

FEIGNING OR FEELING? ON THE STAGING OF AUTHENTICITY ON STAGE

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Abstract

This paper discusses the concepts of authenticity, liveness, and staging in reference to live performances of popular music. It aims to analyze social and individual functions of authenticity, and to develop awareness for the different strategies employed to suggest authenticity on stage.

In the first section, the author differentiates between four types of authenticities: personal, sociocultural, executional, and emotional. He adopts definitions of liveness and staging from theater studies, applies them to the field of popular music, and shows how the ideals of liveness and authenticity are necessarily in conflict with the staged character of public performances because spectators can never be sure about the extent to which performances are enacted or reveal something »authentic.«

In a second section, current stage performances of such differing acts as Metallica, Die Toten Hosen, Pet Shop Boys, and Adele are analyzed to show how musicians deal with this conflict and how they try to fulfill expectations concerning all four dimensions of authenticity. Their strategies include, among others, performing »unplugged,« leaving room for moments of interaction and spontaneity, using downsized stages, or frankly exposing the artificial character of the performance (»authentic inauthenticity«).

Overall, the analyses show that authenticity—no matter how staged it is—is still a very important value in different styles of popular music. The paper closes with considerations about deeper cultural reasons for the increased longing for authenticity in the arts.