



# Reality Theatre and Politics: A Problematic Lacuna and Ethical Considerations

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## Abstract:

In the United States, the term "verbatim theatre" is rarely used among scholars and theatre practitioners; they rather use the term "documentary" to refer to all such factually-based genres or reality theatre. The word 'documentary' first entered the lexicon in the United States in February 1926. The French use the term 'documentaire' to refer to a travelogue. But both English and French concepts are derived from the Latin 'docui' that means 'to teach, rehearse a play'. This fact refers to two essential bases in documentary theatre; the first is the educative task it has, and the second is being factual and fictional in the same time. Indeed, one believes that 'to teach' is 'to imply facts and documents,' and 'to rehearse a play' is 'to entertain through fiction and imagery.' Furthermore, critics assume that documentary has other functions. She lists six functions of contemporary documentary theatre: to re-open trials in order to critique justice, to create additional historical accounts, to reconstruct an event, to intermingle autobiography with history, to critique the operations of both documentary and fiction, and to elaborate the oral culture of theatre (Martin, *Bodies of evidence* 12-13). Nevertheless, in the United Kingdom they use both terms but distinguish between them. Brian Barton (Trans.

Of Garde) uses the term "reality theatre" as a broad category or a general term and categorize under it all other minor practices including verbatim, tribunal, documentary, autobiographical, and history theatre.

This study provides a historical background of the reality theatre to better perceive this genre of theatre from its rise and its development until recent days. Its main purpose is to give an overview and a theoretical explanation, its relation to politics, and the ethical considerations a playwright should particularly have with such factually-based theatre.

Key words: Reality Theatre, Theatre and Politics, Dramaturgy, Testimony Theater, Verbatim Theater, Factually-based Theater.

### **Introduction:**

Reality theatre has its roots in history and is not a genre that has been recently invented or discovered. Critics differentiate between the terms "documentary" and "verbatim" theatre. They use the first to describe "plays that are sourced from existing documents," and the second for plays which cover "the specific technique whereby the exact, albeit edited, words of the subjects are inserted into the play" (Alison Jeffers, "Looking for Esrafil," 90-92). According to this definition, there is a difference between plays such as Peter Weiss's *The Investigation*, about the postwar trials of the Auschwitz guards and David Hare's *Stuff Happens* and *The permanent Way*, about the build-up to the war on Iraq and railway privatization. The first is based mainly on documents and testimonies whereas the second and the third are based on real speech, audio samples and interviews with the subjects, together with dramatic scenes imagined by the author. However, David Edgar does not distinguish between these plays and refers to them with other plays as "documentary" or uses the concept "fact-based" theatre ("Doc and Dram," 18).

The fundamental basis on which works the reality theatre in general and verbatim theatre in particular is trust and authenticity. Representing real events on the stage or telling the truth is crucial and provokes many questions. What does it mean to excavate someone's life and explore its very details? What are the protocols and procedures of this performance? What and how do we record and what should we omit or "massage" from the lived experience? What are our responsibilities towards the audience and towards the character represented? What does it mean to bear this confidence and this witness?

**Definition of verbatim theatre:**

Trying to find a satisfactory definition of the concept “verbatim”, Derek Paget defined it as "a form of theatre firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with "ordinary" people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place" (Paget "Verbatim Theatre," 317). Paget in his definition determines the boundaries and emphasizes on the methodology of this genre of theatrical practice. He emphasizes on the idea of recording and using the source material which distinguish these plays from other forms of theatre.

Martin, trying to find what she calls a "useful" definition of verbatim theatre, states that "it is useful to understand it as created from a specific body of archival material: interviews, documents, hearings, records, video, film, and photograph" (*Bodies of evidence* 9). Deidre Heddon as well emphasizes on the idea of interviews as a foremost base to create a verbatim play. He asserts that the term 'verbatim' articulates a form of theatre which places interviews with people at the heart of its process (127). Nevertheless, Forsyth and Megson prefer to use the terms "fact-based theatre" or "documentary theatre" rather than the term "verbatim." They assert that the final product has diversified away from the raw material collected from interviews (1-3).

The famous director Kate Gaul, once interviewed by director and playwright Roslyn Oades, defined verbatim plays as "stories drawn from real life." Gaul stated that "there is a sense that the word 'verbatim' has something to do with words, that it is as reported, but of course a verbatim is never word for word what was said, I wouldn't have thought. Verbatim—I'd say stories from real life, from reality. Not made up" (qtd. in Wake, "Working Definition," 2).

The Australian playwright Alana Valentine states that "verbatim play" is usually a "work that draws in some way from real life or a community." She adds that it has a "commitment to put that, the voice of that community um, on stage with, with some felicity to the way they speak." But she asserts that this work has some "ethical obligations back to that community to try and keep them involved in what you see on stage." So she thinks that it is important to represent the actual words of that community, but together with other technical components (qtd. in Wake, "Working Definition," 2). Valentine evokes the problematic intersection between

the authenticity and truthfulness of the piece since it is a "verbatim" work, and the dramatic innovation and techniques since it is still a "play" and/or an artistic work. She also refers to the ethical considerations towards the community which we will discuss in details later.

To get rid of any possible confusion between the terms "documentary" and "verbatim," perhaps one of most famous definitions of the first is Peter Weiss's. He states that "documentary theatre is a theatre of reportage. [Its] strength . . . lies in its ability to shape a useful pattern from fragments of reality, to build a model of actual occurrences. [It] presents facts for examination . . . assertions are compared with actual conditions. . . [and] evidence is produced" (Weiss 41-42). Bruzzi sees that Weiss's 1971 definition of documentary theatre is pertinent today because he affirmed the dialectical relationship between raw material and the theatrical apparatus (13). Likewise, Eliza Logan, an actor who has done two verbatim plays, states that "the commonalities are true people's stories, usually revolving around a theme that means specifically something to the community, then whoever has created the production has then, um, created a piece of theatre out of that by interviewing people that are touched the most" (Wake, "Working Definition," 2).

Other critics such as Hammond and Steward state that "the term verbatim refers to the origins of the text spoken in the play." They refer to the methodology of constructing a verbatim play by interviewing real people and recording their real words, then transcribing and editing them in a dramatic form. They emphasize that "verbatim is not a form, it is a technique; it is a means rather than an end" (Hammond and Steward 9). Therefore, they claim, we can use the term "verbatim" to describe dissimilar plays; but they have something in common; the characters that appear in these plays exist or have existed in real.

Comparing these definitions, we observe that no one wants to restrict a stable definition of the concept "verbatim." One sees that none of the former definitions is completely satisfying. Although Alana Valentine tried to define the concept "verbatim," as cited before, in her article "The Possibilities of Verbatim Theatre," she states that "verbatim is one of the most malleable, diverse and surprising forms of contemporary theatre." It is worth noting that while most of critics and theatre practitioners, cited above, emphasize on the idea of interviews and transcribing these interviews credibly, John McGrath lays too much emphasis on the idea of

"invention" in theatre practice. It is in his words that "a writer needs to *reinvent* the theatre every time he or she writes a play" (McGrath 239).

However, verbatim is the staging and representation of reality. The plays that form the corpus of this study, as well as the critical analysis, test the space between the raw material and its subsequent interpretation, and if there is a room for imagination in the manipulation of the original testimony. We will hence follow John Tiffany who declares in an interview that a verbatim play should be fictional based on factual events rather than depending on complete fidelity to the source material of interviews. "Being real," he states, "does not make it dramatic. You've got a responsibility to shape it into something more entertaining," because it is basically an artistic work and one of its aims is entertainment. "Adherence to the literal words of original sources," he notes, "may lead to plays that are not theatrically stimulating" (Edwards 173).

Therefore, many writers and critics use different terms to describe the same kind of plays based on real testimony. This is why Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson state that each writer has chosen and defined his/her own terms to describe the genre (Forsyth and Megson 2). Nevertheless, Martin sees that the term "verbatim theatre" can be used to refer to all the subcategories of fact-based plays (Martin, "Living Simulations" 2).

The first class of reality theatre and the concerned in this study is 'verbatim' which started early in the nineteenth century with George Buchner (1813-37), but hasn't thrived until the twentieth century by significant figures such as Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and Erwin Piscator (1893-1966). However, creating a verbatim play is often rather a collaborative process than an individual work as in conventional drama. The playwright uses the raw material that he gathers from interviews, newspapers, TV speeches, digital media, or any other authentic source to weave his play according to themes, motifs, steps of the subject and the event that he exposes. Since the real rise of such genre, Brecht put some "basic elements in structuring a verbatim play; these elements include addressing the audience, narration, songs and imagery." (Mumford, 2009) Being the main theme of this study, we will later examine this genre in details.

Tribunal plays is another form of reality theatre which, unlike verbatim plays, depends mainly and uses as their only sources the "official transcripts of judicial proceedings" (Reinelt 13). Carol Martin assumes that tribunal plays, more than other genres of theatre practices, have another function. It is to "reopen trials in order to

critique justice" (Martin, 2006: 12). Critics such as Mary Luckhurst include both tribunal plays and plays that are hybrids of fact and fiction in her list of recent verbatim plays. (Luckhurst 200). Nevertheless, Paget more recently differentiates between verbatim plays and tribunal plays. (Paget, 2009: 233-234). We will go with Paget and state that there are two great apparent differences between verbatim and tribunal plays; the first is that the tribunal playwright depends mainly on public inquiries, police investigations and court case rather than interviews. The second difference is that what makes a verbatim play valuable and original is the playwright's ability to say the unsaid, to describe what is happening behind the closed doors, to 'give voice to the voiceless' as Hare once declared, to expose to the audience unknown and hidden issues. However, tribunal playwright's technique is to reexamine, retell and represent what is already said. It is as Wake described "restaging an inquiry so that we the audience can re-view and, indeed, review it" (Wake, qtd. in Brown 8).

One of the well-known tribunal playwrights is Richard Norton-Taylor, Security Affairs Editor for the Guardian newspaper. He presented for the stage a number of plays that dramatize public inquiries such as *Half the Picture* (1994) about the public reports that exposed the scandal of arms in Iraq, *Nuremberg* (1996) about the World War I crimes trials, *The Colour of Justice* (1999) about the inquiry surrounding the murder of a black man Stephen Lawrence by racist British police officers, *Justifying War* (2003) based on the material of the inquiry that examined the circumstances of the murder of David Kelly, weapons scientist and the British Government's chief advisor on Iraq, and *Bloody Sunday* (2005) based on the inquiry into the events of 'Bloody Sunday'. That was in Sunday January 30th 1972, when the British soldiers shot civil rights marchers in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, during an anti-internment march. The victims were 13 dead and another 13 wounded. Nevertheless, the inquiry suggested that the soldiers had been fired on first from the marchers' side. But the families of the victims continued their struggle until a second inquiry was set up in 1998.

Philip Ralph wrote *Deepcut* as an inquiry for truth about the circumstances of the unexplained death of four soldiers who died from gunshot at Deepcut barracks between 1995 and 2002. He based his documented script on real testimonies of the families of the four victims. Nicolas Kent produced his tribunal play *Srebrenica* about The Hague tribunal and the war in the former Yugoslavia exposing the massacre of Muslims and man's inhumanity.

Documentary theatre, however, has something in common with tribunal plays; it is based on authentic documents. One believes that the most satisfying definition for documentary theatre is that of Peter Weiss who emphasizes on the hybrid nature of that genre of theatre and the variety of basis of such performance. He uses the concept "theatre of reportage" as alternative of the term "documentary," stating that:

Records, documents, letters, statistics, market-reports, statements by banks and companies, government statements, speeches, interviews, statements by well-known personalities, newspaper and broadcast reports, photos, documentary films and other contemporary documents are the basis of the performance. Documentary theatre refrains from all invention; it takes authentic material and puts it on the stage, unaltered in content, edited in form. On the stage, do we show a selection based on a definite theme, generally of a social or political character, which contrasts with the haphazard nature of the news with which we are bombarded daily on all sides. This critical selection, and the principles by which the montage of snippets of reality is affected, determines the quality of documentary drama (Weiss 41-43).

Weiss highlights the methodology in editing a documentary play by emphasizing two main principles: the first is the abstention of documentary from all invention or imagination, only authentic documents. The second base is the selection from the large amount of material and editing it that determine the quality of the final product. The notion of 'authenticity' is echoed by Upton as well. She states that "documentary theatre tends to base its claim to authenticity on the assumption, explicit or implicit, that the source documents are themselves incontestably 'true' " (Upton 179). Janelle Reinelt claims that "if we want to understand the minimal claim of the documentary, it is simple facticity: the indexical value of the documents is the corroboration that something happened, that events took place" (Reinelt 10). The basis that Weiss put for performing documentary theatre are not dissimilar from those put by Attilio Favorini, the American scholar, who as well emphasizes the abstention of imaginary from such genre of theatre practices. He defines it as:

Plays characterized by a central or exclusive reliance on actual rather imaginary event, on dialogue, song and/or visual materials (photographs, films, pictorial documents). "found" in the historical record or gathered by the playwright/researcher, and by a disposition to set individual behavior in an articulate political and/or social context (Favorini xx).

The use of authentic documents to represent reality began early since Shakespeare, but was significantly developed in the late nineteenth century by playwrights such as Emile Zola (1840-1902), Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), and Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), who found in the documentary theatre an adequate medium to represent contemporary issues rather than fictional conventional works. Dawson considers Buchner's *Danton's Death* (1835) the best first play in world literature to be classified a documentary play because much of its dialogue comes directly from the primary source material about the French revolution (Dawson 2). *The Last Days of Mankind* (1918) by Karl Kraus, a tragedy based on real documents about the horrors of the World War I, is considered a significant step in the development of documentary theatre. The notion of factuality and authenticity is emphasized by Kraus himself who asserted that the play documents the war; "the most improbable deeds reported here really happened. The most improbable conversations that are carried on here were spoken word for word" (Dawson 3-4). Documentary theatre continued in development during the 19th and 20th centuries. Wake and other critics note that "new technologies . . . such as prints, photos, transcriptions of phonograph recordings" were a major factor in developing documentary theatre. It is for this reason that they assume that "documentary theatre is deeply entangled with politics, technology and an oppositional or questioning attitude towards mainstream media" (Wake, qtd. in Brown 10-11).

Margo Jefferson, the theatre reviewer, comments on the change in based-on- documents theatre or the documented reality towards autobiography, stating that:



Biography and autobiography are the lifeblood of art now. We have claimed them the way earlier generations claimed the novel, the well-made play and the language of abstraction. Literature is filled with memories, personal essays, the travel book as a journey into oneself as well as another country. Theatres, too, are filled with solo performers . . . wherever your turn there is social and literary history on stage, dramas based on the words and deeds of the famous (Henry Ford, Thomas Edison), or the not-so-famous who capture something genuine about life as we know it (qtd. by Dawson 7).

In autobiographical plays the playwright creates a dramatic form that dramatizes his own experiences and his own life. This genre of factually-based plays may deal with public issues but do not necessarily include documents. The difference between autobiography and autoethnography is that in the first the actor performs other people's stories while in the last he performs his own story, as Shahin Shafaei played himself in the Australian performance *Through the Wire*. Heddon states that autobiographical performance permits to "talk out, talk back, talk otherwise" about an issue (Heddon 3). Autobiographical performances give us the opportunity to evaluate the already lived experiences. "In many examples," Heddon states, "[they] represent the already lived in order to beckon us towards, urge us to image or compel us to create the yet to be lived" (Heddon 20).

Perhaps the significant distinction between a history play and a documentary one is that in the first the playwright consults documents but does not imply them in the script; while the second is based mainly on implying real documents in the script to give it value and authenticity. In this genre the "playwrights have brought history back in a creative way," as Todd London notes and calls it "the new epic drama" (Cited in Dawson xiii). One believes that history plays are not an innovation; they have roots since the plays of Herodotus which demonstrate what Favorini calls 'contemporary impulse' of Ancient Greece, and the plays of Shakespeare about the English royalty. Paget has coined the term 'docudrama' and 'BOATS' (Based On A True Story), to refer to plays that are based on real events but do not necessarily adhere to it strictly (Wake, qtd. in Brown 8).

## The Rise of Real Testimony

Factually-based theatre has its deep roots in history since Ancient Greek drama from the time of Herodotus and Aristotle. Dawson states that "It is not a genre that has been recently invented" (Dawson 169). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were many plays based on real testimony and documents. Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley wrote a play based on a real contemporary trial named *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621). Yet, many critics assume that the rise of verbatim theatre began in the early nineteenth century. They consider George Buchner (1813-37) as the first dramatist to create plays that draw on documentation surrounding cases from real life. Dawson sees his *Danton's Death* (1835) as the earliest factually-based play (Dawson 2-3). Buchner believed that, as a dramatist, his "supreme task is to get as close as possible to history as it actually happened" (Richards 117). After Buchner, a generation of dramatists such as Ibsen, Zola, and later Chekhov developed his belief to create plays based on realistic behavior using real documents and assisted by technology of this time such as prints and photos.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, verbatim theatre emerged from opposing politics that followed World War I. In the 1920s, Erwin Piscator (1893-1966) exploited, in an innovative way, many political and social issues in his plays. For this reason he is considered the real founder of modern verbatim theatre. Attelio Favorini stated that Piscator's technique, based mainly on real testimony and documents, was to:

Create a drama based on the principles of new reportage, constructed in an epic succession of tableaux and stations, and designed to promote direct social action. Presented in a revue format and accompanied by music, political cartoons, moving pictures borrowed from government archives and photographic projections, in spite of everything created an alternative to the capitalist newspaper accounts of the same events (Favorini xvii-xix).

Therefore, the real flourish of verbatim theatre was in parallel with the rise of political theatre during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the 1930s in particular which witnessed the first strong wave of verbatim theatre. In the period of the two world wars, writers found in the political issues a good material for their fact-based plays. But the plays of the 1930s differ from contemporary factually-based plays. Both make use of verbatim material, but the most significant difference is that contemporary plays aim at representing testimony credibly rather than

entertaining, whereas as the main aim of 1930s plays was the political entertainment. Another difference is that in the 1930s the plays presented political ideals and principles rather than merely transcribed real testimony. Paget states that the plays of this era were moralistic. He sees that "the factual material in these plays were as one 'weapon' in the revolutionaries theatrical arsenal" (Paget 224).

More than any other playwright that contributed in the development of verbatim theatre from its rise until the 1960s, Peter Cheeseman had a significant role for this. He produced many plays that tackled political and social issues and events that affected his society, including *The Jolly Potters* (1964), *The Staffordshire Rebels* (1965), *The Knotty* (1966), *Six Into One* (1968), *The Burning Mountain* (1970), and *Fight for Shelton Bar* (1974). Wake notes that Cheeseman had his distinct technique which depended mainly on creating the news and telling the stories that have never been told (qtd. in Brown 14).

### **Politics and Verbatim theatre: A Crisis of Truth**

Verbatim theatre, in its origins, was born from the uterus of politics. It rose to oppose and challenge the totalitarian regimes after World War I. Many critics as well as practitioners agree that its aim was mainly "providing an arena for the silent or marginalized" (Paget, qtd. in Gibson 3). David Hare sees that it rose in society mainly to give a "voice to the voiceless" (Heddon 128). One believes that a verbatim play has another function other than to entertain the audience. It is, unlike any other genre of theatre practices, considered as a guard for the nation's memory, or as Soans described "the vessel which houses the conscience of a nation. . . ask(ing) the difficult questions others would rather leave unasked" (In Hammond & Steward 17).

In verbatim practices, some playwrights may neglect ethical duties to their subjects. Gibson insists that "there is a lacuna between ethics and politics. Politics may in fact oblige one to engage in the non-ethical." She goes farther to assert that "ethics and politics do not in any way connect to each other" (6). Additionally, Bell assumes that ethics should be the main source of politics and freedom, but "ethics may in fact become a check on freedom and politics rather than its ordinary source" (6-7). Therefore, Philip Ralph was once asked about the dangers of writing a verbatim play such as *Deep Cut* and the difficulties of tackling such a sensitive topic, especially after the government's assumption, in all the inquiries, that the soldiers have committed suicide.

Ralph declared: "The first thing I did was have a meeting with some lawyers, because I do not want to defame anybody, I do not want to libel anybody" (Ellis, "Philip Ralph on the Controversy").

Weiss assumes that the playwright, in tackling an event or moment in history, should take a side according to "[his] personal ideology" (qtd. in Elvgren 90). However, Gillete Elvgren underlines the importance of independence of art from politics. It is in his words: "I believe in the power of the artist, but I believe his job is something that is important in itself. It is not a function of politics, a manipulation of politics. Art is independent of education; it lives on its own." He affirms the objectivity of the artist and that he "must be free from any association with any form of political alignment. [he shouldn't] take a single viewpoint or single political alignment" (Elvgren 91). A thought echoed by Ralph who emphasizes on the objectivity of the playwright in dealing with his topic. He stated: "In a polemical play, if you only come down on one side of the argument, you lose people. It is much more important to overestimate the intelligence of your audience than to underestimate it" (Ellis, "Philip Ralph on the Controversy"). This traces the methodology that he followed in writing *Deep Cut*; although he is against the theory of four soldiers' suicide, he implied the argument and showed both views and left it to audience to judge and make their minds. Thus, Paul Taylor reviews Robin Soans's play, *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) stating that the play is "entirely composed of interwoven testimonies" ("Talking to Terrorists").

This takes us again to the issue of 'truth.' Philosophically, the term "truth" is ultimately controversial. The French philosopher Alain Badiou argues that "if veracity is a criterion for statements, truth is a type of being (a multiple). There is therefore no contrary to the 'true.' . . . Strictly speaking, the 'false' can solely designate what proves to be an obstacle to the pursuit of the generic truth procedure" (Badiou 12). Taking Badiou's assumption in consideration to judge whether a verbatim play can be 'truthful' or not, we note that it not only provides a principle for the process of structuring a play by editing what appear to us truthful events, but it also puts issues of authentication at the heart of the play creation.

Plays such as *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, *The Colour of Justice*, *Via Dolorosa*, or *Talking to The Terrorists* which trace racism, injustice, suffering of people in Palestine and threats of terrorism reveal the lacuna between politics and theatre practices. They also answer the question why we turn to verbatim theatre; why is it

thriving in the last decade more than any other time? The world, as Hammond and Steward declare, "seems to have become a more serious place, and we want our theatre to help us understand it" (11). Therefore, Susannah Clapp assumes that verbatim theatre "gave political drama a new authority" ("2000 to 2009: Reviews of the Decade"). The most famous performances in this decade were *Gladiator Games* (2003) by Tanika Gupta, *The Permanent Way* (2003) and *Stuff Happens* (2004) by David Hare, *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom* (2004) by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo, *Cruising* (2006) by Alecky Blythe and *Fallujah* (2007) by Jonathan Holmes.

One may agree with Chekhov's famous statement that "the purpose of theatre is not to provide the solutions, but to state the problems more clearly" Eventually, the playwright's stating the problem more clearly is a case of trying to unveil its ambiguous aspects to the audience who find a base of information about the subject; and this is a somehow step to solution. Simply by choosing to put a subject under the theatrical microscope, Robin Soans states, the playwright is saying 'there's more to this than meets the eye,' or 'I think it needs to be re-examined.' (Soans, in Hammond & Steward 19).

### **Ethical and Legal Considerations**

Roger Schmidt once declared "I will speak with you, I trust that if you write a play of this, that you say it right. You need to do your best to say it correct" (qtd. in Gibson 1). Transferring interviews concerning real individuals' life stories onto stage or what is called autobiography plays opens up a series of ethics in exploring and structuring these "real plays" Schmidt's statement provokes many questions: What does it mean to excavate someone's life and explore its very details? What are the protocols and procedures of this performance? What and how do we record and what should we omit or "massage" from the lived experience? What are our responsibilities towards the audience and towards the character represented? What does it mean to bear this confidence and this witness?

The fundamental basis on which works the reality theatre in general and verbatim theatre in particular is trust and authenticity. When coming to autobiography, authenticity becomes much crucial. Dreidre Heddon states that autobiography has traditionally been associated with "telling the truth" about a life story (151). The tribunal plays, as well, has an apparent similarity with autobiographies; as the main principle of both is to

'retell what happened' to the person concerned. Norton-Taylor created a number of tribunal plays such as *Half the Picture* (1994). about inquiries into arms to Iraq, and *Nuremberg*, (1996) about Nuremberg war crimes tribunal, *The Colour of Justice* (1999), *Justifying War* (2003), and *Bloody Sunday* (2005). Taylor affirms that "exposing the truth has been the goal of each of [his] tribunal plays" (In Hammond and Steward 106).

Asked once if it is easier or harder to base a play on firsthand testimony, as opposed to creating fictional work, Ralph asserted that "It is much, much harder; the reason is that you're walking into an ethical minefield if you do things like this. Every writer has got [his] own ethical guidelines" (Ellis, "Philip Ralph on the Controversy"). Likewise, Bentley affirms the fidelity to the original material in performing such genre of theatre. He sees that imposing fiction in such genre of theatre spoils it and is considered as a "deception" for the audience. He states that the artist should "put into people's mouths only the words they had used and which they had placed on the public record. No investigative reporting. No confidential sources. Just what people said in public and for the public" (Bentley 7).

Moreover, many critics affirm the notion of "witness" in verbatim or autobiography plays. Etchells assumes that the theatre's role does not stop at entertaining spectators, but extends to produce audience witnesses, to "leave a mark on the audience," to make them unable to stop thinking, talking and reporting what they have seen (Etchell 18). Wake goes further to state that verbatim theatre can be renamed as "theatre of witness" She assumes that all of the characters, actors, spectators and critics are involved with a piece of such theatre as "performing witnesses" (Wake, "Through the (in)visible Witness" 188). Etchell's idea of "audience witnesses" is echoed by Schaefer. He states that "transformation from spectator to witness is to be desired because it both spurs a spectator's deeper connection with the world (as manifested through the subject of the performance) and creates a lasting conversation between the artist and the audience" (6). Rokem also affirms the concept "witnessing" He assumes that it draws our attention to the theatrical medium by showing the spectators what it means to witness, to watch, to look and to overhear in the particular context established by a specific performance (Rokem, "Witnessing Woyzeck" 169).

Furthermore, in an article about the ethics and responsibilities in verbatim theatre, Gibson affirms that "lives are never isolated from other lives. Any work that engages with others will therefore have an ethical face"

(Gibson 1). But the notion of "ethics" in verbatim theatre is problematic. Certain scholars see that concentrating on the concepts of "authenticity" or "truth," we turn the play away from creativity. It is essentially an artistic and ingenious work. Janelle Reinelt believes that the most significant characteristic of a verbatim play is what she calls "simple facticity," ". . . the corroboration that something happened" (10). Reinelt assumes that verbatim is a genre of theatre that "is in touch with the real but not a copy of it" (8). Likewise, Pollock states that at its hub, verbatim theatre is an artistic invention. Adherence to respecting 'true' stories for ethical reasons can muddy this understanding (12). Similarly, Fuchs believes that verbatim or docudrama "consists of documented fact and imaginative drama" (21).

Gibson also affirms the viewpoint of "creativity" and asserts that verbatim is "a form of theatre that does not proceed *solely* from the imaginative exercise of a writer's pen" (4). Andersen and Wilkinson as well assume: "'verbatim' has now become a portmanteau term, incorporating a stylistically rich and varied product that owes its origins to spoken text but does not always perform these words literally as they are spoken" (154).

Nevertheless, Paget believes that the theatre makers are "committed to authenticity, transcribing and feeding back to their source communities, through performance, with some exactitude and respect, life stories and oral history remembrances garnered from taped interviews" (Paget, "Verbatim Theatre" 317). The idea echoed by Gibson who, beside her emphasis on the writer's "creativity," asserts the necessity of turning towards a consideration of ethics in the creation of verbatim theatre. She states that: "in the re-telling of people's lives, in the use of their experiences, understandings and words can lay tremendous political potential for change. But along with this comes ethical responsibilities, some way of "saying it right" based on an ethic of responsibility and interdependence that is transacted in each particular situation but which also rests on the foundational acceptance of theatre as a collaborative practice. (14)

**Conclusion:**

Asked once about the authenticity of his verbatim plays, Hare stated that he presented real individuals' speech directly to the audience; but "behind the closed doors" he used his imagination. If we go with Paget who asserts the exactitude and authenticity of life stories presented on stage, what about a play such as *Life After Scandal* by Robin Soans which describes the ordeal of those who suffered public disgrace? One believes that verbatim playwright has a duty, at least by his sense of honor, in dealing with such a sensitive material, though it remains problematic not to misrepresent truth. It is for this reason that critics such as Valentine assume that sometimes verbatim plays must be considerably "massaged" because either the series of narrative should be condensed or the content of the material is sensitive (viii).

One refers again to the origin of the term 'documentary,' the Latin concept '*docui*' that means "to teach, rehears a play" which states the possibility of combining both factual and fictional material in a verbatim play. Here one may share some critics' view such as Bottoms who notes that verbatim theatre presents a combination of fact and fiction that can be misleading. This misleading characteristic could be mitigated through a self-conscious presentation of the production processes of the performance (qtd. in Brown 53). The same thought is echoed by Reinelt who asserts that verbatim's task is "to provide access or connection to reality through the facticity of documents, but not without creative mediation, and individual and communal spectatorial desire. The reality is examined and experienced differentially; it is produced in the interactions between the document, the artist, and the spectator" (25). She refers here to the 'document' as the source of facticity, the 'artist' as the creative who presents facts packaged in his/her own taste of creativity, and 'spectator' as the other interacting side.



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