

The Employment Contract as the Materialization of the Social Order

Contracts at Albert Ranft's Stockholm theatres, 1895-1926

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ABSTRACT

In the archive, the materialized traces of theatrical organization and performances remain. In this paper, we focus on the employment contract as a type of source material commonly found but rarely studied in theatre studies. Empirically, the paper is based on a study of contracts from Albert Ranft's Stockholm theatres, 1895-1926. Ranft built his commercially funded theatrical empire in Stockholm in a period when the competition from subsidized theatre was minimal, and for a time dominated the Stockholm theatres. The study demonstrates how the study of employment contracts allows us to form an understanding of the power relations between managers on the one hand, and artists and directors on the other, and also the formal and social aspects of the employment contracts. In the case of Albert Ranft, the contracts bear evidence of his dominant position in Stockholm theatre, which in turn afforded him an unusually powerful position in relation to his employees. The relationship between the formal and social contract is explored, and it is suggested that the formal contract could be seen as a photographic negative of the social contract: if there is an extensive social contract, the formal contract will be less elaborate, and vice versa. The extensive formal contracts of the studied period might therefore be seen as evidence of a relatively thin social contract, implying that industry norms were, at the time, not institutionalized enough to be taken for granted.

KEYWORDS

Albert Ranft, employment contract, employment relations, theatre directors, archive.

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INTRODUCTION

The archive might be seen as traces of past lives, the remains of the day that we are able to encounter in the present. These remains are fragmented, as serendipity and selection determines what should be cast aside and lost, and what should be preserved for the afterworld. The role of archival research, then, is to make sense of these traces, and reassemble the fragments into a semblance of coherence, seeking to provide an understanding of the past and thereby possibly illuminate the present.¹ What can be surmised from these fragments, that we may gain an understanding of the whole? While a more post-modern perspective would argue that 'the whole' is an illusion, and the student of past events a storyteller, interpreting the past in order to create history, it is also possible to argue that there is such a thing as a social order independent of interpretation, and thus the task of the student of the social order of the world we live in is to piece it together from the traces and sources available.² Not to say that our understanding of a social system is not based on interpretation, but rather that the collective construction of social institutions means that they to some extent have effects regardless of the interpretation of any one individual.

This paper seeks to study one such type of fragment, namely employment contracts, more specifically the employment contracts at Albert Ranft's Stockholm theatres, 1895-1926. The studied period, reflecting the span of Ranft's theatres in Stockholm, also captures a dynamic time period in Swedish theatre history, traditionally seen as the advent of the modern theatre, a fundamental shift in artistic ideals, but, as shown in this special issue, characterized both by continuities and breaking points. To what extent such a shift was also mirrored in labour market changes is still largely unexplored. Arguably, employment contracts, although rarely used as source material for theatre history, may prove a source of insight in this respect.

1. Moore, Salter, Stanley and Tamboukou 2016, Chapter 1.
2. Jenkins 2003, 6-9; Bourdieu 2000.

The organization of theatres is commonly denoted by a measure of transitoriness, as companies and crews are often temporarily assembled for a season, a production or even a single performance.³ From a researcher's perspective this circumstance means that organizing theatre also leaves a paper trail of documents in the form of employment contracts and letters discussing plans and hopes for future collaborations and productions. Letters have been more commonly studied, for example to trace the career of a certain performer, but employment contracts have until now rarely been the focus of scholarly interest in Swedish theatre history.

The aim of the study is twofold: firstly, to explore the employment contract as source material for the study of organizations and fields of artistic production, specifically the theatre, and secondly, to contribute to our understanding of labour market conditions and relations in this period of Swedish theatre history. Thereby, the study seeks to explore the possibilities and insights that the employment contract, as a commonly present but rarely studied trace found in the archives of the theatre, holds.

THE LOGICS OF THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

The employment system of the theatre is typically a complex web of interpersonal relations, rules of job design and task assignments, and status systems determined by the rules of the field, which provide sufficient stability to enable high labour motility and the prevalence of temporary employment.⁴ This organizational aspect of the theatre, in contrast to the performative, has not been the focus of extensive studies, although the advances made in the field highlight the complex social system of the labour market of the theatre, which enables the quick assemblage of temporary ensembles and the stability and predictability to provide the possibility of a career in spite of high uncertainty and often high unemployment rates.⁵

The traces the production of theatre leaves in the archive are a kaleidoscopic assemblage of material: photographs, contracts, letters, reviews, advertisements, biographies and memoirs, repertoire lists, recordings, costumes, brochures from suppliers, and so on. From this material, varied and often eclectic, what is the significance of contracts?

As materializations of social order, contracts bear witness to the organization of theatre productions. Research in contemporary theatre suggests two, not contradictory but nevertheless different, explanations for the underlying dynamic of the labour market of the theatre. The first explanation draws on the propensities of artistic production, summarized by Caves in his well-known description of what he terms as 'creative industries', which have later been

3. Haunschild 2003; Lysell 2008.

4. Haunschild 2003; Näslund 2012, 51-59.

5. Eikhof 2010; Haunschild and Eikhof 2009; Karhunen 2004; McKinlay and Smith 2009, 10-28.

adapted for performing arts in general and theatre in particular.⁶ It is less the case of an artistic characteristic unique to creative industries that set them apart from everything else, than a unique combination of properties – separately they may be found in other industries, but taken together they set creative industries apart. These properties are: the nobody knows property (nobody knows beforehand what will turn out to be successful, i.e. a demand is uncertain and difficult to predict), Art for art's sake (productions, and those involved in them, will be situated on a field of artistic production in Bourdieu's sense, where the main aim is artistic progress rather than profitability), the motley crew principle (creative products tend to demand the input of diversely skilled workers), infinite variety (each product is different, hence the need and importance of critics and their likes as evaluators), A-list/B-list (artistic personnel are ranked according to their perceived skills and proficiency, resulting in a clear hierarchy where an over-employed elite coexists with high unemployment in the same profession) and time flies (production, i.e. rehearsals and preparation, is personnel intensive and therefore costly, and consequently often kept to a minimum, or at least a limited amount of time). The performative aspect of the theatre, and direct contact between audience and performers also reduces the need for a middle man to take care of distribution, as may be seen in for example the film and music industries, and furthermore limits the possibilities of profitability since there are limited possibilities to duplicate a hit production, beyond extending the period in which it is performed, or moving it to a larger venue.⁷ These propensities in turn have repercussions on the organization of labour markets for actors, directors and other artistic personnel, with temporary employment, high levels of flexibility and uncertainty for artistic personnel and strong segmentation of artists into the few that are deemed "talented" or "interesting" and have an excess of work, and the many that are deemed "less talented" or "less interesting" and suffer high rates of unemployment, which tends to make the median salaries for actors low.⁸

The second explanation puts less focus on the propensities of production, but rather the dynamics of the social context in which theatre production takes place, described by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as a field of artistic production.⁹ Such fields will share a very specific logic and dynamic, which in turn will structure the room for improvisation and action, and thereby determine the logic of events, choices and order in the field. This field specific logic means that the position of an individual actor in the field will be determined to the extent that the capital they have (whether economic, social or cultural) is acknowledged by others in the field and assigned value, thereby being transformed into symbolic capital. The more autonomous the field, the more symbolic

6. Haunschild 2003; Näslund 2012, 47-49; Caves 2000, 1-21.

7. Haunschild 2003; Klaic 1999.

8. Menger 1999; Hewitt 1970.

9. Bourdieu 2000, 312-345.

capital will be the only type of resource that is acknowledged as a source of status. These two logics, the production logic and the field logic, are both likely to influence how theatre is organized, if they are both present. So, for example, the production logic may explain why so many actors are employed on short contracts, while the field logic may explain why a certain actor (who has more symbolic capital and therefore a higher position in the field) is more frequently thought of and deemed more appropriate for a certain part. The actors in the field will also be in continuous debate on what could be deemed as 'good' or 'artistically interesting' theatre, and thus argue what the right taste should be.

Thus, the two perspectives do not necessarily contradict each other, but rather offer different parts of the explanation. What remains to be explained, however, is how these two logics are interrelated. For example, according to the production logic, the reason why stars are given a higher salary is that success with the public is more likely if they are part of the performance – their participation lowers the risk, and therefore they are rewarded more. If, on the other hand, the field logic prevails in this issue, actors will not be primarily paid according to their appeal with the audience, but also or rather to the extent that they have high status in the field. This may be because they are popular with the audience, but, if the field is more autonomous, it is more likely to be because other actors in the field deem them as artistically interesting. In other words, their work adheres to the artistic conventions and ideals of the time, as perceived by others in the theatrical field. If the field is autonomous, an actor may be wildly popular with the general public, yet carry very little status in the theatrical field. Employment contracts, which contain not only the conditions for employment, but also the remuneration, may serve as evidence of what was valued in the industry at a certain point. Thus, employment contracts, which may be viewed as materializations of the social order of the theatre, may serve to advance our understanding of how these two forces – the production logic and the field logic – interrelate.

THE EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT – FORMAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL

An employment contract represents an agreement between employer and employee, with mutual and reciprocal obligations. It is thereby a manifestation of the relationship between employer and employee, and, as such, not without a degree of complexity. The formal, written contract represents only part of this agreement, albeit the most visible and potentially most durable part of the contract. But there are also other parts of the contract: aspects that are not written down, and aspects that are taken for granted, that go without saying. These aspects may be described in terms of the psychological and social contract, whose content will not be the same as in the written contract, but rather expand and elaborate on the contents of the written contract.

The psychological contract is the specific agreement between an individual employee and employer. It is the obligations that both parties perceive that they carry. The agreement about what these obligations are develops in

interaction between employer and employee. The social contract, on the other hand, is not negotiated between individual employers and employees, but rather the taken-for-granted assumptions that are given by the industry: the norms, rules and beliefs that are shared within that specific social context of the organization.¹⁰ It thereby also follows that the contents of the social contract are context dependent.

The spirit of the employment contract also differs depending on the specific social context and situation, which may lead to a more transactional or a more relational contract. A transactional contract would focus only on the exchange of money for labour between employer and employee. Relational contracts typically focus on more long term agreement and expectations, such as development and training. Transactional contracts, by contrast, primarily specify specific, monetized exchanges of salary for labour.¹¹

Studies of contemporary theatre show that contingent work - work where employment is temporary, and workers self-employed - is the norm within the theatre, and furthermore, that this contingent work relies on an informal employment system. In contingent labour markets, workers tend to show less affect and commitment towards the employer, as a result of the lack of relational contracts, as employers take little or no responsibility for development and training of the employees. The employment system consists of the social system that enables contingent employment: the rules, institutions and organizational practices as to what the relationship between employee and employer should be. Interorganizational ties are also crucial to the employment system, as they enable recruitment and recognition within the industry.¹²

The formal, written contracts found in the archives thus only represent part of the employment contract. Moreover, they represent the part that the parties have deemed necessary to state explicitly, the parts of the agreement that cannot be taken for granted, and which are not stipulated by the social contract. Therefore, even though the social contract cannot be found explicitly in the archive, its photographic negative, so to speak, is there, since the written contract bears witness to what is not in the social contract.

ALBERT RANFT, THE THEATRE KING

The turn of the 19th century, and the career and theatres of Albert Ranft, represent a shift in Swedish theatre, and moreover, from a Swedish perspective, a rare period in which theatre financing was almost solely commercial, in that public subsidies were scarce and thus financing depended largely on ticket sales. The illustrious career of Albert Ranft (see also Hoogland, in this volume), who at one point owned all privately owned theatres in Stockholm, in addition to renting theatres in Gothenburg and touring other parts of the country, and gained the epithet of the king of theatre, was partly due to the opportunity

10. Edwards and Karau 2007.

11. Atkinson 2008.

12. Haunschild 2003.

provided by institutional circumstances and chance: a temporary lack of subsidized theatre in Stockholm reduced competition (the Royal Dramatic Theatre lost its subsidies in 1888, and was not able to produce performances to the same level as before), while the film industry was still in its infancy, a timely inheritance which provided the financial possibility to start up a company, and an early success in the form of the production of *Ljungby horn*.¹³ For a few decades, Ranft was able to build a theatrical empire in Stockholm, and to attract the actors, playwrights and audience necessary to build such an empire. While Ranft was seen mainly as providing light entertainment and certainly was financially dependent on ticket sales and not adverse to profits, it would be mistaken to assume that there was no element of artistic ambition and desire for acknowledgement of the field, as evidenced for example in his vigorous defence of what he evidently saw as a misapprehension from critics and others that his productions did not have artistic merit, and the choice to stage productions of Strindberg and other plays with artistic rather than solely commercial appeal.¹⁴

Ranft's theatres, particularly after the turn of the century, also coincided with what is commonly perceived as a larger shift in artistic conventions in Swedish theatre towards modernism, whereby the performance as mainly a showcase for a star actor in a plum role gave way to a view of theatre as a collective effort, where the playwright and later also the director became the artistic heads of the production, and the actor increasingly became part of an ensemble, rather than either star or backdrop to a star.¹⁵ The contracts of the studied period, 1895-1926, therefore on the one hand present a case of relative institutional stability: consistent lack of subsidies and financial dependence on ticket sales, audience habits not yet shifted from theatre to film, and the lack of collective bargaining. There is no evidence of any conflicts between Ranft and the union. In the contracts, there is the occasional reference to the Swedish Union of Performing Arts and Film in connection with them receiving any fines Ranft would collect from his employees, but the influence of the union on the relationship between Ranft and his employees, to the extent that there was one, has left no traces. The unions in Sweden were recognized to have collective bargaining rights in 1906, but there is no trace of this in Ranft's contracts, which did not change as a result.¹⁶ On the other hand, when it comes to artistic conventions and ideals, the advent of modernism makes the studied period a time of change.¹⁷ Obviously, this is not to say that Ranft's theatrical empire was impervious to economic and social turmoil in terms of for example WWI, that certainly affected ticket sales and audience sizes towards the end of the studied period, but one might argue that the studied period nevertheless was one of comparative institutional stability, when it came to theatre in Stockholm.

13. Rosenquist 1997.

14. Ranft 1921.

15. Ek 2007, 25-26, Marker and Marker 1996, 227-248.

16. Bengtsson 2016.

17. Lagerroth 2007.

As audience habits and taste, and competition in terms of subsidized theatres changed, so did the fortunes of Albert Ranft's theatrical empire, and in 1926, the company filed for bankruptcy.¹⁸

The chosen period, 1895-1926, reflects the period during which Ranft owned theatres in Stockholm, to the extent that the employment contracts have been preserved. The remains of Ranft's archives can today be found at the national Swedish libraries for music, theatre and dance in Gäddviken, Stockholm. For this study, a random selection of employment contracts from the archive (n=38) were studied in detail (File A127/F3 in the Ranft archive), and furthermore repertoire lists of Ranft's theatres, also from the Ranft archive. In addition, contracts from Germany and Finland who did not involve Ranft, a 1902 contract from Kleines Theater in Berlin and four contracts from Svenska Teatern in Helsinki (not to be confused with Svenska Teatern in Stockholm, owned by Ranft), dated 1884, 1901, 1918 and 1922, were studied. In the following, the empirical findings from these contracts will be presented.

THE CONTENTS OF THE BLUEPRINT CONTRACT: POWER RELATIONS AND FIELD STRENGTH

As was stated in the introduction, the employment contracts in Swedish theatre at this time have not been studied before. Therefore, in order to illustrate what the contracts contain, and what information can be gained from them in terms of not only remuneration, but also power relations between managers and employees, and industry convention at the time, a short presentation of the contract and how it evolved over time follows.

Already from the beginning, actors working at Albert Ranft's theatres were offered a standard contract. During the whole period, the convention when it comes to how contracts are written remains the same: there is a standard, detailed and specific contract that is used as a blueprint, and additions or changes are then added in handwriting. This convention was at the time followed not only at Ranft's theatres, but contemporary contracts from Svenska Teatern in Helsinki are also similar.

18. Rosenquist 1997.

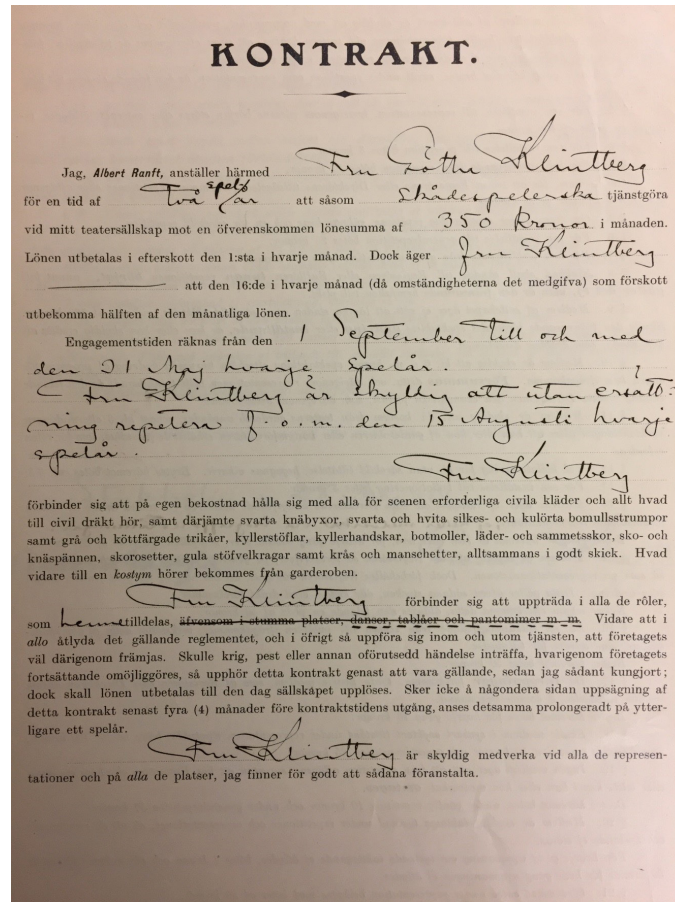


Figure 1. The blueprint contract, with customary additions and changes in handwriting. Musik- och teaterbiblioteket, Stockholm, Albert Ranft's archive, A127/F3.

The Ranft contract, however, is more detailed, and over the studied period, grows even more so, so that in 1896, the blueprint contract has 30 clauses, while in 1926, the blueprint is half a page longer, and contains 36 clauses. The change is gradual: it would seem the blueprint was revised every year, and with each revision, the contract grew longer and more detailed. At no point is there a radical change, but rather incremental development. Different contracts from the same year do not differ substantially, which would indicate that signing the contract was precluded not so much by a negotiation of the conditions, as of being informed of them. This in turn might give an indication of the expected room for negotiation of the terms of the contract for the actors.

The blueprint contract specifies the period of employment, typically one season, from September 1st to May 1st the following year. The actor would also be required to take part in two weeks of unpaid rehearsals prior to September 1st, specified to the time of day that rehearsals would begin on August 15th, and often, Ranft would have the option to prolong the contract for the month of

May, presumably to meet demand if there was a hit production. The actor was also required to provide quite a substantial wardrobe – this list of items, which includes everything from stockings to frocks to gloves, enabling the actor to play historical roles - underwent continuous change, and over the years contained fewer items. This is also a frequent place for alterations, as some of the items stated in the blueprint were often crossed over. The contract also stipulates the salary and on what date of the month it would be paid. Actors were paid every two weeks in the first versions of the contract and monthly in later years. During the contract period, the actor is obliged to perform in all parts, singing, speaking or silent, in any venue that Ranft saw fit. The contract then goes on to detail the rules the actors has to abide by – be on time, be orderly, learn their lines, take part in all rehearsals, not leave the city without permission, adjust to any sudden changes in the program, return borrowed costume items on time, not be drunk, not perform at any other theatres during the contract period, take encores, not sit in the audience after they had performed, and so on. For each listed transgression, there is a fine to be paid. In 1910, an addition is made whereby actors are barred from filming – the fine to be paid is considerable, 100 kronor each time the film is shown, which is comparatively high considering fines for other transgressions range from 10 to 50 kronor, and the monthly salary at this point would range from 200 to 600 kronor. Breach of contract was also heavily fined, typically equivalent to ten months of salary. To summarize, this is a contract that has the appearance of reflecting a very uneven relationship, where the manager is very powerful, and the actor has very little say, or freedom. The security of having almost certain income (some contracts were annulled prematurely during the season, although it is of course difficult to know on whose initiative) for the next ten months may have made up for this in the eyes of the actors. More prominent and better paid actors, however, were likely to have somewhat more freedom in their contract, which would indicate that the restrictions of the contract were such that those who were in a position to bargain sought to decrease them.

That this power relationship was not self-evident at the time is illustrated by the contract negotiations between Albert Ranft and Charlotte Wiehe-Bereny, the famous Danish actress and singer, in 1905 prior to her engagement at Ranft's theatres in Stockholm. The first proposal by Ranft, dated October 20th, is a shortened version of the blueprint, whereby it is stipulated that Mrs Wiehe-Bereny is obligated to perform every day during the contract period. Ranft also has the option of prolonging the contract one month at a time, and Mrs Wiehe-Bereny is obligated to perform in three other named productions. Although the contract bears the heading "Agreement", "Mrs Wiehe-Bereny's Obligations" would perhaps have been more fitting to the content. The contract was signed by Ranft, and evidently sent to Mrs Wiehe-Bereny for her signature, which would indicate that Ranft did not regard it so much as a proposal and starting point of negotiations, as the final proposal.

However, this contract was not signed by Mrs Wiehe-Bereny. Instead, a new document arrives – not from Mrs Wiehe-Bereny, who resides in Paris, but

from her impresario, Folmer Hansen, in Copenhagen. The new contract proposal, which is also the one which is signed by both parties (Mrs Wiehe-Bereny, being a woman, is not able to sign legal documents, and so her husband signs on her behalf), is written in a different tone, and consists as much of Ranft's obligations to Mrs Wiehe-Bereny as the other way around. It gives her greater freedom, as there are now more plays that she agrees to play in (not identical to Ranft's original list), and what part she will play is also stipulated, and her economic position is stronger, as she will to some extent have the right to part of the profit rather than just a set sum. Furthermore, in addition, Ranft is to pay 10% to her impresario.

The impresario is a role which never figures in Ranft's contracts with Swedish actors, nor does the type and tone of the contract that results from the impresario's intervention appear in any other contracts from the period. Although more evidence would be needed in order to draw any certain conclusions, a possible interpretation is that the introduction of an intermediary agent such as an impresario had the capability of shifting power relations between actors and managers, assisting the actor in increasing their leverage.

If we compare Ranft's blueprint contract with contracts from two other contemporary theatres, a 1902 contract from Kleines Theater (previously Schall und Rauch) in Berlin, and four contracts dated 1884, 1901, 1919 and 1922 from Svenska Teatern in Helsinki, several differences are found. All three theatres use a blueprint contract, but the content differs. In the Berlin contract, it is not the manager, Max Reinhardt, who represents the theatre, but his deputy, Hans Oberländer. Similarly to Ranft's contracts, there are blank spaces where the salary, when it is to be paid, and start and end date of the contract are to be filled in. In addition to the salary, the actor is also to receive a sum of *Spielgeld* ("Performance money") for each performance she takes part in. The blueprint also states that the actors are to be given a certain amount (left blank) per night when the company is touring, be guaranteed a certain class (left blank) of train and steam boat when travelling, and that the company will pay for the transport of their luggage. When it comes to costume, the blueprint stipulates that rather than Ranft's detailed list of specific items that the actors are required to provide, female actors are to be provided their costume by the theatre, and male actors should provide shoes, socks and gloves, if needed, but be provided with the rest. The contract in its entirety has 10 clauses, to compare with Ranft's 31, the main reason being that there unlike Ranft's contract, which lists 16 different transgressions that the actor is to pay a fine for, the Berlin contract has none. Instead, the Berlin blueprint stipulates that unless an exemption is explicitly stated in the contract, the terms and conditions of the standard contract of the *Genossenschaft deutscher Bühnenangehöriger* (The union) in Berlin apply. Altogether, the tone of the blueprint is much less rulebook, and more mutual obligations, than in Ranft's contract. The contract in question is for Gertrud Eysoldt, one of the most prominent actresses in the company at the time¹⁹,

19. Fischer-Lichte 2005, 1.

and there are some additions and alterations made to her advantage, such as omitting the blueprint provision that in case needed, the theatre reserves the right to up to a month of unpaid vacation in the summer. In comparison, the blueprint Ranft contract stipulates that all actors are only to be paid nine months of the year.

The Helsinki contracts are similar to the Berlin contracts in that the actors are employed for a whole year, but have the right of 4-6 weeks off in the summer, that the theatre is to pay for travels of a certain class, and that there is no detailed list of transgressions and fines, which makes the contracts much shorter than Ranft's contracts. The unpaid period of rehearsals before the season begins in August does not feature in 1884, in 1901 there are 11 days, in 1919 15 days, and in 1922 returns to no unpaid rehearsals. In other respects, the contracts have elements from the Ranft contracts, for example the list of items of costume that the actors should provide, which is the same as Ranft's, and that the contracts in practice are not for a full year, but from the beginning to the end of the season. There are also stipulations as to what other work the actor can undertake while on contract: no performances at other theatres in Helsinki, but performances at theatres outside of Helsinki as well as film work in Helsinki is fine. The relationship with the budding film industry, it would seem, was quite different at Svenska Teatern in Helsinki, than at Ranft's theatres.

There are also, however, features that are different or unique to the Helsinki contracts. The Helsinki contracts stipulate that unless either party annuls the contract, it will by default be renewed for another year, in the same way that Ranft's contracts do. The point at which the contract automatically renews becomes earlier over the years: in 1884, it has to be annulled before April, in 1901 and 1919, before January, and in 1922, before December – while at Ranft's theatres, the renewal point begins at three months before the end of the contract, and at the turn of the century increases to four months, and remains there. The contract also states that in addition to playing all the parts, speaking or non-speaking, singing or dancing as the manager sees fit, the actor also commits to following the orders of the director, and to observe "an honourable and dignified behaviour and life style" at all times, whether in private or at work. Another unique feature of the Helsinki contracts is that while they, like Ranft's contracts, stipulate that in case of war, fire or any other such event, the management retains the right to dissolve the company and render all contracts null and void, in Helsinki, the actors will receive a month's pay as compensation.

Obviously, a more systematic comparison with employment contracts from other theatres, in Sweden and elsewhere, would be needed in order to show with certainty to what extent there were national or international norms or conventions of conditions of employment at the time, and what position Ranft had in comparison to other theatre managers. Nevertheless, the evidence at hand suggests that at the time, while there was a certain degree of institutional isomorphism in the field, there were certainly local differences in terms of the tone

and content of the contracts.²⁰ One reason for these differences between theatres, apart from the reflection of national differences in terms of for example labour laws and the role of unions, could arguably be that they reflect differences in the relative power of management in relation to the actors at different theatres. In other words, Ranft, in comparison to, for example, management at Svenska Teatern in Helsinki and Kleines Theater in Berlin, might have had a comparatively strong position vis-à-vis the actors, which allowed him a more authoritarian tone and somewhat better bargaining position. The title 'theatre king' was not accidental.

From this brief analysis, we might also see how employment contracts can be used as a source both to find out the relative power of a specific individual, and furthermore to study industry norms, both in terms of content and strength. Studying the degree of similarity between contracts, at different theatres and involving different people, provides insight as to the degree of isomorphism and thereby the degree to which industry norms have been institutionalized in the field.

ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS

Although for the most part, the blueprint was used as is, and only dates, names and salary levels were added, there are frequently some minor additions or omissions in the contract. To some extent, these additions are of the same type, and are then in the next version of the blueprint included in the standard. This is true for example for the list of items of clothing that the actor was obligated to provide, or for the two weeks of unpaid rehearsals prior to the engagement – until about 1905, these are added, but after that, they become part of the standard contract. The contracts were obviously not written individually, but rather, a standard contract was printed, and then any additions or changes were made by hand.

There is also some evidence of negotiations preceding the contract signing, as there are some instances where actors get slightly different conditions to the standard. For example, Nils Arehn, while obviously a star with a star salary (about double the standard at the time), also has an extra clause that if he were to turn up inebriated, he would immediately forfeit his contract. Actors with higher salaries also commonly seem to have been able to negotiate other details of the contract to their advantage as well, for example, that they not be required to perform in silent parts, or that if Ranft were to decide to send them on tour, they would receive extra payment for this. On the other hand, such stars may also be obligated to perform in a certain number of benefit performances at the convenience of Ranft. While contracts are typically always for one season, there might also be a written-in option for Ranft to prolong the contract for a year (at a higher salary), or there might just be a hand-written note saying "The contract is prolonged for another year with the same conditions".

20. DiMaggio and Powell 1983.

Married couples, it would seem, were not unlikely to be employed together, but typically would have individual contracts and conditions. There are some exceptions, such as in the case of Mr and Mrs Carl Carlander, who in 1898 were employed on the same contract. Otherwise, the same contracts with the same conditions are used for women and men, although it might be interesting to note that while in the examples from Berlin and Helsinki, the contracts stipulate one list of wardrobe items for men and a separate list for women, at Ranft's theatres, everyone had the same list, regardless of gender. Presumably, for example under the Helsinki contract, where women had to provide all of their own costumes (unless they were to be dressed as men), and men did not, this would put added financial strain on female performers.

When it comes to salary levels, there is a great deal of variation, but some general patterns emerge. Firstly, the a-list/b-list pattern is to some degree confirmed – that is, that there are stars who would easily be paid five times as much as other members of the ensemble. This pattern remains over the whole period, and more data points would be needed in order to reach a more conclusive evidence. However, the evidence at hand suggests that for a star, Ranft became increasingly willing to pay a hefty salary – or perhaps, he increasingly gained the means to be able to afford the biggest stars. The pattern that emerges, however, is not a strict a-list/b-list pattern, where most would be given a similar, low salary, and a few stars much more, but rather that salaries are consistently found along the whole spectrum. In the 1890s, the highest paid actor received 500 sek, and the lowest 200 sek, with a median salary of 325. In the 1920s, salaries range from 1300 to 300, with a median of 835. Star power seems to have been much more decisive of salary level than, say, gender, and the stand-alone star of all the studied contracts, being paid almost twice as much as the next best paid star (also an actress, Sigrid Brandel), is Pauline Brunius, who in 1919 agreed to work six months at Ranft's theatres for 2150 sek per month. If we regard the directors' contracts – these are much fewer, and, judging from the programmes, this is not necessarily because these contracts are missing from the archive, but because the director as a distinct role with artistic significance was still emerging in this time period. The handful of directors that are found emerge after the turn of the century, and are then paid a star salary, well above the average actor. So, if we are to look at remuneration, the director arrived in the theatre organization a fully-fledged star. However, if we compare the contracts to the lists of the repertoire also to be found in the archive, it becomes evident that this is slightly misleading. There were directors before the director stars arrived, but they were not employed solely as such, and would thus in the contracts be found as "artists". We might conclude that when the director became a significant enough role that someone would be employed solely in that capacity, he (no records of female directors were found in Ranft's archive) had already become a star.

Furthermore, although salaries differ depending on your status, there is also a general pattern of increased salaries. So, even if you are not a star, if

your contract is prolonged, there would usually also be a hefty increase in salary the second year. If you were a star, this was valid too – Pauline Brunius, Ranft's mega-star, was paid 1000 kronor the first time Ranft employed her, and by 1922, her salary is listed as 3000 per month, an all time high for the theatre (there is no contract for her 1922 engagement in the archive, but records in the salary list state it as such). The average salary also roughly doubles from the 1890s to the 1920s, but as inflation levels became highly volatile in the wake of WWI and the Russian revolution, rising to 47% in 1918 before dropping to -18,5 in 1921, further analysis would be needed in order to study if this increase in salary was reflected in a change of real wages.²¹

WHAT CAN CONTRACTS TELL US?

What can be understood from studying employment contracts in the archives? In this study, I have endeavoured to explore how contracts may be seen as source material for studying past organizations.

As we have seen, the contents of a contract, especially relative to other contracts at the time, bear evidence of the power relations of the counterparts. While the relative power of a star or a manager might also be visible in programmes, posters and letters, to name a few, this study shows that contracts are also an important source. The additions and changes to a specific contract, and the traces of the negotiation leading up to it, such as in the case of Mrs Wiehe-Bereny, can also go quite a long way in exposing who had power to do what in the relationship. Not only on an individual level, for taken together, the contracts of a theatre indicate the position of its manager vis-à-vis the artists. Contracts also highlight professional roles, and give insight into who was employed in what capacity (for example, was the director employed as such, in their own right, or were the performances directed by actors who directed on the side). If the contracts are as explicit and detailed as is the case here, they also provide information as to the working conditions in the theatre: the length of rehearsal periods, the items of costume used, under what conditions the theatre travelled and what possibilities actors had for work in film and at other theatres. In other words, the contracts offer a glimpse of the everyday life of an actor. The mundane not often becomes the subject of a letter, a news report or an autobiography, but if we want to understand working conditions for actors and other theatre workers, the mundane should not be overlooked.

Employment contracts also bear evidence of the organization of the labour market, and more specifically the extent and strength of industry conventions. Studies of labour markets in contemporary professional European theatre (at institutions and elsewhere) suggest that while the system is based on contingent work conditions, this fluency of the workforce is made possible by strong industry conventions, which set role and skill expectations, not only when it comes to the artistic aspect of the work, but also when it comes to the pro-

21. SCB 2017.

duction process. Typically, in such labour markets, networks play an important part in recruitment, and although there might not be any formal barriers to entry, the informal barriers to entry will be significant, as employment without the right connections, experiences and credentials is not possible, and these can only be gained by investing heavily in the field.²² In other words, it is not possible to work in theatre without being part of the theatre field, which also means that the conventions and informal rules of employment will be taken-for-granted at that stage. This enables actors and others to move between productions and theatres, as the industry conventions will be the same, and thus to some extent every production, regardless of theatre or the people involved, will follow the same pattern. Moreover, transgressions will not go unnoticed, and will damage your reputation, and thereby risk forcing you out of the industry. As a consequence, in contemporary Swedish theatre, where the field of theatrical production is comparatively autonomous, the industry is therefore permeated by a strong norm system and stable social structure that provides stability in terms of task assignment, production norms and status order. Written contracts are typically very brief and only stipulate contract period, salary, and possibly the production.²³

By comparison, the detailed contracts of Albert Ranft's theatres, where expectations and rules are spelled out in exhaustive detail, not only indicate the power of his position vis-à-vis the actors he employed, but also that these norms could not be taken for granted, but had to be spelled out explicitly. As we have seen, these expectations and rules did differ between theatres (for example, filming during the summer might be allowed at one theatre, and expressly forbidden at another). And there are fines, so it would seem that any damage norm-breaking would do to your reputation was evidently not deemed deterrent enough. Now, one might argue that the reason we do not find such details in today's contracts is that the terms and conditions that in Ranft's day had to be stated explicitly in the employment contract are today regulated by collective bargaining and labour law. While it is certainly true that labour legislation and collective bargaining agreements have been extensively developed in the past century, the content of Ranft's contract is to a large degree items that would not be covered by these – for example, that the actor should be on time for rehearsal, that the actor should listen to and adhere to the instructions of the director and the manager, that actors should take part in the dress rehearsal, and so on. While these rules apply to some extent in today's theatre as well, this is not regulated by labour law, but by convention. Every working actor knows these rules, and if you break them, your reputation suffers, and it will eventually be harder for you to find employment. This is enough to act as a deterrent, and thus contemporary contracts do not include such clauses.²⁴ The employment contracts of Ranft's theatres, where the rules and the fines are

22. Baumann 2002; Faulkner and Anderson 1987.

23. Näslund 2012, 56.

24. Näslund 2012, 55-56.

spelled out, therefore suggest that at the time, convention was not as strong. In this early stage, these conventions are not yet part of the social contract, but made explicit in the psychological and formal contract. One effect of an autonomous field is that the rules and expectations gradually become taken for granted, and are then incorporated as rules of the field, and at that point become implicit. At this period in Swedish theatre, they are evidently still explicit, as evidenced by the studied contracts. This might suggest that in the studied period, the theatre was to a lesser degree an autonomous field, although more evidence would be needed in order to be conclusive.

As an example of the type of question that employment contracts could help us to answer, we initially asked whether the properties of creative industries, and the performing arts, are inherent to and caused by the nature of the theatrical performance, and the conditions and resources required to create it, or to what extent these properties are the result of institutional context, such as artistic convention and systems of subsidies, what was described earlier as production logic and field logic. The findings from this study would imply that not only the financial situation, whether the theatre is dependent on ticket sales or subsidies, but also artistic conventions and ideals play an important part. The A-list/B-list phenomenon, it might be argued, is not as has been previously explained only an effect of the inherent uncertainties of artistic endeavours, and the attempt to reduce this uncertainty by favouring those that appear as certain hits in terms of audience appeal and skills.²⁵ While this certainly plays a part, especially if there is a financial dependency on ticket sales, the salary might also be explained as the valuation the field has made of an individual, and the role they play, if the production takes place in an artistic field.²⁶ Therefore, as artistic conventions change, this is mirrored in the salary levels of those involved in the production: if the field values directors, then they will be valued higher, as will be reflected in contracts and salary levels. While I would not propose that this study presents conclusive evidence of this relationship, it does point to the significance of artistic conventions and ideals, if we are to understand the structure of the labour market of the theatre. A suggestion for future research of the labour market of the theatre would therefore be to take into consideration artistic ideals, and how they will influence the valuation of the field.

To conclude, this study suggests that in addition to salary levels, employment contracts can also inform us of such things as power relations, working conditions and valuation of different professions, and the conventions (or lack thereof) in the theatrical field.

ILLUMINATING THE PRESENT BY STUDYING THE PAST

As materializations of the labour system and the organization of work, employment contracts and, to some degree letters, repertoires, programmes etc, are

25. Menger 1999; Faulkner and Anderson 1987.

26. Bourdieu 2000.

what often remains of the social order of the labour market in the archive. Contracts are preserved in the archive not primarily as a monument of history, but because of their importance and legal significance for their contemporaries. For the same reason, because they contain sensitive and important information, contemporary contracts and letters are rarely accessible to researchers. The traces of the social order that we can observe from the past therefore to some extent provide the photographic negative of the traces of the social order we can observe in our own time. The contract is a source that often only becomes accessible in the archive, its sensitivity worn down by time. Therefore, archival studies not only allow us to understand the present in the light of the past, but also to complete the picture of the social system, by adding another type of source material.

There is an inherent difficulty in studying social structures and norms, as it is in their nature that they become taken-for-granted, and thereby invisible. Those who live by them often 'know without knowing'. Studying a social order different to your own therefore entails making the strange familiar, as it will be experienced as familiarity by those who inhabit the structure. We cannot understand their experience unless we are able to create the same familiarity. The researcher in social sciences, therefore, needs to become what in social anthropology is termed a "professional stranger", proficient in making the strange familiar, and seeing the social world through the eyes of those that reproduce it.²⁷ However, when studying your own society, and contemporary organizations in them, the opposite problem emerges: since you are already familiar with the social order, it risks becoming invisible and taken-for-granted to the researcher as well. Consequently, as pointed out by Van Maanen, the researcher's strategy must be "making the familiar strange rather than the strange familiar".²⁸ Studying the past, it might be argued, could be seen as such a technique for making the familiar strange, because the past will to some extent be strange to us, and thus make visible what has become invisible to us in our own world.

A final point concerns the use of historical and archival data in studying the organization and labour markets in the performing arts. There are very few studies using archive data, but in addition to the advantage of being able to make longitudinal studies over longer time periods, there is also an advantage of access. Contracts, letters and other such documentation often lay bare the mechanisms of the industry, but this also results in making them highly sensitive, and thus access to these sources in modern, contemporary theatre is difficult or unlikely to be attained. By studying archival data, we are thus able to study parts of the mechanisms of the industry that are not accessible if we only study contemporary theatre. Going to the archive therefore allows us not only to further our understanding of the nature of employment contracts in the theatre, but furthermore how this content varies depending on the specific social

27. Agar 2008.

28. Van Maanen 1995, 20.

context. In this, the archive holds not only the manifestation of the relationship between manager and artists in the form of the written contract, but also by way of providing a negative, an impression of the social contract. If the social contract is what goes without saying, rules and norms so self-evident that they need not be spelled out explicitly, then the items that are spelled out are likely not part of the social contract. In other words, the more extensive and detailed the written contract, the thinner and more equivocal the social contract is likely to be. The social and the written contract taken together provide the terms of the agreement – if one is bare bones, then chances are that the other provides exhaustive detail.

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