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Imitations of Authenticity: the Uses of Verbatim

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Abstract

This submission interrogates recent and current verbatim theatre practice, spanning the period of its resurgence in the late 1990s to 2016. The seven written pieces, comprising six articles and one book chapter, that make up this PhD feature five examples of UK-based, and one example of eastern European verbatim theatre practice, produced between 1999 (*The Colour of Justice*, Richard Norton-Taylor) and 2016 (*5 Guys Chillin'*, Peter Darney). My research, taken together, highlights the distinctions in verbatim practice shown in various productions in order to extend knowledge and understanding within comparative discourse. The examples chosen exhibit welcome degrees of aesthetic flair in a field of practice that, in its engagement with urgent, real-world issues and debates, and adherence to the veracity of verbatim testimonies, is typically self-effacing about its theatricality.

The title of this PhD expresses the paradox that 'authenticity' can be constructed through theatrical apparatus, and indicates the premise that verbatim material is a fundamentally transportable substance, adaptable to disparate contexts and conditions of practice. The majority of publications evaluate live performances of the featured work, and incorporate interviews with verbatim practitioners, ranging from established artists Alecky Blythe and DV8 to Dah Theatre, disseminating their contradistinctive methodologies. This submission thus exposes innovative approaches to writing, rehearsal, performance and reception, in order to identify, examine and challenge the debates concerned with 'authenticity' and 'truth' central

to extant critical discourse.

The insights I have drawn from practitioners' first-hand accounts of their practice evidence unique dramaturgical strategies that destabilise established verbatim conventions, contributing alternative methodologies to the field. I have drawn attention to examples of verbatim theatre that have pushed the form from familiar treatments of verbatim material towards the formulation of promiscuous dramaturgies, in order to interrogate and expand applications and definitions of 'truth' and 'authenticity' in verbatim practice and criticism. This contribution to knowledge will be to international theatre scholarship and practice, particularly those scholars and practitioners operating in the domain of political, testimonial and verbatim theatre.

Imitations of Authenticity: the Uses of Verbatim

Contents

This section refers to Appendices numbered from 1 – 7. Each of the seven articles can be cross-referenced in Appendices via the relevant number. The **article summaries** are ordered in this document the as in the Appendices. The full articles can be cross-referenced via the relevant Appendix number.

Introduction

The seven written pieces (comprising six articles and a chapter) that make up this submission explore examples of UK-based verbatim theatre practice, and one example of eastern European performance, produced between 1999 and 2016. Numerous examples of documentary theatre practice can be cited prior to this period: notably, in the UK, the pioneering community-based practice of Peter Cheeseman at the New Vic theatre, Newcastle-Under-Lyme (see Paget, 1987). Marvin Carlson (2016) cites the first clear example of European documentary theatre as being Erwin Piscator's *In Spite of Everything!* (1925). My focus stems from the unprecedented resurgence in verbatim theatre practice that is widely held to have been triggered, in the UK, by the events of 11 September 2001 (Bottoms, 2006; Martin, 2012; Tomlin, 2013).

In order to define the examples of plays and performances I have selected for analysis within the articles, this document is first concerned with identifying the established definitions (verbatim, tribunal and documentary theatre) that categorise various ways and means of sourcing and structuring material (Reinelt, 2009; Taylor, 2011). The title of this submission, 'Imitations of Authenticity – the Uses of Verbatim', expresses a paradox: that 'authenticity' can be constructed, or even faked. The title also signposts my basic premise that verbatim testimony – the *source* of performance practices employed by artists (writers, directors and performers) – is a fundamentally transportable medium, adaptable to disparate contexts and conditions of practice. Since their location, in performance, is situated

outside the constraining conventions of fictional or dramatic frameworks, raw materials have been serviced by various dramaturgical strategies intended to emphasise their 'authenticity'.

The notion of 'authenticity', the space between fact and fiction that verbatim performance is seen to inhabit, resonates frequently in the field of existing critical territories explored in this document. The existing body of academic criticism posits that narrative coherence and organisation (in verbatim plays) works against the documentary impulse, in that accuracy and neutrality – as pre-requisite to factual accuracy – must be compromised by creative intervention (Bottoms, 2006; Hughes, 2007; Soto-Morettini, 2005). My intention is to show that practitioners utilise conventions that can be argued as being intrinsically generic. Over time, the ubiquity of the form has generated and established certain verbatim conventions, in both the process of making and in performance, which have been appropriated, tested and destabilised in the pioneering work of the artists featured in my analyses.

Questions

This submission is informed by questions pertinent to the business of making verbatim performance in disparate contexts and conditions, and the concomitant critical discourses explained in the sections that follow. The questions are presented in approximate sequence of their occurrence through my course of study. While there are inevitable overlaps, the sequence is demarcated here as follows. **1 – 3** underpin the project as a whole, driving my quest for examples of innovative practice and ways of evidencing its distinctiveness from existing practice. **4 – 6**

express the discrete concerns arising from engagement with verbatim strategies as they occurred both within the examples of practice explored in the articles, and explicitly correspond with current debates within this field. **7** indicates my attempt, in the latter stages of the project, to frame the PhD within broader discourse, and **8** indicates both a methodological and contextualising framework compelling and surrounding my contributions to new knowledge.

1. Can I, through the examples of work explored in this submission, and insights provided by practitioners, interrogate relocate academic explorations – and expectations – of 'truth' and 'authenticity' to the materials and methodologies of making verbatim theatre?

2. Can new applications and definitions of 'truth' and 'authenticity' thus be found and evidenced?

3. Is it possible to evidence the generation and establishment of certain 'generic' conventions, in both the process of making and in performance? If verbatim practitioners utilise these, how have they been appropriated, tested and destabilised in the pioneering work studied?

4. Since the raw materials sourced by verbatim practitioners are situated outside the constraining conventions of fictional or 'dramatic' frameworks, how and why have they been serviced by various *dramaturgical strategies*, for example the construction/imposition of narrative coherence? Does creative intervention emphasise, confirm or question claims to 'truth' and 'authenticity'?

5. In the writing and performance of verbatim theatre, is there an implicit hierarchy in the privileging of certain narratives over others? Where and how is that conveyed to the reader/spectator, and how are those relationships influenced?

6. Does soliciting audiences to feel empathy with certain characters impose the binary of 'protagonists' and 'antagonists', setting up ideologically flawed 'narratives of opposition' (c.f. Tomlin, 2013) as a result?

7. What are the key debates surrounding modernity and postmodernity, both historiographical and contemporary, which frame discussion of the specific status of authenticity within performance practice? How do these elucidate the complexities surrounding 'truth' and 'authenticity'?

8. Where, and how do the concepts of 'truth' and 'authenticity' resonate in the field of existing critical territories specific to verbatim practice? How can interrogation of those terms (as manifestations *in practice*) utilise, contend with and destabilise those concepts as they occur in critical discourse?

To summarise, my insights into contemporary verbatim practice, drawn from critical engagement with recent and current work, evidence a shift in the application of verbatim material that can challenge definitions and expectations of 'authenticity', and point to a credible future for verbatim theatre: as a tangible and immediate referent to the real world, yet untethered to established conventions, pushing the genre beyond familiar methodologies and dramaturgies. The examples I have chosen thus invite a critical response that corresponds with the debates

surrounding 'authenticity' and 'truth' that I have encountered in verbatim practice and scholarship. The reader will find, in section three of this document, 'Methodologies', a more detailed elucidation of my research strategies and in section four, 'Contributions to Knowledge and Scholarship', a summary of my principal findings. This contribution to knowledge will be to international theatre scholarship and practice, particularly those scholars and practitioners operating in the domain of political, testimonial and verbatim theatre.

Towards a definition

Peter Weiss's authoritative paper, 'The Material and the Models' (1971), responds to the diversity of terms clustered beneath the 'single umbrella' of the 'realistic Theatre of Actuality', one of which is 'documentary theatre' (1971: 41). Although the term 'verbatim theatre' is not used by Weiss, the components of his fourteen principles can still be seen to inform the contemporary academic field: equivalents of his prescient arguments are detectable in the critical material explored in this section.

The capacity of the form for meaningful political intervention, according to Weiss, lies in its alignment with the apparatus of activism (1971: 41). However, Documentary Theatre in the guise of a political forum, 'which renounces aesthetic considerations, calls its right to exist into question' (1971: 42). Its potential strength, however,

 lies in its ability to shape a useful pattern from fragments of reality, to build a

model of actual occurrences. It is not at the centre of events, it is in the

position of spectator and analyst.

(Weiss, 1971: 42)

Describing the semblances in which those 'models' might emerge in Documentary

Theatre, Weiss proposes three definitive tendencies, appearing to forestall their

proliferation in contemporary verbatim theory and practice: Documentary Theatre

'presents facts for examination', 'takes sides' and 'may become a tribunal' (1971: 42-

43). Much that came to dominate subsequent critical discussion of verbatim practice

is represented in Weiss's manifesto. These points are eminently listable: the

selection, editing and collation of source material; the objective position of

Documentary Theatre as 'spectator' of, rather than participant, in the events it

portrays; or, counter to that, its inclination to 'take sides'; its relationship to

journalism; its claims to 'truth' and 'authenticity', and the formal and aesthetic

strategies it might deploy to 'free itself' from theatre's frameworks of artifice (in

order to substantiate those claims). In this, Weiss draws attention to the central,

contradictory relationship in documentary practice, summarised by Jenny Hughes

as 'the dialectical relationship between raw material and the theatrical apparatus'

(Hughes, 2008: 5). Documentary theatre is presented by Weiss as a range of

possible approaches and is thus understood to be a portmanteau term, but

subsequent critical approaches address a constellation of strategies responding to

particular, real-world issues and events.

Seeking explicit definitions of the specific practices discussed in my articles I have

found sub-genres (within the broader grouping of 'documentary' or 'fact- based' theatre) that are important to my research because their various means of *sourcing* raw material, and the conventions through which this is collated, edited and disseminated in performance, infers their categorical definition. Critics have offered several comparable definitions (Radosavljevic, 2013; Stuart-Fisher, 2011), among which Lib Taylor's offers a representative summary:

> Fact-based theatre is not a homogenous form; rather, it is an attitude to the source material used for dramatic construction. In recent times this has taken three predominant forms. [...] First, verbatim theatre, like [Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo's] *Guantanamo* (2004) is based in the representation of the actual words of real people Second, tribunal theatre, like [Richard Norton-Taylor's] *The Colour of Justice* (1999) ... is based on court and public enquiry transcripts and uses actual words ... collected from formal documents and court records. Third, documentary plays, such as ... Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) ... make use of interview material and documents that are transposed and edited into theatrical texts.

> (Taylor, 2011: 227)

Academic analysis has been broadly concerned with exposing the extent to which each of these forms or 'tendencies' (Taylor, 2011: 227) has refined or obscured its sources and materials. Tribunal theatre is a convenient collective term in the context of this study inasmuch as it cordons off the series of tribunal plays produced by London's Tricycle Theatre, under the direction of Nicholas Kent, from 1999 –

2012. The term 'verbatim theatre' indicates that the material will intrinsically lack the authenticating presence of the court transcript or legally encrypted document, and emphasise the assemblage of individual testimony.

Other than the one example of tribunal theatre discussed in detail, *The Colour of Justice* (Norton-Taylor, 1999), the plays and performances explored in my articles can be defined, using Taylor's categories, as 'verbatim theatre'. My usage of the term 'testimony' refers to the words of individuals – the 'private narratives' that, according to Carol Martin, infer 'great authority to moments of utterance' (Martin 2012: 23) – gathered by practitioners through interview processes prior to production. The exception to this methodology is the Dah Women's *Crossing the Line* (2009), which adapted selections from a pre-existing, published collection of testimonies.

Critical Contexts

The contextual material in this document is intended to broaden the critical framework informing this submission, drawing attention to a field of discourse explicitly concerned with exploring the nature, significance and current status of the postmodern moment. Postmodernism is, of course, relevant to a wide spectrum academic theatre studies, but particularly so to those explicitly concerned with verbatim practice, precisely because it shares the impulse to question 'truth' and 'authenticity'. I have drawn substantially from a collection of essays, published in 2007, that reconsiders postmodernism as historical phase and theoretical field:

Postmodernism. What Moment? (Goulimari, 2007). The arguments summarised

below have been selected for their relevance to the real-world events and epochs

that coincide with the resurgence in verbatim practice in the UK, in particular the

post-9/11 moment (see Megson, 2005; Bottoms, 2006; Tomlin, 2013). While a

decade has passed since its publication, the arguments within are no less pertinent

to exploration of a form of theatre in which contradictory debates surrounding truth

and authenticity are far from resolved.

The next section draws substantially from Daniel Schulze's 2017 title, *Authenticity in*

Contemporary Theatre and Performance, in order to introduce an in-depth

investigation of 'authenticity' within the context of the key debates, both historical

and contemporary, surrounding modernity and postmodernity, before turning to

the specific status of authenticity within performance practice. This section

intertwines Schulze's analysis with the key critical discourses surrounding verbatim

theatre that substantially inform my own writing.

The Postmodern Context

While exact definitions of postmodernism have been contested there is, within

critical discourse, general recognition of its main features:

> the mingling of diverse sources, a juxtaposition of the high and low, the
>
> use of irony and humor and an ambiguity toward … any monolithic

ideology with a one-size-fits-all and one-style-suits-all world view, which was called a Grand Narrative.

(Ahmed 2007: 140).

The characteristic of postmodernism most immediately relevant to this submission is, according to Pelagia Goulimari, recognised by both supporters and critics: 'a Socratic impulse to question truths' (2007: 1). In its detractors' view, however, it 'demolishes without reconstructing and undermines political agency' (2007:1). At the heart of the discourse is a ceaseless dispute between modern and post-modern thinkers. The debates of the 1980s involved severe refutation on both sides:

Fiercely one-sided postmodern polemics excoriated modernity and the Enlightenment as repressive, exclusionary ... bureaucratic, rationalising, and normalising of social domination [...] Modernists retorted with attacks on alleged postmodern irrationalism, relativism and the nihilism or superficial irony that characterised some versions.

(Kellner 2007: 102)

Douglas Kellner argues that an array of modern and postmodern discourses can elucidate present-day complexities. If, however, the latter discourse is to be analytically trustworthy,

there should be distinctions between modernity and postmodernity as

historical epochs; modernism and postmodernism in the arts; and

modern and postmodern theory.

(2007: 103)

The current status of postmodernism is widely contested in contemporary

discourse, largely because it is seen to lack the capacity to encompass the status quo.

In an ever more socially and behaviourally fragmented world 'the lines of force and

meaning are more dispersed, more conflictual, more partial than [the] term …

conveys' (McGowan 2007: 94). The debate, according to John McGowan, is long over,

[a]nd the 'revolution' that theory promised has either occurred or

not. The odd thing is how hard it is to tell. Yesterday's

controversies become today's received wisdom. […] Was

postmodernism a passing fad or are we all postmodern now?

(2007: 94)

The notion of postmodernity, argues McGowan, saw battles waged 'over the terms

'reason', 'truth', 'human' and others' (2007: 93). The label 'postmodern' is

problematic because the revolutionary change it posited in the conditions of life and

thought 'was more desired than actual' (2007: 99). Kellner draws attention,

however, to a transformation in the current age 'comparable in scope to the shifts

produced by the industrial revolution' (2007: 104). He predicts that we are

approaching 'a postindustrial, infotainment and biotech mode of global capitalism,

organized around new information, communications, and genetic technologies'

(2007: 104). Yet despite the positive opportunities and improvements afforded by

revolutions of the current era,

> they are producing at the same time explosive conflict, crisis and
>
> catastrophe. Hence, the turbulent transmutations of the current condition
>
> are highly contradictory and ambiguous, with both promising and
>
> threatening features.
>
> (2007: 104)

The apparent contradictions of the contemporary condition are not, of course,

without historical precedent. Costas Douzinas, in his analysis of the status of human

rights in postmodernity, argues that, while human rights are the unifying, 'staple

ideology of most contemporary regimes' (2007: 50), their ontological suppositions –

the principles of human equality and freedom – were violated by the enormities of

the last century:

> Our era has witnessed more violations of their principles than any of the
>
> previous and less 'enlightened' epochs. The twentieth century was the
>
> century of massacre, genocide, ethnic cleansing – the age of the Holocaust.
>
> At no point in human history has there been a greater gap between the

poor and the rich in the Western world or between the North and South

globally.

(2007: 50)

The fall of communism, according to McGowan, put an end to the hope of

revolutionary change: it 'deprived the left of its favourite alternative to Western

liberalism but also undermined the thesis that the West was rotten to the core'

(2007:100). Once the presence of a second superpower (in the Soviet Union) was

removed, 'capitalism embarked on a new round of ruthless exploitation of labor

while the USA turned into a swaggering bully' (2007: 100). Both sides in the Cold

War, argues Akbar S. Ahmed, had promoted their own Grand Narratives, these being

'capitalism, multinational corporations and democracy' or 'central planning, state

ownership and dictatorship' (2007: 141). After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, 'it

appeared as if Grand Narratives would simply fade away and … postmodernism

would triumph' (2007: 141). Ahmed pinpoints 9/11 as the turning point:

'postmodernism lay buried in the rubble on that fateful day' (2007: 140). The Grand

Narrative was reinstated by the ensuing conflict; both sides advocated and came to

embody their own versions, of which the 'War on Terrorism' became the most

emphatic and isolationist expression of a Grand Narrative: 'at one stroke, local and

different, histories, cultures and traditions were brushed aside' (2007: 141). For the

postmodern to have theoretical and political currency it must, therefore, articulate

these profound developments, that have accelerated, among other movements, an

upsurge of religious fanaticism.

From his present-day perspective, Kellner posits that, while the label of the 'postmodern' has incorporated the 'permutations and mutations of globalization', few debates tie the condition to 'the wide-ranging scientific and technological revolutions, the global restructuring of capitalism, and a turbulent world of political conflict' (2007: 104-5). Our social and cultural situation is hard to comprehend 'in a hypercapitalist culture of spectacles, simulacra and disinformation' (2007: 120). Kellner calls for inquiry that

> may extend from the individual self, to its network of everyday social relations, to its more encompassing regional environment, to its national setting, and finally to the international arena of global capitalism.
> (2007: 121)

This 'dialectical' method 'sees human reality as evolving and conflict-ridden', understanding society 'as a ... structure comprised of multiple levels – economics, politics, science, technology, culture and so on – each if which has its own history, autonomy and conflicts' (2007: 121). There are far-reaching political implications in his call for a dialectical approach:

> There is a growing recognition of the need to impose limits on the excesses of capitalist modernity and its sciences and technologies, while

constructing more humane and ecological values, institutions and

practices, to sustain life on earth.

(2007: 118).

Kellner concludes that we are now between the postmodern and the modern, 'in an

interim period between epochs' (2007: 119), an ambiguous situation foundational

to Daniel Schulze's analysis of authenticity, explored in the following section.

Postmodernity: the 'decay' of authenticity

Paola Botham acknowledges the effectiveness of deconstruction for theatre theory

and practice, but detects 'a new assertiveness in verbatim forms' within the context

of British political theatre, recognizing that 'whereas their reliance on alleged

authenticity ought to be problematised, their pervasiveness tests the dominance of

postmodern theory in theatre scholarship' (Botham, 2008: 308). The following

section intends both to problematise the term 'authenticity' and to consider the

legacy and contemporary relevance of postmodern theory to verbatim theatre

scholarship.

 Schulze (2017: 13 – 24), in his account of the evolution and status of authenticity,

stresses that the term 'authenticity' must be defined within its 'specific historic

discourse and meaning' (2017: 13). His approach to conceptions of the authentic

places particular emphasis on the aspect of loss, a notion absent in Greek antiquity,

where authenticity 'refers to a state of being complete or being whole' (2017: 15).

For Plato and Socrates, authenticity is conceived as an intrinsic, omnipresent value: being authentic was not, in antiquity, 'understood in terms of individualism, but rather the collective and one's place in the divine order' (2017: 16). The status of authenticity as a recognizable given, as part of the natural order of existence, was shattered by the advent of modern science. Schulze traces its development, with an emphasis on the shift from collective to individual achievement of authenticity, through the epochs of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and Romanticism. He arrives at this conclusion:

> The term 'authenticity' … is formatively shaped in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Its qualities … were established then. Namely, these are: individuality rather than collectivity, and a foregrounding of emotion and truthfulness rather than rationality and truth.
> (2017: 21)

Coming to the epoch of Modernity (2017: 21 – 23), Schulze cites the discoveries of Darwin and theories of Sigmund Freud as being key 'signposts of a felt loss of wholeness for the modern subject' since it was no longer possible, thereafter, to perceive 'an orderly teleological system where mankind could locate a fixed place for itself at the centre' (2017: 22). One aspect of Modernity is the belief that authenticity has been lost and consigned to the past, a belief propagated by

nostalgia for an unspecified 'golden age', an age, that is, which predates the twin threats posed by scientific revolution and the decentred, deconstructed self.

Schulze proposes that 'modern civilisation itself … brings forth the notion of authenticity', its developments having 'contributed to a profound feeling of loss and being lost' (2017: 23). Ultimately, for Schulze, authenticity is conceived as an antidote to 'feelings of uncertainty and instability' (2017: 23), something we must search for; not something that, in the postmodern era, we can say irrefutably *exists*, but a quality for which we might nonetheless yearn. Schulze's emphasis on the instability of social identity concurs with Kellner's reading of the destabilised subject in modern and postmodern discourse:

> Modernity problematised social identity, providing new possibilities to construct varied and richer subjectivities. The ability to switch identities intensified problems of alienation and authenticity, as individuals felt that they were being severed from their true selves […] The postmodernization of identity … has engendered disparate searches for the authentic and real, as ersatz identities proliferate, resulting in the growth of oppositional identity subcultures and politics.
> (Kellner 2007: 116).

Schulze conceives the search for authenticity as a riposte to the uncertainties of postmodernity, a 'flight from the unwelcome truth of fragmentation and uncertainty' (Schulze 2017: 25). In postmodern life, posits Schulze,

> the notion of truth has become more and more obsolete. Authenticity in
>
> postmodernity perceived as a myth, replaced by the notion of multiple
>
> and constructed identities.
>
> (2017: 25)

Within pluralist models of twenty-first century verbatim theatre, the assembled presence of individual testimonies suggesting 'multiple and constructed identities' entwine a number of competing, subjective 'truths', disguising any thread that might be identified as a 'master' narrative. The exposure of unreported experience intends to challenge the authority of the 'official' narratives that have conspired, through various operations of power, to exclude them; thus, the impression of postmodern montage in the formal construction of the work assumes a political impetus (cf. Stuart Fisher, 2011; Tomlin, 2013). The potential for authorial or political bias in the construction of 'counternarratives' has, however, called into question their potential for offering more 'truthful' versions.

Amanda Stuart Fisher argues that the spectator of verbatim theatre is brought into an encounter with '*testimony* rather than documentary' (2011: 196, original emphasis), a discrepancy that repeals suspicion of its truth-claims, since 'generating a 'technical' or even 'factual' truth is not necessarily [its] function, nor should the

question of truth be expected to form the grounds of its critique' (2011: 197). Her

analysis repositions private narratives as being legitimised in their moment of

utterance by the *subject* speaking of lived experience:

> this act of speaking out in verbatim theatre and the promise that this bears
>
> witness to a concrete situation or moment in history ... constitutes the truth
>
> claims of this practice.
>
> (2011: 197)

The 'truth claims' in verbatim theatre are seen, in several critical appraisals, as

indication of an apparent 'fetish' for achieving convincing simulacra (see, for

example, Bottoms, 2006). Schulze argues that the 'decay of authenticity' in

postmodern and contemporary society is inevitable according to 'the strict cultural

and analytical concepts of poststructuralism', wherein 'authenticity does not exist

and neither does it play a role' (2017: 27). However,

> conceptions of authenticity and a longing or even nostalgia for authentic
>
> experience and order, which seem to have structured earlier centuries,
>
> are very present in the culture of today. Thus, the concept of authenticity
>
> becomes a sort of fetish in a society without reference points.
>
> (2017: 28)

Schulze's characterisation of authenticity can be applied to the realms of theatre and performance in the sense that authenticity can be *constructed* and commoditised in contemporary culture: it is 'created, performed and developed, and once it is established it becomes a social (unquestioned) reality' (2017: 28). Carol Martin asserts that the 'provocative' element of documentary theatre 'is the way in which it strategically deploys the *appearance* of truth while *inventing* its own particular truth through elaborate aesthetic devices' (2012: 19). For Schulze, though, perceived 'reality' enacts an essentially paradoxical encounter with inauthentic authenticity, rooted in the era of mass reproduction:

> Reality ... is more and more experienced as representation and staging
> rather than authentic. The reason for this development towards a
> structure of feeling in which authenticity is performed can be seen in a
> process of alienation that started in the first quarter of the twentieth
> century.
> (2017: 29)

In Schulze's discussion of reality, the 'real' (cf. Benjamin, 1936) materialises as the original, unmediated object. Schulze explains the 'aura' of the piece of art as enacting 'both the metaphysical, cultic reference of an object and its continued existence over time' (2017: 30). The distinction Schulze sees between an original and its facsimile is that 'the original object establishes a human relation, something that is felt to be

real and that at the same time elicits the experience of time and mortality in the beholder' (2017: 30). However,

> this relation between artisan and beholder, this conversation over time
> and space … is disturbed with the arrival of (mass) reproduction [that]
> bring[s] about the death of the original.
> (2017: 30).

Benjamin's distinction is useful in that it sets up a qualitative difference in 'object' and 'facsimile'. Applied to verbatim strategies, these terms can be understood as the source material and its adaptation into theatrical presentation. Citing *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (Rickman and Viner, 2005) as her primary example, Carol Martin investigates the various types of 'evidence' presented by documentary theatre (the presence of documents, film clips, and so on) that act as surrogates for absent subjects: the 'unavailable, dead, disappeared' protagonists (2012: 17). Here, those 'surrogates' may be seen as the 'original, unmediated objects' that trigger, in the audience, a temporal awareness of mortality through the idea that absent subjects might be 'ghosted', either by those objects or performers.

Martin sees, however, a reflexive dimension in some examples of the form that 'complicate and interrogate archival truth', legitimising a version of the genre 'that can invite contemplation of the ways in which stories are told' (2012: 22). Such a distancing device 'asks spectators to simultaneously understand the theatrical, the real, and the simulated, each as its own form of truth' (2012: 22). Martin's emphasis

on the spectator's role is echoed by Schulze, who posits that 'in a convergent development, functional shifts in the role of the audience are under way' (2017: 30). Where Modernism had, through its destabilisation of authenticity, left audiences unsure of their role, postmodernism undermined the concept of authenticity itself.

One of the best examples for such postmodern doubt, posits Schulze, is offered by Jean Baudrillard's theories on simulacra and simulation. Baudrillard speaks to 'an age in which the media create images that are not rooted in reality anymore'; an age in which *nostalgia* for the real is found to be the 'only viable option' (2017: 33) for consumers of cultural product:

> There is a plethora of myths of origin and signs of reality – a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity. Escalation of the true, of lived experience, resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared.
> (Baudrillard in Schulze, 2017: 33)

Stuart Young (2009), in 'Playing with Documentary Theatre: *Aalst* and *Taking Care of Baby*', acknowledges that

> in the age of the Baudrillardian hyperreal, in which in all aspects of life simulations substitute for and ultimately come to constitute reality, authenticity is a dubious, even quaint concept.
>
> (2009: 72)

The notion of the 'authentic' cannot be so easily dismissed, however. When authenticity and the real are no longer viable, tangible concepts – supplanted, according to Baudrillard, by 'a strategy of the real' (Baudrillard in Schulze, 2017: 33) that replaces the disappeared object – audiences become nostalgic 'for some ideal and obscure past in which authentic experience was still possible' (2017: 33). If audiences then 'create their own version of an (imagined) authentic past' it follows that reality must be 'experienced as *staged, a mere representation* that has no depth' (2016: 33, my emphasis). Their various approaches to representing real-world stories have alerted critics to the contradictions inherent in verbatim performance practices compelled to represent *and* manufacture reality. This apparent paradox reflects the 'the late-twentieth century suspicion of unmediated reality' (Carlson, 2016: 29). Marvin Carlson, in his analysis of American documentary practice, states that the presence of

> '"real" material ... is directly in accord with the central poststructuralist concept that *all* reality is filtered through narrative and other structures, and that no text is in itself more transparent or reflective of true "reality" than any other'
>
> (2016: 28).

Duska Radosavljevic notes that its intervention since the pioneering documentary theatre of the nineteen-sixties has 'relativized notions of 'truth', 'reality', 'document' and, chiefly, 'authorship' and 'authority'' (2013: 147). Liz Tomlin points out

the apparent paradox of a form that is required to rely on the real for its

political authority, whilst simultaneously remaining suspicious of the very

notion of the real as dictated by ... poststructuralist scepticism.

(2013: 115)

Viewed from the perspective of our current, 'post-truth' era, however, Schulze's

troubling notion, that reality has no more depth and substance than a projection

screen, demands scrutiny. I will turn to the concept of 'post-truth' now, in order to

bring the discussion of postmodernity and authenticity to the present day.

The 'echo chamber': theatre in a 'post-truth' era

Are we living in a post-truth world? The answer to that question requires looking at

definitions of the term, its origins and applications, and then asking how it applies to

artists, academics and audiences to theatre. If we really *are* in a post-truth era,

documentary and verbatim's contested relationship to truth becomes even more

problematic. Does the widespread erosion of trust in sources of information extend

to the realms of theatre and performance? If so, verbatim theatre is obsolete,

because it is driven by a quest to expose the truth; without even a vague collective

sense of *belief in*, let alone what we *mean* by 'truth', the quest becomes futile. But if

post-truth is more about contemporary information overload, an avalanche that is

burying truth alive, then the task of verbatim practice – to clear away the debris of

cascading falsehoods – becomes more urgent, more necessary than ever.

Is a satisfying *definition* of post-truth possible? Despite my suspicion of 'buzz-words', I cannot be entirely dismissive of the term now that it has Dictionary status. Oxford Dictionaries selected 'post-truth' as its word of the year in 2016, defining it as shorthand for 'circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (2016: online). This is an intriguing definition that does not quite substantiate the hazy concept of a 'post-truth era', but does offer a tentative rationale for the word that appears to cast subjective – personal – feelings as being 'untruthful'. The definition could serve perfectly well if the word was 'post-fact'. We cannot be past or *over* truth; it is too fundamental to the discourses and belief-systems foundational to a functioning society. Postmodern discourse invites scrutiny of the concept, but does not entirely reject 'truth'.

However, the technologies we rely on and their uncanny powers of silent observation draw us into a perpetual quest for the truth condemned to perpetual deferral. Technology can – and does – construct versions of ourselves made entirely of algorithms designed to detect what we like to look at, and lead us to similar content. Thus, as I access the Internet, filters target my virtual self, leading me to information I believe I'm finding and selecting autonomously. Through that monitored interaction with technology my real and virtual selves become somehow fused, the consequence being that I am guided from any opinions that may substantially challenge my own.

This development implies a loss of autonomy that Kellner, in his conception of a new technoculture as a postmodern phenomenon, did not foresee; his prediction of 'a more decentralized, individualist and variegated culture' (2007: 106) enables the subject to 'generate postmodern selves – multiple, fragmented, constructed and provisional, subject to experiment and change', the result being 'awareness of the variety of roles we play and dimensions to our subjectivity' (2007: 106). Kellner, writing in 2007, had not anticipated the commodification of online activity that has undoubtedly played a substantial role in the movement towards post-truth.

The post-truth concept has profound political implications. As Matthew D'Ancona, author of *Post Truth* (2017) states:

> We have entered a new phase of political and intellectual combat, in which democratic [values] and institutions are being shaken to their foundations by a wave of ugly populism. Rationality is threatened by emotion, diversity by nativism, liberty by a drift towards autocracy. [...] At the heart of this global trend is a crash in the value of truth, comparable to the collapse of a currency or a stock.
>
> (2017: 8)

In light of this apparent deficit it becomes necessary to expose the ways truth is obscured, and ignored, and fabricated; and consider whether, and how, we can get anywhere near to glimpsing, or grasping it. The think tank Demos, addressing

dramatic change, over the past decade, in the distribution of news, confirms that 'the

breadth of information we are shown online is being technologically narrowed –

filtered by algorithms', the consequence being that

> this kind of bias is causing the balkanization of political discussion, a
>
> strengthening of existing biases and political prejudices, and a narrowing
>
> of political, cultural and social awareness. […] This is the 'Echo Chamber'.
>
> (2017: online)

As we increasingly receive our news through our mobile phones, it follows that

social media profoundly influences the way we see the world. D'Ancona states that

between them the 'big five' providers – Google, Microsoft, Apple, Facebook and

Amazon – 'outstrip … all the databanks, filing systems and libraries that have existed

in human history'; information about all of our online transactions 'has become the

most valuable commodity in the world' (2017: 48). Further:

> This technology has also been the … engine of Post-Truth. […] [While] it
>
> was optimistically assumed … [it] would … smooth the path to sustainable
>
> cooperation and pluralism … the new technology has done at least as much
>
> to foster online huddling and general retreat into echo chambers.
>
> (2017: 49)

I have argued that the terms fact and truth are not interchangeable: truth is more

subjective. This does not mean either that people do not believe in or would necessarily dismiss facts; the point is that they are not emotionally invested in them. Facts may have lost their currency because areas of life that are not really about facts, but *values*, are no longer considered to be the monopoly of politicians, intellectuals and self-appointed authorities. Democracy has always been about people trying to persuade others, but 'expertise' is no longer considered an authoritative source of information. Indeed, one of the casualties of the post-truth era has been the discrediting of so-called experts, a situation that confinement to the echo chamber can only perpetuate and amplify. In this respect, the term 'post-truth' is misleading: the issue becomes matter of who is qualified, or entrusted, to speak the truth. The danger comes when people decide to trust a narrative that cannot be – or, worse, does not ostensibly need to be – supported or verified by facts. Reinelt states that 'audiences know that documents, facts, and evidence are always mediated'; whilst knowing 'there is no raw truth apart from interpretation' they seek reassurance, however, in 'the assertion of the materiality of events, of the indisputable character of the facts' (Reinelt 2012: 39). Reinelt's implication is that verbatim theatre establishes trust through blending subjective truths with archival evidence that is understood to be factually sound; D'Ancona sees, in recent political narratives, that facts have lost their sovereignty.

Although, to paraphrase D'Ancona, Donald Trump may stalk these paragraphs like an orange panther (2107: 2), my discussion alludes to another defining moment of the post-truth era: the UK's vote to leave the EU in 2016. In her analysis of the Brexit campaign, the journalist Katherine Viner (2016: online) highlights the most

persuasive, emotive claims made by the key strategists (Gove, Farage, and Ukip

donor Arron Banks) that were subsequently revealed to have had no factual basis.

Viner's conclusion defines the UK's decision as 'the first major vote in the era of

post-truth politics: the Remain campaign attempted to fight fantasy with facts, but

quickly found that the currency of facts had been badly debased' (2016: online).

Viner reveals that 'a few days after the vote, Arron Banks, Ukip's largest donor, told

the Guardian that his side knew all along that "Facts don't work, and that's it. You

have got to connect with people emotionally. It's the Trump success"' (2106: online).

Viner summarises the current state of play thus:

> Now, we are caught in a series of confusing battles between opposing forces:
>
> between truth and falsehood, fact and rumour, kindness and cruelty;
>
> between the few and the many, the connected and the alienated;
>
> between the open platform of the web and the gated enclosures of
>
> Facebook and other social networks.
>
> (Viner, 2016: online)

In light of these troubling developments, can verbatim theatre offer a meaningful

intervention? Anderson and Wilkinson, in 'A Resurgence of Verbatim Theatre:

Authenticity, Empathy and Transformation' (2007), shift critical assessment of

verbatim practice in a different direction as the article argues the explicit advantage

of empathetic engagement with testifiers. Previous academics have persistently

advocated the formal presence of distancing devices that encourage detached

assessment of the events portrayed. This article argues for '[a] community's need …

to be informed, engaged and transformed' (2007: 167) in ways that invite them to

respond to performances both intellectually and emotionally, a process further

emphasised by Lib Taylor's notion of 'emotional enlistment' (Taylor, 2011). Their

analyses posit that, in a cultural climate where 'growing interdependence between

media empire owners and holders of political power effectively suppresses

controversy' (2007: 153), verbatim practice offers a corrective forum for

marginalised expressions of dissent: the authentic storytelling of those individuals

whose stories have been somehow consigned to the margins, or forgotten by

history, or silenced by regimes of power.

The article argues that, once a piece of theatre travels beyond its origins, its claims

to authenticity rest on the 'credibility of its stories rather than the recounting of

interviews undertaken in a research process'; to rely on 'verbatim recounting' as a

test of authenticity is to ignore 'the process of change that any verbatim testimony

undergoes as it becomes theatre' (2007: 154-155). Where, then, are we looking for

evidence of 'authenticity'? In the *process* of making – traces of which we can deduce

from the content, inasmuch as it claims to be *sourced* from testimony – or in the end

result, the *product*? Should audiences be concerned about the veracity of methods of

sourcing as long as the *story* seems credible enough, as this article suggests?

I find it problematic that such a clear distinction should be drawn between process

and outcome. Anderson and Wilkinson challenge the assumption that audiences

attend verbatim theatre seeking truth; they are seeking confirmation of suspected

*un*truths. In a sceptical age, the audience is attuned to the duplicitous nature of political spin, so that in 'works that address current media and political discourses, the audience is also asked to examine what playwrights and performers consider as *inauthentic*' (2007: 155, my emphasis). But the difference needs to be stressed, here, between the confirmation of suspected inauthenticity inherent in political ideologies (the 'inauthentic' narratives) and the affirmation that stories gathered from the testimony of real people are somehow worthier of trust (the 'authentic' narratives).

Liz Tomlin cites, within her definition of a contemporary verbatim practice that is seen to 'challenge the dominant historical account of the subject matter in question' (2012: 119), a list by Linda Ben-Zvi of characteristics inherent in testimonial theatre, among them 'a belief that the words of individuals telling their stories can provide powerful corrective to the mediatized versions of reality claiming legitimacy' (Ben-Zvi in Tomlin, 2012: 119). Tomlin sees, however, a conflict in twenty-first century verbatim practice that stems from commitment to changing real-world political discourse and 'scepticism of the 'real' world, and a consequent discrediting of truth claims or ethical imperatives that seek to distinguish any one narrative as authoritative' (2012: 120). Tomlin's concern with this strategy is that the communal voice, while ostensibly replacing the single protagonist, expresses 'a particular narrative of opposition' (2013: 120). Authorial strategies potentially generate a sense of narrative coherence within verbatim work that may reflect, rather than oppose, the status quo it seeks to challenge.

If we are indeed living in a 'sceptical' age – or even in a post-truth age – there is no

compelling reason to believe that we should be more inclined to believe each other's words than those of our elected representatives. Such an assumption homogenises testimony, not just to a flatly oppositional narrative, but as somehow untethered to *any* form of external political influence, because it implies that the recounting of subjective experience is entirely free, in its articulation, from the biased expression of political affiliations. D'Ancona argues, however, that we are now being led to online content that closes off anything that may cast doubt upon, or oppose, content to which we have already expressed an affiliation. This is a form of 'enlistment' that denies the agency advocated (below) by Lib Taylor. Anderson and Wilkinson suggest that specific communities found, in early examples of UK documentary practice, a shared sense of civic cohesion. From a contemporary perspective, its position as 'historical' practice questions the extent to which the definition of 'community' is limited by relatively narrow geographical parameters. One of the questions raised here is whether a 'global' perspective (and lack of audience proximity to the events described in, say, post-9/11 theatre) holds the audience at a distance and works against 'identification' and thus 'empowerment', or the 'pride and self-confidence' (Paget, 1987: 322) felt by audiences to the pioneering work, in Stoke-on-Trent, of Peter Cheeseman, whose experiments were conducted locally.

The article addresses this issue, suggesting that, in response to technological developments, our definition of 'community' may have changed: communities exist online, can be built through campaigning action, shared enthusiasms, obsessions or political allegiances. My analyses of Alecky Blythe's work (Appendixes 3 and 7) focus on the verbatim theatre maker's fascination with journeys from division to

cohesion in particular communities. While is fastidiously observed and recorded, it is precisely that affinity to localized issues that gives the work its pervasively parochial accent. The current 'global community', now that it has shifted to an online collective owned and monitored by the 'big five', expresses a conception of connectivity – the 'echo chamber' – that casts doubt over the positive idea of unity suggested by Anderson and Wilkinson, above. The question, now, must be whether the stories heard in verbatim theatre – if they do encourage empathetic connection – also encourage an emotional affinity to subjective truth. As argued in the section above, D'Ancona sees this possibility, in the context of online 'clusters', as one of the contributory factors in the movement towards 'enlistment' to narratives with no factual credibility. This development, seen in the context of recent political upheaval, is a threat to democracy. Is there any political agency in subjective reception?

The political dimension of subjective reception can be activated, according to Lib Taylor (2011), through a process of emotional 'enlistment' to the causes espoused by the work. Taylor's hypothesis proposes a coining of the term 'enlistment' – the act of signing up to a cause or enterprise – that connects 'fact-based drama' with 'the concept of theatre as a public sphere in which joining-in with debate may lead to joining-up with a shared point of view' (2011: 229). Taylor does not explain precisely how the shift, in the spectator, from 'a position of passive sympathy' to 'active participation' (2011: 229) is actuated, but would seem to confirm Tomlin's apprehension of pluralistic strategies in verbatim practice that consign audiences to 'narratives of opposition' (2012: 120). The post- 9/11 works cited by Taylor, in

particular *Black Watch* (Gregory Burke, 2007) and *Guantanamo*, '[enlist] the

audience as resistant, and specifically in opposition to government … through

emotional attachment to ideas of ethical or moral responsibility' (2011: 229).

Taylor implies that subjective (emotional) responsiveness does not intrinsically

possess any explicit political function. Stirring up 'indignation, public protest and

sympathy', documentary theatre reflects 'a contemporary world where the

emotional is cultivated as a means of marshalling and impelling action' (2012: 235).

D'Ancona has argued that, far from triggering oppositional activism, (online)

emotional enlistment has a perilous tendency to silence opposition, and thus to play

straight into the hands of the opponent. Taylor states that the play in performance

must 'transfer it into an asset for a political idea' (2012: 234), first and foremost

through raising awareness of the injustices it exposes. The hope (and it is an

optimistic expectation, rather than a guaranteed outcome) is that audiences will be

directed to channel their 'emotional enlistment' towards meaningful activism,

demanding reform, if not revolution.

My analysis of tribunal theatre (Appendix 2) concedes that the element of empathy

is essential to our perception of narrative composition, even when it is principally

intended to provide information. Identification with the victims of a miscarriage of

justice forces us to admit, through testimonial evidence, the uncomfortable truth

about the institutional racism exposed by the tribunal. In this respect tribunal

theatre does have the capacity to reflect the definition of *catharsis* offered by

Kearney, 'this double-take of difference and identity - experiencing oneself as

another and another as oneself - that provokes a reversal of our natural attitude to things' (2002: 142). In the light of this possibility, the emphasis upon 'authenticity' as securely residing in factual material loses some of its authority.

The postmodern problem

Tracing the origins of the post-truth phenomenon, D'Ancona finds the possibility that the finger of blame might point back to post-modern thinkers, who, 'by questioning the very notion of objective reality, did much to corrode the notion of truth' (2017: 92). Among postmodern theorists who express 'incredulity towards … the very idea of 'truth-value'' (2017: 94), Baudrillard's observations are found to be prescient in that he was writing twenty-three years before Facebook and twenty-five before Twitter:

> We live in a world where there is more and more information and less
>
> and less meaning … everywhere socialization is measured by the
>
> exposure to media messages. Whoever is underexposed to the media is …
>
> virtually asocial …
>
> (Baudrillard in D'Ancona, 2017: 95)

D'Ancona's point – that post-modernist texts augured post-truth – is persuasive. He argues that, while post-modernists did not entirely dislodge the consensus that truth was a sacrosanct value, we have arrived at the moment when 'that consensus

has collapsed' (2017: 96). Trump's unlikely ascent may be indicative of its demise;
he became

> the unlikely beneficiary of a philosophy that he has probably never heard
> of and would certainly despise. His rise to the most powerful office in the
> world, unhindered by care for the truth, accelerated by the awesome force
> of social media, was the ultimate post-modern moment.
> (2017: 97)

Authenticity in performance/the performance of authenticity

Despite acknowledgement of the several critiques of Baudrillard's writings in
existence (2017: 35 – 36), Schulze's analysis, when placed alongside the critical
discourses surrounding verbatim theatre, offers the possibility that 'a felt lack of the
genuine, the real or the authentic' (2017: 36) is a crucial factor in the development
of verbatim strategies. The resurgence of verbatim theatre may be a phenomenon
that does not so much reflect, as offer an alternative to theories that destabilise,
even obliterate, adherence to those fundamental concepts. He goes on to posit that

> audiences are keen on bringing back the idea of truth, the real and
> authenticity, and not just as a way of performance but as a genuine human
> experience. While theory may have obliterated truth and the real
> altogether, they have never ceased to play a role in people's lives. [They

are] apparently not happy with the abyss of uncertainty and

mediatisation, and have sought to retrieve something that is authentic.

(2017: 36)

Schulze's inspection of authenticity begins with the premise that it is performative

and that it 'enacts a very tangible social reality' (2017: 37). Schulze questions 'its

relationship with neighbouring concepts such as truth and mimesis' (2107: 37),

basing his analysis on three core assertions, of which these two are especially

relevant:

> Authenticity is a backlash against postmodern rationality and
>
> doubt. […] Authenticity is often consciously created, specifically in
>
> the performing arts, as an aesthetic tool; it is both a strategy of
>
> creation and reception.
>
> (2017: 37)

With reference to Funk (1988) and Culler (1988), Schulze draws attention to the

central paradox contained within this performative notion of authenticity: it is 'only

perceived, when marked as such (mediated), and thus becomes the very thing it

desired not to be' – that is, in Baudrillardian terms, a simulacrum; 'only by entering

the symbolic dimension of language does it obtain its quality of genuineness' (2017:

39). Thus, 'authenticity is both, its own antithesis and the ultimate simulacrum'

(2017: 39). The quote Schulze uses from Funk in support of this claim is strikingly

relevant to the dilemmas that characterise academic discussion of verbatim theatre: 'authenticity' is *enacted* when 'experience (life) and representation (art) touch in the infinitude of paradox' (Funk in Schulze, 2017: 40). Jenny Hughes regards the exceptional relationship between the performance and reception of verbatim theatre as expressive of a central paradox: 'the representation of the real or evidential via performance leaves the audience asking 'is it real?' in a more insistent way, perhaps, than in response to more explicitly fictional plays', so that the form essentially invites its audience to scrutinise 'the limitations of representations of truth' (2007: 152).

Schulze suggests that Funk's approach to the study of authenticity – a study of its outcomes, or 'fruits' (Funk 2015: 56 in Schulze 2017: 40) – 'subverts normal discursive dichotomies such as fake and original, essence and construction, reality and fiction' (2017: 41). Funk's approach proposes a view of authenticity wherein '[t]he authentic object is itself a paradox, which embodies both fake and original and thus nullifies these dichotomies' (2017: 41). Through the process of 'reconstruction', as proposed by Funk (2015), authenticity is put in the eye of the beholder, that is, the 'recipient' (or, in the context of this submission, spectator). Schulze, via Funk, proposes a way of looking at the artefact that somehow 'closes' the binary gap. The recipient must understand reconstruction as a mechanism that 'encompasses all strategies, on part of both the artist and recipient, to overcome deferral and difference'; thus, 'the performance is perceived as whole and unified, and hence authentic' (2017: 41). Janelle Reinelt cautions against 'pessimistic postmodern scepticism', a position that, whilst it rightly questions 'assumptions about the truth-

value of documents' (2008:3), is 'over-determined by anti-theatricalism's distrust of mimesis' (2008:4). Importantly, Schulze raises the concept of mimesis within his mapping of the discourses surrounding authenticity.

Mimesis, according to Schulze, boils down to 'negotiating the relationship between reality and its representation – specifically in art' (2017: 43). Schulze acknowledges that Plato and Aristotle 'have effectively already marked out the two diametrical positions on mimesis: art as *imitation* of truth and art as *representation* of truth' (2017: 43, my emphasis). Verbatim strategies tend to blur the distinction between these two positions, since mimesis can be perceived as a means by which the imitation effectively *becomes* the representation. Schulze proposes a triangular relationship, wherein mimesis is seen as a relationship between objects, their representations and the perceiving (decoding) subject. (Dis)located within this dynamic, 'art's claim to truth in the guise of mimetic qualities has become obsolete' (2017: 48). In postmodernist terms, 'art must be judged purely on aesthetic grounds' because 'mimesis cannot be understood as simple representation or imitation of nature' (2017: 48). Rather, it is reconstituted as 'an aesthetic relationship between perceiving subject and artist or artistic object, which may elicit sentiments of authenticity' (2107: 48). Among Reinelt's list of claims for a particular critical approach to verbatim theatre is her observation that suggests a similar, tripartite relationship:

> 2) The documentary is not in the object but in the relationship between
>
> the object, its mediators (artists, historians, authors) and its audiences.

(2008: 2)

Schulze's analysis is particularly pertinent to this submission because it pushes the argument for authenticity into the era of verbatim theatre's resurgence, the years circa 1995 – 2010. The period is 'characterized by a new structure of feeling, for which a label has yet to be found', that 'grows out of Postmodernism and supersedes it' (2017: 49). My article 'The Mourning After: Structures of Feeling in Verbatim Theatre' (Appendix 5) draws from Raymond Williams' concept of the 'structure of feeing', applied in its original context to the work of Chekhov (Williams, 1993: 103-10). Schulze calls this new structure of feeling emerging after postmodernism 'a rediscovery of older practices but with a more sophisticated understanding of them' (2017: 53). Reflecting observations made by Williams of Chekhov's ability to conjure an inadvertent mood, shared by a group, and expressed without hope of corrective action, change or resolution, I argue that Darney realises precisely this structure of feeling. Even though the structural framework buckles occasionally, it reinforces the sense of stasis Darney achieves; it supports, through aesthetic means, Darney's claim for the 'universality' of the play's latent themes.

Building upon Jameson's Marxist critique of postmodernity (2017: 49 - 51), namely its abolition of historicity and commodification of culture, Schulze points to the fragility of notions of 'authenticity' in a culture 'characterised by mass production and exchange value' (2017: 50). This train of thought leads Schulze to conclude that postmodern condition, expressive of a crisis of identity triggered, perhaps, by 'globalisation, the digital revolution, a global capitalist system' (2017: 51), demands

a remedy. In essence, 'states of detachment, irony or apathy' (2017: 52) do not constitute the totality of the human experience of life, and find no practical application there.

Douglas Kellner argues that the prevailing condition is located 'in a zone between the modern and the postmodern' that contains 'continuities and discontinuities with the past, striking changes and enduring structures, peppered with perpetual conflicts between the old and the new' (2007: 117). What is required now, according to Kellner, is 'a multidimensional optic on the present age that combines historical narrative and critical social theory' (2007: 17). Schulze (2017: 54 – 58) advocates the term proposed by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), 'Metamodernism', as the successor to postmodernism, since it fluctuates between modernism and postmodernism but escapes dogmatic adhesion to either, allowing for 'the freedom to reconstruct' (2017: 55). Schulze's definition of 'reconstruction' (cf. Funk 2015) reconciles the 'dichotomies' of 'fake and genuine, which are both embedded in the same object' (2107: 41). Essentially it 'allows for authentic experience', while knowing that such a thing is forever elusive; the value of this approach lies precisely in its admission 'of a new meaning that can never be found but that should enthusiastically be *sought*' (2017: 57, my emphasis). My article exploring the reconstruction of public inquiries in Tribunal Theatre, 'Nothing but the truth: Narrative, authenticity and the dramatic in tribunal theatre' (Appendix 2) draws substantially from Richard Kearney's study of narrative composition. Kearney (2002: 136) argues that the historical narrative is authenticated, not by the

truth-*claim* but by the truth-*quest*; it somehow circumvents the doubts raised by the vagaries of (fictional) story telling because it intrinsically *endeavours* to tell the truth. The core of Kearney's argument is that degrees of subjective interpretation within the presentation of authored historical narrative mean that fact and fiction can, quite securely, co-exist: indeed, one may thrive upon the other, or the contradistinction might enhance perception of one or the other by throwing its complexities and limitations into sharp relief.

Finally, Schulze brings his discussion of Metamodernism to theatre, stating that in any theatrical situation 'spectators are aware of the constructedness of the situation but are still keen on authentic experience' (2017: 58). Schulze reiterates, rather than resolves the paradox at the heart of verbatim practice, but his central point somehow absorbs – to the point of total evaporation – the problematic schism implied by theatre's imitations of authenticity. Schulze's central point is that 'because audiences are aware of concepts of fakeness and simulation ... they are now able to gain authentic experience in this fake situation' (2017: 58). The paradoxical role Metamodernism is that it 'allows for authentic experience that is genuinely real while everyone knows that it is fake' (2017: 58). Further, the 'fakeness' of theatre 'becomes a virtue because it puts individual Truth at in the centre of attention'. (2017: 58). Schulze's emphasis on the individual spectator within his analysis of Metamodernism is, to some extent, challenged by Reinelt's assertion of the 'social experience of documentary inquiry and critique' as being its principal facet. Reinelt finds in Martin's 'six functions' (2012: 22) an indication of

documentary theatre's 'underlying predication on a viable public sphere' (2008: 8).

Reinelt points out the positive capacity that documentary theatre possesses for

evoking 'a public sphere where a gathered group might investigate and consider the

meaning of individual experiences in the context of state or societal responsibilities

and norms'; it constructs a 'temporary sociality' through which it can 'summon

public consideration of aspects of reality in the spirit of critical reasoning' (2008: 9).

Schulze does not refer specifically to verbatim practice *per se*, although his

statement that theatre audiences are 'able to gain authentic experience in [a] fake

situation' expresses the paradox at the heart of critical discourses specific to the

genre. At this point, I would like to consider two examples of analysis that explore

and articulate the ways 'authentic' experience is represented, constructed and

encountered in contrasting examples of verbatim practice. The articles are useful to

this submission because they raise key issues that occur within with my own

articles and research methodologies, as explained in the section below.

Into the Breach: in Search of 'Authenticity'

Stuart Fisher focuses on the tendency within verbatim strategies to 'exploit' the

experience of 'traumatized subjects', a practice that 'places great pressure on such

literalist construals of truth and authenticity' (2011: 112). The truth-claims made in,

and of, verbatim theatre have been over-emphasised because they place 'limitations

on theatre's capacity to respond *authentically* to real stories of trauma' (2011: 112,

original emphasis). Stuart Fisher proposes 'a more existentially nuanced articulation

of truth grasped as 'authenticity'' (2011: 112), informed by Martin Heidegger's

account of being-towards-death, which looks beyond pedestrian fidelity to *factual accuracy* to consider 'fidelity to the very conditions of our own existence' (2012:112). My article 'Speaking Machines: the Dialectical Voice in Contemporary Verbatim Theatre' (2014) posits that verbatim theatre is 'misconceived' as a form where facts and truth are intertwined, but 'if there is unease about the latter, facts we can trust more securely' (2014: 40). Stating that 'the assembled presence of individuals speaking about an event ... proposes a number of competing truths' (2104: 40), the article acknowledges Stuart Fisher's call for a shift of emphasis, in the assessment of verbatim practice, from its supposed obligation to generate 'technical' and 'factual' truth.

The notion that the truth-claims of verbatim practice are established by 'the act of speaking out' (Stuart Fisher 2011: 197) is echoed in the analyses summarised below. The search for authenticity is, however, further problematised by the distinction Stuart Fisher perceives in the presentation of 'fact' and 'truth'. Ultimately, the dissolution of 'literalist' affinity to the former, and a subjective expression of the latter (enacted, in performance, through extension into poetic, metaphoric forms) may, via appraisal of Heideggerian terms, elicit a more *authentic* response.

Stuart Fisher's analysis of *Talking to Terrorists* (Soans, 2006) argues that, while the play respects factual truth, it fails to reveal 'any insight into the politics of these situations' (2012: 113). This is an inevitable consequence of the 'self-limiting'

methodology of verbatim theatre: its 'fidelity to the word-for-word interview' defines a truth 'where facts legitimate what it means to *speak of* the truth' (2012: 113, my emphasis). The limitation identified here is failure to disclose 'testimonial or traumatic truth' when it is constrained within 'a literal and factual account of 'what happened'' (2012: 113). Essentially, Stuart Fisher sees, in the representation of traumatic experience, a possibility that has been overlooked within verbatim practice under her scrutiny:

> trauma has the capacity to throw the subject into … the liminal space of survival. […] It is this liminality that can precipitate what, following Heidegger, we might call an *authentic* seizing of one's own existence. (2012: 113)

If, as Stuart-Fisher argues, the faithful replication of verbatim accounts can only touch the surface of traumatic experience, how else might such profoundly subjective depths be explored, or 'authentically examined' (2012: 114)? Crucially, the way we look at verbatim practice must move beyond appreciation of its journalistic function (its capacity, that is, to expose the hitherto unseen, *factual* truths of a story). An 'authentic' methodology should break through the constraints imposed by factual legitimacy and reach for different dramaturgical strategies capable of locating and inhabiting this liminal space.

One of the key inquiries driving my own research has been to discover what this 'space' looks and sounds like; how it utilises, or serves the raw material. Stuart Fisher addresses these questions by looking closely at the impact of trauma upon the subject: it can be perceived 'as a 'breach' in the processes of cognition with which we ordinarily experience and make sense of the world' (2012: 114). If trauma cannot be assimilated into experience, it may therefore 'stand radically beyond language and communicability' (2012: 114). Concisely put, verbatim theatre, in its reliance on the spoken word, actually forecloses communication of that which it seeks to disseminate.

This PhD submission is compelled by the search for dramaturgical strategies in verbatim practice that stretch beyond slavish affinity to the spoken word (although I have not, in any of the articles, dealt with the presentation of trauma *per se*). It should be acknowledged, too, that Stuart Fisher is not concerned, as I have been, with forms of verbatim theatre that *necessitate* the presentation of facts. *The Colour of Justice* (Norton-Taylor 1999), the play that illustrates my article 'Nothing but the truth: Narrative, authenticity and the dramatic in tribunal theatre' (2013), is situated within the explicitly legal context (and innate narrative framework) of the high-profile public inquiry. Arguably, the impact of the play was due, in part, to its journalistic facility to set the established facts of the case against the incendiary new evidence it reports. Its intention was not to investigate 'what it *means* to speak of the truth' (Stuart Fisher 2012: 113, my emphasis); rather, it set out – successfully, as it transpired – to *evidence* institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police. This

said, I do, in the article, draw attention to a 'metaphoric' dimension in two extracts of the testimony selected by Norton-Taylor that arguably transcend dry reportage (2013: 24). Looking at specific passages in *The Colour of Justice* the article finds within the text instances where the presence of a metaphorical dimension to the writing opens up the possibility for empathetic connection to the victims, through which the material reflects Kearney's suggestion: catharsis, or empathy, far from being sentimental, is in fact 'a major test not just of poetic imagination but of ethical sensitivity' (Kearney, 2002: 139). I posit that in his role as playwright, Norton-Taylor does permit poetry, sentiment – metaphor, even – to infuse the text, finding that even in verbatim editing the playwright can transcend the reporter's function and take up the historian's (as posited by Kearney): the material is able to find a *subjective* truth.

While there is a striking poetic quality to the imagery contained within those spoken texts, it would be a stretch to claim that they entirely transcend 'a literal and factual account of 'what happened'' (Stuart Fisher, 2012: 113). The hyperreal tribunal theatre form offers no juncture at which a radical departure from mimetic modes of delivery might occur. There is a more convincing link to be found, in this respect, with my analysis of Lloyd Newson's dance-theatre piece *John*, in 'Free Speech: Body and text in DV8's verbatim trilogy' (Appendix 6) and the Dah Women's methodology in '*Crossing the Line*: Reconstruction/Reconciliation' (Appendix 1).

Dah's poetic treatment of testimonials deal explicitly with trauma, in their adaptation of women's accounts of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia: *Crossing the*

Line (2009). As described in my analysis of the production, the Dah women's devised score utilises the discoveries made in the course of making the piece, and traces their own process of coming to terms with the collective trauma of conflict that reverberates, still, through their homeland.

Dah had found, in rehearsal, adherence to restrictive verbatim strategies to be an insufficient (as well aesthetically limiting) methodology. Unable to act as intermediaries for the traumatized subjects – the horrors described seemed to them ungraspable (and any attempt to fully embody the subjects, technically, and ethically problematic) – the company extended into exploring physical expression of their own, individual responses to the material. Dah's dramaturgy in *Crossing the Line* opens up a gap between the spoken and the performance texts: the latter, being made up of the memories and dreams of the performers, can be understood as 'authentic' to *their* experience. Thus *Crossing the Line* is authentic, in my assessment, not to the traumatic experience of the testifiers, but to the Dah Women's process of making. Arguably, the autobiographical content in *John*, and the work's extension, beyond spoken language, into physical expression of its extremities, force us more directly into contact with explicit experiences of trauma. Both examples bring the spectator, in one way or another, into close proximity to mortality. Stuart Fisher is calling for verbatim strategies that somehow embrace and convey this dimension, and in doing so reveal a dimension of 'truthfulness' that factual accuracy (and mimetic performance styles) fail to disclose.

Patrick Duggan's analysis of Paper Birds' 2010 production *Others* suggests the

possibility that authenticity is *affected* in verbatim performance, through a

convergence or 'interaction of the 'reality' of the spoken texts and the overt (almost

meta-) theatricality of the [performance] event' (2013: 150). Duggan's hypothesis

echoes Stuart Fisher's: he proffers that, in this production, 'authenticity' does not

correspond to 'verisimilitude or some sense of 'truth''; rather, the representations

made

> might be seen to correspond to a more Heideggerian interpretation of
>
> authenticity insofar as the work is not attending to any sense of factual
>
> veracity but ... speaks to the conditions of human existence and especially
>
> the experience of trauma.
>
> (2013: 150)

For Duggan, as for Stuart Fisher, the experience of trauma 'is not one of linearity or

clarity and thus any attempt to represent it ... needs to attend to that structural

fracturing and disruption of linear time' (2013: 150). Again, there are striking

parallels to be found here in Duggan's analysis of Paper Birds' *Others* and the

dramaturgical strategies of Dah's *Crossing the Line*:

> The physical language the performers use ... is not trying to be like the
>
> original trauma nor is it making a comment on it; in fact, the poetic

physicality is precisely *inauthentic* in relation to the original moment, but

it produces the effect of authenticity.

(2013: 151).

Duggan sees a parallel, here, with Stuart Fisher's call for a dramaturgy (of verbatim

theatre) that displaces prosaic definitions of 'truth' and offers 'a more existentially

nuanced articulation of truth grasped as "authenticity"' (Stuart Fisher 2011: 112).

But is there – can there possibly be – a 'standard conception' (2011: 112) of truth? I

have explored, above, the extent to which the status of 'truth', as a concept, has been

eroded to a limit point. And is not the 'effect' of authenticity a standard feature of

any (more or less convincing) performance in the theatre? Is it not what we mean,

for instance, by *acting*? One of my intentions, in approaching this PhD, was to find

out, through looking closely at several examples, whether verbatim theatre practice

anticipates and exacts a *particular* relationship to authenticity in performance that

sets it apart from other forms of theatre. Both Duggan and Stuart Fisher implicitly

confirm that there are recognised conventions within verbatim practice that need to

be examined and fragmented: Stuart Fisher refers above to a *methodology* that is

found to be restrictive primarily in its adherence to factual accuracy and reliance on

verbal expression and chronological structure.

Duggan's analysis of *Others*, which foregrounds and advocates its 'deliberately

fractured, fallible, and ambiguous structure' (2013: 150) suggests to me a

dramaturgical strategy that may address, but does not entirely *solve* the problems

with word-for-word retelling as expressed by Stuart Fisher (who sees the convention as leading to oversimplification of complex issues). Rather, it circumvents them; I have the uncomfortable sense that *Others* lets itself off the hook, somewhat, shifting responsibility for representing or, rather, recognising truth to the spectator, by 'openly admitting its theatricality' (as if its status as 'theatre' could possibly be denied), 'thus alleviating any 'truth' claims but allowing the audience to discover their own experiences of the truth and authenticity of the women's stories' (2013: 154). This is a problematic statement because it does not satisfactorily explain how the women's stories are rendered, in performance, more or less 'truthful' (being verbatim texts, they have, ostensibly, been selected precisely because they carry explicit truth-claims); and because Duggan's emphasis on the spectator's subjective 'discovery' rather overstates the audience's capacity to influence and control their reception of pre-selected, rehearsed material.

There is something troublingly contradictory in company member Jemma McDonnell's account of Paper Birds' process (in Duggan's 2011 interview: see 2013: 153, 155) that fails to convince. McDonnell stresses the company's intention to explore the ethical dilemmas encountered through the project, and to encourage audiences to 'explore their prejudices' and 'to re-evaluate their attitudes' (2013: 153). It is not enough, however, to state that the company assuaged the risk of misrepresenting these women by consciously making their misrepresentation of them 'the whole premise of the piece' (2013: 155). There is, for me, something deeply problematic in admitting – even after deep immersion in such a process –

'that we don't understand them and the work is about trying to understand them and maybe getting that wrong' (2013: 155). Are the company not, then, *perpetuating* a situation they've ostensibly set out to critique? McDonnell states their intention as being to '[interrogate] the misrepresentations that all the women have experienced' (2013: 155), but readily admits to the possibility that *Others* potentially adds to their sum.

Questioning McDonnell's claims, however, leads me to ask whether the Dah women, whose rehearsal process in *Crossing the Line* explored their inability to inhabit full understanding of their subjects, have perpetuated a similarly problematic ambiguity. Their work is concerned, however, with revelation of the issues that faced them during development of the piece, and does not assimilate their own 'failure to understand' with the testifier's narratives of misrepresentation. The most explicit link in Dah's methodology is with Newson's parallel intention in making *John*: to allow the DV8 company's improvisational process – that is, the expression of their individual encounters with verbatim texts – to inform the somatic score. Thus, I have argued, *John* offers a definition of authenticity that can be understood as 'authentic' to *their* process, *their* experience. Stuart Fisher is not, however, calling for an admission of absence, the *lack* of that which is beyond understanding; a failure of process, a failure to empathise, or whatever McDonnell might mean by 'getting it wrong'; she is asking for articulation of existential questions in some other, less prosaic form than word-for-word facsimile.

It is possible that *Crossing the Line* and *John* offer a glimpse, in their imbrication of contrasting aesthetic responses, how this encounter with 'authenticity' – an inhabitation of liminal space – might be approached. If *language*, in the face of trauma, is shown to be an insufficient means of expression, the challenge for verbatim theatre

> concerns the problem of how a dramaturgical strategy, constituted on the promise of direct communicable experience, can authentically engage with that which stands radically *beyond* language.
> (Stuart-Fisher, 2012: 114)

Stuart Fisher's examples, *The Exonerated* (Blank and Jensen: 2006) and *He Left Quietly* (Farber: 2008), both of which deal with the trauma of wrongful arrest, feature subjects who 'speak of the encounter with the imminence of their own deaths' (2012: 116) and, following their exoneration, their coming to terms with survival. The austere staging of *The Exonerated* leads us to 'perceive these non-actorly actors as 'intermediaries' for the voice of the person on whose behalf they are speaking' (2012: 116). Additionally, several changes of cast, and the participation of various star actors, 'combine to generate a curiously detached mode of performance' (2012: 116) whereby the audience is encouraged to see the distance between the actor and testifier.

Various critical dissections of the performer's function in documentary practice

caution against asserting the *testifier's* ownership of the material, when the *actor's* interpretation of it is central to the process of dissemination: 'perhaps most fundamentally, the substitution of an actor for the absent human source of the testimony presented in a documentary play *ipso facto* raises the issue of authenticity' (Young, 2009: 72). According to Radosavljevic, verbatim theatre 'allows for the actors' authority to assert itself at least through virtuosity if not through literal authorship' and becomes, in performance, 'ultimately more of a vehicle for an actor's artistry than that of a writer or director' (2013: 129). Tomlin agrees that 'the perspective of the artist holds the ultimate authority, both over the political conclusions of the piece itself and over the representations of the individuals involved' (2013: 123). The apparent veracity of lived experience is central to verbatim practice explicitly concerned with presenting fragments of real life through the performance of private narratives. But the position of the actor as 'surrogate' for the individuals represented problematises further the extent to which 'authentic' performance is achieved.

The most comprehensive single publication concerned with the performance of verbatim theatre remains the special edition of *Studies in Theatre and Performance* (2011: 32: 2) edited by Derek Paget that responds to the 2007 – 10 'Acting with Facts' Arts and Humanities Research Council project. The volume reflects most explicitly the territories and concerns explored in my own research, as it turns to the makers of verbatim theatre in order to examine current practice. The point of confluence in these case studies is their heightened sense of the specific demands made on the actor in verbatim theatre.

Cantrell points to the 'preoccupations with responsibility, psychological and emotional understanding, and the gap between actor and subject' that 'affected ... actors' processes in ways that would not have happened had they been playing a fictional role' (2011: 178). The actors' use of a Stanislavskian vocabulary in this context revealed the limitations of a methodology that was not designed to 'develop techniques for playing a real person' (2011: 178). Stanislavski advocates, in the process of interpreting a fictional character, actors' exploitation of their own, analogous experience. The actors encountered specific technical and ethical concerns in applying this process to portraying non-fictional characters that ultimately 'obscur[ed] their own creative interventions' (2011: 179). My own analysis of Alecky Blythe's methodology (Appendix 3) explores the possibilities and limitations of Stanislavskian vocabularies. Enright concurs that working with testimony placed

> different demands on the actors from those they had previously encountered
> ... with more conventional texts. These included mastering another's speech
> patterns, the fear of misrepresenting the person who had told the story ... and
> the challenge involved in direct address.
>
> (2011: 187)

Stuart Fisher cites Dierdre Heddon's indictment of the form (Heddon in Stuart Fisher, 2011: 194-195) as being 'an unethical and appropriative practice' that 'speaks *as* or *on behalf of* another' (2011: 194). Heddon draws attention to the ethics of processing real-life experiences for the purpose of making theatre, 'suggesting

that verbatim theatre becomes yet another means of exploiting the marginalised and the vulnerable' (2011: 195). Concerned that the act of speaking for others may indeed rob them of agency and thus lead to further disempowerment, Stuart Fisher raises important questions:

> How is it possible to speak for the other without eradicating or subsuming his or her otherness? How do we situate ourselves in relation to someone else's story without falling into a passive, narcissistic version of empathetic identification, where we subsume the other's suffering as our own?

> (2011: 195)

Stuart Fisher, drawing from Dominick LaCapra's notion of the 'surrogate victim' (LaCapra in Stuart Fisher, 2012: 202), asks whether verbatim theatre 'invite[s] the audience into a process of 'unchecked identification' where they are no longer sure who is standing before them?' (2012: 202). Her question indicates that ethical issues surrounding identification are as pertinent to audiences as to performers of verbatim theatre.

Stuart Fisher notes, in Blank and Jensen's introduction to *The Exonerated*, the distinction made between *telling* rather than *reliving* a story. This is relevant to the context of the performance of trauma because the instruction (to the actor) to *tell*, not *relive*, the characters' stories locates the traumatic events described decisively in the past. Trauma, however, resists such firm confinement, and potentially breaks

down 'the usual chronological boundaries of time' (2012: 116). My analysis of DV8's *John* notes how the titular character's narrative function oscillates between telling *and* reliving his own story, which is structured as a relentless chronology of trauma. The piece achieves a disorienting temporal trick through the juxtaposition of the 'storied' John's past tense, verbatim text and its immediate, 'here-and-now' enactment; the character is both interlocutor and participant, inhabiting a space located somewhere between detached reportage and embodied, integrated reconstruction of the past. Trauma, posits Stuart-Fisher, 'returns unbidden to disrupt the present while also radically re-aligning the subject's vision of the future' (2012: 116). My conclusion supports this view: John is shown to have no control over the sequence of occurrences that make up his story, has limited control over their recollection and no control over their consequences.

With regard to the chronological structure of *The Exonerated*, Stuart Fisher posits that 'without access to a non-literal mode of expression such as metaphor or poetry', an *authentic* account of trauma becomes unaccountable; the 'explicable, chronological language of a time-bound interview' (2012: 117) is insufficient. Stuart Fisher uses the story of Sunny Jacobs to illustrate how the 'storied' version of Jacobs (that is, the character in the play) eludes full expression of the profound impact of her incarceration; rather, the play text relies upon educing factual details. Even when Jacobs approaches articulation of the 'existential crisis precipitated by [them]' (2012: 117), a literal account of occurrences, rather than substantial insight or reflection, is afforded to the character. Referring to Jacobs' retelling of her

sentencing, Stuart Fisher asks for more than an echo of Jensen's loss and confusion (expressed, in the text (see Blank and Jensen 2006: 52), literally as her speech*less*ness). Yet the limitation of verbatim theatre's structural methodology, if it is to privilege exact reiteration of interview material, is that it fails to permit the dimension posited by Stuart Fisher as necessary to 'authentic' expression: it is without poetry.

Stuart Fisher's analysis of *The Exonerated* is included here because the play is highly significant to this submission. I attended a performance of *The Exonerated* at the Riverside, London, in February 2006, which concluded with the moment that set my fascination with verbatim theatre in motion: the announcement, by one of the cast members, that 'Sunny Jacobs was played tonight by the real Sunny'. While rising, with the rest of the audience, to my feet, I had to admit to a nagging sense that, up to the point of this revelation (in complete ignorance of Sunny Jacobs' 'true' identity), I had considered her a *bad actor.* I wondered what my applause was *for*: the incognito Jacobs had seemed unable to perform her own words with anything like the skill of her co-stars, and had thus, ironically, emerged as by far the least convincing character. In the light of Stuart Fisher's analysis, had I witnessed something more 'authentic' in her failure to convincingly *perform* her own words? Or is it that the *performance* of verbatim material is, ultimately, where a theatre audience encounters 'authenticity'?

Stuart Fisher's analysis prompts me to consider, in retrospect, whether Jacobs'

rather flat, artless performance betrayed a lack of training or talent, or an inability

to fully *possess* her words. Jacobs' performance of her storied self was certainly

delivered without the authenticating gloss of acting 'technique'. It could it be that

the real Sunny Jacobs could not convincingly 'tell', through any available means of

performance, the experiences recounted by her storied self; Jacobs, unlike the other

performers, would have no choice but 'relive' them. Her apparent failure drew me

close to witnessing Sunny's inability to express, in Stuart-Fisher's terms, the

inexpressible: to 'own' her text – or, in the moment of 'telling' to imitate

authenticity. A certain distance from lived experience was shown, in this instance, to

be necessary to its convincing, theatrical presentation.

Methodologies

The focus of my research is the interrogation of the particular dramaturgies of

recent and current verbatim theatre, spanning the period of its resurgence in the

late 1990s (Richard Norton-Taylor's *The Colour of Justice*) to 2016 (Peter Darney's *5

Guys Chillin'*). I have been concerned with exposing recent practice to wider

dissemination through publication of my research findings: with the exception of

The Colour of Justice, each performances and play is represented by its first and only

academic analysis within this submission. My research, taken together, highlights

the distinctions in verbatim practice across different cultures so that it extends

knowledge and understanding within comparative discourse.

In the process of writing five of the seven articles presented, rather than (exclusively) examining published texts or records (in the form of press reviews, features and interviews) I have attended live performances of the featured work, having conducted my own semi-structured interviews with its makers – directors, writers and actors – in order to discover, from first-hand accounts, how and why their distinct dramaturgical strategies were constructed. My analyses position the artists as intermediaries between their source material and its adaptation, through contrasting dramaturgical strategies, into verbatim theatre. Thus the articles discussed below explore the immediate circumstances of writing, rehearsal, production and reception, and bring my research inquiries into contention with the core issues apparent in extant academic commentaries. In summary, this PhD is an example of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, combining extant historiographical, critical and theoretical research with qualitative, ethnographically inflexed research methods such as interviews and field research (attendance at performance and rehearsal attendance). Thus, it combines 'outsider' and 'insider' knowledge in order to uncover and interrogate the 'intimations of authenticity' in verbatim practice, a phenomenon that, although not bypassed by other scholars, remains a thorny issue in the critical discourses summarised in the previous section (Critical Contexts).

My aim has been to discover innovations that have led the field of verbatim practice into new, fertile ground, opening up possibilities for future development of the

genre. This prerogative has been the guiding factor in the selection of original plays and performances central to the analysis in five of the articles comprising this submission. My analysis identifies conventions that have evolved through various treatments of verbatim material; these are extrapolated in detail in the section below (Contributions to New Knowledge, 72 – 75). I sought examples that, through the singular innovations of their makers, held the potential to destabilise established definitions and expectations of 'authenticity' and expand the field of verbatim practice beyond the range of existing academic cartography. I was drawn to plays and performances apparently pushing boundaries prescribed by recurrent strategies (in performance) and recurrent debates (in critical discourses); my leading objective thus came into focus as I set out to demonstrate how, and why, my examples fulfilled their anticipated potential.

For example, several factors drew me to *Where Have I Been All My Life?* as a potential research subject that can be traced in the article (Appendix 3): my geographical proximity to its venue (the New Vic theatre, Newcastle-Under-Lyme); the occasion of the regional premiere of a new piece by Alecky Blythe, whose *London Road* had already brought verbatim theatre to a wide audience (and made Blythe a nationally recognised artist in the UK); and the status of the venue as the historic site of Peter Cheeseman's ground-breaking work in the field of verbatim practice (see Paget, 1987). In securing an interview with the director, Teresa Heskins, I was pursuing insights pertinent to a call for papers addressing the relationship between performance and technology. Discussing her work with actors,

Heskins' insights provide an intimate account of the process of working with the recorded voices on this project (through the performance methodologies of Brecht and Stanislavski), and raise issues intrinsic to the performance of verbatim material. The subject-matter of the play that provides its narrative motor – a local singing competition, Stoke's Top Talent – gives rise to a tension within the piece between the celebration of individual ambition and achievement and Heskins' attempts, as revealed in the interview, to emphasise the contestants' social context; my critical assessment of the piece, as one of its audience, confirms the presence of conflicting intentions that the production was unable to resolve.

Any claim to have paved a linear pathway through the assemblage of this PhD would be a disingenuous one. The process of binding together the components of a PhD by publication inevitably countenances certain methodological limitations: my final submission comprises, in actuality, a number of disparate pieces of work, each tailored to specific prerequisites set out by their recipients. In every case, the articles followed the submission and acceptance of abstracts responding to calls for papers; appendices 1 – 5 expanded from conference papers, and were subsequently offered to publications whose calls circumscribed germane fields of inquiry. One becomes a hostage to fortune by embracing such a risky strategy: obviously the system routing academic dissemination does not operate in service to the commitments of one's PhD.

Yet I found significant advantages in this approach: it imposed firm deadlines, required rigorous engagement and familiarity with extant discourse, and built, over

time, confidence in voicing my own contribution to the field through an emergent body of work. While the process of writing was complicated, always, by a nagging double bind (how to accelerate the progress of the PhD *and* deliver the goods promised by the abstract?), my nascent awareness and appreciation of existing, applicable discourses encompassed recognition of their worth as both an affirmative supporting structure and point of departure. Concentration on the field of verbatim practice through the sequence of articles establishes an irrefutable connecting thread, while the introduction of practitioners' contrasting perspectives prevents adherence to rigid conclusions about the status of 'truth' and 'authenticity' in verbatim practice.

Interrogating various encounters with a range of innovative compositional strategies guards against convenient, misleading homogenisation of the form, and exposes diverse incentives for working with verbatim material. The practitioners with whom I collaborated have in common the lack of any apparent meta-discourse, in their work, or in discussion of it, that is expressed in recognisably academic terms; they are simply not concerned by the same lines of inquiry. As storytellers, their faith in the veracity of lived experience would seem to express faith in the essential authenticity of speech acts that operate, in their work, as 'truth', but also as the *performance* of truth (by actors, in a theatre, within crafted narrative structures). But at the same time, the stuff of truth is also not treated as sacrosanct and inert: it is a malleable substance, to be wrought into some kind of performance

text. I reasoned that the location of working artists, at the heart of this contradictory business, made their perceptions an invaluable resource.

In centralising practitioners' accounts of their creative processes, my own methodological approach infers collusion with the argument that in verbatim theatre, artists, rather than subjects, assume 'authority' over the work (through their propensity to exploit or manipulate testifiers' contributions to it). If they do so, according to the academics cited, it is in service to problematic ulterior motives: the construction of 'narratives of opposition', for instance (see Tomlin, 2013), or superficially coherent narrative structures (see Hughes, 2007; Sotto-Morettini, 2005). Yet evidence of the specific aims, methodologies and experiences of those artists, acquired through first-hand accounts, are seldom considered in academic assessment of the practice that upholds an objective, critical stance, and at worst, denigrates the artists' practices to exploitative opportunism. This PhD places the practitioners' insights at the centre of the debate: broadly speaking, I have attempted to assess how these reveal the limitations and possibilities of the form; whether practitioners are influenced by the examples that go before them, or awareness of the controversies surrounding the form (are these confined to academia?); why and how they use verbatim material, and the discoveries made about their craft through doing so.

Such an approach intends to tackle recurrent critical issues. For example, I have stated in previous sections that the 'origin' of verbatim material is not configured as

a singular entity and cannot be irrefutably traced in performance; academic analysis

frequently questions the 'truth-claims' of work that disguises the selection of raw

testimony made in the editing process (see Bottoms, 2006; Martin, 2012). The

question of its provenance has been addressed by speaking to artists: I have

discerned the sources of raw material, how it was gathered, and the decisions made

in editing. Exposing the questions asked of interviewees, and the surplus text

disregarded in the editing process, reveals more of those secreted elements than the

finished products (whether published text or live performance) are inclined to

disclose. My analysis of Peter Darney's *5 Guys Chillin'*, for example (Appendix 5),

disseminates findings from the rehearsal process, to which I was invited prior to the

play's premiere in Brighton, that interrogate the directorial decisions made in the

collation, editing and staging of the material. The project has since achieved a level

of success I had not anticipated: the play went on to several London runs, global

performances and, in 2016, became a published text. The decision to blend raw

testimony into the construction of consistent characters was as much a consequence

of Darney's ethical concerns as his drive for narrative coherence: the identity each of

the interviewees that donated highly sensitive material is effectively erased through

this strategy. Despite the persistent presence of a sustained fourth wall and

Darney's invented, narrative conceit of a chemsex party progressing in real time, the

play exposes the process by which it was made by scripting the questions posed to

interviewees (Darney revealed that the same initial questions were posed to every

interviewee) into conversational 'cues'. These, in turn, trigger the performance of

various first-hand testimonies, turned into characters' anecdotes of their

experiences. My position as spectator to *5 Guys Chillin'* (in rehearsal and performance), led me to the conclusion that the audience is held at a distance from sustained identification with characters by the structural flaws in the piece. The real-time, present tense story of the party builds a momentum of its own that works both with and against the spoken text: its past tense delivery precludes the characters from vocalizing any responses to their immediate environment. The illusion of spontaneous conversation is thus made unsustainable.

My methodology comprises discernable research stages, the evidence and outcomes of which had somehow to be adjoined in assembly of the articles. My first step, in preparing a piece of writing, was to approach the director or writer for an interview (none of the practitioners approached during the course of this study declined my request), so that in planning, I could anticipate that their insights would contribute substantially to the writing process. This tactic was used experimentally in analysis of *Crossing the Line* (Appendix 1) and *Where Have I Been All My Life*? (Appendix 3), but had evolved into an established, tested strategy by the time I came to Peter Darney's *5 Guys Chillin'* (Appendix 5). I had, by then, realised the advantage (in supporting my obligation and claim to have disseminated new knowledge and produced original work) of integrating exclusive material in the form of interview transcripts: the artists' voices could, in principle, bring about a fascinating tension between extant critical issues that surround verbatim practice, and first-hand encounters with the practice itself. My aim was to encourage and construct a dynamic vacillation between inside and outside perspectives, intended to infuse the

articles with the vitality of artists' subjective disclosures. This strategy became

problematic in execution, however, due to the academic context of the exercise: my

primary intention was to produce rigorous critical analysis, not to provide an

unopposed platform for the broadcast of artists' commentaries.

Ironically, perhaps, there are similar critical and ethical issues implied here to those

I have discussed in relation to verbatim practice. Beside the ever-present danger

that, in foregrounding artists' narratives of making, my writing became overly

dependent on anecdote, questions arose concerning my responsibility to give their

insights fair and accurate representation. My own editing process was concerned

with how interview material should be integrated and tailored to support the

critical framework of the article, as preordained by its target publication. Thus my

methodological approach was driven by contradictory impulses: as an interviewer,

one's preferred bearing is attentive, appreciative, encouraging, generous; these are

not attributes commonly recognised in a critic. In saying that, I may have drawn too

rigid a division. I recognise that there is a fair compromise to be found between

rigorous, objective appraisal and the artist's entitlement to 'defend' and to express

ownership of their work. I contend, however, that the way into writing an article is

not to strive for balance above all else. I found it expedient to write articles with

some temporal and spatial distance from the interview situation (a relatively

intimate, human encounter), so that any critical response to the work in question

would not feel tantamount to betrayal. I became conscious of placing myself in a

changed context and role: from interviewer to academic writer. There is a

significant difference, which has to do with a diminished sense of connectedness – loyalty, even – to the interviewee, and pressing awareness of the main objective. But this is not to say that interviews were not informed and guided, to some extent, by prepared questions, not all of which proved relevant in the moment but tended to spring from the critical issues I was concerned with. In this respect, the parallels between my own undertaking and that of the verbatim playwright are clear: there is an intrinsic tension – and settlement to be found – between the compulsion to respect and convey the integrity of artists' responses and address the remits of academic publishers. Arguably, I was similarly conscious of word-limits, of the pressure to deliver coherent structures and cogent, persuasive lines of argument. Not so, perhaps, of the admonishments levelled at playwrights whose outcomes express perceptible bias.

Explaining the methodological approach I took to writing the articles requires an attempt to disentangle the influence of interview material from that of the imported critical sources framing it. There are certain key academics and hypotheses that occur frequently in the articles (these are fully examined in the previous section). Once I had absorbed these and recognised their value as a methodological tool, it was possible to appreciate their potential to support a twofold function in both underpinning and supporting the artists' statements, but also destabilising them. Thus the first task, of listening back to, and transcribing interviews, became a matter of detecting where statements could be confirmed or contested, or at least problematised, shifting the process from journalistic to academic territory. Again,

the divide between those two realms is not so rigid as the previous statement implies; I found this to be the case in researching contextual and critical material for plays and performances so current that they had not yet featured in any academic publications. Press features and reviews proved a useful source of relevant, up-to-date information, a way of gauging the immediate impact and broader cultural, or counter-cultural location of the performances under scrutiny. However, overreliance on journalism shifts the register and balance of my writing too far into journalistic territory, I think, in the piece about DV8's *John* (Appendix 6). Because the director, Lloyd Newson, could not be contacted for interview, my article integrates press interviews with him as well as press reviews and articles responding to *John*, so that my own voice and contribution of original, academic analysis is comparatively diminished. Access to artists does not always guarantee results, however: I had interviewed Alecky Blythe prior to writing about *Little Revolution* (Appendix 7), but Blythe's status as a major verbatim practitioner in the UK, and the degree of exposure that attends her celebrity, worked against my objective to draw out exclusive insights. Blythe's responses were so practiced, guarded, even, that the interview garnered nothing original or useful enough to make a significant impact on the article. In this instance, though, the omission of interview material led to an alternative, fruitful strategy (explained later in this section). I wonder, in retrospect, whether I was more vocally critical of the *Little Revolution* performance than I would have ventured had Blythe's 'voice' (and therefore her presence) been apparent in the article. There is another, disquieting possibility here: that I was so troubled and distracted by witnessing Blythe's

presence, in *Little Revolution*, as writer and performer of her 'authored' self, that I reacted, as a compensatory measure, by editing the playwright from the article. I cannot be sure. I am sure, however, that better discipline results from constraints than abundant resources. Teresa Heskins' account of directing *Where Have I Been All My Life?* (Appendix 3) so dominates the article that, again, my own voice within it – my ownership and control of the material – is compromised: my decision to close the article with an extended quote from Heskins, rather than my own conclusion, makes the mistake of giving the interviewee the last word, and passes ownership to Heskins.

My article exploring the work of the Dah Women (Appendix 1) presages the research methodology evident in subsequent articles (Appendixes 3 and 5), and remains, in my estimation, the most accomplished outcome (and therefore the best example of constructive methodology) within this PhD. This is not an admission of diminishing returns, so much as recognition of its strength as an abiding benchmark for subsequent output. Artists' perspectives contend, in my analyses, with critical interrogation of their work; thus their insights become the principal means through which existing academic critiques of verbatim practice, as well as my own conclusions, are confirmed or countered. The article initiated my quest for critical discourse that dissects current practice, and attempts to examine and recontextualise the emphasis upon 'authenticity' and 'truth' that informs the critical landscape.

My interest in their *Crossing the Line* project arose, by chance, from informal discussions with the company that took place during their visit to my place of work, Manchester Metropolitan University, as workshop facilitators. Finding, through conversation, that my contemplation of verbatim practice as a research territory coincided with strategies intrinsic to their project, I was compelled to accept the artists' invitation to visit their headquarters in Belgrade, Serbia, to see *Crossing the Line* and interview its directress Dijana Milosevic. My intention was to investigate Dah's claim to have introduced formal innovations in verbatim practice through their *Crossing the Line* project: the actors had emphasised the objective driving their *modus operandi*, that is, to introduce a 'poetic' dimension to the treatment of verbatim material. There are three principal, interwoven strands apparent in the article, indicating the interdisciplinary approach I have used in the production of this, and subsequent output.

Its subject is a current, original verbatim performance, *Crossing the Line*, to which I had access as a spectator; the article was planned in anticipation of immediate engagement with the piece as one of its audience, allowing for critical assessment of the work, taking into consideration the location and context of its performance and initial reception. Further, the article explores the creative process from the makers' point of view. Drawn from interviews conducted over a two-day period prior to the performance, the information gleaned from conversations with the company allowed me to explain how the artists' individual responses to the original transcript material sourced for the spoken text of *Crossing the Line* profoundly influenced Dah

Theatre's dramaturgical strategies in devising the performance. The article

evaluates its subsequent, radical departures from those that typically characterise

examples of the genre.

Interviewing the directress of *Crossing the Line*, Dijana Milosevic, I set out to

establish how the project was conceived and how it became possible to realise Dah's

intention to produce, in her words, 'performance art'. I consider the Dah women's

process of working with the text and discover how their unique compositional

strategies came about. This is crucial to an understanding of their dramaturgical

decisions and is seen to have influenced their responses to unavoidable ethical

questions surrounding the genre, questions that permeated every aspect of their

production from editing through to performance and reception. I posit that it is in

this respect, this relative flexibility that the work differs from much verbatim

theatre and where, as a spectator, some of the difficulties in reading the

performance text can be located, since there are no clear reference points in the

spoken, source text that might explain the actions that accompany them (say, the

ritualized usage of large quantities of salt that closes the piece in episode 23). The

article demonstrates the benefit of close contact with verbatim practitioners: I could

only have gained retrospective insight and understanding – an accurate reading of

the work – from interviewing them. Uncovering Milosevic's methodology explains

why the work is not at all times in service to the text, how the primacy of the

verbatim material is subverted by an elliptical, often cryptic score, by images and

impressions gathered from somewhere outside and later imported.

Whilst acknowledging that those imported elements, being unrelated to the spoken words, are impossible to read (in performance) with any certainty of their precise meaning, the article demonstrates that what they are doing with the text is opening up a space for interpretation, making the audience work to connect action and image to their speech acts (or leaving them free to accept this lack of correlation), something rarely seen in the treatment of verbatim material.

Arguably, as a spectator to the work (in Belgrade, Serbia), I was better prepared to read *Crossing the Line* than those in the audience closest to the actual events the piece explored, because I had interviewed the makers and knew precisely where and how the performance text originated and what it meant. Did that make my reception of the material any more 'authentic'? More so, perhaps, because I was in a position to interpret, with a greater degree of accuracy, the company's treatment of verbatim text. But the stories told would surely have delivered, to the local audience, the unmistakable, communal impact of authentic (first-hand) experience.

The section of this submission offering a critical overview incorporates a field of academic discourse exclusively concerned with verbatim practice; my articles are also informed by the strategy of taking critical perspectives from outside this immediate context as a means through which fresh insights into narrative and performative conventions can be gleaned. The advantage of this approach can be seen in my analysis of narrative structures in tribunal theatre, where the current

critical discourse around verbatim theatre is used as 'counterpart' to the core

structure and drive of Richard Kearney's discourse on Aristotelian narrative

structure from *On Stories* (2002). Using the current critical discourse around

verbatim theatre as 'counterpart' to Aristotle's model, my strategy in the article is to

dovetail the core structure and drive of Richard Kearney's discourse. The article is

concerned with the processing of raw (factual) material into pre-existing narrative

models, for it is within this transposition of fact into the familiar apparatus of fiction

- of story telling - that notions of 'authenticity' have been problematised.

My analysis of *5 Guys Chillin'* is the first of my articles that explicitly connects with

gay identity politics, drawing from Ian Lucas's historicist analysis, in *Impertinent*

Decorum, of the performative spaces carved out by gay activism and 'theatrical

manoeuvres' (1994: 128-129). Darney's spaces are seen to be other than the 'public

spheres' suggested by Hughes (2007): the chemsex scene, a rapidly expanding

subsection of contemporary gay life, is activated in cyberspace; it requires

withdrawal to near-invisibility, and its theatrical representation, a return to the

living room. In support of my arguments I draw from Raymond Williams' concept of

the 'structure of feeing', applied in its original context to the work of Chekhov

(Williams, 1993: 103-10). Reflecting observations made by Williams of Chekhov's

ability to conjure an inadvertent mood, shared by a group, and expressed without

hope of corrective action, change or resolution, I argue that Darney realises

precisely this structure of feeling. Even though the structural framework buckles

occasionally, it reinforces the sense of stasis Darney achieves; it supports, through aesthetic means, Darney's claim for the 'universality' of the play's latent themes.

The status of verbatim practice as primarily an issues-based medium has tended to prioritise, in critical discourse, the socio-political contexts of the plays and performances. While my articles do not ignore this aspect I have forged a more intimate connection to the work by attending live verbatim performances; my first-hand encounters with the work, emphasised, with the exception of *The Colour of Justice*, in all of my analyses, has allowed me to assess the efficacy of key critical hypotheses, using spectatorship as a means of 'testing' the appropriateness, relevance and scope of critical discourse against the product itself. *Crossing the Line*, *Where Have I Been All My Life?* and *John* do not yet exist in published form; the immediate advantage of this approach is that it provides access to ephemeral practice, and engages with issues surrounding the quiddity of spectatorship particular to verbatim performance (see Botham, 2008; Wake, 2009).

My analysis of *Crossing the Line* explores, as stated above, the 'imported' elements in their work that may be impossible to read (in performance) with any certainty of their precise meaning. Importantly, spectatorship has allowed me to encounter audiences as one of their number; academic discourse tends to homogenize the 'audience' as a faceless, voiceless – and putatively liberal – mass. The venues that housed the plays I have discussed, and the demographics of their audiences, have been an important material consideration in my critical appraisal.

For example, the decision to stage *Little Revolution* at London's Almeida is found to be problematic, in that it took the play outside of the community towards which its subject matter is explicitly targeted. My analysis of *Little Revolution* sets up a distinction between the play as live performance text, as I first encountered it in the Almeida production, and the play as written and published text. While the flaws in the production of *Little Revolution* may have overwhelmed, and unjustly tainted my initial response to the play (as spectator), close scrutiny of the published text (as reader) affords a deeper appreciation of Blythe's dramaturgical strategies. This second critical appraisal examines how the playwright has structured the play's complex series of juxtapositions so that they expose profound inequalities within the community she is representing. Lib Taylor has identified in Blythe's practice the tension between the spontaneity of speaking and permanence of writing (2013: 23), reflected, in my analysis, by imposing a separation between my critical position as spectator/listener and that as reader, the discovery being that reading the play allowed for more immediate, intimate encounters with the testifiers that populate its pages than I had felt in the Almeida's auditorium. The absence of actors allowed me to 'hear' the characters' unembellished voices and pay closer attention to the intricacies of their debates. It allowed, too, for a deeper appreciation of Blythe's craft.

Darney argues for universal messages in the piece *5 Guys Chillin'*, messages about the human need for contact, acceptance and stability. The play was marketed

towards, and attracted a specific (male, gay) audience yet, I argue, far from asserting

the liberal unanimity Darney claims, in interview, to have sought, forced it into

confrontation with aspects of controversial and potentially life-threatening social

and sexual behaviours that, while defiant and celebratory in their assertion of sub-

cultural identity, clearly expose negative consequences. If the audiences present at

the performances I attended are an accurate indication, the 'universal' aspect of the

play's themes did not connect with so broad a demographic. Its potency as a play

lies in its capacity to inform and educate, for the sake of their safety and protection,

the communities it both reflects and constitutes.

I will conclude by restating the relevance of a debate that brings the critical

perspectives I have encountered into contact with artists' own testimonies, not with

the intention to see who emerges the victor but in order to discover a discourse

appropriate to the analysis of current practice. While it has not proven possible to

circumvent entirely the preoccupations with 'truth' and 'authenticity' that informs

the critical landscape, I have drawn critical attention to work that has pushed the

form from familiar treatments of verbatim material towards the formulation of

promiscuous dramaturgies that expand the definitions of these terms. Finding

innovative ways and means to engage with urgent, real-world issues and debates,

contemporary practitioners still 'authenticate' their material through the veracity of

verbatim testimonies, discovering that they need not adhere to existing verbatim

conventions in devising their interpretative strategies. The imitations of

'authenticity' apparent in their work lie in practitioners' particular relationships to

verbatim material and can be seen in the utilization and exposure, within the formal properties of the work, of their processes of making.

Contributions to knowledge and scholarship

Overview

Part of the title of this submission, 'The Uses of Verbatim', encapsulates my approach to analysis of the verbatim work cited in this section. My inquiries begin from the basic premise that verbatim testimony – the *source* of performance practices employed by artists (writers, directors and performers) – is a fundamentally transportable medium, adaptable to disparate contexts and conditions of practice. Since their location, in performance, is situated outside the constraining conventions of fictional or dramatic frameworks, raw materials have been serviced by various dramaturgical strategies intended to emphasise their 'authenticity'. Arguably, however, in their quest for performance languages that advance the truth-claims made by the work, verbatim practitioners have brought about a comparable framework of self-imposed constraints, utilising conventions that can be classified as generic to verbatim theatre.

The ubiquity of the form, apparent since its resurgence, has led to awareness, on the makers' part, of certain strategies that intend to prioritise the veracity and immediacy of the spoken word over the 'inauthentic' dimensions of overtly 'theatrical' presentation. These have placed limitations on the extent to which 'truth', accessible through the performance of testimony, should be processed, as if

to augment these voices with too much authorial or directorial intervention would discredit their predominance. Weiss' manifesto notes a tendency within the form to ratify its credibility as a political mouthpiece through 'attempts to free itself from the framework which defines it as an art form' (1971: 42). Theatre that altogether 'renounces aesthetic considerations', however, 'calls its right to exist [*as theatre*] into question' (1971: 42). Critical analyses of the form, in its several guises, would seem to confirm the presence of this irrefutable double bind, a contradiction that is near impossible to resolve.

Conscious of the paradox that factual accuracy must always be compromised by creative intervention, verbatim theatre *is* typically self-effacing about its own theatricality: in scenographic design, for example, either every effort is made to make the playing space feel clinically realistic (as seen in the Tricycle's series of tribunal plays), or it is stripped entirely of any superfluous trappings; to surround performers with signifying elements other than stools or chairs (as utilised in productions of *The Exonerated*) might distract audiences from attentiveness to the all-important spoken word. Of course, the environments in tribunal theatre, intended to replicate the locations of the tribunals being re-enacted, are highly constructed; while the hyper-reality of these settings would seem to intimate 'that reality, however opaque it may appear, can be explained in every detail' (Weiss, 1971: 43), it prohibits the intrusion of any interpretative dimension into their design.

This apparent fetish for achieving convincing simulacra influences acting

methodologies designed to replicate, with painstaking accuracy, the original

utterances of the interviewees: the absent subjects for whom the performers,

usually through systems of direct address, have become surrogates. As soon as

audiences begin to identify or empathise with individual characters, however, a

fictional element intrudes; just as writers have selected and edited material, actors

have interpreted original utterances and channelled their subjective interpretation

into their performances. Similarly, the presence of narrative coherence in the

organisation of raw materials intimates that unalloyed accuracy and neutrality

must, to some degree, be compromised, although, as Carol Martin points out, 'the

process of selection, editing, organization, and presentation [...] is not always

transparent' (2012: 18). Narrative structures tend to work against the privileging of

any one, coercive thread within a dramaturgical weave intended to support a

number of competing narratives, voices and points-of- view: the 'pluralistic'

approach examined above by Tomlin (2013) *et al*. How much the writer or editor's

subjectivity can be seen to have influenced the selection and organisation of

material is limited by the mandate for accuracy and neutrality. Authors or editors of

performance texts therefore contend with an obligation to shield their own

visibility: the ownership of verbatim work should lie with the subjects whose

testimonies speak to the overarching themes expressed by it.

Yet the conventions briefly summarised above have, I contend, been appropriated

(or disregarded) in the current work of artists seeking innovative applications of the

form, in which issues and definitions of 'authenticity' are undermined by the urge to

innovate and experiment with, to borrow Weiss' phrase, the 'aesthetic

considerations' renounced by formally conservative precedents. My insights into contemporary verbatim practice, drawn from critical engagement with recent and current work, explore alternative, risk-taking approaches to the application or appropriation of verbatim material. I have selected examples that can expand, even destabilise, definitions and expectations of 'authenticity' and point to advancements in verbatim practice that distinguish it from the relatively narrow range of work cited in the existing interlocution of the field. This submission repositions verbatim material as a tangible and immediate referent to the real world, loosely connected, if not wholly untethered to established conventions, pushing the genre beyond the boundaries enforced by familiar tropes (in performance) and cyclical debates (in critical discourses) I have encountered through my research.

The critical contexts outlined in the previous section expose above all a dominant pre-occupation in the interlocution of verbatim practice with questions of 'truth' and 'authenticity'. The articles comprising this submission consider whether these questions are as important to the practitioners as they are central to critics' assessment of their work; whether practitioners are bound to 'the promise of documentary' (Reinelt, 2009), and influenced by an obligation to the specific expectations and responsibilities anticipated of the form by audiences and critics alike. Duska Radosavljevic implies that such liabilities are not so much deserved as imposed, and suggests that rather than anticipate complete authenticity (of a form that is unable to deliver such assurance) we should 'stay faithful to the language of theatre which renders the real life story into a metaphorical framework' (2013: 137-138). As the preceding summary demonstrates, however, the appropriateness of

rendering 'metaphorical frameworks' from material expressly intended to bring audiences into contact with real-life experiences is widely disputed.

I have stated in the previous section that the tension found in critical discourses between factual and fictional elements in the verbatim work cited can, in part, be attributed to the enigmatic nature of its source material, its fragmented, variable and elusive nature, which has alerted academics (Reinelt, 2009; Martin, 2012; Tomlin, 2013) to potential duplicity in its theatrical rendering. Looking to clarify precisely where 'facts' and 'evidence' originate, I have acknowledged sub-genres within the form that are useful because the nature of the material gathered determines its categorical definition. The term 'verbatim theatre' indicates that the material will lack the 'authenticating' presence of the court transcript or legally encrypted document, and emphasise the assemblage of individuals' testimonies.

With the exception of *The Colour of Justice* (1999), one of Nicholas Kent's tribunal series at London's Tricycle Theatre, the examples of verbatim practice I have selected have in common the foregrounding of testimony as their primary subject matter; there are considerable discrepancies, however, in the methodologies through which the artists have selected, collated, edited and represented raw materials. In the previous section, I refer to a number of lists that, in similar ways to Weiss' manifesto, indicate the distinctive properties, capabilities and limitations of the form, against which, in principle, any specimen of theatre practice claiming 'documentary' status can be assessed. They categorise the 'claims' (Reinelt, 2008), 'functions' (Martin, 2012) and 'characteristics' (Ben-Zvi in Tomlin, 2012) of

verbatim theatre. Categorisation can be reductive; it is in the nature of lists to become preserved as a set of rules, the adherence to, or breaking of which, determines the critical analysis of any work that is scrutinised against their jurisdiction. The verbatim practice I have cited, when assessed against these summaries, arguably resists categorisation, and 'breaks the rules', for the reasons argued in the article summaries below. My analyses position the artists as intermediaries between the source material and its adaptation, through contrasting dramaturgical strategies, into verbatim theatre.

As stated in the previous section, Carol Martin investigates the various types of 'evidence' presented by documentary theatre (the presence of documents, film clips, and so on) that act as surrogates for absent subjects: the 'unavailable, dead, disappeared' protagonists (2012: 17). My examples interpret the concept of the 'absent protagonist' in Martin's sense – the bereaved victims in *Crossing the Line*, the murder of Stephen Lawrence in the tribunal play, *The Colour of Justice* – but also take the concept to mean the 'available', living interviewees 'ghosted' by performers in the work of Peter Darney (*Five Guys Chillin'*), Lloyd Newson's trilogy of verbatim pieces with his DV8 company (*To Be Straight With You, Can We Talk About This?* and *John*), and Alecky Blythe in *Where Have I Been All My Life?* (2012) and *Little Revolution* (2014). The status and function of the performer is particularly relevant to the work of Alecky Blythe, whose output with her company Recorded Delivery has been widely reported in the media and discussed in academic commentaries (Tomlin, 2013; Taylor, 2013). The plays I have selected for close examination, however, have not, until now, featured in any other extended analyses.

Other than one example of tribunal theatre, the work I have chosen to examine within this submission exhibits dramaturgical strategies in text and performance that distinguish it from the examples cited in the critical overview. A summary of the articles and the discoveries made within follows below.

Contributions to new knowledge: the articles

The summaries below provide more explicit elucidations of the contributions to knowledge stated above, and the principal critical hypotheses I have deployed in order to draw them out. Peter Weiss contemplates the limitations of the form as potential adjunct to political discourse: it 'cannot compete with an authentic political event [...] Even when it attempts to free itself from the framework which defines it as an art form' (1971: 42). Weiss goes on to censure documentary practice that 'remains frozen in an attitude of wild attack without actually hitting its opponent' (1971:43). I have contemplated the extent to which the examples I have selected for analysis demonstrably 'hit their opponents'; the answer would partly depend upon whether they profess to have any particular targets in sight. The summaries below conclude with an assessment of the extent to which they can be seen to have made meaningful interventions that disrupt the political discourses and narratives they seek to expose and challenge.

The Dah Women, whose adaptation *Crossing the Line* (2009) began my investigation of contemporary verbatim practice, foreground their own, profoundly subjective experience of the process of making in their treatment of testimony. The result of this strategy is a richly symbolic, poetic form wherein the images offered to the

spectator escape the tyranny of verisimilitude, bearing no direct correlation to the spoken text, even though the words had not been altered.

Article Summaries

'Crossing the Line: Reconstruction/Reconciliation'

SYMBOLON – Journal of Theatre Studies **Vol XIII No. 22 (2012)**

(Appendix 1)

This article interrogates the work of the Serbian theatre company Dah Teatar, aka the Dah Women, providing intimate access to their working processes for *Prelazeci Liniju (Crossing the Line)*, revealing new possibilities for treatment of verbatim material that eschews the familiar conventions of the genre. The 'gap' opened up between the (source) text and performance offers audiences an unfamiliar relationship to the material that explicitly foregrounds the process of making, thereby raising questions about the role and function of the 'artist' as intermediary in the translation of verbatim testimony into performance. Their strategies are found to repudiate the dogmatism of the rhetorical devices they seek to challenge.

'Nothing but the Truth: narrative, authenticity and the dramatic in tribunal theatre'

Performing Narrative, **Eds. Shirley, D. and Turner, J., (2013)**

(Appendix 2)

The tension between factual reportage and the construction of 'historical' narratives is explored in this analysis of tribunal theatre, which examines overlaps apparent in the sub-genre between verbatim testimony and legal discourse through analysis of Richard Norton-Taylor's *The Colour of Justice* (1999). The article questions the faithful, televisual replications of public inquiries typically seen in the quasi-legal presentation of tribunal plays that may reinforce rather than undermine the deference shown to lawyers and the legal process – a factor that inadvertently parallels the play's exposure of institutional prejudice.

'Attempts on Their Lives: Absent Protagonists in Verbatim Theatre'

DramArt No. 2 **(2103)**

(Appendix 3)

Alecky Blythe's trademark innovations foreground the utility of technology as 'authenticating' presence. The position of standing in for absent subjects raises an ethical obligation, on the artists' part, to honour the original utterance and to ensure that participants are 'properly' represented. Using material gleaned from interview with its director, Teresa Heskins, these issues are explored through analysis of Blythe's play *Where Have I Been All My Life?* The article explains how the play negotiates tensions between the celebration of individual ambition and achievement and Heskins' attempts to emphasise the inequalities, fractures and divisions within contestants' historical and social context.

'Speaking machines: the 'dialectical' voice in contemporary verbatim theatre'

DramArt **No. 3 (2014)**

(Appendix 4)

This paper signifies a watermark indicating my position in response to the several critical strands that inform much of this submission. The paper asks whether apparent absence of authorial hierarchy is actually reinstated when a multitude of voices is harnessed to the same ideological apparatus, reflecting Tomlin's concern that artists working within testimonial verbatim practice almost always hold a commitment to a particular narrative of opposition (2013: 120), thereby propping up the neoliberal persuasions of the audience.

The Mourning After: Structures of Feeling in Verbatim Theatre (2016)

Accepted for forthcoming publication in the edited collection *Translation, Adaptation and Dramaturgy: Interstitial Collisions* **due 2018**

(Appendix 5)

This chapter explains how verbatim practice utilizes methodologies of 'translation' and 'adaptation' in the strategies employed to transpose verbatim testimony into theatrical languages, asking whether the material can be served through alternative strategies, and what happens to the work when the conventions are broken. Peter Darney, in *5 Guys Chillin'* (2015), takes the radical step of delivering verbatim

testimony through the construction of a fourth-wall, entirely fictional frame, rejecting typical verbatim strategies such as direct address, the layered presence of multiple voices and absence of a signifying field. The material is, I argue, theatricalised in a fashion that builds a Chekhovian sensibility, but retains an urgent political impetus.

Free Speech: Body and text in DV8's verbatim trilogy

Submitted to *Choreographic Practices* Winter 2017

(Appendix 6)

This article posits that Lloyd Newson, in his trilogy of verbatim works culminating with *John* (2014), presents a radical departure from verbatim conventions by expressing the central narrative of *John*'s protagonist through DV8's singular style of dance-theatre. The result is a dynamic, uneasy tryst between mimetic and somatic modes of movement that call into question the artists' 'ownership' of verbatim performance and the ways in which it is further 'legitimised' or 'authenticated' by the presence of testimony. This, in common with Dah's work, suggests a definition of 'authenticity' that pertains to the artists' creative process.

Two Sides of the Road: Alecky Blythe's *Little Revolution*

Submitted to *Journal of Arts and Community*

(Appendix 7)

The work of verbatim theatre practitioner Alecky Blythe records the ways

individuals attempt to heal and renew communities whose identity and solidarity is threatened by major events: in the case of her latest play *Little Revolution* (2014), the riots that swept through London in 2011. While the playwright documents initiatives intended to repair the fractures left in the riot's wake, *Little Revolution* exposes pre-existing contradictions and irresolvable divisions, based on class, race and economic inequality: the playwright has structured the play's complex series of juxtapositions so that they expose profound inequalities within the community she is representing. Examining the play as performance and published text, the article interrogates Blythe's unique staging strategies and explores the consequences of her 'omnipresence' as researcher, writer and collaborator in her practice. The article asks whether, in her quest for narrative structure, the playwright has reaffirmed, as much as exposed and challenged, territorial divisions in the community represented by *Little Revolution*.

Conclusion

If indeed we are in a 'post-truth' era, living in the era of 'alternative facts' and 'fake news', it is significant – perhaps inevitable – that the art being talked about is dystopian fiction: it is worth noting that Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* rose to the top of the bestseller charts days after Americans were encouraged to embrace 'alternative facts.' Fictional dystopias can invite queasy recognition of our current circumstances; not through facsimile, or Baudrillardian simulacra, but rather, through elements of allegory: the celebrated television adaptation of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, for example, exhibits recognisable parallels with the real world

that seem to confirm our worst presentiments. Perhaps we no longer look at dystopian fiction in the same way when we believe ourselves to be already in the midst of dystopia. I had anticipated a second resurgence of verbatim theatre in response to the current political and cultural climate, but we are turning to work that reflects a kind of foreboding, perhaps because we are resigned to a world in which the moderate, putatively liberal territory known as the 'middle ground' has been squeezed out by the bellicose populism of recent political upheaval. The relationship of the genre to journalism has been undermined by the diminishing status, in the real world, of print journalism and the shift to online content. Fuelled by rapid technological advances, and with astonishing rapidity, the persuasive influence of the 'media', as we knew it – the reportage and opinion of paid professionals – has been all but eclipsed by the ceaseless chatter of social media. There are positive aspects to this phenomenon: the secretive nexus of politicians and media moguls has been exposed and weakened; the voices of individuals in the public domain appear to have gained status and power. Yet the ownership and manipulation of social media by five supremely influential, global corporations raises serious doubts about where the power truly lies. The capacity of search engines to feed fake news stories to our handheld devices has brought about unchecked assimilation of the fake and the real that Baudrillard could scarcely have conceived of.

The examples of verbatim theatre cited in this submission consider the dissemination of marginal voices as a positive alternative, corrective or form of

redress to the 'master narratives' propagated by media corporations bound by their own political associations. Now, however, the proliferation of public opinion, expressive of more extreme, more reactionary, more polarized affiliation to online 'clusters', *is* the master narrative. The claim that verbatim theatre could offer a viable *alternative* is no longer so easy to make; a form of theatre predicated on the veracity of individual testimony seems destined, in the current climate, to get lost in the maelstrom.

In February 2017, Rufus Norris, the director of Alecky Blythe's *London Road* (2011), announced the latest verbatim project to receive its premiere at the National Theatre: *My Country: A Work in Progress*, at the Dorfman, London; it has since been adapted for television and broadcast on BBC2 in November 2017. The piece uses testimony taken from subjects across the UK responding to the political fallout following the Brexit vote, blended with original material by the poet Carol Ann Duffy. The voices of seventy people have been edited and distilled, and are spoken by six actors, representing six regions of the country, who learnt their lines from recordings of the original interviews. Interviewed in the Guardian, Norris states:

> I think what comes through very clearly is a strong rejection of modern
> politics, the selfishness, the career-driven nature of it. [...] Everybody is
> fed up with their communities being broken apart, the breakdown of the
> NHS, the wealth imbalance in this country. You feel a real kick against the
> misinformation, an awareness that everything they are being told is

fiendishly biased.

(Norris, 2017: online)

Rufus Norris' recent Brexit project is laudable, but mistimed. While it is important, in the light of the revelations stated in my analysis of post-truth, to realise that voters were not necessarily duped by the spurious campaigns that led to the UK's decision to leave the EU – many voters were influenced by their perception of genuine social and economic inequalities – any dissenting voice is being heard too late to make any difference to the outcome. While my fascination with verbatim practice, and belief in its capacity for meaningful political intervention and aesthetic innovation, has not diminished, I proceed with the awareness that the status of 'authenticity' and 'truth' as sacrosanct values has diminished even further than postmodern scepticism would dare to have anticipated.

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