



PERFORMANCE
PHILOSOPHY

AUTHENTICITY IN THE PERFORMANCE OF SELF

COLLEEN CONROY UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
LITZA BIXLER LITZABIXLER PERFORMANCE

Introduction

"The hardest role to play is yourself," reflected James, an actor participating in our study on authenticity and performance of self. This insight lies at the heart of our inquiry: What happens when actors perform verbatim re-enactments of their own recorded interviews? How does the relationship between actor and role or between story and identity shift?

For this study, actors performed verbatim recreations of their own interviews—not testimonies from others as in traditional verbatim theatre—reproducing their pre-recorded words and gestures with meticulous fidelity to text, voice, and gesture. We term this method "auto-verbatim" and use it to examine identity and the fluid nature of authenticity in performance.

Psychological realist acting traditions have long focused on authenticity, typically emphasizing the performer's internal sense of emotional truth to convincingly portray a character's emotions. While scholars like Zarrilli (2002) examine how such traditions privilege the actor's self over the role or merge the two, these approaches continue to echo essentialist views of identity by assuming individuals possess stable, core selves that can be accessed and expressed through performance.

We situate this work within verbatim theatre and other “theatre of the real” genres (Martin 2013), such as documentary theatre and autobiographical performance. These forms traditionally conceptualize authenticity as either an innate quality, an aesthetic construction, or a product of audience expectations.

To examine this tension, three actors trained in psychological realism (Sylvia, David, and James) performed filmed verbatim recreations of their own interviews. Through self-performance, we interrogate both authenticity in acting and essentialist notions of selfhood. This work challenges conventional realist acting techniques and contributes to broader debates about the essentialized self.

We begin by contextualizing auto-verbatim performance and situating our study within broader discussions of psychological essentialism and authenticity. We then outline our methods and filming protocols, examine the internal dynamics of self-performance through actor reflections, and conclude with an analysis of audience survey data from 50 randomly selected viewers. To interpret these dynamics, our study draws on scholarship in psychological realism, verbatim theatre, theatre of the real, and psychological essentialism. We examine Stanislavski’s concept of *perezhivanie* alongside Brechtian estrangement and theorize that “Authenticity-Effects” (Garde and Mumford 2016) often impact audience responses. These frameworks illuminate the paradoxes that emerge when authenticity is reconstructed rather than spontaneously lived.

The following sections establish our theoretical framework before detailing our methods, actor reflections, and audience responses.

The Essentialist Premise in Acting

As Sjöström (2021) notes, Western acting traditions have long pursued “the quest for emotional truth and authenticity” (8), notably through psychological realist techniques influenced by Stanislavski’s system. These approaches seek “inner truth” via tools such as emotional and sense memory, given circumstances, objectives, actions, and the “magic if” (e.g., Benedetti 2006; Hagen and Frankel 1973; Meisner 1987; Stanislavski 1986; Whyman 2013). Psychological realism is united by a commitment to emotional truth, yet its methods vary widely. Practitioners may draw on the actor’s own emotional memory, emphasize imagination and given circumstances, or focus on spontaneous interaction to achieve “behavioral truth.”

In *An Actor Prepares*, one of the seminal works of psychological realism, Konstantin Stanislavski ([1936] 1986) asserts that truth and belief are inseparable in a performance:

Everything that happens on the stage must be convincing to the actor himself, to his associates and to the spectators. It must inspire belief in the possibility, in real life, of emotions analogous to those being experienced on the stage by the actor. Each and every moment must be saturated with a belief in the truthfulness of the emotion felt, and in the action carried out by the actor. (142)

This pursuit of an accessible “inner truth” inherently underpins the essentialist premise of psychological realism. We suggest that this approach is rooted in an essentialist view of identity, which assumes the self to be a fixed and unchanging “essence” that can be discovered, understood, owned, and shared. As Newman (2016) suggests, this belief in the “existence of essences” is a central component of psychological essentialism (295).

This essentialist premise is evident in actor training through two interconnected approaches to the use of self: focusing either on the essential self of the actor or the essential reality of the character. For some practitioners, the actor’s own identity is the primary source of emotional truth, thus framing identity as something fixed and knowable. It directs the actor inward, as exemplified by Uta Hagen’s directive to “learn to know who *you* are ... find your own sense of identity” (Hagen and Frankel 1973, 22).

Lee Strasberg’s development of the Method makes this orientation explicit. Building upon the work of Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, and Meyerhold, Strasberg locates the truth within the actor’s own emotional life, asserting that “the soul of the character that you’re playing comes from your own emotions” (Cohen 2010, 26–27). Through exercises in sense and emotional memory Strasberg instructs the actor to mine their personal experiences and realities as raw material for performance, treating the actor’s self as the fixed and knowable emotional source for a role. This, along with the given realities of the character, will create truthful and believable characters, aligning with realistic behavior and credible emotional expressions (Konijn 2002).

Stella Adler, on the other hand, criticized actors’ exclusive reliance on their own experiences, calling it a “great disservice” to actors (Adler in Kissel 2000, 65). Instead of rejecting the pursuit of truth, Adler relocated it to the character, grounding it firmly in context and the character’s given circumstances. In reference to Hamlet, she argued that the actor must find the truth of the role not in themselves, but in the character’s fixed reality: “The truth of the character isn’t found in you but in the circumstances of the royal position” (Kissel 2000, 65). Even here, the essentialist premise persists. While the actor is told to find the truth outside of themselves, the objective is still to discover and embody a character’s fixed, essential circumstances and objectives. The assumption is that these realities are singular, complete, and merely waiting to be discovered.

Ultimately, whether the essential truth is located in the actor’s own feelings or the character’s fixed circumstances and actions, psychological realism rests on an essentialist foundation: the belief that a knowable “inner truth” exists for the role, and the actor’s job is to discover and embody that truth.

Verbatim and the Fluid Self

Theatre of the real often engages with and represents real people and events, employing methodologies that can disrupt the psychological realist approach. Their very nature and aesthetics muddle the essentialist link between the actor and the role, as well as traditional notions of authenticity and what could be considered real and truthful.

Our study focuses on verbatim theatre, which draws on documentary material including interviews, oral histories, and testimonies to shape performance. Practitioners vary significantly in their approaches: Anna Deavere Smith creates transformative performances that cross identity boundaries through embodied *mimesis* (Paterson 2015, 6); David Hare creates characters and scenarios inspired by interviews and both factual and imagined events (Hare 2006; Schulze 2017); and Alecky Blythe employs a “recorded delivery” technique, in which actors perform live while listening to audio recordings via earpieces—not only hearing what to say, but how to say it (Hammond and Steward 2008; Taylor 2013). More broadly, verbatim performance requires actors to “investigate and perform the words and gestures of the person they portray,” rather than simply performing a role (Vachon and Salvatore 2023, 7).

When working with students, Anna Deavere Smith explicitly challenges the self-centered technique of psychological realism, noting that acting is about becoming the other.

To acknowledge the other, you have to acknowledge yourself. It's not psychological realism. I don't want to own the character and endow the character with my own experience. It's the opposite of that. What has to exist in order to try to allow the other to be is separation between the actor's self and the other. (Martin and Smith 1993, 51–52)

Our adaptation, auto-verbatim performance, draws from this tradition while subverting the typical “actor-to-other” relationship. We employ Vachon and Salvatore's (2023) definition of verbatim performance as “the precise portrayal of an actual person using their exact speech and gestural patterns as a data source for investigation...” (385). In this study, however, the actors reproduce *their own* vocal, physical, and linguistic behaviors from *their own* filmed interviews. This self-reflexive method creates what Goffman (1959) describes as a situation where actors can “stage a recapitulation” of their own past, reframing authenticity as a reconstructive rather than spontaneous process (72).

This tension is compounded by the fact that the actor is the subject and the medium simultaneously. Theatre scholar Bert O. States (1983) describes the actor's experience of performing as being “a kind of storyteller whose speciality is that he *is* the story he is telling” (359). Through auto-verbatim technique, the actor performs *their own* story, entering a hyper-literal space in which the storyteller and the story are one and the same. Paradoxically, this results in a reflexive distance between the storyteller (the observing, present self, or actor) and the story (the remembered, performed self, or character). This distancing will be a core focus of our analysis when examining the actors' reflections.

Authenticity as an Effect: Theatre of the Real

Authenticity is a nebulous concept, both subjective and contextual. Within social interactions, *authenticity* often equates to someone *truly being* what or who they claim to be (a real doctor, a real pilot, etc.), a view that is particularly salient when real lives are at stake. As Goffman (1959) notes, “when an individual plays a part ... [observers] are asked to believe that the character they see

actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess ... and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be" (17).

Defining what constitutes an authentic performance is perhaps more elusive. To establish a baseline for our research, we first analyzed the definitions of "authenticity" provided by our actors and survey respondents. Both groups relied heavily on essentialist terminology. They used words like, "real," "true," "honest," "genuine," and "spontaneous." They also described authentic *performance* with phrases like "the opposite of fake" and "truthful expression of feeling," and characterized it as spontaneous and empathetic. Survey respondents offered similar descriptions, identifying the word "real" most often (84% used this term), followed by the words "genuine" (48%), then both "honest" and "true" (36%).

These definitions reflect the term's Greek origins: αὐθεντίας (authéntēs), meaning "self-doer"—or acting from one's own authority. This etymological foundation connects to modern notions of being "true to oneself" (Oxford English Dictionary 2024). Ultimately, "what is consistent across the literature is that authenticity encapsulates what is genuine, real, and/or true" (Beverland and Farrelly 2010, 839), a broad definition that was echoed by both the actors and survey participants in this study.

This essentialist perspective, however, is complicated by the nature of performance. An actor doesn't necessarily need to have the lived experience of every character they portray since no real lives are at stake and performances are usually clearly signposted as such. As Heddon (2008) reminds us, performance is just that—a performance and not the real world, prompting us "to consider whether and how the 'real world' is performance, or at least performative" (28). Similarly, theatre scholars challenge the assumption that "theatre of the real" possesses inherent authenticity or truthfulness merely because the source material is based on documents, interviews, transcripts, memory, or historical experiences/events (e.g., Martin 2013; Tomlin 2013; Schulze 2017). As Martin (2009) notes, "at its best, documentary theatre complicates the idea of documentary and of the real, of a document, and even what it means to document; documentary theatre troubles our already troubled categories of truth, reality, fiction and acting" (88).

The specific aesthetics of our approach further contributed to these effects. The actors in our study were required to meticulously learn their text, speech patterns, and physical movements from their recorded interviews. Schulze (2017) contends that documentary theatre employs techniques such as these "to make the actors appear as true a representation to the actual person as possible" (13). The actors' technical precision and their use of "idiosyncratic and bizarre language" was "immediately recognisable as lacking artifice" (Soans 2008, 24) and contributed to the audience's expectation of the truth. As Soans (2008) asserts, the audience of a verbatim play assumes what it is watching is "truthful" and that "they're not going to be lied to" (19).

Beyond physical and vocal mimesis, the performances were explicitly framed as "real" and were presented using the same costumes, lighting, framing, and edits as the original interviews. These "documentary signifiers" likely created what Garde and Mumford (2016) call Authenticity-Effects, which then generate sensations of "the sincere and genuine," "referential truthfulness," and

“unmediated contact with people who actually exist” (2). Kear (2021) observes a similar effect, noting that “the erasure of any signs of direction, choreography or even rehearsed behaviour ... [confirms] the ‘authenticity’ of the show ... ” (11).

In the context of performance, authenticity is perhaps less a fixed state of truth and more a product of context, consistency, and perception, the result of an unspoken agreement between the performer and audience. We argue that the high degree of perceived authenticity in our study results from these very effects, aligning with Garde and Mumford’s (2013) observations regarding “Reality Theatre”:

Our experiences of performance as Reality Theatre, and of performance segments as “authentic,” are constituted by a certain mode of (re)presentation and viewing that frames spectators’ interactions with a performance. The “authentic” is not a given and fixed entity, but rather the product of a contract between performers and spectators which has to be renewed for each “authenticating act.” (149)

The Authenticity-Effects created by these aesthetic and technical choices proved powerful not only for spectators but also for the performers themselves. The finding that all three actors misidentified their own performances as their original interviews; despite knowing they could be fabrications, demonstrates the psychological and perceptual impact of reconstructing authenticity through rigorous mimesis—a finding we explore further in reflections and results. So perhaps authenticity can only exist in a world with human actors capable of pretending. After all, there is no truth without lies, no sincerity without insincerity, no copy without an original, and no performance without real life.

Methods

This study utilized auto-verbatim performance as an experimental framework to examine authenticity and the psychological and performative tensions of self-recreation. Unlike traditional verbatim theatre projects created as standalone performances or forms of political activism, this research was designed as a controlled experiment to isolate the internal dynamics of the actor and the audience’s perception of authenticity. Specifically, we wanted to examine whether a performance rooted in meticulous precision and mimicry, rather than subjective interpretations of “emotional truth,” could still resonate as authentic to both performer and audience.

Three student actors from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Sylvia, James, and David), all trained in Stanislavskian approaches, were interviewed and filmed. They were then tasked with faithfully recreating these interviews in subsequent performances for the camera. We collected multi-modal data from both participants and observers. The actors provided qualitative feedback through interviews, workshop recordings, and personal logs; they also completed surveys to rate the authenticity of their own performances from a viewer’s perspective. This process required the actors to embody three distinct roles: interviewee/storyteller, performer, and viewer/audience. Additionally, to assess independent external perception, 50 randomly selected viewers completed audience surveys after watching either the original interviews or filmed recreations. The study

received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and all participants provided written consent to engage in the research.

Embodied Learning and Auto-Verbatim Techniques

The three actors had no prior experience with verbatim performance and were instructed to reproduce their recorded interviews with strict fidelity. To achieve this, they engaged in a rehearsal process focused on the meticulous, repetitive study of their interview footage. While the actors did not use any aids such as video monitoring or headphones during their final filmed performances, their preparation relied on the internalization of a precise physical and vocal score derived from their original recordings. This required matching vocal parameters (pitch, volume, pacing, timbre, and articulation) and physical behaviors (posture, gestures, micro-expressions, and eye contact). By preserving every hesitation, interruption, and repetition, and attending to subtle shifts in breath, muscular tension, and movement tempo, this methodology treats the body as a site of meaning rather than a vehicle for it. This is consistent with Kemp's (2012) account of the "reflexive relationship between thought, feelings, and expression" (6).

This methodology treats kinesthetic expression with the same analytical weight as spoken language, challenging traditional hierarchies that privilege the brain over the body or text over gesture. Our approach draws upon research showing that gesture-based learning precedes speech (Fadiga and Craighero 2006) and that imitation is fundamental in the development of the self (Meltzoff and Moore 1995). We thus acknowledge that movement "gives us knowledge of our world" and "reveals important insights about our nature, capacities, and limitations" (Johnson 2007, 20).

By positioning the voice as "the bridge between the inner and outer worlds" (Houseman 2002, xiii), and movement as "fundamental to an actor's understanding and presentation of personality" (Ewan and Green 2017, 2), this embodied framework foregrounds physical and vocal precision. Ultimately, auto-verbatim performance examines how authenticity is perceived through disciplined embodiment rather than spontaneous expression.

Interview Protocols

Interview questions were semi-structured and designed to achieve two primary goals: first, to elicit growth-oriented personal narratives (Bauer 2021) that allowed actors to reflect on their identity and life trajectory; second, to explore definitions of authenticity in both general and performance contexts. Narrative prompts included: "Tell us about a time you felt lost," "When have you felt most at home?", and "Tell us about a time you felt like an outsider." Questions on authenticity included: "What do you think it means to be authentic?" and "What is an 'authentic' performance?"

Not all recorded responses were used for the final films. We selected stories that demonstrated organized, coherent, transformative, and self-regulatory narrative structures (Chatman 1980), providing actors with rich, reflective material for the subsequent performance stage.

Filming Protocols

Interviews were filmed from two angles and edited for length and clarity. Identical lighting, costume, and editorial structures were used across both interview and performance footage to ensure visual consistency. This minimized subtle filming variations that might influence either the actor's process or audience perception.

Workshop Process

Actors rehearsed independently for one to two weeks before participating in an online workshop. One author had previously taught the actors; the other author had not. The workshop followed an exploratory rather than a prescriptive approach that guided the actors toward greater awareness of visual, auditory, tactile, and temporal elements (Kemp 2012). The authors also suggested specific physical and vocal adjustments to achieve a more accurate auto-verbatim performance.

Survey Protocols

50 participants were recruited via Prolific (an online survey platform for academic and market research) from a randomized demographic sample representative of the US population across race, gender, and age (18–80 years). While the sample size was limited by financial constraints (3 actors, 50 survey respondents), this pilot study was designed to establish proof of concept for the auto-verbatim performance method and identify key phenomena for future large-scale investigations. While our actors were drawn from a convenience sample of university theatre students, our survey respondents represented a broad cross-section of the U.S. population, providing diverse perspectives on authenticity across demographic groups.

Each participant was randomly assigned *one* video to view—either the actor's original interview *or* the performed version (but not both)—and then responded to a series of questions assessing its authenticity. This between-subjects design ensured that viewers' authenticity ratings were not influenced by comparing the two versions. Respondents were compensated for their time, informed of the possibility of deception at the conclusion of the survey, and given the option to withdraw at any point.

For the analysis, we categorized responses on two types of Likert scales—one measuring agreement and the other measuring perceived excellence—into positive and neutral/negative ratings of authenticity. On the agreement scale, responses of "Strongly agree," and "Agree" were classified as positively authentic, while responses of "Neutral," "Disagree," and "Strongly disagree" were grouped as neutral/negatively authentic. On the excellence scale, responses of "Excellent" and "Very good" were categorized as positively authentic while "Good," "Fair," and "Poor" were categorized as neutral/negatively authentic.

Survey respondents categorized the videos as interviews or performances and answered open-ended questions identifying specific elements that influenced their categorization. When viewing their own videos three years later, the actors completed a survey similar to the Prolific respondents, allowing direct comparison of self-perception versus audience perception.

Actor Reflections on Performance and Process

The actors were given reflexive opportunities during the rehearsal process, and we drew upon this data from four distinct phases:

- Initial interviews regarding their pre-existing beliefs on performance authenticity.
- Research observations, informal dialogues, and actor process logs and reflections.
- Post-performance reflections.
- Post-viewing of their filmed performances.

This multi-stage data collection allowed us to trace the evolution of the actors' perceptions, from their initial theoretical definitions about "authentic performance" to the practical friction experienced during the auto-verbatim process. By examining their subjective experiences of the auto-verbatim technique, the actors were encouraged to explore what Zarrilli (2019) describes as the "dynamic embodied/enactive psychophysical phenomenon and process" of acting (12).

Inside Out / Outside In

As noted through researcher observations and rehearsal logs, actors frequently gravitated toward an "inside-out" approach during the workshops, emphasizing inner truth and emotional authenticity (Kemp 2012, 5–6). This aligns with Kemp's observation that the dichotomy between "inside-out" and "outside-in" methods often reinforces a separation between mind and body, privileging either psychological or physical processes rather than integrating them (Kemp 2012, 8).

In an initial interview exploring his pre-existing beliefs about authenticity, David noted that authentic performance requires a temporary alignment of emotional sincerity with psychological truth. He offered: "To be authentic is to say what you feel, to express, truthfully, your feelings...." For David, truth begets truth—the actor must "show something true first" to convince the audience that they can be relied upon to deliver the "truth" of the character.

Even when portraying themselves, the actors wanted to ground their performances in internal emotion. For all three, feeling preceded form, serving as the catalyst of their performance. This underscores a tension between essentialist and existentialist views of authenticity, mirrored in contrasting acting approaches. Stanislavski (2009), for instance, encourages emotional immersion within fictional circumstances. In contrast, methods influenced by existentialism reject fixed identity, framing both self and character as fluid and socially constructed (Gergen 1991). This malleable self can then be refined and shaped by the actor's choices, actions, and interpretations (Abulof 2017), much like a lump of clay on a potter's wheel.

Stanislavski's Experiencing and Dual Consciousness

While these different approaches to identity and character offer contrasting frameworks, Stanislavski's concept of *perezhivanie*, or "experiencing" (Whyman 2013, 34) provides a framework for understanding how actors navigate the tension between emotional immersion and technical skill. *Perezhivanie* is a kind of deep-flow, dual conscious state, in which the actor is simultaneously

aware of the technical demands of a performance while fully engaging in the emotional life of the character.

Sylvia's initial interview reflected this orientation directly. She described feeling most authentic in performance when she accessed her "inner essence" and drew on personal experience. This position reflects the psychological and emotional fusion between actor and character that Stanislavski (2009) terms the "I am" state. In this state, the actor strives to maintain an "unbroken line" of attention on the fictional world, fully absorbed in the dramatic situation (Stanislavski [1936] 1986), experiencing the role's emotions as if they were genuinely their own. For Sylvia, emotional immersion was central to what authentic performance meant:

You completely immerse yourself into whatever it is you're doing, and you don't think about performing a certain way. You just think about becoming whatever it is in that performance, whether that's someone that you're not or someone that you are.

In practice, however, authenticity in performance is judged not by the actor's internal experience, but by the audience's belief in the character's reality. In our study, the actors often reported feeling inauthentic while performing, yet this subjective experience did not align with how authentic their performances were perceived by viewers. This disconnect may be due, in part, to the constraints of the strictly verbatim format, which limited spontaneity and improvisational flow, qualities that are typically associated with live performance.

As Sylvia observed, "the spontaneity of a performance ... is part of an authentic performance." Yet in verbatim theatre as practiced here, actors were required to reconcile spontaneity with fidelity to a recorded script, and emotional expression with technical precision. This tension foregrounds a central paradox: a performance can feel artificial to the actor while appearing entirely authentic to the audience. Diderot's *Paradox of the Actor* illuminates this contradiction: he argues that a cold, dispassionate performer—one who simulates rather than experiences emotion—is often better equipped to deliver consistent, credible performances (Diderot [1773] 1883). Verbatim performance, with its emphasis on repetition and accuracy, aligns closely with this ideal of emotional discipline and performative control.

The actor's ability to maintain a dual-conscious state during a performance requires the actor be "affectively dissociated from his presentation in a way that leaves him free to cope with dramaturgical contingencies as they arise" (Goffman 1959, 216). Or, as Goffman observes, the performer must use dramaturgical discipline to "offer a show of intellectual and emotional involvement in the activity he is presenting, but must keep himself from actually being carried away by his own show..." (216).

Thus, in verbatim performance, multiple authenticities can coexist. For example, an actor may strive for emotional authenticity by immersing themselves in the character's emotional life (e.g., Stanislavski, Strasberg), the authenticity of the character's circumstances (e.g., Adler), or deliver technical authenticity by adhering precisely to the verbatim script and replicating another person's

gestures, posture, and expressions (e.g., Smith). These “authenticities” can overlap, forming a kind of palimpsest, where each type of authenticity enriches and informs the others. In this way, the actor can actively toggle between them, choosing which to emphasize in the moment.

Essentialism, Pragmatism, and Acting Method

While a full account of psychological essentialism lies beyond the scope of this paper, we examine how actors adopted essentialism as a pragmatic heuristic (Dewey 1922). Their method choices emerged through a feedback loop shaped by training, academic demands, audition processes, and rehearsal constraints. When authenticity is prioritized by stakeholders—whether audience, director, or actor—time-efficient approaches become practical.

In this context, “essence work” functions as a utilitarian shortcut, guiding actors towards meaningful discovery (Gröner, Gröner & Bischof 1983). Method selection thus becomes an adaptive strategy (Mead 1934), chosen not for ideological purity but for its efficiency in achieving performance goals. It is arguably easier to get the gist of a person by capturing their essence than by meticulously mimicking every individual mannerism by rote.

Copying, Mimicry, and Epic Theatre

It was evident that our approach was unfamiliar and contrary to the actors’ typical way of working. For example, during the rehearsal process, Sylvia contrasted our auto-verbatim performance approach with how she typically prepared for a scripted role stating, “the problem is that it’s nothing like anything I’ve ever done before. In terms of, you know, when we think of characters, we usually think of just memorizing the lines, we don’t think of movement a lot.” As she continued to grapple with the technique, Sylvia expressed her frustration with the rigorous mimetic demands, “I don’t like this, I don’t like it. [But] I’m hoping that *my* gestures come more naturally to me ... maybe that’ll like, you know, add a different level to the performance.”

The actors were concerned that by precisely copying every gesture, eyeroll, and vocal inflection, they would portray themselves accurately from the external viewer’s point of view, yet without the same internal connection or objectives expressed in their interviews. Consequently, they risked being perceived as “fake,” akin to a forgery in painting. David’s post-performance reflection captured this anxiety directly:

What sets imitation apart from an authentic recreation of, of something ... or [an] interview in our case, is whether you have the goal or objective.... If the actor does not have the same intention as the interviewee in the clip, the [performance] will just be an imitation. It’s like it doesn’t have a soul no matter how, how detailed [or] how specific, [or] how accurate those hand gestures are ... you’re just a robot.

Thus, the actors were caught in a persistent dilemma: how to deliver what they considered an authentic performance based on “emotional truth”, “spontaneity”, and “empathy” while staying faithful to the auto-verbatim performance parameters we had set. Sensing the actors’ discomfort, we instructed the actors to utilize mimicry as a learning tool, and to approach the physical elements with the same precision and care they would typically apply to dialogue. We discussed the importance of enactive cognition and the mirror neuron system (Varela et al. 1991) in learning and

encouraged them to fully embody the gestures as part of the memorization process. This method aligns with research suggesting that observing another person's actions activates sensorimotor areas in the brain, effectively simulating the experience as if the observer were performing the actions themselves (Fadiga et al. 2005; Johnson 2007, 161).

Despite inherently embodying their own given circumstances (and identity), auto-verbatim performance creates distance between the actor and their own story, rendering the familiar strange. This aligns with Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung* (commonly translated as "alienation" or "defamiliarization"), which aims to "estrangle what is widely accepted and familiar" (Sjöström 2021, 11). This distancing, however, can lead to a fluid form of self-knowledge. Just as Meltzoff and Moore (1995) suggest that imitation is a "psychological bridge between self and other that bears two-way traffic" (73), Smith contends that the repetitive mimetic process allows her to "become the 'them' that they present to the world" (Martin and Smith 1993, 57). She notes that through this external focus, the character's words are "knocking at my door and they're saying, 'parts of Anna, come out'" (57). Through auto-verbatim performance and the imitation and the distance it fosters, the actor is able to study and observe themselves as they would a stranger—utilizing the "two-way traffic" of mimesis to bridge the gap between their performed and perceived selves as a method for deeper understanding.

Masking, Reflexivity, and the Performed Self

In James's filmed interview, he shared how growing up as a Korean American in a predominantly Jewish and Italian neighborhood in New Jersey left him feeling like an outsider who was often bullied because of his race and heritage. This sense of alienation was so profound that, as a child, he said:

I decided that I needed to change things about myself, to fit in, to act a certain way, to reject everything that I considered Asian, Korean, inherently what I am, and I felt embarrassed to ... I felt embarrassed to ... to be born, how I was.

James later confirmed, "I felt like I've ... I've acted every single day of my life." He described wearing a "mask" and "playing a role" each day simply to fit in (Park 1950). His everyday social interactions felt like inauthentic performances used to navigate social pressures. Yet paradoxically, acting became a way to express himself more authentically than he ever could in everyday social settings. As he explained, he brought "tiny little aspects of myself into all these roles," leading to a profound observation: "I felt like I had to be somebody else to be me," and further, "I can be myself more when I'm in character than when I'm in like, say, just a regular social setting."

James's auto-verbatim process extended this dynamic. By meticulously recreating his own interview, he was forced to witness himself as an external object, a character. This reflexive distance allowed him to treat his past self with the empathy and honesty typically reserved for a character. He reflected, "I wanted to give that respect to myself... [to] that little eight-year-old boy in New Jersey, like just trying his best to fit in. I wanted him to kind of get his story, because I think that he deserves it." Through this process, James gave voice to his childhood self—first by telling

his story, then by relearning and performing it. The very tool that initially created distance (playing a role) was repurposed to achieve authentic self-expression and acceptance.

This aligns with Spry's notion that "to hear one's words spoken, resonating in the body, dialoguing with one's own subjectivities through embodiment is a profoundly moving process in understanding self and other" (Spry 2016, 186). Reflecting on his experience, James explained, "I looked back at [it] and ... I didn't even really know, like, the extent of, like, what I felt until I spoke it out loud, until I put it in words."

James also observed that "to have authenticity in another person's shoes, you have to understand *who* they are, *why* they do what they do, [and] *what* drives them to be the type of person they want to become...." And he used this same investigative process when performing himself. Thus, echoing Hagen's belief that "your own identity and self-knowledge are the main sources for any character you may play (Hagen and Frankel 1973, 29).

Ultimately, James both *discovers* and *creates* himself through the act of performance, embodying the view of the self as something constructed and reconstructed over time through memory and narrative. This perspective aligns with narrative psychology scholar Dan McAdams' (1993) assertion that "If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself ... then I, too, must come to know my own story" (11). The auto-verbatim process requires the actor to deliberately transition from telling their story (memory), to relearning and re-coding that story as a new memory, which is then retold as a performance. This process requires the performer to move fluidly between past, present and future, as well as between the subjective and the objective, or from *I* to *he* to *me*. The self then becomes a product of reflective thought rather than a stable identity, affirming that "[a]n autobiography is as much the expression of a present self as it is a representation of the past one" (Lloyd 1986, 170).

Self-Performance, Objectivity, and Distancing

David and Sylvia both expressed self-judgment when analyzing their own interviews. They were noticeably more critical of themselves than they were of other interviewees. For example, Sylvia admitted to feeling a lack of confidence in her story, stating, "my wording is fucking weird." Similarly, David described his discomfort with relearning his idiosyncratic speech patterns: "to repeat my grammatical mistakes and hesitations over and over again, it's just so weird. I just don't like that feeling ... because I'm a pretty self-conscious person." Both initially assumed that performing themselves would be easier than performing another person, or a fictional character, and both later confessed that it was more challenging.

For David, watching himself on video was a daunting task that raised fundamental questions about how we perform different versions of ourselves in daily life. He described feeling embarrassed while watching his interview and struggled to view it objectively. Reflecting on the experience, he noted: "It's really hard to analyze myself.... It feels extremely uncomfortable and embarrassing. So, I have to kind of, like, keep a distance between myself and [the] version of myself in [the] interview before starting work on it."

He became acutely aware of the gap between his internal self-perception and how he appeared in the interview, explaining: "It felt really strange to look at myself, and it's really different from what I perceived of myself in the mirror.... I just feel that the guy in the video is not me." This experience prompted him to question whether his internal sense of self aligned with how others perceive him in everyday interactions. He reflected on the incongruity that arose when confronting these potentially discordant views, a struggle that mirrors Lloyd's (1986) observation that "of our living selves we cannot be objective knowers" (184).

David also wondered whether the presence of others during the interview altered his psychological and physical expression of self, stating, "I also think ... like the presence of someone else in the recording process makes my psychological and physical condition different from what I am currently." David saw the filmed interview as a public performance of self. He recognized the influence others had on him and was acutely aware of how he might adjust or moderate his behavior due to his awareness of being observed.

For the actor playing a version of themselves, this creates a unique challenge: managing multiple impressions and multiple authenticities simultaneously. The actor must navigate the "performed self" and the "performing self." This process echoes Heddon's (2008) assertion that "the presentation of self (in performance) is a re-presentation, and often a strategic one" (27), particularly in relation to autobiographical performance. To maintain this strategy, the actor must juggle their internal state alongside the character's, all while being mindful of how they are being perceived by the audience—an audience that, in this case, includes not only themselves and the interviewer but also the eventual viewers of the film. This requires what Goffman (1959) calls dramaturgical discipline and enables the performer to "move from private places of informality to public ones of varying degrees of formality, without allowing such changes to confuse him" (217).

In this context, the filmed performance becomes a public objectification of the private self, transforming what feels intimate into something observable and analyzable. This process echoes Brechtian notions of estrangement (*Verfremdungseffekt*), where the familiar becomes strange, forcing the actor to reflect on how performance reframes identity as both subject and object.

Watching The Performances

Three years after filming, we emailed the actors a survey to view and evaluate both their original interviews and auto-verbatim performances. The instructions provided a deceptive frame: "In the survey you will watch two videos; they could be two different edits of your original interview, two different edits of your performances, or one of each." We also invited them to film their reactions as they watched the videos. While Sylvia and David filmed their viewings, James provided verbal feedback. This methodology allowed us to capture the actors' embodied responses to witnessing themselves, data impossible to collect through a standard online platform. We then asked them to rate the authenticity of the story, the storyteller, and the performance in each video.

Remarkably, all three actors misidentified their performances as their original interviews. While the presentation order (performance first) may have influenced their judgments, and this was notably a small sample, this universal failure of self-recognition still surprised us.

Sylvia appeared detached while watching both videos, displaying little emotion. Similarly, David appeared contemplative as he watched his interview, with one hand over his mouth and the other resting on his chin, as if studying it. By contrast, he was highly animated while watching his performance—his mouth often agape and his hands fluttering between his temples and his mouth.

These contrasting physical responses, Sylvia's consistent detachment versus David's contemplation and agitation, revealed the unsettling experience of self-recognition, or in this case, failed self-recognition. When confronted with his own footage, David seemed to experience what Giddens (1991) terms "ontological insecurity", which is a destabilization of the continuous self-narrative through which identity is maintained. For David, this manifested as a loss of coherence between his embodied performance and his self-understanding:

It's really hard to watch myself doing this.... I would probably respond to the question totally differently if I'm gonna do the thing right now.... Like, although ... this person is still called David, it's like, still, it's just a completely different person, already. Um, and I felt kind of like watching a stranger with, with similar life experience.... And I can still see traces of myself in that video, which made it even weirder.

For David, inhabiting another version of himself created an unusual tension. While perfect identity alignment should theoretically eliminate risks to ontological security and maximize authentic performance, this assumes congruence between an actor's self-perception and how they appear to others. When David encountered himself as others perceive him (a performed self refracted through external perspective), the alignment fractured. This suggests that these internal incongruencies produce a profound sense of identity incoherence.

David's discomfort with the incongruity between his current and former self is mirrored in Heddon's (2008) examination of the "re-presentation" of self in autobiographical performance: "There is the self who was and the self who is. There is the self who is performed, and the performing self. Which 'self', then, is being presented?" (27). David's reaction contrasts with the actors' earlier desire for a fixed identity or "essence" to latch onto. Instead, it reveals that our perspectives on authenticity, the self, and our ability to perform for ourselves and for others, may be far more adaptable than we imagine.

When completing the survey, the actors collectively identified spontaneity, naturalness, genuineness, and "thinking in the moment" as key indicators of authenticity. Their ratings, however, revealed a striking pattern. When rating what they believed was their original interview (the performance), all three rated themselves as authentic storytellers telling genuine stories. When rating what they believed was the performance (the actual interview), responses diverged: Sylvia maintained both she and her story seemed authentic; David remained neutral about his authenticity as storyteller but agreed his story was authentic; and James "strongly agreed" both were authentic, even while believing it was a performance.

Notably, James was the only actor who eventually recognized the deception after we revealed the video order, identifying subtle changes in his physical appearance between the gap in filming. His ability to finally distinguish performance from interview through physical rather than behavioral cues underscores how thoroughly the auto-verbatim method captured “authentic-seeming” behavior.

David’s experience further illustrates this blurring of boundaries between genuine and performed authenticity. He went on to say:

I probably have this presumption of the “right/authentic” way of stuttering, which is actually a dramatized version from my actor’s perspective that tends to make things more visually appealing.... Maybe I should do less acting and observe more how people talk in real life instead of simply imagining.

For David, verbatim performance highlighted a disconnect between his acting technique and his perception of an authentic way of being, challenging his very understanding of acting.

Later, in miscategorizing his interview as a scripted performance, David suggested that:

This one, I felt was not very authentic, because ... when I talk about the, um, the darkness in the house ... I felt the stuttering was a little bit pre-planned.... And this is, like, a very, very important moment of my life ... and I didn’t see those moments, you know, actually, in front of my eyes. Just to be honest, I wasn’t convinced by the person in the video.

David’s reasoning reflects a preconception tied to sense and emotional memory (Stanislavski’s affective memory), in which the actor “lives the part” (Whyman 2013, 34). He expressed disappointment that he could not “see those moments” as he watched himself in the interview, remarking, “This is like a very, very important moment of my life, and I just kind of not brush it over, but it’s like, um, took it not very seriously.”

Sylvia also miscategorized her performance as the original interview, stating, “the body language seemed natural, and the story seemed to come to me in the moment.” She reflected that she “wasn’t thinking enough” during the interview, which led her to believe it was a performance. Both Sylvia and David noted that their level of engagement with the story influenced their perception of its authenticity. After rewatching the original interview, Sylvia commented, “... it just wasn’t a super entertaining story.” Similarly, David admitted, “I was not very engaged with what I’m saying.”

James too misidentified his performance as the original interview, attributing his mistake to the possibility that his “thought process wasn’t truly showing.” He went on to say:

I fully thought that the first video shown was the original interview, but it turns out it was the re-enactment. I’m not gonna say that I was impressed with [my performance]. [But] you know this is my story, so I am able to speak on it with some authenticity, and I think it was still genuine.

Because the story was his own, he attributed a degree of authenticity to the performance, demonstrating how the content of a narrative can overshadow the authenticity of its delivery.

The actors' reflections suggest that they relied on criteria such as "spontaneity" and "genuineness" to evaluate the authenticity of their performances. They then applied similar criteria when distinguishing between the interview and their performance. For instance, David assumed his performance was the original interview because, as he explained, "the stutter appears to be very spontaneous.... I could spot some typical mannerisms of myself ... [and] the emotions evoked by recalling the past were genuine."

Taken together, the actor's explanations for these misidentifications reveal a striking paradox: they judge authenticity based on whether the performance matches their idealized sense of genuine expression, rather than recognizing their actual spontaneous behavior. David, for instance, finds his calculated performance more "spontaneous" than his unrehearsed interview, suggesting that actors may be more convinced by theatrical representations of authenticity than by their own authentic behavior.

At a recent conference presentation, we observed similar results. When participants were shown actors' verbatim performances of interviews based on others' stories, they frequently misidentified the performance as the original interview. Similarly, a significant percentage (80%) of our survey respondents thought the actor's performances were their original interviews. The consistency of these misidentifications points to fundamental questions about how we recognize—or fail to recognize—authentic human behavior. Ultimately, these results demonstrate the success of Authenticity-Effects (Garde and Mumford 2016), where the meticulous reconstruction of behavioral cues becomes more persuasive to an audience than the spontaneous, lived moment.

Survey Data

Beyond the actors' self-perceptions, we also investigated broader audience responses through our survey. Before undertaking this research, we asked ourselves:

- Would actors' auto-verbatim performances be perceived as authentic by viewers?
- Would viewers misidentify interviews as performances and vice versa?
- Would viewers rate storytellers as authentic regardless of correct identification?

Participants were evenly divided: 25 watched original interviews, 25 watched auto-verbatim performances.

Results

Our data collection followed a two-stage evaluative process. After watching the video, all respondents rated the subject's authenticity ("*How authentic is the person telling this story?*") using the Likert scale described in the Survey Protocols. Respondents were then asked to categorize the footage as either an original interview or a performance. The findings were notable: 94% of *all* respondents rated the actors as authentic, regardless of their categorization, and 96% of the total

respondents believed they were watching original interviews. Specifically, of those who watched the auto-verbatim performances, 80% believed they were watching original interviews—whereas only one actual interview was misidentified as a performance. This asymmetry suggests that the auto-verbatim performances were highly convincing.

Breaking down the results by category: actual interviews received 96% positive authenticity ratings, while performances received 92%—a small difference that indicates the power of verbatim techniques to create convincing Authenticity-Effects.

To investigate how framing influenced perception, we employed different prompts based on viewers' initial categorization. Those who thought they had seen an interview, whether they were correct or not, were told: *"In fact, the video you just watched was an actor performing from a script. How would you rate the authenticity of their performance?"* Whereas those who identified the video as a performance were simply asked to rate authenticity without this frame.

This framing experiment revealed an intriguing pattern. When the actual interview footage was deliberately mislabeled as a performance, authenticity ratings remained high (92%). In contrast, when the actual performances were correctly labeled as performances, authenticity ratings dropped to 72%. This may suggest that this framing effect influenced the viewers' perceptions, or that they subconsciously detected subtle performance cues, though future research would be needed to confirm either theory.

The respondents offered insights into their categorizations of the videos, and the cues they associated with authenticity. Those who correctly identified the performances pointed to awkward pacing and gestures. For example, one respondent noted "the body language was off.... It seemed like the person [was] trying to remember what to say next instead of telling a story naturally." Another shared "the plodding pace ... made it feel less genuine."

In contrast, both those who correctly identified the original interviews and those who misidentified the performances cited emotional connection, natural delivery, and speech patterns as their reasons. One respondent shared, "it sounded like they were speaking from their heart. There were lots of filler words which made it seem more real." Another observed, "his facial expressions seemed to match his emotions in the story which made him seem real." Interestingly, the same cues were interpreted differently by different viewers, while some viewed slow pacing as a marker of performance, others saw it as a marker of authenticity. For example, one respondent stated, "she took pauses while telling the story as if she was recalling those memories."

Audiences struggled to distinguish auto-verbatim performances from original interviews, suggesting that perceived authenticity isn't necessarily a reflection of the actor's "inner truth," but is instead a by-product of physical and vocal precision that meets the viewers' expectations of "real behavior." Notably, these Authenticity-Effects were so powerful that even the actors themselves struggled to distinguish their performances from lived experience.

Conclusion

The auto-verbatim process reveals a fundamental paradox: when actors perform exact recreations of themselves, neither they nor audiences can reliably distinguish performance from reality. This finding challenges basic assumptions about authenticity, identity, and the essentialist premise in acting, pointing to broader philosophical implications about our ability to distinguish the real from the fabricated. These questions become particularly relevant as AI-generated “deepfakes” achieve increasingly convincing realism, raising urgent concerns about truth, representation, and the nature of authentic experience in an age of sophisticated technological reproduction.

The actors’ encounter with their performed selves destabilized their sense of identity. Their responses revealed self-judgment, identity incongruity, and shifting self-knowledge. All three performers acknowledge that they feel differently now than they did at the time of the interview. In the years since, they have graduated, moved on with their lives, and grown into different versions of themselves. As James mused, “I think I definitely feel a lot differently now than I did back then. It was kind of a little bit sad, I would say, but I think that I really hadn’t, at that point, come to terms with how I truly felt.”

This study illuminates deeply rooted assumptions about emotional truth, empathy, spontaneity, and self-perception, as well as the ongoing tension between internal self-perception and public personas. While essentialist notions of identity may provide actors with a useful heuristic in preparing performances, they often obscure the nuances of human behavior and the fluidity of authenticity. The actors’ use of “observing” external behavior over “imagining” internal states proved successful. Both audiences and actors perceived the performances as authentic, and the actors’ technical reassessments revealed a broader challenge to traditional acting methodologies.

These findings have implications for actor training and performance theory. When neither performers nor audiences can reliably distinguish authentic self-expression from skilled recreation, the essentialist premise that authentic portrayal requires an interior, fixed self loses its foundation. In the end, authenticity in performance appears to emerge not from being but from doing, through careful observation and precise embodiment.

So perhaps the self is not as fixed as it feels. Through performance, memory, narrative, and social interaction, the self is constructed and reconstructed. Until, like the ancient Ouroboros, it becomes an endless loop of selves chasing one another.

Future Research

While these pilot findings are compelling, they raise as many questions as they answer. To test the impact of self and other on the authenticity in performance, future studies should have viewers compare three versions: the actor’s original interview, the actor’s auto-verbatim performance of their interview, and *another actor’s* verbatim performance of the interview. We have filmed all three iterations and plan to run this comparison study soon.

In addition, a broader study with a larger, more diverse sample of actors would allow for systematic comparisons across variables such as race, gender, age, and ethnicity to examine how these factors impact perceived authenticity. Additionally, studies involving AI-generated “self-avatars” could explore whether authenticity is achievable with non-human actors, enabling individuals to interact with alternate versions of themselves to enhance self-awareness and empathy.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Brittingham Wisconsin Trust.

Works Cited

- Abulof, Uriel. 2017. “Be Yourself! How Am I Not Myself?: II. Society and Politics: Between Essentialist and Existentialist Authenticity.” *Society* 54 (6): 530–32. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-017-0183-0>.
- Bauer, Jack J. 2021. *The Transformative Self: Personal Growth, Narrative Identity, and the Good Life*. Oxford University Press.
- Beverland, Michael B., and Francis J. Farrelly. 2010. “The Quest for Authenticity in Consumption: Consumers’ Purposive Choice of Authentic Cues to Shape Experienced Outcomes.” *Journal of Consumer Research* 36 (5): 838–56. <https://doi.org/10.1086/615047>.
- Benedetti, Robert L. 2006. *The Actor in You: Sixteen Simple Steps to Understanding the Art of Acting*, 3rd ed. Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.
- Chatman, Seymour Benjamin. 1980. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Cornell University Press.
- Cohen, Lola, ed. 2010. *The Lee Strasberg Notes*. Routledge.
- Dewey, John. 1922. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*. Henry Holt and Company. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14663-000>.
- Diderot, Denis. (1773) 1883. *The Paradox of the Actor*. Translated by Walter Herries Pollock. Chatto and Windus.
- Ewan, Vanessa, and Debbie Green. 2017. *Actor Movement: Expression of the Physical Being a Movement Handbook for Actors*. Bloomsbury.
- Fadiga, Luciano, and Laila Craighero. 2006. “Hand Actions and Speech Representation in Broca’s Area.” *Cortex* 42 (4): 486–90. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-9452\(08\)70383-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-9452(08)70383-6).
- Fadiga, Luciano, Laila Craighero, and Etienne Olivier. 2005. “Human Motor Cortex Excitability during the Perception of Others’ Action.” *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 15 (2): 213–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.conb.2005.03.013>.
- Garde, Ulrike, and Meg Mumford. 2013. “Postdramatic Reality Theatre and Productive Insecurity: Destabilising Encounters with the Unfamiliar in Theatre from Sydney and Berlin.” In *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance*, by Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll, and Steve Giles. Bloomsbury. <http://doi.org/10.5040/9781408183519.ch-007>.
- Garde, Ulrike, and Meg Mumford. 2016. *Theatre of Real People: Diverse Encounters at Berlin’s Hebbel Am Ufer and Beyond*. Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472580252>.
- Gergen, Kenneth J. 1991. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. Basic Books.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford University Press.

- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books.
- Groner, Rudolf, Marina Groner, and Walter F. Bischof, eds. 1983. *Methods of Heuristics*. Routledge.
- Hagen, Uta, and Haskel Frankel. 1973. *Respect for Acting*. Macmillan.
- Hammond, Will, and Dan Steward, eds. 2008. *Verbatim, Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*. Oberon.
- Hare, David. 2006. *Stuff Happens*. Faber and Faber.
- Heddon, Deirdre. 2008. *Autobiography and Performance*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Houseman, Barbara. 2002. *Finding Your Voice: A Step-by-Step Guide for Actors*. Routledge.
- Johnson, Mark. 2007. *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kear, Adrian. 2021. "Authenticity and Theatricality: World Spectatorship and the Drama of the Image." In *The Oxford Handbook of Politics and Performance*, edited by Shirin Rai, Milija Gluhovic, Silvija Jestrovic, and Michael Saward. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190863456.013.16>.
- Kemp, Rick. 2012. *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Performance*. Routledge.
- Kissel, Howard. 2000. *Stella Adler: The Art of Acting*. Applause Books.
- Konijn, Elly. 2005. "The Actor's Emotions Reconsidered: A Psychological Task-Based Perspective." In *Acting (Re)Considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, 2nd ed., edited by Phillip B. Zarrilli. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203991473-7>.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. 1986. "The Self as Fiction: Philosophy and Autobiography." *Philosophy and Literature* 10 (2): 168–85. <https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1986.0030>.
- Martin, Carol. 2009. "Living Simulations: The Use of Media in Documentary in the UK, Lebanon and Israel." In *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, edited by Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230236943>.
- Martin, Carol. 2013. *Theatre of the Real*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Martin, Carol, and Anna Deavere Smith. 1993. "Anna Deavere Smith: The Word Becomes You. An Interview." *TDR/The Drama Review* 37 (4): 45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1146292>.
- Mead, George Herbert. 1934. *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. University of Chicago Press.
- Meltzoff, Andrew N., and M. Keith Moore. 1995. "A Theory of the Role of Imitation in the Emergence of Self." *The Self in Infancy: Theory and Research*, 73–93. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0166-4115\(05\)80007-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0166-4115(05)80007-x).
- McAdams, Dan P. 1993. *The Stories We Live by: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. The Guilford Press.
- Meisner, Sanford. 1987. *Sanford Meisner on Acting*. With Dennis Longwell. Vintage.
- Newman, George E. 2016. "An Essentialist Account of Authenticity." *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 16 (3–4): 294–321. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685373-12342181>.
- Oxford English Dictionary. n.d. "authenticity (n.)." Accessed 1 September 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9125673299>.
- Park, Robert E. 1950. *Race and Culture*. Free Press.
- Paterson, Eddie. 2015. *The Contemporary American Monologue: Performance and Politics*. Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472585059>.
- Schulze, Daniel. 2017. *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance Make It Real*. Bloomsbury.
- Sjöström, Kent. 2021. "Authenticity, Copying and the Critical Gaze: The Crisis of Representation." *Arte Acta* 4: 7–26.
- Soans, Robin. 2008. "Robin Soans." In *Verbatim, Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, edited by Will Hammond and Dan Steward. Oberon Books.

- Spry, Tami. 2016. *Body, Paper, Stage: Writing and Performing Autoethnography*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315432816>.
- Stanislavski, Constantin. (1936) 1986. *An Actor Prepares*. Routledge.
- Stanislavski, Konstantin. 2009. *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*. Translated and edited by Jean Benedetti. Routledge.
- States, Bert O. 1983. "The Actor's Presence: Three Phenomenal Modes." *Theatre Journal* 35 (3): 359.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3207216>.
- Taylor, Lib. 2013. "Voice, Body and the Transmission of the Real in Documentary Theatre." *Contemporary Theatre Review* 23 (3): 368–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2013.806318>.
- Tomlin, Liz. 2013. *Acts and Apparitions: Discourses on the Real in Performance Practice and Theory, 1990–2010*. Manchester University Press.
- Vachon, Wolfgang, and Joe Salvatore. 2023. "Wading the Quagmire: Aesthetics and Ethics in Verbatim Theater Act 1." *Qualitative Inquiry* 29 (2): 383–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221098988>.
- Varela, Francisco J., Eleanor Rosch, and Evan Thompson. 1991. *The Embodied Mind*. The MIT Press.
<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6730.001.0001>.
- Whyman, Rose. 2013. *Stanislavski: The Basics*. The Basics. Routledge.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B. 2019. *(Toward) a Phenomenology of Acting*. Routledge.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B., ed. 2002. *Acting (Re)Considered : A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. Routledge.

Biographies

Colleen Conroy is an assistant professor of voice and acting at the University of Wisconsin-Madison whose work lives at the intersection of voice, identity, and performance. She earned a BA in acting and an MFA in voice studies from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Her research explores embodied storytelling and verbatim theatre, with a particular focus on the relationship between voice and identity. Current projects include "The Accent Collective," an open-access global accent archive, and an immersive theatre project inspired by the Camino de Santiago. She has received multiple grants, published and presented her work internationally, and is a member of the Voice and Speech Trainers Association.

Litza Bixler has produced work on stage, on screen, up mountains, and in galleries. She was artistic director of the company Litzabixler Performance for six years and later established the production company Dust Baby Films. She has an extensive history in dance theatre, physical theatre, contemporary dance, visual art, and film. In the UK, she was awarded multiple grants for her work, including from the Arts Council of England, Channel 4, and Yorkshire Arts, and she created movement and action for many iconic films and television shows. Her research focuses on performance studies, authenticity in performance, and identity construction. She has published academic chapters and papers, and written several screenplays that have won or been shortlisted for multiple awards.

© 2025 Coleen Conroy and Litza Bixler



Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).