid-19 pandemic create the premise for a collective reflection in which workers and activists have the

possibility to frame individualisation outside of individualistic terms but towards an integration with community and solidarity practices (Colombo et al. 2021).

Conclusions

The dissertation explored creative workers' subjectivation processes in a neoliberal and post-Fordist context where notions of entrepreneurship and self-realisation are intertwined with radical insecurity. A portion of the research was conducted after the outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020 and the analysis has embraced contingent aspects of workers' experience as well as structural dynamics. The empirical research aimed at deepening the community's knowledge on performing artists' contemporary experiences of life and work and to account for the effects of Covid-19. In this sense, the study contributes to expand the sociological field of studies on creative workers and on subjectivities formations in neoliberal and pandemic times. With this intent, we developed an ethnographic fieldwork that focused on working conditions, professional experiences and workers' subjectivities in their interaction with discursive practices permeating the contemporary environment of work. In the past three years, we collected data from live and digital spaces where we performed 40 in-depth interviews with workers, 10 interviews with field experts and activists and participated in online and offline meetings. The main contribution of this work pertains the study of the embodied subjectivation processes at stake in performing arts work considering discursive features of neoliberal ethos of work, workplace power relations and subjects' practices of resistance.

The thesis structure has been elaborated with the aim of opening a dialogue with different theoretical and empirical contributions. Firstly, studies on cultural and creative industries are illustrated, letting emerge the main features of the different research streams that have researched into the economic and cultural aspects of cultural production. Secondly, contributions in the field of social theory are taken into account with regard to the subject's position, considering both contemporary processes of individualisation and precarisation

alongside with subjects' individual and collective possibilities of resistance. The empirical results, preceded by the description of the research context and of the methodology adopted, are focused on the analysis of research participants' discursive elaborations, taking into account entrepreneurial narratives of work as well as everyday power relations permeating working experiences. Lastly, the transformations that followed the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic are considered in relation with ongoing collectivisation processes that are taking place in the performing arts.

In the following pages, the research's contributions are summarised and inserted in a dialogue with theoretical insights. The main results of the ethnographic fieldwork are discussed alongside a reflection on subjective and intersubjective experiences of contemporary work.

The affective meaning of contemporary work

During the past decade, scholars' analysis in the field of cultural and creative work have often evoked the centrality of passion and commitment to characterise cultural workers' identity formation processes (McRobbie, 2016; Umney and Kretsos, 2015). In this sense, creative workers' passionate attitudes have been regarded either optimistically as fostering value creation and innovation (Ellmeier, 2003; Florida, 2002) or as the core of mechanisms of self-exploitation and false consciousness (McRobbie, 2016). In this thesis, we argue that the radical transformations in the meaning of work brought by the post-Fordist reorganisation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007) have been followed by processes of aestheticization and romanticisation of working activities that discursively construct the workplace as spaces of self-realisation and subjectivation (Farrugia, 2021). The language of affects and emotions seem to have culturally overcome the one of instrumental rationality in describing and

signifying the domain of work and career (Gregg, 2011). These transformations in the meaning of work are cultural processes particularly evident in creative professional environment because of the explicit romanticisation that features artistic professions. Furthermore, in the sector analysed these tendencies are, in our opinion, even more significant since actors embed their own work both bodily and emotionally. In such context, passion is not anymore configured as an individual quality or an attribute but rather as an affective stance necessary to face contemporary labour market which needs to be cultivated and enhanced in order to allow the subjects for self-actualisation. Thus, it appears that the discursive meaning of work has shifted from monetary compensation towards the intimate domain of love and passion. The subjective understanding of the experience of work values personal growth and emotional satisfaction over monetary rewards. The relevance of intimacy, ambitions and commitment configures a space where the borders of working activities blur and eventually vanish in embracing every activity as eventually significant and useful to increase subjects' potentials.

The goal of being actualised seem to pass, in the current narratives of work, through the simultaneous coexistence of labour and leisure (Sandoval, 2018; Tokumitsu, 2014). In this context, narratives on the concrete working practices appear to be absent from discursive formations on work and career, especially in the case of artistic activities that "per se" have been historically both romanticised and (as a consequence) considered *semi*-working activities. Young actors' aspirations and desires are built into an aestheticised discursive framework around creative work that can, eventually, clash with an everyday working practice where material articulations and working conditions are increasingly precarised.

Considering contemporary socialisation as a highly reflexive activity where self-expression and self-realisation are experienced as injunctions (Honneth, 2004), this study configures

self-discovery as a consistent motivation for engaging in working activity. Thus, work emerges as the central part of the contemporary reflexive project of the self (Farrugia, 2021). On the one hand, self-care and self-improvement are subjectivising processes able to generate value at work (Scharff, 2016), especially in the case of performers where subjects' body, emotions and affects are inextricably involved in the act of acting. On the other hand, self-monitoring and reflexive practices aimed at evaluating and understanding their personal path which are intimately related to their social positionings (Allen et al., 2013; Banks, 2017a; Gill, 2014).

In this thesis, rather than looking at passion and self-expression as sugar pills of contemporary creative workers, we consider the discursive constructions that permeate the field and the shifted meanings of the working experience from mean to end of the subjective reflexive project. In such a context, passion does not operate in a vacuum but in connection with emotional, affective and aspirational stances that eventually construct working activities as the elected space for subjects' self-realisation.

Workers' subjectivities between entrepreneurship and precariousness

The intimate connection between work and self-realisation seems to fit particularly well with the demands of contemporary neoliberal capitalist environments. On the one hand, it has been noted that neoliberal policies construct individualised workers as autonomous self-entrepreneurs focused on increasing their human capital in a competitive environment (Feher, 2009; Rose, 2005). On the other hand, several scholars underlined that self-identification with working activities can trigger self-precarisation dynamics and the acceptance of poor working conditions in exchange for personal realisation (Armano et al.,

2017; Lorey, 2015). However, from the research conducted, it emerges that, far from being passive victims of false consciousness, workers engage in ongoing self-reflexive activities aimed at operating career choices coherent with both affective and economic desires. The intertwining between precarious and entrepreneurial stances is complex, informed by lived experiences and oriented toward a negotiation of artistic aims and economic needs. It emerges that the conceptualisation of work as source of self-realisation can confront the logics of neoliberal capitalism, moving beyond monetary compensation and enhanced competition. Anti-economic values together with bohemian and artistic activity can, on the one hand, match entrepreneurial and individualised logics of work but, on the other hand, they can also offer an alternative ethical system based on socially oriented aims. Thus, despite the attention that scholars have granted to the reproduction of neoliberal discourses in the creative and cultural sectors, workers engage in an ongoing reflexive practice whose outcomes exceed monetary oriented logics and comprehends ethically oriented aims (Alacovska, 2020; Banks, 2006). As the experience of Covid-19 pandemic shows, becoming entrepreneurs of the self is indeed the normalised and institutionalised discourse in the field but is not the only subjectivising instance at stake. Rather, it emerges the relevance of continuous changing processes involving not only institutional determinants but also affective and relational network where subjects are embedded (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008). Thus, a dynamic and creative potential is generated from subjects everyday experiences of the world (Braidotti, 2006c).

The normalisation of precariousness in life and work can draw subjects close to individualised aims and entrepreneurial projects (McRobbie, 2016). Looking for the possibility to exert control over their career paths, entrepreneurial projects are often considered a necessity (Sennett, 1998) more than a neoliberal vitalistic stance of autonomy

(Florida, 2002). Contemporary discursive formations about work appear to generate contradictory stances, causing both emotional suffering and deep feelings of attachments. Furthermore, facing insecurity and precariousness in everyday life can be highly costly in emotional and social terms. Despite several scholars pointed at the future oriented attitudes of creative workers (Kuehn and Corrigan, 2013; Neff, 2012; Ross, 2004), in the examined case future seem to be absent from subjects narratives. While scholars in the Anglo-Saxon context tend to consider precariousness as a temporary condition, from the presented research, it emerges the impossibility to imagine an end of uncertainties. The accent posed on positive entrepreneurial and aspirational attitudes (Duffy, 2016; Scharff, 2016) is questioned by feelings of disempowerment characteristic of precarious experiences (Armano et al., 2017). Furthermore, the passage between youth and adulthood, traditionally concretised by the funding of a new family and home ownership, appears to remain unfulfilled in cultural workers experiences (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008; Umney and Kretsos, 2015). Discursive injunctions about typical qualities of youth, such as enthusiasm and creativity, are inserted in contemporary narratives of creative and cultural work and workers are asked to perform as if they were in an eternal youth, without assuming the consequences and the needs of adulthood (Farrugia, 2021). In this sense, it appears that subjects' possibilities of realisation as workers are constructed as the only possible and legitimate way of self-realisation. Instead, desires of self-fulfilment through activities of care, family life and interdependence are excluded from the discursive spaces (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

Relational practices and the role of luck in career progression: questioning entrepreneurial logics

Relational and self-promotional practices have been considered fundamental in creative work and central for the construction of neoliberal entrepreneurial subjects (Mäkinen, 2012; Scharff, 2015). However, they have also been analysed in relation with precarisation processes permeating cultural and creative workers' environment (Duffy and Pooley, 2019; Ursell, 2000). In a context characterised by informal recruitment practices, in order to reach visibility and generate working opportunities workers are often exposed to poorly paid working activities and employers' blackmail. Here, workers are involved in the reproduction of self-branding narratives and in the adoption of cheerful and positive attitudes. If, on the one hand, developing a "neoliberal set of feeling rules" (Gill and Orgad, 2018: 490; Hochschild, 1979) is central to face in the labour market, on the other hand, subjects engage reflexively with emotional requests. Considering the disciplinary role of precariousness and uncertainties on the workplace (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017), workers often challenge self-branding discourses and refuse to perform emotions outside of their space of authenticity. Thus, the role of personal values and work ethics needs to be reconsidered in cultural workers experiences (Alacovska, 2018, 2020) as well as daily acts of micro-resistance (Norbäck, 2021). Furthermore, the system's capacity to recognise and valorise hard work and talent is often questioned in relation to the relevance of public relations and cheerful dispositions in gaining employment opportunities. In the narratives collected, luck and chance seem to have substitute meritocracy and hard work as means to explain professional recognition and career success. Creative work's discourses often fail to acknowledge the role of social and cultural capitals in careers' construction creative (Gill, 2014; Gill and Orgad, 2018) but, instead, research participants stressed the relevance of these same resources in their everyday experiences of work. Despite aestheticized narratives of work (Duffy and Hund, 2015), feeling of precariousness led to experience the impossibility to impact on social reality, paving the way for the consideration of luck as the main driver of career outputs.

Dismantling contemporary constructions surrounding meritocracy and hard work could challenge the discursive basis of neoliberal ethics of work and represent a hint of resistance (Norbäck, 2021). Immersed in a context of radical insecurity, it seems that reflexive practices are not anymore sufficient to grant subjects with the possibility to master reality (Lash, 1993), especially in relation with time and life course (Rosa 2013). Thus, subjectivation processes operate inside the contradictions of the self-reflexive efforts needed to construct a meaningful biography (Beck, 1992) and the radical precariousness of the environment in individual, social, political and environmental terms (Butler, 2004).

Bodies and emotions at work: glimpses of freedom and constraints

Considering the relation between workers' self and body on the workplace as central for subjectivation processes (Wacquant, 1995), the reflections presented are guided by contributions of feminist literature on bodies and emotions (Grosz, 1994; Hochschild, 1983) and look at the individual dimension of collective experiences. From the data collected it emerges the difficulty in separating workers' emotions and aesthetics from their positioning in the labour market. Since physical appearance and workers personality are part of the selection process, the cultivation of emotional and aesthetic qualities is a fundamental work (Mears, 2011). Thus, cultural categorisations merge with institutional artistic rules and aesthetic canons, impacting on career possibilities (Dean, 2005). Scholars have highlighted workers' use of their "unique selling points" to gain competitive advantages on the labour market (Scharff, 2015: 101), however, subjects' emotional and affective efforts in embodying their working activities need to be considered beyond instrumental rationality's scopes. Categorisations emerge to be lived out and solved on an individual level but occasionally

subjects share reflections on the structural nature of this matters (Beck, 1992). Furthermore, the context of performing arts appear to be a workplace structured around an ideal male actor and, at the same time, its cultural products are similarly imagined for satisfying a male spectator. Women underrepresentation in the sector pertains both gender unbalances and discriminatory practices in the working environment but also the level of society's cultural representation. To this regard, age and gender result to be central variables of employment opportunities in an environment where positions of power are mostly occupied by old males. In a context of autonomous and project-based work, actors and actresses are responsible for finding their working engagements and negotiating their salaries. Power asymmetries strongly emerge from this configuration of the field and, as the #Me Too movement brought to light (Hillstrom, 2018), ambiguity and harassment are unfortunately common. From the interviews collected, research participants tend to enact individualised solutions, enhancing their confidence and resilience (Gill and Orgad, 2015, 2018). However, during Covid-19 outburst in March 2020, actresses started to engage in collective practices of resistance towards gender discrimination and violence on the workplace. In this sense, it appears that the pandemic, despite having worsen women's positions in the public and private sphere (Özkazanç-Pan and Pullen, 2020; Yavorsky et al., 2021), gave actresses time and space to take action and speak out against malpractices and harassment. Actresses' experiences in Amleta collective point at the relevance of intersubjective exchange for subjectivity construction and to the centrality of collective processes for questioning discrimination and inequality.

The Covid-19 outburst and performing artists' collective resistance

The emergence of Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 provided the research with the opportunity to observe how a category of workers that wasn't previously mobilised starts to enact collective practices. The exploitative and precarising mechanisms permeating the performative arts' sector became evident when, on the one hand, workers experienced a common condition of forced unemployment in the quasi absence of social benefits and, on the other hand, Covid-19 was expanding already present inequalities. The aura of exceptionality of such times made possible what has been theorised as assembly in feminist context of protest (Gago, 2020), witnessing the rise of several auto organised groups of workers in the entertainment sector all over Italy. In the context of "Attrici e attori uniti – A2U" mobilisation, our results show that workers challenge entrepreneurial models giving birth to cooperative and horizontal decision-making practices, demanding a pandemic basic income and reconciling artists' movements with traditional unions. Furthermore, the research presented points at the central role of emotions and affects for the mobilisation. In fact, on the one hand, Covid-19 emerges as a common narrative point for the biographical experiences of fragmented and individualised workers (Sennet, 2000) and, on the other hand, personal and affective ties result to be fundamental in the recruitment process (Castells, 2015). Peer discussions started around the absence of social benefits but became a broader process of collective reflection around performing arts' malfunctionings, that resulted in the transformation of activists' points of view and in enhancing collective solidarity (Hirsch, 1990; Zhelnina, 2021). Emotions have a fundamental role in allowing workers out of social isolation and to connect personal and individualised experiences into collective ones (Melucci 1996; Rebughini and Scribano 2018). In pandemic context where the everyday life forcefully moved in the online space, internet-based platforms have helped participatory practices and sharing opportunities for workers' movements. Social media in particular have enhanced the visibility of performing artists' protest in the mediatic space as well as activists'

network on the local and national level. Participating in online communication campaigns generated feelings of agency, effectiveness, and a sense of community among activists. Since the pandemic is still ongoing, it is difficult to foresee the future of performing arts' protests. After the first months of enthusiasm, the group has suffered from the burden of voluntary work on activists' time management, especially when theatres and show venues started to reopen. However, despite the uncertainties regarding the course and the outcomes of the protest, workers in the performing arts have been able to question the individualisation and exploitative mechanisms, letting emerge a collective sense of responsibility able to question the structural conditions that created insecurity and precarity. If the research underlines that the significance of work is nowadays inserted into a subjective domain of intimacy, the performing arts' movement that followed Covid-19 outbreak hints at the fact that individualisation is not a monodirectional process towards private individualism but that work can – still – be the arena for cooperative and collective subjectivities (Colombo et al., 2022).

Further developments

The presented research focuses on workers' individual experiences in the performing arts sector and contributes to current debates on cultural work by considering a context of work that has been largely overlooked by international scholars. Deepening the relation between performing artists and individualisation processes on the workplace, the research also contributes to the analysis of how subjects are created in and respond to contemporary discursive formations. Adopting an intersectional gaze to look at inequalities at work has given fruitful insights to our research but an exploration of social class and family

configurations in the career construction can be beneficial. Furthermore, the outburst of Covid-19 seems to have shrink the performative arts sector in its fundamentals stimulating a wide workers' response. Considering the emergence of new collective and informal movements has allowed the research to shed light on the ways in which previously unmobilised categories became involved in a pandemic mobilisation where emotions, affects and social media are central. Thus, notwithstanding scholars' longstanding emphasis on desocialisation processes in creative work, it emerges the necessity to (re)consider workers collective practices of resistance to the current institutionalised framework. In this sense, the research presented is not exhaustive of the many questions that are arising in a sector that is undergoing a deep transformation, especially after the outbreak of Covid-19 that has been shaping and will shape the future of performing arts, cultural and creative sectors and of work in a broader sense. Furthermore, on top of the usual constraints related to space and time in research development, the research project had also to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic effects on international mobility and ethnographic fieldwork. Thus, several aspects of performing artists' experiences of live and work could be enlightened through a research design that takes into account an international comparison among different institutional frameworks.

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