Singing
Subjectivity
on
Documentary
Performance
and
Authenticity

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Singing Subjectivity:

on Documentary, Performance and Authenticity

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Acknowledgement

This thesis is about performance, and moreover, this thesis is a performance. A long-term performance that is, but nonetheless a performance. A performance that I am very proud of, I must say. Although 'performing' this thesis was a rather solitude engagement, as you will learn reading this thesis a performance is never an autonomous act or, in this instance, achievement. Rather, a performance is defined by its context. There are many people who have contributed to this achievement: they define the context of this performance. And I want to thank them, sincerely. First my supervisor Susan Aasman, for her patience and unbaiting confidence in that this thesis (eventually) will meet its end, at times when I wasn’t so sure. But moreover, for fueling my confidence in the quality of this work, at times when I needed that greatly. Also, I thank prof. Hans van Maanen, for recognizing my (academic) interest in performance, years before I did. However, this thesis would not have been performed without the aid of my family: my parents, my other parents, my sister. They have helped tremendously in the ‘domestic department’ so that I could study, and I am grateful for that. But most of all, I want to thank my best boys Samson en Lex and my husband and fellow hero Erik for, well, for what not. This achievement is for, and because of us.
Abstract

Singing politicians: in any circumstance an uncommon sight, let alone in a documentary film. Yet, Dutch film director Robert Oey chose 'song' as a means of representation in his documentary film “De Leugen” (2010), which focuses on a political affair concerning Member of Parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Oey's approach results in several surprisingly personal and credible performances from politicians who were involved in this affair, most notably the performance by former Minister of Immigration Rita Verdonk, in the Dutch media also known as 'Iron Rita'. Apart from offering a memorable cinematic experience, this method of 'representing reality' brings interesting issues to the surface regarding the problematic relationship between performance and authenticity in documentary film. For how can something so completely and overtly staged as a vocal performance be considered 'authentic' or let alone 'truthful' in a documentary film?

This research aims to map the conditions under which Verdonk's vocal performance can be understood, experienced and theorized as documentary practice. Drawing on concepts from performance studies, film phenomenology and documentary studies, it will be argued that 'performance' and 'documentary' are not as incompatible as the dominant take in documentary studies on 'authentic representation' might indicate. Rather, the dominant conceptual models of 'performance' and 'documentary' within documentary studies conflict. To reconfigure these conceptual models from representation to performative offers possibilities to provide a coherent understanding of how documentary and performance (both as types of human activity) relate to each other, in Verdonk's case perhaps even enforce each other, and how they can both be made to perform socio-historical reality authentically. So, instead of approaching the cinematic image of Verdonk performing as a text to be read as authentic, the cinematic image of Verdonk is taken as an authentic performative act in its own right, within a documentary film that is essentially a performative utterance.
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Introduction

When in 2010 the documentary film ‘De Leugen’ by Robert Oey premiered at the Dutch Film Festival, it created a buzz among film critics, reporters and Film Festival audiences: not only would well-known politicians speak frankly about their personal experiences in the infamous political affair concerning member of Parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali\(^1\), some of them would actually sing songs about it! Reporters consequently emphasized the curiosity of the fact that these politicians would show themselves in a vocal performance -“Have you ever heard Verdonk and Halsema sing a song?!“- and when asked about her expectations of the film on the red carpet, one guest replied: “… hilarious! I think.” (Nederlands Film Festival TV) Basically, the release alone of this documentary musical caused a stir, much less because of its controversial and vividly remembered subject matter than of its form. But rather than the ridiculing presumptions of politicians singing about their feelings would indicate, the film was received with high praise and was nominated for the Award of the Dutch Film critics. Many film critics were on the same page in their reviews: the documentary film ‘De Leugen’ was considered to be something extraordinary, something truly remarkable and something unmistakably sincere. (De Volkskrant; Trouw; NRC Handelsblad; Driessen 2010, 81)

One of the most notable vocal performances in the film is that of former Minister of Immigration Rita Verdonk, in the Dutch media also referred to as ‘Iron Rita’. Leading up to the vocal performance, we see Verdonk engaged in a conversation with one of her staff members on the backseat of her official car. She talks about her personal experiences during the affair and how she felt betrayed, not only by Hirsi Ali but also by her fellow party members. This scene is followed by a short fragment of an interview with Hirsi Ali in 1992 about her experiences as an asylum seeker. Supposedly in reply to the question “how much have you changed?” she states on film: “Now, I don’t accept

\(^{1}\) The affair became known as the ‘passport-affair’, and occupied the Dutch media in the period May-June 2006. It started with a broadcast by the Dutch news programme Zembla where it was revealed that Hirsi Ali had lied about her given name and date of birth in her application for asylum. In response to that broadcast and after hasty investigation the Minister of Immigration Rita Verdonk stated that in light of these recent events Hirsi Ali never had or should have acquired Dutch citizenship. What followed was a grim political play, not unlike a true Greek tragedy, what eventually led to the collapse of the Balkenende II administration and with that, to the end of Verdonk’s term as Minister.
things anymore just like that.” While looking at these images we can hear Verdonk starting to sing, apparently directed towards Hirsi Ali: “Ik kijk in je ogen en zie wat je denkt”. Via a sound bridge the viewer is led back to Verdonk on the backseat of her car - alone this time - where she continues singing:

“maar als jij mij eens écht zou zien/ en wist dat ik niet anders kon/ ik weet dat men zegt dat ik niet wou/ maar in mijn hart deed ik het ook voor jou/ omdat ik zeker wist/ het moest zo zijn/ ik wil dat jij mij begrijpt/ zoals geliefden dat doen”.² (Oey)

Verdonk’s performance is notable not because of her vocal qualities – although filmcritic Jann Ruyter describes her singing as “the least off-key of all” (Trouw) - but because she is capable to convey a profound sense of honesty and vulnerability, which is at the least in strong contrast with her public image as an almost relentless political opportunist, an image that was even more confirmed during the political affair on which the film focuses and which is the source of her alias. Critic Kees Driessen remarks in Vrij Nederland on Verdonk’s performance:

“Because of her boldness and candidness – she is at risk of undergoing a major fiasco–Rita wins in on sympathy. In the political game around Hirsi Ali she has often been accused of an unsound craving for power, but here it seems that she really means what she sings. Her performance is extra brave if you consider that ‘De Leugen’ is directed by

² All of the songs in the film ‘De Leugen’ are written by poet Erik Jan Hermens and composer Robert Jan Stips. With the poetic quality of the text seemingly lost in translation, the literal translation of the song is as follows: I look into your eyes and see what you think/ but if you would really see me/ and knew that I could not act differently/ I know people say that I did not want to/ but in my heart I did it also for you/ because I knew/ it had to be like this/ I want you to understand me/ like lovers do.
Robert Oey, the husband of Femke Halsema – at the time her most fierce opponent.” (Driessen 2010, 81)

By means of song Verdonk conveys the sense that she is a sensitive and emotionally affected human being and consequently imparts a very credible account of her personal experiences regarding the affair onto the viewer. In other words, by singing Verdonk charges this scene with truthfulness and it is this counterintuitive experience of authenticity that makes this documentary film so appealing. For how can something so completely and overtly staged as Verdonk’s theatrical vocal performance be considered ‘authentic’ or let alone ‘truthful’ in a documentary film?

Performance and authenticity
Since documentary film is expected to “offer authentic representations of socio-historic reality”, as Spence and Navarro state in ‘Crafting truth’ (15), Verdonk’s performance as a means of authentic representation challenges fundamental notions and conventions of documentary representation in several ways. First of all, the singing an sich can be considered a clear token of artificiality. Not only does it seem highly unnatural that Verdonk spontaneously bursts out in song in front of a camera, it is even more suspicious that she sings a song accompanied by music that does not have a designated source within the space of the socio-historical reality. This indicates that Verdonk sings in a diegetic world that, according to documentary conventions, should existentially coincide with ‘the real world’, an assumption that is disrupted by the acknowledgment of non-diegetic music by Verdonk. To describe this in terms of Vivian Sobchack: Verdonk’s singing transforms real space into irreal (hypothetical) space and the nonfictions becomes fictional. (241) Furthermore, conventional authentic representation in documentary film demands a more direct and indexical relationship between the image and the socio-historical reality than is the case in Verdonk’s performance. On the indexicality and the immediacy of the documentary image, Spence and Navarro state: “we expect documentaries to be indexically bound to the subject represented. The camera and its subject were there at the same time”. (15) Since Verdonk’s performance indicates (‘indexes’) an irreal, fictional space, these images do not direct the viewer to
the socio-historic reality, but to an artificial historic reality. Also, this disturbed indexical bond between image and socio-historical reality shows that the profilmic reality -“what was in front of the lens when the scene was recorded” - has been altered for the benefit of the camera and at the expense of the immediacy of the image (Spence and Navarro 11, 213).

Indeed, Verdonk’s vocal performance as authentic representation disregards cornerstones of documentary practice, such as the indexicality of the image, the notion of immediacy and the pro-filmic reality, notions that all are aligned with the ‘documentary truth claim’ that every documentary asserts in one way or the other. And yet, this kind of documentary imagery can just as well be considered as an authentic account of the socio-historical reality, as the cinematic encounter with Verdonk’s performance clearly proves. It is this oxymoron of authentic performance within the context of documentary film that I am interested in and this will be the focus of this research.

Research question
What this research aims for is to grasp the authenticating workings of Verdonk’s vocal performance and how such a notion of authentic performance is embedded in documentary theory. The task at hand is thus to explore the ways in which ‘performance’ and ‘documentary’, as two seemingly contradictory concepts, correlate in order to represent reality authentically. The key question in this research is then: How does Rita Verdonk’s vocal performance in ’De Leugen’ offer an authentic representation of socio-historical reality?

Methodology
As noted, the aim of this research is to map the conditions under which Verdonk’s vocal performance can be understood to represent reality authentically. These conditions seem to be located in three different aspects of the performance. First, and most obvious, there is the notion of ‘performance’ itself. In the film ‘De Leugen’ Verdonk’s vocal performance is deployed as a tool to represent socio-historical reality or, more aptly put, Verdonk’s experience of that reality. The relevant question here is: what does
(this kind of) performance actually entail? And consequently, how can vocal performance then be used as a device or method to represent socio-historic reality in an authentic way? The first part of this research will therefore address the ontological issues regarding Verdonk’s vocal performance - what is performance, what does it actually do? - from the perspective of performance studies.

As a field of research, performance studies is committed to explore ‘the world of performance and the world as performance’ and this involves drawing from a broad range of academic disciplines, most notably theatre studies, anthropology, sociology and gender studies. In other words, the concept of ‘performance’ has roots in a variety of discourses, and the term ‘performance’ can in that sense be applied to various activities: from aesthetic to social, cultural and political practices, i.e. basically any practice that involves human interaction. Because of this multifaceted notion of what it means ‘to perform’, many scholars even question if there is such a thing as a unified concept of performance or let alone, an overarching definition of what a performance is. Performance theorist Marvin Carlson therefore labels ‘performance’ as “an essentially contested concept”, a concept that is defined by the quality that it lacks a fixed definition, or that it has “disagreement about their essence built into the concept themselves”. (Carlson 68) As a field of research, performance studies thus operates between academic disciplines to explore (and theorize) the various ways in which performance inscribes - in the broadest sense - human (inter)activity and our understanding thereof.

Or, as Richard Schechner puts it:

“‘Being’ is existence itself. ‘Doing’ is the activity of all that exists, from quarks to sentient beings to supergalactic strings. ‘Showing doing’ is performing: pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing. ‘Explaining showing doing’ is the work of performance studies.” (Schechner 2006, 28)

Then to draw from performance studies in order to ‘explain’ Verdonk’s ‘showing doing’ opens up possibilities to regard a vocal performance such as Verdonk’s not only as artistic practice aligned with ‘pretense’ and artificial realities, but also as a modality of social interaction or cultural existence that could channel reality.
Second, there is the experience of Verdonk’s performance by the viewer that elicits the rendering of this performance as authentic. To investigate this experience of Verdonk’s performance I take on a phenomenological approach, thereby taking film phenomenologist Vivian Sobchack’s work as my primary source. In the introduction of her study ‘Carnal Thoughts’ Sobchack elaborates on what a phenomenological approach in film studies entails and aims for. Phenomenological inquiry, so she states, concerns “the phenomena of experience and their meaning as spatially and temporally embodied, lived and valued by an objective subject- and, as such, always already qualified by the mutable specificities and constraints of history and culture.” (2004, 2) As a theoretical approach, phenomenology thus emphasizes that human experience is always embodied, that both (objective) bodily senses and (subjective) consciousness are engaged in the process of ‘making meaningful sense’. Additionally, embodied experience is affected by the historical and cultural knowledge incorporated by the ‘objective subject’, i.e. ourselves. Experience is therefore never an isolated or fixed phenomenon, or “a priori to historical and cultural existence”, but is fluid and always to be put in context of knowledge about the historical and cultural world we inhabit. Basically, what phenomenology does is that it “(…) seeks, in a given case, the meaning of experience as it is embodied and lived in context (…)”. (Sobchack 2004, 2, 4) In the second part of this research, drawing from phenomenology, my point of reference is the (my) actual, embodied experience of Verdonk’s cinematic performance, and the valuing of that experience as authentic. To investigate the structures at hand in this experience, i.e. the ways in which this experience is informed by notions of ‘bodily senses’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘historical and cultural knowledge’, will allow me to address the question of how this experience of documentary renders authenticity.

Third, there is the more contextualized notion of Verdonk’s vocal performance. Verdonk’s performance takes place within the context of a documentary film and, as explicated earlier, this implies a field of tension as ‘performance’ and ‘documentary’ seem to be rather incompatible concepts when it comes to the notion of ‘authenticity’. The immanent question in the third part of this research is then: how is ‘performance’ embedded within documentary theory as documentary practice, i.e. as a means of
representing reality? Or, in other words, how can a documentary performance, usually regarded as a token of artificiality, assert a claim on the truth?

Within the representational framework that inscribes documentary studies, Spence and Navarro emphasize that documentaries are first and foremost products of filmmakers, filmmakers that are (contrary to fictional counterparts) concerned with the real, or “actuality”. As they state: “Yes, documentaries direct us to the world. But they are also texts. And as texts, they are constructions – the documentary maker’s construction of reality.” (2) The issue of yielding truth in documentary then needs to be regarded within this context of understanding documentaries primarily as constructions or ‘texts’, sanctioned by the filmmaker’s agency. And this understanding (documentaries as texts) problematizes the notion of ‘truth’ as a product of documentary representation. “Therefore”, they state, “what is at issue is not so much ‘is this [representation] true or untrue?’ but rather ‘how is actuality treated in order to sanction the documentary’s claim to be telling the truth?’” (2) This notion of ‘documentary truth’ aligns closely with the aim of this research, as the pivotal issue here is not if Verdonk’s performance can be considered true or false, but rather how this performance sustains the notion that this documentary represents reality authentically.

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3 Here, Spence and Navarro refer to John Grierson’s founding definition of the genre of documentary film as “the creative treatment of reality”.

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Part I- Performance and authenticity

As is noted in the introduction, performance can be described as 'showing doing'. The default understanding of this 'showing doing' is that it takes place in artistically framed situations and often involves 'playing a role' or 'acting in character'. However, other social processes that are not necessarily artistic or aesthetic can also be regarded as performances, for example a political speech, a religious rite or even ordinary social interaction. Richard Schechner typifies these different manifestations of performance as something that 'is' a performance and something that can be studied 'as' performance. But as Schechner also points out: “Certain events are performances and other events less so. There are limits to what 'is' performance. But just about anything can be studied 'as' performance.” The limits of 'is' performance do not originate in certain characteristics or features of this type of performance; rather, they are defined by the context in which the performance takes place. Or as Schechner states:

“[T]here is nothing inherent in an action in itself that makes it a performance or disqualifies it from being a performance. Something 'is' a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage and tradition say it is. (…) One cannot determine what 'is' a performance without referring to specific cultural circumstances.” (38)

As Schechner argues, to distinguish aesthetic/artistic performances from social performances, i.e. performance as an integral part of social reality, is a difficult task: “[A]t one end of the spectrum it's clear what a performance is, what an artwork is; at the other end no such clarity exists.” (38) Interestingly enough, Verdonk’s performance in 'De Leugen' can be placed on both ends of the performance spectrum. Verdonk’s act of song is unmistakably an artistic activity, yet at the same time it works as a social performance, as something from social reality. So, the relevant question here is not necessarily ‘what kind of performance is this?’ -since it is both-, but rather, how does this performance actually work as both artistic and social performance? And furthermore, how does this particular performance create the possibilities to render this performance as ‘authentic’? To answer these questions it is important to first understand what it
means for Verdonk ‘to perform’: what is performance and how does it work? An understanding of this particular performance then gives way to grasp it authenticating workings.

§1.1 An ontology of performance

Performance as a conscious act

In the introduction of 'Performance and cultural politics' (1996) Elin Diamond states that performance is “always a doing and a thing done”. (1) In this sense, a performance is essentially an act, i.e. a bounded activity executed by an agent. Since not all activities carried out by agents are performances - or are they? -, there are boundaries to what activities can be considered performances. These boundaries are shaped by the manner in which these activities are executed by their agents. In other words, performing involves a certain way of doing things, it implies conducting a certain kind of behaviour. Richard Schechner describes this certain behaviour as 'restored behaviour' and claims that this typical behaviour inscribes performance: in fact, it is its fundamental characteristic. (Schechner 1985, 35)

In his influential study 'Between performance and anthropology' (1985) Schechner explicates his concept of 'restored behaviour'. Schechner states, from an anthropological point of view, that living behaviour in all its manifestations is inscribed by certain social, cultural and historical norms such as conventions and traditions. This means that behaviour is never 'original' but always learned, rehearsed and repeated. A child learns how to behave oneself in social situations just as an actor learns (rehearses) how to perform his or her role on stage. These different instances of behaviour share that they are both “socially sanctioned modes of behaviour”, as Marvin Carlson puts it. (Carlson 4) They are both informed and restrained by social, cultural or aesthetic forces.

In a performance, a mode of behaviour is the 'raw material' that a performer works with: it is taken and 're-stored' in a new performance. To illustrate this process, Schechner uses the metaphor of how a filmmaker uses a strip of film to assemble a film:
“Restored behaviour is living behaviour treated as a film director treats a strip of film. These strips of behaviour can be rearranged and restructured; they are independent of the causal systems (social, psychological, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. (…) Originating as a process, used in the process of rehearsal to make a new process, a performance, the strips of behaviour are not themselves processes but things, items, 'material'.” (Schechner 1985, 35)

A performer can thus alter, rearrange or reinvent these strips of behaviour in order to create a (new) performance. In that sense, a performance is always a citational act: they are always related to acts and behaviours that already exist in the world. Or, as Schechner states: “Performance means; never for the first time. It means for the second to the nth time. Performance is 'twice-behaved behaviour'. (36) However, in the process of restoring behaviour, a performer can choose how to use and apply these 'strips of behaviour'. In other words, a performer exercises its agency to change (or maintain) a 'performance score':

“Restored behaviour can be put on the way a mask or costume is. Its shape can be seen from the outside, and change. That's what theatre directors, councils of bishops, master performers and great shamans do: change performance scores. A score can change because it is not an 'natural' event, but a model of individual and collective human choice.” (Schechner 1985, 37)

As argued, strips of behaviour are the raw material of a performance score, and this indicates that these behaviours – “things, items, 'material' ” - exist independently from the people who act out these behaviours. Like Schechner formulates “they have a life of their own” and, in addition, “distant from 'me'.” (36) This means that in a performance (on stage or in the social world) there is a distance between the performer's 'self' and the behaviours and actions he/she carries out. This distance implies a high degree of consciousness of the behaviours a performer conducts, as in a consciousness of performance. In this degree of consciousness lies the difference between 'just living life' and performing: even if the acts and behaviours in a performance are exactly the same as in 'everyday life', like brushing teeth or singing a song, since the performer is conscious
about the acts and behaviours that he 'does', these acts can be considered performances. Or as Carlson states: "we may do actions unthinkingly, but when we think about them, this introduces a consciousness that gives them the quality of performance." (Carlson 4) Herein lies the conception of performance that Schechner passionately endorses: every human activity can be considered a performance, on the condition that these acts and behaviours are executed consciously and exist independently from the person doing them. This goes for the actor playing Hamlet, the priest baptizing a child or a shaman performing a healing ritual. Performance is thus not identified as such by the frame in which actions and behaviours are performed (like theatre or rituals), but by a certain attitude towards these actions. (Carlson 4; Schechner 1985, 36)

To follow up on Ellen Diamond's statement at the start of this paragraph: a performance is "always a doing and a thing done". Diamond elaborates upon this phrase by stating that although there seems to be a temporal division between a doing and a thing done, a performance is both at the same time. "[A] performance, even its dazzling physical immediacy, drifts between present and past, presence and absence, consciousness and memory." (Diamond 1) She argues, like Schechner, that performances are restraint by social, cultural and historical forces, forces she labels 'previous performances'. "Every performance, if it is intelligible as such, embeds features of previous performances: gender conventions, racial histories, aesthetic traditions- political and cultural pressures that are consciously and unconsciously acknowledged." (1) So, that liminal state between a doing and a thing done - thus drifting between present and past, presence and absence, consciousness and memory - is the site where social, cultural, historical and aesthetic forces ('previous performances') materialize in conscious restored behaviour, into a performance framed in time and space.

Performance as a relational act

Another aspect of performance as a 'conscious doing' is explicated by Marvin Carlson, following Richard Bauman in his concept of 'consciousness of doubleness'. Carlson argues that every performance involves a mental comparison of the actual 'doing' with an ideal version of this 'doing'. Both the performer and the observers of the performance make this mental comparison between 'doings'. Carlson gives here the
example of an athlete who compares his performance with a certain mental standard that sets the norm. However, Carlson emphasizes that it is not the “external observation” of the performance that is most central in this mental comparing, but rather the 'double consciousness' of the performer while executing the actions. Performers are conscious of the act of comparison, by both themselves while performing and by 'others' watching them perform. This 'consciousness of doubleness' consist then on the one hand of the conscious executing of the act itself and on the other hand of the awareness of the comparing that takes place within themselves as well as their observers. The concept of 'consciousness of doubleness' therefore gives way for the conception that performance is essentially a relational act, since the performer is aware of being watched and acknowledged as a performer, sometimes even just by him-/herself: “Performance is always for someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, the audience is the self.” (Carlson 5)

In her study “The transformative power of performance: a new aesthetics” (2008) Erika Fischer-Lichte also emphasizes the notion that performance is a relational act, while explaining the concept of performance. She connects the relational quality of performance with her argument that performance is an event; it involves actors and spectators interacting in 'bodily co-presence', framed in time and space. It is in this bodily co-presence that a relationship between actors and spectators is established, a relationship that “enables and constitutes performance”. (Fischer-Lichte 32) This relationship between performers and observers is not so much defined by transmitting and interpreting messages, but more by a certain dynamic between actors and spectators that generates the performance:

“[In bodily co-presence spectators do not] represent distanced or empathetic observers and interpreters of the actors’ actions (...); nor do they act as intellectual decoders of messages conveyed by the actions of the actors. [Bodily co-presence] also does not imply a subject-object relationship in which spectators turn actors into objects of their observation, while the actors (as subjects) (...) confront the audience (as objects) with non-negotiable messages. Instead, their bodily co-presence creates a relationship
between co-subjects. Through their physical presence, perception and response, the spectators become co-actors that generate the performance by participating in [it].” (Fischer-Lichte 32)

The dynamic between co-subjects that constitutes performance is what Fischer-Lichte describes as an 'autopoietic feedback loop'. The term 'autopoiesis' describes a self-organizing and self-generating system: “autopoietic systems are simultaneously producers and products, circular systems that survive by self-generation.” (Fischer-Lichte 7) Performance as an autopoietic system then crystallizes in the dynamic between co-subjects that Fischer-Lichte defines as 'a feedback loop'. This particular feedback loop works as follows:

“The actors act, that is, they move through space, gesture, change their expression, manipulate objects, speak or sing. The spectators perceive their actions and respond to them. Although some of these reactions might be limited to internal processes, their perceptible responses are equally significant: the spectators laugh, cheer, sigh, groan, sob, cry, scuff their feet, or hold their breath (…)”. (Fischer-Lichte 39)

The actors in turn respond to these reactions, for example by intensifying or diminishing their actions on stage. “In short, whatever the actors do elicits a response from the spectators, which impacts on the entire performance.” (Fischer-Lichte 38) So, the course of a performance can be changed, adapted, or adjusted by each turn of the feedback loop. “Hence, performance remains unpredictable and spontaneous to a certain degree”, as Fischer-Lichte states. (38) This conception of a performance as an ever changing, unstable and self-referential event implies that a performance cannot be pre-fixed, completely planned or controlled by either of the participants. Consequently, any sort of meaning conveyed through a performance originates not in an autonomous message, but is constructed in the interaction between the participants. Therefore, meaning is not a pre-existing element of the performance, but it is generated by means of the performance: it is created by the participants in “a reciprocal relationship of influence”, that is the feedback loop. (Fischer-Lichte 50)
The performers and the spectators thus keep the performance feedback loop in motion by responding to one another. These responses do not only consist of visible and audible actions, but also of a certain energy circulating between performers and spectators. Fischer-Lichte states that this energy “is no phantasm, (…) but is indeed physically perceptible.” (59) She describes this particular energy as something that can be physically sensed as it circulates between the performers and the spectators; one can feel it instead of see it or hear it. And like the more easily discernable responses, this energy can be perceived, experienced and transferred back to the other end of the feedback loop, affecting the course of the performance. (Fischer-Lichte 59)

In sum, according to Fisher-Lichte a performance is an event defined by the dynamic between performers and spectators that she labels a feedback loop. This feedback loop is brought about by the responsiveness of both performers and spectators towards the actions, behaviours and energy flows they employ. In other words, both groups of participants fuel the performance by engaging in it. By doing so, they influence and determine the course of the performance and keep the dynamic -the performance- in motion. In this sense, performance as an autopoietic feedback loop is a relational, self-generating phenomenon that is kept in motion by the same actions, behaviours and energy flows it produces.

Performance as a bodily act
As is noted earlier, the notion of bodily co-presence is of major importance in Fischer-Lichte’s conception of ‘performance’ as an autopoietic feedback loop. In fact, for Fischer-Lichte it is a prerequisite that performers and spectators are in each other’s physical presence for a performance to occur. Fischer-Lichte marking this co-presence as a fundamental condition of performance obviously problematizes the notion of mediatized performances, most notably performances on film such as Verdonk’s song in ‘De Leugen’. In Fischer-Lichte’s view it would be highly questionable that this is, in fact, a performance and not a mere recording of one. This particular problem concerning live versus mediatized performances and co-presence will be discussed later in this chapter, for now it is important to focus upon Fisher-Lichte’s view on the ‘bodily’ part of performances.
The bodily co-presence that constitutes performance points to a crucial quality of performance: the body, or more accurately, the corporeality of both the performer and the spectator. Central to the concept of corporeality is the notion that humans both have and are their bodies: “Humans have bodies, which they can manipulate and instrumentalize just like any other object. At the same time, they are their bodies, they are body-subjects.” (Fischer-Lichte 76) ‘Having a body’ emphasizes the understanding that bodies possess (incorporate) a semiotic quality -bodies can be made into meaningful objects-, while ‘being a body’ refers to the phenomenal quality of the body, a body ‘being-in-the-world’. In Fischer-Lichte’s view a performance generates exactly this corporeality; it brings forth the manipulated but nonetheless bodily existence of the performer and as such it enables the corporeal spectator to access (experience) the performance. For a performer then to generate corporeality, processes of embodiment and presence are immanent. (Fischer-Lichte 77)

Embodiment

In theatre studies, the term embodiment (or processes of embodiment) is one of historical depth; it deals with the relationship between actor and dramatic character and this relationship grounds many of the theatrical concepts and ideologies on acting through history. However, in performance studies the term ‘embodiment’ is deployed from an anthropological and phenomenological perspective, it refers to the conjunction of the mind and the body (as opposed to Cartesian dualism) and ultimately to the condition of cultural existence. Disregarding these overarching philosophical ramifications of the term, it is useful to take the notion of embodiment as to understand how performance manifests itself as both an aesthetic and cultural/social practice.

In line with the notion of corporeality, Fisher-Lichte states that a performer “cannot be severed from their material. They make their ‘artwork’ from a highly peculiar, even wilful material: their bodies or, (...) ‘the material of one’s own existence’.” (76) The materiality of one’s body thus serves as the locus of performance. The body is the site where the intangible conditions of performance, namely ‘consciousness’ and ‘relationality’, materialize and where the performance becomes (potentially) intelligible by others. In a process of embodiment, the performer more or less re-structures the
relationship between mind and body for semiotic purposes. The performer then engenders his/her phenomenal body as a semiotic body, as a cultural and meaningful object, while remaining a body-subject. In other words, a performance manifests itself through, with and because of the body: it is primarily an embodied practice.

Presence
As embodied practice, a performance is empowered by the presence of the performer. Where processes of embodiment are dominated by ‘having a body’, the notion of presence is more closely related to the phenomenal body of the performer, and consequently, to how that body is experienced by the spectators. Fisher-Lichte marks three discursive concepts of presence that accentuate different features of presence: weak, strong and radical concept of presence. The weak concept of presence deals with the physical implications of what it means ‘to be present’; it points to the sheer presence of the performer’s phenomenal body and the response that body induces in the spectator (erotic, comic, discomfort, etc.). The strong concept of presence entails ‘presentness’ generated by the performer in terms of sensations and energies, sensatory elements that in turn reflect upon the spectators:

“Through specific processes of embodiment, the actor [performer] can bring forth his phenomenal body in a way that enables him to command both space and the audience’s attention. (…) The spectators sense that the actor [performer] is present in an unusually intense way, granting them in turn an intense sensation of themselves as present. To them, presence occurs as an intense experience of presentness.”. (Fischer-Lichte 96)

The third concept of presence is labelled ‘radical presence’, and describes a type of presentness in which both performers and spectators emerge as embodied minds. Radical presence emphasizes the notion that in performance body and mind ‘meet and interact’ to generate and experience a performance. “Consequently, presence is not ‘primarily a physical but a mental phenomenon’ notwithstanding its physical effects on performers and audience”, as Fischer-Lichte states. (98) Presence can thus be understood as a process of consciousness, “one that is articulated through the body, and
sensed by the spectators through their bodies”. Hence, presence invokes the appearance of performers and spectators as embodied minds. (Fischer-Lichte 98-99) According to Fischer-Lichte this radical concept of presence is crucial in order to understand the workings of any notion of presence in performance: “Presence does not make something extraordinary appear. Instead, it marks the emergence of something very ordinary and develops it into an event; the nature of man as embodied mind.” (99)

To return to the encompassing notion of corporeality: processes of embodiment and presence are inherent to corporeality, or as Fischer-Lichte also describes, ‘the generation of materiality’. ‘To embody’ refers to employing the phenomenal body (‘being’) in a semiotic way (‘having’), and by doing so the body is manifested (present) as an embodied mind. These processes give way for the spectators to experience (as embodied minds) these bodies and to engage in the performance.

What resonates in these concepts and notions of the strategies of performance is the conception that embodiment and presence are the designated means to affect the spectator/other in a performance, to induce affective responses and bring about the feedback loop. Fischer-Lichte describes this in terms of ‘force’ and ‘energy’ emanating from the performer:

“The performer employs specific techniques and practices of embodiment enabling him to generate energy, which circulates between him and the spectators, immediately affecting the latter. The ‘magic’ of presence therefore lies in the performer’s particular ability to generate energy so that it can be sensed by the spectators as it circulates in space and affects, even tinges, them. This energy constitutes the force emanating from the performer.” (98)

In my view, this ability to affect the other through embodiment and presence is a crucial element to understand the workings of performance in general, and Verdonk’s performance in particular.
Verdonk’s performance

As is emphasized in the introduction, performance is ultimately an elusive concept, even “essentially contested” as Marvin Carlson states. There are many ways to understand, characterize or typify performance, but none of them seem to be sufficient (so far) to offer a common understanding of this type of human activity. My aim then here is not to propose an all-encompassing ontology of performance, but to localize certain ontological characteristics in the extensive span of performance discourse to understand the workings of performance, and Verdonk’s vocal performance in particular. In the above sections I have outlined three of these characteristics that can be regarded as the parameters by which this particular performance can be understood: Verdonk’s performance as 1) a conscious act, 2) a relational act and 3) a corporeal act.

The notion of performance as a conscious act is a useful starting point to analyze Verdonk’s performance. Unmistakably, Verdonk’s performance is an act in terms of ‘a doing’. Even more so, it is behaviour, a certain way of doing things. To apply Schechner’s terms: Verdonk’s particular behaviour in this performance is that of singing a song to give testimony, behaviour that is typical of the genre of musical (film or theatre). This typical behaviour thus exists independently from Verdonk; it has a life of its own as the topos of theatre- and film musical. This creates distance between Verdonk (as a documentary subject) and the behaviour she executes. So, what Verdonk actually does while singing is re-storing (re-arranging, re-inventing) typical musical behaviour -behaviour that is not naturally her own- into an idiosyncratic song. This requires a high degree of (self-) consciousness regarding the actions she ‘does’. Verdonk’s song can thus be understood as conscious(ly), restored behaviour.

Consciousness regarding one’s actions also grounds the claim that performance is essentially a relational act. Carlson’s concept of ‘consciousness of doubleness’ and its somewhat confusing construction of comparing ideal performances points to the understanding that performance is always for someone. As I have outlined earlier, this kind of consciousness works both ways; it can be directed outwards, in terms of expression and conveying meaning in addressing an audience, and it can be directed inwards by being aware of an observing and acknowledging audience. This ‘double consciousness’ applies to Verdonk’s performance in a prominent way; not only does she
give testimony in a certain conscious way (song) for an audience, she is highly aware of the existence of this audience she sings to, and that awareness reflects upon her actions. Hence, Verdonk’s performance is not only for someone but also because of someone watching.

Where Carlson’s notion of relationality resides in the consciousness that comes with performing, Fischer-Lichte’s conception of performance as an event locates its relationality in the actual manifestation of performance, somewhat as its driving force. To understand Verdonk’s performance as an event between performer and spectator is, in my view, very helpful to understand its workings, especially within the frame of a documentary film, which I will argue later on in this research. When Verdonk bursts out in song for (and because of) an audience, she invites the observer to engage in the performance by experiencing it, in other words, she brings about a feedback loop. As I will point out later, this feedback loop works on a different plane then Fischer-Lichte proposes since she argues that the dynamic of a feedback loop requires the physical co-presence of performer and spectator, which is not the case in Verdonk’s performance. Nevertheless, these processes of embodiment and presence (as an embodied mind) that constitute the feedback loop are equally immanent in Verdonk’s cinematic performance.

While singing, Verdonk exemplifies the notions of having a body and being a body: she uses her phenomenal body —emphasized by her singing voice— as an instrument to bring forth a meaningful body. And in Verdonk’s performance, this understanding of embodiment is even more profound since she essentially embodies her own persona; she transforms her own phenomenal body into a semiotic body that signifies herself. By employing her phenomenological body in song, Verdonk simultaneously marks her physical presence in the performance, as one does according to the weak concept of presence. Additionally, this act of singing can be considered a ‘specific process of embodiment’, a process that enables Verdonk to bring forth her phenomenal body in an intense way, which is consistent with the strong concept of presence. This intensity can, in my view, be ascribed to the particular qualities of the voice. The voice can be understood as something inherently pertaining to one’s phenomenological existence, in other words, a voice is something extremely personal and individual and to a certain degree difficult to manipulate. You can more or less change your appearance for semiotic
purposes, but you cannot change your voice, especially not as an untrained singer, like Verdonk is. By foregrounding her voice through song in a performance, Verdonk thus inherently accentuates her phenomenal existence and becomes present in a powerful way. In turn, this enables observers to experience Verdonk’s phenomenal presence in the performance in a powerful way, and the impact of that experience triggers a sense of presence in the observers as well. These two notions of presence (weak and strong) are immanent to the understanding of Verdonk being present as an embodied mind. Because she is marking and emphasizing her phenomenological presence, Verdonk inherently displays a sense of self-consciousness; she is aware of her presence, since it is a mindful and meaningful bodily presence. In the words of Fischer-Lichte, Verdonk thus articulates consciousness through her body, and emerges (in order to be recognized) as an embodied mind. So, as an embodied mind in the process of embodying her mind (!), Verdonk invokes a feedback loop and permits spectators then to experience this particular act of consciousness.

Within these parameters of performance, Verdonk’s song can thus be understood as a conscious, relational and, above all, corporeal act. These conditions seem to be cultivating the affective force of performance: the particular embodiment-strategy that Verdonk employs (singing) is directed towards inducing an affective response in the audience regarding her own persona. In other words, these notions of consciousness, relationality and corporeality are key elements to grasp and comprehend the strategy of Verdonk’s performance to affect an audience, and this affective force most notably crystallizes in her bodily presence. In any performance, processes of embodiment and presence are like two sides of a coin: one is always implied in the other. But as I have pointed out, in this particular performance the bond between ‘to embody’ and ‘being present’ is even more pervasive, since one practically validates the other. Verdonk’s performance originates in and is validated by the fact that she embodies herself. By embodying herself, she charges the feedback loop and permits an audience -a collective of embodied minds- to experience her in an affective, and consequently, a meaningful way. And in my understanding, it is also this affective force residing in Verdonk’s presence that dismisses Fischer-Lichte’s argument that performance requires physical co-presence.
**Live vs. mediatized performance**

For Fischer-Lichte, performance demands a performer and a spectator interacting in physical co-presence. She connects this physical co-presence with the notion that performance can only exist in the present. She derives this notion from performance theorist Peggy Phelan, who argues that

“performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other then performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.” (Phelan 1993, 146)

Both Phelan and Fischer-Lichte then endorse the notion that there is a fundamental conflict between live and mediatized performance. For Phelan, this conflict is grounded in the nature of performance as a transitory phenomenon as it can only exist in a particular moment in time: “Performance’s being (...) becomes itself through disappearance.” (Phelan 146) To store a performance by recording it would then “only highlight the unbridgeable chasm between the performance and a fixed reproducible artefact”. (Fischer-Lichte 75) According to Phelan it is then impossible to speak about documented (mediatized) performances, since performances are by definition not artefacts, nor can they be reproduced. Fischer-Lichte agrees with Phelan as she states that “performance does not consist of fixed, transferable, and material artefacts; it is fleeting, transient, and exists only in the present”. However, Fischer-Lichte does acknowledge that performances can be documented, but “such documentations rather create the possibilities to speak about past performances”. (75)

The keyword in this conflict between live and mediatized performance is ‘presence’. For Fischer-Lichte, a feedback loop cannot emerge if performers and spectators are separated in time and/or space. This can be traced back to her understanding of performance as ‘a reciprocal relationship of influence’: if performers and spectators are separated by time and space, they cannot respond to one another and energy flows between them cannot emerge. In effect, they cannot influence let alone constitute a feedback loop. In that sense, mediatized performance can only exists as ‘past performance’, since Fischer-Lichte regards it as a mere recording of a performance/
feedback loop that has emerged between performer and whoever physically present ‘at the scene’ interacting in bodily co-presence. Fischer-Lichte thus grounds the conflict between live and mediatized performance in what she regards as the absence of presence in the latter that consequently denies a feedback loop:

“A new dichotomy has emerged between live performance constituted by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators and the autopoietic feedback loop and mediatized performances which sever the co-existence of production and reception. Mediatized performance invalidates the feedback loop.” (Fischer-Lichte 68)

If mediatized performances are in fact past-performances, constituted by the dynamic between performer and spectator present, where does that leave the viewers of these past-performances? In Fischer-Lichte’s argument these viewers would be put ‘out of play’; they do not partake in the performance but are mere bystanders. This understanding indicates that these viewers cannot establish a relationship with ‘mediatized performers’, since they are not present for the performers as spectators and reversely, the performers are not present for the viewers as well. The question then arises, where do these viewers then respond to? Fischer-Lichte states that where live performance depends on the generation of presence, mediatized performance brings forth an impression of that presence. Technological and electronic media “create the impression of presentness without actually bringing forth these bodies of objects as present. With the help of technology they are able to make the promise of presence.” (Fischer-Lichte 100) According to Fischer-Lichte, viewers of mediatized performances thus respond to an illusion of bodily presence, created by technological and electronic media. “Human bodies (…) are made to seem present in a particularly immediate manner but they remain constituted only of moving lights or pixel arrangements on a screen. Real human bodies (…) remain absent anywhere on the movie, television or computer screen.” (Fischer-Lichte 100) The responses that these illusions of presence induce in the viewers can be “intense” and “overwhelming”, however; “the illusion does not bring forth the performer’s phenomenal body as present.” (100) Here, I disagree with Fischer-Lichte,
I would argue that this ‘illusion’ does bring forth a phenomenal body as present, albeit in an affective instead of a physical way.

In his study ‘Liveness. Performance in a mediatized culture’ (2008a [1999]) Phillip Auslander explores the relationship between live and mediatized performance. And unlike Phelan and Fischer-Lichte, he argues against any fundamental dichotomy between these two ‘possibilities of performance’. He questions if there really are “clear-cut ontological distinctions” between live and mediatized performance. (Auslander 2008a, 7)

According to Auslander, we need to regard the (in)difference of live and mediatized performance within the context of contemporary, highly mediatized culture. He then makes two significant claims regarding live and mediatized performance and their relationship within this particular contemporary context. First, he states that live and mediatized performances are not mutually exclusive phenomena, but that live performance gradually has assimilated features of mediatized performance, or in other words, applied ‘technologies of reproduction’. “Live performance now often incorporates mediatization to the degree that the live event itself is a product of media technologies.” (2008a 25) Auslander provides examples such as the amplifying of voices in musical performance, the use of video monitors during a sports event or video projections in a theatre performance. With these examples of ‘hybrid performances’, Auslander points out that the ‘liveness’ and ‘immediacy’ of an event is not determined by inherent qualities of the performance itself, but rather by the way the spectators experience an event. Then secondly, Auslander states that the experiences of ‘liveness’ are historically mutable; what constitutes as an experience of ‘liveness’ within media culture changes over time. “The default definition of live performance is that it is the kind of performance in which the performers and the audience are both physically and temporally co-present to one another. But over time, we have come to use ‘live’ to describe performances that do not meet those basic conditions.” (2008a, 60)

Here Auslander refers to performances that are labelled ‘live broadcasts’ or ‘live recordings’, i.e. performances that show variations in the time/space coordinates. With these claims Auslander supports his notion that the definition of ‘liveness’ and ‘immediacy’ in performance is not due to the ontology of performance, but to the circumstances of contemporary media culture in which performance is experienced:
"[W]e cannot treat the qualities traditionally assigned to live performance that putatively differentiate it from technologically mediated performance as inherent or ontological characteristics. They are, rather, phenomenological and historically defined. They are phenomenological (as opposed to ontological) in the sense that they are not characteristics of performance itself but things experienced and felt by performers and spectators. (...) [And] historically defined in that both our experience of liveness and our understanding of what counts as a live performance change continually over time to the development of new media technologies.” (Auslander 2008b, 108-9)

By stating that live and mediatized performance are ontologically indifferent, Auslander stands in direct opposition to Fischer-Lichte. Their conflicting positions regarding live and mediatized performance originate in a different understanding of the notion of, again, presence. What resonates in Fischer-Lichte’s argument is that she regards ‘presence’ as inseparable from ‘physicality’; one needs to be physically present to generate bodily presence that fuels a feedback loop that in turn constitutes a performance. Auslander, however, connects the generation of ‘presence’ with his notion of liveness and immediacy, and defines it as primarily an ‘affective experience’:

“[L]iveness can no longer be defined purely in terms of either the presence of living human beings before each other or physical and temporal relationship between them. The emerging definition of liveness [i.e. immediacy, JR] may be built primarily around the audience’s affective experience.”. (Auslander 2008b, 112)

To regard ‘presence’ as an essentially affective experience, or for that matter something that induces an affective experience, is crucial in order to understand Verdonk’s performance in terms of a dynamic or a feedback loop between Verdonk and an audience. If the generation of bodily presence in a performance is not bounded (anymore) by co-existence within a specific time and space frame, but can transcend that frame by means of media and affect audiences separated in time and space, then ‘mediated bodily presence’ can charge a feedback loop and enable audiences to affectively engage in a performance. This understanding then implies that a feedback loop
is not propelled by interactivity on a physical level, but works more on a plane of consciousness; performers and spectators engage as embodied minds in a performance by being conscious of each others (bodily) presence. And somewhat ironically, this understanding of presence can be directly linked to Fischer-Lichte's conception of presence as a process of consciousness, “one that is articulated through the [mediated, JR] body, and sensed by the spectators through their bodies”, to quote Fischer-Lichte once more.

Thus by understanding presence as essentially an affective experience instead of an physical phenomenon, and in effect, understanding the feedback loop that is performance as something that involves interaction on a level of consciousness instead of interaction that requires physical co-presence, it can be stated that Verdonk’s (mediated) performance manifests itself as a dynamic between Verdonk as an embodied mind and the audience as an (anonymous) collective of embodied minds. So, within the three parameters of performance I have outlined in this chapter, Verdonk’s performance functions as a feedback loop. Or, to put it differently, Verdonk’s performance is and works as a performance, because it is a conscious, relational and corporeal act that cultivates its power to affect audiences separated in time and space.

**Performance and performativity**

This conception of performance, and in particular its affective force, needs to be regarded within the context of ‘performativity’: the theoretical concept that entails the underlying condition of, among other phenomena, performance. In light of this research, the concept of performativity provides an understanding of how performance is able to affect audiences. In this section I will briefly explore this notion of performativity, and relate it to Verdonk’s performance, in order to understand how this performance calls something ‘into the world’ that affects audiences.

The concept of performativity has its roots in the field of linguistics, where linguistic philosopher J.L. Austin coined the term and explored its usage. In a series of lectures at Harvard University (1955)

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4 These lectures were posthumously published in 1962 under the title ‘How to do things with words’.
linguistic utterances; he distinguishes performative speech sequences from constative one’s. He states that performative utterances are not just statements concerning actions, or reflect consequences of actions, these utterances are actions in themselves. They are actions in the sense that they “change the world effectively”, or, “bring forth the social reality they are referring to”, to quote Fischer-Lichte on this matter. (24) To use performatives in speech thus practically means that one is not only saying something, but inherently, one is also doing something. Examples of performatives that Austin provides are marry a couple (‘I pronounce you…’) or christening a ship (‘I name this ship…’).

So, when these utterances are expressed (albeit by the appropriate person under the right conditions), a couple is married or a ship bears a name, i.e. these utterances have made a difference in reality, they have invoked something in the world, they have done something. (Austin 1-9: Fischer-Lichte 24-25: Loxley 2-3)

The notion of performativity as constituting while uttering reality is also explored elsewhere, namely in the field of gender studies, and most notably by feminist scholar Judith Butler. While she does not refer directly to Austin, her study ‘Gender trouble’ (1990) can be understood in light of this Austinian notion of performativity. In this study Butler uses the concept of performativity as a theoretical resource to understand how social identities are constructed and performed, and in particular (deviating) gender identities. She states that gender

“ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.” (Butler 191)

According to Butler, the stylized repetition of acts reiterates one’s gender identity; they constitute gender identity while uttering it. Hence, one’s gender identity is not to be regarded as a result of expressing or referring to one’s sex and gender as a pre-existing
norm or value, rather, gender identity is created "in being performed, bringing about the entity, the 'I', to which [it] refers." (Loxley 119)

In Butlers reworking of 'the performative' towards 'being performative', she stresses the condition of embodiment. Butler points out that the constituting of identity (by performative acts) always occurs in a process of embodiment, where she describes embodiment as "a manner of doing, dramatizing and reproducing a historical situation." (Fischer-Lichte 27) In this sense, stylized repetitive acts are restraint by specific cultural and historical norms regarding sex and gender, and these specific norms are marked (as valid or invalid) and generated by the body. So, by means of the culturally and historically inscribed performative acts that are articulated by the cultural and historical marked body, one constitutes a gender identity. To construct one’s individual gender identity through performative acts is a somewhat ambiguous process, it can be regarded as an interplay between agency and convention. As Fischer-Lichte points out: “on the one hand, society violates the individual bodies by imposing performative acts that constitute gender and identity. On the other hand, performative acts offer the possibility for individuals to embody themselves, even if this means deviating from the dominant norms and provoking social sanctions.” (27-8) However ultimately, performative acts do have the power to collapse these cultural and historical boundaries, for they bring something into the world, whether according to or regardless of social norms; they bring forth an identity. (Fischer-Lichte 27-8; Loxley 119-20)

There is much more to the concept of performativity relating to identity and subjectivity then outlined above, however, these are the premises of performativity that have inscribed the field of performance studies in theorizing performance. Within the frame of performance studies, the notion of performativity as the process of constituting social reality is to be regarded as the underlying condition of performance as social, cultural or aesthetic practice. Or as Elin Diamond states;“performativity materializes as performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations), between someone’s body and the conventions of embodiment (...).”. And when that happens, she argues, one has access to cultural meanings and critique. (69) In this sense, the affective power of performance stems from the performative nature of these
(conscious, relational, corporeal) acts: that these particular acts invoke something in reality that can be experienced, recognized, interpreted, critiqued, etc. Then to point out the performative nature of Verdonk’s performance, one could state that while singing, Verdonk performs herself as a subject. Through her stylized acts (i.e., singing a song to give testimony in the tradition of musical) articulated by her body, Verdonk utters a performative version of herself, she brings forth her subjectivity while referring to it by embodying it. And it is this performance of subjectivity (presence?) that executes the power to affect audiences, and, in the terms of Diamond, granting them access to cultural meanings and critique. Thus in Verdonk’s performance, the affective power of her performance can be located in the notion that Verdonk is not just being herself, she does her persona, she calls her subjectivity into being by performing it through song and by bringing it into the world.

§1.2 Authentic performance

The first section of this chapter was dedicated to laying out the groundwork for understanding the workings of Verdonk’s performance. So far, I have argued that Verdonk’s performance of song can be understood as a conscious, relational and corporeal act that, in accordance with the performative nature of this act, brings forth a social reality that affects audiences. To move from here towards an understanding of authentic performance, the immanent question is: how does this performance, as understood along these parameters, bring forth the possibilities to render this performance as authentic? Or in other words, how can these features of performance (conscious, relational, corporeal) be administered in order to provide an authentic representation? To answer this question, it is important to first establish what kind of authenticity is at stake here.

In performance studies, the term authenticity bears several meanings, somewhat alongside the performance spectrum from ‘is’ to ‘as’ performance, or from aesthetic to cultural/social performance. With regards to the performing arts, on one end of the spectrum the term authenticity is usually deployed to indicate the degree in which the ‘work’ is consistent with its ‘original’. For example, the way an orchestra performs a
score composed by Mozart, or the way an theatre director stages a play written by Shakespeare. (Rubidge 13) One could then speak of the authentic performance of a work, which is a markedly ‘text-based approach’ in correlating authenticity with performance. In performance art, the notion of authenticity is more related to the performers as performative beings, instead of the work or text they perform. As Erin Striff points out: “the performers themselves become the text to be read. We are, in fact, encouraged to read the artist as being fundamentally present in his or her own work, frequently through the expressions of their bodies.” (9) Here, authenticity can then be understood more in terms of originality and expressiveness then of historical accuracy. Both of these notions of authenticity are mostly adhering to the artistic values of performance. At the other end of the spectrum, in social and cultural performance, authenticity is more closely related to the notion of yielding truth, or the way in which a performance is grounded in or in accordance with social reality. And it is this notion of authenticity that is central to this research. The question of authenticity in this chapter than focuses on the way Verdonk utilizes the means of performance to invoke something truthful or genuine in social reality.

**Authenticity and sincerity**

In ‘The presentation of self in everyday life’ Erving Goffman explores the notion of performance as social practice and additionally how social performance relates to authenticity. He asserts that in (social) performance, individuals always try to govern the impressions they impose on others. And reversely, ‘others’ invest a sense of truthfulness in this impression, or as Goffman puts it; “They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be.” (28) The authenticity of this impression relies for a great deal on the individual’s attitude towards his/her performance, whether or not he/she believes in this ‘impression of reality’. Goffman qualifies this belief in terms of being sincere and being cynical towards a performance. When a performer is convinced that his/her performance is grounded in fidelity, instead of falsehood, and is invested in the beliefs of the audiences, he/she is sincere. But when the performer is sceptical about ‘the
realness’ of the performance, and consciously deluding his/her audience, the performer is cynical:

“When the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience, we may call him cynical, reserving the term ‘sincere’ for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance”. (Goffman 28)

Goffman thus argues that it is a matter of the performer’s sincerity whether a performance is considered authentic or not. And this is a helpful vantage point to explore the authenticity of Verdonk’s performance. The task in this section thus lies in exploring the ways in which the audience is led to believe that Verdonk is sincere in her performance. Or to put it differently, how the performance strategy implies that Verdonk believes in the truthfulness of it.

Verdonk’s performance of sincerity

The most prominent feature of Verdonk’s performance is her act of song. In the first part of this chapter I argued that, following Schechner, this act of song can be understood as conscious, re-stored behaviour. Verdonk adapted the typical behaviour of ‘musical’ that is not her own, and reinvented this ‘raw material’ into a new idiosyncratic performance. And as I pointed out earlier, this re-storing implies that Verdonk is highly self-conscious of her behaviour, since it is consciously constructed behaviour. This self-consciousness then feeds the notion that Verdonk in fact authorizes her performance: that she is in accordance with executing this behaviour in this particular way and with the purpose of it, i.e. give testimony for an audience. And in effect, this authorization grounds the understanding that Verdonk is sincere in her performance, since she endorses it.

Even more so than ‘just’ acknowledging the (self-)consciousness that is implied in the act of song, this act accentuates Verdonk’s corporeality that comes with performing. As specified earlier, processes of embodiment and presence are the designated means in performance to affect audiences, and in Verdonk’s performance these processes are marking the performance as sincere in a prominent way. As stated, the act of song can be considered a ‘specific process of embodiment’, a process wherein Verdonk attracts
attention towards her phenomenological existence and effectively empowers her presence. And because she is embodying her ‘self’, this phenomenological presence validates her ‘semiotic presence’. That is, Verdonk’s semiotic body signifies her phenomenological body, and this understanding feeds the notion that Verdonk is sincere in her performance. This sense of sincerity is even more profound considered Verdonk’s act of singing. Her (untrained) voice employed in singing is intimately connected with her body, with her phenomenological existence. It discloses intimate features of Verdonk as a ‘being-in-the-world’ that are difficult to masquerade. Even literally, singing brings the inside out through vocal cords and respiratory systems. So, singing in performance implies that one ‘opens up’ in front of the other, to affect the other in a personal way. In this sense, the act of singing as an embodiment strategy then not only accentuates Verdonk’s body as being present, but it also accentuates Verdonk’s vulnerability as an individual. This vulnerability contributes to the sincerity of Verdonk’s performance: by embodying herself in a vulnerable way, Verdonk engenders the sense that she believes in the truthfulness of her own performance, and that she is invested in the beliefs of her audience that she is sincere and not cynical.

By following this particular embodiment strategy, Verdonk charges the feedback loop with a sense of sincerity and truthfulness. She enables audiences to affectively engage in the performance and in effect, induces an experience of sincerity in them. She accomplishes that by bringing herself forth as a sincere body-subject, or in other words, she constitutes this sincerity as social reality, to which the audience affectively responds and renders her performance as sincere. Concluding, Verdonk’s performance can be understood as a conscious, relational and corporeal act that brings forth the social reality of Verdonk’s sincerity that affects audiences. It is and works as authentic performance, because it cultivates its affective powers to induce a sense of sincerity in the audience.
Part II- The phenomenology of authentic performance

Where in the first part of this research Verdonk’s performance as a channelling device was central, this second part is dedicated to exploring the experience of that performance, a shift to the other end of the feedback loop so to speak. I have argued so far that Verdonk’s ‘performance of authenticity’ is informed by the affective force residing in Verdonk’s cinematic presence. To utilize ‘performance’ as a means of authentic representation is then to cultivate this affective force by following a particular embodiment strategy that foregrounds one’s phenomenological existence, which in Verdonk’s case is the act of song. This embodiment strategy is directed towards inducing affective responses (experiences) in audiences, responses that are aligned with the sincere nature of the performance. Performance as a means of authentic representation is therefore concerned with charging the dynamic between performer and spectator with sincerity and governing that sense of sincerity experienced by the spectators. What resonates in this argument is that performance as a type of human activity does not deal with issues of artificiality and authenticity in itself, but rather with a certain attitude towards these matters (sincere or cynical), and this attitude results in employing performance space. In other words, the artificiality of Verdonk’s cinematic performance is not so much informed by the act of performing an sich, but more by the fictional or irreal space in which this performance takes place, i.e. artificial space where Verdonk can burst out in song to give testimony. So, to question the ways in which Verdonk’s performance is experienced as authentic is to question how the fictional space of the performance is experienced and identified as real documentary space. And in this chapter, this question is most immanent and will be addressed by following film phenomenologist Vivian Sobchack’s approach regarding identifying cinematic imagery.

Phenomenological approach

On distinguishing real from irreal space in film, Sobchack states that to differentiate documentary from fiction based on the characteristics of representational (textual)
forms, such as performance, is ‘presupposed’; “and it is this presupposition that (…) our actual experience of taking up a film image as real or irreal puts into question.” (2004, 267) Therefore, Sobchack opts for a “pragmatic and phenomenological perspective” in distinguishing documentary and fictional space:

“…that is, from a perspective that recognizes the dynamics and contingency of actual viewing experiences and from these experiences goes on to thematize and interpret some of the conditions under which the cinematic image may be ‘charged’ for us with an embodied and subjective sense of what counts as the existential and objective ‘real’.” (2004, 268)

As stated in the introduction, phenomenology “seeks (…) the meaning of experience as it is lived in context.” Regarding this quest for the meaning of embodied experience: the phenomenological approach Sobchack endorses provides a very pragmatic account of investigating embodied experience. To conduct phenomenological research, Sobchack states, the first step is to describe a particular experience, and move from there towards explicating “general or possible structures and meanings that inform the experience and make it potentially resonant an inhabitable for others.” A phenomenological account of a specific experience is in that sense successful, or accurate, when others (readers) are able to comprehend the structures at hand in this particular experience, even without actually having this (kind of) experience, or attribute similar value to it. (Sobchack 2004, 5)

The practice of describing a particular experience as a point of departure in phenomenological research involves drawing primarily from personal autobiographical experience, and this practice can raise suspicion, as Sobchack acknowledges. But in the realm of phenomenology Sobchack legitimizes this autobiographical account of embodied experience:

“Indeed, grounding social claims in autobiographical and anecdotal experience is not merely a fuzzy and subjective substitute for rigorous and objective analysis but purposefully provides the phenomenological – and embodied- premises for a more
processual, expansive, and resonant materialist logic through we, as subjects, can understand (and perhaps guide) what passes as our objective historical and cultural existence.” (2004, 6)

Basically, since phenomenology focuses on the meaning of experience ‘as it is embodied and lived in context’, the autobiographical account of experience is the designated portal to investigate this. Also the concept of the ‘objective subject’ invests in the legitimacy of autobiographical account of experience. Since we are all embodied entities, and therefore subjective objects - or objective subjects -, subjectivity can be considered as something social and mutual instead of individual. (Sobchack 2004, 4, 6) Other embodied experiences and its structures are in that light something that we can all relate to (‘inhabit’) because we are subjective in ourselves, the subjective experience becomes incorporated, objectified and knowable. Or, as Sobchack puts is, quoting Rosi Braidotti:

“subjectivity is a socially mediated process. Consequently, the emergence of new social subjects is always a collective enterprise, ’external’ to the self while it also mobilizes the self’s in-depth structures.”. (2004, 6)

In sum, the autobiographical account of particular embodied experience does not devaluate phenomenological inquiry, but is the site from where experience can be put in context of historical and cultural knowledge, and to define the ‘general and possible’ structures to make the experience inhabitable for other (embodied) subjective objects/ objective subjects, not despite but rather because of its subjective nature. In the following sections I will use the phenomenological approach that Sobchack proposes to distillate important structures that govern the experience of authenticity in Verdonk’s performance in the film ‘De Leugen’. First by describing my particular (idiosyncratic) cinematic experience, followed by contextualizing this experience to point out certain structures that inform this specific experience of authenticity.
§ 2.1 embodied experience of Verdonk’s performance

To give an autobiographical account of an experience is to verbalize that experience. Sobchack follows Paul Ricoeur on this matter, whom she quotes; “Ordinary language (…) appears to me (…) to be a kind of conservatory for expressions which have preserved the highest descriptive power [regarding] human experience …”. (2004, 5) Sobchack opts to (linguistically) draw from sources that use ordinary language, sources like reviews, interviews, advertisements and the like, since they “not only foreground the vitality of ordinary language but also suggest a certain common or general understanding of certain embodied experiences- and point to their broad resonance even as they never strike the same chords in every body.” (2004, 6) Therefore, in the following section I will describe my own embodied experience of Verdonk’s performance, and support that description with verbalized accounts of similar experiences from (selected) sources in the field of public media, such as newspapers, magazines, etc.

Experiencing Verdonk’s song

As a (embodied) spectator, it was hard to enter this cinematic experience of Verdonk as a singing subject as a blank slate. The fact that politicians, and most surprisingly Rita Verdonk, would sing in this film was emphasized in probably every instance of its media coverage. In fact, it was even presented as the main attraction to go see this film -“this is what makes (the) documentary not to be missed”. (Driessen 2010, 81) So, not only made this information the viewer, myself, highly curious about the sight of a singing Verdonk, but while watching the film also full of anticipation, almost to a distracting degree. And yet, when the moment arrived and Verdonk’s voice could be heard in song for the first time, I was caught off guard by an experience that elicited a broad spectrum of (emotional) responses.

Unmistakably, the encounter with a singing Verdonk is weird at first, mostly because the sight of it is so unorthodox and unconventional in documentary film, as I argued in the introduction. While the scene with Verdonk is not the first scene involving a singing politician in ‘De Leugen’ - Hilbrand Nawijn and Femke Halsema preceded her- it took a moment for me as a viewer me to shift back into the ‘musical mode’. As a response to
the initial weirdness of this 'musical mode', the confrontation with Verdonk singing is something quite uncomfortable and slightly embarrassing. Like Kees Driessen states; “it is indeed on the edge of cringing, but never quite over it”. (2010, 81) This awkwardness seems to be less due to the ‘singing in documentary’ in itself than to the display of sincere emotions by Verdonk by means of the singing.

With her deep tone of voice, Verdonk sings the words of the song in a quite fragile and vulnerable manner, and this imparts an emotional tension onto the viewer (myself). And it is this tension that makes the encounter so uncomfortable, for this vulnerability and intimacy does not match with the image of the ‘hard-boiled’ and unsentimental politician that Verdonk incarnated up until then. “Immediately they become humans of flesh and blood again, fallible and vulnerable” as Kevin Toma describes in his review of the film. “For nobody can express themselves as personally and intimately as by a song, even if that song is written by someone else”. (De Volkskrant)

By singing this particular song, Verdonk is - or appears to me as - very frank about her personal, emotional experience. She seems to let her guard down. This is of such disarming and moving quality that in effect it gives weight to the words that she sings. Or more precisely, it confirms and adds an emotional dimension to her statements regarding her experiences that she made earlier in the film, in the more conventional setting of conversation. In these conversations she talks about and refers to her loneliness and the betrayal by people she considered her allies, perhaps even her friends. But in the song, in my perception, she clearly mediates her feelings of loneliness, hurt and disappointment in a genuine way. In an interview by Pieter van Os, when asked to illuminate his choice for song, director Robert Oey states that his intention was to pierce through the masks of these politicians:

“Behind the cardboard images of politicians there are persons hidden, interesting individuals with serious dilemmas. To really make these dilemmas heard, the conventional way of interviewing is not very suitable, because then they just pop back into their trained mode. (…) And when these masks have dropped, I hope it becomes visible that these politicians are people that, even more than others, want to be right, but above all eagerly crave for love.
Everybody needs to love them, over and over again. That goes for Ayaan, for Rita and yes, for Femke as well.” (NRC Handelsblad)

In sum, by singing her song and displaying her feelings of loneliness, hurt and disappointment, Verdonk aims for empathy in what Oey describes as a longing for love, and is quite successful in achieving that. Her singing account of her experiences mediate not only her intimate feelings about the affair concerning Hirsi Ali, but it also endorses the words she sings, and by that gains empathy and sympathy from the viewer. This experience of emotionality and, in effect, authenticity in Verdonk’s performance puts the viewer to the task to relate to Verdonk anew, despite previous thoughts, values and interpretations. When asked about her experiences regarding her contribution to this film right after it premiered, Verdonk answers; “For me, it felt like rehabilitation. I wanted to show that I was an honest (‘integer’) politician. I was [like] that back then, and I still am now. I didn’t participate in all the lies and the games. And I have nothing to confess in this film. Other than that the whole thing was very difficult for me.”

(Nederlands Film Festival)

§2.2 experience of authenticity lived in context

In the previous section, the cinematic encounter with Verdonk as a singing subject is explored and verbalized, in order to describe the ways in which the experience of her performance feels authentic. In this second paragraph, the focus is shifted towards the matter of how this experience can be considered or ‘taken up’ as real or truthful and the task is to define the structures at hand in this particular experience of authenticity. As is argued in the introduction, the experience of vocal performance as authentic is problematized, because it challenges fundamental (and textual) notions of authentic representation in documentary film. Sobchack, however, argues that identifying cinematically

5 Interestingly enough, this particular fragment of footage clearly shows the ‘trained mode’ Robert Oey refers to when politicians are being interviewed. In answering the questions of the reporter, instead of replying in a way that is spontaneous and emotionally charged, Verdonk seems to deliver with these words like it was a pre-cooked, politically motivated statement that would not be misplaced in some election-campaign. So, in order to maintain her credibility as the sincere politician without a hidden agenda, maybe she should have sung it.
images as real or irreal does not depend on its textual features, but that it entails an “experienced difference in our consciousness, our attention towards and our valuation of the cinematic objects we engage.” (2004, 261) In a preliminary essay to ‘Carnal Thoughts’, titled “Towards a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience” (1999), Sobchack explores these different ‘modes of consciousness’ in identifying cinematic images. She draws upon the work of psychologist Jean-Pierre Meunier, who structured film experience in three discursive modes of spectatorial consciousness and corresponding cinematic objective forms: home-movie, documentary and fiction.

Spectatorial consciousness

Sobchack’s differentiation in spectatorial modes of consciousness starts by pointing out that “the necessary condition of all films as they are experienced is their presentation of objects to perception that are not physically present to us except in their form as images.” (1999, 242) Spectators engage in images of objects, as opposed to physically present objects. Which is not to say that all cinematic images are irreal because they are physically absent, but rather that the reality or irreality of the cinematic image is ”always modified by our personal and cultural knowledge of an object’s existential position as it relates to our own.” (Sobchack 1999, 242, emphasis in original) This ‘personal and cultural knowledge’ regarding the existential status of an image shapes our spectatorial consciousness by which we engage in a cinematic experience; it provides an certain ‘attitude’ or ‘bias’ toward the cinematic image that reflects upon ourselves as existential subjects. Or in Sobchack’s words: “The attitude of our consciousness toward the cinematic object simultaneously positions us as existential subjects in relation to the screen and posits the existential status of what we see there in relation to what we have experienced and know of the life-world we inhabit.” (1999, 243)

Sobchack thus defines, following Meunier, three different modes of spectatorial attitude or consciousness that structure the relationship between image and spectator, alongside what she defines as ‘the spectrum of cinematic identification’. On one end of the spectrum she posits the home-movie, or preferably labelled film-souvenir. When

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spectators engage in cinematic images as film-souvenirs, their knowledge regarding the image -knowledge that is more personal than cultural- foregrounds the specificity of the image and its existential status as part of the spectator's own (past or present) life-world: “(…) we take up these images as existentially and specifically known to us already – as referring to beings and things and events that exist now or once existed ‘elsewhere’ than solely on the screen.” (Sobchack 1999, 243) This consciousness regarding the image allows the image to activate certain memories into the spectator, and the image becomes a “channelling device through which the viewer evokes and identifies not with the mimetic image, but with an absent person or past event.” (Sobchack 1999, 247) In that sense, spectatorial ‘film-souvenir’-consciousness restructures the relationship between spectator and image as ‘from the same life-world’, and thus ‘real’, based on the existential knowledge of the spectator regarding the specificity of the image.

On the other end of the spectrum Sobchack marks fictional images, and, unlike the images of the film-souvenir, these images bear no specificity for the spectators: fictional images only exists in the realm of the (narrative) fictional world on-screen. So, where the film-souvenir image guides the spectator’s attention through the image to evoke memories, the attention of the spectator engaged in a fictional image is solely focused on the image itself. As Sobchack states: “(…) the images of fiction are experienced as directly given to us, and they exist not ‘elsewhere’, but ‘here’ in the virtual world that is ‘there’ before us.” In other words, in identifying fictional images we are more “screen dependent” or screen-orientated for specific knowledge regarding the image. (1999, 243, emphasis in original)

The third category of spectatorial consciousness that Sobchack differentiates is aligned with documentary images, and takes in the ‘intermediate’ position on the spectrum of cinematic identification. Identifying documentary images also entails modifying our -less personal then cultural- knowledge regarding the image, and, moreover, our partial lack thereof regarding the image. “That is, (…) aspects of what we see are taken up by us as unknown in their existential specificity, yet because we have some general knowledge of them, their past or present existence is posited by us nonetheless -, if, however, always in a way qualified by our lack of personal knowledge.” (Sobchack 1999, 243) Unlike the film-souvenir image, the documentary
image does not evoke personal memories of things already known to us, but allows the spectator then to learn about the cinematic object while viewing the film. So, the spectator’s attention is not directed through the image, as is the case in film-souvenir due to personal knowledge, but focused on the cinematic image itself, that is nonetheless, -and in alignment with general, cultural knowledge-, posited (and identified) as part of the shared life-world. “(…) [H]owever much our cultural knowledge informs us that who and what we see on the screen are partial aspects of a ‘real’ and more general existential ensemble, insofar as we do not ourselves have existential experiences of the persons or events we see on the screen, our specific knowledge of these persons and events is contemporaneous with our viewing of the film.” (Sobchack 1999, 249)

These three modes of spectator consciousness, shaped and modified by personal and cultural knowledge (or lack thereof), sustain Sobchack’s main argument: that cinematic identification does not depend on textual features of the cinematic image, but rather on the spectator’s consciousness and, in effect, experience of that image. In this sense, and as Sobchack exemplifies in her essay, what counts as irreal fiction for one spectator can evoke personal memories related to those images for another, and therefore function as a film-souvenir. Or as one spectator’s home-video can be experienced as a ‘unsatisfactory’ or plain boring documentary by a spectator who is unfamiliar with these images and does not have personal (specific) knowledge regarding the events depicted. As Sobchack points out, and this goes for all kind of cinematic images, “a ‘documentary’ is not a thing, but a subjective relationship to a cinematic object. It is the viewer’s consciousness that finally determines what kind of cinematic object it is.” (1999, 251)

**Documentary consciousness**

In the chapter ‘The Charge of the Real’ in ‘Carnal Thoughts’, Sobchack further explores the documentary mode of consciousness, and relates it to experienced differences in cinematic space. Sobchack defines ‘documentary consciousness’ here as “a particular mode of embodied and ethical spectatorship that informs and transforms the space of the irreal into the space of the real”. (2004, 261) In this definition the phenomenological claim resonates that human experience is always embodied: body and consciousness, object and subject, are intertwined in making ‘meaningful sense’. And inherently,
embodied experience is constrained by incorporated (embodied) historical and cultural knowledge. So, as Sobchack argues, and in alignment with her previous exploration of this concept, ‘documentary consciousness’ -being inherent to particular embodied viewing experiences- manifests itself by means of embodied knowledge regarding the existential, shared world. Furthermore, she states that ‘documentary consciousness’ also entails an ethical dimension in the embodied viewing experience since the experience is ethically charged as well. (2004, 268) In the following sections the experience of Verdonk’s performance, as has been described earlier, will be analyzed in terms of ‘documentary consciousness’, to point out that although Verdonk's performance occurs in irreal space, the particular structures inhabiting the spectator’s ‘documentary consciousness’ pulls the performance back into real and ethically charged space, i.e. documentary space.

Extracinematic knowledge of the image
In the verbalized accounts of Verdonk’s performance, there appears to be some consensus in experiencing Verdonk’s song, especially regarding the initial weirdness of it, the awkwardness regarding the display of sentiment and the surprise of an honest and ‘human’ account of her emotions. For example, Kees Driessen uses the word “cringing” and Kevin Toma notes that “suddenly they [the politicians] become humans of flesh and blood again, fallible and vulnerable”. All these accounts indicate that the experience of Verdonk’s performance is shaped, in Sobchack terms, by our ‘extracinematic’ and ‘extratextual’ knowledge: the historical and cultural knowledge that is incorporated outside of the reality of the cinematic world. (2004, 268, 271) Since Rita Verdonk is in fact a public figure, more specifically a controversial politician burdened with a persistent image, there is a lot of extracinematic knowledge available regarding her persona. Taking this extracinematic knowledge ‘into account’, it appears to be difficult to experience Verdonk as a performing subject in irreal space independently from the experiences of her political persona in real space, moreover since she embodies both. This cinematic image of Verdonk performing in irreal space will thus always be perceived (‘taken up’) in the context of -“both socially conventional and personally idiosyncratic” - embodied,
extracinematic knowledge, and consequently, this puts the existential status of the image (real or irreal) into question. (Sobchack 2004, 272)

On applying extracinematic knowledge in cinematic experience, Sobchack uses the metaphor of bracketing. When we are engaged in a (verisimilar) fictional cinematic experience, we bracket the existential status of the image: we put the irreality of it “out of play” or on the “sidelines” of consciousness. However, when our embodied knowledge raises this existential status of the image to our conscious attention, as is the case in the vocal performance of Verdonk, the existential status of the image is un-bracketed:

“When we are alienated from (…) our engagement in a fiction, we no longer bracket our sense of the real; our consciousness of our own life world intrudes on the fictional world and restructures it. The result is that a supposedly fictional space is experienced – and evaluated- as documentary space.” (Sobchack 2004, 269-71, 274)

So, when engaging in the vocal performance of Verdonk in ‘De Leugen’, the viewer relates the image of Verdonk in fictional space to his or her incorporated knowledge regarding Verdonk from extracinematic, real space. In effect, the viewer un-brackets the cinematic image and evaluates its origin as ‘from the real’, and the image is experienced as ‘real’.

Ethical investment in the cinematic image

Documentary consciousness in a viewing experience does not solely restructure ‘experienced cinematic space’, but it also entails a reflexive account of the viewer’s own existence in that restructured space. By means of what Sobchack describes as ‘the response-ability of our actual bodies’, the viewer is made aware of his or her conscious existence in this documentary space and is able to respond to the cinematic image, not only physically and emotionally (affectively), but in also ethically. (2004, 284)

In the experience of Verdonk’s performance, this ‘response-ability’ and its ethical implications are at its most apparent in my experienced sense of awkwardness and emotional tension regarding the performance. These bodily sensations point to my own existence within the real space of the cinematic image, as opposed to my non-existence was it fictional space. This ‘re-positing’ in ‘re-structured space’ includes my ethical
judgment, what Sobchack defines as ‘responsibility’: that I am, albeit uncomfortably, ‘moved’ by Verdonk’s display of emotions and regard and evaluate these emotions as ‘honest’, ‘authentic’ and ‘truthful’. This experience of transforming irreal space to shared real space puts the viewer, myself, to the task of ‘relating anew’ to the cinematic image, since the image became part of my own life world and my own ethical investments in that world. And it is because of this shared existential real space and the ethical charge of that space that Rita Verdonk can be ‘rehabilitated’ by a viewer such as myself, as she aims for in her performance.

In sum, the experience of authenticity regarding Verdonk’s performance seems to be grounded in what Sobchack defines as ‘the charge of the real’ and conditions the ‘documentary consciousness’:

“[The charge of the real] engages our awareness not only of the existential consequences of representation but also of our own ethical implications in representation. It remands ourselves as embodied, culturally knowledgeable, and socially invested viewers. Thus, in those moments in which fictional space becomes charged with the real, the viewer is also charged. The charge of the real comprehends both screen and viewer, restructuring their parallel worlds not only as coextensive but also as ethically implicated each in the other.” (2004, 284)

In this second part, the task was to explore the ways in which Verdonk’s performance, - or for that matter, the cinematic image of Verdonk’s performance-, is charged with the real, in order to be experienced and identified as ‘real’. As has been argued, identifying the existential status of cinematic images has little to do with textual features incorporated in the image, but more so with spectators experiencing cinematic images and cinematic space. So, based on the textual features of the cinematic image of Verdonk’s performance, the image points to the realm of fiction and artificiality, since the performance occurs in fictional, irreal space. However, as Sobchack aptly states, “it is the viewer’s consciousness that finally determines what kind of cinematic object it is”. And the spectatorial mode of consciousness at hand here is that of ‘documentary
consciousness’, a mode of consciousness that entails extracinematic knowledge and ethical spectatorship. The cinematic image of Verdonk’s vocal performance is then charged with the real and pulled back into real space to be identified as ‘real’, 1) because the viewer brings embodied, extracinematic knowledge regarding Verdonk into the experience, and 2) because this restructuring of fictional space as real space puts the viewer in the position to relate and respond ethically to the cinematic experience of Verdonk’s performance, since both viewer and image become part of the same (subjective) life-world that is dominated by the ethical judgments of the viewer.
Part III- Theorizing documentary performance

In the first two parts of this research it is argued how -and under what conditions- Verdonk’s performance works as a marker of authenticity, and how that performance is or can be experienced by the viewer as authentic. This understanding of ‘authentic performance’ provides the groundwork for investigating how performance is embedded in documentary theory as to understand how performance can function as documentary practice. In recent years, the concept of performance has gained academic interest, however not as much in the field of documentary studies. This is at the least remarkable, since questions regarding representing subjectivity within pro-filmic (socio-historical) reality seem to be at the heart of both documentary practice and documentary inquiry, and the concept of ‘performance’ –as explicated in the first part- adheres closely to these issues. However, as multifaceted (and ‘inherently contested’) the concept of performance in itself is, so divers and, overall, problematic its employment in the field of documentary studies seems to be. Scholars that do include ‘performance’ in their field of documentary research rarely use the term ‘performance’ and its theoretical counterpart ‘performativity’ in a constructive and coherent manner, arguably because they hardly ever ask ‘what does it actually mean ‘to perform’?’. Thus to conceptualize any notion of ‘performance as documentary practice’ within documentary theory, it is necessary to align these different usages and modulations of the terms ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ as they are employed by influential players in the academic field: Bill Nichols, John Corner and Stella Bruzzi.

§ 3.1 Bill Nichols

In Representing Reality (1991), Bill Nichols sets out to give an overview of the characteristics of documentary film, often by juxtaposing the genre to fiction film. He distinguishes documentary film from (live-action) fiction film by stressing the different indexical dimensions of cinematic images and sound. In both genres, cinematic images and sound originate in (some kind of) historical reality: the camera records images as
they appear in front of the lens. However, where in fiction film images refer to an artificial historical reality, in documentary film the images refer to the authentic (social-)historical reality. As Nichols states: “these images directs us not to a world, but to the world.” (1991, 109) According to Nichols, this indexical bond with social-historical reality determines the way viewers take up a film to identify it as either fiction or documentary. Within this view, there is hardly any conceptual room for hybrid forms of documentary film, such as drama-documentary or indeed documentary musical. Nichols thus clearly draws a line between documentary and fiction: “Documentary is a fiction unlike any other, precisely because the images direct us towards the historical world, but if that world is unfamiliar to us, our direction will just as likely be toward a fiction like any other.” (1991, 160)

**Documentary performance**

The distinction between documentary and fiction film based on the indexical bond of cinematic images with historical reality also resonates in Nichols view on ‘documentary performance’. In opposition to ‘theatrical actors’ that appear in fiction film, he describes documentary subjects as ‘social actors’. He uses this term to “stress the degree to which individuals represent themselves to others: this can be construed as a performance.” (1991, 42) Nichols’s notion of a social actor is in that sense closely related to Goffman’s notion of ‘social performance’—i.e. performances that facilitate social interaction— even more so since Nichols emphasizes that social actors in documentary film perform on the ‘historical arena’, informed by social structures and conventions, and not in an artificial world where (theatrical) actors are confined to the artistic frame in which they operate:

“(...) social actors, people, retain the capacity to act within the historical arena where they perform. The sense of aesthetic remove between an imaginary world in which actors perform and the historical world where people live no longer obtains.”. (1991, 42)

Performance by ‘social actors’ is what Nichols labels as ‘virtual performance’, contrary to ‘actual performance’ by ‘theatrical actors’. Virtual performance, or “the everyday
presentation of self”, as Nichols states, “presents the logic of actual performance without signs of conscious awareness that this presentation is an act.” This ‘conscious awareness’ then refers to the way documentary subjects are self-conscious regarding their actions, or conscious of the camera recording those actions. (1991, 122) Herein lies for Nichols the difference between ‘actual’ and ‘virtual performance’: where ‘actual performance’ is qualified by the overt consciousness of actors performing ‘bounded acts’ that propose artificial realities, ‘virtual performance’ is qualified by the notion that documentary subjects represent themselves with a disclaimed sense of self-consciousness, in front of the camera that is part of the authentic social-historical context. This notion of ‘virtual performance’ then seems to harbour a paradoxical notion of what it means ‘to perform’, as Nichols also more or less points out. ‘Virtual performance’ as Nichols explains it, is basically performance that tries not to be performance, in the sense of some sort of conscious un(self)consciousness, or in Nichols words, “where the concepts of acting and performance are simultaneously disclaimed and desired”. (1991, 122) So, when Nichols argues that ‘virtual performance’ is actually not really performance (hence the term ‘virtual’\(^7\), he seems to be -wrongfully- attached to the idea that ‘real’ or ‘actual’ performance, i.e. overtly self-conscious behaviour, entails falsification or fictionalisation of the subjective self and/or events, or is for that matter only executed by ‘theatrical actors’. For Nichols, performance has a strong alliance with fiction that excludes documentary. This somewhat rigid stance towards documentary performance is also apparent in his Introduction to Documentary (2001) where he states, “the director’s right to a performance is a ‘right’ that, if exercised, threatens the sense of authenticity that surrounds the social actor. The degree to which people’s behaviour and personality change during the making of the film can introduce an element of fiction into the documentary process.” (2001, 6)

According to Nichols then, visible traces of performance in documentary film -and Verdonk’s song would certainly fit that description- more or less corrupt the notion of ‘documentary truth’, because of the disturbed (‘distorted’) indexical bond with social-

\(^7\) Nichols refers to the definition of ‘virtual’ according to the Oxford English Dictionary, “that is so in essence, or effect, although not formally or actually; admitting of being called by the name so far as the effect or result is concerned.” (1991, 122)
historical reality. Verdonk’s song would in Nichol’s view then place the film ‘De Leugen’ in the realm of fiction, and as such it would not qualify as a documentary since it violates ‘documentary truth’ warranted by the indexical bond. Nichols’ approach to documentary performance in Representing Reality is in this sense more a matter of documentary ethics than of realist representation.

**Performative mode**

In his study Blurred Boundaries (1995) Nichols’ approach to realist representation shifts towards a less pronounced demarcation between documentary and fiction. He asserts that documentary nor fiction can be (dialectically) defined by strict inherent qualities, since they are both elusive concepts that “defy simple definition and resist static identity.” (1995, xiii) The boundaries between realist and fictional representation are thus more ‘blurred’ then Nichols initially asserted in Representing Reality. In that light, Nichols proposes an alternative\(^8\) mode of documentary film: the performative mode. This “new mode in town” exemplifies the blurring of boundaries by marking “a shift in emphasis from the referential as the dominant feature”. (1995: 94) As opposed to the four previously defined documentary modes, the performative mode -as Nichols defines it- seems to withdraw somewhat from the social-historical world as the primary referent in order to cultivate expressive, poetic and rhetorical aspects of documentary filmmaking. In effect, where “classical objective discourse” deals with ‘argument’ and ‘referentiality’, performative documentary deals with ‘affect’ and ‘experientiality’. The main objective of performative documentaries is then not to represent the social-historical real, but rather how that world is (or can be) experienced. This shift in emphasis implies that instead of the historical real, the life world of the viewer becomes the primary referent. (Nichols 1995: 93-95)

The performative mode, according to Nichols, inevitably challenges notions of realist representation by relating anew to the historical real. Nichols states (a bit dramatically):

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\(^8\) In defining the performative mode as ‘alternative’ to other modes of documentary filmmaking, Nichols seems to underscore his reluctance to incorporate performance and performativity into the documentary realm.
“Performative documentary suspends realist representation. Performative documentary puts the referential aspect of the message in brackets, under suspension. Realism finds itself deferred, dispersed, interrupted, and postponed. (...) Realist epistemology comes into question and under siege.” (1995: 96-97)

For Nichols, performative documentary harbours qualities that apparently seem incompatible with the institutional framework of documentary filmmaking that (in his view) is dominated by the indexical bond between image and pro-filmic real, and consequently blurs boundaries between documentary and fiction. Nichols asserts then that these types of films are incomprehensible as documentaries. However, “the sense of incomprehension is not literal -such film can be understood it seems- but categorical: they seem comprehensible more as fictions or formal experiments than as documentaries.” (Nichols 1995: 97) These films are then experienced ('understood') as documentaries9, because ‘the message’ is grounded in the social-historical real. “Such works then, though expressive, stylized, subjective and evocative, also constitute a fiction (un)like any other. The indexical bond, which can also prove an indexical bind for the documentary form, remains operative but in a subordinated manner.” (Nichols 1995, 98)

So, in contrast to his views on performance explicated in Representing Reality, Nichols perceives performance in documentary now more as a stylistic treat employed by documentary filmmakers to engage the viewer to the social-historical real, not so much intellectually but rather on an affective and empathetic level. His usage of the term performance then shifts from describing the way documentary subjects are representing themselves in front of a camera towards describing a certain modality in documentary filmmaking. Verdonk’s performance should in that sense, as a sequence in a performative documentary, be understood as a strategy employed by filmmaker Robert Oey to engage the viewer affectively to events depicted: that although the song is not indexically bound to the socio-historical real, and hence not ‘proper documentary material’, it can be ‘understood’ as real, or offer an experience of the real, because of its affective impact. Nichols thus allocates the term ‘performative’ as a means to signal the ‘performance-

9 Here, Nichols makes a similar distinction between “is” documentary and “as” documentary as Richard Schechner in differentiating between ‘is performance’ and ‘as performance’.
like'-quality of certain types of documentaries, and has in so far little to do with the Austanian notion of performativity, i.e. the process of constituting social reality.

§ 3.2 John Corner

In his article “A Fiction (Un)Like Any Other?” (2006), John Corner takes up on Nichols’ creed to investigate how to deal - academically- with the issues raised by Nichols regarding the cultural and aesthetic separation of documentary and fiction. While Nichols clearly opts for a specific (alternative) modality of documentary practice that incorporates performance (or performance-like qualities aligned with fiction), Corner proposes that documentary work altogether is undergoing ‘a slow aesthetic reconfiguration’, a development he labels “a dramatic turn in documentary crafting”. (2006, 90, 95) This 'dramatic turn' is closely related to a prominent shift in referentiality, one that Nichols also pointed out in explicating performative documentary. Corner takes Nichols' assertion a bit further by stating that many aspects of contemporary documentary, or 'the art of the real', are continuously being refashioned as a viewing experience. He sees this shift in close relation to changes in the documentary economy, i.e. the structures of producing and distributing documentary films and programming, “grounded in the competition to win and keep viewers”. (2006, 90) In other words, against the background of 'popular factual programming', documentary crafting becomes much more an issue of playing into the viewing experiences of (potential) audiences, and in that sense the life world of viewers, then of the more traditional representations of the socio-historical real. Corner outlines three aspects of this 'dramatic turn' that are centered on the primacy of viewing experiences in contemporary documentary practice: the intensity of events, the pull of story and the attractions of character.

Intensity of events
First and foremost, the dramatic turn in documentary practice is sanctioned by what Corner describes as “a new premium on material strong in kinetic or other forms of affective impact”: events that are high on dramatic impact. Such events can vary, in Corner’s words, “from scenes of violence through angry interaction and verbal abuse to
scenes of celebration and joy (for example, the moment of arrival of good news; the reunion). It may close down entirely around personal testimony, the intensity of a 'speech event', perhaps a personal revelation or other form of disclosure or difficult recollection. (…)". (2006, 90) The intensity of these events is mainly regulated by their dramatic value and their capability to “create 'little explosions' of visual arrest and/or shock in the viewer". Within the new dynamic of documentary production, these types of events have become an important (if not mandatory) stylistic feature in shaping contemporary documentary experience.

“What is clear is that, for much factual work, the dramatic moment that comes as a surprise, emerging unexpectedly in the flow of testimony, observational footage or archive research, is now no longer sufficient. A regular intensity of viewed events is becoming an expectation of viewing, one for which increasingly ingenious modes of delivery must be found.” (2006, 91 emphasis in original)

Pull of story
Secondly, and in line with the 'intensity of events'-aspect, Corner highlights an emphasis on narrative design in contemporary documentary. Narrative values are being brought into the documentary account, leading up to what Corners describes as 'dramatisation' of events, i.e. “an organisation and direction of filmed events that conventionally extends to a script and actors". (2006, 93) This 'dramatisation' relies heavily on narrative structures and values from fictional narratives. “Where a documentary focuses on specific individuals, circumstances and actions, the story design can approximate to at least some features of fictional narrative, working creatively, for instance, with anticipation, episodic development and various types of reversal, suspension of resolution, etc. It can even incorporate generic models (the detective story has been put to extensive use here).” (2006, 92) So, by cultivating 'the pull of story' through strong narrative design, borrowed from fictional narratives, documentary practice becomes more and more involved in 'playing into' viewing experiences and viewers expectations.
Attractions of character

The third aspect of 'the dramatic turn' in contemporary documentary that Corner defines deals with documentary subjects as objects of attraction, or more aptly put, an intensified focus on subjectivity and selfhood, motivated by viewing experiences and pleasure. Corner signals (in reference to Renov 2004 and Dovey 2000) a change in the ways in which subjectivity and selfhood are portrayed in documentary forms, regarding the popular, self-descriptive modes of representation like the 'video diary' or the focus on 'selves in action and interaction' in, for example, reality game formats. These modes of representing subjectivity are inscribed with an overt sense of self-consciousness and awareness, which according to Corner gives it the quality of performance and, as such, can raise suspicion on whether or not these modes provide “indicators of real social interaction or specific personality”. However, says Corner, “this performative dimension, this playing into the theatrical dynamics of audio-visual space, is a refreshing change from the more conventional kind of play-acting, that of pretending that the camera is not there and that the space of action is purely naturalistic and unmotivated.” (2006, 95)

These three aspects of 'the dramatic turn' are marking the growing range of interconnections between contemporary documentary and fiction, and are for documentary scholars like Nichols indicators of a devaluation of documentary values. However, Corner emphasizes that although elements of fictional representation are infiltrating documentary practice, engagement with the social-historical world still constitutes the generic identity of documentary, “inquiry and understanding is clearly central to many notions of documentary, carrying with it social and ethical entailments.” He therefore proposes to “dispense with Nichols' brackets (...). Documentary work whatever fictional aspects are inherent to its project or redevelopment requires a confident 'unlike' verdict.” (2006, 96)

Post-documentary culture

The 'dramatic turn' in documentary work needs to be regarded within the context of what Corner previously (Corner 2002a and 2002b) has described as 'post-documentary culture' to indicate the conditions of contemporary documentary practice. In formulating 'post-documentary culture', Corner does not signal the end of documentary
as a genre, but he tries to relocate the term 'documentary' within the cultural dynamics of documentary production, or better, to re-evaluate its usage: what does 'documentary' mean nowadays? For Corner, this question is closely related to questions of functionality: what function does documentary fulfil nowadays? Corner sees in contemporary documentary culture “a decisive shift” from the more traditional, classic functions of - roughly outlined- promoting citizenship, exposition or alternative perspective (Corner 2002a, 2) towards “documentary as diversion”, i.e. documentary as a form of popular entertainment. In this sense, the dramatic turn in documentary production and its interconnections with fictional representation is sanctioned by entertainment as the 'new documentary imperative'. (Corner 2002a, 2)

In what ways have the conditions of documentary as a genre then changed to constitute a post-documentary culture? Corner describes three parameters of 'post-documentary culture' that are marking the shifting generic identity of documentary. First he proposes that “under the drive of diversion” the term 'documentary' is not as comprehensive anymore to indicate the widely diffused body of work: “Extensive borrowing of the 'documentary look' by other kinds of programming, and extensive borrowing of non-documentary kinds of look (the dramatic look, the look of advertising, the look of pop-video) by documentary, have complicated the rules for recognising a documentary.” (4) Documentary has in that sense become an umbrella term for work that adopts documentary methods, styling and/or values, disregarding distinctions of fiction/non-fiction. Secondly, and in line with 'the dramatic turn', Corner points out that “a performative, playful element has developed strongly within documentary production.” This 'new playfulness' manifests itself in stylistic features (such as the musical score), but also in the newer forms of portraying selfhood and displayed self-consciousness. “This self-display is no longer viewable as an attempt to feign natural behaviour but is taken as a performative opportunity in its own right.” (4-5) Consequently, says Corner, these performative qualities will influence conventional documentary rhetorics and establish a new documentary language: a language that fosters the aesthetics of performance. Thirdly, Corner embeds post-documentary culture in a broader (social-)historical reconfiguration of the public and its members:
“[These changes, JR] involve the way[s] in which selfhood is set within culture and culture set within a particular political and economic order. The terms of 'seeing others' and 'seeing things' on the screen today are very different from those of the defining moments of documentary history, those moments when an expository realism seemed to resonate at least partially with a public, democratic rhetoric of reform and progress.” (5)

Here, Corner points to what he sees as a shift from documentary for the public to promote citizenship and solidarity towards documentary as popular entertainment within an audio-visual culture dominated by marketing strategies and the dynamics of consumption. In other words, where in 'traditional documentary' viewers were addressed as members of 'the Public', in post-documentary culture viewers are addressed as consuming individuals that are part of 'the Market' in which documentary operates. Social affiliation then becomes a commercialized (and somewhat 'detached') experience instead of a product of public knowledge. This shift implies a disconnection of “self” in/from society and, consequently, influences the ways in which viewers cognitively and affectively relate to 'things' and 'others' they see on screen.

In sum, what Corner argues is that contemporary documentary practice has changed because the conditions of the audio-visual culture in which it operates have changed. Under the auspices of entertainment and the dynamics of consumption, documentary work becomes more and more 'interconnected' with fiction, i.e. it adopts stylistic, narrative and 'performative' features of fiction into its methods of representation, hence 'the dramatic turn'. For Corner, this aesthetic reconfiguration does not necessarily imply that documentary has lost its 'core value' -to speak in marketing terms-, but that the initial shift in referentiality offers possibilities to incorporate these features of fiction and -more importantly- their constructedness and still offer an 'experience of the real'.

In positioning 'documentary performance' such as Verdonk's song in ‘De Leugen’ then: Corner clearly sees 'performance' as part of the (evolving) genre of documentary, hence the “unlike verdict” in reference to Nichols, but rather from an historical perspective then an epistemological one. According to Corner, it is primarily the developments in and around the genre of documentary that have contributed to the
incorporation of performance aesthetics in documentary language. In this sense, understanding Verdonk's song as authentic documentary representation is then more an issue of 'cultural habitualisation' regarding documentary style then a product of theoretical inquiry into the origins of documentary and performance. This also resonates in Corner's terminology. Like Nichols, Corner applies the terms 'performance' and 'performative' to indicate stylistic features of documentary that point to a certain degree of artificiality (the default definition of performance), without properly questioning what it actually means 'to perform'. This is most evident in the -thus somewhat misleading- title of his article where he coins the term 'post-documentary culture': "Performing the Real". Here he seems to be unaware of the theoretical implications of such a phrase, since this title does not refer to an Austanian sense of performativity -in that documentary constitutes the social reality that it seeks-, but to a new, culturally sanctioned documentary language in which aesthetic features of performance are appropriated.

§ 3.3 Stella Bruzzi

In her study 'New Documentary' (2006) Stella Bruzzi approaches documentary performance from yet another angle, one that is more affiliated with critical theory. Unlike Nichols and Corner she does not regard performance as a stylistic feature that some respectively all documentaries more or less contain, but more radically as a fundamental aspect of documentary. By stating that “documentaries are a negotiation between filmmaker and reality and, at heart, a performance” (186) she seems to stand in direct opposition from Nichols' views on the matter. She particularly takes issue with Nichols 'family tree of documentary', the -altogether- six modes of documentary film(making), among which the performative mode. Bruzzi regards this "compartmentalisation of documentary" as a failed attempt to structure the generic identity of documentary in categories that are, according to her, too linear and too reductive: documentary texts are much more complex and heterogenic then Nichols presumes with these modes. Also, she states, these categories are primarily historically defined - each mode is attributed to a certain period in documentary history - where it
is essentially a theoretical issue that Nichols is addressing: "how is reality represented?" Thus where Nichols answers this question by proposing various strategies in which documentary can (or should) authentically represent the real, Bruzzi boldly replies: 'by performing it'. (Bruzzi 3-4)

**Documentary is performance**

For Bruzzi, documentaries are essentially performances and, as such, they are the product of a conjunction between filmmaker and reality, a conjunction she defines as 'negotiations'. In other words, she proposes that in documentary reality is negotiated, 'agreed upon', through the act of representing it. With this claim she argues against what she refers to as the "idealised notions" in documentary theory discourse that the relationship between the documentary image and the real is either a) uncompromised, i.e. there is, can or should be an undistorted image of the real, or b) profoundly problematic, i.e. representation by definition corrupts reality and therefore invalidates the documentary pursuit. Rather, she states, documentary values are not localized in the cinematic images -which is a text-based approach-, but reside in the interaction between reality, film(maker) and spectator. “The pact between documentary, reality and the documentary spectator is far more straightforward than many theorists have made out: that a documentary will never be reality nor will it erase or invalidate that reality by being representational.”(6) Instead, says Bruzzi, documentaries perform reality, they are performative acts that represent reality, and are rendered as such in “a multi-layered, performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators.” (10)

**Performative documentary**

Against the background of defining documentaries as 'performative acts' (i.e. performances), Bruzzi defines a specific mode of documentaries that are “themselves performative”, which she labels 'the performative documentary' and describes as “a mode which emphasizes -and indeed constructs a film around- the often hidden aspect of performance, whether on the part of the documentary subjects or the filmmakers.” (185) These type of documentaries ostensibly apply performance strategies to point to the impossibility of authentic representation in documentary and, and in
effect, to underscore that documentary values reside in the interaction with the spectator. Bruzzi defines two strategies of the performative mode; either constructing the film around an “intrusive filmmaker” who “acts out” the documentary in front of the camera, and/or portraying “performative subjects”, i.e. subjects that expose a high degree of self-consciousness or self-conscious behaviour for (and because of) the camera. These performance strategies, or “tactics”, draw attention to the film’s constructive nature; they are, in Bruzzi’s words, “alienating, distancing device[s]” that are foregrounding the film’s form rather than its content. (185-86) So, what Bruzzi proposes is that inherent to (all) documentary production, there is a certain degree of reflexivity. Both filmmakers and subjects are consciously aware of themselves and of the actions they perform or behaviour they conduct by virtue of the camera; this awareness is “the often hidden aspect of performance”. Performative documentaries then are emphasizing exactly this aspect of documentary filmmaking: that documentaries are being performed, they (documentary filmmakers and subjects) are performing reality for the camera.

In reference to Austin and Butler, Bruzzi regards performative documentaries as acts “that simultaneously both describe and perform an action”, i.e. performatives that propose reality rather than constatives that refer to reality. Bruzzi thus appropriates the term 'performative' (as a noun in the Austanian sense) to performative documentary to indicate that especially these documentaries “enact the notion that a documentary only comes into being as it is performed, that although its factual basis (or document) can pre-date any recording or representation of it, the film itself is necessarily performative because it is given meaning in the interaction between performance and reality.” (186) Consequently, says Bruzzi, these documentaries explicitly point to a renewed or, more aptly put, relocated sense of documentary authenticity: the sense that authentic images of social-historical reality are essentially products of construction and artificiality, and that values of authenticity are ascribed to these images in the interaction between film, reality and spectator. (186)

By incorporating a “notable performance component” -which Bruzzi regards as a prerequisite to the performative mode- performative documentary thus problematizes traditional notions of 'authentic documentary representation', because, she says, it points out the distortion of social-historical reality inherent to representing it. Performative
documentary, like its traditional (constative) counterpart [which I suppose she means is documentary that is not performative but 'just' a performance], aims for authenticity and truthfulness regarding reality, but is “more aware of the inevitable falsification or subjectification such representation entails.” (187) Performative documentary then relies heavily on ideas of disavowal, as Bruzzi states, by striving to represent social-historical reality as faithfully as possible, but also implying “through the mechanisms of performance”- that such a representation is cognitively dissonant. For Bruzzi, authentic representation in performative documentary is then an issue of honesty, not necessarily regarding its subject matter (i.e. reality) but rather regarding its production process:

“The performative element could be seen to undermine the conventional documentary pursuit of representing the real because the elements of performance, dramatisation and acting for the camera are intrusive and alienating factors. Alternatively, the use of performance tactics could be viewed as a means of suggesting that perhaps documentaries should admit the defeat of their utopian aim and elect instead to present an alternative 'honesty' that does not seek to mask their inherent instability but rather to acknowledge that performance -the enactment of the documentary specifically for the cameras- will always be at the heart of the non-fiction film. Documentaries, like Austin's performatives, perform the actions they name.” (187)

Bruzzi's understanding of documentary performance is then, unlike Nichols and Corner, primarily ontological: documentary is (note: not works as) a performance and some documentaries then explicitly foreground this quality of performance through performative strategies. Verdonk's song -as 'a notable performance component'- fits the definition of such a performative strategy. The song, or act of singing, can be understood to underscore the notion that documentaries are essentially performances and as such are being performed for the camera. In that sense, through the act of song, Verdonk performs 'the real' for the camera in a performative manner: she simultaneously describes and performs reality by singing it.

So, where Nichols and Corner approach documentary performance as something alien to documentary ontology, but accepted as specific respectively contemporary
documentary practice through cultural and historical forces, Bruzzi's approach locates performance 'at the heart of documentary film' as she argues that documentaries – and some documentaries in particular – 'perform the actions they name'. To regard documentaries as essentially performances by emphasising the performative quality of such an act and the instability of realist representation seems a promising approach to incorporate performances such as Verdonk's song as integral documentary practice into documentary theory. However, for a thorough understanding of documentaries as performative utterances in the Austanian sense, as Bruzzi seems to argue, it requires a more in-depth reading of these central notions of performance and performativity in relation to documentary representation then Bruzzi demonstrates in her study. Bruzzi, and here like Nichols and Corner, appropriates the concepts of 'performance' and 'performativity' rather inconsistently and ambiguously, mainly -as I will argue in the following sections- because Bruzzi does not differentiate theoretically between a performance, a performative and performativity. Although Bruzzi's claim that (a) documentary is (a) performance is in several ways incongruous with the concept of performance in performance studies, her initial idea is worth further inquiry to theorize the authenticating workings of Verdonk's documentary performance in 'De Leugen'. So, in order to provide a coherent understanding of authentic documentary performance within documentary theory, Bruzzi's theory needs to be re-worked or reconfigured towards an understanding of documentary performance that is more critically aligned with the concepts of performance and performativity.

§ 3.4 Documentary's ontology: performance vs. performative

In her article “Performativity and documentary” in “Performative Realism” Anne Jerslev provides an insightful, critical analysis of the appropriation of the terms performance and performativity in documentary theory. She particularly takes issue with Bruzzi's modulations of the central concepts on which Bruzzi bases her ontology of documentary film(making); an ontology that Jerslev ultimately considers as invalid. First
of all, Jerslev points out that Bruzzi uses the concept of ‘performance’ to both define an ontological quality of documentary and to point to formal and aesthetic structures in a documentary film, thus in both a generic and specific sense, and Jerslev remarks that this usage is not “analytically precise”:

“If the verb [to perform, JR] or the adjective [of that verb: performative, JR] is used to define an ontology of the documentary (performing the real), it doesn’t make analytical or categorical sense to use the same forms to define formal or dramaturgical elements or a specific routine by a social actor (whether it be a performative act [a performance, JR] or a virtual performance in Nichols’ sense). Performative cannot simultaneously be used to propose a documentary ontology and to describe the specificity of certain filmic elements, certain acts, without it being clear what kind of performativity (or performance) one is talking about.” (Jerslev 105-06)

Following Jerslev, one of the main problems in Bruzzi’s argument is then that she mixes different meanings of performance and performativity and uses them for different purposes. She does not accurately differentiate between performativity as a theoretical resource to understand the processuality of representing reality (bringing forth social reality) and the manifestation of performativity as a bounded act executed by an agent (a performance) with or within a documentary. Because of this display of theoretical ambiguity, Bruzzi cannot sufficiently argue that performance as a concept is a fundamental quality of documentary film or, for that matter, that a documentary itself is a performance; “(…) if the fundamental characteristic of documentary is ‘performance’, it must be a whole different matter to talk about the “self-conscious performance” of [social actors]. If the fundamental characteristic of documentary is ‘performativity’, then what has that got to do with ‘performance’?” as Jerslev aptly asks. (106)

What Bruzzi proposes is that all documentaries are performances, and some documentaries are performative by foregrounding this fundamental quality through a performance. But it would have made more sense if Bruzzi had argued that documentary film (as cultural practice) is performative by virtue of its performative nature (“performing the actions they name”), and that some documentaries make this
performativity visible by ostensibly employing performative strategies. Or as Jerslev states: ‘Had Bruzzi been terminologically precise, she should have labelled a performance sequence a performance of performativity.’ (108) Then the ontology of documentary film would not reside in the sense that documentaries are performances and use performances to show that they are performances, but that documentary film works performatively and that documentaries are performative utterances, which is something fundamentally different.

Performing the real vs. constituting reality
Understanding documentaries as performative utterances rather than performances, and documentary performance as specific acts that bring this performativity forth, challenges Bruzzi’s assertion that documentaries ‘perform reality’, that they are the products of a conjunction between filmmaker and reality and ‘negotiate reality’. Bruzzi seems to understand ‘performing reality’ in a manner of representing reality by consciously portraying (or (re)enacting) reality for and because of the camera/the audience. This implies a degree of distance or detachment between the cinematic performance and pro-filmic reality. In other words, a documentary as a performance is in Bruzzi’s understanding a filmic representational act that points (refers) to a pro-filmic reality, rather than that it brings this reality forth in a performative manner. So, even though Bruzzi emphasizes the interactive exchange between a performance (a documentary) and reality, she still regards a documentary as something autonomous from the reality it has recorded. Her ideas of what it means to perform reality in documentary are in that sense fundamentally dissonant with performativity theory, where reality (or, for that matter, identity, gender, etc.) is not represented but constituted, not portrayed but presented. Or, as Jerslev comments, the concept of performativity emphasizes that documentary filmmaking is an activity in reality (106), not just about reality:

“Performativity theory prevents us from thinking of documentary films and the filmic recording of reality as something basically different from the reality it has recorded. Not in the post-modern sense that there is no such thing as the pro-filmic real, but in the sense that the reality status of the filmic and the pro-filmic cannot be understood as
belonging to completely different ontologies. Combining documentary and performativity in this manner make the documentary film and the reality that it has recorded elements on the same level, elements in the process of coming into being, becoming through each other." (Jerslev 107-08)

Performances vs. performative actions

If documentary film is first and foremost a doing, as Bruzzi argues, and secondly a doing that constitutes rather than represents reality, as Jerslev adds, then how does 'performance' fit in? As argued so far, Bruzzi claims the concept of performance to express how documentary can never represent reality authentically, and instead proposes an alternative reality, a performed one, in some documentaries made visible 'through mechanisms of performance'. These performances -the bounded acts executed by documentary subjects and filmmakers- then bring forth the ‘inevitable falsification or subjectification’ of realist representation. Bruzzi in a way thus labels ‘performance’ manifested as and in documentary as ‘the next best thing’ to reality, rather than a process or strategy to bring forth that reality performatively, as argued above. In response to Bruzzi’s conception of performance, Jerslev (questionably) asserts that “there is no such thing as a performance proper [bounded acts that represent something, JR] in documentary film- new or older. Instead, we have a range of performative actions, each conceptually different from the other.”(108, emphasis added)

So, rather than defining different ‘kinds of performances’ in documentary film, Jerslev stresses that the keyword is ‘performative’ as she differentiates between ‘degrees of performativity’.

First degree of performativity- mediation

First, documentary films as interactions between filmmaker and reality can be theorized as performative utterances, since these films are proposing or constituting (a) social reality, through various audiovisual strategies. As an activity in reality, documentary films bring forth that reality by performing (in terms of presenting rather then representing) it. This dimension of performativity also resonates in Bruzzi’s statement that ‘documentaries perform the actions they name’. On a additional note: herein lies Jerslev’s
main objection to consider documentary film’s performative nature as its ontology, since the term ‘performative’ (or Bruzzi’s ‘performance’) does not reflect as much upon ‘documentary’ then it does on ‘film’. “Using performance in this ontological sense means basically the same as mediation, to perform the act of ‘representing’ reality in any medium in order to be able to communicate it to an audience. This may just as well go for the pro-filmic real in fiction.” (Jerslev 106, emphasis in original) Indeed, the concept of performativity offers ways to understand the processuality of filmic (re)presentation of realities -authentic and artificial- and, in effect, does not connote anything in particular concerning the generic identity of documentary. So, in response to Bruzzi, Jerslev rightfully poses the question: what makes a documentary then a documentary by being performative? Since this particular issue remains unresolved in Bruzzi’s theory (and Jerslev’s analysis thereof), Jerslev opts to dismiss performativity as documentary’s ontology altogether. However, I would like to suggest that the concept of performativity does provide valuable ways to grasp the workings of documentary film, especially in relation to performance sequences such as Verdonk’s song, as I will argue later on.

Second degree of performativity- performances
Against the background of performativity in terms of filmic mediation of “any reality”, Jerslev defines a second degree of performativity in documentary film, that of actual performances by social actors. Here, Jerslev talks about performances in a documentary film by documentary subjects that can be qualified as ‘performances of performativity’: bounded acts in which subjectivity (or the identity of a documentary subject) is constituted by means of a performance. These acts rely heavily on ‘previous performances’, i.e. performances that are socially, historically and culturally sanctioned.

Or as Jerslev formulates: “Identity is a doing, a mimicking projection between subjectivity and social routine, between repetition and unique presentation. Reality is repeated, (…) not represented. (…) [S]ocial actors simultaneously are themselves and become themselves in the act of performing themselves (…).” (109)
Third degree of performativity - performative behaviour

A third degree of performativity in documentary film that Jerslev distinguishes deals with “the self-conscious performative practices” in documentary filmmaking, as employed in ‘new documentaries’ and reality show formats (108), by displaying and facilitating self-conscious behaviour for the camera. This third degree performativity thus relates more closely to a specific mode of documentary filmmaking that can be considered ‘performative’, i.e. acting out a documentary/reality show, rather than to specific acts (performances) of performativity.

What these three degrees of performativity indicate is that there are different ways (or levels) in which performativity manifest itself in documentary film: in mediating reality, in performing subjectivity by means of performances and in ‘performative behaviour’ related to contemporary documentary filmmaking. Additionally, these degrees of performativity need to be regarded within a context of what Jerslev describes as “a zero degree non-mediated performativity”: the Goffmanian notion that all social communication is essentially performance, inscribed by “the repetition of routines selected by each individual in different situations.”(108) Documentary is in that sense is just another ‘situation’ where certain social routines are repeated and performed.

For Jerslev, these different ways of understanding performance and performativity in documentary film influences the usefulness of the term. Apart from her claim that performativity does not ‘explain’ the generic identity of documentary, Jerslev states that the terms performativity and performance might be useful to rethink documentary strategies but are also too multifaceted to define documentary film as a whole:

“The term performative proves useful in discussing different visual and narrative strategies and different ways of displaying subjectivity in a range of contemporary documentaries. Furthermore, it calls attention to the ongoing and unfinished exchange between film and reality in documentary filmmaking that may be consciously expressed in particular films. Finally, it points out that reality is on both sides of the camera. Thus, the term performativity invites us to think of processes of mediation in new ways. Performance may be used to label delimited acts in a documentary, but it may also be
used with the metaphorical power that Goffman or Butler confer upon the term. This being the case it seems to me a very unfruitful approach to also use performance/performativity in order to make claims on an ontology of the documentary film.” (111)

Here, I disagree with Jerslev. I suggest that the concept of performativity does provide an adequate frame to theorize documentary film, and in such a way that qualifies explicit, stylized performances such as Verdonk’s song as ‘proper’ documentary practice. Thus rather than adopting Bruzzi’s claim that the ontology of documentary is performance, I opt to re-assess that problematic claim by stating that documentary is not essentially a performance but rather essentially performative.

§ 3.5 Documentary: made to perform reality

As argued so far there are two major problems in how Bruzzi theorizes the ontology of documentary as performance: one is that she uses ‘performance’ to argue the performative nature of documentary film, whilst those two concepts are “rooted in different conceptual origins” as Jerslev states, citing Mieke Bal. “Performativity is derived from linguistics, philosophy and constructivistic ideas (an utterance that performs what it says) and performance from aesthetics and performance arts (performance art as “the unique execution of an act in the here and now” (Bal 2002 176) )”. (Jerslev 104, emphasis in original) Second, she claims that the performative strategies inherent to documentary filmmaking are motivated by their capacity to ‘falsify’ or ‘disavow’ authentic representation. These terms are pointing towards what can be considered as representational qualities of the cinematic image, but however do not address properties of performative utterances. Both of these problems stem from the same problematic issue in Bruzzi’s theory: that Bruzzi proposes a (‘new’?) documentary ontology of performance/performativity, supported by arguments that originate in the traditional notion that documentaries are (inherently distorted) representations of reality.

So, what Bruzzi actually addresses in ‘New Documentary’ is a problem with ‘mediation’ in representing reality (a problem quite familiar in documentary theory); that indeed cinematic images cannot represent reality authentically because these images are
mediated, not only by the cinematic apparatus but also by the filmmaker’s agency. For Bruzzi, the way to deal (theoretically) with this problem is to understand documentaries as performances, performances as constructed realities that refer to pro-filmic reality. In effect, Bruzzi situates herself in a theoretical lockdown because, despite alluding to ideas of performativity (‘documentaries perform the actions they name’), she still regards documentary film as essentially representational and not performative. Then, understanding documentaries as performative utterances rather than representational performances sheds new light on the theoretical problem of mediation. Mediation is in that sense not something that distorts or disrupts pro-filmic reality but part of the process of constituting reality, of bringing forth the social reality that it has recorded. By applying a new ‘model of thought’ regarding the origin of documentary film, i.e. performativity in favour of representation, opens up possibilities to understand images of the real as real, not based on their representational (indexical) merits, but on how these images mediate this reality and the structures at hand in this process.

To take up on Jerslev’s unanswered question: what makes a documentary then a documentary by being performative? An adequate way to reply is to refer to Sobchack by stating that identifying a cinematic image does not depend on its textual features, on what the image represents, but that it is a matter of spectatorial consciousness, and in effect, of how the image is experienced. What differentiates documentary from fiction is not its performative nature an sich, but the way documentary reiterates its identity through its images, how it is made to perform reality through strategies and structures that trigger ‘documentary consciousness’ into the spectator. These strategies and structures are then restraint by cultural, historical and technological forces. In other words, the way documentary constitutes its (generic) identity through the cinematic apparatus (as documentary’s technological corpus), and provide experiences of the real, is analogous to the way Judith Butler proposes a gender identity is constituted performatively through the body: by stylized, repetitive (performative) acts that are culturally and historically inscribed, also referred to previously as ‘previous performances’ or ‘performances of performativity’.

So, what a conceptual model of performativity offers in identifying documentary images as such is a shift from a text-based approach (‘what does this image refer to?’) to
the dynamics of performance (‘what does this image do?’). In that sense, it can be argued that Verdonk’s vocal performance ‘enacts documentary’ by playing into this dynamic, thus cultivating the affective force of this performance by employing particular strategies that trigger ‘documentary consciousness’ into the viewer, and in effect constitute a social reality that is rendered as real. This reconfigured ontology of documentary, that embeds the dynamics of performance, is then a fruitful starting point to address the key question of this research -how does Rita Verdonk’s vocal performance offer an authentic representation of the socio-historic reality?- by asserting that essentially Verdonk’s performance does not represent reality at all, rather, by performing, Verdonk performs socio-historical reality performatively.
Conclusion

This research was initiated by my experience of a certain act, a doing that changed something in my life world within social-historical reality. It brought something into existence, invoked something to relate to, to critique, -and most notably- to question. This act proposed a cinematic vocal performance as social reality: a social reality that conflicted with my embodied (extracinematic) knowledge regarding the subject, its subject matter as well as its origin as documentary practice. What had happened here? How can Rita Verdonk -of all people- sing a song on film and have me believe that she is actually truthful and sincere, up to a point where I relate differently, i.e. more considerate, to her then I did before? And furthermore, how can we call this ‘documentary’?

This particular theoretical problem of identifying a vocal performance as documentary practice stems from the dominant take in documentary studies on what a documentary is or should be: a representation of the real, inscribed by the indexical relationship between image and reality, where the immediacy of the image and its commitment to pro-filmic reality are important markers of authenticity. That’s how you generally make a ‘truth claim’, as documentary scholars seem to say. And performance does not follow these rules of realist representation, since it involves ‘staging’: performance effectively manipulates pro-filmic reality. Cinematic images of a staged performance in a documentary thus refer to artificial realities instead of the singular authentic (‘spontaneous’) one. The task of this research was then initially to come to terms with how a cinematic performance such as Verdonk’s -despite its ontological insufficiencies as documentary practice- could be understood as an authentic representation of reality. But gradually, the notion arose that it was this conceptual frame of documentary (representation) itself that proved to be insufficient to understand performances such as Verdonk’s as authentic or from the real. What Verdonk’s manifestation of ‘authentic performance’ in documentary film indicates is that performance and documentary as both specific aesthetic and/or cultural practices are not each other’s sworn enemies, but rather that the dominant conceptual models of
‘performance’ and ‘documentary’ in documentary studies conflict. To reconfigure these conceptual models from representation to performative offers possibilities to provide a coherent understanding of how documentary and performance (both as types of human activity) relate to each other, in Verdonk’s case perhaps even enforce each other, and how they can both be made to perform socio-historical reality authentically. So, instead of approaching the cinematic image of Verdonk performing as a text to be read as authentic, the cinematic image of Verdonk is taken as a performative act in its own right, within a documentary film that is essentially a performative utterance.

From a performative perspective then, the film ‘De Leugen’ thus reiterates its generic identity as documentary through the particular audiovisual strategies filmmaker Robert Oey as an acting agent employs. Some of these strategies in ‘De Leugen’, the songs in particular, deviate (aesthetically) from what is culturally and historically defined as conventional documentary imagery, but bring about the same kind of responses (albeit in different ways) in the viewers by which these images are identified and qualified as documentary. In a way, Nichol’s understanding of the performative mode in documentary filmmaking resonates with this performative approach. ‘De Leugen’ can be qualified as (what Nichols calls) a ‘performative documentary’ to categorize the type of strategies (‘stylized performance’) employed in this film, strategies that ostensibly are directed towards governing the affective responses of the viewers. However, ‘performative documentary’ is not an alternative mode to ‘proper’ conventional documentary filmmaking, since it follows essentially the same structures (note: not strategies) in constituting reality and reiterating its (generic) identity as documentary. This is also Bruzzi’s point in explicating her version of ‘performative documentary’: identifying documentary is a matter of rendering images as ‘from the real’ or as ‘authentic’, and that happens in the interaction between image/agent and viewer. The conditions under which this interaction is established might vary or evolve, due to social, cultural, historical and/or technological forces (cue Corner’s post documentary culture and the dramatic turn), however, the structures inhabiting this interaction remain consistent; they are essentially the dynamics of performance.

As argued, Verdonk’s cinematic vocal performance can be understood as a particular audiovisual strategy employed by Oey to mediate reality performatively, by bringing forth
social reality in order to evoke affective responses that render these images as real or authentic. This understanding resonates with Jerslev’s account of a first degree of performativity: that a (documentary) film mediates reality through its strategies, strategies that govern the affective force of the images. Additionally, the ways in which these images are ‘performed’ by the filmmaker and then taken up by spectators condition the ways in which these images are identified and qualified as documentary. Thus, as a performative strategy in documentary filmmaking, ‘De Leugen’ follows the dynamics of performance in mediating reality as Robert Oey cultivates the affective force of the images to propose a sincere, authentic social reality.

Verdonk’s performance can also be understood in terms of Jerslev’s second degree of performativity, as a performance of performativity, where Verdonk brings herself forth as a documentary subject by means of the act of ‘performing herself’. In such an act, the aspect of performativity that comes with performing is foregrounded. In Verdonk’s performance, the act of singing can thus be considered as a process to bring forth her subjectivity, i.e. to reiterate herself as a subject. Or in Jerslev’s words, Verdonk simultaneously is herself and becomes herself by performing herself. The act of performing (‘becoming’) herself is then shaped by ‘previous performances’: performances that are socially, historically and culturally sanctioned. This notion of ‘previous performances’ significantly resembles Schechners notion of restored behaviour, in indicating that performances are never isolated and autonomous acts, but are altered repetitions of ‘previously behaved behaviour’. As restored behaviour, Verdonk’s act of song is then an alteration of performances/acts that are (socially, historically, culturally) aligned with film and theatre musical, i.e. typical discursive behaviour. Additionally, Butlers notion of stylized, repetitive acts through which identity is manifested applies to Verdonk’s act of ‘performing to become her self’: the (more) stylized (then) repetitive act of song to give testimony is constraint by specific social, cultural and historical norms, norms that impose an artificial, even cynical (in the Goffmanian sense) quality onto this particular act of theatrical musical behaviour. However, as this act is an interplay between these conventions of testimonial song and the agency of the performer (realized in the act of ‘re-storing behaviour idiosyncratically’), this performative act of song can collapse these boundaries and propose something new, something deviating from the dominant
norms and values attached to those norms. This act can propose something truthful and genuine, namely Verdonk as her sincere self.

What these different degrees of performativity in Verdonk's cinematic performance underscore is that performativity necessarily materializes as performance, and this notion effectively problematizes differentiating between these concepts, a problem Bruzzi encountered as well. As can be understood from the previous sections, it is indeed quite vague where performativity ends and performance begins, or more aptly put, if -and if so, how- a performative act theoretically differs from a performance. In an attempt to clarify this confusing entanglement of concepts, but at risk of only making matters worse, I would suggest that performativity is necessarily enacted by performative acts, and these performative acts can be construed as performances. In other words, a performance is essentially a performative act but can be understood in terms of a dynamic or feedback loop between performer and spectator (as in a conscious, relational, corporeal act), whereas a performative act is characterized by its performative quality, i.e. its capacity to bring something into the world. So, these different degrees of performativity in Verdonk's performance sequence then point to different performative actions construed as performances that are performed by different agents, agents who are mediating and constituting reality with this documentary film. A first degree performativity is realized in Robert Oey's performance as a filmmaker in 'making this film perform', using the cinematic images of a singing Verdonk as a technological body to (actively) mediate reality, for and because of an embodied audience. A second degree performativity is realized in Verdonk's performance as a singing documentary subject, an act through which she 'does' her persona, for and because of an embodied audience. So, this cinematic performance sequence embeds different instances of performative acts, 'each conceptually different from the other' but simultaneously engaged in performing reality performatively in a cinematic performance. In other words (and the following perhaps requires to be re-read a few times), this performance sequence thus articulates exactly how this documentary is a performative utterance, by performing performativity through performative acts that are manifested as performances.
Turning towards the conceptual model of performativity and the dynamics of performance to understand the authentic quality of documentary performance means analyzing cinematic images not in terms of what they represent but rather what these images do and how they do that. Drawing on Sobchack, what the cinematic image of a singing Verdonk in particular 'does' is that it induces a viewing experience that triggers 'documentary consciousness' into the viewer, and it is because of this triggered documentary consciousness that this image is rendered ('experienced') as real, or better, from real ethically charged space, and hence identified as authentic, documentary imagery. As explicated earlier, 'documentary consciousness' entails a specific mode of spectatorship, conditioned by bringing specific extracinematic embodied knowledge into the viewing experience, knowledge that effectively transforms fictional space to documentary space. So, Verdonk's cinematic performance -as both a particular audiovisual strategy to mediate reality as a bounded act of performing subjectivity- is directed towards evoking this particular mode of spectatorship. The performance thus acts to evoke specific embodied extracinematic knowledge regarding Verdonk as a political persona, knowledge that in effect modifies the cinematic experience, in order to have these images from fictional space rendered as real, i.e. as part of the same life-world that is dominated by the ethical judgements of the viewer.

As argued so far, Verdonk's performance essentially enacts documentary by playing into the dynamics of performance, i.e. playing into the viewing experiences and triggering documentary consciousness into the spectators through which the cinematic image of a performing Verdonk is rendered as 'from the real'. This 'playing into the viewing experiences' then involves cultivating the affective force of the performance by employing a particular embodiment strategy: the act of song. By singing, Verdonk enables audiences to affectively engage in the performance, and in effect she constitutes a feedback loop. This feedback loop is, as argued earlier, propelled by interactivity on a level of consciousness: both performer and spectator are consciously aware of each other’s phenomenal existence as embodied minds as they are engaged in the performance. And it is in this feedback loop, this relationship between co-subjects, where meaning is produced or rendered, as Bruzzi also pointed out by stating that the
interactive exchange between agent and viewer is the site where documentary values are produced.

The conditions under which this interaction or feedback loop is established and governed are informed by Verdonk’s act of song: the bounded conscious, relational and corporeal act that, in accordance with the performative nature of this act, brings forth a social reality that affects audiences and offers possibilities to render the performance as real and authentic. And as stated before, the affective force most notably crystallizes in Verdonk’s bodily presence as she embodies herself in the act of song. Again, Verdonk’s performance originates in and is validated or, in that sense, authenticated by the notion that she embodies herself. Verdonk’s phenomenal body thus functions as the primary marker of authenticity since it authenticates her semiotic body: the meaningful body she brings forth through song in fictional space. With this particular way of employing her body, Verdonk fuels the feedback loop with sincerity regarding the performance and that sincerity reflects on her (performing) self as well. In effect, Verdonk imposes a sense of sincerity and, consequently, authenticity onto the viewer at the other end of the feedback loop. There, Verdonk’s phenomenal presence (that validates her semiotic presence) invokes embodied, extracinematic knowledge regarding Verdonk and in effect triggers ‘documentary consciousness’ in the viewer that restructures the fictional space of the performance as documentary space, space that is ethically charged. So, to address the crux of the matter in this research: within this dynamic, dominated by the emergence of performers and spectators as embodied minds, lies the understanding that by performing herself, in terms of performing subjectivity performatively, Verdonk is able to have me believe in the sincerity and truthfulness of the performance, and in effect to relate anew to this singing subject formerly known as ‘Iron Rita’. Furthermore, we can call this ‘documentary’ because the dynamic of Verdonk’s performance is embedded within a documentary film that can be theorized as essentially a performative utterance.

What resonates in this analysis of Verdonk’s authentic documentary performance is that the conceptual model of performativity imposed on documentary film not only offers a shift from the text-based approach of representing reality to the dynamics of performance, through which (vocal) performances such as Verdonk’s can be experienced and theorized as documentary practice, but also a shift in (what counts as) discursive
markers of documentary authenticity. Within the model of representation, documentary authenticity seems to be regarded as a value derived from textual features of the documentary image, most notably features that refer to the immediacy of the image and its indexical connection to socio-historical reality. Verdonk’s performance would therefore not be qualified as an authentic representation of reality, since the vocal performance is clearly staged, hence not immediate and certainly not indexing social-historical reality. Whereas, within a conceptual model that embeds the dynamics of performance, documentary authenticity can be qualified as primarily an affective experience-in a similar way Auslander understands 'liveness' or 'immediacy'-, since such an experience is rendered in the interaction between documentary subject and spectator, and—more importantly—where the body marks its authentic quality. As argued above, the body (of both performer and spectator) is thus a crucial factor in authenticating Verdonk’s documentary performance, as it 1) marks authenticity in the act of performing by generating corporeality, and 2) renders authenticity through the specific structures at hand in the embodied viewing experience. This relocated sense of documentary authenticity, marked by 'the body', then sustains the argument that authentic documentary performance as documentary practice is conditioned by the interaction between body-subjects (i.e. documentary subjects and spectators), and can be understood in terms of an intersubjective experience, an understanding that implies a new ontology of documentary, that of performativity.
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