

## **‘To Speak The Truth, The Whole Truth and Nothing But The Truth’: About Political Performances of Listening**

By Anika Marschall

### **Abstract**

In this article, I discuss performative sound interventions by British-Jordanian media artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan. I employ performance studies discourses to think through the politics of authenticity that his works address. I argue that Hamdan’s performative interventions aim to bring forth a new form of political agency that grounds on us rethinking the dramaturgy of listening. Different from an aesthetic of authenticity as seen in verbatim theatre, he does not aim to give a voice to the voiceless in order to challenge the norms of cultural belonging and identity politics. Instead, his artistic works about legal authentication processes produce a new sensibility for the act of listening and the political positioning of the listening subject. Interrogating how the politics of listening coalesces with an aesthetic of authenticity, I argue, can impel us to reconsider our understanding of the *vox populi* and naturalised practices of exclusion.

### **Introduction: Politics of Authenticity**

In this article, I make a case for how contemporary performance art challenges our politics of authenticity and can expose state-related practices of identity authentication. I discuss the performative interventions by British-Jordanian sound artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan. By looking at how his artistic works about legal authentication processes produce a new sensibility for the act of listening, I suggest that they impel us to reconsider our understanding of the *vox populi* (the voice of the people) and naturalised practices of exclusion.

Shifting perspective from the prevalent notion of our society as a speaking and self-representational one, Hamdan

seeks to establish an understanding for the political impact of listening. His artistic research interrogates juridical hearing practices, legal identity profiling and voice authentication and he places new emphasis on audibilities<sup>1</sup> rather than on culturally dominant visual metrics. The works comprise exhibited audio documentations, legal petitions, technological installations, and lecture performances. The works are open-ended and use self-reflexive strategies to subtly undermine the authority ascribed to expert witnesses, forensic linguists and narrator's voices, while at the same time unmasking the political stakes of listening. How can we account for practices that authenticate accents and that categorically fix identities? Can performance art offer modes of resistance to these legal disapprovals of inauthentic and 'wrong' voices? Or, in what ways does an 'aesthetic of authenticity' (Wake 84) merely reproduce imbalanced structures of communications that reify otherness? How does a prevalent cultural valorising of authenticity exclude particular groups from effective voice in the first place?

The fatal and complex consequences of contemporary migration movements oblige us to account for policed forms of authentication. To challenge established state-related demands for performing authenticity and to give a plausible account of oneself by means of voice today (Couldry 10)<sup>2</sup> is especially im-

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<sup>1</sup> What I term audibilities here refers to the multiple soundings and voices that can be heard by means of human ears but also by means of technological devices. In his works, Hamdan analyses human voices but he goes even further in his interrogation when he analyses sounds which are not audible to mere human ears. Therefore, I use audibilities to highlight the complex disparities of sensual and digital or technological ways of listening to multiple forms and depths of sounds and voices. Hamdan uses the term audible in a political way to describe how those sounds and voices which are categorised as intelligible get transcribed and historically recorded – as opposed to those voices that are regarded as impossible to transcribe (2016, 1).

<sup>2</sup> In *Why Voice Matters*, Nick Couldry gives a sociological account of how narrative resources are unequally distributed in Western societies and that there is a limit to whose voices can be heard and what voices are readily recognised

portant but equally controversial when it comes to asylum appeals (see Jeffers; Nyers; Jestrovic).<sup>3</sup> Theatre scholar Caroline Wake argues that specific forms of documentary verbatim theatre can shift our practices of listening and thereby assist, damage or disable the formation of publics rather than discussing theatre's efficacy of giving a voice to the voiceless (Heddon 128).<sup>4</sup> Playfully referencing Gayatri Spivak (1994), she insists that in this way theatre brings forth new modes of listening and cultural belonging, stating that '[r]ather than thinking about whether the subaltern can speak, listening encourages us to think about whether the mainstream subject can listen' (Wake 95). Informed by her approach, I seek to examine how Hamdan's body of work on the *Politics of Listening* intervenes in cultural and political Western productions of truth(s). Even if postmodern criticism and culture easily targets and troubles the epistemologies of truth, authenticity and reality (Martin 1), it seems that our contemporaneous culture is still or again preoccupied with them as defining terms for performance—be it performance in the arts, forensics, politics or law (Lavender). In the following, I will ex-

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in our institutional politics. He is aware that listening is not a tool to easily reconcile that conflictual distribution, but that it is necessary to acknowledge the entanglement of our stories with the stories of others (131).

<sup>3</sup> This article foregrounds practices of listening rather than speaking out. Nevertheless, the ramifications of the contemporaneous rise of right-wing politics, and fascist and sexist rhetoric are in fact urgent and so dangerous that one cannot simply lean back in silence. I do therefore acknowledge the necessity to speak out against injustice, inequality and racism as well as the necessity to elicit solidarity such occasions as in the Women's Marches on 22 January 2017. Not despite but exactly because of that, in the following I challenge culturally disciplined forms of communication(s) and I aim for new forms of political agency, ethical responsiveness, and cultural belonging.

<sup>4</sup> Theatre practitioner David Hare acknowledges theatre's capacity to bring about public dialogue and in particular to be giving 'a voice to the voiceless' (Heddon 128). In this context, theatre is seen as political useful because it can provide a platform, a setting and a stage for oppressed and marginalised communities to make their point of views heard by a wider public audience. But what seems important is to challenge the metaphor 'voiceless' and the problematic of speaking for rather than with others in verbatim and documentary theatre.

amine how Hamdan's performative interventions make evident how authenticity is practised as a means of political bureaucracy (Jeffers 17), and how prevalent its valorisation is for a socio- and biopolitical construction of identity (Agamben).

### **Challenging Bureaucratic Truths**

Based at the Goldsmiths College in London, Hamdan interrogates the role of voice in law through artistic research. He is part of Forensic Architecture which is an institute that 'undertakes advanced research on behalf of international prosecutors, human rights organisations, as well as political and environmental justice groups' (Forensic Architecture). Alongside the founding member Eyal Weizman, the team includes architects, film makers, media and urban designers, theatre and performance makers, journalists, cultural theorists and historians, who work on new modes to present researched evidence in high profile human rights investigations. While in Forensic Architecture visual metrics and protocols are pertinent in the evaluation of crime scenes, the mapping of borders, and environmental changes, Hamdan investigates technologies of the ear that deal with judicial court hearings and evaluative listening. He attributes a new form of political agency to audacity and the listening subject—as opposed to the one speaking out.

Even though forensic listening is not the primary research interest and practice of Hamdan, his body of work does reflect on the ways it theoretically and empirically intervenes in how society deals with voices and soundings. Since forensic listening has been used juridically in the 1980s, the legal and linguistic interpretation of sound or noise is at issue – any kind of sonic resonance or voice inflection can become evidentiary. Acts of listening for the courtroom have made way for specially

trained ears and phonetic analysts operating as expert witnesses (Hamdan 2011: 83). Hamdan's artistic works focus on the role of the voice in law and how the changing nature of testimony can be understood in the face of new regimes of body control, algorithmic technologies, medical sciences and methodologies of eavesdropping. To him, listening is ultimately political.

Hamdan refers to the year 1984 as a political marker that deeply intervened in the understanding and practices of listening. When the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) came into force in the UK, it brought forth a new 'sonic avantgarde' that is related to the audio recording of police interrogation interviews (Hamdan 2014a). Since then, all police interviews are compulsorily audio-recorded rather than documented solely through note-taking. As Hamdan puts it, this legislation has brought about the 'death of incidental and ambient background sounds' (2014a), and created instances of expert listening where linguists spend three working days listening to a single recorded vowel and what meanings are captured in it. This emphasis on the object-quality of sound rather than its ephemera and the presumed legibility of a voice (as means of age, health, and ethnicity) risks essentialising sound. Sound studies discourses that have aim to contest the long fetishised notion of the voice-as-object (Thomaidis and Macpherson 4–5) do not align with this politicising and policing of voice and sound. In the following, I will look at two of Hamdan's performance interventions and how they negotiate listening and the politics of authenticity: *The Freedom of Speech Itself* (2012) and *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself* (2014–ongoing).

### ***The Freedom of Speech Itself* (2012)**

The performance installation *The Freedom of Speech Itself* was ex-

hibited at The Showroom in London in 2012. With this piece, Hamdan critiques the voice profiling applied by immigration offices all around Europe. Part of this performance installation are sculptural voice prints that are made of acoustically absorbent foam and thus they intervene in the audio-space. These sculptures materialise different pronunciations of the word 'you' cartographically and make them tangible in the form of 3D voice prints. They form a sort of tectonic structure that reminds of geographic maps, but they illustrate how the frequency and amplitude of two different voices saying the word 'you'. This use of cartographic techniques works to exemplify how accents can be linguistically mapped and forensically identified – much like fingerprints. But the core of the installation is a 30-minute audio documentary, a bare sound piece which includes expert interviews that reveal the actual complexities of vocal biographies. The content expounds different power-relations intertwined with the (ab)uses of language in our societies. Audiences can listen attentively and sit down on plastic chairs surrounding a large square wooden table on which four speakers are placed that play the documentary.

Adapting the form of a radio programme, the sound piece confronts listeners with different stories from people involved with or affected by the practice of voice analysis. A sonic background is produced by sound altering effects, voice layovers and other mechanical sounds that distort and interlude. After Hamdan's own voice gives an introduction to the piece, an ironic lift music eases the passage to the first contribution: UK's leading forensic speech analyst Peter French explaining his use of the accent atlas and comments on his listening practice. French imitates different English accents ('running late, layte, lite') while in the sonic background we can hear the looped and repeated

recordings of single syllables and spoken phonemes, delivering a sense for the microscopic level of scientific deep listening. A North-American sociologist then describes how speech analysis was developed in the 1990s in Swedish immigration offices. A dry corporate and old-fashioned jingle interludes before a lawyer and activist linguist questions the legal status of accents and explains how forensic listening has evolved as a new means of securing the UK borders.

As an undocumented asylum seeker you can either give your body in evidence for a testimony, or you can have your biographic claims validated by giving your voice in evidence. Usually, such voice evidence interviews do not last longer than 15 minutes. They are recorded on tape and sent to private companies that produce a verdict on the origin of the asylum seeker without any personal contact. From this physical distance, the validation of origin neglects any body language. Even more problematic is that the interviewer more than often does not speak the same language as the interviewee, or they lack certain linguistic and cultural knowledge to the extent that it creates blind or rather mute spots for the interviewer who is unaware of the interviewee's tendency to change their 'original' way of speaking and adapt for the benefit of smooth communication (*The Freedom of Speech Itself* 12:40–13:28min).<sup>5</sup>

The audio documentary shares different examples of such stories: a case worker speaks about an Afghan man whose asylum claim was denied because of how he pronounced the letter 't' convincing analysts that he was Pakistani. Another story revolves around the pronunciation of the word 'tomato' which was used at check points during the Lebanese civil war to detect

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<sup>5</sup> A group of linguists and other scholars have published guidelines for the use of accent profiling in relation to questions of national origin in refugee cases. See also: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4cbebc852.html>.

whether an enemy (in this case, a Palestinian) wanted to pass. A third story is told by a Sierra Leonean who has been mistakenly identified as Nigerian and is about to be deported 'back to his country'. In the first person, he is wondering where he will go once he arrives at the airport in Lagos. These stories paired with the contributions of field experts and voice analysts vex once again questions about the equation of territorial origin and the language(s) one speaks. They question the ideology that underlies these listening analyses and that fatally derives from the actual diversity across national borders. These stories led Hamdan to include a legal petition in his performance installation, diffusing the means of the artistic realm itself. The petition was not in any way exhibited as artefact but as a 'real' document open for audience members to sign. Drafted by Hamdan himself and a lawyer, it aimed to stop forensic accent tests and to amend the right of silence by expanding the caution that 'anything you do say may be given in evidence' with 'any way you say something may also be given in evidence'.

Thus, these audibilities expose the moral debris of forensically constructed bureaucratic truths and reinforce the complexity of vocal biographies. They reveal how a native tongue is virtually impossible and give way to manifold possibilities of cultural belonging. When Hamdan asks the seemingly simple question 'Where are you from?' to one of his interviewees, it opens up what Emily Apter considers to be 'cosmopolitical worlds of constant migration' (106):

So, where are you from?  
I'm from Hackney.  
But you're Danish, aren't you?  
No, I'm Palestinian.



So where are you from in Palestine?

I'm not from Palestine.

So where are you from?

We're Palestinians from a refugee camp in Lebanon.

So you were born in Lebanon?

No, I was born in Dubai.

Why do you have an American accent?

What do you mean?

You speak English with an American twang.

It's because, you know, because of Eddie Murphy, Stallone.

So you're from Hollywood?

No, no, I'm from Hackney.

*(The Freedom of Speech Itself 22:30–23:18min)*

This conversation highlights how the idea of an authentic native tongue is purely fictional and does not account for traces of constant uprooting that are left in one's language. Thus, an accent is not only a cultural stigma that is yet to be overcome but it is even more so a new bureaucratic liability: accents are governmentalised and can pose a primary threshold to access the very social realm itself.

*The Freedom of Speech Itself* challenges the presumed authenticity revealed through the object-quality of accents. I argue that by referencing audio techniques of radio programmes, podcasts, and television documentaries the performative installation operates as a documentary aesthetic rather than an 'aesthetic of authenticity' (Wake 84). As documentary aesthetic, it seeks an (at times elusive) educational effect and questions the status of the voice as a legible document. The performance in-

stallation does not affect through a story-telling that is bound to a valorised authenticity prominent in theatre and performance discourses about authenticity (Luckhurst). The work challenges political efforts of de-legitimising and othering 'inauthentic' voices and accents. Further it makes intelligible how authenticity is scientifically marked and legally constructed through voice profiling. What becomes evident is that authenticity cannot be heard in any voice or accent testimony—despite technological and political attempts to render the voice legible.<sup>6</sup> Thus, authenticity is not an effect of the voice itself but of prior extra-legal knowledge or rather beliefs about the assimilation between voice and the territorial confinements of a nation-state. Therefore, I argue that authenticity is ultimately political and part of a wider performance framework in which artistic, scientific, and jurisdictional practices of cultural belonging hybridise.

### ***Contra Diction: Speech against Itself* (2014–ongoing)**

In his performance lecture *Contra Diction: Speech against Itself* Hamdan expands his critique on policed authentication. Hamdan presented the performance lecture at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin on 15 April 2016, as keynote for the two-day annual symposium *what now?* by Art in General in collaboration with the Vera List Center for Art and Politics in New York on 24–25 April 2015, and at the annual one-day conference *Improving Reality* organised by Lighthouse as part of the Brighton Digital Festival on 4 September 2014—among others. In all three conference presentations, Hamdan addresses internationalised audiences capable of fluently speaking and understanding

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<sup>6</sup> Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson propose to understand voice as not simply expressive utterance, but rather as interconnection of multiple entities. They argue that it is only productive to speak of voices as a plurality, 'there is [...] no definite article: the voice does not exist' (4).

English and who are intricately interested and feel comfortable in participating in a public dialogue among artistic practitioners, researchers and critics alike. During the lecture, he usually stands on a bare stage of a teaching institution and makes use of a teleprompted script or a music stand alongside a video projection. Additionally, he carries a portable unit for sound modulation, turning him into ‘a hip musician and a nerdy scientist at the same time’ (You 113). He usually starts his performance by describing the digital progress of communication software and how it is able to constantly analyse our voices through different devices. There is no longer a transparent transmutation and threshold that marks how our speaking becomes liable testimony and how it is being turned into a bureaucratic truth about our identity and cultural belonging: ‘we can no longer depend on a place and time to which the law acts on our voices, there is no longer simply the police interrogation room and the witness stand, our speech is now legally accountable in all sites and across international jurisdictions’ (Hamdan 2014a).

In turn, Hamdan seeks possibilities within the communication(s) politics of our ‘All-Hearing and All-Speaking society’ for avoiding telling the whole truth at all times and preserving our right to silence. Concerned with strategies of how to object to a certain imposed politics of listening, he focuses on the principle of *Taqiyya*, which is a Druze Islamic jurisprudence. This practice is ‘simultaneously speaking freely and remaining silent’, a subversive strategy that is neither lying nor ‘not not lying’ (Hamdan 2014a).

*Taqiyya* is introduced by Hamdan as ‘Islamic jurisprudence, a legal dispensation whereby a believing individual can deny his [sic] faith or commit otherwise illegal acts while at the risk of persecution or in a condition of statelessness’ (2014a).

In this politico-religious context, it mirrors Giorgio Agamben's discussion about the state of exception—being both inside and outside of the law at the same time (27). However, the notion of Taqiyya is not occupied with a normalisation of otherwise exceptional biopolitics. Rather, it balances and reconciles what it means to make use of lying, while maintaining a trustworthiness when 'absolving people from the offence of blasphemy in the case of renunciation of faith under duress' (Apter 113). Taqiyya fosters the adaptation of speech to the kind of listener one is talking to; it is a vocal practice of pronunciation and a mode of identification amongst an exclusive community. In the logic of this privately expressed faith, if a phonetic pronunciation of certain words is incorrect, then the truth is not being spoken, and a believer is guarded through Taqiyya, through the potential contradiction between what they said and how they have said it. According to Emily Apter, for Hamdan Taqiyya 'carries the sense of keeping one's own counsel, preserving faith inwardly despite the outward appearance of compliance with the enemy, or speaking truth to power in the medium of vocal dissimulation' (113). This form of 'not not lying' dissimulates authenticity and can be understood as a possible subversion of the postmodern notion that the State, the law and identity rely on fictions and imaginaries as much as 'forensic' facts. In my view, this jurisprudence therefore resembles the very paradoxes of acting, of theatricality and performance itself—a manipulation or designing of an outward appearance that appears as it would publicly represent something which is private or internal (as the mind of a character) without the burden of proof.

Practised by the Druze minority in northern Syria, Taqiyya functions as a withdrawal from the nowadays fundamental obligation to 'perform oneself in public, to speak on behalf of

oneself or to confess an authentic heart' (Hamdan 2014a). The linguist Mi You argues that it performs a gap in our cultural communication codes going beyond the binary division between what one says and one does not say and invoking a 'camouflage' by words (121). It complicates the relation between speech and reality, exceeding a linguistic signification context of truth and lies, and serving as 'a vehicle for direct perception and attainment of insight' (114). It emphasises the interiority of language, a Deleuzian distrust of significations and the redundancy of our processes of denotation, although Hamdan reverberates very traditional linguist dichotomies of poststructuralist thinking, pitting the said against the saying while he does not reflect what is at stake in terms of secularity and religious beliefs (Kreuger 70).

As I argue in the following, what further challenges the ethics of his performance is the way in which he presents his findings about the Druze community to his audiences. Quite paradoxically he states that his research intention was to 'get to the truth of what happened there [when the Idlib Druze agreed to a forced conversion under the rule of the Sunni Islamist terrorist al-Nusra in March 2015] [...] to understand the concept of truth in our age of the freedom of expression' (2014a). He tells a story about how he visited the Druze community to learn new insights about Taqiyya, but the community did not grant him access to their religious documents. Meanwhile, his presentation visuals show a silent video that depicts blue skies and a tree from which cassette tape is hanging. He explains how this 'obsolete media' (the tape) is (re-)used by the community to ward off birds from feeding off of the trees' fruits. Compelling, yet not sufficiently convincing in terms of an 'aesthetic of authenticity', a seemingly true account or testimony, he further tells his audience

how he suddenly discovered a dictaphone tape which he bluntly categorises as a tool for recording foremost private notations or personal conversations. Hamdan therefore anticipated to find a tape recording with 'a confessional and biographical personal content' and he did 'harvest[...] the voice on the tape' which in turn revealed the recording of a Druze scholar's interpretation of Taqiyya.

This fictional story about the artist proudly admitting his harvesting of a voice and sharing it publicly with an audience without (in the logic of the fiction) permission by the recorded voice to eavesdrop seems ethically troubling and contradictory to what Hamdan's lecture is set out to do: the seeking for safeguards of acoustic spaces. The performance lectures were presented to mostly academic English-speaking audiences, and those more familiar with his work must have noticed how this story-telling conflicted with his publication *A Politics of Listening in 4 Acts*. Therein is a transcribed and referenced interview with a Druze scholar with the exact phrasing that Hamdan plays to the audience in his lecture (36–45). Inasmuch as this story and interview were designed for two different audiences and media, they coalesce with my own research bias when it comes to the evidentiary mode of media and documents. I am prone to taking the printed publication as accurate or 'worthy' of a truthful crediting as opposed to the live story-telling. I shall now show how this live story-telling can have impact upon our ethics of listening, and how it relates to the politics Hamdan seeks to engender.

While performance's salient feature is the negotiation of private and public space, Hamdan's story anticipated as a model for listening does fail to account for the complexities and contexts that make secret listening practices differ from an 'ethical eavesdropping' (Dreher 9). Krista Ratcliffe suggests to under-

stand eavesdropping as a composite and purposeful cross-cultural listening practice which allows the eavesdropper in the context of critical race and whiteness studies to learn from others by deliberately choosing an outsider position ‘on the border of knowing and not knowing’ (90). Even though Caroline Wake likewise focuses on listening in verbatim theatre, her discussions about how an audience should be granted as listeners and contribute to the negotiation of safer speaking spaces are valuable to larger cultural frameworks. She considers how listening easily risks being co-opted (Lloyd 482; Salverson 188) and that consequently, a politically charged mode of listening might counter ‘solidifying existing social arrangements’ (Wake 90) and perpetuate an aesthetic that sentimentalises vulnerabilities and those with marginal power. I argue that this is the inherent biased problematic in Hamdan’s work.

In the conclusion of his performance lecture, Hamdan celebrates Taqiyya as not being ‘a minorities’ claim to an identity and State of one’s own, but rather a claim to Statelessness [...]. A simultaneously subservient and subversive form of political agency’ (2014a). However, reaffirming and subversive that claim to statelessness seems, it is made from a position of power neglecting the highly perilous and highly contested claim to asylum that is judged by a policed aesthetic of authenticity.

Different works by theatre scholars about refugee performance on and off stage show how authenticity relies on a performing of power relations (Jeffers 31), on the ethics of public performances (Bishop 112), and the ambiguity of any theatricalised frame (Jestrovic). Despite any postmodern critique of the epistemologies of authenticity and truth, those scholarly analyses and their case studies proceed from the idea of authenticity as a means of valorising aesthetic *and* political performance. Where-

as documentary refugee theatre works within an aesthetics of authenticity which paradoxically seeks to affirm documentary evidence *and* its artificiality or forms of alienation, the political requirements imposed on refugees to perform authentically for public authorities reveal a less contested, dangerous and unethical practice of cross-cultural public listening to their testimonies, stories of trauma or violation. The way in which Hamdan affirms and proposes Taqiyya as resistance strategy to the penalty of perjury does merely perpetuate the figure of the refugee and their rendering as bogus. *Contra Diction: Speech Against Itself* therefore raises difficult ethical issues and I would question its political stakes. The work actually takes us away from the idea of how a listening subject can hold substantial political agency and question our passive-active communication dichotomies. Thus, I would say that Hamdan's understanding of Taqiyya merely solidifies the othering of voices by which I mean the expectation that the exile will meet our notion of what a 'real' illegal immigrant looks or rather talks like to have their refugee status legitimised in our eyes in the first place.

### **Conclusion: From Vox Populi to Aures Populi?**

The speech act 'to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth' in the proceedings of a court hearing reiterates the very conditional and complicit relation between theatricality, the law and the voice—many different clusters of voices are necessary for the law to be executed (Parker 4). But it also reveals tensions between the frailty of language and the reliability of words that may cause severe harm or in some cases may even open up possibilities for strategic acts of resistance, acts of equivocation. Testimonies and truth-producing seem to be structurally similar, seem to be inherent performative in the specific language ecol-



ogies of both documentary theatre and the courts of law. Carol Martin describes documentary theatre as agentive in the way it 'strategically deploy[s] the appearance of truth, while inventing its own particular truth' (11). Similar to the courts of law, theatre forensically constructs a path of evidence that serves as a form of authorised pretext for the testimony of actors, inasmuch as for the testimony of witnesses and lawyers in court. Whereas this aesthetic of authenticity in documentary theatre is seen to serve as a non-legislative opportunity to exercise the freedom of speech (14), Hamdan renegotiates this exercise in the legal realm; he suggests in turn to extricate oneself from speaking authentically and to obtain the right to silence.

His reappraisal of the right to stay silent seems to be a somewhat controversial idea—especially in the face of a current political apparatus that makes use of what Emma Cox has analysed as bureaucratic language '[which is] meant to silence response'. This bureaucratisation of language and the policing of voice forcefully help to protect national borders from an overflow of 'illegal' bodies and their symbolically *and* materially or racially othered voices.<sup>7</sup> Through its aesthetic perspective about alternative understandings of belonging or identity and the shifting borders in Europe, the discussed body of Hamdan's work brings forth a new form of political agency. This agency is based upon a powerful re-positioning of the listening subject who can manifest (or subversively exceed) political and bureaucratic truths which are based upon an unjust legitimacy of naturalised practices of exclusion. Whereas documentary verbatim theatre can be seen to bring a voice to the voiceless, trigger issues of responsibility through affect, and confound notions of

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<sup>7</sup> See e.g. *The Politics of Listening* by Leah Bassel for how norms of audibility are being enforced by state actors through law, political discourse and policy (17); and see *Theatre & Voice* by Konstantinos Thomaidis for the notion of listening intersectionally (46f).

authenticity and illegitimacy, Hamdan's performance interventions do not so much affect through an aesthetic of authenticity as they seek to formally intervene in the politics of authenticity. Thus, his art intervenes in the discourse about how subjects are legally constituted and suggests that it is through the act of listening rather than speaking out. Beyond aesthetically probing the immateriality of state-related surveillance and identity authentication, his documentary aesthetic makes us reconsider our very own communication biases, and the responsibilities of our own positioning as listening subjects in an environment of constant migration.

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