

Dramaturgy as a Source for a History of Stage Lighting: Pirandello *capocomico* thinker of lighting

Berilo Luigi Deiró Nosella¹

¹Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei – UFSJ, São João del-Rei/MG, Brazil

ABSTRACT – Dramaturgy as a Source for a History of Stage Lighting: Pirandello *capocomico* thinker of lighting¹ – The present article, in the proposal of a history on the thought about the making of a modern stage lighting, focuses on the context of the early 20th century modern Italian scene, using the metatheatrical dramaturgy of Luigi Pirandello as documentary source for the history of theater. Thus, it deals initially with the methodological questions implied therein, to later undertake analyzes of the plays that form his *Theater in the Theater* trilogy, focusing on the articulation between the notions of visibility and visuality, proposing them as key concepts for understanding light in the modern scene, beyond the dichotomy *light to see* and *narrative or effect light*.

Keywords: **History and Historiography of Theater. Documentary Sources. Scenic Lighting. Micro-History. Modern Theater.**

RÉSUMÉ – La Dramaturgie comme Source pour une Histoire de l'Éclairage Scénique: Pirandello *capocomico* l'illuminateur – Cet article, dans la proposition d'une histoire de la pensée sur le faire de l'éclairage scénique moderne, se penche sur le contexte de la scène moderne italienne du début du siècle XX, en utilisant la dramaturgie du metathéâtre de Luigi Pirandello comme source documentaire pour l'histoire du théâtre. Ainsi, il s'agit, d'abord, des questions méthodologiques impliquées ici pour, ultérieurement, entreprendre des analyses des pièces qui composent sa trilogie *du théâtre dans le théâtre*, en ayant comme centre l'articulation entre les notions de visibilité et visualisation, en les proposant comme des concepts clé pour la compréhension de la lumière dans la scène moderne, au-delà de la dichotomie *la lumière pour voir* et *la lumière narrative ou d'effet*.

Mots-clés: **Histoire et Historiographie du Théâtre. Sources Documentaires. Éclairage Scénique. Micro Histoire. Théâtre Moderne.**

RESUMO – A Dramaturgia como Fonte para uma História da Iluminação Cênica: Pirandello *capocomico* iluminador – O presente artigo, na proposta de uma história do pensamento sobre o fazer da iluminação cênica moderna, debruça-se sobre o contexto da cena moderna italiana do início do século XX, utilizando-se da dramaturgia metateatral de Luigi Pirandello como fonte documental para a história do teatro. Assim, trata inicialmente das questões metodológicas aí implicadas para, posteriormente, empreender análises das peças que compõem sua trilogia *do teatro no teatro*, tendo como foco a articulação entre as noções de visibilidade e visualidade, propondo-as como conceitos-chave para a compreensão da luz na cena moderna, para além da dicotomia *luz para ver* e *luz narrativa ou de efeito*.

Palavras-chave: **História e Historiografia do Teatro. Fontes Documentais. Iluminação Cênica. Micro-História. Teatro Moderno.**

THE DIRECTOR – No, not white! I said sky! Don't do anything – let me do it. (Calling) – Hey, electrician, turn off everything and give me some atmosphere... lunar atmosphere... blue, blue on the jury-rigs, and blue on the cloth, with the spotlight... Like that! Enough! (Pirandello, 1999, p. 232).

Introduction

In the proposition of a history of the schools of thought in the making of stage lighting² in the context of the modern Italian scene of the early 20th century, the use of Luigi Pirandello's metatheatrical dramaturgy as a documentary source for the history of theater is a central issue to be dealt with in this article. In this sense, both theoretical and methodological propositions and exemplification of the results of analyses will be developed, in a coordinated attempt to discuss and demonstrate the pertinence of such an investigative universe, having in mind a prior issue of what constitutes documentary sources for a history of theater or what these sources may be.

The facing of this issue carries with it fundamental definitions in the historiographical field on the modern scene. The challenge is to look at the history of theater by the lenses of a scenic element, trying to solve some, methodological questions still pertinent, although not new, such as the ephemerality of the object – the scene and its lighting –, articulating a look at another object proper to the theatrical performance, which is lasting in its core, like dramaturgy, by re-signifying it as a documentary source. Right from the start, it seems to us that such a discussion, although not being the main goal, sheds some light on an issue that has presented itself as recurrent in the historical studies of theater: the ephemerality of the spectacular phenomenon; counterbalancing such an elusive character with dimensions of permanence, either of the textual object – the basis for analysis – or of new socio-cultural comprehensions of the theatrical phenomenon based on permanence: the knowledge, trades and conventions transmitted and transformed into tradition. By proposing the history of theater outside of the scene, obviously not dismissing it, but not taking it as an object of analysis, a historical understanding of the phenomenon is provoked beyond the scene (Fontana, 2017).

The historical context chosen as the object of observation, Italy from 1924 to 1930, presents itself as a particularly propitious moment. This is

the period in which Luigi Pirandello occupied the position of *capocomico*³ of the *Cia. Teatro d'Arte di Roma*, being responsible for the staging and rewriting of several of his dramatic works, including two of his plays in the *Theater in the Theater* trilogy: *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* e *Ciascuno a suo modo*; and ends this moment, having already been withdrawn from the company, with the production of the play *Questa sera se recita a soggetto*, in a type of balance of the experience of those years. The broad dimension of the work that constitutes what we call Theater, in the context given above, we believe that shapes the metatheatrical dramaturgy of Pirandello, promoting a rich document for historical research of the productions, in this case, the stage lighting.

History and its Sources: Fiction as a Historical Document

But what, after all, is the common feature of calling such disparate sources of historical knowledge as a 5th century BC Greek statue, a Mayan mask, a Marquis of Pombal letter, a Mozart concert, a motion picture film, a newspaper article on the dangers of deforestation, a recorded interview of a striking worker, a photograph and a soap opera? The answer lies in the historian's interest in inquiring what these things reveal about the societies to which they belong and in the creation of an explanatory narrative about the outcome of their analyses (Janotti, 2006, p. 10).

In this quotation, the author asks us a key question in the face of the disparity of materials that have been and can be considered historical sources. And she answers: being a source is not in itself a specificity of the material; it is not the objective description that qualifies the object (a letter, a coin, a book, etc.), that defines it as a source; it is the historian's interest in inquiring such an object that makes it a source. And, in order for this process to be completed, a narrative must be developed from the game of questions and answers between historian and source – subject and object.

Although the issue initially proposed seems somewhat solved – for in a game of articulation, that we might call history making, every object that arouses the interest of the historian is potentially a source, and will indeed become a source in the very capacity of the historian inquiring it and demonstrating the actual results of what they acquired –, what, in this relation between subject and object, in the process of construction of historical knowledge, could test new limits to the relationship itself? The answer, it

seems to us, can be given by the history of the science of history itself: through the method. The method would be the set of rules referring to the criteria and procedures for observation; pre-established rules (not fixed and unchanging but constantly tested and reformulated) for the subject/object relationship which, as we have seen, defines not only the extremities of the relation, but its bases. In other words, the very making of history.

A final reflection on the importance and meaning of the method in History could not begin without referring to the history of the discipline itself, for it was only when the criteria and procedures of criticism and analysis of the sources were developed, between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, that History gained autonomy in the face of philosophy and the human sciences and, in relation to the latter, claimed similar status of scientificity. It was the method, therefore, that allowed, at first, to set and safeguard the limits of the *historian's territory*, while at the same time promoting them to the status of scientist (Grespan, 2006, p. 291).

What defines an object as a historical source would then be the very relation between the potential of the object and the interest of the observer, mediated, however, by the method, that is, by a set of criteria and procedures to be proposed and applied in the act of observation and questioning from the historian to their source. Thus, we have a two-way (or three-way) path, since both the type of source defines its method and the method confirms the state of the source assigned to a given object, considering that the method is nothing more (or all this) than the specific way of inquiring each diverse object to obtain from it the historical knowledge that is sought, namely, to make that object a source.

What we see forming is an intricate thread between the power present in the object, the interest of the historian, and the strategies of observation and questioning, which will enable them to construct, through narrative, historical knowledge. In this thread, there is always a precise alignment between a historical theory, the method that is proposed, and the inquired object.

Going back to our proposed issue, the proposition of the use of dramaturgical works as a primary source for the historiographic exercise does not present itself as an outright solution. The issue in itself puts forward some deepened reflections regarding the relation(s) between history and literature as far as both theories and methodologies of historical making are concerned. In the

very clash against the works indicated as source, we could, in a synthetic way, separate some reflections that we present here.

Carlo Ginzburg (2007), in his text *Description and citation*, having as an axis the relationship between history and literature which unfolds in the relation between the real and the fiction, points out how the motion of distancing and, later on, approximation between the notions of evidence, as a basis for the thinking and the making history, and of narration, is confused with the very quest for its own making.

According to the author, the heart of the question would be in the notion of *enargeia*, which means clarity, vividness. The search for what, since the Greeks, should be the ultimate purpose of history – truth – was confused with the narrative exercise of rhetoric, namely, in ancient historiography the truth of history lied in the clarity and vividness of its narrative – which would oppose the modern notion of evidence, referring to our current understanding of what a document is.

The difference between our concept of history and that of the ancient thinkers would be summarized as follows: for the Greeks and the Romans, historical truth was based on *evidentia* (the Latin equivalent of *enargeia* proposed by Quintilian); and, for us, it was based on documents (in English, *evidence*) (Ginzburg, 2007, p. 24).

According to Ginzburg, the paradigm shift occurred in the second half of the 17th century and led to the proposition to systematize principles of analysis based on sources that left behind a notion of truth from persuasion to then bring forth, into the historical making, the objective control of the facts. This movement, however, if on the one hand meant a methodological gain for the making of history, on the other hand also meant, at the moment of its emergence, control over what might be called truth. (Ginzburg, 2007).

The critique to the very notion of source – which, from the 17th century onwards, distances history from the narrative experience – becomes, once again, necessary at the end of the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century, in reaction to the moment when this movement reached its apex, with positivist historiography. We could note that the renovations that the historiographical experience has undergone throughout the 20th century – from the founding of the *Annales d'histoire économique et so-*

ciade, by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in 1929, revising the objectivist notion of the source and the document, its relations with analytic and narrative work, and the role of interpretation, all without abandoning the advances that the historiography of evidence has brought to the historiographic method – are a kind of *halfway* which are sought in the understanding of the definition of source itself and of our relation with it.

The texts, no doubt: but all texts. And not only the archival documents on whose behalf it creates privilege [...] But also a poem, a picture, a drama: documents for us, testimonies of a living and humane history, saturated with thought and action in power (Febvre, n. d., p. 31).

Ginzburg (2007), in what concerns the relation between fictional and historical narrative, claims that such relation is more of a struggle than a trench warfare, a relation of mutual challenges between the so-called objectivity of the source and subjectivity of the narrative, of which the object of dispute is the representation of reality.

Maria de Lourdes Rabetti (Beti Rabetti) (2017, p. 52) proposes what she calls “documented writing”, in which one must proceed with the writing of history without denying the narrative element, bringing it back to the core of the historical making, but also without forgetting the boundaries between fictional and historical narratives. She says that such writing “[...] makes its sources intensely emerge in order to dialogue with them before the reader. It therefore navigates between a subject and the data that it has sought to achieve in order to face it, in an exercise of interpretation that subjects them to analysis, but always has them in sight, under constant control”.

From a look into the history of historiographical making, Pesavento (2013) states that the opening proposed by cultural history for the use of cultural objects themselves as sources was an important element in the construction of new readings for the historian. The works of fiction, which are in themselves representations of reality, could reveal in the game of articulation between historian and object, transformed into a source in the game itself, unique and specific knowledge. And, in this context, in the second half of the 20th century, beginning in the 1970s, there was an emergence of a new theory and a fundamental methodology in the development and re-

definition of the paths of cultural history: the Italian microhistory (Pesavento, 2013, p. 857).

It should be recalled that what the school of microhistory proposes is a reduction of the scale of observation without losing the overall dimension. From the perception of particular elements, often not perceptible to a general look, one seeks to capture traces of this overall, which seems to us of immediate interest, because a possible documentary uniqueness of the source can be relegated to the background. The object itself, proposed as a source, would no longer pre-determine in its entirety the desired answers. This formulation seemed to us particularly propitious to the proposition of the use of dramaturgy as a source. It is not the dramaturgy itself as an object that interests us, but rather what it can reveal about something that does not relate to its specific function, the stage lighting. Be it at times in which the text, because of its own characteristics, gives precise indications of how to proceed with lighting – passages usually present in the author's headings – or clues in the body of the text itself – which can vary from information about the time (if it is day or night), ambiance or even effects – or simply textual passages that lead us to indirect readings about light.

The dramaturgy, including the metatheatrical, is not a direct result of the practice of lighting, but rather an object which, if a small-scale observation is made, creates a possibility to grasp fundamental elements for the reconstruction of a way of thinking about the making of stage lighting at that moment. Going back to the relation between history and fiction, in methodological terms, what has become evident in the historiography of the 20th century is that the history of a (so far considered) trivial object, in relation (or even opposition) to the history of great events, must be made either with new documents, which, as distinct objects of analysis, require distinct observation, or at least with a new look at old documents.

In a brief look at the recent publication of the dossier *Histórias, memórias e acervos teatrais no Brasil*, by *Sala Preta* journal, from USP (v. 17, n. 2, 2017), one can notice how programs, costumes, drawings and notes in its own making are understood today by researchers as essential documents for the reflection and historical construction of our theater. Each of these objects carries within itself, located in a certain time and space, traces of the making that has begotten them, since, as objects, they can be discussed as a

source of research and as a constituent element of the material making of theater, which makes possible its own, historical making. A program, a poster, a costume or a lighting script have their functions defined because they were produced as specific goals within the dynamics of scenic creation and production at a given time and, in this sense, reveal a lot about the making in itself, but can also reveal, under the watchful eye of the historian, aspects of other makings beyond that which was its first reason. This means that the widening of the range of objects that can (and should) be regarded as historical sources of scenic making must shift the horizon as to the identification of these objects/sources, but must also turn our gaze, with renewed interest, to objects already consecrated as sources.

In proposing a history of the lighting as a history of the thought about the making of lighting, we begin with the perception that there is something about a certain historical aspect of doing that we might call a structure of feeling of lighting – bringing back a fundamental analytical concept from the works of Raymond Williams (2010) to the history of the scene – which could be grasped in an object of particular, fluid characteristics, as we believe to be dramaturgy. The search, in the meanderings of theatrical plays, for the historical recovery of the making of stage lighting from the past alters the reading relation regarding the one which is made in an analysis with a literary aspect, hoping that it reveals to us other dimensions of said making. The information on the making of the lighting should come from the very documents of said craft, while the dramaturgy, in the condition of a fictional narrative, even metatheatrical, as it were, would give another level of concreteness. Such perception does not render this or that proposed source inoperative – if we think that historical knowledge exists in a constant process of construction and movement, since it is done in the game between subject and object and in the collation of sources – it reveals much more the potential work possibilities with each one. If the source does not immediately reveal concrete and objective data about a particular making (in this case, lighting), it reveals, in a different way, a certain thought about it, which not only excludes that making, but is in itself a part of it, being its fundamental element.

In continuity, we can think of the understanding of the importance that the historiography of the 20th century, in its renewals, attributed to that

thought or mentality, to an understanding of the past. In this sense, in what concerns us most immediately, there are two fronts: the first considers that abstract thinking, shaped and identified within the field of the imaginary, can hold extreme power for the understanding of a given time; the other understands that the works of human expression, among them, the fictional narrative, constitute privileged territories of the decanting of such abstract imaginary. We must understand that the imaginary functions as a “[...] system of identification, rating and valuation of the real by guiding conduct and inspiring actions. We may say that it is a real/more real than the concrete real” (Pesavento, 2006, p. 12).

Analyzing the relation between history and dramaturgy in the work of Joaquim Manoel de Macedo, João Cicero T. Bezerra (2018) warns us to the fact that, even when an imaginative picture does not exactly match data from its historical reality, it still carries elements of historicity of that reality, since it reveals, if not the fact, certain social desire of that period. And perhaps such a desire, shaping the imaginary of an age, can tell us about what we were and what we are as much as the possible data that contradict it.

There is, however, a clear difference between the imaginary that we have today of another time and the imaginary that is formed within a group of men of a certain time, promoting, by the exercise of thought, the configuration of a system of ideas that is proper to that time. Both imaginaries are constructed: one as a representation of something that is distant, at another time; the other as a kind of self-representation. In this case, the fictional narrative holds the power to actualize both imaginaries, but what is most immediately relevant to what we propose here, since both may interest history, is the second form – that is, what was, from the imaginary of a time, inscribed to a given narrative work?

In this sense, the fictional work presents itself to us as a historical documentary source because of the historicity inscribed in it, revealing something from the time when it was generated. Literature holds an intimate relation with its incubation period, even if autonomous in its last configuration, given that it is a form of expression, it “[...] manifests emotions and the worldview of individuals and groups; it is a form of knowledge, even as diffuse and unconscious incorporation” (Candido, 2004, p. 176).

Thus, our interest is not specifically sparked by the content of dramaturgy alone – since our goal is the making and the thought of stage lighting, and the selected plays, even metatheatrical works, were not written in order to deal with this theme – but by the characteristic of the dramaturgical text as a literary work that holds within itself the potential of, beyond the subject that develops in the foreground, expressing in detail of its organization what we can call the feeling of an era. This feeling which, resuming the concept of *structure of feeling* of Raymond Williams (2010), is inscribed in the play in a sort of imagined scenario, that would be its own burden of historicity. According to the author, since the playwright's imagination of the scene is conditioned to the technical and cultural conditions of an era, it defines forms of writing for the scene that could reveal these conditions, which are historical.

This configuration becomes more powerful if we think of metatheatrical drama, which presents itself as a fictional representation of a concrete practice, theatrical making itself, loaded with historicity both in the historical limitation of the author, who gets to know that practice in their period, and beyond such limitation, by carrying the proposition of the (also historical) desire for a possible making – as it is done and how it proposes to do. Metatheatricity itself is a kind of symptom of modernity, a structure of dramaturgical feeling responding to the questions and radical technical transformations through which the theatrical making undergoes in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In this field, the issue at least shifts from history to what we are choosing here as its source – the fictional narrative – and it unfolds in what we may call a style or a school. If, as we have said, this element of historicity, present in the imaginary of an era, inscribes itself in the form, it will do it differently according to the different styles of the narratives. In this sense, the way of conceiving the relation between history and fiction is also linked to the style, or school, of the narrative, which is no more than the way in which this fictional narration establishes its relation with what Pesavento (2006) said was its reference point, reality. Which is also to say that this style is essentially its historical component.

In order to develop such a reasoning, it is necessary to start from a premise that we know not to be unanimous: that every fictional work has

its referential relation to reality, which is not to affirm that every work is realistic in the stylistic meaning of the term, nor that only realistic works would interest history. Contrary to what one might think, once the *structuring* of the real in the fictional work takes place in the form, we can affirm that a work of unrealistic style has as much value as source for analyzing the said historical imaginary as one of realistic style. Thus, Pirandello, author of fierce fantasy in his narrative, presents himself as an exemplary object for such an exercise.

Pirandello's metatheatrical dramaturgy, fantastic in the first sense, places us at the heart of the most compelling theoretical and aesthetic dispute of modernity, between naturalists and symbolists; here, however, we will confront it as we should, but rather we will only touch on it to illustrate some questions. If radically opposed in some respects, we agree that these trends, as standards of scenic modernity, were animated by the discovery of the resources of electric lighting (Roubine, 1998). Perhaps the main fact is what was called the re-theatralization of the scene (Sarrazac, 2013) by the process, largely provided by the lighting, first by gas and then electric, of three-dimensional materialization of the stage. The space previously privileged by the visual illusion of the Renaissance perspective – which invokes three-dimensionality from the two-dimensional scenarios painted on screens and arranged in space synchronously – the stage, with the possibility of free distribution of light sources and with its growing autonomous control, has become materially three-dimensional. In this context, the scene became effectively constructed and no longer merely a simulacrum, or an ambiance in a naturalistic setting, or an abstraction in a symbolist configuration, such as the rhythmic spaces of Appia or Craig's *screens* (Nosella, 2018a).

Since lighting is one of the fundamental components for the visual elaboration of the scene with regard to the design of its spatiality and especially dependent on the technological resources available in its historical moment, we believe that there is a fundamental element to understand, fully interconnected, the practice of the scene and its renovations between the early 19th and the 20th century. "Enthusiasm" with the new possibilities of spatiality, from the lighting and the control of the light itself, constitutes one of the keys of what we call modern theater, providing, through extreme control over the scene, the proposition of a "scene beyond the human", as

Grazioli (2016) points out and as specifically addressed in Nosella (2018b). Thus, as the actor who aspires to become an automaton, a puppet, the modern scene also becomes something to be manipulated to express the director from the technological control. And these are questions that lie in the configuration of the modern metatheatrical dramaturgy/scene, as a component of its materialization, in the last degree.

The metatheatricity of Pirandello, which shows itself as a structure of feeling of the scenic modernity in itself, is one of the conformations of this scenic materiality (or what we could call re-theatralization of the scene), presenting itself as a kind of materialization of ideas about the making, obviously fictional, but not exempt of what we can call a theatrical culture of the time, full of historicity.

This is reinforced by the parallelism of production of these ideas with the period of constitution and performance of the *Cia. Teatro d'Arte di Roma*⁴, of which Pirandello was the *capocomico* from 1924 to 1928. On this fact, we find it extremely relevant to the information that the setting of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, directed by Pirandello in 1925, has clear scenic adjustments made by the author/director in response to other important scenarios of the time, specially from Max Reinhardt in Berlin in 1922, and of Pitoëff in Paris in 1923; and that such adjustments were effectively incorporated into dramaturgy, constituting the version we know today. Similarly, the version we have today of *Ciascuno a suo modo*, staged by Pirandello in 1928, is the reissued version of the play in 1933, with forceful modifications regarding the use of the scenic space, probably motivated by the inevitable growth of Pirandello as a director; by the immense failure that was the staging; and by the perception that, from this experience of a stable company closed in 1928 by Pirandello's growing disagreement with the Italian fascist government, *Questa sera se recita a soggetto* would be a kind of synthesis and revision of a set of ideas from the author/director on his own making (D'Amico; Tinterri, 1987).

The Plays and their Vestiges of Lighting

From this point on, we will present some analyses of metatheatrical dramaturgy as a historical source in order to define a possible framework of the thought and practice of lighting by Luigi Pirandello. For that, we chose

a clipping that, in a possibly broader analytical array of the issue, we consider exemplary. It is precisely a question of how the relation of new techniques of the scenic making, especially the lighting, as a support or effect of the configuration of the scene itself, happens. This question, which we have chosen as a central topic in the analytical section presented here, is directly related to the functions of visibility and visuality of light as the axis of thought about lighting in the scene (Tudella, 2017). In short, visibility would be the function in which light would only serve to “aid observation”, and visuality would be related to the fact that light takes on a stronger narrative role, intervening, as an effect, in the narrative itself. A light that illuminates (brightens) and a light that creates (Grazioli, 2015, p. 155).

In order to perform a historical reading of the thought about the making of lighting in Pirandello’s work, we selected and transcribed specific excerpts from the three metatheatrical plays – the *Theater in the Theater* trilogy – the original versions, in Italian, and the selected translations⁵, were compared and organized in order to try to construct a reading of the author/director – *capocomico*/lighting technician – regarding the issue. Let us examine it:

Meanwhile, the Doorman of theater, with his hat on his head, will enter the audience and, crossing the hallway between the chairs, will continue to hurry towards the stage to announce to the Director of the Company the arrival of the Six Characters that, having also entered the room, will follow the doorman at a distance; a little lost and perplexed, they will look around (Pirandello, 1999, p. 187).

The entrance of the six characters on the scene, in the play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, is marked by a scenic dispute that we consider exemplary of what we can call scenic writing as a materiality of language proper to modernity. We know that the proposed staging by Pirandello and the *Cia. Teatro d'Arte di Roma*, which premiered in Odescalchi Theater on May 18, 1925 (D'Amico; Tinterri, 1987), presented, for the first time, the currently known model of this scene, where the six characters come into scene from the back of the audience and cross them to reach the stage. Probably, this proposition from director Pirandello consisted of an adjustment/response to the first version of the play, from 1920, after the author watched, in 1923, the staging of Georges Pitoëff in Paris, in which the cha-

acters entered by the load elevator located in the back of the stage. Another scenic adjustment that Pirandello proposes in his 1925 play, according to several French and German critics who, after watching Pitoëff's plays in 1923 and Max Reinhardt's in 1922, watched the *Cia. Teatro d'Arte di Roma*'s version on tour through Europe⁶, is a radical differentiation in the scene between the *characters* and the *actors*, and with that comes the first blunt contribution of lighting:

Anyone who wants to attempt a scenic transposition of this play must strive, with all means, to achieve maximum effect so that these Six Characters are not confused with the Company's Actors. The disposition of one and another, indicated in the rubrics, when the first ones take the stage, will undoubtedly help; as well as a different coloring of light, using appropriate spotlights (Pirandello, 1999, p. 187)⁷.

Pirandello proposes to light in a different way the groups formed by the characters and the actors of the company that rehearse on the stage and suggests that such a difference of lighting is given by color, through appropriate spotlights. Even to this day, thinking about lighting different groups of actors on the scene, who move through space – having already seen their entrance through the entire audience – and in some moments even interact, with different colors, is not technically so simple. In any case, this reveals an important principle of control and autonomy of the technical potential of lighting, since, for this to happen, it is necessary that the light sources are independent, capable of being positioned in different places and having the control to turn the lights on and off at will. In addition to these technical characteristics of the light apparatus, it is essential that the stage directions are very precise and rehearsed, almost a kind of spatial choreography previously agreed on, so that the specific lights being switched on and off may illuminate the entire movement of the whole group of actors in scene.

Such technical clarity and precision in the constitution of what we call the *light effect* in conjunction with the other competencies, especially that of the actors, seems to us to be strong features of the debate proposed by the Pirandellian theater at the time of his role as director and playwright with the *Cia. Teatro d'Arte di Roma*, between 1925 and 1928, and we will focus on this issue. In fact, this is not only about Pirandello, but also about the scenic modernity, made possible, among other things, by the development

of the potential of electric lighting, so impactful that, in some cases, it overlapped with the other elements of the scenic making, even with the actor.

At the end of the play, another light effect is proposed by the director/author Pirandello: the characters reappear as shadows, behind a cloth, illuminated by a ghostly green light, this time without interference from the director (character) on the scene.

Suddenly, behind the white backdrop, as if by a mistake, a green spotlight will light up, which will project, in large and prominent imagery, the shadows of the Characters, except for that of Little Boy and the Little Girl. The Director, upon seeing them, will jump off the stage, terrified. At the same time, the spotlight will be extinguished behind the background, and on the stage the nightly blue will return (Pirandello, 1999, p. 239)⁸.

It is evident the importance that the effects of lighting, precise and calculated, come to have in the scenic proposition of the version that we know today of *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, which is begotten from Pirandello's reflections as *capocomico* of *Cia. Teatro d'Arte di Roma*, between 1924 and 1928, and thus concretized in his staging of the play in 1925. In addition to the effects, the role of visibility that the lighting plays is present in several moments, in which the Director, in the process of rehearsal, requests the lights to be turned on or off so that he can see or finish the job.

In the play as a whole, we can see that the duality fiction and reality, proposed as a central issue of the work, also bifurcates in the lighting: the effect lighting, which has, as a feature, the proposal of readings linked to the fictional universe of the characters; and the lighting which is present in the daily life of the company's stage work, with the function of making the rehearsal, and one or another scenic setting of the plot of the rehearsal, visible. Of these two functions of light in the scene, it seems fundamental to us that the first type of lighting is outside the control of the Director, while the second type is always under his care. It is as if the proposition of effect lights, a novelty that Pirandello embodies in both his scenic and dramatic practice – we have already seen that the modifications proposed in the scene in 1925 are incorporated in the text in relation to the first version of the 1921 play –, in Pirandello's metatheatrical fiction was still far from the director's control and was manifested as the property of the scenic event itself.

In the case of the second play of the trilogy, *Ciacuno a suo modo*, from 1924, now showing its metatheatricity in a play proposition *à clef*⁹, Pirandello is much more restrained in the use of lighting, avoiding the use of great light effects in the development of the play. It is interesting to note that, also in spatial terms, the author seems to retreat from the more daring propositions already experienced in *Sei personaggi*. In the first play, as we have seen, the Characters come in from the back of the audience, crossing it, just as the Director leaves the stage in the direction of the audience, remaining there, incidentally, at various moments of the staging – this is not only possible in terms of visibility by the flexibility of distribution of light sources and their control, but also with a strong intention of visuality, since there is a clear demarcation of the differences proposed by light (color and type of light) between Characters and Director. But in *Ciascuno*, although presenting the proposition of *intermezzos* that should occur outside the scenic stage, in the common spaces of the audience, of audience circulation in the intervals between the scenes, which we have already seen to be technically possible by the new potentialities of lighting, it happens as a whole on the scenic stage, not breaking the spatial division between stage and audience. It seems to us, however, that exactly when realizing an apparent retreat, Pirandello proposes as an experiment a radicalization of the use of lighting as a spatial construction of the senses in the scene, using exactly the potential of distribution and control of light sources as a way of, apparently only for visibility, to create an innovative scenic effect in terms of metatheatrical proposition.

Let's consider and ponder about one of the only moments when Pirandello proposes its use in the play, right in the first act:

First act

We are in the former palace of the noble lady Dona Livia Palegári, at the time of the reception, which is about to end. In the background, through three arches and two columns, one can see a richly lighted hall with many guests, ladies and gentlemen. In the front, less illuminated, we will see a living room, somewhat dark, all damask, adorned with valuable canvases, mostly of sacred subject; so that one would have the impression of being in the chapel of a church, of which that Hall in the background, beyond the columns, is the nave: sacred chapel of a profane church. This living room will have only a bench and some chairs for the convenience of those who want to admire the hanging screens of the walls. No door. From the hall,

some of the guests will be seen, in pairs or trios, away exchanging confidences. And when the cloth is lifted, we will find an Old Friend of the house and a Spirited Young Man talking (Pirandello, 1999, p. 325)¹⁰.

In a first reading, it may seem a very simple statement, which only informs about the spatial arrangement of the scene. We believe, however, that what is being constructed as a proposition is a kind of conjunction, in terms of elaboration of a scenic writing, of the two powers of light seen in *Sei personaggi*, that is, an effect light and a functional light of scene. This is due to the simple perception that Pirandello proposes that the space of the room in the background, which we may consider secondary, be more illuminated than the front room. Were it not for this information, we could suppose that the hall in the background would only exist to create a certain ambience, which could be illusory, since 1) it is in the background; and 2) all scenes of this act, except for the last one, occur in the front parlor, thus leaving the background environment reserved for the indiscriminate circulation of characters – possibly extras. The fact that this space is purposely cited as better illuminated than that of the front informs, however, that it could not serve merely as an illusory figuration *in the back*, since we know that, in public perception, this lighting configuration tends to *bring* the well-lit space *to the front*. This space, therefore, could no longer be just a painted screen, for instance, which would be enough for ambience. There is something else there, a sort of background that moves forward and leaps over the first, modifying, at some level, its meaning. The conversations that took place in the foreground, a constant *back and forth* of opinions, which are consistently changing, about the theme of the play, have their meaning punctuated, in a kind of real frivolous representation, by the guests of the party who, carelessly and continuously, stroll, laugh, drink and eat.

In the development of the act, this intention becomes more evident when the room in the background empties, but, contrary to what might seem more obvious in terms of the movement of light, remains illuminated, with more intense light, in evidence. Pirandello also makes a direct reference to this fact and, not only indicating a stage direction of light, he indicates its intention: “Dona Lívia will leave with the two old friends. Doro and Diego will remain for a long time in silence. The empty, illuminated hall behind it will make a strange impression” (Pirandello, 1999, p. 336)¹¹.

Following this, for the first time, the character of Délia Morello, who would represent Amélia Moreno, will enter the scene and, unlike what happened in the whole act, will advance through the back hall, stopping before entering the room in the foreground, remaining on the threshold of spaces, bringing the scene to the back, breaking the distinction between planes. The next scene, a dialogue between Diogo Cinci and Délia Morello, will also break the movement of the *back and forth* of opinions, as evidenced by Diogo's growing passion towards Délia and, throughout the scene, Délia's towards Diogo.

Such use of the lighting constitutes a scenic writing that must act unto the reading of the play without grand technical effects, inserting itself only in the field of the visibility. Technically, what we can perceive from the use of the proposed light is the possibility of a scene in depth and that has its materiality kept in that depth. As we have said, although it seems a retreat to the radical occupation of the space of *Sei personaggi*, here, taking this configuration of the proposition of that reading, the scene leaves the axis of the proscenium, proper of the illusory space of perspective, illuminated by the limelight, and advances to the background of the stage, not only orienting another spatial relation, but creating an effect that proposes the reading in a kind of visual distortion. This is only possible by the technical chart already described, consisting of punctual and autonomous light sources, which can be arranged along the stage positioned at the top unto the scene, and, to provide the difference of intensity between background and front, individual control on turning the lights on and off.

In terms of a scenic writing, the spatial configuration drawn by light – by its greater and lesser intensity – evidences a proposition of intimate articulation between the dramaturgical proposal and the drawing of light. Being a play *à clef*, Pirandello proposes it in planes of perception and signification, planes that would be composed and intertwined in levels of relation between reality and fiction, for instance, relative to the real characters of the story (Amélia Moreno and Barão Nuti – Délia Morello and Michele Rocca). Such a proposition will be repeated, like mirrors positioned face to face, generating successive *over reflections* in the scene, in scenographic and light planes, in a movement in which the visibility generated by the light will come to act as visuality of the scene.

In the case of *Questa sera si recita a soggetto*, written in 1930, the question about the duality of effect light and light to illuminate the scene gets the stage as the axis of the play itself, as if in it the author sought a synthesis of the questions raised in the previous one. Like the others, it is possible to perceive the narrative planes in the play. On the one hand its metatheatrical plot (a company trying to rehearse a play when it is interrupted by six characters or a night of debut in theater in which one tries to represent a play *à clef* with the people represented in the play sitting in the audience) and, on the other, the play inside the play (melodramas that would be the plot to be staged). In this case, the Director, returning to the scene, proposes an improvised play, having the text only as a script; in this way, he remains present, in the audience, intervening when necessary for the plot to go on. The presence of the Director, *roughly*, leads the technical set of the staging to provide scenic effects, which have light as the protagonist. Contrary to what we have seen in *Sei personaggi*, now the one who has full control over the creation of light effects is the Director accompanied by his technical staff (machinists, electricians, etc.). We shall mention, as an example, the beginning of the play inside the play as soon as the director, Dr. Hinkfuss, announces: “I apologize, ladies and gentlemen. The spectacle now really will begin” (Pirandello, 1999, p. 259).

Meanwhile, on the stage, you may see a city street with a white, rustic wall of a house, which runs from left to right for more than three-quarters of the stage, where it will angle in depth. On the corner, a lamp with its arm. Beyond the corner, on the other wall of the house in an obtuse angle, you will see the door of a Cabaret, lit by small colored lamps; and, almost in front of it, a little farther to the back and to the side, the portal of an old church, on three steps. Shortly before the curtain rises and the procession enters the room, the sound of church bells will be heard on the stage, and barely perceptible, the thud of an organ touched within it. When the curtain is raised and with the entrance of the procession, men and women (no more than eight or nine) passing in the street will be seen kneeling on the stage along the wall and to the right; the women making the sign of the cross; the men, taking their hats off. When the procession, having taken the stage, enter the Church, these men and women will join the cortege and will also enter. At the entrance of the last one, the sound of the bells will cease; in the silence, more distinctively, only the sound of the organ will remain, and then it will be lowered slowly, along with the gradual darkening of the stage. Suddenly, as soon as this sacred sound is extinguished, the jazz sound in the cabaret

will burst with a violent contrast, and at the same time the white wall that runs over three quarters of the stage will become transparent. There will be a glow of several colored lights inside the cabaret (Pirandello, 1999, p. 261)¹².

This effect, in which a solid surface, such as a wall, becomes transparent, enabling us to see what is happening behind it, is a well-known illumination trick, which requires a precise positioning of the sources in relation to object (usually fabric) that would represent the solid surface, as well as absolute and autonomous control over the lighting and turning off of these sources. This is so because this effect is made by turning off the sources that shed light on the fabric, making it appear solid, and the simultaneous lighting of another light that illuminates the scene that exists behind this cloth.

The director Dr. Hinkfuss' desire for effects is evident in the context in which he builds an elaborate scene with “[...] a beautiful setting representing an airfield, arranged with admirable effect” (Pirandello 1999, p. 275), and, in the end, he orders to undo everything, because it will not make any difference to the progress of the play and, sure, they could get new and better effects at another time.

Such a picture of aspiration for the technical effect, prepared along the plot that proposes this improvised role-playing based only on a script and the directives of the director on carefully designed effects, presents its limit to the end of the play, when the actors, feeling oppressed – in the clash between the creative freedom that the practice of improvisation gives to the performance and the bonds of precise stage directions, required by the effects proposed by the Director, imposed on them – they decide to cast him out. This will mean taking control of the performance and performing it from there without the apparatuses considered superfluous, of scenery, light, etc., which could be replaced by the force of the characters' own interpretation and truth along with the imagination of the public. Somehow, the technical elements would be brought back to their strict functions, in the case of light, to the visibility, as we have seen to be similar in *Ciascuno*. At that moment, alone on the stage – once engineers, scene technicians, electricians, etc., with the departure of the director, also leave their stations to watch the scene –, the actors resume the role-playing. They only begin to represent and the stage game, as if by magic, resumes its course.

Each one, saying their last line, will retreat to the dark, to the right. The first actress, left alone among the three bare walls of her jail, which, during the make-up and the change of clothes, will have been erected in the dark of the stage, will hit the head first on the wall on the right, then at the one on the bottom and then the left one. At the touch of the forehead, the wall will be visible for a moment due to a sharp blow of light coming from above, like a cold flash of lightning, and will disappear again in the dark.

[...]

On the wall of the background a small window is made transparent, as if veiled and distant, from which a soft moonlight appears.

NENÊ (from the dark, in a quiet voice, happy, with a tone of childish wonder, while from far away, a faint, distant serenade will be heard) – Oh, the window, look, it's really the window...

THE FIRST COMIC (in a quiet voice, also from the dark) – It was already there, but who illuminated it?

DORINA – Silence! (Pirandello, 1999, p. 302-303).

Apparently, by the very force of interpretation, scenery and light accompany them, subtlety, proposing significant effects that begin to compose the narrative together with the scene as a whole. And, at the dramatic apex of the scene, which runs smoothly throughout its duration, which had not been possible so far, Doctor Hinkfuss returns.

From the front door of the room, he appears enthusiastically, running down the hall, Doctor Hinkfuss, who goes straight to the stage.

DOCTOR HINKFUSS – Magnificent! Magnificent picture! They did as I said! This, in the novel, does not exist!

THE CHARACTERISTIC ACTRESS – Here he is again!

THE FIRST COMIC (coming from the left) – But he was always here with the lighting technicians, commanding in secret all the light effects!

NENÊ – Oh, that's why they look so beautiful... (Pirandello, 1999, p. 315).

Thus, the duality introduced in the play between the technical effect and the pulsating force of the improvised interpretation, which crosses Pirandello's thought about his own particular scenic act in his trilogy, has a conciliatory outcome when the whole group finds a kind of deletion of the individual elements of the mechanism of the scenic making for the sake of building something greater, born of the whole, which is the scene itself. The effect, as a cold and technological element, led by the director, who would require of actors and poetry the hardness of precise marking, on the one hand, and the truth of the actor embedded in their character, who mo-

ves only by the truth of poetry, of others, seemingly irreconcilable, become essential in composing a set apart from themselves in the scene.

Lighting, which we have agreed to have become essential to the scenic making, and not just for its function of making it visible, would become more and more essential the more it not did so, that is, the longer it remained as a constitutive element of the active scenic proposition; and, to this end, the potential of control, to tame such proposition, would be characterized as the great achievement of man in his representational performance since Prometheus. Pirandello's thoughts about the making of lighting in the scene coincides, therefore, with his thinking about the making of the scene, a scene that had in its unity the balance between its elements, achieved by a control that is begotten from itself. The scene, and the greater our potential for control over it is, would have to assume the role of a kind of organism, an automaton, a puppet that comes alive and moves by itself, illuminated by the light of the technological advance that inspired the era so much.

The Fiction: desire and expression of(in) history

What is perceived in the analysis presented here, which carries on throughout the three plays, is how the resources and potentialities of scenic lighting, made possible by the technological advances of the 19th and early 20th centuries, both become a subject for Pirandello as playwright – in an apparently more forceful phase as a *capocomico* of a stable company – and enable his work to construct particular scenic-narrative structures. Somehow, as we have said, what is perceived is the fact that the metatheatrical structure is a manifest expression of that historical moment, in which the material conditions of the scenic work are reflected in the work of the Italian author, leaving rich material for knowledge of the ways to think about the making (and of the making in itself) of the past. From materiality to materiality – historical technical conditions and narrative structure – what is fixed is a way of thinking the making.

The dramaturgy, as we have seen, incorporating in a diffused form the real potentiality of the present and the desire impelling towards the future, performs its historical testimony of a moment of important transformations and aspirations. In the field of lighting, the technological novelties of lighting, gas and electric, carry the question of its role in the scene with extreme

force. From accessory to historical protagonist, lighting can no longer only fit the role of brightening the scene, and is, therefore, imputed a responsibility to be always present as something more. Its function of visibility becomes little in the aspirations of creators and spectators, who always seek new forms of visibility. Such a context has made us – creators, spectators, critics and theorists – forget that, without visibility, there is no visibility; just as there is no visibility without visibility. And the amalgam lies in the historical dimension of technology and labor (Nosella, 2018b, p. 75).

The scenic lighting imagined by Pirandello in the pages of his meta-theatrical plays, when placed between tradition and renewal, reveals a theater that, from the barricades of history, rises towards a new century, a century that, as we have already seen in its stage, will be between the need of shelter of our humanity and the *wonderful world of technology*. And, exactly, between tradition and renewal, it will show us that, in what often appears only as duality, there is more of an array (if not factually, than by necessity) than what is seen.

Notes

- ¹ This article resulted from the research *Capocomicato e metateatro: o fazer e o pensamento da iluminação na dramaturgia pirandelliana*, developed as part of the postdoctoral studies in the research lines in History and Historiography of Theater and Arts of the Post-graduation Program in Performing Arts of Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), supervised by professor Maria de Lourdes Rabetti, PhD (August 2017-July 2018), financed by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel – CAPES (December 2017-July 2018).
- ² In the sphere of the proposition of a history of the schools of thought in the making of stage lighting, this article, without harming its autonomy, composes, in the author's view, a set with two other articles produced in the same period of investigative work. For those who are interested, see Nosella (2018a; 2018b).
- ³ To briefly refer to the question of the meaning of *capocomico*, which is quite important in general historical studies of theater and the history of the scene, in particular, I will cite only a brief definition, almost as an entry, in a translator's note: “Capocomico – comic chief – leader of a theatrical company for

bookkeeping of the actors; figure that, within the popular comic theater, one tends to accumulate functions like director of the company, first actor, tester. Capocomico, the experience which is present at different moments in the history of theater, requires, precisely, historical-theatrical studies that unravel it from value adjectives, in order to recover the historical understanding of its notion, from the theatrical context, its configuration” (Rabetti, 2013, p. 151-152).

- 4 The *Cia. Teatro d'Arte di Roma* was founded in 1924 by Mussolini and began its activities with Pirandello as *Capocomico* in 1925 (D'Amico; Tinterri, 1987).
- 5 The readings and re-readings of the plays always occurred in both versions; the precise comparison was only given in the sections selected for analysis.
- 6 Paris on the 6th of July and Berlin on the 12th of October of 1925 (D'Amico; Tinterri, 1987, p. 130).
- 7 Original in Italian: “*Chi voglia tentare una traduzione scenica di questa commedia bisogna che s'adoperi con ogni mezzo a ottenere sopra tutto l'effetto che questi Sei Personaggi non si confondano con gli attori della Compagnia. La disposizione degli uni e degli altri, indicata nelle didascalie, allorché quelli saliranno sul palcoscenico, gioverà senza dubbio; come una diversa colorazione luminosa per mezzo d'appositi riflettori*” (Pirandello, 2015, p. 9).
- 8 Original in Italian: “*Subito, dietro il fondalino, come per un sbaglio d'attacco, s'accenderà un riflettore verde, che proietterà, grandi e spiccate, le ombre dei personaggi, meno il Giovinetto e la Bambina. Il capocomico, vedendole, schizzerà via dal palcoscenico, atterrito. Contemporaneamente, si spegnerà il riflettore dietro il fondalino, e si rifarà sul palcoscenico il notturno azzurro di prima*” (Pirandello, 2015, p. 69).
- 9 Based on facts.
- 10 Original in Italian: “*Atto Primo: Siamo nell'antico palazzo della nobile signora Donna Livia Palegari nell'ora del ricevimento, che sta per finire. Si vedrà in fondo, attraverso tre arcate e due colonne, un ricchissimo salone molto illuminato e con molti invitati, signori e signore. Sul davanti, meno illuminato, vedremo un salotto, piuttosto cupo, tutto damascato, adorno di pregiatissime tele, la maggior parte di soggetto sacro; cosicché ci sembrerà di trovarci nella cappella d'una chiesa, di cui quel salone infondo, oltre le colonne, sia la navata: cappella sacra d'una chiesa profana. Questo salotto avrà appena una panca e qualche scranna per comodità di chi voglia ammirar le tele alle pareti. Nessun uscio. Ci verranno dal salone alcuni*

degli invitati, a due, a tre alla volta, per farsi, appartati, qualche confidenza, e, al levarsi della tela, ci troveremo un Vecchio Amico di casa e un Giovine sottile, che discorreranno tra loro” (Pirandello, 2015, p. 11).

- ¹¹ Original in Italian: “*Via Donna Livia coi due vecchi amici. Doro e Diego resteranno per un buon pezzo in silenzio. Il salone vuoto e illuminato farà, alle loro spalle, una strana impressione” (Pirandello, 2015, p. 27).*
- ¹² Original in Italian: “*Sul palcoscenico, intanto, si vedrà una strada della città col muro bianco, grezzo, d’una casa, che correrà da sinistra a destra per più di tre quarti della scena, dove farà angolo in profondità. Allo spigolo, un fanale col suo braccio. Dopo lo spigolo, nell’altro muro della casa ad angolo ottuso, si vedrà la porta d’un Cabaret, illuminata da lampadine colorate; e, quasi dirimpetto, un po’ più in fondo e di taglio, il portale d’un’antica chiesa, su tre scalini. Un poco prima che si levi il sipario e che la processione entri nella sala s’udrà sul palcoscenico il suono delle campane della chiesa e, appena percettibile, il rombo d’un organo sonato nell’interno di essa. Al levarsi del sipario e all’entrata della processione, si vedranno sul palcoscenico inginocchiarsi, lungo il muro e a destra, uomini e donne (non più di otto o nove) che si troveranno a passare per la strada: le donne, facendosi il segno della croce, gli uomini scoprendosi il capo. Allorché la processione, salita sul palcoscenico, entrerà nella chiesa, questi uomini e queste donne s’aggiungeranno al codazzo ed entreranno anche loro. Entrato l’ultimo, cesserà il suono delle campane; durerà ancora, nel silenzio, più distinto, quello dell’organo per poi venir meno piano piano col graduale mancar della luce sulla scena. Subito, appena estinto questo suono sacro, scatterà con violento contrasto il suono d’un jazz nel Cabaret e, nello stesso tempo, il muro bianco che corre per più di tre quarti della scena si farà trasparente. Si vedrà l’interno del Cabaret sfolgorante di varie luci colorate” (Pirandello, 2015, p. 126-127).*

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Berilo Luigi Deiró Nosella is a Professor of the Undergraduate Theater Course and the Postgraduate Program in Performing and Scenic Arts of the Arts Department of Universidade Federal de São João del Rei (UFSJ).

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3009-9836>

E-mail: berilonosella@ufsj.edu.br

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