

## Research Presentation Kent Sjöström

In my dissertation *Skådespelaren i handling – strategier för tanke och kropp (The Actor in Action – Strategies for Body and Mind)* from 2007, focus is upon the actor as a subject in thought and action. My current research also touches upon the actor as an object for the gazes of others, as well as the values and ideologies surrounding or inherent in the work of the actor. This direction can be summarised by the headline “Ideologies of Portrayal”, and uses Brecht's theories of scenic art as its point of departure.

My current and previous research is regularly presented by myself at theatres, theatre academies and seminars, most recently in Helsinki, Gothenburg, Shanghai, and Copenhagen. I am a member of the networks Performance Philosophy and the Helsinki Performer Training Platform, while also cooperating with the board of artistic development at the Danish National School of Performing Arts. Since spring 2014, I am the field representative for artistic research at Malmö Theatre Academy, and a member of the board of the National School of Research. I am also in charge of the course The Theory and Practice in Theatre at Malmö Theatre Academy.

Beneath the headline of “Ideologies of Portrayal”, I work with the following areas of research:

- The body as an ideological field and physical regimes. Within the framework of the Finland based researcher network The Helsinki Performer Training Platform, I presented the lecture “The Bodily Unease in Culture” in January 2014, which, pending peer review, will be published in the British periodical *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*.
- In the recent decades, the term *moved* has assumed a central role as a mark of quality within the field of theatre, among critics, audience, and performers. A viewpoint frequently expressed is that theatre gains its value by *moving*. This attitude values an emotional and physical experience, and by extension touches upon a discussion of the cathartic or therapeutic effect of theatre, as opposed to its intellectual or critical stance. My discussion concerns not only the reception of theatre, or its effect upon the viewer. It also ties into the applied techniques of the actor, and the actor's attitude towards using one's own thought, emotions and experiences. Thus, my study concerns itself with the values and methods which are at stake in a discussion about *moving* and *being moved*. I have introduced and discussed this theme at Folkteatern in Gothenburg, a lecture which also can be found in article form: *Skakad och berörd (Shaken and Stirred)*
- The contested self. The question of self-expression in the work of the actor is central, especially in relation with a contemporary discussion which has developed in multiple directions: from therapeutically oriented methods concerned with authenticity, to a questioning of the position of the self, and a holding up of its constructed nature. With Bertolt Brecht and Konstantin Stanislavsky, one finds different methodological approaches to the actor's relationship with their own self. My research investigates this conflict, exemplified through Brecht's *Stories of Herr Keuner* and Stanislavsky's “Magic If”. This opposition carries with it ideological dimensions, and also encompasses a perspective on identity and scenic representation. I examine the view of the performer's relation to sacrifice and the

discussion of original, copy, and authenticity, using Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin and Brecht as my point of departure. I discuss how elements of submission and will to sacrifice are related to different directions of performing arts. Today, there is also a discussion of reflection, autonomous artistry, and one's own construction of professional skill. Here, one can find an increased amount of individuality, and a more sceptical attitude towards tradition. My research examines stories of the artist's will to sacrifice in the master-apprentice tradition, and how the Brechtian break with this tradition looks.

Links

Nordic Theatre Studies vol 20: *Reflection, Lore and Acting – The Practitioner's Approach* (Spanish version: *Reflexión, Saber y Actuación – el Enfoque de los Actores*)

*Skådespelaren i handling – strategier för tanke och kropp*