

ENACTING, NOT-ACTING, POST-ACTING: EMBODIED LIFE STORIES ON CONTEMPORARY LITHUANIAN THEATRE STAGE

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Abstract

In the context of contemporary Lithuanian theatre, the most notable manifestations of the evolving dynamics between performer and role may be observed in the emergence of experience-based performances and embodied life stories. In recent years, a number of performances focusing on first-person narratives, often represented by non-actors, have emerged on the Lithuanian theatre stage. Performances based on first-person narratives and embodied life stories prompt spectators to engage with a particular mode of experiencing reality. The presence on stage of the very subjects of the narrated life stories intensifies the demand for authentic presence. Furthermore, it inevitably gives rise to questions concerning the nature of the relationship between reality and acting in the context of contemporary theatre. Using examples from recent Lithuanian theatre productions, this article analyses the emerging new ways of acting or embodying meanings, their underlying principles, historical development, and broader cultural implications.

Keywords: *acting, embodied life stories, Lithuanian theatre, performance, reality theatre*

In contemporary theatre, the changes brought about by the so called “performative turn” have led to a changing approach towards actor’s body and identity and have stimulated theatre makers to look for the new ways of embodying as well as communicating meanings. The performative turn has not only reframed

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the notion of acting as a means of articulating an authentic self, but it has also served to complicate the conventional understandings of what constitutes reality and authenticity within the context of theatre.

On the one hand, there is a visible tendency in contemporary theatre that strives to create an environment for experiencing the effect of authenticity, where one can indeed experience reality or encounter the real, no longer available for us in “society of spectacle”, with abundance of social roles, political stagings, public spectacles and mediating frames of the digital. According to Daniel Schulze, the increasing popularity of one-on-one performances – one of the strands of the fast-growing field of “Reality theatre” – can be interpreted as “an expression of a shared need for intimacy” [Schulze 2017:105]. On the other hand, theatre discourse is still heavily influenced by the notion of acting as something artificial, repetitive, hypocritical and indeed theatrical, wherefore various forms of participatory or engaging performance, documentary or site-specific theatre, experience based or confessional performance point directly to the sphere of post-acting, with the reality effect as its central attraction.

In the context of contemporary Lithuanian theatre, the most notable manifestations of the evolving dynamics between performer and role can be observed in the emergence of experience-based performances and embodied life-stories. In recent years, a number of performances focusing on first-person narratives, often represented by non-actors, have emerged on the Lithuanian theatre stage. Performances based on first-person narratives and embodied life stories prompt spectators to engage with a particular mode of experiencing reality. The presence on stage of the very subjects of the narrated life stories intensifies the demand for authentic presence. Furthermore, it inevitably gives rise to questions concerning the nature of the relationship between reality and acting in the context of contemporary theatre.

Using examples from recent Lithuanian theatre productions, this article analyses the emerging new ways of acting or embodying meanings, their underlying principles, historical development, and broader cultural implications. Drawing on performance theory, the article also attempts to identify aesthetic strategies and discuss key issues that emerge in performances that use first-person narratives and embodied life stories on stage.



At the end of the 20th century, poststructuralist theory as well as practices of postmodern and post-dramatic theatre further advanced the perception of the performative body. As a result, the body of actor became not only a means

of expression or embodiment of the fictional other – character – but also socially, historically or culturally conditioned locus of meaning.

The concept of social role and performative presentation of self were the important concepts behind these transformations. As Erving Goffman, one of the most prominent theorists of social role, argued, social identity, in other words, the presentation of the self in everyday life, is shaped by theatrical means [Goffman 1990]. According to Goffman, our behaviour in the presence of others is always performed as a role and is characterised by certain modes of theatrical presentation – role-building techniques, scenery, dramaturgy, staging and props. When an individual is in front of others, they are consciously or unconsciously projecting a specific situation, the most important part of which is the performative construction of the concept of the self [Goffman 1990].

As a result, in artistic practice the body began to be perceived as an interplay between organic, natural and socio-cultural origins, as well as an interaction between the individual and the cultural context, in other words, the body came to be interpreted as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Thus, it became apparent, that culturally conditioned body of stage actor inevitably demonstrates, promotes or criticises the models of self-presentation and behaviour that are typical or emerging in a particular society. In other words, the actor's gestures and body movements are not only inscribed with theatrical meanings, controlled by drama text or imagination of stage director, but at the same time also imprinted with socio-cultural meanings that have long been ignored on modern theatre stage.

Another important development was the post-structuralist revision of the concept of representation: Jacques Derrida's notion of the "freeplay of signifiers" as an endless play of signifying systems signalled its autonomy and disrupted the categories of "reality," "representation," or "meaning," focusing instead on the internal inconsistencies, the constructed nature, and the possibility of multiple interpretations of these concepts [Derrida 1978]. After the post-structuralist turn, representation (text, image, or the actor's body) was declared to be an autonomous system that constructs rather than re-creates reality. While the creators of modern theatre and performance art believe that an actor could achieve authentic presence by removing social or representational masks, poststructuralist theories argue that representation is never neutral, it cannot be escaped and that post-representational presence is nothing more than the effect of reality.

Roland Barthes defined the creation of the reality effect as the concealment of the "mediating frame", which metaphorically means representational codes and conventions, in order to make the spectator believe that they are actually witnessing the "faithful image of the world" [Barthes 1974]. Consequently, reality or authenticity onstage are understood not so much as an objective representation

of reality, but rather as the result of the interaction between the scenic image and the mind of the viewer. The idea that systems of signification cannot be perceived as neutral or transparent but are rather constitutive of reality influenced the practice of postmodern theatre, opening it up not only to the critique of “unmediated presence” but also to the investigation of the mechanisms of production of meaning as well as the processes of performance creation and perception.

Consequently, it became apparent that the actor’s body on stage is not only defined by the codes of a particular performance or text but is also always subject to social discourses. However, if modern theatre artists believed that ideological and cultural codes can be neutralised, the postmodern artist is aware that they are forced to work within the codes that define their cultural landscape. Postmodern theatre makers, influenced by poststructuralist theories on the constructed nature of identity and the discursive coding of the body, sought to reflect and expose this condition. In postmodern performances of the end of the 20th century the actor’s body was perceived and presented as a historical and cultural construct, postulating its performativity and materiality, as a space in which ideological codes and “inscribed” social meanings were concentrated.

Another important process that took place in postmodern and post-dramatic theatre was the desemiologisation of the actor’s body. According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, post-dramatic theatre was characterised by a self-consistent corporeality, where body of actor does not express certain themes, but rather becomes the theme itself [Lehmann 2006: 95–98]. It manifests itself rather than represents other theatrical means of expression. Actor investigates what it means to be in their body and not to transform it according to the needs/shapes of the character, how these two states are similar and how they differ. In conclusion, postmodern aesthetics brought the understanding of the actor’s body as a “matter” always “inscribed” with cultural meanings, therefore never a “neutral” one.

Enacted social roles and non-acting bodies onstage

The analysis of Lithuanian stage practice of the last decades suggests that the change in the relationship between the actor and the role until 2010 was developing in several directions: the transformation of the locus of the actor’s body in the hierarchy of formal elements of the performance structure (the relationship between textuality and corporeality in the performance) and the creation of reflexive practices that analyse the relationship between the actor’s identity and the role (as well as fictional and social role). These transformations manifested themselves in such stage practices as self-reflexive acting, deconstruction of the role, and the involvement of the amateur performers, together with the so-called experience-based drama and embodied life stories.

The increasingly frequent appearance on the theatre stage of amateurs or performers who have gained prominence outside the theatrical domain can be interpreted as a performative or physical intertext. Such performers serve at least two functions. Firstly, they broaden the scope of interpretation, given that the very presence of the performer represents the socio-cultural context that has shaped their identity. Secondly, the inclusion of non-professional performers also demonstrates the theatrical nature of identity, thereby indicating that identities are constituted by context. In such performance, the boundary between the 'life' and 'theatre' is always reflected upon, either asserted or demonstratively exposed as fictional. The dynamics of the relationship between social and theatrical identity are brought in the forefront, thereby raising the issue of the interaction between acting (fiction) and being (reality).

Initially, this tendency appeared as isolated fragments in the works of different generations of Lithuanian stage directors. In Eimuntas Nekrošius's interpretation of William Shakespeare's "Othello" (2000), two brothers – characters invented by the director – are performed by non-professional actors Viktoras and Jonas Baubliai. In Bernard Marie Koltes "Roberto Zucco" (1998), directed by Oskaras Koršunovas, Algis Maceina, a notorious city dweller of Vilnius at that time, becomes Galiūnas, a stage signifier of the urban landscape. The performers of Nekrošius's "Hamlet" (1997) and "Othello" (2000), rock singer Andrius Mamontovas (Hamlet) and ballerina Eglė Špokaitė (Desdemona), are clearly different from other actors in the manner of performance; they not only represent the meanings of the play text or the symbolism of the characters, but also gently direct the viewer's interpretation towards other sociocultural contexts – first of all, the "real" identities and social roles of both performers.

Images created by these performers combine a fictional theatrical existence with a socio-cultural identity. While the meanings of these images may conflict, disturb, complicate, or interpret the text of the play, the successful unravelling of all these layers of meaning depends on the spectator. In essence, it represents an endeavour to deconstruct the very nature of the theatrical and to establish an immediate existence on stage that is "untouched" by representation. The second, more characteristic of the postmodern imagination, is the desire to explore the tenuous boundary between public social self (rock star, famous ballet dancer) and the theatrical role.

In other instances, non-professional performers do not assume the role of a character; rather, they simply occupy a position on stage as participants in the theatrical action or as visual figures within a scenic landscape. This approach to acting is closely related to the specific aesthetics of visual or post-dramatic theatre, as exemplified by the work of Robert Wilson and Jan Fabre. In visual theatre, actors perform almost entirely in a way that is referential and almost completely abandon the referential – the very act of representing something else. According to

the iconic acting scheme coined by Michel Kirby, these forms of performance can be attributed to the extreme point of the not-acting vector, which he terms non-matrixed performance [Kirby 1990]. In the visual landscape of performance, actors exist as self-referential signs, referring to no one else but themselves.

Such examples of “not-acting” were quite rare in contemporary Lithuanian theatre. One of the earliest instances of this practice was observed in a dance sequence and performance featuring a skateboarder (L. Kirkilionis) in the 1998 production of “Roberto Zucco,” directed by Koršunovas. The performers did not so much represented fictitious characters as they did present themselves as real bodies on stage. They did, however, occasionally enter the symbolic field of dramatic meanings, as evidenced by the skater who doubled the role of Roberto Zucco. Together with the fictional characters, they enacted their roles within the confines of the contrived stage space, as though they were integral to the contemporary urban landscape. In certain instances, such as the disco scene, they even became the focal point of the visual *mise en scène*.

Almost two decades later similar acting techniques were present in two productions created by Polish theatre artist Lukasz Twarkowski and his team for Lithuanian National Drama Theatre – “Lokis” (playwright Anka Herbut, 2017) and the first immersive and durational performance in Lithuania “Republic” (2020). In Lithuanian theatre context, both productions were exceptional due to their autonomous, self-contained, and detached visuality, fragmented narrative, choreographic ambience, non-acting techniques, heterogeneous structuring of theatrical elements and decentred modelling of the stage space.

More than real? Embodied life stories and first-person narratives

While the examples from the previous section opened up more diverse forms of embodiment of meaning onstage and initiated a trend toward rethinking the relationships between the authentic body, social role, and non-acting in Lithuanian theatre, they still focused on examples of amateur actors creating roles based on plays or being inserted into the fabric of the performance at the will of the director, rather than telling their own stories. However, the last decade has seen a growing number of performances in Lithuanian theatre focusing on first-person narratives or embodied life stories represented by non-actors. Do we really need the mediating presence of professional actors to tell someone’s story? Or perhaps only first-person narratives can ensure authentic experience in the theatre? These questions are coming to the fore in a growing number of the most recent productions of experience-based drama and embodied life stories, which represent a particularly illustrative manifestation of the emerging approach to the relationship between performance and reality in contemporary Lithuanian theatre.

Indeed, embodied life stories and first-person narratives invite the audience to experience a specific effect of reality, since the appearance on stage of the very subjects of the narrated life stories redoubles the urge for authentic presence. This kind of performance tries to escape the criticism that is directed at many documentary or verbatim forms of theatre for performing an “act of ventriloquism”, according to Deidre Heddon [Heddon 2008: 129]. In other words, for irresponsibly manipulating the act of speaking in the name of the other. It can be assumed that the ethical and psychological challenges that documentary or verbatim theatre makers face when attempting to appropriate the stories of others for artistic purposes can be avoided by allowing the real people to perform their own stories onstage.

One of the first in the line of embodied life stories on Lithuanian theatre stage was the production “The Green Meadow” (2017, directed by Jonas Tertelis and Kristina Werner, dramaturgy by Rimantas Ribačiauskas, Lithuanian National Drama Theatre) – a collectively devised performance based on interviews and workshops conducted with current and former workers of the Ignalina nuclear power plant, as well as people involved in negotiating its closure. The so called “everyday experts” [Dresse, Malzacher, Rimini Protokoll 2008] – namely, the local residents of Visaginas and Helene Ryding, an independent energy consultant from the UK recount onstage the stories of their personal accounts of the decommission of the Ignalina nuclear power plant and its subsequent impact on their lives and identities. Interweaving personal experiences, family stories, historical, political and popular discourses, “The Green Meadow” was performed in three languages: Lithuanian, Russian and English, with each person speaking their native tongue.

Real people, not characters embodied by actors, appear on stage in the production “Dreamland” (2017, Artscape, Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, dramaturgy — Rimantas Ribačiauskas, Kristina Savickienė, stage director — Mantas Jančiauskas). Immigrants from the Middle East, Turkey, Afghanistan and Russia living in Lithuania, among them refugees who had sought or been granted asylum, international students as well as economic or love migrants performed their life stories on stage. The performance narratives were based on information derived from a range of sources, including Lithuanian and foreign online articles, political statements, speeches and other material collected during artistic research at the Pabradė Foreigners’ Registration Centre.

Typically, the presentation of embodied life stories and first-person narratives on stage by “real people” prompts the audience to experience a particular effect of reality. The appearance on stage of the very subjects of narrated life stories serves to intensify the demand for authentic presence, which is intrinsic to the essence of any kind of “Reality Theatre”, be it documentary theatre, one-on-one performance, Theatre of Experts (Rimini Protokoll), etc. The creators of “The Green Meadow” and

“Dreamland” also sought to achieve the “reality effect” as one of the primary objectives of their production. According to the creators, the important task of the production “The Green Meadow” was to introduce the audience to a completely real, non-acted person [Ribačiauskas 2018: 11]. As noted by critic Dovilė Statkevičienė in her review of “Dreamland”, “the mere fact that they are telling their stories is enough to hit you over the head” [Statkevičienė 2017].

All of the performances referenced herein have dealt with people and/or social groups (migrants, asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, inmates, taxi drivers, etc.) who are not often represented on the theatre stage or who are on the margins of mainstream theatrical narratives. These protagonists can be described as “cultural strangers”, to use the term coined by Meg Mumford while analysing the works of Rimini Protokoll “as different, foreign, or insufficiently known, due to their occupational, class or ethnic background” [Mumford 2013: 154]. Although the goal of offering a new perspective on the unfamiliar, of giving cultural strangers a voice in the theatrical space, is undoubtedly a new step in Lithuanian theatre, both aesthetically, narratively and ethically, it is important to understand the means by which socio-cultural distances are bridged and “what sort of spectatorial encounters with cultural strangers does these productions facilitate” [Mumford 2013: 154].

Both “The Green Meadow” and “Dreamland” were created using the characteristic elements of reality theatre: the use of direct address, everyday language, proximity to the audience, minimal stage design, and “invisible” stage direction (as Statkevičienė noted in her review of “Dreamland” – “directorial silence” [Statkevičienė 2017]). The performative creation of the effect of authenticity was similar to many contemporary forms of documentary or verbatim theatre – contemporary audiences are already quite familiar with these models of theatrical direction and recognize them by the way the performance is constructed as “true” rather than fictional. However, this promise of truthfulness and unmediated presence was treated uncritically in both productions. On the contrary, the producers seemed to ignore the fact that life stories are the products of creation, constructed to compose a public re-presentation of oneself, involving various aspects of power, ethics and politics.

First, even as theatre takes on lived experience, with its subjects addressing the audience directly, the question of authorial agency remains central. Both performances were clearly playwright-led and director-led productions, with the playwright and director driving the authorial process. Based on material gathered in group sessions, individual interviews, and workshops, the scripts of both productions, although based on lived experience, went through a process of dramatisation and theatrical framing that influenced the effect of the performance. The initial stories were selected, edited, and shaped into relatively

linear narratives that followed the romanticised model of the eternal human quest for self-fulfilment and happiness, rather than revealing the conflicts, social antagonisms, and ideological complexities lurking behind the Chernobyl-style Soviet industrial colonisation project, as in the case of “The Green Meadow,” or the psycho-social realities of migrating subjects in “Dreamland.” As critic Aušra Kaminskaitė noted, the dramaturgy is arranged in such a way that “the chaotic, unconnected narratives are given an orderly structure, as if to deceive the audience that they [performers] are speaking openly on stage” [Kaminskaitė 2018: 60]. Thus, the dramaturgical choices were made by the creators for the performing subjects.

Second, the treatment of socio-cultural difference in artistic practices always produces a specific spectatorial position – critical or empathetic, challenging or reinforcing stereotypes. The representational models of the performance “The Green Meadow” and to some extent “Dreamland” produced an effect of “dramatisation” that was exactly the opposite of the creators’ intentions: instead of authentic narratives, the audience was confronted with stereotypes and an exoticised objectification that reinforced the privileged position of the spectator and at the same time created distance instead of eliminating it. The critic Statkevičienė metaphorically characterised the “encapsulation” of personal experience into coherent narrative structures, almost devoid of antagonisms and ideological complexities in “Dreamland”, as “a glazed form of dramaturgy”, “a blood mist instead of a bloodstream” [Statkevičienė 2017].

What we encountered in these performances was appropriation and re-iteration rather than a critical or self-reflexive investigation of “the ethics and politics of using other people’s lived experience and testimonies to make theatre” [Stuart Fischer 2020: 2]. The performers became protagonists without agency: not given the opportunity to reflect on their role in the structure of the performance, they embodied an imaginary notion of themselves, a creative reconfiguration of their own experience, bereft of conflicts, complexities and contradictions. Paradoxically, “The Green Meadows” and “Dreamland” offered their protagonists the opportunity of becoming actors, an agency of public performance, an opportunity of being in the spotlight rather than an agency of controlling their representation. We were able to get to know not so much the cultural strangers as the creators’ interpretations of them.

Moreover, the performances rejected not only the possibility of critically/self-reflectively assessing the authority of the director/writer, but also of evaluating the privilege of the spectator-subject in relation to the performer, who becomes an exotic object to be observed. This privileged position of the spectator/observer was reinforced by the fixed performance space (traditional theatre stage) and traditional viewing locations – the audience seated in the hall. In this case, the performance

was not framed as a form of dialogue or mutually empowering social exchange, but rather as a pleasurable satisfaction of curiosity.

According to Mumford, in order to achieve a mutually empowering encounter in reality-based theatre, several strategies can be employed, including the disruption of “the viewing and consumption practices that fix marginalised unfamiliar into a place of exclusion and total knowability”, as well as “a spatial and textual play with observer-observed relations and the layering and juxtaposition of fictional and documentary narratives that reveal the audience’s complicity in exclusive practices” [Mumford 2013: 165]. These were precisely the strategies of the other two performances – “TAXIS. Attempts at Covering Distances” and “Guided,” in which non-actors were the embodiments and narrators of their life stories.

The performance “TAXIS. Attempts at Covering Distances” (2021) – a slight modification of one-on-one and first-person narrative performance (stage director Kristina Werner, dramaturgy Rimantas Ribačiauskas, Artscape), took place not on a theatre stage, but in an authentic social environment, directly related to the life stories and their narrators. The stage was a taxi, the set was a city, the actor was a taxi driver, the plot was the interaction between driver and passenger. While this may evoke the typical ambience of a taxi ride, it was, in fact, a distinctive hybrid form of documentary and participatory performance. It offered insight into the world of taxi drivers and their diverse experiences that have become the foundation for the dramaturgical material of “TAXIS”.

According to the creators of performance: “Performance “TAXIS. Attempts at covering distances” was aimed at trying to capture the present, where “the old taxi business is almost extinct, changed by algorithm-controlled transportation platforms, though still alive in the heads of several drivers and their work culture” [Artscape.lt 2021]. The starting point for this performance was the question “Why do you drive a taxi?” posed to a group of taxi drivers, who responded to the authors’ invitation not only to tell their professional stories, but to become their narrators – everyday expert performers. Similar to “The Green Meadow”, the authentic stories of taxi drivers were collected through interviews and workshops, then selected and developed – rewritten – in collaboration with the creative team. However, the stories themselves, although dramaturgically reworked, were not polished into a coherent narrative, they did not avoid fragmentation, antagonisms, uncanny moments, silences, or the play between reality and fiction.

The performance – a fictional but very real taxi journey – begins at the specially constructed call-centre (centriukas) and overseen by a dispatcher, who accidentally assigns routes and drivers to the passengers – the audience. The journeys traverse a multitude of routes, elucidating various aspects of the city from the eyes of the taxi driver. There are certain fictional aspects – theatrical interludes or moments of

artifice in the performance: musical score imbues each journey with a distinctive ambience; visual media art and interactive game elements highlight the interaction between drivers and passengers. The script is open to unscripted improvisations, such as questions from the audience – passengers. The role play and dynamics between observer-observed (performer-perceiver) fluctuates throughout the journey, while both drivers and passengers seem to enjoy this performative “social pleasure ride” on the borders of fiction and everyday-life [Mumford 2013: 161].

“Taxis” acknowledges the performative nature of both the stage and the everyday; theatrical interludes or instances of artifice reinforce moments of reality. The most important aspect of this production is the demolition of the power relationship between the audience and the narrating subjects/performers: sitting in a taxi with an arbitrarily assigned fellow passenger, one is no longer in the privileged position of the observer, but rather in the fluctuating position of being both observer and observed.

Similarly, the project “Guided” (2023) was initiated in 2021 by the authors and the Artscape team through the organisation of workshops at Pravieniškiai Prison (stage director Mantas Jančiauskas, dramaturgy Rimantas Ribačiauskas, Mantas Jančiauskas). In developing a model, the authors describe as a “performative encounter,” Jančiauskas and Ribačiauskas were exploring new forms of coexistence in theatre. They were attempting to create the mechanics of a performance that actively and provocatively, yet safely, involves both convicts and spectators [artscape.lt 2023]. During a performative encounter, 10 convicts and 10 spectators meet for a dialogue in an authentic environment – prison, for which neither side is prepared in advance. The very moment of entering the prison – of passing through the screening, of sitting in front of the convict – is felt on the skin of the participant and radically reverses not only the traditional practices of spectatorship in the theatre but observer/observed relations as well.

Although face-to-face, the meeting is mediated by technology – questions appear on smart screens that act as meta-texts for self-reflective situational assessment. The creators of the performance themselves are critical of the “claim to truth” in the prisoners’ stories or in the answers to questions from both sides. The encounter involves eerie moments of fear, silence, the uncanny, the uncomfortable, but the differences are not glossed over. The one-on-one performance opens up the possibility of dialogue, moments of potential communion and genuine connection that go beyond simple curiosity. As critic Sigita Ivaškaitė writes in her review of the production: ““Guided” does not ask for an acquittal, does not lead to a definitive conclusion. The main instrument of the performance, the dramaturgy, in fact subtly guides, moderates the conversations between two shyly meeting people, so that each round of meetings opens up more and more confidence or at

least freedom (!) to speak. (...) Perhaps this moment becomes the key to answering the inner question: am I behaving like an insensitive tourist in front of those behind bars? At a certain point, we become for them as much exhibits or living moulages, designed to revitalize the skills of everyday communication.” [Ivaškaitė 2024]

These one-to-one encounters (both in “Guided” and “TAXIS”) strived to create a model of dialogue, marking a radical shift from the first-person narratives conveyed on the stage (“The Green Meadow”, “Dreamland”) to the creation of a non-hierarchical communication structure of the performance, in an authentic environment that best opens the space for self-reflexion and dialogue.

Conclusions

The performative understanding of subjectivity and identity, as an effect created within intersubjective exchange, has had a significant impact on the processes of acting, particularly in relation to the actor and the character, in contemporary Lithuanian theatre. Nevertheless, the resulting willingness to forego the intermediary function of professional actors in order to narrate another’s experience does not necessarily imply a post-representational understanding of the role.

Although all the above-mentioned performances based on embodied life stories share their devising methods with socially engaged ethnography in all of them the notion of authenticity and the pledge of an unmediated presence are treated without critical scrutiny, resulting in challenges that are analogous to those encountered by numerous projects within the domain of “theatre of the real” [Martin 2013]. One particularly salient example of this tendency is the case of “The Green Meadow”, which succumbed to the “myth of authenticity”, eschewing reflexivity regarding the processes of its creation. Despite being gathered from everyday experts during group sessions and based on their direct experiences, the scripts of these performances underwent a process of dramatisation, i.e. were carefully crafted into fixed narratives. The manner of theatrical framing had an impact on the overall effect of this performance as well. The model of narrative construction, coupled with the presence of non-fictional individuals onstage/in their authentic social environment necessitates an affective response rather than a critical or dialogical engagement.

It is beyond doubt that these first-person performances contribute to a greater understanding of the possibilities of acting in contemporary Lithuanian theatre. One potential beneficial consequence of publicly enacting one’s personal narratives is the capacity to exert a particular social influence. In such cases, the ability to speak for themselves without the intermediary presence of professional actors can be a significant practice in taking control of their own narrative. Nevertheless, an uncritical approach to first-person narratives onstage, which portray representations

as neutral and devoid of any conflict, may preclude the possibility of a critical or political perception in such productions.

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