

The Role of the Technical Staff

A work of art is the product of a sublime spirit. Let us say this is correct. In making such a statement we usually imagine this 'sublime spirit' not only as self-sufficient but as totally independent: it is developed and realised without regard to external conditions and, therefore, without regard or despite any compulsion or limitation. Such an idealisation desires to turn one's attention from everything 'material' in art, and especially from its link with every 'profane' activity, which is considered not only removed from art, but entirely foreign to it. As though a work of art could exist without its, in a literal sense, technical production, without what is usually referred to as the 'technical side of an artistic project'. Naturally, one is not referring here to the employment of technical aids which daily delight us with some innovation, for laser gramophone needles, rotogravure or quartz cinema screens, all such things, serve the receiver more than the creator of a work of art. Here our reference is to those 'behind the scenes', to those who are often referred to or at least considered as 'secondary', or, to put it more gently, as 'auxiliary staff'. Assistants, composers, make-up artists, people in charge of props, technical editors, stage-hands ... whole groups of various craftsmen, specialists and hands aid in the realisation of that 'main' thing - the work. Their task is to carry out their duties so that their part in the work's realisation will not be noticed: they are spoken of only when they make a mistake. They remain anonymous, but not unrecognised. For us, indeed, the performance begins with a newspaper announcement or a poster, with the box-office attendant and the usher; for the performer it begins with the costume maker, the make-up artist, the stage-setter, the curtain, the lights and the stage manager ... The performers are well aware of the importance and power of the technical staff, and the more experienced authors even recognise their personal touch. Hence the politeness which they often show to them is more a matter of hypocrisy than of a feeling of solidarity, for every inspired star is aware that the capable realisation of the technical side of a work is an imperceptible element of their own success.

Where the technical side of the production is not on an artistic level, the entirety of the work or, at least, its suitable treatment is absent. Sloppiness

appears like a blot that may completely cover the true meaning of the work. It is sufficient to recall those errors in copying or proof-reading which have impinged upon the interpretation and introduced all manner of errors and muddles into the reading and understanding of the text, from the Bible to Joyce's Ulysses: how long have people held on to a false interpretation, simply thanks to a single orthographic mistake! How much unwanted improvisation, how many ruined concepts due to the clumsiness or carelessness of stage-setters and technical editors! The artist tests the feasibility of his idea also in co-operation with the technical staff. The work is first given to them. They perfect its external form, preparing it for public launching. But, as much as they contribute to the work, so much do they restrict it. "This we can do ..." - say the technicians - "This we cannot...", proving thus that the ideal concept may not always be realised. This is not to do with that resistance of theme and material which the artist feels in his creative searching: his 'material' now becomes the ability of another to realise his idea. As the editor-in-chief in a publishing house, always the personification of power, is the first real limit to the writer's creative freedom, so also the compositor proves to the writer that he is not complete master of his own text. Both the one and the other manipulate the work as they would a product left to their powers and potentialities, and both one and the other basically use the work, although, at least in the unfortunate author's opinion, they should serve it.

So, authors often accuse the technical staff for carelessness and for the obvious failings of a work. Although it happens that artists, at times, by their slander of the technical producers are simply justifying and trying to conceal their own ignorance and failures, in the majority of cases, their anger stems from a desire to defend the integral sense of their work. It is here one should seek the origin of the careful director's choice of a film crew, the care of an editor in putting together his editorial board and the sceptical delay of producers and managers in the selection of studios or concert halls. The technical equipment and the craftsmanship of the auxiliary staff are the preconditions of a rounded production of the work. Since the skill of the craftsman becomes the more obvious as the technical equipment is less, in every technical crew a real hierarchy among the 'masters' begins to form, a hierarchy that is founded upon the degree of their ability. Both individuals and institutions, joyfully and with full confidence, engage the best of them, and, when in trouble of any kind, summon

their aid, even when it appears that some project is beyond help. Such a craftsman himself begins to take on the qualities of a 'star', a privileged person who, in a sense, holds the work in his power, and therefore rightly expects praise and every possible support for his labour. Indeed, pop-artists, especially, exaggeratedly praise and applaud all members of their technical team, fearful of let-downs and practical jokes which may bring lasting disgrace on their ephemeral glory, but only the true craftsman knows that "the true artists do not undervalue his work", for they know that he is their partner. Such a partner, who has a thorough knowledge and love of his trade, may come to love the work in which he has put his skill, and with time begin to feel like its co-author, since it bears witness to his life activity and to his life itself. He numbers with pride the performances for which he constructed the wings, the books for which he made the format, the exhibitions in which he hung the paintings ... His memory becomes a chronological register of cultural events, deprived indeed of critical assessment and aesthetic evaluation, but considered as the constitutive part of a lifetime. For this reason, when such a craftsman has a fit of grouching from time to time, one should never take it too seriously, for he belongs to those devoted members of the institution of culture, who are for ever on the point of leaving it, but never go.

The craftsman's involvement with the work remains within the framework of his trade, which takes its origins from the unbridgeable difference between routine skill and the uniqueness of the creative act, and, above all, from the 'point of view'. While the artist evaluates his work from the aspect of creative effort and achievement, the craftsman, mainly, considers it from the point of view of its technical demands: there are 'difficult' performances, full of clumsy decor and extravagant costume, exhibitions choked with complex exhibits, books with intermittent and various scripts, laden with quotations and bunches of notes; there are also 'easy' works, which, with their straightforwardness and reduction of material, give the greatest pleasure to the tired staff of the technical section. The more complex the work in its technical production, the greater the disappointment of the technical staff when the work fails. Although a bad work cannot be saved by the very best 'packaging', although the technical assessment of the work is rarely in agreement with artistic assessment, still the representatives of the 'auxiliary staff' receive every artistic failure of a work with

bitterness, for they feel that, in a way, this is a reproach to their work also, however well they may have carried out their part of the assignment. Usually, there then ensues mutual blame, which through hushed insinuation or violent accusation clearly affirms that it is a question of two separate workshops, of which neither is willing easily to abandon its basic interests which, being basic, always come first. In the stubborn defence of their own, both the one and the other side in any conflict clearly reveal that their relationship is a forced one. Both sides would gladly be without it, each would prefer to be on its own.

Both the craftsman and the artist consider that they would achieve more if left to themselves. And, since both the one side and the other consider that they suffer both a material and spiritual loss through this relationship, their relationship remains one of necessary but undesired co-operation. Even when a production achieves harmony between the craftsman and the artist, when there is no fumbler among the craftsmen and no dilettantes among the artists, when the craftsman becomes the master-'artist' and the artist, in a different way, the master, even then in the nature of their skill and in the harmony of the work itself, there remains a legible trace of their difference. True, often the technical staff contribute to the enjoyment of the work. True, many works fail, thanks to technical carelessness, but their relationship in the final contribution to its realisation will not have been proportional: the technical side of the work has to function, the artistic side desires to exist.

Every artist's ideal is a work that depends only on itself. In his search for independence, the author seeks to be freed from all external necessity, even when it has the outward appearance of aid. Indeed, to dispense with the help of a technical staff may be the result either of ideological or material necessity. '*Samizdat*' and various stencilled editions clearly illustrate this. Perhaps, the many anecdotes concerning Barault and Welles also prove that even the greatest occasionally have appeared in one or other such predicament, but their resorting to all manner of jobs was, above all, the result of a feeling of personal responsibility and a desire to realise their work. In abolishing the imposed division of labour, the artist becomes his own employee and complete master of his work. But in striving for complete independence he may threaten the work itself, for his engagement with auxiliary matters does not allow him fully to

dedicate himself: everything exterior to the work threatens to endanger the activity and the act. Hence, every artist feels the skilled craftsman to be a necessary ally, who relieves the burden of his task. His contribution to the work may not be underestimated.

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