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# Director training and education: models from Brazil and the UK

Pedro de Senna , Bruce Adams and  
Adriana Schneider Alcure 

This paper presents a conversation that took place via Zoom on 6 September 2022, between Adriana Schneider Alcure and Bruce Adams, curated by Pedro de Senna. In it, Alcure and Adams discuss their experiences, respectively, at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and Middlesex University, London (MDX). Both universities offer BA courses in theatre directing, but follow very different models. Both universities also offer MAs in Theatre Arts (MDX) and ‘Artes da Cena’ (UFRJ), with similar interdisciplinary thea. Mediated by de Senna’s experience of both cultural contexts, Adams and Alcure talk about commonalities and differences, addressing two key pedagogical questions: in what ways can directing be taught, if at all? And: what is the role of theatre (and theatre directors) in society? The conversation is not directly transcribed, but edited and organised by de Senna, drawing on the themes explored, and addresses contemporary theatre director training from an intercultural perspective. The exchange touches on questions of academic and artistic labour, student cohorts, curriculum design, interdisciplinarity; and the relationship between ‘training’ and ‘education’, when it comes to the performing arts in general, and theatre directing in particular: are these terms even adequate? It is clear that these questions are imbricated with those relating to the purpose of, and access to, the arts and education more broadly, in societies that, while very different, have more in common than might at first be acknowledged.

**Keywords:** University, theatre directing, education, artist

## Introduction

What you will read below are excerpts from a conversation that took place *via* Zoom, on 6 September 2022, at 8:00 am Rio de Janeiro time, between Adriana Schneider Alcure and Bruce Adams.<sup>1</sup> Alcure is an Associate Professor in Theatre Directing at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro; and Adams, who describes himself facetiously as a

<sup>1</sup> The time is significant, as we will see.

2 Business and Technology Education Council – a provider of secondary qualifications, with a focus on specialist, work-related skills.

‘reluctant academic’, is a Lecturer in Theatre Directing and Dramaturgy at Middlesex University, London. Both are also theatre directors, with very different educational trajectories: Adams has a BTEC in Acting, a BA in Theatre Directing, and is a doctoral candidate in Theatre; Alcure has a BA in Journalism, an MA in Theatre and a PhD in Anthropology.<sup>2</sup> For her, entering academia ‘was the best choice I could make in my life’. Still, the similarities in their understanding and approaches to teaching and directing are striking; perhaps this goes to the heart of what is at stake in this Special Issue: if two people from different continents and generations, and with disparate academic and career trajectories can have such similar views, what direction does director training actually offer in the formation of directors and educators?

In preparing this text, I found myself torn between allowing for the flow and orality of the participants’ voices, and the impulse to organise the wealth of experience shared in a coherent way for readers. I have decided to add headings and some context when appropriate, removing my own interventions as much as possible, and occasionally shifting segments around and condensing information. Tempering this curatorial endeavour with an effort to decentre academic English, I have allowed for Alcure’s Brazilian-accented idiolect and occasional turns to Portuguese to remain in the body of the text, offering a translation in the elbownotes where necessary. I have also added a/ to indicate interruptions and overlaps in the conversation.

### The hamster-wheel

The first question emerging from the exchange was quite simple: how can we resist? I use the word advisedly. Perhaps as artists and educators we cannot resist the desire to blur the work-life binary; still, our labour as educators and artists demands that we frame our practice as resistance. Moreover, Alcure’s and Adams’s initial focus on the idea of labour allows for an approximation between the work of a director and that of a director trainer, highlighting the personal investment required to perform both functions, which is often co-opted into neoliberal systems.

It seems clear that understanding the pressures under which director trainers in Higher Education find themselves, and often place themselves, is important to understanding the training itself, in that much of this process is about facilitating and holding spaces where learning can happen. The same is true of directing; the form of the teaching becomes – in the sense that it turns out to be, but also that it befits – the content.

**Adriana Schneider Alcure (ASA):** Today is a busy day. I started at 7 am. So this is my second appointment. I don’t know, but I have this feeling that we are working harder and more here in Brazil.

**Bruce Adams (BA):** What kind of work? Is it actually teaching more? Or is it other kinds of work?

**ASA:** Other kinds of work, of course; teaching also, but supervision, work with dissertations and theses, and this productivity thing that we have to write, we have to speak. We have to give lectures, we have to show and prove our work. And because we are inside a theatre, we have

to act outside the University also, no? Creating plays, developing projects; and then my feeling is that the work is without stopping: my life and my work are a mix.

**BA:** It is like being in the hamster wheel, and it prevents you from doing a lot of the things you love. I haven't practiced – I haven't made a professional show for six years, and that's not even so much about not having had the time as having the mental space to do it, and the mechanisms around you that allow you to collaborate and tease out ideas and produce, which is a huge thing; and because so much of the job now is having to account for your time, having to compensate for so many things that have changed.

But I do think, in terms of what our discipline offers, one of the most important things, the moments when I feel like I'm making a difference – Pedro and I had this experience together: a few years ago, we began a directing module and the entire class – they were all women, and that felt really important. And so being a person who encourages, being a person who can facilitate, being a person who can be in a position to say: 'you can do this. Here is a way into it. Here is a way to think about it.' Those are small acts that build up.

**ASA:** I feel this activist perspective in our work. I am inside the public service, the public university in Brazil is a very strong system. And with the rise of the far-right government here, things became more acid and more violent inside the institutions. And with these two years of the pandemic, the mental health inside university is disturbed, you know: and of course, this makes everything more urgent. So I am talking about co-optation – we have to pay attention to this, this neoliberal co-optation – but I think there are some things that we have to do; we are doing what we have to do. It's a little bit like this.

I love universities, as places. The idea that academics are these boring people, surrounded by dust – I don't agree with this perspective, this is a lie; we are not this, and especially in the fields of arts. And I think this is new, this idea of an artist who is also a researcher. Who is a teacher. Who is an activist. This is the legacy, for us in Brazil, of these last twenty years of policies and changes and challenges that we are fighting here, that we are facing here.

**BA:** That touches on the question of interdisciplinarity, and that we're never one thing. That's true creatively, but also in terms of all the practices that we have to engage with, which include teaching, disseminating, and articulating, but also as you were mentioning, things like mental health problems that have come out of the pandemic. So one thing I thought of a lot is actually that the most radical things we do in our work are those very small and individual acts of care. And that – the idea of radical care – those are the moments I step back from, and often think about as making the most difference ...

And certainly, if we're talking about what the key to directing is, I think that the ability to communicate and, to use a phrase I use a lot, 'cultivate calm', is massively underrated, and not spoken about enough.

### The crisis of this figure

Alcure and Adams discuss the implications of decentring the figure of the director and expanding its definition, allowing for more people and practices to be included under this category, even if the term doesn't seem adequate anymore. In Brazil, public universities such as UFRJ are free, but to gain access to them, candidates need to pass a competitive exam, which normally privileges those who can afford private school (mostly white, middle-class). However, in 2012, under the presidency of Dilma Rousseff (Workers Party) a new law determined that 50% of places in federal universities be allocated to candidates coming from state schools, with quotas for non-white and disabled students varying according to the population of each state (Lei No. 12.711, 2012). This has led to an important demographic shift in the student body. I ask Alcure about the importance of this shift.

3 more and more

**ASA:** I think even more – *cada vez mais?*<sup>3</sup> Yes of course, this is the wonderful thing of these last years. When I started at the University, our classrooms were totally white and middle class. But in the last years, 50% are black students, and the debate about decolonising the curricula, the pedagogical keys, is totally strong inside our university. The traditional ways of teaching are in check now – are in question, and everybody is facing this challenge, which is amazing. But about theatre direction: I don't know if this is what we are teaching. I think that the possibility for theatre direction is the understanding of a kind of 'general artist'.

Because we cannot imagine any more this director who is at the top of the hierarchy in the creative process, or a director who has a name and a mark, like a brand. This is old. We are talking about creative processes and modes of production as political. This is the political thing that we pursue. Not this idea of a political theatre in the tradition of Brecht. We know that the political struggle is inside the process. It's inside our rehearsal rooms. It's inside our choices, our production. I don't know if you can think about the theatre director as we used to – this is finished. So our pedagogical curricula inside UFRJ are about thinking this general artist. When our students graduate, they work as dramaturgs; they work as lighting designers; they work as critics; they work as actors, and they work as artists in general. I think this is the possibility in what we are offering.

**BA:** Yes, that paradigm of the director as leader, the top of a hierarchy, the skill-based approach of 'here are some things that I can do, which I'm doing to you, for you' is ego-driven. That's what we're doing a lot of work to deconstruct. It's certainly masculine, and ignores really fundamental things, which come back to that very basic pedagogical stuff we were talking about, taking care of the students. It involves kindness and creating environments to hold you and care for you. That's what we're doing most of the time, actually. So little of it is about the actual product that comes out at the end.

And similarly to the way you describe your students, we're a kind of comprehensive, North London university, with students from very broad socioeconomic backgrounds, race, gender, class; but still to a large extent trapped in that white, masculine Western paradigm.<sup>4</sup> You read about the

4 In the British secondary education system, a 'comprehensive' is a state-funded non-selective school.

5 A degree in Theatre Teaching.

6 municipal schools, state-level schools.

7 Alcure here is referring to the process that led to the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff.

terrible ways emerging artists are treated, ways they're spoken to by professional directors, terrible working practices that are at worst misogynistic and racist, and at best are elitist, and exclusive, which we all know; but when the students are seventeen, eighteen years old and don't have that critical experience, they feel like that's the way it should be. They wonder why you're not talking to them like that, why you're not creating these strict discipline-based rooms and not telling them what to do. And that's what we're trying to do – moving away from that being what directing is about, and what theatre is about.

**ASA:** Now we have this debate – we have to create another course, because we have a BA in Theatre Directing. But we want to create the *Licenciatura em Teatro*, because for us in Brazil, directing is taught inside the higher education system.<sup>5</sup> So we want to create this because we think that school is the most amazing place to think this profession. Having a theatre director inside the school system is structural for what we are doing inside the University, you know? I think this could be a very interesting answer about the crisis of this figure, the director in contemporary theatre.

**BA:** I'm interested to know how that might work.

**ASA:** It's interesting, because here in Brazil we have public education at all levels: *as escolas municipais*, *as escolas estaduais*; they are all public schools.<sup>6</sup> You have of course the private system for the middle-classes, but the public system is for everybody. Here in Brazil this is our conquest, our legacy: a public health system, and also public education.

And this is our basic work – *nosso trabalho de base* – our basic political work. This is a possibility for work for our students – in schools. And this is very important for social change: as a theatre teacher in a school, you will direct. You will direct, of course! You have to develop plays with your students. So, there is this amazing possibility to connect these roles ... Because it doesn't make sense anymore: who will come to study direction nowadays in Brazil? With the situation of theatre in Brazil, with no policies in the field of arts and culture anymore?. We were criminalized in these last years, after the coup in 2016.<sup>7</sup> The situation of the arts, culture and education in Brazil is hard: these three fields are under attack without mercy. So, it's very important to connect these things – education, art, and culture together – and we have to be inside all these institutions. We cannot fight for a sector, a department in the municipal government, or in a federal ministry; we have to fight for space inside all institutions. I think this is the contemporary role, and the sense of the arts in our days.

## Creating methodologies

Having discussed the figure of the theatre director and their potential role in society at large, as well as questions of access, we turn to the question of what, who, and how we teach in universities. Alcure's notion of teaching theatre from primary school, with teacher-directors trained as politically aware artists, brings the conversation towards methodologies in director training today. Form and content are of course

interconnected, as mentioned above, although they sometimes exist in tension with one another. A key observation is made: the first role of the director is methodological. Creating methodologies in this context is understood as the creation of spaces where specific methods can evolve – a process of investigation into the ways of directing.

**BA:** First and foremost, I think that amongst theatre disciplines, directing is the hardest to teach because it only exists in relation to what is being directed: performance, design, text, space.<sup>8</sup> It's almost impossible to isolate and teach directing on its own, like you can those other disciplines. This means that our year three directing module, which is the only module that teaches directing on its own, without anything else – and it's the module that speaks most directly to my specialism – is by far the hardest to plan and teach, and I think that tension is fascinating.

I mentioned earlier about how the product and the skills are such a small part – that really teaching directing is a long and cumulative experience. And the most important thing is about building up a kind of confident, informed individual perspective on what theatre is for you, as well as the ability to confidently and productively collaborate and communicate with everyone involved in your process. Not just actors – a lot of time is dedicated to how you collaborate with actors – but you need to know how to speak to a lighting designer, you need to know how to work with a stage manager. So, cultivating productive communication is vital! And all of that can only be effectively learned cumulatively and over time. It's very hard to teach that in a workshop.

There are some specific skills and tricks, maybe. But I hate teaching directing around the table. I mean, you can have seminar conversations, you can talk about productions, approaches. We can critique work in a kind of seminar fashion, which is really valuable and enjoyable. But sitting down, and looking at how to analyse text, how to organize and research – that kind of stuff in isolation is really difficult.

When I was training, the approach as we were working towards production outcomes, assessments, was that the tutors would start to work almost exclusively with the directors, and they would critique you, challenge you, advise you, ask questions, and that would allow you to develop the work. And those skills and techniques would always emerge from the work, from what you were dealing with, rather than being drawn from a curriculum and applied to the work. That kind of teaching will trickle through the directors to the actors who are in the same class with you. For me, that was amazing, because it required of you to be independent, and required of you to have a really strong perspective and approach and opinion about the work, which is increasingly rare among students.

So that was what worked for me. But I'm not sure that it works for the students we have now. I think the environment over the last decade, and exponentially so with Covid, has changed. It requires that students are confident and self-assured, which, to an increasing extent, they are not anymore. They expect more structure. They find complexity overwhelming. The challenge as a pedagogue is to simulate environments

8 For clarity: Adams is alluding to the fact that directing only realises and manifests itself through other disciplines; while one can look straight at a performance or an element of design, directing is only perceived by its effect on the other elements of a production.

where you can teach those things in a practice-led way, but in a manner that also feels safe for them.

**Pedro de Senna (PdS):** So if I am to try and put this in a very simplified manner: we cannot, as might have been the case when you were training, just throw students into a production and say, 'figure it out, and I'll be here supporting you'.

**BA:** That's the best way to learn: to do that over an extended period of time, that's what I believe is the best way to learn.

**PdS:** But considering the students you described, and perhaps more than the students, the structures and the time that we have to spend with each of them, and institutions allow, doing that becomes very difficult. So we need to find ways to/

**BA:** Condense and concentrate those environments. But keeping them active and practical, not reducing them to lectures.

**ASA:** We have a lot in common, Bruce. I think we are brothers in arts. In UFRJ, the directing courses are practical. We work in an empty room, a multi-space room, and it's very practical – and theoretical also. I think the idea that we have a method for training direction is an illusion. It's not like this.

**BA:** It's also true of directing itself – the idea that every theatre director has a method. Do you think a methodology belongs to an individual artist, and they apply that consistently, or does a methodology belong to a specific project and process, and the people who are committed to it?

**ASA:** To the specific project. Each project has its own methodology, and I think to create methodology is part of the job. It's how to create this dramaturgy of the process. I think this is very interesting to think about. This of course is connected to the way we are teaching. It's the difference between pedagogy and content.

The way of doing is very, very important, and the way of doing is also politics, is also content. It's also procedures to enable consciousness about democracy, within the process. This is the idea. Methodology is what we do as directors. How to connect. If you don't have this quality, this atmosphere, this space of work, you don't have anything. Maybe eighty per cent of our work is about how the relationships among people inside the process operate. Really.

**BA:** This touches on another key challenge to teaching directing: students expect there to be a method. They ask you 'how do I do it?' They ask 'how did Stanislavski do it, how did Brecht do it, how does Sebastian Nübling do it, how does Katie Mitchell do it?'. And the answer is that the answer doesn't exist!<sup>9</sup> It's about actually seeing the work in front of you, and allowing a method to emerge from it, and often they're scared of what's directly in front of them. They need to look at it. They're scared of looking at it and interpreting it, and that's where the method comes from.

**ASA:** But I think a method is different. It's not methodology, these are different things. Methodologies can be part of the creation, and of course, each project asks for a specific methodology. I think we can understand that direction is like creating methodologies. And this is important – the creation of methodologies that are not a *receita*. It's not

<sup>9</sup> Of course, Stanislavski (2016), Brecht (2018) and Mitchell (2009) have written fairly comprehensive accounts of their methods, both in the works cited here and elsewhere. The answer which does not exist is to the 'how do I do it?' question.



a recipe, but there are some principles, some ideas and debates, some things that we can think about together. I like to think of the classroom as a rehearsal room; for me it's the same. And a course has a dramaturgy like a show that we are creating; and of course the way of teaching is like a creation process.

**BA:** It's like acting as well.

**ASA:** It's the same as acting. I'm always tired when I end a class because I am totally connected with the students, with what we are rehearsing – rehearsing and researching. It's something that comes together. Of course, we have lots of books we can bring, about theatre direction: about theory, about poetics, about political things, we can bring history; we can bring many things inside our curricula and our classrooms. But to think about, for example, the idea of *marcação de cena* – no sense!<sup>10</sup> This is a crazy thing, this cannot exist anymore!

10 blocking

**BA:** But some students think that's all that directing is.

**ASA:** This is crazy, this is not what it's about. So OK: then what can substitute for this idea? The relationships: relations with the space, among actors. Another thing that is very important: the idea of being alive on stage, or the life-potential inside what we are creating – how to understand that we can create this, that we can construct this, that we have techniques to do this? We can show this by experimenting with exercises about presence, about listening. Or the other principle that's fundamental: the notion of space, how to think about this possibility, this concrete possibility – because our work is very material, we are like materialists. Because we work all the time with material: a text is a material that we/

**BA:** Text, the body, the voice, space, all material/

**ASA:** can POOF-pa! Pum-PEW! [*arms flailing about*] you can explode it! Or, for example, the idea of rhythm. What is the correct rhythm of a play? This is very subjective, but we can train about rhythm, and the maturity of this process of being an artist is part of this. You will do something, you will exercise this, you will direct a lot, you will work together with others to create a play, and then you will understand what is this idea of rhythm. I think we do that – I do that inside my classroom. And then we can bring the traditional theory. But in a subversive way.

**BA:** Which comes up through the work rather than the other way around.

**ASA:** We can exercise rhythm, and then I can bring Stanislavski to talk about rhythm. But it's to dialogue with me, not to tell me what it is. And this is interesting, because I can do this with Stanislavski and I can do this with what is happening now in the contemporary scene; and we can do this thinking about popular culture in Brazil – another way to think about a spectacle, the idea of a spectacle. The idea of an encounter.

The problem in Brazil today is this: it makes no sense to go to the theatre to see a play. So, the idea of theatre for us here should be connected to the idea of an event, an encounter of people, a party – because parties in Brazil are full of people and we can make money with parties. So how to bring this strategy into the theatre? For example, in popular culture, if you go to 'Bumba: meu boi' in the state of Maranhão, a very

11 *Bumba meu boi* is a Brazilian popular festival first recorded in the 18th century in the north-eastern region of the country, involving music, dance, and drama. It tells the story of a bull (*boi*) who is killed and then brought back to life. The bull is usually represented by a large, decorated costume worn by a performer. The festival is recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. For a good scholarly introduction to *Bumba meu boi* and its contexts, see Watts and Ferro (2012).

12 drawer

13 spectator

14 See Lepecki (2013).

traditional popular expression in Brazil, which is centuries old; you go there and you see thousands of people!<sup>11</sup> Or carnival: we go to the carnival in Rio and we are millions of people in our costumes, and we are playing inside this context. How can these modes of production and creation be brought into what we are doing? And then we can train this as principles, as experiences, and not a thing that you open a *gaveta* and go: ‘ah, this is it! PAH! [*gestures like ‘voilà’*] Now I can direct this!’ This is crazy!<sup>12</sup>

So, I think blocking is just a matter of tuning at the end, just that; and of course, our perspective as directors, one of our principal functions is to be the first *espectador*.<sup>13</sup> It’s also to organise [visually, spatially] at the end, but there are many, many, many processes before you fine-tune the scene.

**BA:** I think blocking is a result, it’s not a process – that’s what I object to.

**ASA:** In dance training, the idea of choreography is also under question. André Lepecki, for example, talks about choreopolitics: that this imperative of the choreography – like the idea of puppets – is under scrutiny, because we are thinking about how to be political.<sup>14</sup> And to be political we have to think about all these hierarchical and colonial principles that Puff-ARGHG [*gestures like stretching and binding*] put these tensions and prohibitions and conflicts inside our bodies.

And of course, the study of perspective and things like that is amazing, but not as the principal keys, the principal tools, the principal skills to have and teach. All these ideas come together, but not as major principles – more like things to think about.

**BA:** So at Middlesex directing emerges... The students come in as performers or designers. They can still work broadly across both, but they’ll have a chosen specialism, and directing emerges out of either pathway, and is something that they opt into later on in their degree, which I think is a really good structure, because often students aren’t sophisticated enough to realise that directing is their interest when they’re eighteen, it’s something they need to discover through practice.

But one of the trade-offs for allowing it to emerge is that you very rarely know how many directors you’ll end up with in any given year. I had three last year; I’ve got eleven this year, so that makes it really difficult to plan ahead, especially in a very complex multi-disciplinary degree, where you’ve only got four modules to play with and they’ve all got different assessment schemes, different timetables. It means a lot of the time, ideas on collaboration or working creatively, working in a more integrated, not modular, non-constructed university-style way, or trying to override those structures – much of this is very difficult. So you are often shackled by practicality. And you only get a three-hour class a week.

I do an exercise with my third years at the beginning of the module, and it’s based on the company Frantic Assembly – they have this concept of a bibliography of inspiration.<sup>15</sup> I ask the students to bring in everything cultural that they like: to bring in books, CDs, DVDs, pictures, texts, everything that they like – high culture, low culture, and then just put it out in front of them. Then you can go: ‘Okay? Well, what does that pop song tell you about how you understand rhythm? How does that apply to

15 See Graham and Hoggett (2009).

this Sarah Kane text?’ And that’s what I mean about how so much of this kind of training is cumulative, because it’s about having a much broader aesthetic and intellectual experience, rather than going to any one individual piece of theatre and being able to say: ‘oh, they did this, plus this, equals that result’. It’s about having an understanding in really sophisticated detail of how those sensibilities inform each other, and then, having the maturity to be able to draw down from that in a way that serves the work and not just your individual ‘I like this song. I want to put it in my show’. Actually, it’s ‘this song tells me that I’m going to use rhythm in a specific way’.

**ASA:** I think this is perfect, because the arts are about ways of life; and then the work of the director is about choices, how to choose. And how to choose is about developing your own intuition. And how to develop your own intuition is about thinking of imagination as a muscle that you can expand, that you can be conscious about, your own process. So, I think this is what can lead us to create exercises, to make these principles organic in a pedagogical process. I totally agree with you.

### The expanded scene

Here, Adams and Alcure discuss postgraduate studies and work. The UFRJ and Middlesex MAs are called, respectively, Artes da Cena and Theatre Arts – so by definition those postgraduate courses are already working with a plural conception of the artist.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, this also extends to the kinds of people who can claim that title, and necessitates rethinking the ways in which theatre directing, theatre in general, and maybe society overall are conceptualised.

**PdS:** So, should we learn about the history, about the canon or about certain techniques? Is it possible to teach directing without mentioning Stanislavski at all?

**ASA:** Yeah, I do this all the time. [*laughter*] But it’s important to bring Stanislavski also – for demystification – what people did with Stanislavski’s work. We are trying to change our curriculum, especially the theoretical disciplines, like history. We are teaching theatre history like positivists, with this idea of evolution, beginning with a very old idea of the Western tradition; Brazilian theatre history is also very problematic, and there is a lot of invisibility in our historiography. I think this is the role of our postgraduate courses – these researches are having an impact in the way we teach these disciplines in the undergraduate programs.

This is interesting to observe in Brazil. This is very specific. Why? Because the Masters and PhD programs are quite new, I think thirty or forty years old. And just nowadays, my generation, a generation of artists who also have PhDs, can make tensions with these ways of thinking these disciplines, and I think this is very important.<sup>17</sup> Black students, for example, are now in postgraduate programs, and are in tension all the time with our historiography, and this is amazing. So, this is changing. My colleagues are totally inside this discussion, and this is urgent. We return to the first point in our conversation: we must be activists also.

I have a question for both of you: what is the impact of immigration and second-generation citizens – does this public look for a formation in

<sup>16</sup> Arts of the Scene might be the most adequate translation.

<sup>17</sup> In this context, the expression ‘make tensions’ means to stretch, expand, or otherwise contest the established paradigms and praxes in the performing arts.

theatre directing? Because it's a little bit similar to our changes in the last few years, with non-white people that could finally enter the space of the university.

**BA:** I would say the majority of our students don't speak English as a first language, and come from another culture or background.<sup>18</sup> So, to the question of the impact of that: one of the most immediate things is you look at the canon of texts that you're used to dealing with; you look at theories that you're used to dealing with, and you're immediately confronted by the fact that they are either not relevant or inaccessible, or differently accessible to the vast majority of the students. This forces you to find ways around that, to find different ways of applying those texts and theories, to decentre them and bring in the students' experience as well.

There's a lot of debate about whether certain texts are relevant to the students; but there are also questions about how the students make the text relevant to them. I've seen student productions of Beckett plays that incorporate queerness and blackness in incredible ways, which one would never have thought about. So, just as much as decentring those writers, it is also about giving students agency to take ownership of whatever material they want to take ownership of and finding ways of projecting themselves onto whatever material they want. That's one of the most constant day-to-day challenges.

And that question about just what you teach and what order you teach it in: when you work within quite a large team of different kinds of practitioners, that's one of the main challenges a lot of the time – you'll have natural disagreements about that: 'they need to learn these skills, but also they need to ...'; 'how can they practice in this way before they understand postcolonial theory?' 'How can they do any of this if they can't write an essay?'. Those conversations are very, very alive, and throw up the issue that you just don't have space for all of it. So, what do we eliminate? And you're changing that all the time, because you're responding to students in front of you.

**ASA:** We are working on this idea of expanded scene.<sup>19</sup> I think this is important, and it's important also to think about art and artists as workers, regular workers. As I said earlier, our students are not graduating as directors only; they are graduating in general arts, but with a very interesting perspective. So, I think the name of our bachelor's in Theatre Directing is also old. But to change this would be harder, because you have to do this through MEC – the Ministry for Education. Maybe because in postgraduate programmes we have more liberty to think about that; our programme is *Artes da Cena*, with this idea of expanded scene and with the possibility of hybridity among artistic languages. This is also key for us. So, in our post-graduate programme, we have projects about cinema, visual arts, performance, politics in the streets, photography, dramaturgy, about creation processes, many different things. It's very contemporary in this sense.

Another point is that we have to think of an artist as a person, a worker that could be inside all kinds of institutions. In anthropology, we have this – the profession of the anthropologist has changed a lot in the

18 It is important to note that these students are still overwhelmingly white Europeans, whose first language is not English.

19 The website for UFRJ's postgraduate programmes in Arts of the Scene, defines the expanded scene as 'one that is not circumscribed only to the conventional theatrical modes of production and reception, but also to distinct artistic fields, integrating practices, knowledges and learnings from other performing arts, fine arts, audio-visual media, performance art, literature' (PPGAC n.d.) [my translation].

last few years. Then you have anthropologists inside the War Ministry, you have anthropologists inside the Economy Ministry, anthropologists inside enterprises, anthropologists teaching theatre! And I think we have examples of this among the contemporary practices in arts. Many artists are trying to work together also inside institutions that are not in principle arts institutions. I think this is interesting: we can think about this, you know. That's why the idea of theatre direction as a profession ... Okay, we can have this, but few students really become directors/

**BA:** It's unsustainable.

**ASA:** And few students can survive in our context here in Brazil – this is a fact. So, we have students working as consultants, curators, critics, teachers, lighting designers ... My ideal would be to create an understanding of the general artist. This is not possible, this is utopia. But we can have this strategy, because the character of a theatre director can be this general artist, if we think about it. I am not only a theatre director: I am an actress; I am a dramaturg; I am a performer; I am a teacher; I am an activist. I can be a producer; I can do lighting design. I can think the sound of a work. I can think many things – I can work in many things. I can be a *gestora* – manager – I was a manager in the last few years at my university in the area of culture. Maybe this training offers all these possibilities.

**PdS:** Is there a difference between training and education, then?

**BA:** I wonder whether training is just education in application.

**PdS:** I always think of training as being a little bit too instrumental, serving a narrow purpose.

**ASA:** So why not experimenting, experiencing?

**BA:** I think there's a certain dignity to the word training. It's reasonable rare to have a degree title in directing in the UK, and the vast majority of them are postgrads. I think ours, and maybe one other is undergrad.<sup>20</sup> So singling out directing as a degree title, and as something in which one is trained, in which one undertakes a focused, disciplined course of study and application, gives directing some dignity and respect in terms of its craft and its significance – in a context where historically directors are often English literature graduates who have been to the theatre. So, people who have an education and an interest in literature and theatre, but for whom directing is a thing that they do, rather than something they learnt how to do. This certainly did lead to elitism, because those people overwhelmingly tend to be white men.

On the other hand, I think the future of training and of creative artistic education is moving away from those specific titles and practices. Courses that are very narrow are increasingly under threat. The solution is to pull back the discipline and look at what are the underlying skills and practices, which in theatre are often not so much about techniques, but about humanity, communication, and collaboration, and which have much wider applications than just in theatre itself.

When you describe yourself as all those different roles, with all those different skills, I think that's true of a lot of people, but we're not trained to describe ourselves in that way. We have this kind of ego-led paradigm where we say, 'I'm a director', 'I am an actor', or this one thing, because

20 Currently, as far as I can ascertain, only the University of York, the University of Chichester and Middlesex University offer BA: Theatre degrees with Directing in their title, either as an entry point or as an exit award.

it's concrete and prestigious; but most of us have an undercurrent of all of those things that you describe: a pedagogue and a manager and a producer, and all of those things. So, I think we're going to move to an education environment where we're recognizing that much more explicitly. And the things that make us human, the things that speak to our ability to communicate as humans, to understand our human experience are going to be increasingly valuable, because our jobs are becoming automated. And that's what employability and jobs are going to rest on: to put it frankly, what can you do that a machine can't do? Those underlying, humanist skills are what we're going to be left with, and siloing those inside theatre is not going to be very useful.

**PdS:** You just wrote a manifesto for future theatre directing.

**BA:** Yeah, I'm not sure how I personally feel about that. I'm also really conflicted about that.

**ASA:** There is something that I became aware of recently: I've always worked with collectives and collective processes of creation – always. The dramaturgies came together with the plays themselves. I think this became my speciality – how to do collective processes. I started doing theatre when I was a child, I think like many of us; this was very important for my process as a person, a sanity space for my development, and I've never stopped it. But inside the university I can do everything – and I can do this transit between the outside and inside the university, and this makes me alive; these connections are very important for our context here in Brazil. So, lots of work, but I think that's it. That's it.

## Conclusion

We return to the question articulated in the introduction: how, having arrived at theatre directing from such divergent training paths, can both Adams and Alcure have so many points of convergence in their situated perspectives? However different the socio-political contexts in which they operate may be, in both countries an emboldened right seeks to assert its influence in the fields of education and the arts, through the double threat of atomisation and marketisation. The need to resist these threats transcends nationality.

While organising this paper, I note, in retrospect, that its longest section is dedicated to 'creating methodologies', and perhaps this offers a key. If creating methodologies is understood as devising modes of searching for methods and practices; if these modes of searching are seen as vital in both contemporary directing and its teaching; and if education and the arts are under siege; then, the methods and practices searched for ought to serve as a means of resistance. Alcure's recognition of the importance of the collective, and Adams's acknowledgement of the need for time to cultivate artistic identities, both represent effective responses to the threats of neoliberal encroachment. Director training becomes an exercise in the fundamental, human promise of the theatre: that of spending time, together. Indeed, how can we resist?

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