

The Art of Acting

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Foreword

This book has been written for one reason: I have always felt the absence of such a book, a book introducing the history and methods, perspectives and issues of the art of acting. A book that dares to define the field, explain its contents and situate it in a larger context. A book that can draw a map.

It is odd that this book has not existed, not in Scandinavia, nor in English or in any other of the major European languages. It is also strange that now that it has been written, that this has been done by somebody who is not from the acting profession, but is instead a writer, dramatist and director. This perhaps says something about the field itself, and that it has no broad written tradition offering a meta perspective.

Where then does my interest for the art of acting come from? My starting point is deeply personal: as a young man, full of doubts, anxiety and loneliness, I experienced an insurmountable gap between my inner world and the outer world in which everyone else seemed to be participating. When I debuted as a fiction author in the early 2000s, the actor appeared to me to be my antitheses, a kind of artistic antipode. While I created in solitude with a basis in my own ideas, the actress created in a community and through dialogue with others. The actor/actress appeared to master strategies for communication, creativity and existence that I yearned for and that could potentially build a bridge between the inner and outer worlds.

This is how I ended up at The Academy of Theatre at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, after having convinced the institution that I had something to teach their students. But actually I was there to learn from them. With time, as my experiences became integrated skills, and my practical and analytical knowledge about the field increased, I felt a need to write about my discoveries. The actors who studied the discipline appeared to be satisfied when they practised what they had learned. For my own part, on the other hand, a great need arose to express it, to explain the field to others.

This book should be read as an attempt to explore some boundaries, to establish principles for a discussion about acting, about how creation takes place in film, television drama and theatre. My focus is thus on the people who perform and take the stage in this field and on why they do what they do. The book is written in a specific timeframe, from a specific position and is based on the art of acting as found in Western culture. The Asian art of acting is just as old, comprehensive and diverse as the European. When non-Western acting work is discussed here, this is because it has had an important influence on the Western tradition.

The book is written as a chronological narrative with more or less thematically independent chapters, with an awareness that many readers will only read sections of the

book– and derive valuable benefits from doing so, at least after having read the introduction, and through active use of the index.

This book has been made possible through research funding from various sources, as listed in the colophon on the title page. This has given me the time to read and write, but even more importantly: I have had the opportunity to attend countless workshops and to speak with acting instructors, taken part in classes and tried out the methods of the art of acting with my own body.

In addition to this, many others have contributed to the development of the book: The Dean of the Academy of Theatre Even Lynne with patience and confidence, Editor Hege Gundersen with enthusiasm and guidance, R&D consultant Grete Refsum with crucial support. The library staff at the Oslo Academy of the Arts has been extremely flexible; especially Hanne Storm Ofteland and Bjorge Vestli have been of inestimable assistance. R&D coordinator Linda Thu has also been an important administrative sparring partner for many years.

I would also extend my thanks to those who have read parts of or the entire book and offered important feedback: Bar Stenvik, Svein Gladso, Merete Morken Andersen, Camilla Eeg-Tverbakk, Hanne Ramsdal, Espen Klouman Hoiner, Janne Heltberg Haarseth and Orjan Hattrem. And a special thanks goes to Barbora Kysilkova, for the most beautiful acting book cover of all time.

And last, but in no sense least, a thank you to all of the actors and students I have met along the way. You taught me something I did not know – about being and daring, about seeing and being seen.

Introduction

This is a book about the art of acting, a book that attempts to define the parameters of the art form, how it arose, how it has developed and how it is practised today. The book also explores the ripple effects the art of acting has had on other disciplines and the impact of other disciplines upon it.

This is a book that is written in the belief that knowledge about the art of acting can contribute something important, about the art form in and of itself, but also for our understanding of film, television and theatre. And as such, it can also make a contribution in all of the contexts where one seeks to portray human beings and their actions. This book is therefore written in such a way that it can be read by everyone with curiosity about the discipline, without the need for any particular prior knowledge of the field.

Performativity

If all the world is a stage, then we are all actors. We perform in different ways in different situations. In a job interview we appear flexible, hard-working, and diligent. On a date we come across as attentive, sympathetic and amusing. As parents, we appear to be all-knowing, decided, and caring.

We have all experienced, to varying degrees, how our behaviour can have an extroverted, demonstrative side. This type of behaviour makes us socially adaptive. At job interviews we hold back information about our being notorious sleepyheads. On dates we seek to cover up our nervousness. As parents we do not roar about having lost our patience. We show different sides of ourselves in different social contexts.

It is feasible that Shakespeare had all of this complexity in mind when he made the stage a metaphor for the world. And Shakespeare's plays are full of people who dress up in costumes, appearing to be somebody other than who they actually are. A servant pretends to be the master, the enemy is disguised as a friend, women as men.

The stage metaphor finds expression for an intuition that we are selective about where we choose to perform, the type of roles we present, how much we show of our true selves – and whether, in the final analysis, we are in possession of any self, beyond that of these roles. We pretend, dissimulate, over-act, under-act and imitate.

In recent decades it has become common to speak about *performativity*. People are performative, we *present actions*. We stage ourselves, sometimes consciously, other times, unconsciously. When our actions are observed, this influences the way we carry them out, we modify and correct them, adapting them also for the viewer. The form our actions take is

performative. There are many ways of understanding this term, but when we are talking about acting, this is the most applicable.

This performativity appears to be a fundamental component of all human culture. We have a tendency to think, act and interpret the world from the perspective that it is all being staged, performed. If that is the case, that we are all performing a part, what is the difference between any one of us and an actor?

Contract with the Audience

Although the job interviewer, our significant other or our child may suspect us of being selective about what we choose to reveal about ourselves, this is not necessarily a given. The rules of the game are not obvious. Social situations are made up of explicit and implicit rules. And these rules are displaced, revised and employed all the time. We go in and out of different roles without necessarily giving clear signals about the manoeuvres involved. In the theatre and in film on the other hand, this contract is clearer.

One of the most frequently employed definitions of the theatre is the British dramatist Eric Bentley's formula "A impersonates B while C looks on" from *The Life of the Drama* from 1964. The actor presents something other than his or her daily self while the audience watches. This requires a large degree of awareness on the part of the spectator: what the actor is presenting is not to be misconstrued as being identical with him or her.

This consensus and awareness requires an explanation of the underlying conditions – an *audience contract*. The audience has some type of awareness of themselves as an audience. They understand that this situation is an exception: the person performing before them does not correspond with the same person off-stage or off-screen. And this behavioural split is not a violation of social rules and codes, and as such, an audience contract is an agreed-upon exception which instead encourages such a breaking of the rules.

Normally a theatre stage or a cinema in and of itself is all we need in order to accept this contract. We have been socialized to understand it as such – we were not born with this insight. Anyone who has attended a theatre production for children or simply played Santa Claus at Christmas has noticed this: young children are fundamentally uncertain about the contract, what it means when the person behind the mask and the mask itself at one moment appears to be the same person, the next moment two different people.

Such audience contracts can have many nuances. It could be that we experience a kind of equivalence between A and B. Or we find the contrast between them to be of interest. It can be that A is not even attempting to resemble B, but only illustrates and alludes to B. We can call these different types of *performative contracts*, contracts that define how we are to interpret the participants' relationships to themselves, to one another and to us.

The Fictional Universe

However, the theatre and the cinema are not alone in being contexts that establish performative contracts. There are many situations where we assume roles in which we are not wholly our usual selves, situations where the spectator constitutes a key dimension and where the spectator understands that we do not normally behave in this way. Some examples would be talk shows, interviews, political debates, or teaching situations.

If we attend a lecture about the art of acting in a filled-to-capacity lecture hall, it is likely that we will witness a speaker who is well prepared and influenced by the situation. He will play the part of someone who is knowledgeable about the subject matter, a person who is going to enlighten us. This will have an impact on his persona, the way he speaks, his tone of voice, the nervous tugging at his earlobes. His behaviour is modified, consciously or unconsciously. He is normally not this person. So what is the difference between a stage for the theatre and these other performative contexts?

What the speaker says will potentially have immediate ramifications also outside the performative context, outside of the lecture hall. If the speaker states that Eric Bentley's definition of theatre is not "A impersonates B while C looks on", but instead "A impersonates B while B looks on", this will perhaps have a different impact on the audience's understanding of acting. "The actor's foremost goal is to resemble the audience," he could also claim. And he will certainly make a good argument for this being the case. If the audience accepts this claim, the statement will be brought into new contexts, setting the parameters for new discussions.

In a *fictional universe* on the other hand, the most dramatic and violent events can take place without this having any repercussions outside of the universe in which they unfold. This is precisely because that universe is a proposal, because we are just pretending, because this is an exceptional case that we are exploring and we are not to understand it in literal terms. But the actions can have emotional consequences for the spectator. If so, this will nonetheless be an indirect consequence: the spectator is aware that it is his or her own experience of the fictive events that is responsible for creating such an impact.

There are documented sources from Antiquity claiming that a number of women had fear-induced miscarriages when Aeschylus' tragedy *The Eumenides* was performed for the first time. These types of concrete, practical or physical changes in the spectators in their world are nonetheless rare. Few of us would blame the actor for the sad state in which we leave the theatre. We have personally chosen to accept this contract.

Approaches

An actor is not alone in behaving performatively. And a theatre stage is not the only place where one takes on roles. But the combination, the actor in a fictional universe, usually occurs

in the framework of the stage or film. What is the meaning of this type of performativity? How does the actor/actress address it? Address his or her own part?

All performativity develops aesthetic terms and rules, whereby a type of internal system will arise, a form, which controls the performance. This can influence the actor at many levels, in the understanding of their role, the way the actor moves the body, use of voice, relationship to the audience. Actors have at all times sought to find means of communicating in an expedient way and the forms for doing so have varied enormously.

Two examples from Modern theatre are the Russian Konstantin Stanislavsky and the East German Bertolt Brecht. Stanislavsky claimed that the actor must psychologically identify with the character, feel what the character feels. This entails an emotionally-based approach to the part to be played, where the aim is that the character will appear credible, true to life. Brecht, on the other hand, wanted the actor/actress to show us his or her opinion of the part, to question and analyse it, without necessarily any emotional identification. The goal is not to awaken the actor's or audience's feelings, but to provoke reflection and debate.

The first school of acting will perhaps criticize the second of being illustrative and external, while the second would say that the first is subjective and narcissistic. These are two introductory and obvious examples of different views of the aesthetics and ideology of acting.

There are many such lines of conflict. Some can be gleaned from opposing conceptual pairs, such as the difference between *realistic* and *theatral*, *physical* and *psychological*, *representational* and *identificatory*, *improvisational* and *declamatory*, *relational* and *hermetic*, *acting* and *non-acting*. These are conflicts that have a tendency to pop up on a regular basis in the acting profession, but always in a slightly different form: What we define as "realist" has varied greatly. And the idea that there is a contradiction between psychological and physical theatre is a perception that is affiliated with a specific time period, a specific perspective. These are some of the approaches this book will explore.

Our ways of being performative change, and the issues connected to our performativity then also naturally change. The acting techniques and methods of analysis that have been developed attempt to address such questions. Some will claim that emotionality is the most important, others action, still others the immediate impulse. There are as many answers as there are actors. It is a part of the actor's job to be performative in a specific way in every single performance, film and role.

Acting as an art form

The actor is thus carrying out a conscious and goal-oriented cultivation of the human tendency to behave performatively. Is this activity then creative art, or is it a performing handicraft? Is it a specific artistic discipline or is it one of several interdependent art forms? That depends on how we define *art*, *handicraft*, *discipline* and *form*.

In Antiquity, no distinction was made between art and handicraft; the Greek word *techne* encompasses both technique and aesthetics. With Kant and the Romantic Period of the

19th century, the idea arose that art shall not have a practical application, that an aesthetic expression is something we regard with disinterest, in other words, without wanting to eat it, live in it, wear it, have sex with it, etc. Modernist definitions of art also entail that art shall be innovative, eschewing clichés and stereotypes we have seen before.

From both a Romantic and Modernist point of view, acting can be understood as an art form. It normally speaking has no utility value beyond that of its aesthetic expression. And further: acting is, like all other art forms, full of stereotypes and clichés, and whether the actor transcends these is an extremely individual matter. But yes, there have also been innumerable performers who have wanted to forgo traditional teachings, who wanted to create something new, something more, something different.

A Modernist requirement for art is also that it shall be autonomous, that it shall constitute a field with own laws and principles, it shall be discipline-specific. This means that it must be possible to distinguish every art discipline from other art disciplines. Art disciplines in the Modern era have often been defined according to their presentation space, such as a concert hall, gallery or theatre. These spaces, these contexts, establish a specific way of viewing. It is as if the gallery's white walls or the theatre's black define and elevate what we see. They are a part of art, situating the art work in its particular discipline. The art of painting, literature, music, photography, film and theatre are some examples of what are often understand as being separate art disciplines.

Acting is not normally referred to as a separate art discipline, in the same way that other art forms belong to an art discipline, such as directing, playwriting, set design or cinematography. These are forms that fall into the categories of art disciplines such as film, theatre or television productions. We can also add video art, music videos and computer games. Acting is accordingly an art form found in different art disciplines, in the same way that a dramatic text or a concept for direction are not in and of themselves the dramatic arts. Since the art of acting is something that is found in a number of art disciplines, any description of acting as an art form cannot simply relate to just one discipline, such as film or the theatre alone.

Simultaneously, it is possible to make the argument that the art of acting is a more independent art form than the drama and directing: improvised theatre forms or physical theatre have throughout history often thrived on the stage, without a director or playwright. A lot of video art has also been created by a performer alone in front of a camera. It is therefore possible to claim that the very core of the dramatic arts and film is precisely the actor, and that anyone who wants to understand these art disciplines, must first and foremost understand the actor on stage, or in front of the camera.

The art of acting today is a clearly defined discipline with its own terminology, own internal conventions and aesthetic criteria. Actors have developed their own ways of creating theatre performances, of reading dramatic texts, interpreting and recreating psychological and physical processes – independent of the other art forms with which actors often collaborate.

Although a Modernist understanding of art is also prevalent today, a change has been underway since the Second World War. Art definitions have been subjected to critique and what it means to be innovative or what is autonomous is no longer given. Art can be social, Actionist or economic and we no longer believe in art for art's sake, that the artist creates according to his or her own, purely artistic, vision. Since the 1960s, the idea that art is new has gradually disappeared; the boundaries between the arts disciplines and other fields have become less clear. Art has become anything and everything.

The development of the art of acting also illuminates this problem. Political theatre, performance art, film and television commercials, and reality shows are all examples of traditions that have challenged and influenced the art of acting, but have also made it difficult to distinguish the art of acting from other forms. The traditions do not distinguish to any noteworthy extent the art of acting from other art forms.

Acting as a profession

Actors, as we have now defined them – performers who portray something other than themselves in a fictional framework – have existed since the origins of the theatre. In a European context, the time and place of that origin is Athens, 511 BC, when tragedies were first performed at the annual Dionysus festival.

The professional title of actor has not been protected. Anyone can call themselves an actor. We can use the term to refer to everyone who has play-acted, whether they have taken part in a single workshop or have spent their entire professional career learning the craft. People who have had a small part in a film are without hesitation referred to as “actors” by the media.

Nonetheless, in theatre and film communities, the development has been in the direction of a professional definition and the majority of those who use the title today have an acting education. All European countries have actors' organizations which grant membership only once a professional status can be documented in some way, either through studies, a certain number of roles in recognized institutions or if acting constitutes the person's primary source of income. Acting can be described as a profession.

The actor's place in society has varied throughout the history of Europe. They have often been amateurs, in other words, they have not made a living from the art form, and it has not been their primary activity. The first documented case of professional actors is found in the Empire of Ancient Greece in 300 BC. Historically the respect for acting as a profession has fluctuated. One of the reasons behind the low status is the idea that the actress is lying, that she is somebody presenting something that is untrue. She is, by virtue of her choice of profession, somebody not to be trusted.

In the last century the acting profession has acquired an increasingly solid position as a serious vocation. In keeping with the growing production of fiction, of plays for the theatre and screen, the demand for actors has increased. The actor can today achieve a privileged

position. The profession holds a potential for public recognition and honour and celebrity status. Especially after the 1990s, the number of new acting educations has exploded. In Norway in 2015, five times as many actors are receiving training at a university level than was the case 20 years ago. The same development can be found all over Europe and in the USA.

What then do all of these professional actors do? A good number of them receive a dramatic text containing lines to work with, other players to act with and a director who supervises the work process. But a growing number also create own productions and films, or take part in such processes or they teach acting to others. The actor's skills are in demand in increasingly more areas.

Simultaneously, there are performers who normally fall outside of the professional category of actor, but who work with similar type processes. The most obvious of these are performance artists, dancers and opera singers. Other types of professionals also meet with corresponding types of challenges in their work, such as politicians, musicians, television stars, religious leaders, teachers, prostitutes and professional athletes. We will nonetheless hesitate to characterize them primarily as actors. The reasons behind this are as we will see, many and complex, and connected to questions of status, religion, use of terminology, etc. But first and foremost, the reasons are connected to the type of performative contracts in which we expect to find acting.

Mememes and terminology

This book is not intended to be an introduction to theatre history, film, the art of direction or drama. Neither does it contain a list of well-known actors or great acting achievements. This is a book that seeks to present texts, moments, places and individuals who have left something behind that has changed the way we think about or work with theatre, what evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins calls mememes in his book *The Selfish Gene* from 1976. Dawkins explains that while our bodies pass on biological information through our genes, other kinds of information are passed on as mememes through language and culture. Mememes are units of information such as theories, symbols, fashions, techniques and technologies. In this book I am seeking to present the mememes of the art of acting.

Where do we then find these mememes? Although acting itself has existed since time immemorial we must move relatively far ahead in time before anyone starts to write about it, not to mention formulate a theory. From Antiquity and the Middle Ages only text fragments and illustrations remain. Some fledgling attempts were made starting in the Renaissance, and in the 18th century we find the first extensive reflections upon the art form. Nonetheless, all the way up to the time of the Modern Theatre, we must take detours through written drama and general theatre history to understand the drama as an art form.

Starting in the 19th century and in Modern theatre, however, explicit techniques and methods were developed, first in declamation and use of gesture, then in physical and

psychological strategies. A presentation of the art of acting will therefore quite naturally change in character from the 1850s onward; it will be more specific, have a far greater amount of detail. It is no longer necessary to use indirect sources; the art of acting is referred to and discussed by many. Starting in the 1950s, a change again occurred in the culture, whereby a large number of parallel training strategies and schools of thought emerged. Starting in the 1990s, many of the methods and technique were intermixed, and a completely different type of eclecticism and awareness about performative contracts arose.

This book thus establishes a *canon*, a delineation of what has been important in the discipline. And as is the case for all canons in every discipline, it may be criticized for deficiencies and oversights. It has been helpful to base the book on established and recognized works of theatre history (Brockett and Hildy 2003, Zarilli and McConachie 2009). There are also a number of key anthologies about acting and performativity that have provided critical impulses (Cole and Chinoy 1974, Benedetti 2005, Zarilli 1995). This is also the case for article anthologies offering an introduction to the most commonly used and defining training strategies for actors (Hodge 2010, Watson 2001, Bartow 2008). Works that attempt to clarify acting from a more deductive and theoretical perspective have also been important (Gordon 2009, Roach 2011, Trolie 2005).

These types of books are often very technically specific, written to satisfy the criteria of research communities, or they focus on specific aspects of the theory and practice of acting. And none make an overt attempt to provide an overview or introduction for uninitiated readers. But they have all been important in finding frameworks for the writing of this book. In addition there is a lot of literature that explains, promotes or clarifies specific work methods and perspectives; the references can be found throughout the book. The references and bibliography have a main focus on that which pertains to acting, in order to facilitate a search for related literature for readers who are interested in further reading.

Since the field has only to a limited extent sought to formulate an overriding theory or narrative, there is no common understanding of terms. Many terms also have different meanings in different languages. For example, in English the word actor is used, which comes from the Latin and means “one who acts”. In many other European languages however, words are used that make no reference to action, but more to play and play-acting, such as the English word player. In German the word *Schauspieler* is used, which means someone who plays in front of someone who is watching. The use of the word *performative* is relatively recent, and when we are speaking about theatre and acting, it is often used in the sense of “showing doing” (Schechner 2006: 22).

In specific contexts, however, such as for specific schools and methods, terms are used in wholly specific ways. Words such as “action”, “circumstance” or “movement” often have a clear, but different significance in different methods. It is therefore at times necessary to explain what the same word means in different contexts.

Nonetheless, in this presentation a number of recurring terms, approaches and perspectives must be established. In that way we will know what we are looking for. For the purposes of this book, human beings' tendency to stage, create fiction and produce performative contracts is an important underlying premise. But we also need to know something about the type of contracts a play can create, in order to outline some possible perspectives throughout history.

The individual, the actor, roles and characters

When an actress stands on stage, there is a focus on various aspects of her. The performative – the form her conduct and actions takes – can be analysed at different levels. All films and performances establish as such an understanding with the audience about which part of the performance we are to focus on, what we shall notice, what is important. These performative contracts are often produced unconsciously, and understood unconsciously, but this does not make them any less effective.

There are many ways of breaking down and explaining such contracts. When discussing acting work, in other words, the actor's relationship to himself, to other participants and the audience, it can be helpful by way of introduction to outline four main aspects: the performer as an *individual*, as an *actor/actress*, as playing a *role* and as a *character*. These four aspects provide an image of some of the most important contracts found in the history of the art of acting.

Performativity that focuses on the *individual* will try to make us aware of the actual human being standing before us, including everything he or she feels, thinks and is at this moment. Performance art is typical in this sense; often such performers do not have an objective of being seen and perceived as different from their real-life selves. Or if a performer is injured when the stage set is tipped over, we will be obliged to relate to the human being standing before us, perhaps even intervene and call a doctor. Whether such a performative contract can be considered under the art of acting is an open question, since it is not contingent upon a clearly fictional contract.

When the main focus is on *the actor/actress*, it is above all the actor/actress's special training, their particular expertise that is communicated. Plays that employ masks, pantomime or choreographic expression, are typical of this type of form. Such expressions have an artificiality and theatricality that is not sought concealed. To the contrary, this theatricality is an intended part of the aesthetic. A juggling actor need not, strictly speaking, have another reason for his or her actions beyond precisely the visual and physical impressiveness of the juggling. The unique skills create thereby the basis for the aesthetic.

In expressions where *the role* is of primary importance, the actor's performance is determined first and foremost by the whole. The role is connected to a *dramaturgical* approach, in other words, a perspective that is focused on the composition and progression of the entire film or play. The role can be understood as the function the performer has on the

stage or in the film. This function is based on the entire play or the film's story, the visual expression, the overriding aesthetic. In the most extreme cases, the performer can break out of the role to comment upon it. Puppet theatre can be such a form. The puppets may have an extremely limited range of movement, they need not even resemble people or animals, but we still understand them, first and foremost, as components in a story or an aesthetic whole.

A lot of acting aesthetics focus on *character*. In this context we can understand *character* as meaning a person other than whom the actor/actress is in reality, with another history, other dilemmas and a wholly different future. The acting aesthetic has the aim of presenting a credible figure that differs from the identity of the performer. The performer shall explore the character, create his or her own version of it, create feelings and a physical expression that communicates something distinctively different from him or herself. Ideally, the person in question shall become the character. *Method acting* is a term that is often used when discussing such approaches to acting as an art form.

These are not absolute categories, and most actors work with several of these aspects. Performative contracts can have an emphasis on one of them, but then break the contract to concentrate on another aspect, in one and the same production. The way the contract relates to these aspects, which aspects are taken into consideration, determines the assessment criteria that are produced. If one visits an art gallery hoping to see the character that a performance artist creates, or to a puppet theatre to investigate the actor's physical skills, one is assessing the aesthetic according to criteria not relevant to the theatrical expression in question.

As a spectator we can of course choose to focus on any of these aspects: the individual, the actor, the role or the character. No actress can prevent us from imagining her personal life. But if we want to meet the form of expression halfway, if we want to see whether the aesthetic is adequate, we must relate to the performative contract. It is therefore impossible to set up any absolute evaluation criteria for the art of acting. There are too many types of expressions, too many diverse types of contexts for that to be possible. Rather than creating rules that will be always valid, it is a matter of understanding the context in which the expression has arisen, what it is trying to communicate.

The use of the terms individual, actor, role and character as different performative contracts corresponds with how they are more or less consciously understood. Nonetheless, the use of terminology is not consistent and in this book as well it will at times be necessary to use the words in other ways. Hopefully the meaning of the words will be clear from the context. It is impossible in a book about the art of acting to reserve the word "actor/actress" as a term that exclusively designates a specific performative contract. Over the past hundred years there has also been a tendency to use other terms, precisely to avoid the associations related to these words. More open terms such as *artist*, *participant* or *performer* can be used to avoid the traditional conventions associated with the terms "actor", "role", or "character", or to describe other nuances in the performative contracts.

The aspects of the play that have been important, what has created the play's form throughout history have varied: Religious, social, political and aesthetic tendencies have in different ways influenced acting styles. It will therefore be just as necessary at times to discuss cultural trends as to discuss the theatre and film's own development features. The art of acting has not developed solely in the theatre and film, but in dialogue with all manner of trends and movements.

Awareness about acting

Although most of us consume large quantities of film and theatre in the course of a lifetime, the knowledge about the actor's thought processes and practice is relatively limited. This is often reflected in reviews and interviews of actors, where journalists reveal their lack of awareness when they are going to talk about acting, which often stands in contrast to their knowledge about directing, screenplays or cinematography. It is as if what the actor is doing is something incomprehensible and unarticulated, something that it is not possible to put into words.

The reason why the acting profession comes across as being mysterious is twofold. One reason is that since Antiquity, it has been heavily influenced by the spirit of the guilds, a craftsman's attitude: the profession can only be learned in practice, passed on from a master to an apprentice. Even today this attitude permeates many theatre and educational institutions. An acting education is often a practice-based education, even though it is also found at the university level. An internal, experience-based knowledge has thus developed that always employs practice as a measuring stick.

The art of acting is also one of the few art forms that does not use any external technology. It cannot be investigated and discussed as separate from the artist's own body. The dramatist's text, the director's concept, the musician's score, the cinematographer's choice of camera angles – all of these things can be discussed as non-embodied technologies. In a culture where we prefer the object of investigation to be outside of the body, that it can be separated from us before we analyse it, it can be difficult to find a language to describe different types of acting.

This book nonetheless tries to create a language, to show different perspectives. Not with the objective of laying a foundation for the technical skills needed to be an actor, but to create a broad understanding of what the art of acting is. In this way, actors, theatre and film workers will no longer be without a history in their work. It will also give those who are trying to understand the art forms of film, television drama and theatre some references.

A fundamental understanding of acting methodology is crucial for being able to carry out an exhaustive analysis of theatre and film. Every time an actress stands on stage or in front of a camera, she makes suggestions about how a human being thinks and acts. She says something about what motivates us, how causal connections arise, about how we relate to one another or if we even relate to one another at all.

In every performance, TV series or film, each individual actor offers a proposal for what a human being is, with all of the aesthetic, ethical and ideological implications this implies. Both as a participant and a spectator, there are many good reasons for taking a closer look at the origins of this proposal. Why does it appear as it does, and how could it potentially have been different.

Acting strategies have also influenced many other disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, rhetoric and philosophy. Public relations workers, marketing professionals, politicians, television hosts and litigators all employ techniques developed within the acting profession. And the art of acting is cross-fertilizing new disciplines all the time.

Throughout the entirety of the history of human culture, we have performed for each other, simulated and parodied one another, acted and wanted our actions to be observed, interpreted and understood. An important dimension of human culture is performative. This is a dimension that will gain further clarity through our investigation of this: the art of acting.