

Editorial

Authenticity is both a historical concern and a hotly debated topic. As a concern for the genuineness of historical artefacts and the validity of individual and collective memory, authenticity reaches into the past. In the first sense, the advent of mechanical and digital reproduction has turned authenticity from a relatively straightforward scientific question of accurate dating into a more open-ended philosophical investigation of the meaning and value of the authentic object. As it relates to memory, questions of authenticity serve to open up enquiries into the hierarchy of facts over feelings (or vice versa) and the extent of our ability to reconstruct the past.

Alongside and as an extension and intensification of these questions, authenticity has more recently become a favoured preoccupation in academic research and journalism. In the 2016 U.S. election, for instance, the comparative authenticity of presidential candidates like Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump was on everyone's lips. Touching on the realm of performance and theatricality, the concern here was with the authenticity of the self and its public performance, a topic seminally explored in Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972). Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that in response to newfound interest in, and the apparent currency of, the 'authentic, several recent monographs emerge from within theatre and performance studies that engage to a significant degree with the notion and current relevance of authenticity. Both Andy Lavender's *Performance in the Twenty-Century* (2016) and Daniel Schulze's *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2017, reviewed in this issue of *Platform* by Sara Reimers), for instance, identify hunger for authenticity as a now predominant structure of feeling, emanating from the desire to

replace postmodern scepticism with something more tangible, real, and post-postmodern.

The articles in this issue of Platform pursue and question this newfound penchant for authenticity in myriad different ways, from concerns with the authenticity of historical representations in the theatre (Greenstreet, Starkman) to the market value of an artistic identity constructed as authentic (Dapena-Tretter). The political valence of an aesthetic of authenticity is a particular concern; the articles here examine how such an aesthetic might be constructed through the combination of documentary and fictive elements in the theatre (Ferguson) and interrogated through performative sound installations (Marschall).

In the opening article, 'Jean Dubuffet & Art Brut', Antonia Dapena-Tretter examines the mid-twentieth century art world's propensity to see authenticity in what was perceived as 'primitive' rather than cultured, and in the amateur's supposed unselfconsciousness and lack of concern with professionalised art practice, as opposed to the learned perception of the trained artist. Through an examination of Jean Dubuffet's Art Brut collection and Art-Brut-inspired art practice, Dapena-Tretter exposes how claims to uncultivated authenticity could become extremely lucrative for a consummate professional and highly cultured artistic insider like Dubuffet.

Hannah Greenstreet's article, 'Historical Authenticity', examines how two neo-Victorian plays, *Red Velvet* by Lolita Chakrabarti and *An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, grapple with the history of black representation in the theatre. Analyzing how the two plays interrogate and question the authenticity of stereotyped representations of black people, Greenstreet argues that the plays pursue this goal through different strategies. While both provide critiques of racist representations

in Victorian theatre, *Red Velvet* upholds authenticity as a category of value to locate a forgotten black theatre history whereas *An Octoroon* challenges the validity of racial and theatrical authenticity altogether, putting forth in its stead a more performative understanding of race.

‘A Woman’s Brood’ by Jordana Starkman continues the exploration of historical authenticity, using an analysis of competing memories of the Ireland’s 1916 Easter Rising to examine and question the privilege of constructing ‘authentic’ historical memories. Starkman analyzes how the 1926 staging of Sean O’Casey’s play *The Plough and the Stars* in Dublin threw into sharp relief the different ways in which Ireland’s Easter Rising had entered into the Irish collective memory. Because it championed a distinctly unheroic female working-class perspective that was largely excluded from the national narrative and because the play failed to affirm their triumphant memory of the Rising, *The Plough and the Stars* was controversially received by Irish revolutionary women. Examining how O’Casey’s play became a focal point for a contest between competing memories of a nationally significant event, Starkman calls into question the very idea of authentic history.

Anika Marshall interprets the sound installations and lecture performances of the media artist and researcher Lawrence Abu Hamdan in her article ‘To Speak The Truth, The Whole Truth and Nothing but The Truth’. Engaging with technologies of surveillance, control of immigration, and court hearings, Hamdan draws attention to voice-based legal profiling authentication procedures. While theorising the means by which Hamdan intervenes in the practice, epistemology, and politics of listening and the listener, Marshall questions the ethics of his works, especially the ethics involved in the act of re-playing mar-

ginalised voices to the audience. She finds that the subversion of Hamdan's works may not lie in their critique of power relations but rather in the disturbance of a politics of authenticity.

Alex Lazaridis Ferguson relies on his experience as the director of a documentary theatre production when questioning the representation of testimony in 'Authenticity and the 'Documentive' in *Nanay: A Testimonial Play*'. Using this play—which is based on interviews with Filipino domestic workers in Canada and their employers—as his case study, Lazaridis Ferguson analyses the process of making artistic choices, as well as the dilemmas and debates to which such choices give rise. From his position as a scholar-practitioner, Lazaridis Ferguson confronts and reinterprets the different and often clashing demands of discourses of ethics, affect, and aesthetics on authentic representation and the representation of the authentic. Lazaridis Ferguson dedicates special attention to the physical proximity of actor and object to the audience, and he advocates for the legitimacy of non-realistic stylisation when engaging with the 'authentic' transmission of real people's voices and stories in the theatre.

Following the academic articles, this issue of *Platform* includes a monologue by Christopher O'Shaughnessy. The monologue was first performed by actor/comedian Dave Bibby at the Hen and Chickens Theatre in London on 19 September 2016. It speaks to the theme of authenticity through its exploration of the thoughts and memories of a long-distance coach driver, who articulates his difficult, traumatised life-changing journey towards a cornea transplant.

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Julia Peetz and Raz Weiner, Editors

Works Cited

Lavender, Andy. *Performance in the Twenty-First Century: Theatres of Engagement*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

Schulze, Daniel. *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance: Make it Real*. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017.

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