Kent Sjöström

The Actor as a Bodily Document – The Amateur Becomes the Expert

Introduction

In a contemporary discussion about science and politics, the terms *truth* and *post-truth* are prevalent, in addition to *fake news* and *alternative facts*. The extended use of social media and alternative news, and the technical possibilities for manipulating all kinds of documents – be they pictures, film or sound – allow for a critical and suspicious gaze, where even well-established science might be disputed. In the face of an overwhelming plethora of diverging narratives, sometimes presented by fake identities, the question arises: What is a trustworthy *document*? – in a wide definition of the term. Documentary elements in theatre and film are often seen by the audience as a guarantee of the work's contact with something true, authentic or genuine. In theatre and film, dramatic material can be more or less documentary: it can range from fiction, as in an ancient drama, to day-to-day observations and documentary events from someone's everyday life. The boundaries are often blurred, even in the case of conventional drama. Documentary material can be dramatised into a fictional and completely different story, as in *autofiction*, and fictional stories can be disguised as trustworthy documents.

The above-mentioned phenomena and questions can be applied to a contemporary discussion of film and theatre, namely about identity, authenticity and representation. In the following, I will focus on the actor's representational aspect and argue that the actor is a part of the dramatic material and can be considered and judged as a kind of document. The actor's performing body can even be seen as a more or less credible document. It is a document that must account for its own truthfulness in relation to the curious and critical eye of the spectator. When authenticity is at stake – and this is often the case in the art of acting – the genuine and credible document takes on a desirable position.

My examples, drawn mainly from Swedish film and theatre, will be helpful in illustrating the sometimes heated debate about the training, appropriation and casting of actors, and about the use of amateurs in film. I will contextualise my discussion through a brief historical overview, which will show that the discussion about role-taking and identity is by no means only a contemporary phenomenon. But the present-day discussion has acquired an extra dimension in which the actor's role-taking is connected to a discussion about identity politics, appropriation and power relations in society (Diamond 2012, 64–67).

What does *documentary* mean in the actor's performance? In short, it refers to the actor's own body and voice, her experiences, memories, sensibility, knowledge and ability to analyse; in other words, it is the personal material the actor must draw on in the encounter with the fictional situation and role in a play or film. And how is the *truthfulness* or *authenticity* of this document assessed? The actor's task is to portray a fictional character using his or her own appearance as the main tool. To varying degrees, depending on the

genre, the audience demands some kind of coherence or similarity between the character and the actor. A discussion about the actor's characterisation is therefore often concerned with the actor's handling of his own person in relation to the fictional character (Auslander 1997, 28–38; Chekhov 1953, 85–86; Brecht 2015, 206–209, 306–307; Stanislavski 2008). Depending on genre, acting methods and even ideological views, the endeavour for the actor's closeness to or similarity with the role can vary: in ancient Greek theatre and in Elizabethan theatre, female roles were cast with men, while as recently as 1961 the white British actor John Gielgud could play Othello in blackface. As a contrast, the contemporary discussion about artistic representation, in relation to ethnicities, people with disabilities or sexual minorities, is signified by a sensitivity concerning who can play what. From a 20th-century perspective, one can see a movement in which the actor's closeness to or similarity with the role has been challenged:

> Whilst the early modernist movement of Naturalism attempted to develop precise and mimetic theatrical representation of the real world beyond the theatre, the avant-garde movements that followed can be usefully characterized by their suspicion of mimetic representation and their attempts to establish non-representational, or anti-representational, practices as politically radical alternatives. Central to the development of such movements were the figures of Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, whose influences are still discernible in the recurring trends of twenty-first century practice. (Tomlin 2013, 19–20)

In the theatre one can often see a variety of violations of the stage illusion. The spectator is hardly surprised by being addressed from the stage or by the actors moving among the audience and greeting them in the foyer. Similarly, it is common for roles to be changed in public and for the actor, ostensibly as a private individual, to create new fictional layers by commenting on the events on stage. Role-taking is in this way demystified and acting appears to be a playful change of identities. The actor we see on stage is expected to have the professional tools and skills to deal with multiple genres, in addition to handling different ways of approaching the role.

My argument so far concerns the professional actor and her role-taking in the portrayal of an obvious fiction, and where no spectator normally suspects that the actor *is* the role. There is a tacit agreement in a dominant performing arts tradition that the actor portrays a character, usually from a written drama. Within this stable tradition, of course, one finds a variety of genres and ideals: traditional realism's quest for psychological credibility; the direct audience appeal of revue and comedy; and postmodern theatre's questioning of role-taking and scenic construction. In any case, the actor is always present, or, as US director Joseph Chaikin puts it: "Acting is a demonstration of self with or without a disguise" (Chaikin 1972, 2). Depending on acting methods, the

actor's physical identity, psychological experience or theoretical knowledge can be more or less crucial for the work on the role.[1]

In a fiction film, the conventions of role-taking are usually even more apparent: the audience expects the actor to be consistent in his or her fictional appearance and in some sense not to leave his or her character. If the actor's private self or the production apparatus itself becomes visible, it would be seen as a slip – or a challenging artistic move.[2] The alleged fusion between actor and role, and the actor's sometimes sacrificial, struggle-like process of entering the role, is today a strong argument in the marketing of commercial films. In a hopefully abandoned romantic tradition, the actor ruthlessly sacrifices himself on the altar of art and exposes his own suffering – which often turns out to be commercially powerful:

> It is also this attitude that forms the essence of contemporary, well-known narratives about screen actors, mostly American men, who sacrifice their well-being and sometimes even risk their lives in grandiose, well-publicised gestures of sacrifice in the metamorphosis that aims to *become the character*. Nothing promotes an American film as effectively as the actor's demanding or painful transformation, about which the producers make sure the press is informed. When American actor Robert de Niro played Jake La Motta in *Raging Bull*, he gained 27 kilos, and Christian Bale almost doubled his weight after first performing a starving character and then transforming himself into Batman. In other cases, actors have removed teeth, by surgery, or put themselves into jail or under torture. (Sjöström 2020, 18)

In the following I will try to map, mainly with examples from Sweden, how conventional representation and role-taking can be challenged in contemporary film and theatre: "Recent decades have seen an increase in documentary forms of expression, in media, TV and podcast as well as in arts, an increase that has been obvious also in Swedish performing arts where several of the most praised works in the 2000s are more or less based on documentary material" (Arlid 2021, abstract). In a quest for authenticity and in line with an interest in documentary art forms, one type of actor has become more visible, whose qualifications consist in not being in possession of the professional actor's skills. I partly use the commonly used term "amateur" below, but it is questionable whether it covers the phenomenon. As I will illustrate later, this actor can instead be described as an *expert* in his or her own experience and life situation – but not in the art form of theatre or in acting. Within this casting practice, there is a critique of the trained actor and the conventions and means of expression that have traditionally given legitimacy to the profession.

1 For a thorough overview of the actor's craft and methods, see, for example, Benedetti (2007), Roach (1993) and Lehmann (2006).
2 Examples of these approaches can be found in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003) and Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999).

The authentic amateur

In recent years, a particular phenomenon has become more prevalent in some film productions: instead of trained and professional actors, the cast is made up of amateurs. And these are not primarily amateur actors but people who are not normally involved in or even necessarily interested in theatre or film. The directors and casting agencies actively look for people with the same life experience as the characters they are to portray. In some descriptions of the cast's work, it is obvious that they sometimes try to find the actors in environments such as public squares, social help centres and social media, sometimes referred to as "street-casting". The intention of the casting is obviously to make the characterisation as authentic as possible. The actor's personal experience is seen as the guarantor of the truthfulness and credibility of the characterisation. In the Swedish film *Drifters* (Tjuvheder, Grönlund, 2016), there are roles that carry experiences that trained actors are rarely considered to have undergone. First, the presumption seems to be that actors seldom have a background that includes poverty, criminality or experiences in general from the working class. Second, it is supposed that the actor must have an experience similar to that of the role if the performance is to be trustworthy – a standpoint that also is found in the highly influential Method Acting tradition. Before the premiere of *Drifters*, director Peter Grönlund said: "There are real police officers in the film, there are real social workers, real shelter staff and then several participants who have lived socially vulnerable and homeless lives. I think that's the way to tell this story. Anything else would be artificial" (Nam 2015). In Gabriela Pichler's *Eat Sleep Die* (Äta Sova Dö, 2012), and in *Something Must Break* (Nånting måste gå sönder, 2014), directed by Ester Martin Bergsmark, supporting roles are performed by amateurs. In *The Square* (2017), director Ruben Östlund partly uses non-actors who have the profession they play in the film, including advertisers, counsellors and curators.

But the phenomenon is not new. Swedish directors such as Roy Andersson, Lars Molin and Bo Widerberg have all used actors with no experience or training, even in leading roles. Often these directors have expressed scepticism about how the trained or established actor presents conventions instead of authentic life. A quotation from Swedish actor Marika Lagercrantz reflects this view: "Lars Molin said that it is difficult to find an actor who can play a maid or a lorry driver credibly" (Jeppsson 1998). In Roy Andersson's film *Songs from the Second Floor* (Sånger från andra våningen, 2000), the amateur actors appear helpless in speech and movement – the characters rarely use any real gestures – and the lines often sound like they are being read with some difficulty from a script. The bodies and groupings appear as aesthetic arrangements and the roles often seem to have no agency in the situation. For me as a spectator, the acting creates a great deal of distance and is characterised by a peculiar charm – the term that comes to mind is almost *anti-acting*. There is a big difference between the acting idiom that Roy Andersson cultivates in his films and the way the actors appear in, for example, Gabriella

Pichler's *Amateurs* (Amatörer, 2018). In the latter example, the aim is clearly to achieve behaviour that is close to the actors' private behaviour – this is the documentary quality. It is significant how the actors speak in their own local dialect and not the normative idiom, including the clear articulation, that is taught at acting academies. Pichler specifically uses the term *expert* when describing the actor Fredrik Dahl in *Amateurs*, because in the film, as in real life, Dahl is a business strategist in a small town. In this capacity, he could advise the director on how best to make a situation authentic, but Pichler also describes how her acting instructions to Dahl sometimes resembled taming a wild horse (Pichler 2018). The trend towards amateurs has been positively recognised by the industry and a surprising number of recent film awards have gone to untrained or inexperienced actors in leading roles.

One's own life becomes the true document

Even in the performing arts, authenticity can be invoked to make a strong truth claim. In her Royal Dramatic Theatre production of *Swedish Hijabis* (premiered at Dramaten, Stockholm, 14 October 2016), director America Vera-Zavala endeavoured to stage authentic experience. In the performance, five Muslim women present their lives and the prejudices they face each day, but, despite the fact that the performance is directed and has a clear dramaturgy, the audience does not encounter the usual role-taking of a group of actors. It is clear that there are five narrators, not actors, portraying their own experiences, and they are not interchangeable. The idea that an actor would take over any of their stories would defeat the purpose of the project. The term is *community theatre*, an increasingly common form of theatre that allows people from a particular group or area to present their personal experiences. What is at stake is the agency – the power over one's own story – that is gained through the presentation of one's own life as a true document.[3]

Since the late 1990s, the German theatre group Rimini Protokoll has been exploring different scenic storytelling formats, including an approach they call *experts of the everyday*. In a large number of performances, different personal life stories have been presented by people who are themselves: politicians, muezzins, adoptees, taxi drivers, police officers and scientists present their stories, but without trying to appear as actors. In the performance *Radio Muezzin* (premiered at Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, 9 March, 2009), a group of muezzins from Cairo talk about their background and how their professional identity and activities are threatened by centrally pre-recorded prayer calls. At the performance I attended, one of the narrators' seats was empty, as one of the participants had dropped out during the tour, which further strengthened the impression of the narrators' uniqueness. In Rimini Protokoll's performances,

3 In addition to community theatre, similar agendas are investigated in the German *Bürgerbühne*, in director Milo Rau's *reenactments* and Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

perfection is not even desirable. In one long-running production, the narrators became more and more confident and increasingly exposed the qualities of a conventional actor. The management of the theatre group sought to curb this, as uncertainty and vulnerability are understood by many in the audience as authenticity. In line with this approach, narrators should not memorise lines. Honesty is perceived to be more substantial when the presentation is made by a person who openly displays deficiencies in the ability to manage the body and voice in public. In Rimini Protokoll's productions, despite the fact that the narrator appears as himself and with his own knowledge, the production is organised in a dramaturgy, the stories are arranged for a stage and the performances are directed and rehearsed. What is presented is an artistically arranged reality, albeit based on the personal document. Some critics have compared Rimini Protokoll's approach to the *ready-made* art tradition (Behrendt 2008, 69). This tradition, exemplified by Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) and *Bottle Rack* (1914), involves the elevation of everyday phenomena into art through an institutional framework.

The contested profession

What some directors react negatively to is probably the fact that an actor is not only portraying a role but also a convention. The traditionally trained actor has an educated and noticeable diction and gesture, which, according to this reasoning, is the opposite of the authenticity one wishes to see portrayed. The actor has an awareness of craftsmanship, sometimes referred to as a *toolbox*, and when exposed it is seen as an artificial filter placed over the performance. These conventions are mostly maintained and reproduced in theatre academies. In a theatre academy, students are taught to reconsider and broaden their means of expression. Usually, the aim is for the student to learn the standard use of the language and to be able to opt out of their own dialect; the body is taught to be able to start from a neutral physical posture in the performance process; and the students generally gain an increased awareness of their own physical and linguistic choices. On another level, and perhaps more unconsciously, a more general social habituation takes place, all of which gives the actor a legitimacy in the field. This whole process has sometimes been criticised for creating uniformity and an isolated culture. English director Andy Field brutally summarises the trained actor: "No one looks like actors or talks like actors; after three years spent almost exclusively in the company of each other and their teachers, they seem to develop into their own species like Darwin's finches" (Field 2008). The actor, says Field, becomes just a conventional character separate from the thoughts, feelings and ideas they are expected to represent. They merely refer to a set of conventions carried by a slightly archaic language. In a similar vein, Swedish actor Stellan Skarsgård refers to the way director Bo Widerberg did not want to see the actors as "tools" but as living people. Tools do not make people alive, and Skarsgård adds that amateurs can be better actors than professionally trained ones (Ståhlberg 2016). Of course, many professional actors have no formal education, and

the very idea of having actors' training at conservatoires or academies is, in a historical view, a recent phenomenon. But these non-educated actors have mostly been habituated into the professional sphere. The amateurs, non-actors or "experts" in my examples above are chosen because they don't resemble the professional actor.

However, there is another aspect to the view of the trained actor, and this concerns, among other things, sustainability and the ability to repeat insights gained during a rehearsal process. Here, of course, the conditions differ between a film shoot and the rehearsal process and the repetitive performance of a stage production. The different requirements of these work processes are one of the reasons why the amateur is more visible on film than on stage. A trained actor has – or should have – come to realise that one's own body, voice and psychology are resources that require care in order to be sustainable. A trained actor is a person who can reflect on her own choices, develop them, manage their energy and commitment, and critically reassess her work process. This naturally entails a certain distance, albeit temporary. During the work process, a trained actor – especially one with long experience and strong artistic capital – can also challenge and question the director. There is an ethical aspect to putting amateurs, or everyday experts, on stage. In many cases their lives can be changed by the self-distance created by theatrical or cinematic exposure – insights can be awakened, life choices can be questioned – and this is an aspect for which production managers can take more or less responsibility. The "experts" from Rimini Protokoll's performances, according to Behrendt's interviews, report a positive impact on their lives: "Even if none of the interviewees would say that Rimini Protokoll's theatre has really changed their lives [...] it has nonetheless had a positive, if not euphorigenic, effect" (Behrendt 2008, 73).

Orientalism and indigenous romanticism

What are the qualities that are appreciated and emphasised when untrained actors are preferred by the director and the audience, and celebrated at festivals? A fascination for the authentic, the tangibly original and an unpolished body, marked by experience?

In the same way that parts of the early modernism of the West searched for the original, authentic and true in other continents, such as Africa and Asia – that is, through exoticism and romanticising Orientalism – the directors in my contemporary examples present the authentic everyday person as unaffected by the disciplining of expression through schooling and professionalism. It seems important that this amateur or expert does not try to appear as a professional actor and thus reproduce conventional signs. The amateur is demanded a static position, and thus maintains his or her aura of naturalness, in contrast to the trained actor, who can be seen as an artificially created cultural product, and thus a less credible and trustworthy document.

In a discussion of the actor's relationship to the role, there is an interesting paradox in the demand for sensitivity, empathy or compassion: if the actor mainly represents themself and their own personal experience, empathy is not required in the first place. If, on the other hand, the actor takes on a foreign perspective and conquers another perspective, the requirements are greater.

The story of the amateur as a truth witness also carries with it a subtext of suspicion of the artificiality of training. To put it bluntly, the expertise of the trained actor is questioned, but the expertise that comes from life experience is seen as favourable, especially if that experience is based on social vulnerability. There is reason to believe that the trained actor is in some sense suspect, in the same way that elites are suspect. This suspicion of the actor's sometimes blatant misrepresentation is not a new phenomenon but one that has historical roots.

Role-taking as a threat

In the history of theatre, or rather in the history of acting, there are recurrent examples of how truth, genuineness and authenticity, appearance, falsity and deception are some of the crucial terms when discussing acting. "Men should be what they seem," says Iago to Othello, and the famous line highlights the relationship between a person's interior and exterior. The actor's skill and ability to take on another personality has historically been both celebrated and criticised, and even seen as blasphemy, a threat to the stability of the state or hazardous to one's health. Philosophers such as Plato and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the medieval Church Fathers and the English Puritans all attacked the actor's ability to transform and take on roles with great enthusiasm and eloquence. The attacks on the actor's performance are not uninteresting; they cover a wide range of moral-philosophical theories that can provide the theatre with incentives for development, but just as often they are driven by hateful bigotry. A common feature is the suspicion of the human being who appears as someone other than who he is.

For Plato, one of the more famous critics of theatre, role-taking or rather imitation is possible but only if it is limited to people of the same sex, the same social class and similar morals. This is because imitation is formative; one tends to become what one imitates. The actor's play with identities challenges the static role each person is assigned in society. When deceptive fiction expands the given reality, imagination threatens reason, which equals disintegration and chaos, and ultimately threatens the stability of the state (Barish 1981, 21 et seq.). Ultimately, then, it is the state that is threatened by theatre's role-taking, since every role-taking can generally be seen as a test of an alternative to the status quo.

One of the Church Fathers, Tertullian, warned in *De Spectaculis*, around AD 200, against any misrepresentation of one's identity, including the muscle

exercises of an athlete or the shaving of one's beard. For the actor, it is a crime to portray both noble acts and villainous deeds: in the former case, one acquires a false virtue; in the latter, one repeats a sinful act. Identity is given by God; to change it is anti-Christian (Ibid., 46 et seq.). The Puritans enthusiastically pursued the attacks on the theatre, and indeed on fiction in general, that the Church Fathers had launched. The Puritans had a growing influence on social life after the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, an influence that later led to the closure of London's theatres in 1642. Man is assigned his role in life by God, and any violation of this order is also a violation of God. Men dressing as women, which was the rule in the Elizabethan theatre, was one of several violations of the divine order. The ideal was that each person's actions should correspond to their inner essence.

The French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau had occasion to express his scepticism about the performing arts during discussions about the construction of a theatre in his native Geneva in the 1750s. According to Rousseau, even if a theatre could help improve the morals of an already depraved Paris, a theatre – and especially the presence of actors – would corrupt pastoral Geneva. Rousseau also distrusted the representations of the theatre, arguing that the popular festival instead allows man to appear in his ideal and true form: as himself. There, under the open sky and without false pretence, children and adults can meet in sports games, dances and competitions (Rousseau 1985, 125 et seq.),

There are, to some degree, similarities between the above-mentioned stances and parts of the contemporary discussion of identity and representation. The quest for authenticity in casting has increasingly been highlighted in a contemporary debate on representation and identity: Who is considered capable of representing whom on a stage or screen? The discussion argues that the actor should not portray herself as a false document, that she should avoid portraying an exterior that has no basis in her own lived identity or experience. The belief in authenticity seems to be based on the basic assumption that what we can call, for lack of a better term, the inner should harmonise with the outer.

Truth as a construct

When feature films became more widespread about a century ago, there was a simultaneous theatricalisation of parts of the theatre; it was at this time that the European theatre avant-garde began to emerge. Through its intimacy, the film medium created a zone where even realistic theatre, compared to film, appeared to be preconceived. The theatre avant-garde wanted to offer a different truth from the realistic and recognisable portrayal of everyday life: approaches such as symbolism, absurdism or a more physical and ritual theatre were considered to dig deeper into human existence than *psychological realism* could. If I try to define *modernism* in theatre in the 20th century,

two roughly parallel movements are found: avant-garde and realism. Both orientations carry diverse claims to represent truth or authenticity, although the formal language is of course different.

In the 1920s, German theatre director Erwin Piscator (1893–1966) used contemporary and historical documents in his radical and agitational theatre on Berlin's Nollendorfplatz. His stage design could use authentic projections from newspapers, historical images, film, sound recordings, statistics and cartoons. It was total theatre and it was multimedia. According to Piscator, the credibility and authenticity of the documents, and the suggestion and conviction they provided, strengthened the agitational power of the theatre. Bertolt Brecht collaborated briefly with Piscator during this decade but went his own way in criticising both traditional realism and the avant-garde. Sceptical of his colleague's documentarism, Brecht argued that Piscator's elevation of the authentic document to the highest authority of truth did not encourage the critical eye of the viewer. A depictive photograph presented as a documentary truth does not encourage a critical understanding of the depicted phenomenon. According to Brecht, the viewer's gaze is not provoked or challenged: "The situation has become so complicated because the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions" (Brecht 2000, 164–165). The art of direct representation preserves an image of reality as self-evident, static and unchangeable (Giles 2007). This is similar to Brecht's approach to acting and theatre in general: the traditional realism of directing and acting only confirms the spectator's habitual view of the world.

I will not dig deeper into Brecht's complex theatre aesthetics here but will limit myself to his interest in the use of documentary images. Brecht criticises the use of photography as a documentary source of truth, instead arguing that the *montage* of documents provides an opportunity for critical scrutiny. In a montage, as practised in *Kriegsfibel* (1955) or in his *Arbeitsjournal* (1977), Brecht combines documentary photographs, sometimes several that are thematically linked, with epigram-like poems. The photographs, mostly from World War II, illuminate each other but also cancel each other out. The value of the photograph as a true document is questioned in a dialectical process. The brutal images of war or of the Nazi leadership are commented on in artful rhymed poems. For Brecht, the task of the montage is not to present documents, and thus an undisputed or self-evident truth, but to demonstrate a position and stimulate the reader to adopt an *attitude* (Haltung) towards the work of art. As philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman describes it, Brecht's aim is not "to reproduce the real, that is, to present the truth, but to make the real *problematic*" (Didi-Huberman 2019, 96). Based on his specific view of realism, Brecht argued that fiction should appear as fiction and that artistic representation should manifest this aspect openly. According to Brecht, it is undialectical to claim that fiction should be given a semblance of truth; the truthfulness of traditional theatre is low, precisely because it tries to pretend that it is real truth. By distancing the actor from the role and historicising

the scenic fable, the audience would be able to view the event critically, an approach referred to by the familiar term *alienation effect* (Verfremdung). The argument is partly inspired by the Russian poet Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984), who argued that art employs alienation as a means of "increasing the difficulty and duration of the perception" (Sklovskij 1971, 51). When Brecht expresses delight at cabaret artists, amateur actors and children on stage, it is because they are unaffected by the actor's conventional means of expression, and it is obvious that what we are watching is theatre, not true reality.

Authenticity as a sign

The demand for the actor's authenticity in relation to documentary "truth" can be understood quite simply, but what is debatable is how the term is used and how the documentary aspect of the actor's body is seen as a guarantor of a definitive or undisputed truth.

On the one hand, the term describes an experience of something recognisable. Something strikes us and the already known is confirmed. Authenticity is most easily recognised in an everyday situation and not in exceptional circumstances. The term can denote behaviour that we perceive as reasonable and likely, and it is associated with a kind of normality (in a discussion of an actor's performance, the equally complicated and somewhat narrower term *psychological credibility* is often heard). However, the term can therefore also have a diminishing or moralising function. When authenticity is seen as desirable in the performing and film arts, the confirmation of one's perception of reality is closer than the questioning of it; there is thus a conservative potential here.

On the other hand, the unfamiliarity and strangeness of a performing body can appear authentic, especially if it carries a narrative of nature, originality and a body unaffected by convention and discipline.[4] From a global and historical perspective, this approach is described by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), but the approach can also be identified more nationally and locally: the broad dialect, the funny hairstyles or the odd home furnishings can appear both foreign and authentic.

A stimulating starting point is to see the actor's authenticity as culture-dependent and learnt. There is a convention of signs of authenticity, and these signs can be reproduced and reinforced as a professional tradition (Bork-Petersen 2013, 25–28). One can sometimes see in the audition process to a theatre academy how applicants have conquered and incorporated these signs, mostly from American cinema. It is common to search for words, stutter and blink quickly

4 For an overview of different definitions of *authenticity*, see Radde-Antweiler (2013), 88–89.

a few times to suggest that tears are about to appear. Often the nervousness and incompleteness are cultivated; the presentation can give the impression that some strong emotion is about to emerge but is stopped. In short, it is a presentation that reveals that sensitive nerves are in play. It is about playing on the audience's desire to know what is not revealed explicitly but which is moving inside. In this example, the inner life is the very guarantee of authenticity. There are examples in the history of theatre when performance was less dependent on identity and private psychology and based more on knowledge of a tradition. In the 19th century, for example, there were rules about the gestures Lady Macbeth should use in a particular scene and the facial expressions she should master. Similar rule systems are still used in Chinese opera and Japanese Kabuki theatre, among others.

Conclusion

Authenticity and truth claims in the performing arts have been increasingly highlighted in a contemporary debate on representation and identity: Who is considered capable of representing whom on a stage or screen? There is now a demand that the actor should not put on borrowed plumes and adopt the experiences of other, more vulnerable groups, that is, avoid appropriation. The discussion argues that the actor should not portray herself as a false document, that she should avoid portraying an exterior that has no basis in her own lived identity.

In my examples, I have tried to illustrate how a selection of directors in certain works can view amateurs and non-professionals as more credible performers than conventionally trained actors. What is sought is a truer and more reality-based portrayal, which should be seen to have a documentary quality. To achieve this goal, the amateur, the expert or the storyteller should not adopt the conventions of acting. They are primarily visiting the art world and should not lose their original habitus. The spontaneous, original and unbridled is seen as truer and more authentic than the cultivated and disciplined physicality of the professional artist – a view that illustrates and perpetuates a polarisation between nature and culture.

As an extension of what I want to call documentary casting, an artistic ideal of the hyperrealism of stage and film art can be sensed: art and reality should be close to each other, or even overlap. Here there is reason to return to Brecht and Didi-Huberman: when a work of art is presented and marketed as a document with allegedly high truth content, reality is not problematised but rather presented as natural – and thus not possible to question.

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