Adapting 'Real-life' Material: Metatheatrical Configurations of Authorship and Ownership of Story in Contemporary British Verbatim Theatre

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Abstract
This article argues for the relevance of adaptation as a theoretical paradigm in the discussion of contemporary British verbatim theatre. It does so by contextualising and examining a particular modality of metatheatricality in three representative examples of the genre: David Hare's *The Power of Yes* (2009), Alecky Blythe's *Little Revolution* (2014) and Chris Goode's *Monkey Bars* (2012). Focusing on a hitherto marginal aspect within the discussion of verbatim drama, the study will enquire into how the metatheatrical dramatisation of the author figure (*The Power of Yes*, *Little Revolution*) and the interviewer figure (*Monkey Bars*) highlights the craftedness of the play in this mode of the "theatre of the real" (Martin 2010: 1). The reflexivity within the plays to be discussed helps us consider the intermedial features present not only in their performance but also detectable in the process of their making. These plays weave the research processes typical of the verbatim genre into their plots or dramaturgical frameworks. While a verbatim play in performance may come across as seamless on the surface, verbatim performance invites us to engage with the *media* – the channels – of its intermedial fabric, and it displays how it works through these channels.

Key-words: verbatim theatre, contemporary British drama, adaptation, metatheatre, David Hare, Alecky Blythe, Chris Goode.

1. Introduction

"You have to give me the material, not the play" (Hare 2009: 6), cries out David Hare, to be more precise, a character called David Hare in Hare's play *The Power of Yes*, a 2009 drama about the recent global financial crisis. With this exclamation 'Hare'[1] addresses one of the

[1] I will indicate mentions of authors as a character in their respective plays in single inverted commas.

interviewee-characters, the banker David Marsh, who, among other interlocutor-characters at the beginning of the play, seems to know how to write a drama about the subject. The 'David Hare' of the play clearly insists that *he* does the writing for the drama no matter how strong an impression we might be given of that raw material being communally assembled (and indeed some twenty-four named individuals are dramatised on whose interviews the script is based). Yet 'Hare', the *dramatis persona*, also makes it clear that he is setting out to write the play *from* the talk of others. The subtitle of *The Power Of Yes – A Dramatist Seeks to Understand the Financial Crisis* – also pinpoints a crucial aspect of the authoring or composition of this documentary drama piece: the real-life material collected (that is to say, already mediated) is in some way *adapted*, that is, it goes through the intellectual and creative sieve of the author. It is through his understanding, through his interpretation and creative reworking (in other words, adaptation) that we encounter the trains of thought and any other utterances of the individuals dramatised.

This article will contextualise and examine a particular modality of metatheatricality in three representative examples of contemporary British verbatim theatre: David Hare's *The Power of Yes* (2009), Alecky Blythe's *Little Revolution* (2014) and Chris Goode's *Monkey Bars* (2012). The study will enquire into how the metatheatrical dramatisation of the author/interviewer figure highlights the craftedness of the play in this mode of the "theatre of the real" (Martin 2010: 1). As we see in *The Power of Yes*, in Blythe's play about the 2011 London riots the author-interviewer also features 'herself' as a character, while in Goode's play the interviewer-character is not a dramatised version of the author but of a conversation expert and facilitator (and, parenthetically, also a trained actor), Karl James, who conducted the interviews for the play with over 40 school children aged between seven and ten. As Nicole Boireau argues, "Drama and theatre are forced to meditate on the validity of their own medium within the limits imposed by that medium" (2014: xii-xiii). The reflexivity within the plays to be discussed helps us consider the intermedial features present not only in their performance but also detectable in the process of their making. The plays in question incorporate the creative processes into their fabric not in the least through the author/interviewer character dramatised. Importantly, these plays weave the research processes

typical of the verbatim genre into their plots or dramaturgical frameworks.

Focusing on a hitherto marginal aspect within the discussion of verbatim theatre, the study will analyse these British examples of the genre in order to highlight the specific dramaturgical strategy of applying an author/interviewer character from among a plethora of adaptive approaches to rearticulating and reshaping stories in the dramatisation process. The techniques and stylistic features that one may discern in these plays range from metatheatricality to (attempted) hyperrealism (and a merging of the two). By showcasing examples of heightened metatheatricality through author- or editor-voice and/or researcher presence the article will contribute a fresh perspective to this field. It will emphasise the thoroughly adapted nature of verbatim theatre-making and argue that this metatheatrical aspect of adaptation highlights the genre's alignment to the epic theatre tradition (see Derek Paget 2002, among others)[2]. Even in the attempted hyperrealism on stage that Alecky Blythe's 'recorded delivery' approach represents, the apparent ironing out of the authorial signature in the spirit of working 'verbatim' draws further attention to the craftedness-in-the-moment, as we watch and hear actors working with audio recording through their earpieces. The article at the same time will also raise the question of not only the language- but to some extent the culture-specificity of this particular form, especially its recorded delivery – or "headphone verbatim"[3] – variety. If the auditive and, to a lesser extent, the visual characteristics of an original utterance[4] are so crucial in rendering a role in live performance, is 'recorded delivery' locked in language (and to some extent, perhaps culture)? Is the sound of an original interview snippet an integral part of the fabric of the play or – to use W. B. Worthen's metaphors (2010) – of the score, the blueprint, the

[2] See also Duška Radosavljević's 2013 discussion of how contemporary British documentary theatre navigates between the Piscatorian and Brechtian epic theatre tradition and Stanislavskian realism.

[3] Kristine Landon-Smith uses this term in a Headphone Verbatim Masterclass (27 October 2011) published by Tamasha in 2012 as a Tamasha-NIDA online video.

[4] In addition to the prime importance of the recorded audio material, Alecky Blythe also speaks of observations of physical appearance (including what the interviewees wear) and gestures, as well as photography, as helpful aides-memoire that she can share with the actors (Forsyth 2014: 118-120).

information or the software of the drama, or can it be/should it be left behind at some stage in the drama's (after)life (stage life and any transmedia adaptation beyond stage realisations)?

2. Concepts, features and practices

A form famous for "draw[ing] attention to […] its roots in real life" (Hammond and Steward 2008: 9), verbatim theatre may be seen to have started as a "technique", a "means" (p. 9) that has turned into "a mainstream method in its own right" which "is now being studied as a theatre genre" (p. 11). Here, verbatim theatre will be treated as a subgenre – in Duška Radosavljević's words, a "UK subspecies" (2013: 119) – within the broader category of documentary drama, which is an intriguing hybrid form that aims to fuse the 'factual' and if not necessarily the 'fictional', at least the 'creative', while marking an overlap between popular oral history and drama (Paget 1987). Further terms that aim to capture the features of what we might loosely define a "border genre"[5] (Paget 2011) include "[t]heatre of the real, […] docudrama, […] reality-based theatre, theatre of witness, tribunal theatre, nonfiction theatre, and theatre of fact" (Martin 2010: 1). To put it in general terms, in the British context verbatim plays are based on oral (often interview-derived) material rather than written and other documents. As Tom Cantrell clarifies, "[T]he form is more malleable than this, and writers have frequently combined interview material with invented scenes, or used reported and remembered speech rather than recorded testimony" (2012). Indeed, whether a dramatist or other theatre-maker handles the 'raw material' with a fair amount of creative freedom or allows themselves less poetic license, there is a process of reconceiving or rearticulating material in the dramaturgical process that is of an adaptive nature. The aforementioned David Hare has a more free-handed approach to carrying out what I would regard as adaptive work within the genre (which includes adding words to those genuinely uttered by interviewees), and so does actor and verbatim playwright Robin

[5] I use the term to imply generic and modal hybridity here, while Derek Paget, from whom I borrow the term, uses it more strictly: for cases that share some features of docudrama but are not docudramas per se because they are not based on documents closely enough (Paget 2011: 15-16).

Soans. Alecky Blythe's adaptive work in verbatim theatre, on the other hand, is closer to the opposite, stricter end of the continuum, where a sense of hyperrealism is attempted by close reliance on – or, in Blythe's own terms, "copying" (Forsyth 2014: 120) of – audio-recorded material in the editing and the performance rather than learning the script by heart either off the page or even from the recording. In between these two approaches are several other standpoints. Chris Goode's play, *Monkey Bars*, was developed from many hours of interview material recorded by dialogue artist Karl James with the participating children, then scripted from transcripts (rather than audio) by Goode, who collaborated with the six-strong cast of the play's original performance (see Chris Goode and Co. website). Director Nadia Fall also uses audio-recorded interviews in *Home*, her play about the young and homeless for the National Theatre, but claims that in her experience the performance does not need to follow "a hundred per cent word for word what somebody said and a hundred per cent the same accent, a hundred per cent the same rhythm" (in National Theatre Discover 2014). In the much acclaimed play *Deep Cut* (2008) the actor and playwright Philip Ralph combines verbatim material with other documentary sources.

In terms of methodologies, then, the rather orthodox (although chronologically speaking, more recent) 'recorded delivery' approach of Blythe and her company and the headphone verbatim identified by Kristine Landon-Smith are the strictest variations on the contemporary verbatim method. They also constitute its most transparent variation. Blythe learnt the verbatim theatre-making technique from actor, director and educator Mark Wing-Davey at his "Drama Without Paper" workshop while he was running the Actors Centre. Wing-Davey learnt the rudiments of the technique from American playwright and actor Anna Deavere Smith, an internationally acclaimed master of the form. Her strategy has involved recording interviews in real-life situations and learning lines directly from the recording rather than a transcript, recreating suprasegmental elements of the diction, the breathing, the timing as well as body language. Wing-Davey further developed this method by having the actors reproduce the lines with the aid of earphones rather than from memory, which may be seen to have increased the sense of theatrical realism and to have highlighted the metatheatrical features. Indeed, the audio recording visible from the auditorium

spotlights the self-referentiality latent in the form. The performance reveals overtly if discreetly some key aspects of its making. At the same time, it renders the form as emphatically intermedial. Blythe internalised this technique and further experimented with it with the inventively named Recorded Delivery, a company she established. The name now also refers to the method, not only the verbatim company. In terms of collecting material for the scripting of the drama, she established a method of finding a "way in" (Forsyth 2014: 117) – something more specific for her dramaturgical purposes than interviewing people on a topic, as she learnt in "Drama Without Paper", and as she set out to do in her first play, *Come Out Eli* (2003), which was intended to be about fear. This "way in" is usually an event around which a narrative can be developed (a siege in *Come Out Eli*, a riot in *Little Revolution*, a series of murders and their aftermath in the 2011 *London Road*, a talent contest in the 2012 *Where Have I Been All My Life*, and so forth).

Some of the intriguing questions around the adaptive aspect of verbatim theatre (as well as documentary theatre, somewhat more broadly) are to do with the possibility or at times tangible presence of political or ideological bias on behalf of the author or editor – what Derek Paget (2002) calls the "openly didactic" aspect of this form (see also Lane 2010: 67). This concerns how interviewees, subjects and factual materials are selected, how they are indeed shaped in the playmaking and then the performance process, both of which, one might argue, further adapt the story and further complicate the already very intricate authorship web. In a long process consisting of many steps, from gathering (at times, eliciting) material to editing, dramatising, directing, performing and audience interpretation we are potentially several times removed from any utterance made by a historical figure, whose pronouncement is not in any sense available to us in its original context – we only encounter multiple adaptations of any 'original' utterance which will have been through certain interpretive and creative filters, the exact nature of which depends on the techniques employed by the theatre-makers involved[6]. While many documentary and verbatim playwrights are comfortable to

[6] As Stephen Bottoms (2006: 57-58) points out, "such plays can too easily become disingenuous exercises in the presentation of 'truth,' failing (or refusing?) their own highly selective manipulation of opinion and rhetoric".

talk about the interview process they undertook, the raw material is normally strictly shielded from the public or even from the researcher – no doubt for very understandable reasons to do with confidentiality and tact but also the rather grey area of intellectual property. An intriguing and almost unique counter-example is that of the aforementioned *Home*, where Nadia Fall (2013) mentions in the introduction to the play that the interview material derived from the research process in one of London's inner city high rise hostels doubles up as source material in the environmental psychology research of her collaborator and co-producer on the show, Esta Orchard. The issue of who exactly owns the interview material, the story or stories that originated a verbatim play's or performance's story as *we* read it or see it is far from straightforward. There are however examples of the genre where various configurations of dramatised authorial presence or authorial traces draw the audience's attention to the fact that it is indeed adapted material that they encounter.

Verbatim theatre as a hybrid form has a close alliance with journalism[7]. As good investigative journalism, verbatim theatre is very much guided by a key question for the research process. This feature is discernible in the metatheatrical fabric of both *The Power of Yes* and *Little Revolution*. In the former, the playwright-character reminds us of an investigative journalist as he is uncovering the background to the global financial crisis. The genre's kinship with journalism also accounts for the fact that the author-character is likely to come across as a quasi-objective investigator of public matters who attempts to tone down their own personal idiosyncrasies in any of the dialogue that is 'self-dramatising' and emphasise the centrality of the 'cause', as the trailer for the premiere highlights (National Theatre 2009).

In a like vein, the 'Alecky' character's work gathering information, reflections and recording snippets of 'lived experience' in *Little Revolution* comes across as similar to that of the journalist characters she includes in the play (Alan Dein, a BBC journalist,

[7] David Hare has been acclaimed for his talent as "a first-rate journalist" (Billington 2009; Billen 2009); furthermore, actual collaborations between theatre people and journalists are not infrequent in this genre, as the verbatim play *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* (2005) most eloquently testifies.

Heidi from the *Hackney Herald*, an American journalist and Christoph, a *Der Spiegel* reporter), although we get to see 'Alecky' more in action, of course, and we can see her bonding better with the local residents. "I'm not going to stitch you up", 'Alecky' says to the middle class couple who worry about how they are going to be represented (Blythe 2014b: 81)]. She lets their words speak for them, and Tony's self-defining words suggest a firm social identity with a glimpse of an almost mischievous (and semi-guilty) admission of its limits and potential divisiveness: "I'm proud to be middle class. I'm white and middle class – that's what I am. Ya know so d- I have no concerns about being seen as that. But you know it's what we do that matters" (p. 81) and also "I jus sort of always been ya know proud to be middle class. (*Beat*.) Food's much better!" (p. 82). Both these plays demonstrate that the journalistic trait of verbatim drama is one of the genre's several features that lend themselves to metatheatrical treatment.

3. Dramatising the author/interviewer figure as a metatheatrical treatment of authorship and story ownership

Considering the multiple layers of adaptation latent in any verbatim play or performance, the concept of authorship is a complex one in specimens of the (sub)genre. This is apparent even in something as basic as how authorship is communicated on paratextual material surrounding the plays and performances (for instance, book covers or posters). At times some authors of verbatim drama go to the extent of eliminating the author designation if not the author function entirely, and they tend to refer to the making of these plays with almost any phrase other than 'writing' them. A most prevalent demonstration of this is identifying oneself as an 'editor' rather than a playwright or author in any traditional sense. In Britain probably the best-known contemporary practitioner of this is Richard Norton-Taylor, who appears as the editor of many tribunal plays (a subgenre of documentary theatre, dramatising inquiries and trials typically with a dedicated 'verbatim' aesthetics). When asked about the nature of his contribution to this genre, he defines "writing verbatim drama" as "editing" (Hammond and Steward 2008: 130). The front cover of his play *Chilcot* (2016), where his name appears with that of Matt Woodhead, suggests he identifies himself as 'author'

rather than 'editor' but the copyright designation covers 'edited transcripts copyright' as well as identification as author following the usual copyright formula. In an essay about his work he states that he does not see himself as an artist but considers his work to be primarily a craft rather than an art (p. 130). Norton-Taylor's frequent collaborator, Nicolas Kent, claims copyright for the 'Arrangement of text' for his 2005 play *Srebrenica*, while also identifying himself in the same publication as author following the usual formulaic wording: "in accordance with section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act". Another noteworthy example is Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner's editing of peace-activist Rachel Corrie's diary entries and emails into the play *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* (2005), which has "taken from the writings of Rachel Corrie" almost as a subtitle. In a recent interview, Chris Goode emphasises that a play is "wrought" or worked", which further highlights the craftsmanship of the verbatim playwright with the raw material being moulded (Svich 2018: 38). In the same interview collection, Blythe also notes that playwright, "spelt the same way as 'shipwright,' actually means 'play-maker' rather than writer in the traditional sense" (Jester 2018: 26).

Who the story really belongs to is a subject that several of these plays and performances tackle either head-on or in more subtle and intricate ways. The dynamic of joint/collective authorship and ownership of these dramatised stories as played out in the script and/or performance is multi-faceted; and understanding more about the metatheatricality in the three key case studies sheds more light on how authorship and story ownership are dramatised in the genre.

A typical trope of verbatim drama is the presence of the interviewer (or the interviewers) as a character, which emphasises the genre's above-discussed alliance with journalism and highlights an authoritative and impartial presence behind the material collected. This happens very directly in *The Power of Yes* and in *Monkey Bars*. The latter gives voice to child interviewees from primary schools in and near London, who were asked about the "Big Questions" of life alongside being given the opportunity to just talk among themselves and with the interviewer.

Both *The Power of Yes* and *Monkey Bars* start with a direct address from the interviewer, who is a dramatised author figure in the case

of Hare and a conduit type of person doing the interviewing for the author in *Monkey Bars*. 'Karl' is a channel between the author and the children, who never directly meet. They both bear their real life counterparts' names: Hare, as mentioned, is turned into a character called 'David', who tells us that he has written the play we are watching – a very noticeable marker of metatheatre –, while the character of 'Karl' in *Monkey Bars* – the dramatised version of Karl James – addresses the interviewees rather than us and sets out the terms and conditions of 'sharing' to them, clarifying that adults will perform the children's words, not acting as if they were children but as adults.

This is how Hare's character opens the play:

> This isn't a play. It's a story. Or rather it's only partly a play. It's more properly a story. And what a story! How capitalism came to a grinding halt! Where were you on September 15th 2008? Do you remember? Did you notice? Capitalism ceased to function for about four days.
> This summer I set out to find out what had happened. (Hare 2009: 3)

The last sentence suggests that there is a journey to take. On this epic journey 'David', like Dante in the *Paradiso* of the *Divina Commedia*, has a Beatrice, and his companion is called Masa Serdarevic, who is a young expert about to join the *Financial Times*. She is the only female character in the play, and the only character who – perhaps tellingly in a largely male-dominated play – does not receive a short character description on the *dramatis personae* page. It is understood that she was appointed by the National Theatre to explain all things to do with financial markets to the artist, so they journey together, yet 'David' needs to understand it all by himself, as "Dante-protagonist" (Brownlee 1993: 117) of the *Commedia* very much needed to live his own quest. Another character that enhances the self-referential aspect of the play and performance is the Announcer. As if on a TV show or in a corporate office with PAs talking through loudspeakers the Announcer introduces us to the characters and therefore does the job of the enumeration for the epic traveller. One may also associate the Announcer with a different kind of a market and therefore yet another kind of self-referential metaphor: the figure of the announcer at an antique fair or an auctioneer who would make apparently objective evaluative statements of all the

items available for bidding. Here they are statements about the credentials of the dramatised experts, for instance "Educated at Harvard" (Hare 2009: 24, this is about Scott Rudmann, founder of Nectar Capital). *Monkey Bars* also begins with a narrative frame in which the interviewer character is introduced to us. As I mentioned, Chris Goode gives 'Karl' the first words of the play:

> OK, so my name's Karl, and let me tell you a little bit about what we're doing here, shall I? Er, I'm working with a man called Chris who's making a play, and the idea behind the play is that sometimes adults don't really listen to children. How… What do you think about that? Do you think that's true? Do you think adults sometimes don't listen to you? (Goode 2012: 27)

The initial and emphatic appearance of the researcher figure in both cases gives a loose frame to the drama and introduces the moderately plot-free, non-Aristotelian (or at least questionably dramatic) nature of the respective plays (of which nature we get a clearer sense in *Monkey Bars* than in *The Power of Yes*).

It is not only the beginnings or should we say narrative frames of these plays that are metadramatic but the plays have their metatheatrical features in the main body of the playtext as well. In a *mise-en-abyme* scene of *Monkey Bars* one of the interlocutor characters, Juliette says, in conversation with 'Karl': "Well I really like writing stories and I like making up characters and things". When she is asked by 'Karl' where she gets the stories and characters from she says: "Probably from things I do or see. […] Yeah" (p. 35). This miniature mirror image of what the play itself does contributes to the dramaturgical frame of the otherwise considerably loosely structured piece. Another *mise-en-abyme* scene is related not to writing stories but to the title-giving phrase, namely the metaphor of the monkey bars: in scene 16 Laurel tells us of working on the monkey bars a lot because she plays rugby, and it is quite lonely to do so as a girl. This short scene captures a key purpose of verbatim plays: to give voice to the marginalised within society (Paget 2002). Scene 14 includes 'Karl' again, wondering about what audiences may make of the material as presented to them and how the children feel about the way it will be presented: "Do you think audiences could tell that it's words by children, or

not?" (Goode 2012: 45). Grace's answer suggests attentiveness to how adults behave:

> Nnyeah, little bit.
> Cos, um, like children they, they sound a bit more like quieter and the adults sound a bit more louder.
> And, um, the adults, um, sound, um, like, like, if they were, like, like if they were angry at someone a little bit. (p. 45)

Metatheatrical moments also abound in *The Power of Yes*, where several experts from the financial sector claim to be well placed to comment on the potential dramatic element of the crisis, and the challenges of writing a drama from it. So much so that about two-thirds into the play the character of Howard Davies, first chair of the Financial Services Authority offers to present the story as "a drama in five acts": "SUB-PRIME, LIQUIDITY, UNRAVELLING, MELTDOWN, PUMPING" (Hare 2009: 42). The character of Private Equity investor Jon Moulton also tells the writer: "I've been thinking about how to do a play about this and you're welcome to my creative thought if you want it" (p. 4). George Soros's character is not short of advice either: "I would have thought your problem as a playwright is that it's a big event, but it's an abstract event" (p. 4). The conceit of everybody being more of an expert in the play-maker's art – or, perhaps more pertinently in an insight- and skill-focused play, craft – enriches the metatheatrical streak of the play and in a deeply self-referential gesture that is as much about the artist as about the contemporary *Weltanschauung* ironises the role of the artist in contemporary society.

The conceit of not being an expert in the subject and learning from those already initiated by full immersion is discernible across the three plays. 'David', as discussed above, is on an epic journey learning about the financial crisis. The experts used by Goode via 'Karl' are clearly the children, who are connoisseurs of contemporary British child worldviews. Alecky Blythe, the playwright does not shy away from showing occasional clumsiness in the 'Alecky' character, for instance in relation to technology. It is easy to warm to her as a character, and she is shown to have more consideration and empathy than the (other) journalists in the play. While *Little Revolution*'s 'Alecky' does not have one bespoke guide on her otherwise no less

epic (but differently epic) journey than that of the author character in *The Power of Yes*, she certainly relies on the insider knowledge of some characters to a considerable extent[8]. In my reading, Colin, "a very sage barber on the street […] who's a great philosopher" (Blythe 2014b: 7) is the Beatrice type of character helping 'Alecky' on her quest for the truth in this very complex matter. He helps her see clearly, as Masa helps 'David': "I'd go to him and he'd give me his insight; given that he'd had his shop there for twenty years he's familiar with that area" (p. 7). The playwright interprets the situation in an interview as a consequence of the class divide in contemporary British society: "On one side of the road you've got a lovely square and on the other side there's quite a big estate, so there're quite contrasting people living on the two sides of the street. Colin had seen the changing face of the area" (p. 7). It appears that the titular phrase itself comes from the interview material with Colin. As his character says in Scene 12, entitled "Mini Revolution":

> But it's a revolution innit. It's a mini relev-revolution it's a young people's revolution 'n' eh al revolutions have lootings y'know. (*Chuckle*.) All revolutions has fire. So this is kinda a mini relev-revolution. Yes … This is a little revolution and it hasn't stopped here yet. When you see kids throwing bricks and den dey sending messages 'It was the best day of my life,' 'n' you know what musta came off their chest? The first time they probably started a young age that they've actually stood up for something. They haven't had chance, the first time they had been able to express themselves to a bigger – audience. (p. 47)

'Alecky' clearly identifies herself as a theatre-maker when she interacts with locals, which adds to the play's commentary on how its own texture is woven. "I make plays" (p. 58). And with the odd reference to 'writing': "Do you know what's going on? Do you know what's going on? I'm writing a play, I'm doing research I'm just wondering if you know what's going on?" (p. 58).

Parenthetically, this is not Alecky Blythe's only play that features 'her' as a character. For example, her first experiment with the form, *Come Out Eli* (2003), a play documenting the 2002 Hackney

[8] Blythe herself singles out a few in the interview conducted by Chris Lawson, the Almeida Theatre's Schools and Education Manager which precedes the Nick Hern edition of the play.

siege, also has the playwright's character counterpart played in the production by the versatile Miranda Hart (and the casting decision is a distancing effect of a kind itself). Blythe uses a transparent metatheatrical narrative frame which shows her character persuading an important witness to talk to her for the benefit of the play she is working on, but making clear she is not going to sleep with him for it. These instances of a marked playwright-figure presence contribute to blurring the distinction between a "fully imagined play" (Hammond and Steward 2008: 52) and a verbatim one[9].

4. The performance of the dramatised story – A further adaptive filter: towards a conclusion

The three key case studies demonstrate three different models of verbatim theatre-making, with Hare's play representing a looser approach, Blythe's a more orthodox one, and Goode's somewhere in between the two 'poles'. Alecky Blythe's assertion in an interview that "Nothing in this play is written or made up" takes a lot of unfolding (Blythe 2014b: 5). While there may be no words "made up" in a typical Blythe play, there is a strong element of writing, of an adaptive kind in the sense that a dramatic structure is created from the mass of recorded communication. Another verbatim writer would create a different play from the very same source material. David Hare's claim that "what a verbatim play does is flash your research nakedly" is immediately qualified when he clarifies that "The hard thing is to turn [the research] into dialogue, to make the transition between somebody talking to the audience and drama" (Hammond and Steward 2008: 51)[10]. This transition is an adaptive act of turning traces of real-life dialogue into drama. When Robin Soans tries to make a distinction between "created" and verbatim plays, he comes to the conclusion that it lies in the expectations of the audience (Hammond and Steward 2008: 19), as "verbatim theatre

[9] The trope of suggested or actual interviewer presence is also fairly prevalent in cases when such plays are filmed for a mediated performance experience, such as the British documentary musical *London Road* (2011; film version 2015), and *The Laramie Project* (2000; film version 2002).

[10] Indeed, the avoidance of creating a static play is a priority for verbatim playwrights, as we can see emphasised by both Blythe and Fall in the National Theatre's 2014 video masterclass.

is as creative a medium as another" (p. 34). What he describes is a strong sense of authoring through adapting and dramaturgy:

> For any playwright, there is a moment when what I would call the 'vision' of the play is revealed. The tone is established, the themes and the story coalesce and, most importantly, the shape of the drama becomes clear. At this moment it is the prerogative of the playwright, verbatim or otherwise, to choose the parts of the material which embody that vision most clearly. (Hammond and Steward 2008: 34)

Beyond the level of how the play script is composed and how an authorial presence may be woven into the text, an important element of what I see as an overall highly adaptive process is the performance of the story and the creative choices made for that performance, including casting, rehearsal and performance style in revoicing and embodying utterances originating elsewhere (original utterances which in their recorded versions replace the traditional script of text based drama in the recorded delivery/headphone verbatim variety). Whether one actor performs one character or there is multiroling, whether casting is blind to colour, gender and age or not, whether there is an elaborate set or a minimalist one, whether actors are fed the interview material through an earphone or are dealing only with transcripts, all have their adaptive input into how the story is shaped and presented and indeed claimed as their own by many parties. All these creative decisions contribute to the making of the piece and confirm the presence, often a metatheatrically emphasised one, of a complex and composite author function of an adaptive nature. Some play scripts themselves include a direct and rather metatheatrical consideration of this element, which acknowledges the problematic of authorship and ownership. In *Monkey Bars*, for instance, one of the characters, Holly, immediately reacts with excitement and quite considerable maturity when she gathers from the interviewer-character that the material will be performed by adults: "I never had a… I never, um, had my voice in a grown-up's voice" (Goode 2012: 28). Reading a verbatim play as a script is bound to provide a very different experience from watching the audiovisual translation of speech, movement and overall habitus that is part of the actors' performance. Reading from the page – and reading out loud or doing an informal rehearsed reading of – an Alecky Blythe play may open

up further potentials and may render additional palimpsestic layers to this already complex fact-based but strategically adapted and shaped story in comparison with what we encounter when it is performed via 'recorded delivery'. Drama as a thoroughly intermedial art form is conspicuous in its working when it comes to *accessing* a verbatim play.

The adaptive processes of writing, staging and performing dramatised documentary material constitute remaking and, coterminously, also making, creating and constructing rather than merely reiterating or replicating stories of an "aggressively theatrical" time dominated by the "technologies of display and artifice" (Reinelt 2006: 70). Indeed, the verbatim form appears to be not only an intricate adaptation case study in contemporary theatre, but also an intermedial theatre genre *par excellence*. While a verbatim play in performance may come across as seamless on the surface, verbatim performance invites us to engage with the *media* – the channels – of its intermedial fabric, and it displays how it works through these channels; in this sense it provides an emphatically metatheatrical and intermedial experience at the same time. This feature of the genre urges us to think that any foreign-language translation/adaptation/recreation/revival of a verbatim play (at least of a recorded delivery/headphone verbatim kind) would face serious challenges, as the play does not consist of the written text only but possibly also of the recorded material that the script emerged from, not to mention the playwright's/other researchers' memories of the context in which any dialogue/utterance originated. It may not only be a 'text' in the 'print' medium to need further adapting but a complex intermedia text. Suprasegmental features of spoken language (for example intonation) would, needless to say, function very differently and have different cultural connotations language by language. Yet careful studying of such a translational or adaptive challenge would hold up a mirror to this clever, often self-conscious and seemingly excessively realist form, and show its creative and medial parameters beyond its oft-cited social and political worth.

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