

The real in documentary theatre: Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta, by Lucía Miranda

Jara MARTÍNEZ VALDERAS and Mélanie WERDER AVILÉS

Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Instituto del Teatro de Madrid

jaramart@ucm.es

mwerder@ucm.es

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES:

Jara Martínez Valderas holds a Ph.D. from the Universidad de Granada and a Bachelor's Degree in Stage Direction from RESAD. She is a professor at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where she lectures, among others, on the Master's Degree in Theatre and Performing Arts of the Instituto del Teatro de Madrid (ITEM).

Mélanie Werder Avilés is a Ph.D. Candidate in Theatre Studies (UCM) and a playwright. She is Senior Researcher on the project "Escena Urgente: teatro documental para mejorar la vida universitaria" (POE-UCM). She was awarded a grant from the Teatre Lliure (Carlota Soldevila 2019) and Sala Cuarta Pared (ETC 2020) and forms part of the IX Laboratorio de escritura dramática of SGAE (2021).

English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

From The Cross Border Project company, *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*, written and directed by Lucía Miranda, is an artwork created using verbatim theatre techniques. The dramatic text and staging are based on interviews with teachers, non-teaching staff, mothers and students of a secondary school. This work is part of a phenomenon that had a significant presence in Spanish plays during 2019-2020 season: the use of "the real" on stage. This article focuses on analysing Miranda's work through this concept and its use as a theatrical strategy, given its influence on emotive reception, with a higher purpose: to reveal the structural discriminations and difficulties experienced in secondary education in Spain and promote citizen awareness. In our methodology we mix theories on contemporary political sociology around *the real* and documentary theatre, as well as theory about the analysis of the creative process and of productions.

Keywords: Lucía Miranda, *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*, *the real* on stage, verbatim technique, documentary theatre, distance and theatrical emotionality

The following article is framed within the research objectives of the Instituto del Teatro de Madrid, the Theatre Studies Seminar and the CARTEMAD project: "Digital Cartography, Preservation and Dissemination of Theatrical Heritage in Contemporary Madrid (H2019/HUM-5722).

Jara MARTÍNEZ VALDERAS i Mélanie WERDER AVILÉS

The real in documentary theatre: Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta, by Lucía Miranda

I don't care about realism, I care about reality.

Augusto Boal

Je voudrais dire la vérité. J'aime la vérité. Mais elle ne m'aime pas. Voilà la vérité vraie: la vérité ne m'aime pas.

Jean Cocteau

Introduction

In this article about the play *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta* from the The Cross Border Project company and directed by Lucía Miranda, we propose an analysis of staging based on the concept of *the real* in documentary theatre. This show was created under the auspices of the 5th Programme for the Development of Current Dramaturgies of the Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y de la Música (INAEM) in 2016 and was last performed in February 2020, after having enjoyed an unusual tour for Spanish companies. In the 2019-2020 season, the use of *the real* re-emerged in Spanish theatre, with different theatrical applications. It seems to respond to a social need, but also as a value added for commercial purposes or a legitimising strategy per se. The plays go beyond the well-known slogan “based on real events” to become “*the real* is the basis of *fact*.”

Faced with this boom in Spanish theatre, it is worth asking, among other questions, about the reasons that explain it, such as the value of *the real* in contemporary theatre; the taxonomy of the different manifestations; moral issues concerning the use of reality in the fictional;¹ how the system of creation modifies the dramaturgy and direction; issues related to the theory of reception given the audience's awareness of *the real*; and even if *the real* exists on stage, from the moment reality becomes a cultural construct. We

1. See the article “Lo real: un reto para el teatro”, by Josette Féral, in which she looks at moral issues in relation to documentary theatre and wonders if it is legitimate to use *the real* to the extent that it might be considered obscene and humiliating for the victims who, paradoxically, are supposedly being defended (2016: 211).

cannot, for reasons of space and to adhere to our objective, explore all of them, but we do want to open up this field of reflection in relation to *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*, by Lucía Miranda.

In this case, *the real* is used as a generator of fiction through the transposition of the life situation of some people to a dramatic situation of some characters where these people are explicitly present for the audience. It is a kind of drama framed within documentary theatre, and more specifically the verbatim technique. Before we begin, and to avoid confusion, it must be clarified that with *the real* we are not referring to the naturalistic (or realistic) codes of representation — although it maintains an interesting dialogue with this —, but neither to performative theatre, insofar as it concerns blurring the boundaries between life — *reality* — and fiction — art — (Lehmann, 1999: 171-178; ed. 2017), but rather to the emotive strategy of the sources drawn *from reality*, as we will see below.

This article aims to contextualise the documentary theatre movement from which the show arises and to learn about Miranda's theatre production in order to determine how and why the concept of *the real* appears in the play *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*. To this end, we will mix into our methodology theories on contemporary political sociology around *the real* and documentary theatre, as well as tools from the analysis of the creative process and analysis of the shows. With this research we seek to contribute to the academic movement that deals with documentary theatre today and that is gradually gaining importance; the reflection, as we indicated, of its emergence on stage.

Documentary theatre

The political scientist Noam Chomsky has confidently described one of the instabilities of contemporary societies, which is the doubt about fact: "People see themselves less represented and lead a precarious life with increasingly worse jobs. The result is a mixture of anger, fear and escapism. The facts themselves are no longer trusted" (2018: 16). A society with a lack of certainties and with a growing distrust of political systems, which control the media without worrying too much about hiding this, seems to accept manipulation of the truth as something inherent in existence. "The truth in a belief, therefore, is defined based on its effectiveness in order to produce pleasant emotions" (García del Muro, 2019: 18). *Post-truth*, a term that appeared in 2010, but which describes a much earlier scenario, has finally come to fruition ten years later. García del Muro establishes a context in which "*post-truth* is preached and practised, but not enough thought is given to it" (2019: 18).² In the book *La competencia de lo falso*, Jorge Luis Marzo explores the concepts of truth and lie in contemporary society, which has undergone profound transformations of public belief and communion systems (truth regimes), where verification patterns — the collective formulas that make it possible to determine trusts and suspicions — have been displaced (2018: 27).

2. In his essay *Good bye, verdad*, García del Muro traces the causality of the devaluing of facts in favour of interpretations: "Rational thinking, radical relativism, emotivism and pragmatism. The confluence of the four, in the thinking of postmodern authors, has led to a questioning of reason, an exaltation of emotions and irrationality" (2019:20).

Faced with the collective feeling of *falsification* of communication, a specific strategy of current theatre has been to take a stance on the opposite side by recovering *unadulterated* material, offering experiences that sell the authentic, *the real on stage*. The paradox is that theatre, the art form that historically has sought — by convention — to make fiction plausible, abandons it at the service of truth. These words by Marzo seem pertinent to us if we relate them to the theatre of *the real*:

New social sensibilities lead art, once a bulwark of the fictional universe, in new directions that undermine its traditional position of detachment towards objective forms of communication. Today, an increasingly greater number of artistic practices are available, often forming a diffuse battle line, to engage in a confrontation with a communicational universe that has endorsed the principle of utilitarian truth, one whose legitimacy pivots around the degree of productivity of its effects. Art has chosen to deal with the objective, partly abandoning its love of the subjective (Marzo, 2018: 28).

While testimonies of real people or situations are included on stage (*the objective*), in a search for what is true, there are other dramaturgical techniques that seek to show the false, or the polyhedral vision of reality. The concept of documentary theatre is resized, including new formulas that reflect this reality of *fragmented truths* common in the media.³

Enrile Arrate (2016: 116) chooses to divide contemporary documentary creation into two typologies. On the one hand, argumentative documentary theatre, which seeks to persuade the audience based on a thesis, and, on the other, through Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, relational documentary theatre. In this device, the audience and their interactions — unpredictable to a certain extent — create *the real*.⁴ From the Anglo-Saxon perspective, Johnny Saldaña lists more than eighty-three academic terms referring to postdramatic documentary theatre and its variants. They all share the fact that “the script or the performance text is solidly rooted in nonfictional, researched reality, not realism, but reality” (Saldaña, 2011: 14). Ethnotheatre merges the concepts of ethnography and theatre: this is what he calls the use of stage and theatre techniques whose object is “to mount for an audience a live or mediated performance event of research participant's experiences and/or the researcher's interpretation of data” (Saldaña, 2011: 15). The text that emerged from the Ethnodrama is defined as follows:

A written play script consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or printed and media artifacts such as diaries, blogs, e-mail correspondence, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, court proceedings and historic documents (2011:13).

3. For instance, transmedia theatre, the reading of WhatsApps — as in Jordi Casanovas' dramaturgy — or tweets — in the Bazo brothers's dramaturgy.

4. Among the pieces performed in Madrid, we can cite *Remote Madrid* (2019), by Rimini Protokoll, in which the audience use headphones to be guided through the city while receiving instructions; *Pendiente de Voto* (2012), by Roger Bernat, which gets the audience to answer a set of questions using remote controls, creating different groups and situations of representation; and Álex Rigola in *Un enemigo del pueblo (ágora)* (2018) in which there is a debate with the audience about democracy.

Saldaña suggests an update of the idea that Peter Weiss set out in 1968 as a possible documentary theatre:

Files, minutes, letters, statistical tables, stock market notifications, balance sheets of banking companies and industrial companies, government statements, speeches, interviews, statements of well-known personalities, journalistic and radio reports, photographs, documentaries and other testimonies of the present (Weiss 1971: 99, trans. 1976).

Thus, the concept of *documentary* is expanded as technology enables new ways of communicating, recording and reproducing human action.⁵ The origin of the information divides the *possible ethnodramas* into four typologies:

- a) Ethnodramatic Dramatization of Interview Transcripts.⁶ Here the verbatim technique emerges, developed by the actress and playwright Anne Deavere Smith whose premise is: “Language is identity.”⁷
- b) Ethnodramatic Adaptations of Documents and Published Accounts. Dramaturgy emerges from letters, diaries and any type of manuscript that reflects thoughts and information about the fact under investigation: recordings, transcripts of trials and interrogations, sworn statements, reports, official letters and police files.
- c) Original Autoethnodramatic Work. In this variant, the scenic is mixed with the autobiographical. The documentary is generated through memories, lived experiences and the personal perception of the playwright, who can be the performer.⁸
- d) Collective Creation of Ethnodrama. Finally, in this type of creation, the documentary arises from a collective work. The playwright, researcher or guide asks a set of questions, seeking to dramatically reflect the debate originated and its nuances.

Therefore, from the Anglo-Saxon perception, we see that the dramatization of data (Saldaña, 2011: 13) is a constant formula in contemporary documentary theatre: a distance is created between conventional fiction and the

5. We see a need to rethink the virtual medium, for example, with the appearance of terms such as memes, internet records, chats, bots, virtual assistants, hashtags, hacks of websites, apps, video conferencing, etc., which are shown as a document on stage. However, when it comes to being understood as true material, they pose problems, as they are easy to alter.

6. Included in this genre is the classic *The Laramie Project* (2001), a research piece by Moisés Kauffman and his company The Tectonic Theater Project, which staged the set of interviews that the actors conducted in Wyoming about the murder of Matthew Shepard.

7. Her plays *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* (1992) or *Notes from the Field* (2016) are paradigmatic. A documentary show is developed using interviews, noting all the particularities of speech, in which the actress — in this case, always barefoot, since she asserts that she “puts herself in the shoes of the other through her voice” (Deavere Smith, 2005) — reconstructs a social reality.

8. Some examples are: *Second Chair* (2008), written and performed by Saldaña, which tells of his youth as a gay, working class, coloured and overweight young man trying to get a post as a clarinetist in the school orchestra. In Spain, *Mathausen. La voz de mi abuelo* (2018), a research piece written by Pilar G. Almansa and played by the protagonist's granddaughter, Inma González, could be close to this category as she documentarily works on the family story of her grandfather Manuel, survivor of the Holocaust. An interesting example of this movement has been the performance of the play *Los remedios* (2019) at the Sala EXlímite, directed by Juan Ceacero and with the actors Fernando Delgado-Hierro and Pablo Chaves, by carrying out documentary work on their shared personal history since they were children.

transcription of materials from *the real*, be they interviews (a), documents (b), memories, experiences (c) or forums (d).

The concept of *the real* in theatre

Once the political and social origin of *the real* on stage and the reference to one of its possible taxonomies has been noted, it is worth wondering whether, if we stick to the result of a play, it matters where the fiction comes from. It may not be relevant whether the playwright *imagines a situation* or whether he/she *takes it from reality*. The dramatic result could be the same; even a play that draws texts from reality may be less credible, plausible, than one that does not. So what are the differences?

The first is that it does not emotionally predispose the audience in the same way. Being aware that the text is drawn from reality elicits greater emotionality in its reception. For Lucía Miranda, all the “weight of her work” lies in the deeply emotive fact of being aware that these people exist, “that what is narrated is not fiction.” This theory can be confirmed from the stage construction: a common denominator is that documentary theatre shows currently running begin with a voice-over that announces that what is going to be seen is taken from reality.⁹

The second is that it is a typology of documentary theatre that, from its inception, its creative process, can work with the groups the play is about. This means that, through Miranda’s relationship with them, in the interviews and workshops that we will describe in this article, the social and the artistic are mixed, from the beginning and beyond the final product.

Theatrical and *documentary* are two terms that coexist in a line of conceptual tensions, which Niney rightly questions regarding documentary cinematographic creation: “Is it a terminological contradiction, an impossibility or an oxymoron that designates devices that are certainly documentary but share with theatre features characteristic of the *mise en scène*?”¹⁰ (Niney, 2019: 177). The playwright Julie Zenker, in what she herself has called the “Zenker’s paradox”, points out that documentary theatre maintains a balance between “the explosion of the real on stage and the implosion of artistic parameters” (Zenker, 2006: 6), since it combines an impossible ambiguity: wanting to be documentary (a champion of *the real*) but remaining theatrical (a language that understands that what is located on a stage is part of a fictional agreement, an implicit game). Within this game of limits, special attention must be paid to the relationship between the documentary and the search for objectivity. The critical vision must be sharpened in response to the artistic formulas that are called documentary —born from *the real*— and show a single totalitarian point of view of a complex and multifaceted reality.

9. This is applicable to *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta* but also to *Jauría* by Miguel del Arco and Jordi Casanovas or *Paisajes para no colorear* by Carolina de la Maza and Marcos Layera, to name a few shows running recently in Madrid. In *Prostitución*, by Albert Boronat and Andrés Lima, they continuously use other systems of signs in the performance to remind the audience that the stories told are testimonies of prostitutes.

10. “Est-ce une contradiction dans les termes, une impossibilité, ou un oxymore désignant des dispositifs réellement documentaires mais qui partagent avec le théâtre certains traits de mise en scène?”

We use the following words by Pradier (2019), on the theatre of social transformation, to explore this question within *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*:

The evaluation of the process cannot be aesthetic, but is related with the social transformation processes in which the artistic quality of the products is not a determining factor of the intervention itself. Artistic expression is thus conceived as a *means* of participation, emancipation, transformation, but never as an end in itself. Therefore, there is a displacement of the *aesthetic* evaluation of the product towards the *technical* consideration of the play as a cognitive facilitator, as a valid interlocutor between the artist, the mediator, and the intervening subject, participant and protagonist of the process. This does not prevent the appraisal of the proposals as aesthetic objects, nor does it deny the undeniable artistic value of some specific manifestations. But, of course, the role of the artist is repositioned, causing the transfer of his or her agency — and agenda — to a place on the periphery (Pradier, 2019: 168).

Following this logic, Miranda's play is a means and not an end in itself; therefore, it seeks social transformation, but, as Pradier argues, in all these plays the artistic value is not subsidiary, and this is our case: it is essential to achieve its objective on the audience, who it must entertain and excite — avoiding the melodrama existing in other documentary plays — to finally make us reflect. Miranda apparently fulfils the last aspect of Pradier's quotation. Her role seems to be that of a simple medium, disappearing as an artist, transcribing a reality... but, as we will gradually show, *Zenker's paradox* does not disappear, all fiction is the construction of a reality, of a story. In Pradier's linguistic game, with respect to the *peripheral agenda*, Miranda shows that social theatre can be at the core of the theatrical life of a country and be a viable product in commercial terms.¹¹

Lucía miranda verbatim technique

The fundamental tool of creation in *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta* is the technique of Anglo-Saxon origin called *verbatim*. Created in 1970, “[it] is a subcategory of documentary theatre which refers to a particular mode of dramatic composition whereby the performance text is based on the exact words of real people” (Garson, 2015: 48). The technique involves the creation of the character based on recorded interviews. The rhythm, speed, tone and nuances of each voice, along with some gestures that the interviewer has noted down, are the germ of the piece, since verbatim understands language as a generator of identity.

Lucía Miranda (Valladolid, 1982) is a playwright and director with more than ten plays premiered since 2010, when *De Fuenteovejuna a Ciudad Juárez* was seen for the first time in New York. Although she considers that all of her plays are bathed in or worked from the documentary, she adheres to the rule that only texts that are 90% true are valid as documentary theatre.¹²

11. The play has been performed in 36 venues, which can be consulted at: <<https://thecrossborderproject.com/fiesta-fiesta-fiesta/>>.

12. Personal communication, 4 May 2019.

Miranda's creative process involves preliminary workshops and draws on the subsequent involvement of the audience. Her work starts with an educational intention, to understand and help explain the society surrounding her.

We can see the gradual incursion of the documentary in her creations. In the forum theatre piece *Qué hacemos con la abuela* (2012), in which the company maintains her line of creation shared with the groups, Miranda composes a dramatic play on the problem of caring for relatives with Alzheimer's. Despite being a forum theatre play, *the real* in this show does not only stem from the audience's involvement in the search for solutions to the dramatic conflict, but from the autobiographical origin of the theme. The drama is based directly on Miranda's experience, although all the members of the company had some experience of it. To write the character of Flori, Miranda interviewed her grandmother's caregiver. She drew on the recordings of said interview to create the character by capturing the nuances of speech.

In *Perdidos en Nunca Jamás* (2013), a version of *Peter Pan* adapted by Silvia Herreros de Tejada, audios of interviews with parents of the members of the company are played.¹³ In *Nora 1959* (2015), a version of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, adapted and directed by her, the documentary is present through audio. In a fable in which the radio plays a crucial role, a sound documentary sneaks in, opening and closing the fiction to give the show a more real and tangible characteristic. The use of testimonies is intended to get the audience to identify with authentic *Noras*.¹⁴

In her latest premiere, *La chica que soñaba* (2019), Miranda returns to forum theatre and constructs a fiction based on interviews with women with historically masculinised professions. The features of her creation are thus maintained: on the one hand, the involvement of the social in the creation of the show (both in the interviews and in the participation of a group of teenagers); on the other, the importance of the voice in the development of characters (the secondary school teacher and the adolescent's friend draw their scenic strength from the use of the voice); and, finally, the creation of a debate in the *forum* mode that aims to include the audience.

Despite all these infiltrations of *the real*, the playwright only considers three of her plays to be documentary theatre: *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta* (2017), *País clandestino* (2017) and *I am Miami* (2019).¹⁵ In *País clandestino* (2017), premiered in Chile, different perspectives, experiences and life trajectories are contrasted. Miranda herself reveals the origin of this during the show: "Lucía: We talk a lot about politics, about the differences in our countries... And we've wondered what it would be like to make a fiction with one of our discussions"¹⁶

13. The parents talk about the work situation of their children, thereby linking testimony, voice and theatrical fiction: "It's an awful collective failure / of this society / that young people have to leave / Spain / and you too / eh / because there's no work" (Miranda, 2013).

14. The recordings of older women — the document — from the same generation as the main character (they were young in 1959) anticipate the parallelism of their own life trajectory with the fiction that is about to begin: "My brothers could go out whenever they wanted," "I could never to the movies" (Miranda, 2015). The final recording alludes to a hopeful, emotive, message with the end of the play: "Enough with obeying" and "I want to ride a bicycle at 87" (Miranda, 2015).

15. Personal communication, 4 May 2019.

16. She refers to the playwrights Maelle Poesy (France), Jorge Eiro (Argentina), Pedro Granato (Brazil), Florencia Lindner (Uruguay) and herself who, after meeting in the Director's Lab — from the Lincoln Center in New York —,

(Miranda, 2017: 4). The play was developed in an artistic residence and also remotely (recording conversations in person, video calls on Skype and audios from WhatsApp). It is the result of work that explores the concepts of testimony, memory and recollection. For *I am Miami* (2019) – seven simultaneous fifteen-minute pieces – the playwright repeats the creative process she used in her previous premiere, *Fiesta...*, to make theatrical sense of the recording of interviews with more than sixty Miami residents, also using *verbatim*.

Verbatim technique in *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*

The research process began with the possibility of conducting interviews in a state secondary school in the Community of Madrid. During spring 2016, the playwright recorded thirty-seven testimonies from students, teachers, non-teaching staff and mothers. It is framed within the second category established by Derek Paget (1987) for the verbatim technique, plays that faithfully transcribe recorded texts: Miranda herself calls it an *organic poem*. When editing the material, she highlights her words in another colour – thus joining the stories – to differentiate them from the literalness of the testimonies. Let's remember that, in order to stay within the limits of documentary theatre, she imposes on herself an invention of less than 10% in the text. The playwright argues that 5% or 6% does not come from what was said by the interviewees but were words that she invented.¹⁷ She also modifies the context, for example, in class scenes; everything she narrates is literal but not all the students were in all the scenes.

Moreover, in the research process to create the dramaturgy, she also works in her facet as art-educator: she uses applied theatre techniques. The company participated in various workshops (sound space, Chinese shadows, creation of the *haka*) for the actors to return to the secondary school and share creative space with young people.

In terms of her relationship with *the real*, she defends the right of the interviewees to express their opinion and participate in the material created. Once the stage text was written, several dramatised readings were organised at the school. Following comments from the participants themselves, certain scenes were removed and modified. One of the significant examples of the communicative and egalitarian relationship that the playwright tries to establish with the people interviewed is that the name of each character is decided after asking this question: “If you were a character, what would you like to call yourself?”

Beyond the research and actual origin of the drama, the most relevant documentary characteristic is based on the use of the verbatim technique during the performance of the play and the use of the *organic poem* in its written version.¹⁸ The actors received the dramatic text and the audio testimonies. The cast did not have any contact with real people until after the

began a friendship and theatre project which they define as *autodocumentary*.

17. Personal communication, 5 May 2019.

18. “NATE: At primary school / But not here / All my mates are Spanish and whitey (laughs) / At school / there was (laughs) a lad who called me chocolate milk / and when they call me / when they insult me because of my colour... it puts

premiere, since what was expected from the actor was a work of appropriation and not an imitation. The use of the voice is the element that constructs reality and identity: “Breathing is very powerful, where someone pauses (...) there is a lot of intention and a lot of emotion. A good actor, such as the five actors that I have been lucky enough to direct, is capable of appreciating that without having to see it.”¹⁹ It is through this journey that Lucía Miranda’s documentary theatre is achieved, a type of work in which the way of speaking and the voice are the centre of her relationship with truth.

Analysis of the mise en scène of *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*

The first stage sign of the performance has a profound meaning that will gradually be understood throughout the play. The *haka* ritual dance is related with the intimidation of the adversary through the feeling of collective strength. The idea is the union of people in a joint purpose, their potential, and the need of the individual to belong to a community. While the others continue with the dance, one of the actors puts on a cap (and this sign already denotes him as a character) and says: “I relate to the fried plantains that my aunt makes in the Guinean festivals.” Here we already have the core of this show: identity, which results individual awareness – “I relate to” – , family – “my aunt” – , food – “fried plantains” – , traditions – “festivals” – and nationality – “Guinean” –.

The character of Alma is the link with the other characters and the guiding thread that supports the dramaturgy. She appears in the first scene and introduces herself, “I am the mistress of the dungeon,” in an ironic tone, to tell us that she is the caretaker. The playwright’s and director’s aim with the character is clear: to get the audience to empathise with her. To illustrate our statement on the emotive strategies of the dramaturgy, let’s look at how the character introduces herself: 1) Direct address to the audience, which seeks to bring us closer to the character and remove the barrier of “the fourth wall”; 2) Use of music to encourage the emotive element, first with her *hum* which lends her sympathy and joy and later with the use of a well-known aria sung by Pavarotti; 3) The text, revealing that she had wanted to be a midwife but her parents did not have money to pay for her studies and that she is a “bit of a mother” to the school’s students. These are the three dramaturgical resources: direct address to the audience, atmospheric use of music, and emotive information about the character’s past.

The incident unleashing the dramaturgy is the holding of a class project on festivals in different cultures. Students must prepare a brief exposition where they speak about the festival they choose and where it takes place, who participates in it, the dances and the customs, as well as the food or drink. The root of the activity lies in becoming familiar with the different traditions of the group. Students of Moroccan, Latin American or Chinese

me in a very shitty mood” (Miranda, 2017: 31). Miranda also gives the actors the entire audio interview, with everything that has been left out of the dramatic text, which means that they have more information to create the character.

19. Personal communication, 4 May 2019.

family origin are represented, but the play insists that they are all Spanish by birth or by residence; therefore, nationality is not a feeling of belonging.

The festival is the guiding thread (hence the title), which is mentioned throughout the play, to give coherence to the action and help the audience to follow a causal line. Based on this dramatic core, through changes of time and place, we are told the stories of the different students. We will develop two of these cases, as a sample of the dramatic character of the piece.

Xirou is the first, a student of Chinese origin who enjoys playing the viola but must work in her parents' restaurant. In fact, we are told that since the first year of secondary school she has taken care of the restaurant's book-keeping. With the money she gets she buys a viola. The music teacher, Yolanda, describes Xirou's ability in order to support her and her desire to develop her passion for the viola.

Xirou's story is interrupted to tell Naima's. The dramaturgical trigger is clear: the use of the veil. The treatment of this character is preceded by the opinion of one teacher who tells us that she has given up insisting on the need for Muslim students to question its use. She also argues that the lower the social class, the more radicalism there is in the families, because of poor cultural level. This dialectical seed on the freedom of teenagers of Muslim origin to use the veil, and our tolerance of it, where she wants to locate us and this is why she opens the story of this character in this way. She is already getting us to take a stance before Naima tells Alma that they want to her to stop studying and marry. She ends the search for empathy with the audience: Alma offers to adopt Naima to free her from her future without education. Alma's tenderness contrasts with the emotive injustice and rigidity of her parents. The thesis ends positively, with the following words of her father, said by Alma (aided by a slow verbal delivery): "Study, so that you don't depend on anyone if you don't want to and you're not a stupid as me" (Miranda, 2017: 55), to which Alma replies: "She is a free woman because she has her own criterion and abides by it" (Miranda, 2017: 56).

We have three voices from which the story is told in the *mise en scène*: 1) The characters, who perform the people interviewed; 2) The characters themselves when, indirectly, they give a voice to parents or non-teaching staff; 3) The presence of the playwright through the characters or the voice-over. This mixture in the subject of the dialogue is complemented with a *mise en scène*, from the start, within the theatrical stylistic aesthetics, which is defined as follows:

The aim is to highlight the fictionality, the metatheatrical game with the audience, to become aware of attending a theatre performance. The actors reveal their status, and the space would clearly show that it is a theatre stage. They are productions that generally seek the game, entertainment and reflection (Martínez, 2017: 79).

It seeks what Pavis defines as the *theatrical effect* (Pavis, 1998: 157). To make the audience participate in the stage code proposed, different resources are used such as: narrative language and audience address; simultaneous dialogues; choreographed dances; a symbolic abstract set design and, therefore,

outside realism, which requires the textual space for the locative function; and actors that perform different characters and through whom they move quickly, with a simple change of characterisation or gesture. With these theatrical strategies Miranda manages, in the first minutes of the performance, to establish the degree of convention, whose stage foundation is the theatrical game. The key of theatricality lies in building the dramatic narrative “live” and in the “here and now” with the audience, to create involvement, above fiction, which intercedes between the stage and the audience.

The play constantly seeks to convey empathy for the real people that are behind the characters, giving legitimacy — although presented as wrong — even to those who denote racism, classism or religious obduracy. This emotive relationship determines the whole dramatic strategy, both the textual style and the *mise en scène*. The sentimental search of the story is achieved, along with what occurred, by inserting two prototypical resources: humour and music.²⁰ These stage strategies create closeness and dramatic relief, and contribute to the emphatic emotion. The play explores the search for two different emotions: one created by the mimetic identification with the characters and another achieved by reflecting on the social context surrounding them, in dialogue with the reality of the audience. In the first case intimate scenes are used, created through reduced spaces of light, with a realistic dialogued text and naturalistic performance, which seek to create empathy. The latter is achieved through the rupture with the former opening up the field of vision and showing the theatricality: stage design, texts addressed to audience or effects of distancing such as choreographies or shadow theatre. In this way, it confronts the audience, from a distance from what occurred — breaking the spell —, to think critically about what is presented. The final consequences are emotive, but not only because the audience empathises with the harsh situations of the characters/real people, but also because it reflects on the injustices of the education system that conditions them.

The stage design is based on a sentence said by the school headmaster: “A school offers a great deal; people don’t realise, but it contains an entire world inside” (Miranda, 2017: 58). This statement contains two keys to the production: the stage design metaphor — a background full of globes — and the objective of the staging — “people don’t realise” —, which we develop next. Miranda creates a play with a very alive social purpose, education in secondary school, the anteroom to the creation of adults. She wishes to show the reality of these education centres, the diversity, the teaching problems, the teachers’ involvement and the lack of understanding of the rest of society. Miranda’s aim is for “people to begin to realise”. For this reason she chooses the *verbatim* technique, which enables a voice to be given to the real protagonists. *Giving a voice* becomes the best strategy to *make people aware* and perhaps like this, by moving, to invite us to *reflect* and finally *unleash the action*. We want to highlight the idea of seeking emotion as a stage strategy to achieve the ultimate purpose of social transformation. It is therefore necessary for

20. *La Traviata* sung by Pavarotti; *La Danza Andaluza*, by Granados; *Eres mi canción*, by Rubén Blades; *La Gozadera*, by Marc Anthony; *Adiós Muchachos*, by Carlos Gardel; *River Flows In You*, by Yiruma; David Guetta.

the audience to know that behind what is told there are real people to manipulate its reception. Using the *verbatim* technique is not only a creative process but becomes a theatrical effect of dramatic manoeuvre. This is revealed by the voice-over that opens the show, with the auditorium still dark: “*Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta* is a documentary theatre play for which we have interviewed students, teachers, mothers (fathers did not turn up for the interviews) and non-teaching staff. The show is a direct transcript of these interviews.” This initial statement is clear and conditions the entire reception of the play by increasing the emotive involvement of the audience, who are aware that the stories have been or are being experienced by one individual or group. In the plays of *the real*, in contrast to those based on imagined material, the story is not invented and the importance lies in how it is told (Gómez, 2019: 64).

Conclusions

Ten years have elapsed since the publication of *Prácticas de lo real en la escena contemporánea*, by José Antonio Sánchez (2007). This book focuses on the performances of the second half of the 20th century and the 21st century in which *the real* is the driving force of stage creation. In the years since its release, *the real* has continued to interest creators and audiences. This is revealed by the presence of this concept in the current theatre panorama. This boom of documentary theatre has taken on an unquestionable strength in the panorama of creation and will be a phenomenon that we predict will have a long life, related to the moment of crisis of collective identity – where seemingly there is a right to consume the truth that best suits each individual – and of adaptation of the living arts to the competition of technological leisure. As researchers we cannot, despite the lack of critical distance, ignore this phenomenon: for this reason, we have endeavoured, through these lines, to contribute to the understanding of its characteristics and purposes with the analysis of *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*.

Although the concept of *the real* is revealed in multiple ways in contemporary theatre, it continues to mark the creation, modes of production, invention of dramaturgy and stage outcome. The way of approaching the creative process, outside the standard “director or producer chooses the text, designs the product and rehearses for thirty days”, seems to be making its way onto the fringe stage, the medium-size format, and even public theatres.²¹

Fiesta... by Lucía Miranda, as we have highlighted, is a documentary theatre play which is framed within the category of Saldaña’s Ethnodramatic Dramatization of Interview Transcripts, along with the following taxonomy: 1) Plays whose final product is determined, as shown on the stage, by the creative process. 2) Plays whose ultimate end is to raise awareness of a

21. It is increasingly more common to see programming that endorses these production models. For the 2019-2020 season in Madrid, Teatros del Canal created the itinerary “Morder la realidad” (To Bite Reality). In the municipal sphere, every Friday Teatro del Bosque de Móstoles programmes plays categorised as documentary in its so-called “Ciclo de Teatro Social” (Social Theatre Season). On the fringe, Teatro del Barrio introduced the 2019-2020 season with the following motto: “No hay entretenimiento más apasionante que la realidad” (There is no more exciting entertainment than reality).

social problem and, to achieve this, use emotional manipulation strategies.²² 3) Plays that can transform the audience, but also the group the play is about, through social theatre and processes in which performance is an additional element and not only a commercial product. 4) A theatre of social transformation that does not take place on the periphery, or condition artistic quality.

In Miranda's career a clear educational commitment has been gradually established, a perception of theatre as a means to debate the coexistence in community. "Listening to the ordinary" takes on a stage form with verbatim. With respect to the audience, in her dramaturgies she seeks empathy, connection and identification. "I can, through fiction, transform a reality that I don't like, to shed light on a war that we ignore. To make an unknown reality known" (Miranda, 2015: 3).

In this article we have gradually developed an insight into the use of *the real* through: 1) The verbatim technique, the actor as a transmitter of *the real*. 2) The collective feeling brought about by music and addressing the audience. 3) The theatrical stylistic aesthetics strategy as an integrating game between emitter and receiver. 4) Use of workshops, ethnotheatre, to lend truthfulness to the stories by making testimonies rather than fiction. However, this truth, this reality, which is naturally manipulated to become a work of art, makes what Lane defines as "tergiversation, generalization, biases, embellishment of the events and political protest" (2010: 73; cited by Pradier 2019: 180). There is not a reality, neither vital nor artistic, but a gaze or a political discourse; this verbatim theatre is an efficient play, in which Miranda's dissolution of the voice is a fallacy, and the game of representing *the reality*, a pure convention, but this is the purpose: to create a counter-discourse of the hegemonic, a new one that improves and humanises it. We began this article by mentioning the collective assumption about what is false in the mass media, in which the fight to manipulate our thought and consumption has replaced subtleness with insolence. Indeed, the role — albeit trivial... a minor support actor — of Miranda's theatre is to create another narrative of *the real*, of *truth*. To create the illusion of lack of manipulation of the story taken from reality to transform it, to recognise life and, yet, feel it different. Theatre, which is pure convention — Zenker's paradox —, avoids fiction, or alters it with *the real*, to attempt to write about truth, and although the difficulties mentioned by Brecht in *Writing the Truth. Five Difficulties* persist, we persevere, as Lucía Miranda shows, within the heterogeneous boom of the theatre of *the real* on the contemporary stage.²³



22. Darío Facal, with his company Metatarso, working on a performance called *La realidad*, which is sold as "something that links the narrative to the fictional and *the real*, by mixing never seen emotions" (Naves del Español en Matadero, Ayuntamiento de Madrid). He stresses the audience's emotive experience with respect to *the real*, an issue that supports the hypothesis of this article.

23. "Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the courage to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; the keenness to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; the skill to manipulate it as a weapon; the judgment to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the cunning to spread the truth among such persons. These are formidable problems for writers living under Fascism, but they exist also for those writers who have fled or been exiled; they exist even for writers working in countries where civil liberty prevails." (Brecht, 1934).

Bibliographical references

- BRECHT, Bertolt. "Writing the Truth. Five Difficulties". Original edition: *Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Sagen der Wahrheit* (1934). <<https://bit.ly/3z3361Y>>.
- ENRILE ARRATE, Juan Pedro. "Teatro documento: Libres hasta el final. El teatro como documento artístico, histórico y cultural en el siglo XXI (2000-2016)". *Conferencia del XXV Seminario Internacional del SELITENT@T*. 30 June 2016. <<https://canal.uned.es/video/5a6f63d9b111f55238b465d>> [Last accessed: 5 June 2019].
- ENRILE ARRATE, Juan Pedro. *Teatro relacional: una estética participativa de dimensión política*. Doctoral thesis. Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 2016.
- FÉRAL, Josette. "Lo real: un reto para el teatro". In: Emmanuelle Garnier, Fernando G. Grande and Anna Corral (Eds. and trans.). *Antología de teorías teatrales, el aporte reciente de la investigación en Francia*. Bilbao: Artezblai, 2016, pp. 177-230.
- GARCÍA DEL MURO I SOLANS, Joan. *Good Bye, verdad: una aproximación a la posverdad*. Lleida, Barcelona: Editorial Milenio, 2019, pp. 18-27.
- GARSON, Cyrielle. "Verbatim Theatre and New Writing in Britain: A State of 'Kindred Strangers?'". *Études britanniques contemporaines*, No. 48, 2015. <<http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/2133>> [Last accessed: 25 February 2020].
- GÓMEZ SEGARRA, Manuel. *Estrategias narrativas de los documentales históricos españoles sobre la Guerra Civil (2000-2014)*. Doctoral thesis. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2019.
- LEHMANN, Hans-Thies. *Teatro posdramático*. Translated from German by Diana González et al. Original title: *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999). Murcia: CENDEAC, 2017.
- MARTÍNEZ, Jan. "Noam Chomsky: La gente ya no cree en los hechos". *El País* (Madrid: PRISA) (10 March 2018). <<https://bit.ly/3mlmjBb>> [Last accessed: 5 June 2019].
- MARTÍNEZ, Jara. *Manual de espacio escénico. Terminología, fundamentos y proceso creativo*. Granada: Ediciones Tragacanto, 2017.
- MARZO, Jorge Luis. *La competencia de lo falso. Una historia del fake*. Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2018.
- MIRANDA, Lucía. *Fiesta, Fiesta, Fiesta*. (2017). Muestra de Teatro Español de Autores Contemporáneos (INAEM). <<http://muestrateatro.com/archivos/02-Fiesta-fiesta.pdf>> [Last accessed: 23 March 2020].
- MIRANDA, Lucía. "Dossier de Fuenteovejuna a Ciudad Juárez". Madrid: Cross Border, 2015. <<https://bit.ly/3xZ7qHF>> [Last accessed: 23 March 2020].
- MIRANDA, Lucía. "Dossier de País clandestino". Madrid: Cross Border, 2018. <<https://www.contextoteatral.es/paisclandestino.html>> [Last accessed: 23 March 2020].
- NINEY, François. *Le documentaire et ses faux-semblants*. Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 2019.
- PAGET, Derek. "Verbatim Theatre: Oral History and Documentary Techniques". *New Theatre Quarterly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), III, 2 (1987), pp. 317-336. <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X00002463>> [Last accessed: 10 March 2020].
- PAVIS, Patrice. *Diccionario del teatro*. Translated from French by Jaume Melendres. Original title: *Dictionnaire du théâtre* (1996). Barcelona: Paidós Ibérica, 1998.

- PRADIER, Adrián. "El arte impotente: Un estudio sobre arte, autonomía y transformación social". *Pygmalion, revista de teatro general y comparado* (Madrid: Instituto del Teatro de Madrid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid), 11 (2019), pp. 163-186.
- SALDAÑA, Johnny. *Ethnotheatre, Research from Page to Stage*. New York: Left Coast Press, 2011.
- VALLEJO, Javier. "Un baño de realidad sobre el escenario". *El País* (Madrid: PRISA) (9 November 2017), <<https://bit.ly/3D1hB2s>> [Last accessed: 23 March 2020].
- WEISS, Peter. *Escritos políticos*. Translated from German by Feliu Formosa. Original title: *Rapporte 2* (1971). Barcelona: Lumen, 1976 (Ediciones de Bolsillo; 472), p. 99.
- ZENKER, Kathrine Julie. "Transmetteur du réel, une approche du jeu d'acteur dans le théâtre documentaire". *Lignes de Fuite*, No. 02 (2006), pp. 1-8. <http://www.lignes-de-fuite.net/IMG/article_PDF/article_113.pdf> [Last accessed: 23 March 2020].