

CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE LIGHTING:

EXPERIENCE, CREATIVITY, MEANING

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Language, creativity and collaboration

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Light occupies a unique position in the dramaturgy of live performance: it is the only visual design element that can only be seen when in situ, being reliant on the articulation of both space and time. Although light is a visual design element, it is not solely image based (as can be seen from contributions elsewhere in this volume). As a performance material, it is dynamic and fluid, and the process of creating light on stage is equally dynamic and fluid. Lighting designers (as well as lighting programmers) are required to complete their work on site in theatre spaces during technical rehearsals¹⁷ and are thus subject to an exceptional set of spatial and temporal constraints that differentiate their creative working practices from those involved in other scenographic processes. Technical rehearsals¹⁸ are at the start of what is called the “production week” and mark the first time that the entire company (cast, creative team and production team) is in the theatre together. For the lighting designer, the technical rehearsals are often very “expos[ing] – ‘like standing naked on a table and asking “what do you think?”’, as [lighting designer] Mark Jonathan puts it” (Moran, 2017, p.27). I am specifically interested in technical rehearsals as they are “a period of often intense activity” (Moran, 2017, p.27) and “intense creativity but also of anxiety and strain” (Hunt, 2015, p.1). Lighting designer Lizzie Powell describes the start of a technical rehearsal as a “horrible feeling because it’s the first time ever you’re showing people your thoughts” (Powell in Fisher, 2021, p.12). Therefore, as Nick Hunt argues, “a conception of lighting design not as object, pre-made for reproduction, but as process – a continuous act up to and through the moment of performance – might prove to be a better fit with the immediacy with which theatre is made and experienced” (quoted in Palmer, 2013: 240). To further interrogate this provocation, I want to examine two ways in which the creativity of the lighting designer – and the interwoven work of the lighting programmer – can be made visible: through performance installation (and light itself) and ethnography. In the first half of this chapter, I will provide some context for my study of technical rehearsals, including why they are a crucial part of the theatre production process and how an understanding of the hidden process that occur during this period is essential for a fuller comprehension of the ways in which performance is made (and, by extension, what performance *is*).

¹⁷ Since the Covid-19 pandemic, some of this work has been happening remotely; however, the lighting designer and lighting programmer are still required to be present in the space, whether virtually or in person.

¹⁸ In opera, these are called “stage and piano” rehearsals and, later, “stage and orchestra” rehearsals.

The second half of the chapter draws on naturally occurring examples of language and interaction from technical rehearsals, taken from my doctoral fieldwork, in order to explicate this further.

Lighting designer Lucy Carter's triptych, *Hidden*, at Sadler's Wells in 2016 as part of *No Body*, was a promenade experience constructed specifically around light and sound as performance materials. *No Body* was conceived as an immersive, interactive experience – a “dance” show without the physical presence of dancers, a clear departure from Sadler's Wells' usual programming. The first piece was *LightSpace* by lighting designer Michael Hulls, who since 2009 has been an associate artist at Sadler's Wells and is the first non-choreographer to fulfil this role. This performance took place on the stage at Sadler's Wells and fully immersed the audience in light and sound through an exploration of and homage to the power of tungsten light. Audiences were free to wander around the stage, between clusters of bare tungsten light bulbs and through the beams of light from large banks of Parcans overhead. In *Indelible*, composer Nitin Sawhney then took audiences on a historical tour of Sadler's Wells through the building's foyer and public spaces using a combination of projection, binaural sound effects and original compositions. *The Running Tongue* and *Kairos* were films by choreographers Siobhan Davies and Russell Maliphant, respectively. In different ways, both films sought to envelop the audience in a series of dramatic visual moments, focusing on bodies in motion in light. Finally, Carter's *Hidden* showcased the backstage areas of Sadler's Wells, places and spaces audiences were not usually privy to.¹⁹

In all three pieces of this lighting triptych, Carter showcased a hidden world, full of hidden people and their hidden creativity. According to Carter, *Hidden* was “an opportunity to show audiences all the work, all the massive creativity, that goes on backstage” (Sadler's Wells Theatre, 2016, 0:12–0:22). Paradoxically, it was “a performance with no bodies, and I was interested in how I could represent these creative people backstage but without them being there” (Sadler's Wells Theatre, 2016, 0:27–0:38). The installation was divided into three sections, each showing a different backstage area and the work of the people who usually inhabit these spaces. *Wardrobe and Wigs* (Hidden 1) took audiences through the costume workshop, full of costume rails and wig heads, and a looped soundtrack that accompanied LED-lit interiors of washing machines, giving the impression of a busy team in the middle of their work. In *Control Room* (Hidden 2), the audience was invited into the lighting and sound control rooms, a space usually hidden at the back of the auditorium behind thick panes of glass. The sound of the performance along with the deputy stage manager calling the show could be heard in both control rooms. On the lighting side, a lighting control desk was set up,

¹⁹ See also Lucy Carter's chapter on pp. XX–XX in this volume.

complete with several monitors. On one monitor was the cue list, which moved on to the next cue with the deputy stage manager's "go" command. Another monitor showed a "magic sheet" – a diagrammatic view of the lighting plan, which highlighted the lights being used on stage in the cue that was currently live. While the actual lighting itself was not shown (as the stage was being used for Michael Hulls' *LightSpace*), the process of its creation was on show. Here, the act of creation and reproduction was made visible, something Carter was keen to exhibit. The result was the feeling that you were witnessing the creation of a performance, that you were privy to something that was both "a doing and a thing done" (Diamond, 1996, p.5) that captured the formation and dynamism of performance-making. In *Light Store* (Hidden 3), Carter created a lighting storage area underneath the Sadler's Wells stage in what is commonly the seat store (when the auditorium seats are removed to make space for the orchestra pit, this is where they are stored – see colour plate 17). Here, Carter was particularly interested in showing the "personalities" of the various lanterns used, in addition to representing the lighting technician who might work in that space. In each space, Carter included a large, transparent, glowing "pebble", which served as a physical yet abstract representation of a body at work.

Individually, each section showcased a discrete area of backstage practice; taken as a whole, *Hidden* aimed to draw critical attention to the labour of backstage workers, theatricalizing and making visible both the people and the process of theatre-making. As backstage ethnographer Christin Essin notes, "the complexity and significance" of this labour has historically been "mostly overlooked, misunderstood, or deemed unworthy of examination" (2021, p.9). Like Carter and Essin, my aim in this chapter (and in my research more broadly) is to contribute to an understanding of the hidden, tacitly practised mechanisms that are integral to theatre-making, drawing out and unravelling the latent processes of creativity, agency, and identity that characterize off- and backstage work. Unusually, however, in the study of scenographic processes, I use linguistic ethnography to do this, examining instances of naturally occurring dialogue at the production desk during technical rehearsals. This approach allows me to study the ways in which lighting designers and programmers, in particular, negotiate the creative hierarchies and personnel structures in which they work *while they are working*.

This chapter draws on my doctoral research and fieldwork, in which I observed lighting designers, lighting programmers, and directors at work during technical rehearsals (Zezulka,

2019). My interest is in how lighting designers and programmers, in particular, use language as part of the process of creation, as part of “a reflective conversation with the situation” (Schön, 1991, p.76). I examine this through a concentrated focus on technical rehearsals, which occur just before the first public performance of a production. The technical rehearsal period is a fundamental part of the theatre production process but one that has been almost entirely overlooked in writing by both scholars and practitioners (the notable exception here being Nick Hunt’s (2013a, 2013b, 2015) work). This has in turn led to an inadequate recognition of the skill and contribution of lighting professionals to the theatre production process, and their work, therefore, remains mostly unseen, unexamined, and insufficiently understood. However, a detailed examination of technical rehearsals as a discrete and distinctive part of theatre-making is essential for understanding the integral and important contribution that both light and lighting designers make to a production. I have chosen to focus on technical rehearsals because both the environment and the work that takes place during this time are arguably challenging for lighting designers and programmers for a number of reasons: it is a creatively exposing time, the hours are long (usually 9am to 10pm, or a “10 out of 12” in the United States²⁰), there is significant negotiation and constantly shifting power dynamics, and it is the time when the bulk of the physical work of the lighting designer and the lighting programmer happens.

The practices and processes of the technical rehearsal, for lighting designers and programmers, especially, are what Spencer Hazel describes as “the kinds of practice that are most prevalent in our everyday affairs, but due to our having been so thoroughly socialized into them they can become challenging to describe” (Hazel, 2018, p.266). While the technical rehearsal may not seem like an “everyday affair” to an outsider, for lighting professionals, it comprises a large and essential part of their working life. It is, in fact, one could argue, the most important part of the creative process for a lighting designer, and thus it is remarkable that the technical rehearsal has been largely neglected in scholarly research thus far, something my work seeks to address.

²⁰ There is evidence, however, that this practice is changing. In the UK, the Reset Better campaign (and others) has advocated for “two-session” days during the technical rehearsal period, shortening the working day to eight or nine hours, and in the US, data gathered by the group No More 10 out of 12s has shown the detrimental effect of long days on theatre workers’ productivity, mental and physical health, and quality of life.

As freelance workers, theatre lighting designers and lighting programmers find themselves constantly having to navigate ever-changing workplace environments as they move between theatre venues and companies and are not tied to any one place. The nature of this movement means that there is limited time to build professional relationships and to integrate into a new or established workplace community. As McEntee-Atalianis posits,

As we enter into any new setting, we are often confronted with patterns of behaviour that challenge our sociopragmatic and sociolinguistic frames of reference. In the workplace, integration into a new community of practice can be testing as we are confronted with an established community of professionals. (2019, p.98)

There is a process of assimilation that occurs with every production – this could be a freelance designer working with a new (also freelance) creative team; it could be a lighting designer working for the first time in a venue with locally employed, in-house staff; or it could be in a team that has worked together previously but not for some time.

In contrast to this environment, workplace discourse studies have primarily concentrated on an in-house, localized labour force rather than on freelance workers. It is perhaps easy to deduce the possible reasons for this: the relative stability and consistency of a permanent workforce, and the shared geography and proximity of workers. Theatre and live performance are industries in which “freelance working has become deeply institutionalised” (Kitching, 2015, p.22), and therefore workplace studies in this area are few. As a lighting designer, working on more than one production simultaneously and often across different genres, approaches, or traditions, and with different creative and production teams, requires an ability to concurrently develop shared languages within these varying teams and to adapt to variations in personal and professional relationships. Ultimately, the ability to assimilate into these teams impacts on the process of theatre-making and creativity.

A historical look at agency and creativity

The agency afforded to the lighting designer and programmer is closely linked to the lighting profession’s historic and continued marginalization, as can be demonstrated through a closer look at the language used to characterize the practices and processes of lighting and scenography. In the 1950s (in the UK), the move to a specialist lighting designer (a job role that had previously been undertaken by the director or chief electrician) brought about a corresponding change in the existing power relations of the creative and production teams. Rebellato (1999) maintains that this shift to professionalism and the related change in job titles – and, in some cases, responsibilities (e.g. from “electrician” to “lighting designer”) – “indicated much broader transformations” (p.83) in the

industry. For lighting designers, this meant, among other things, vying for creative and authorial agency and input in a role that had traditionally been seen as “technical – to make the lights work as required by the Producer and Designer” (Guthrie, 1952, p.11; quoted in Rebellato, 1999, p.92). While this attitude is certainly no longer the case, it could be argued that the residual effects of this historical hierarchy still linger in contemporary practice.

The recent “scenographic turn” (Collins and Aronson, 2015) has occurred in part as a result of the recognition of the affective and dramaturgical potential of design and its impact on audiences, for example, as well as an effort by designers (set, costume, lighting, sound and video) to subvert the current hierarchies that not only constitute but are constitutive of contemporary theatre working practices. An example of this can be seen in the ways in which lighting designers and the role of light (and thereby the teams responsible for its creation) are described in writing. The focus on the technical aspects of design is perhaps one reason for the apparent marginalisation of lighting designers, whether that comes from inside or outside the industry. In *The Right Light*, Moran (2017) poses the question: “If light on stage is so important, how come it is so rarely written about?” (p.22). One of the reasons for this, he posits, is that “writers are intimidated by the apparent technical complexity of the *machine* that is needed to get the light onto stage” (Moran, 2017, p.22, emphasis in original). Related to this are “the limitations of language”, with Moran noting that “a particular difficulty arises when we try to describe the ways in which light affects our experience” (Moran, 2017, p.25). Anecdotally, this can result in a dismissal of the lighting designer’s creative contribution or the inability of outsiders to engage with it properly – and this lack of artistic and creative recognition or wider acknowledgement impacts the ways in which lighting designers and their work is sometimes seen within the industry.

The split between what is traditionally seen as art and technology, implied by Moran above, may be due to a historical belief that “anything technical is out of the artist’s realm” (Wrench, p.25), according to a 1954 article in TABS magazine entitled “Who lights the set?”, a title that is itself telling of the then-prevailing attitude towards lighting designers and demonstrates how light was widely seen at this time to be purely functional and facilitative. The title also shows the (ongoing) divide between art and craft (and the implicit hierarchies in British theatre practice). The role of the lighting designer and the dramaturgical role of light have advanced considerably since then, though it is interesting to note that the hierarchical distinctions between art and craft continue to prevail in some practices.

In the UK, where my research has taken place, the lighting designer will typically join the design team after the set designer and after the bulk of the production's visual aesthetic has been decided on. In what might be termed a "traditional" hierarchy, the director and the designer work together to create the production's "concept" and the visual elements that support this, including the set design (see both Constable and Breiner in this volume). This work tends to happen before the start of rehearsals (see Knowles, 2004, pp.28–9) and, crucially, for the purposes of this chapter, before the appointment of the lighting designer. These hiring practices point to a continued perception of lighting designers as secondary creative contributors, who often lack access and input to the initial design conversations and therefore miss a significant opportunity to contribute creatively to the process. This has implications for the nature of lighting design: while light obviously maintains its potential to be a dramaturgical force and to aid the visual narrative, it does so reactively, rather than proactively, with the lighting designer responding to "the space that the designer has *given* me" (Fisher; quoted in Palmer, 2013, p.262, emphasis added). The lighting designer is typically responding to what is presented to them – usually drawings and a model of the set design – rather than being able to influence the design decisions from the very beginning. This has led some, including set designer Michael Pavelka (2015), to suggest that "lighting designers can sometimes feel a bit marginalised [...], knowing that they often can't make a concrete contribution until the physical design starts to take shape" (p.61). That this opinion is still upheld and perpetuated by some practitioners only serves to reinforce existing production processes and the continued (perceived or actual) marginalization of the lighting designer (and video and sound designers, who often enter the process even later).

The integrative lighting designer

In *The Right Light* (2017), Moran introduces the "integrative lighting designer" (p.16), who works against this "traditional model of practice" and is "more regularly part of the discussions about the production from the beginning" (p.17). These designers aim to "reintegrate the creative use of light into the earliest creative discussions", though Moran admits that "for many this remains an aspiration" (Moran, 2017, p.29). A closer look at Moran's interviews reveals the actuality of the working practices that lighting designers face. For instance, while lighting designer Natasha Chivers aims to be involved in discussions earlier than is typical – i.e. at the initial "white card" stage – her design decisions are still responses to the director's vision and the designer's model: "looking at the designer's research material, learning why the choices have been made, and finding out what has been discarded" (quoted in Moran, 2017, p.35). Moran later notes that being involved "right at the start of the process often well before even a white card model meeting [...] is quite unusual, and a

lot of lighting designers say they would kill to have it” (Moran, 2017, p.39). Many of the lighting designers interviewed talk about their practice in reactive terms. Peter Mumford calls lighting design “the last creative act in the process of making theatre” (quoted in Moran, 2017, p.49), and Johanna Town states that lighting designers are “the third step” (quoted in Moran, 2017, p.32) in the creative hierarchy, noting that “the director’s vision for the play [...] may actually be different to what I feel” (quoted in Moran, 2017, p.32). Mark Henderson states that he is “very driven by what I’m given as a set” (quoted in Moran, 2017, p.30), echoing Rick Fisher’s comment above, while some lighting designers may “see the model box for the first time with the actors, which is quite scary” (Ormerod; quoted in Moran, 2017, p.43). Ormerod continues: “Sometimes you don’t get booked until after the set’s been designed, amazingly enough. Sometimes, you’re actually not in the country when the set’s being designed” (Ormerod; quoted in Moran, 2017, p.43). However, there are signs that these practices are beginning to change, as seen in the increased emphasis on process and working practices in industry-facing literature. Recent articles in lighting design magazine *Focus* have highlighted both how important early involvement in the process is becoming for lighting designers and the rarity with which this occurs. As lighting designer Elliot Griggs has observed in his own practice:

As performances become increasingly technical, with tighter integration between lights, music, sound, video, movement and set, the need for collaboration between creative teams is becoming far more necessary than before. Early design meetings, which typically would’ve involved just the director and set designer, are becoming meetings with the entire creative team. (Griggs, 2018, p.36)

Lighting designer Lucy Carter notes that, ideally, lighting designers would be paid a more representative fee for time spent on each project, a point Griggs also touches on, which would allow them to

commit more time to projects, which would in turn improve the collaborative experience. We could commit more time during the set design process so that we avoid the design being completed before we are involved and discover a difficult, if not almost impossible, set to light. We could have more time to develop our ideas with the designer and director so that everything is fully integrated and wholly of the concept. (Carter, 2018a, p.4)

In concluding the second edition of *Performance Lighting Design*, Moran (2018a) offers a series of provocations on the position of lighting designers. Among them, he states that “If as LDs we are going to be useful collaborators with our fellow creative team members, rather than technical facilitators, we need to be steeped in the dramaturgy of the pieces we light” (p.262). This is

inherently dependent upon having the opportunity and ability to speak for and about light creatively – with the director and other designers, in the rehearsal room, in production meetings, and during technical rehearsals – with the ultimate goal to, according to Moran, “make creating performance lighting more like making art” (2018, p.262). These distinctions are important because they govern the ways that lighting design is seen and lighting designers (and programmers) see themselves.

As we can see from these examples, a creative product must “be the outcome of the right kind of process [...], one that non-trivially and essentially involves agency” (Gaut and Kieran, 2018, pp.13–14). Hunt (2013), however, argues that agency is rarely applied to the “technician or designer – roles that in many performance traditions are seen to have creative agency of a secondary order” (p.296). Fulfilling these roles is often said to be done in service of the text or the director’s “vision”, and any agency is thus seen as secondary to the creative agency that is attributed to performers and the director. It is within this hierarchy (or, perhaps, within the shadow of this hierarchy) that most lighting designers work. When decisions “trickle down” from the director to those lower in the hierarchy, this potentially diminishes those creative agents’ contribution to the endeavour and can risk making them less likely to be intrinsically invested. Creative people tend to seek out work “at the edge of their creative potentialities” as these “have a certain baseline level of difficulty and interest for them” (Kieran, 2018, p.3). Furthermore, creative people will “question or challenge conventional practice [...] and are self critically reflective” (Kieran, 2018, p.3) about their work and creative interests. This ideal is compromised in those hierarchical group arrangements in which “the higher-up person determines the creative end, which is then farmed out to” other individuals in the group (Kieran, 2018, notes from seminar discussion).

There are, Richmond (2016) posits, at least three different types of agency at play during the performance-making process. The first is authorial agency, described by Isackes (2012) as an “alternative way of making work” (p.2) in which the scenographer is not a “reactive artist—one who responds to a playwright’s text only through the mediation of the director’s primary vision” (p.1) but rather a “generative artist” who is not limited “by a fixed position in a predetermined collaborative hierarchy” (p.6). Professional agency refers to how professionals “influence, make choices and take stances on their work and professional identities” (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p.61), which has had “very positive connotations for creativity [...] connected to subjects’ autonomy and self-fulfillment” (Eteläpelto et al., 2013, p.46). Finally, identity agency describes “the habitual patterning of social behavior” (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p.179), in which we “select into situations that allow us to build and fulfill important identity commitments” (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p.180). The examples below will

show how these three types of agency are interconnected and enacted during technical rehearsals through a detailed analysis of naturally occurring language in the workplace.

Language and dynamics

In examining technical rehearsals, my focus was on the interpersonal and professional dynamics that characterize and constitute this particular working process. Analysing this particular creative process necessitated my presence in the environment at the time the work was taking place. This was a crucial consideration and led me, methodologically, to linguistic ethnography. As a subset of ethnography, linguistic ethnography is an emerging interdisciplinary field that, as the name suggests, uses analyses of naturally occurring dialogue to attempt to explain everyday interactions. Drawing on my own significant experience as a lighting designer, lighting programmer and production electrician, and using Melrose's concepts of "expert spectating" (2007a, paragraph 1) and "expert practitioner-specific modes of knowledge" (2007b, p.3), this approach has allowed me to articulate the "expert-intuitive operations" (Melrose, 2007a, paragraph 8) that characterise the creative process during technical rehearsals. In doing so, this research positions the lived experience of lighting professionals during technical rehearsals as a valuable means of exploring the processes of theatre production and the production desk as a useful site of knowledge construction. Combined with field notes and thick description, this allowed me to explicate the nature of technical rehearsals as a fundamental element of the theatre production process, gaining valuable insights into the intricate and nuanced ways in which theatre professionals (lighting designers, especially) work together.

Lighting designers and lighting programmers have a variety of linguistic strategies to draw on to enable and facilitate dialogue at the production desk. Individually, these may seem insignificant, but taken together they form the basis for cooperative working practices, and for the creation and maintenance of an environment in which lighting designers and lighting programmers can enact authorial, professional and identity agency. The effects of agency and identity on process can clearly be seen in some examples below. Both examples include what is known as "relational talk", that is, talk that is primarily oriented to "the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships" (Locher and Watts, 2008, p.96). Being able to integrate the relational aspects of personal discourse with the transactional nature of professional discourse is crucial for assimilating effectively into changing workplaces, thus allowing lighting designers and programmers to exercise their authorial, professional and identity agency.

Example 1

The first example below is taken during the technical rehearsal of a large West End musical. The lighting designer had never worked with the designer or director before, though their relationship with the lighting programmer was very well established, affording the programmer a large amount of creative and problem-solving input. The exchange below between the lighting designer (LD) and the lighting programmer demonstrates one strategy for realigning control and authority through the exercise of professional and identity agency. Despite potentially seeming to be a wilfully disruptive tactic, the strategy employed here is crucial in gaining time for the lighting designer to work productively at a critical time during the production process. Without this intervention, the significant limitations on time that are already present and the hierarchies at play during technical rehearsals actively work to negate the contribution of the lighting designer and lighting programmer, whose work would otherwise be forced to take place in the margins and achieved despite less-than-ideal working conditions.

1	LD: This is the new, slower tech style, isn't it?
2	Programmer: We are, absolutely. And I am more than happy to cop some of the flak for that. I will go slower if I need to go slower.
3	LD: It's just – it's a request from everybody.
4	Programmer: Good. I just – it's mad.
	[...]
5	LD: It's the conversation we had last night.
6	Programmer: But [the director] doesn't listen. Don't worry; I'll just be really shit at programming today. And then we'll just go back to the...
7	LD: Just let me know when you're being shit and when you're not being shit.
	[Laughter.]
8	Programmer: Thanks, [LD]. I would hope that you would notice.
	[Laughter.]

We can see in this excerpt a clear example of how the lighting programmer uses their professional agency to support the work of the lighting designer and wider production team.

This transcript comes from the second day of technical rehearsals, after a particularly hurried first day. In speaking with the lighting team before the start of this session, I learned that the design and production team felt that the speed of the first day had not given them adequate time to focus on the design elements, specifically lighting, or some of the more technical, logistical elements such as scene changes. This had been discussed in the pub after rehearsals had finished on the first day, without the director present, and there was a general feeling among the creative and production team that the director was more concerned about the dancers and the choreography than the design. The creative team, therefore, along with the deputy stage manager, decided to forcibly (but surreptitiously) slow down the technical rehearsal to ensure enough time was spent on the technical and design elements from day two.

The director of this production did not appear to be interested in meaningful collaboration with the design team. The lighting designer was provided with images from the production's previous incarnation and often seemed to be simply reproducing what had come before, reducing their role in many cases to that of a facilitator. Not only did this prove frustrating for the lighting designer (as well as the associate lighting designer and the lighting programmer), but it was also largely self-defeating for the director, who was in effect actively denying themselves access to the lighting designer's creativity and expertise. In instances when the lighting designer – or, indeed, the lighting programmer – did attempt to exercise some level of creative agency or input over and above mere facilitation, this was curtailed by the director. According to my field notes, this led to another instance in which creative decisions were mooted against the director's wishes. While this could have had a detrimental effect on both professional and personal relationships within the lighting team, this in fact served to strengthen group amity. The lighting designer's comment in turn 7 above could potentially be taken as an insult in another context in which the interlocutors were not as friendly with each other. Here, however, "it is as if they are saying 'I know you so well I can be this rude to you'" (Daly et al., 2004, p.960). The insult is not taken seriously, and in fact the programmer makes a joke out of it.

During the exchange above, the director was located at another production desk in the stalls, closer to the stage, and was out of hearing range. As stated, the director had not been consulted about the proposed change of pace, and the creative team (led by the lighting programmer) was effectively subverting the director's authority in a subtle but highly coordinated way. The lighting programmer

takes responsibility for the conditions in which the artistic and technical output of the wider team may be realised by taking control of the situation with the group goals in mind; they are exercising their professional agency in a way that both supports the lighting designer and their work and benefits the process as a whole.

It is notable that it is the lighting programmer who either has been designated or has volunteered to lead this shift in control. The programmer states, “I will go slower if I need to go slower” (turn 2), and while this is clearly a deliberate choice on the part of the programmer, the blame for the lack of speed can easily be apportioned to the lighting console itself – the interface between the programmer and the actual lighting fixtures on stage and, crucially, an inanimate object. The level of sophistication of both the console and the lighting equipment provides the programmer with a “buffer” for what could be seen by an outsider as the programmer’s lack of skill or ability; the potential capacity for the technology to fail or be otherwise difficult to manipulate (independent of the programmer) provides a convenient and “safe” way for the programmer to maintain their professional standing without fear of repercussions. The fact that this labour is both largely unseen and not understood by those without this specialist knowledge adds to this defence. The programmer is also clearly free to choose when to “be really shit at programming” (turn 6), meaning they must constantly “read” the situation and respond accordingly; they will only “go slower *if I need to go slower*” (turn 2, my emphasis).

What is also particularly fascinating about this exchange is the way in which the programmer volunteers to “cop some of the flak” for any potential challenge from the director, an act that is designed to save the lighting designer’s professional face while simultaneously asserting the programmer’s own identity agency. This is a clear example of how “face is closely related to a person’s sense of identity or self concept: self as an individual (individual identity), self as a group member (group or collective identity) and self in relationship with others (relational identity)” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p.14). The longstanding nature of the programmer’s relationship with the lighting designer afforded them this ability to protect the lighting designer’s authorial agency, using technology to disrupt the process as and when needed, but to the benefit of the lighting designer and wider creative team.

Example 2

Sometimes, establishing or preserving the dynamics of the team or the wider process requires an opposite approach, as in the excerpt below. The following example comes from a different

production, with a different creative team, and therefore a different dynamic, both professionally and interpersonally. This can be seen throughout the linguistic interactions that occurred during my observations, one of which will be analysed in more detail below.

Compliments and their responses help to create cohesion and to construct positive working relationships (Holmes and Marra, 2004); complimenting is “a communicative act that impacts a person’s identity” (Mirivel and Fuller, 2018, p.219). Compliments are part of a larger group of linguistic strategies called “positive communication” (Mirivel and Fuller, 2018), which help to establish effective workplace interactions. Mirivel and Fuller suggest that such relational strategies can also “strengthen professionals’ competencies” (2018, p.224). When responding to compliments, English speakers

are under two concurrent constraints that are not simultaneously satisfiable: compliments are assessments, and since assessments are usually followed by an agreement with the assessment as a preferred next turn (Pomerantz 1984), a form of acceptance should follow after the compliment has been given. At the same time, it has been shown that when speakers praise themselves, such behaviour is routinely sanctioned (Pomerantz 1978). (cited in Golato, 2003, pp.102–103)

Preference here (in conversation analysis terms) is a structural notion, not a psychological one; it refers to how we would expect someone to reply (things like question–answer pairs are a good example of this), rather than how speakers feel about each other or about what they’re saying. One way of attempting to satisfy both of these response criteria is to provide “the history of the object of the compliment (i.e. where or how one obtained it)” (Golato, 2003, p.118), which is precisely what the lighting designer does in turn 2 below. The use of “just” minimises the lighting designer’s authorial agency and almost seems to separate their work and their creative agency from the effect of the light itself. The set designer praises the lighting designer’s work in the previous scene without quite being able to articulate what they liked about it:

1	Designer: There was something you did at the end of that scene that just...
2	LD: I just added a bit of my backlight.
3	Designer: Yeah, it just made it...

The lighting designer offers a downgraded assessment of their involvement in the lighting state being referred to, as if the light were acting independently of the lighting designer’s creative actions

and intentions. The designer's language reflects this in their switch in pronouns: in turn 1, "There was something you did", but in turn 3, "it [the backlight] just made it...". Following self-effacing or self-deprecating turns (such as in turn 2), the preferred response is disagreement, though "a dispreferred can be couched as preferred" (Glenn, 2019, p.241) as it is in turn 3. The designer starts with an agreement marker ("Yeah"), then matches the lighting designer's mitigating "just", perhaps sensing the potential for embarrassment or expecting another self-effacing remark from the lighting designer. To offer a "preferred" response in either case would potentially be face-threatening (Sifianou, 2012, p.1560), which could serve to upset the dynamics of the team. The link between identity agency and face is noted by Layder (1997), who notes that "much routine situated activity requires a great deal of creativity and ingenuity with respect to the notions of self, meaning, situational propriety and so on" (p.235). Throughout my observations of lighting teams at work, face-saving acts such as these occurred frequently, by all members of the creative and production teams. There were very few instances of overtly face-threatening acts; instead, there seemed to be an aversion to anything that threatened another person's face, even if these were not explicitly face-saving. Creative agency, therefore, seems to be strongly linked to the development and maintenance of a professional workplace environment that is founded on personal relationships, trust and a degree of autonomy and agency. Additionally, both of these examples show that the construction of personal and professional relationships is a process that is essential for creative collaboration and demonstrate ways in which this is enacted through language.

Conclusion

The examples I have shared here from my observations show just two ways in which creative relationships can shape scenographic processes. In the first example, we saw the lighting programmer subverting the hierarchical norms of the workplace, using their professional and identity agency in service of the wider production aesthetic. In the second, the lighting designer uses a linguistically face-saving strategy in order to preserve team dynamics, inadvertently downplaying their own authorial agency. Much like with Carter's *Hidden*, making these latent processes visible contributes to a fuller and wider understanding of how theatre is made and how creative individuals exercise agency throughout the process.

Using linguistic ethnography and discourse analysis to closely study the processes of the technical rehearsal opens up new ways of thinking about how theatre is made. These often hidden processes are integral to our understanding of theatre-making and how language can be used to either facilitate or disrupt these processes. Ontologically, research into the intricacies of the technical

rehearsal also opens up potential theoretical and practical implications for theatre and production studies more widely through its focus on process over product: the processes of theatre-making in which lighting designers, programmers and directors engage (and, importantly, how they engage in them) have a direct impact on the final product, and thus on what theatre, at a fundamental level, is. The technical rehearsal should, therefore, be seen as an integral and essential part of theatre-making, part of a continual process of creative experimentation, personal and professional engagement, trial and error, and problem-solving, that serves to engender opportunities for collaboration in theatre production. Recognising the centrality of this process marks a fundamental shift in the ontology of theatre-making and in the way the contribution of lighting designers and lighting programmers is understood. The work of the lighting designer and lighting programmer is intrinsic to this process and deserves to be given more attention, in both the academy and the industry, as well as through public performance events such as *Hidden*. Demonstrating the creative contribution of the lighting designer and lighting programmer as integral to the creative process, as this research does, in turn opens up the possibility of light to act as an agential force in contemporary theatre practice.