

MODULE A: DEFINITION & LINKS

Verbatim Theatre is a type of documentary theatre. This means theatre makers use audio recordings, interviews, written transcripts of things real people have said, or found objects and texts such as photos, newspaper articles and adverts, theatre programmes or letters. This source material is used as a starting point for making a theatre piece.

The first step with Verbatim Theatre is to ensure that you have the appropriate permissions. If you are using people's words you should ensure they know what they are agreeing to and all the usages which may come out of it. Make them aware of how you are likely to manipulate the source material and consider whether anyone in their wider circle will be affected by what they share. It can be good to involve people who share their words at different stages so that they see how their information and experiences are used. People are usually very proud to see something beautiful created out of their real experiences, but you have to be sensitive too.

There are a number of ways to approach Verbatim Theatre. You can edit, splice and arrange people's actual words into a narrative so that you are quoting what they've said word for word. Be aware of how you distort what happened through what you choose to include.

Another technique is to use the source material to immerse yourself in other people's worlds (mannerisms they have, vocabulary they use, objects they keep). From there you can create brand new characters and events which you have written or devised yourself, which will be very specific to the world you were inspired by.

There are a whole load of skills which underpin making Verbatim Theatre: navigating archives, finding interviewees, planning the interview and your interview style so that you get the most interesting responses. It can be interesting to watch videos of chat show hosts and reporters to see the tactics they use to prompt candid responses. You are always seeking to get beyond the surface to the heart of the story (in a sensitive collaborative way).

Because Verbatim Theatre portray lived experience, it can be a challenging but fascinating and rewarding theatre form to explore.

Lucy Bell, Documental Theatre

USEFUL LINKS

The World Turned Upside Down – A verbatim based collaboration between director Paul Jepson and the University of Exeter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9su4to1y5d8>

<https://researchandinnovation.co.uk/the-world-turned-upside-down-a-newtons-cradle-of-memories/>

LUNG, a campaign led verbatim theatre company that tours work nationally

<https://www.lungtheatre.co.uk/>