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Reflections on the Creativity of Non-Actors Under Restrictive Direction

Abstract

Adult non-actors can be found in fictional feature films throughout film history. There are various reasons why one might cast an adult non-actor in a role and various ways one might work with them: some non-actors are advised to behave as freely as possible in front of the camera; others have to follow restrictive direction. The following article focuses on the creativity of non-actors under restrictive direction in two case studies: Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (1948) and Jean-Marie Straub's and Danièle Huillet's *Not Reconciled* (1965). I explore three very different directors and two aesthetics with divergent artistic aims and show how they are linked by the way the directors worked with their non-actors. The case studies highlight the paradoxical situation in which a restrictive style of directing can be interpreted as a moment of equality between non-actors and their professional counterparts. As the argument progresses two points may become clear: that from the director's point of view rigid directing results in specific creative contributions by the non-actors; and that non-actors, despite the challenge of fulfilling complex instructions, have a creative contribution to make to the working process. Finally, the paper argues that directors and non-actors don't necessarily have to share the same perspective on where exactly the loopholes for non-actor-creativity can be localized.

Introduction

In 2014, Barkhad Abdi, a mobile phone vendor and limousine driver, found himself in somewhat surreal circumstances. He had just won the BAFTA award for best supporting actor, having been cast as a Somali pirate in Paul Greengrass's *Captain Phillips* (2013). Abdi, an unknown non-actor cast opposite to Hollywood icon Tom Hanks, went on to accumulate awards and more than twenty nominations for his work in the film. Abdi's success might be perhaps unrepeatable, but it points to a recent trend. Since the turn of the millennium, casting non-actors in European and American cinema has been on the rise. Recently this has been confirmed by the number of acting awards non-actors have received for their first movie appearance,¹ new film movements like Mumblecore, Neo-Neo-realism, the New Berlin School, the Romanian New Wave, and the rise of performance in documentaries.²

André Bazin would probably have pointed to the fact, that this trend is nothing new. As early as 1948, he claimed film has “continual[ly] use[d] [non-actors], [...] ever since the days of Lumière” and called this type of casting “a true law of the cinema.”³ Bazin enunciated this law in

relation to what he called the “realistic schools” of Italian Neo-realism and Soviet Film. Within these schools the characters played by non-actors seem to parallel their own biographies. Thus, the non-actor is presented as acting authentically. This form of “representationalism”⁴ seems motivated by a political impetus, which tries to distance itself from the commercial star system, with the intention of supporting underrepresented milieus by giving them a genuine voice.

Non-actors are, as Bazin says, a continuous phenomenon in global film history. Nevertheless his law must be expanded, since the use of non-actors is not confined to the so-called “realistic schools.” The casting of non-actors can also be motivated by the desire to achieve an alienation effect. In these cases, the non-actor's performance is guided into a direction that prevents the viewer from identifying the actor with the film character; this contrasts with naturalistic acting – which came to dominate western productions after the establishment of the sound film. Furthermore, the decision to cast a non-actor can also be motivated by marketing strategies: to cast an already well-known musician or athlete in a role, for example, allows one to exploit the

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popularity the non-actor has achieved in her or his original field.

The ways of working with non-actors on set varies as well, we find directors who work without detailed scripts, improvise dialogue, or deploy a documentary style of shooting, which gives actors more creative freedom. Conversely, we find directors who precisely follow a script so that the non-actor is forced to meticulously learn his lines and to follow detailed (technical) requirements on set. And of course we find variations between these two extremes. The style of directing seems to particularly affect the creativity of non-actors, since they have not learned to develop an interpretation of a character on the basis of stage directions. While it is very likely that a non-actor can contribute his creative ideas under flexible direction, a rigid style of directing seems to reduce the likelihood of such an outcome. The continual intervention of a director during his work with a non-actor seems to be rooted in distrust of the non-actors' ability to create a fictional character. In such cases the restrictive style of directing could be interpreted as a compensation for the non-actors' supposed lack of performative creativity. This might prompt us to ask how the non-actor deals with such direction. Does the non-actor have the impression that this approach denies the expression of her creativity?

In 2013 I was able to perform so called problem-centred interviews⁵ with the non-actors Agnese and Nellucia Giammona (*La Terra Trema* [1948]), Ulrich von Thüna (*Not Reconciled* [1965]), and director Jean-Marie Straub. The following description of their work on set and the conclusions drawn from the participant's reflections are, for the most part, based on these retrospective interviews. But I also consulted reviews, journalistic interviews, scholarly articles, as well as production material such as the shooting diary of *La Terra Trema* and the script of *Not Reconciled*. Using this material I try to develop an understanding of the cooperation between the directors and the non-actors on set as well as their perspective on the complex phenomenon of creativity. I will describe the work on set to show how far the directors' way of working with their non-actors can be identified as restrictive. Secondly, I will elaborate on the director's general reflections on their non-actors and specifically on their creative contributions. Finally, the non-actors

will have the floor. The article will outline how the non-actors evaluated their creative input in the course of these productions.

The work on set

Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* – a movie about poor Sicilian fishermen – was shot in the late 1940s in Acì Trezza. The film is an adaptation of Giovanni Verga's novel *I Malavoglia* and depicts the family life of the Valastros. The unity of the family is about to be tested by the actions of the eldest son Ntoni Valastro – a fisherman like his father and grandfather – who tries to operate independently of the wholesalers. In the course of the film, residents of Acì Trezza, who have never worked as actors before, make an appearance. Agnese and Nellucia Giammona play Ntoni's sisters Lucia and Mara Valastro. Visconti met them in their parents' trattoria in Acì Trezza. When not in school, they worked in the trattoria as waitresses.

Not Reconciled, an adaptation of Heinrich Böll's novel *Billiards at Half-past Nine*, also deals with family matters. The film tells the story of the Fähmels, a family of architects, and their behavior during and after World War I and II. All of the characters are played by non-actors. In 1963, Straub and Huillet approached Ulrich von Thüna, a lawyer who worked as a film journalist for newspapers in Germany and Switzerland, at a film festival to play the so-called "Emigrant Schrella."

As Ulrich von Thüna remembers, he first received the contract, and then, after some delay, found the script in his mailbox. According to von Thüna, Straub asked him to learn the lines without "Schauspielerhingabe"⁶ – without the prototypical passion of an actor – but with a certain neutrality. In



Fig. 1: Ulrich von Thüna

contrast to their other films, Straub and Huillet did not rehearse the scenes with von Thüna in advance. Instead, almost every take was rehearsed on set and frequently re-shot. When one compares the script with the final film, the reason becomes apparent: von Thüna was asked to follow *every* word exactly as it appeared in the script.⁷ He even had to follow the written instructions for pauses. In addition to the exact repetition of the lines and the prefixed rhythm of speech, von Thüna was required to follow instructions concerning body language as well. These instructions, for example, when to put down a glass or when to change the line of sight, were also defined in the script. Straub developed minor variations on location, and even these variations had to be meticulously recapitulated.

In contrast to Straub and Huillet, Visconti did not provide a final script to his non-actors. At night he would write the scenes for the next day. His roughly sketched lines were in Italian, but he wanted the non-actors to speak in their Sicilian dialect, so he handed the lines to one of his assistant directors, Franco Zeffirelli, who spoke Sicilian.⁸ With his help Visconti described, in detail, the content of the scene to his non-actors. He used a lot of images to specify the situation of the characters and their emotional state. He then asked the non-actors what kind of phrases they would use to express the respective emotions.⁹ With the help of his non-actors he transformed the rudimentary Italian lines into differentiated Sicilian dialogue. Visconti stated in an interview: “That’s how the dialogues [*sic*] were developed. [...] Then I let them repeat the lines, sometimes for three to four hours [...] But we didn’t change a word along the way. The lines were treated as if they were written down.”¹⁰ To compose instructions for the non-actors’ body language, Visconti observed them in their everyday surroundings. Nellucia remembers that Visconti once came into the trattoria and after noticing an interesting gesture of her’s he shouted: “Stay like this, stay like this [...] remember this gesture.’ And this gesture I had to repeat in front of the camera.”¹¹ Agnese recalled that Visconti gave instructions to his assistant director Franco Zeffirelli. Zeffirelli would rehearse the action sequences with the non-actors and relay the instructions regarding what they should do and how they should move.¹²

Quite often the sisters were able to shoot a scene

immediately after the technical rehearsal with the camera department. But the “Diari di Lavorazione” (the shooting diary)¹³ noted that there were also takes that had to be shot over and over again. The main reason for repetitive shooting was the fact that the non-actors were not allowed to improvise their dialogue or to change their movements after they were determined by the director, Visconti rejected even minor variations. Agnese recalls:

Once I had to look into a spotlight. It was a spotlight of 10, 000 watt. [...] I had to look into this spotlight and when I changed my line of vision only for millimeters [...] he recognized it. [...] At home, [...] I was blind. My mother, [...] anger! ‘Mr. Visconti! You ruined my daughter’s life, she can’t see anymore.’ Visconti: ‘Don’t be worried.’ My eyes were bandaged for 24 hours and I took some medication, so I finally regained my eye-sight. You see? These were our sacrifices for the movie.¹⁴

Although Visconti involved his non-actors in the development of the Sicilian dialogue, allowing at least a limited opportunity for improvisation before the dialogue was written down, Visconti’s and Straub and Huillet’s directing styles are, nevertheless, linked to each other by the restrictive stage directions the non-actors had to follow. To answer the question whether we can interpret the intervention of the directors as a form of compensation for the non-actors’ supposed lack of performative creativity, we have to learn more about the directors’ approach to non-actors in general and specifically to their possible creative input.



Fig. 2: Agnese Giammona

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The directors' reflections on non-actors and their creative input

Visconti and Straub and Huillet did not make a categorical distinction between non-actors and professional actors. In my interview with Straub, he stated that his goal was to “catch” certain feelings, no matter what kind of performer stood in front of the camera. Straub proposed the same goal for actors and non-actors alike: mirroring feelings should not be the result of a premeditated decision on the part of the performer. Feelings should come about by means of repetitive work. Straub, however, also mentioned that working with trained actors might require a little more effort as some professional actors would propose approaches to their roles, which a director has to disregard:

In my opinion, you'll reach your results faster with non-actors than with professional actors. I would have to obliterate too much. Most professional actors are not even able to simply open a door. Beyond that, [...] they have their own perception of a character and they follow a psychological approach I wanted to avoid [...] My movies are not only big machines against psychology but also against the 'art of acting.'¹⁵

Despite his option that working with trained actors might require additional effort, Straub, in general, equated actors and non-actors. This is also suggested by a statement at the beginning of *Not Reconciled*. Here Straub and Huillet didn't introduce the performers as non-actors but as actors. The title card, quoting Bertolt Brecht, reads: “Instead of wanting to create the impression that he is improvising, the actor should rather show what the truth is: he is quoting.”¹⁶

La Terra Trema starts with a peritext as well. Here, however, Visconti explains that the characters in the film are played by Sicilian fishermen. The title informs us that it is “A story of man's exploitation of man, set in Aci Trezza, Sicily” and that, “These are the houses, streets, boats and people of Aci Trezza. There are no actors; these are the inhabitants of Aci Trezza. They speak in their dialect to express their suffering and hopes. In Sicily, Italian is not the language spoken by the poor.” Although the

peritext of *La Terra Trema* seems to suggest that Visconti distinguished between non-actors and professionals, his reflection on working with non-actors is similar to Straub's. Visconti explained that his main objective was to let them become actors.¹⁷ He asserted his repetitive directing style was meant to achieve the same results as the work with professional actors. The more talented the non-actors were, the easier it was to achieve that goal. He emphasized that he was impressed by the fact that the non-actors did not display any constraints in front of the camera and he achieved satisfactory results even faster than during his work with trained actors. From Visconti's point of view, working with professional actors above all meant helping them to overcome their feelings of inferiority.¹⁸ Film historian Laurence Schifano describes Visconti's work with professional actors on stage as “dressage sessions.”¹⁹ The professional actors were only allowed to follow Visconti's directives, and, according to Visconti's article “Il Cinema Antropomorfo,” he forced them to completely “unlearn” their acting methods.²⁰ Only by overcoming artistic approaches can one find her humanity and instinctive speech.²¹

The fact that the directors' restrictive working methods were not exclusively developed for the work with non-actors but a way of dealing with performers in general proves that their style of directing was not motivated by distrust in the creative abilities of non-actors, but was prompted by a deep skepticism about the training of actors and established acting methods. Their criticism of the art of acting emphasizes the fact that acting methods and acting styles are cultural constructions. Like any set of conventions that create a division between professionals and non-professionals, from the perspective of a director, the art of acting can and even *must* be questioned from time to time. The director's frequent intervention while working with their non-actors can be interpreted as an attempt to establish parity between non-actors and their professional counterparts and, on a more abstract level, as an attempt to fight against established (art) systems and the hierarchies that are linked to them.

Straub and Huillet, moreover, welcomed the creative contributions of their non-actors, while Visconti could be said to have intentionally provoked them. As the peritext of *La Terra Trema* suggests, Visconti was convinced that the use of a

person's mother tongue considerably increased the ability of a person to express suffering, hope and other affective states. By allowing the non-actors to transpose his Italian dialogue into their language, he provided an opportunity for them to express themselves in a personal and imaginative way. We can imagine how deeply he trusted in the non-actor's ability to independently create the dialogue, considering that Visconti did not understand Sicilian.²² In fact, he added, the non-actors in *La Terra Trema* benefited him through the use of their language and their own ideas, images and mode of expression.²³

The peritext of *Not Reconciled* also calls the viewer's attention to the subject of speech. Straub and Huillet sensitize us to the fact that we cannot expect an interpretation of the novel's dialogue within the confines of naturalistic acting standards. Taking the reference to Brecht into account, it is not surprising that, in contrast to Visconti, Straub and Huillet's non-actors were not forced to perform their lines in any particular way. Instead, they were instructed – as Straub stated – to deliver the text in accordance with a specific “*Partitur*”²⁴ (a score or sheet of music). Straub's screenplay, which is full of detailed advice, is reminiscent of Johann Sebastian Bach's elaborate scores.²⁵ Bach gave very detailed advice to the performers, he “wrote scores that specified every note to be played, and added instructions for how to perform the notes – indicating which passages should be played louder, which notes should stand out, and when the tempo should speed up or slow down.”²⁶ In the context of this association, the non-actors in *Not Reconciled* can be understood as musicians who play their instruments in accordance to a detailed score. It may seem from this that Straub and Huillet followed the European fine art tradition, where performers were not “supposed to be creative; European classical music composers hate it, when performers interpret their works creatively.”²⁷ But listening to the non-actors in *Not Reconciled* we find that the members of this “orchestra” sound too different and are not playing in perfect harmony. To call them, in line with the European fine art tradition, “ideal performers” who function as “transparent windows to the mind of the creator”²⁸ is inappropriate. *Not Reconciled* already contains an “instrumentation of language through voice,” which is brought to perfection by

Straub and Huillet in their later movies (such as *Class Relations* [1984]). Ursula Böser's statements, concerning this film apply in certain aspects also to *Not Reconciled*. In *Class Relations*,

the spectrum of voices and the prosodic patterns of speech which we hear are marked by a rich diversity. [...] A highly heterogeneous scope of voices, accents, and individual idiosyncrasies of speech is thrown into sharp relief against a sparse stylistic background. [...] [Straub and Huillet] confront the actors' individual characteristics of speech, their sense of rhythm and even their breathing patterns with the content and linguistic construction of specific dialogue passages.²⁹

I would argue that we can identify this “individualization of language”³⁰ as a loophole for the non-actors' creativity. By giving non-actors the possibility of finding their individual intonation and the freedom to interpret the rhythmic specifications, they come close to classical music groups, who have “to improvisationally coordinate several aspects of the performance.”³¹ Once again Straub and Huillet revolt against a western cultural model, against, as Robert Keith Sawyer claims, “the all-too-common belief, that performance is not creative.”³² They succeed in emphasizing the creative power of Böll's novel as a singular work of literature as well as the undeniable fact that the non-actor's performance is not “simply an execution of [this] work,”³³ but a creative process, and as such, an autonomous piece of art.

The non-actor's reflections on their creative input

When asked why Visconti cast the sisters for the female parts in *La Terra Trema* Agnese Giammona responded with a pragmatic statement. She believed that she and her sister were in the film primarily because they were able to understand what Visconti asked of them. The sisters had attended a secondary school, and they spoke Italian, a little English and a few words of German, so, in contrast to some of the fishermen, they could easily follow Visconti's instructions. Although they were shy in the beginning, they gradually started to trust Visconti

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and felt increasingly relaxed on set and in front of the camera. Agnese confided that she and her sister adapted to shooting considerably faster than the fishermen.

The sisters repeatedly emphasized that Visconti was happy with their work because they made a great effort to be focused and take account of every detail they were asked to consider. Serious conflicts only arose when one of the girls appeared on set with coiffed hair or when Visconti suspected them of wearing make-up in order to make themselves look prettier. This enraged him and he insisted they return to an absolutely natural appearance. In most of the scenes, the two sisters were only allowed to wear one of their own apron dresses, no shoes and no make-up at all.

When Agnese and Nellucia changed small details of their appearance during the shooting process they tried to follow their individual vision of how a movie actress should “normally” look. The sisters used to go to the cinema in the nearby city with their father. Because of their involvement in a film production they started to watch movies and actors in a different way. They recognized a huge difference between their own look in *La Terra Trema* and the appearance of Harriet Medin in *Genoveffa di Brabante* (1947).³⁴ The sisters confronted Visconti with their observation. He had to convince them that in *Genoveffa di Brabante* when the main character’s dramatic destiny was taken into account (Genoveffa is imprisoned and decides to live in the woods), Harriet Medin’s invariably perfect hairdo and glossy lips did not match the story.

This anecdote foregrounds a parallel between the two non-actors and professional actors: according to Jill Nemiro, professional actors observe the performance of their colleagues in order to learn, as an actor in Nemiro’s interview study explained: “what works and what doesn’t work.”³⁵ I argue that when Agnese and Nellucia changed small details of their appearance during the shooting process, these efforts can be regarded as attempts to shape their characters. But while professional actors need to observe other actors’ work continually and gather and store these observations for future use, in this case the non-actors’ comparable creative activity was only temporary.³⁶

Agnese maintained that there was a major difference between her character Lucia and



Fig. 3: Nellucia Giammona

her personal life. Agnese describes Lucia as a “sparazina”³⁷ (a slightly frivolous girl), while Agnese – from her own point of view – knew and respected the social norms and habits, and took orders from her mother, supporting her at home and in the family business, the trattoria. Agnese shared: “To be honest, I had no idea what I did. We were not allowed to see the rushes. Visconti didn’t want that. In Venice [at the film festival], we saw the film for the first time. Is that me? Have I done that? We were surprised about ourselves.”³⁸ Nellucia stated that in comparison to the life of her character Mara, her life was much more “normal.” Nellucia was a regular and conscientious worshipper who worked a lot. In her opinion, she did not contribute to the development of the character, and her way of performing Mara was not a result of her own reflections. She just did what Visconti told her.

Obviously the rigorous style of directing reduced the opportunity for Agnese and Nellucia to contribute their own interpretations. It seems that from their point of view the adaptive process – from Italian to Sicilian – was not a significant moment of creative input, maybe due to the fact that Italian was as much their language as the Sicilian dialect. Neither had the feeling of playing herself – if this is at all possible – although they wore their own clothes and performed in their hometown; nor had they the experience of creating a fictional character. The sisters came quite close to Denis Diderot’s description of great actors as some kind of jumping jack; cardboard figurines propelled into movement by the pull of a string.³⁹ In contrast to Diderot’s definition of the perfect actor, as described in “The Paradox of Acting,” the sisters did not possess

the ability to analyze their characters with any profundity; nor could they reflect on the impact of their efforts on the audience.

Ulrich von Thüna likewise gives only practical reasons for his appearance in *Not Reconciled*. He is convinced that he was asked to play a part in *Not Reconciled* because Straub and Huillet knew that he spoke French and had a keen interest in French cinema. For him the work on the character started when he received the script. He marked the lines and pauses and memorized them. He was happy to be asked to present the dialogue in a “neutral” manner. As von Thüna explained, “[t]hat was exactly the way, I’d have spoken the lines, even without the admonishments, the requests and the suggestions of Straub. Because after all, I’m not a very emotional person.”⁴⁰ While he memorized the script, he read the novel. But he didn’t apply himself to subtle considerations or a profound analysis of either. Nor did he study Brecht and his alienation effect. He indicated that in real life, he was neither an emigrant nor had he ever been imprisoned, and therefore he had to make up the person he was supposed to play. He developed a concept of who the emigrant Schrella was. He explained that he grew up with the movies: he started to write about films when he was still a school boy, visited film clubs and art-house cinemas, and read a lot about filmmaking. This knowledge explains why he had no problem coming to terms with the shooting or its technical requirements. He shared that he simply tried to play Schrella based on his ideas: dry, embittered and unfortunate.

The work on the script was the starting point for a creative process. Von Thüna couldn’t resist forming an idea of the character’s condition and development and he didn’t feel restricted during the shooting process. There is no indication that Straub and Huillet rejected the premeditated decisions von Thüna had made for his fictional character, so the non-actor not only developed his own interpretation of the character, he was even able to deal with the rigid directing without giving up his ideas. The creative process lasted from the moment he read the script until his work was finished.

Conclusion

For professional actors, inflexible direction that

forces them into a preconceived interpretation of a fictional character often has a negative effect on their creativity.⁴¹ It also seems logical that rigid direction would undermine the creativity of non-actors, nevertheless some directors worked with their non-actors in a restrictive manner. As the paper outlined, in the two case studies at least, the restrictive style of directing was motivated by the attempt to work beyond the “beaten path” of the established (art) system and its hierarchies. This demanded the same efforts from non-actors as from professional actors.

The analysis of the directors’ reflections on their non-actors’ contribution to the production revealed that they have not tried to cut off the non-actors’ creativity. Instead they enabled an essential condition for the non-actors’ contributions – the linguistic handling of the source material (Giovanni Verga and Heinrich Böll’s novels).

The interviews with the non-actors show that they indeed contributed creative input but these opportunities were not to be found where the directors had intended them. With regard to *La Terra Trema*, André Bazin describes the result of their efforts as the “paradoxical synthesis of realism and aestheticism,”⁴² while Wolfram Schütte characterizes *Not Reconciled* as a film that provides “access to the segments of a reality resulting from a paradoxical jump from extreme naturalism to naked abstraction.”⁴³

The two case studies seem to confirm Robert Keith Sawyer’s observation that “no notational system is capable of completely determining the final performance.”⁴⁴ But the differences in the non-actors’ reactions on the restrictive style of directing allow a further conclusion: Visconti’s direction had at least offered a clear possibility for creative contributions during the rehearsal stage, but ironically, the non-actors’ creativity was low. The non-actor in *Not Reconciled* on the other hand, although under pressure, comparatively speaking, to follow restrictive directions, exhibited a significantly higher level of creativity. Obviously the non-actors’ reactions to rigid direction cannot be systematized in the same way as the reactions of professional actors in similar working conditions. This brings us back to “the art of acting,” professional actors are generally defined as persons who have completed study at acting school or experienced some form

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of training.⁴⁵ This educational process involves the systematization of the creative process with the aim of expanding and stabilizing the creative potential. As a result, the actor can rely on her creative capacities, which in turn gives the actor the freedom to deal with the structures and contextual influences she is confronted with during the production process. Analyzing the creative process of actors originating from a similar cultural background, Jill Nemiro found that all of them rejected rigid direction and regarded it as a limitation on their creativity.⁴⁶ We must remember though, that the evaluation of these contextual influences is affected by the teaching methods of the respective acting schools. Professional actors learn to deal with given structures (script, direction etc.) and, at the

same time, to confidently insist on adding their own individual contributions and interpretations. Restrictive directing, as a result, becomes a question of respect and the recognition of the actor as a creative personality.

Though untrained and unaccustomed to the professional working process, the non-actor does not automatically accept all contextual influences, nor is she characterized by a certain immunity against restrictive directing methods. More often, the non-actor can gain creative freedom from the fact that she does not have to defend her artistic identity. So in a way, the non-actor becomes an uncontrollable element in the production process. The non-actor can be seen as symbol of the subversive character of creativity.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my interviewees Agnese and Nellucia Giammona, Jean-Marie Straub and Ulrich von Thüna. Without their willingness to share their experiences with me, this article would not have been possible. Many thanks go to Michael Wedel for his notes on this paper. I would like to thank Sebastiano Gesù, Barbara Ulrich and particularly Patrick Jennings for their support.

Notes

1. Séverine Canele played the lead in the movie *Humanité* (1999) and Émilie Dequenne in *Rosetta* (1999). In 1999, they were honored ex-aequo with the Award for Best Actress at the Cannes Film Festival. In 2007, Jennifer Hudson won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her part in *Dreamgirls* (2006). Dwight Henry became famous for his role in *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) and was awarded with the Award for Best Supporting Actor by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association in 2012. Nazif Mujic won the Silver Bear in 2013 at the Berlinale Film Festival for the lead in *An Episode in the Life of an Iron Picker* (2013).

2. See Birgit Kohler, "Performing Documentary. Birgit Kohler im Gespräch mit Jana Seehusen," *zfm online*, October 2014, <http://www.zfmedienwissenschaft.de/online/web-extra/performing-documentary> (accessed 31 December, 2014). In 2011, the Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin offered a series of films and conversations under the title "Performing Documentary." The program dealt with a number of documentaries that were produced in the 2000s, characterized by an explicit use of performative elements – inter alia non-actors who perform other people's real-life experiences. Performative documentaries reject the clear division between fiction and documentary films and question the possibility of representing reality.

3. André Bazin, "An Aesthetic of Reality: Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation," in *What is Cinema? Volume 2*, trans. and ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 22. Article first published in 1948.

4. Bert Cardullo, *Screening the Stage: Studies in Cinedramatic Art* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 11.

5. The problem-centered interview (PCI) is a theory-generating interview method that is widely used in German Media and Communication Studies. A summary of that qualitative interview method can be found here: Andreas Witzel, "The Problem-Centered Interview," *FQS Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (January 2000), <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1132/2521> (accessed December 28, 2014). Andreas Witzel and Herwig Reiter published the first English

- introduction to this method: Andreas Witzel and Herwig Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012).
6. Ulrich von Thüna, in discussion with the author, January 2013.
 7. Published in *Nicht versöhnt oder Es hilft nur Gewalt, wo Gewalt herrscht: von Danièle Huillet / Jean-Marie Straub*, ed. Karl Stamm (Weimar: VDG, 2009), 13-104.8. Sebastiano Gesù, in discussion with the author, July 2013. Film historian Sebastiano Gesù (who was also involved in the production of *La Terra Trema*) kindly accompanied me while I performed the PCIs in Acì Trezza with the non-actors.
 9. Luchino Visconti, *La terra trema: Sceneggiatura desunta dall'edizione integrale del film da Fausto Montesanti* (Roma: Bianco e nero, 1951), 118.
 10. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Jean Domarchi, "Gespräch mit Luchino Visconti," in *Der Film. Manifeste - Gespräche - Dokumente. Volume 2: 1945 bis heute*, ed. by Theodor Kotulla (Munich: R. Piper, 1964), 64.
 11. Nellucia Giammona, in discussion with the author, July 2013. Author's translation from the Italian.
 12. Sebastiano Gesù, "La Terra Trema, Una Felice ed Esaltante Avventura," in *La terra trema. Un film di Luchino Visconti dal romanzo I Malavoglia di Giovanni Verga*, ed. by Sebastiano Gesù (Comiso: Salarchi immagini/ Lipari: Edizioni del Centro studi, 2006), 15.
 13. *Ibid.*, 57-127.
 14. Agnese Giammona, in discussion with the author, July 2013. Author's translation from the Italian.
 15. Straub quoted by Jürgen S. Lerschenthal in "Noch immer "Nicht versöhnt"? Anmerkungen zu einem deutschen Film," *Die Andere Zeitung*, April 21, 1966. My translation from the German.
 16. "Anstatt den Eindruck hervorrufen zu wollen, er improvisiere, soll der Schauspieler lieber zeigen, was die Wahrheit ist: er zitiert. Bertolt Brecht." English translation from George Clark and Redmond Entwistle, "We do everything for this art, but this art isn't everything," *Vertigo* 3, Issue 6, (Summer 2007), http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/vertigo_magazine/volume-3-issue-6-summer-2007/we-do-everything-for-this-art-but-this-art-isnt-everything/ (accessed January 3, 2015).
 17. Doniol-Valcroze and Domarchi, "Gespräch mit Luchino Visconti," 64.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. Laurence Schifano, *Luchino Visconti. Fürst des Films* (Gernsbach: Katz, 1988), 280. Author's translation from the German.
 20. Luchino Visconti, "Il Cinema Antropomorfo," *Cinema* 173-174 (September, October 1943), 108-9.
 21. *Ibid.*
 22. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Jean Domarchi, "Gespräch mit Luchino Visconti," 64-5.
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. Jean-Marie Straub, "All about Nicht versöhnt," in *Nicht versöhnt oder Es hilft nur Gewalt, wo Gewalt herrscht: von Danièle Huillet / Jean-Marie Straub*, ed. by Karl Stamm (Weimar: VDG, 2009), 113.
 25. Besides Arnold Schoenberg, the composer Johann Sebastian Bach features prominently in the work of Straub and Huillet; see Ursula Böser, *The Art of Seeing, the Art of Listening*, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), 12 and 29-69.
 26. Robert Keith Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 344.
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. Ursula Böser, *The Art of Seeing, the Art of Listening* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 125-6.
 30. *Ibid.*, 127.
 31. Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity*, 347. Here, Sawyer refers to the research by Peter Weeks, who studied the rehearsals of chamber orchestras, see: Peter Weeks, "Musical time as a practical accomplishment: A change in tempo," *Human Studies* 13 (1990): 323-359 and "Synchrony lost, synchrony regained: The achievement of musical coordination," *Human Studies* 19 (1996): 199-228.
 32. *Ibid.*, 362.
 33. *Ibid.*, 345.
 34. Credited in the film as Harriet White.
 35. Jill Nemiro, "Interpretive Artists: A Qualitative Exploration of the Creative Process of Actors," *Creativity Research Journal* 10, Issue 2-3 (1997), 233.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. A. Giammona, discussion.
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, trans. Walter Herries Pollock (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), 61-2. First published in 1830.40. von Thüna, discussion.41. Nemiro, "Interpretive Artists," 229-239.42. Bazin, 42.43. Wolfram Schütte, "Nicht Versöhnt: Ein Hinweis auf Straubs Böll-Adaption," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, December 10, 1965, quoted in Arbeitsgruppe Filmclubs beim Club der Filmschaffenden der DDR, ed., *Film 67* (Berlin GDR: Ag Filmclub der DDR, 1967), 37-39. Author's translation from the German.
 44. Sawyer, *Explaining Creativity*, 346.
 45. Whether this approach, distinguishing professional actors from non-actors is appropriate is an interesting question. Unfortunately, however, a discussion of this topic would go beyond the scope of this article.
 46. Nemiro, "Interpretive Artists," 229-239.