Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures Vol.17, No. 4, 2025, pp1217-1239

JJMLL

Theatre's Reaction to Media: Robin Soans' *Life after Scandal*

Yeliz BİBER VANGÖLÜ
American Culture and Literature Department, Atatürk University, Turkey

Mehmet ÜNAL *
Translation and Interpreting Department, Atatürk University, Turkey

Received on: 11-8-2024 **Accepted on: 23-4-2025**

Abstract

Mass media's influence on public perception, often involving the manipulation of information, raises concerns about its role in shaping public discourse. However, the relationship between media and individuals is complex and not always one of exploitation. By constructing plays from the documented words of individuals, verbatim theatre offers a unique response to this mediated reality. This article analyses Robin Soans' *Life after Scandal* (2007) to explore how verbatim theatre engages with and critiques media representations of high-profile scandals. Through an examination of key characters' experiences and the play's thematic focus on truth and manipulation, this study applies media effects theories, including agenda-setting, framing and the concept of the 'global village,' to demonstrate how verbatim theatre exposes the constructed nature of media narratives and offers alternative perspectives on the complex relationship between media, individuals and public perception. By presenting multiple, often conflicting, accounts of the same events and amplifying marginalised voices, the analysis reveals that verbatim theatre challenges the dominant media narratives, offering a critical lens through which to understand and resist media manipulation.

Keywords: Verbatim Theatre, Media Effects, Robin Soans, *Life after Scandal*, Media.

Introduction

Since the mid-twentieth century, mass media has become an indispensable, albeit occasionally unsolicited, aspect of global life. The ubiquity of its various channels renders exposure to its messages nearly inescapable, influencing individuals worldwide. Consequently, various theories endeavoring to determine just how influential media can be and how it may be used for and against people have emerged over time. This essay examines the multifaceted impact of mass communication media on the public as depicted in British playwright Robin Soans's *Life after Scandal* (2007). Specifically, the essay analyses how media consumption shapes audience perceptions and attitudes, exploring both the overt and subtle ways in which these effects manifest.

* Doi: https://doi.org/ 10.47012/jjmll. 17.4.18
* Corresponding Author: **mehmet.unal@atauni.edu.tr**

Even though media studies cover myriad theories examining the effects of media on its audience, the results of the "examination of 224 studies of communication and development published … [and] the research literature… [between 1958-1996] about media effects… reveal that much of the research was informed by models predicting either powerful effects or limited effects" (Braman et al. 2020, 174). The powerful effects paradigm, rooted in the belief that mass media wields significant influence over its audience (Noelle-Neumann 1973; Roberts and Bachen 1981), encompasses theories like 'agenda-setting,' 'priming,' 'framing,' 'dependency,' 'spiral of silence' and 'cultivation'. In contrast, the limited effects paradigm, exemplified by the 'uses and gratifications' theory, posits that mass media's impact on audiences is minimal or limited (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). These contrasting paradigms provide a framework for understanding how the play portrays both the manipulative potential of media and the ways in which theatre responds to such manipulation, through specific examples from the play.

This study will also utilize Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan's influential aphorism, 'the medium is the message[1],' which suggests that content is inextricably linked to the medium through which it is conveyed. McLuhan argues that the medium itself shapes both the message and its impact on the audience, asserting that without the medium the message will never exist (McLuhan 1964, 152). He envisions a world transformed into a global village by technological advancements, with nations becoming interconnected tribes reliant on media for information. This concept of the 'global village' is particularly relevant to understanding McLuhan's theories and will be explored further through examples from the play.

Developed by French sociologist and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard at the beginning of the 1980s, the concept of 'simulacra and simulation,' examining the relationship between reality, symbols and society, is also considered as a key argument to any discussion of media manipulations and will be explored in detail later in this study. Since media manipulation is the main theme of the select play, Baudrillard's ideas on simulacra and simulation are very crucial for the examination of media manipulation in this study and they will be explained in detail in the analysis part of the study.

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant given the limited scholarly attention paid to media's manipulative power within the context of verbatim theatre, especially in Soans' work. Despite the growing popularity of verbatim theatre as a genre, scholarly engagement specifically with Robin Soans' *Life after Scandal* remains relatively limited. This study therefore aims to contribute to this nascent body of scholarship by offering a detailed analysis of the play's treatment of media influence through the lens of media effects theories. Existing research on verbatim theatre often focuses on ethics or its platform function for marginalised voices (Belfield 2018; Wake 2010). This study, however, analyses how *Life after Scandal* dramatises the complex interplay of media, public perception and individual experience. By exploring this interplay, the study not only sheds light on the play's thematic concerns but also contributes to a broader understanding of the potential and limitations of verbatim theatre as a form of social commentary.

1. Verbatim Theatre vs Journalism / Truth vs Post-Truth

When creating a play, a verbatim (word-for-word) style of theatre directly employs the precise words spoken by interviewees who have some connection to the chosen subject matter. Constructing narratives based on direct quotations to inform the public about recent events is traditionally the role of journalism. However, verbatim theatre seems to have assumed this responsibility, suggesting a perceived failure of traditional media to fulfil its traditional function. The term 'verbatim' was first coined by the British researcher and writer of documentary theatre, Derek Paget in 1987 who defines verbatim theatre as:

> [A] form of theatre firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with 'ordinary' people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place... (Paget 1987, 317)

Documentary theatre is often used as an umbrella term for various types of "theatre responding to and representing real people and events such as 'theatre of fact', 'theatre of testimony', or 'theatre of actuality'" (Wake 2010, 6). Verbatim theatre is similarly placed "alongside related 'reality theatre' practices such as autobiographical performance, community theatre, documentary theatre, tribunal plays, and historical plays" (Wake 2010, 5).

While documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, theatre of testimony and tribunal plays are terms used interchangeably on occasion, their source materials and production methodologies may be very different from each other. Tribunal plays are, for instance, "edited transcripts (literally, 'redactions') of actual trials, tribunals and public inquiries whose proceedings have been officially recorded" (Paget 2008, 135). Although such difference in terminology might be confusing, it is quite obvious from the definitions of these terms that documentary theatre encompasses verbatim theatre as an umbrella term and verbatim theatre can be considered as a form of documentary theatre.

Verbatim plays may focus on a wide range of social problems such as lack of equity, police brutality and systematic racism, but they are largely different from the other literary genres in that they use the 'real words' of the 'real people'. Resembling journalism, this very process of using 'real words' seems to bring out the result that this type of theatre and performances are usually defined as "journalism through theatre", "journalism as performance", "enacted journalism" or "news on stage" (Adams 2020). However, it is precisely this aspect of these plays that renders them a quality of authority and sincerity, making them, at the same time, more interesting for the audience especially compared to reading about the issues addressed in these plays through journalism which is commonly believed to fabricate the news or present a single side of the events.

Due to verbatim theatre's direct engagement with individuals connected to a particular issue, it is often commended for its capacity to provide deeper insights into the events being portrayed, allowing audiences to "look further in the heart of the events" (Keen 2017, 16). Verbatim plays are also considered as a type of theatre, the productions of which are "telling stories that aren't being told elsewhere and they often describe what they are doing with phrases such as [revealing] 'hidden histories', 'giving voice to the

voiceless', or 'writing from the ground up'" (Wake 2010, 8) or giving "a face to the faceless" (Burnside 2003, v). In this regard, another significant function of verbatim theatre is its role as a memory keeper, providing solace for individuals who have experienced personal trauma in isolation. By giving voice to those who have suffered, it acknowledges the profound need to share one's experiences, as Zora Neale Hurston poignantly articulates, "[t]here is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you" (2006, 175).

Verbatim theatre provides a platform for individuals to share their perspectives on a specific issue with a wider audience, offering them the opportunity to present their version of events or highlight aspects of their story they wish to be heard. It eventually functions as "the bonding of document to drama, fact to fiction, world to word, public to private, where the first term contradicts the second" (Dawson 2012, 5). Verbatim theatre distinguishes itself through the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory elements. This type of theatre is about facts, but the staged performance is at the same time fiction, it tells the private story and personal history of people but tells it publicly. It is a document as a recorded reportage, yet the final product is a piece of drama as well. It tells something important regarding the world by utilising the words and stories of real individuals. In other words, it collects personal stories and connects them with universal histories.

Furthermore, verbatim theatre endeavors to establish theatre as a substantially more democratic medium as anyone from the public can be a character in verbatim plays to express their thoughts and feelings. Unlike other media like newspapers and television which are more or less biased and one-sided most of the time under the influence and control of authorities, verbatim theatre as a medium ostensibly provides all individuals with the opportunity for self-expression thereby giving the impression that everyone in the society is equally important and worth listening to. Accordingly, the democratic approach of verbatim theatre—namely giving voice to almost everybody related to the topics addressed in the plays and presenting a comprehensive range of perspectives—has drawn the attention of people who are aware of the exploitation of democracy and in search of possible democratic practices.

It would be inaccurate to suggest that the popularity or impact of verbatim theatre stems from a claim to objectivity or an absolute representation of reality. Instead, its significance appears to lie in the authenticity inherent in the spoken word itself:

> Verbatim theatre is not about truth in the sense of the most accurate imitation of real utterances according to this way of thinking, but rather, it is about the truth revealed in the words themselves, which have validity because somebody really said them. (McManus 2010, 7)

Based on interviews, which are naturally subjective expressions, verbatim theatre cannot be wholly objective. This does not, however, mean that it lacks truth entirely. The information presented in verbatim plays cannot be considered entirely objective due to the singularity of their source. The genre, however, distinguishes itself from others since "verbatim plays are usually about something important [and] the implication is that when the content of a play is actually important to us then we shouldn't rely on fiction" (McManus 2010, 8). The audience of verbatim theatre assumes that they are not presented with fictitious

material but actual words of actual people thereby counting on the idea that these plays will reveal the truth and present reality in a way that imaginative plays cannot.

Even though journalism also utilizes the real words of real people, it often prefers to present only one side of the events unlike verbatim theatre. As reality may be multifaceted, the presentation of multiple points of view is inevitably essential in the claim of the presentation of reality and truth. This very characteristic of verbatim theatre—namely presenting as many points of view as possible—is the main difference between journalism and verbatim theatre although both include verbatim reportage from real people. In this way, the audience has an option of believing any version of the story told in verbatim theatre or they at least become aware of the fact that there may be more than one point of view in any given incident.

Verbatim theatre's approach to reality from different standpoints is accepted as at least "a stand against the one-sided projection of reality. Even if it cannot disrupt the fictions imposed under the guise of reality, leaving a question mark next to them and opening them for discussion means placing a threat against them" (Biber Vangölü 2020, 59). Multi-sided projection of the same events which were once projected one-sidedly by the media seems to be a reaction from verbatim theatre to media manipulation. Verbatim theatre poses a threat to media manipulation since it seems to break the illusion of reality created by the media with the presentation of multiple realities as opposed to the quasi-ultimate reality of the media.

Although "the age-old attack on journalists from those who feel they have not been well represented in the print media too, that their comments were 'taken out of context'" (Belfield 2018, 92) can be the same concern for verbatim pieces after the editing process, the drafts of the plays are quite often staged for those whose stories are used in the plays "through preliminary readings and 'closed' performances" (Brown 2010, 111). It is a common practice to convince the interviewees that the material they provide is being used properly without manipulation or misrepresentation. In spite of the fact that this practice is not applied by all the practitioners of verbatim plays, it is nevertheless a sensitivity that the media has never shown to those, the life of whom has been affected by the news it has produced.

Given that media is known to fabricate information and manipulate facts to serve those in power, media output cannot be considered an accurate representation of truth; it can rather be described as post-truth[2]. Accordingly, mass media today is aptly called 'post-truth media'. Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction (which was the reason used to justify the invasion of Iraq) was, for instance, presented as truth by media at the time but Tony Blair and George Bush—who were believed to control the press—later confessed to the falsity of that piece of 'truth'. They nevertheless tried to justify their actions by stating that Saddam "had the capacity to make weapons of mass destruction" (Press Conference by the President 2021) and "[t]he world is a better place with Saddam in prison not in power" (WMD Intelligence Was Wrong 2021).

Some of the journals like *The New York Times* likewise admitted after the war that they were wrong and the public was misinformed about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (Cozens 2021). The truth presented by media at the time has thus turned out to be the post-truth politics of the ones possessing the power. Unlike media, verbatim theatre is at least in search of the realities and truths even

though its productions are constructed by passing through the filter of the authors. When compared to media which is under the influence of dominant capitalism and consumerism, verbatim theatre as a form of art is far more resistant to the influences of these ideologies as its primary concern is neither power nor money or control but the examination of the human condition.

2. A Response to Journalism through Verbatim Theatre

Robin Soans, a playwright specialising in verbatim and documentary drama, is also an actor and stands as a prominent figure in British verbatim theatre. His pursuit of truth emerges as a driving force behind his motivation for creating verbatim plays. Soans (2008) explains why the truth matters so much in today's world as follows:

> The phrase 'it does what it says on the tin' is much in fashion at the moment, yet it seems to me that we are living in an age when virtually nothing 'does what it says on the tin': photographs are fake; television competitions are won by people who haven't entered; articles in newspapers turn out to have been entirely fabricated... (17)

In his play *Life after Scandal*, Soans addresses similar concerns. The play centres more on the media's construction of truth in the modern world and the experiences of those entangled in scandals than on actual scandals.

Therefore, one might assert that the play's creative origins lie in the problems Soans has observed in this age of technology and media, such as the fact that "[t]he normal channels of reportage, wherein we expect some degree of responsibility and truth, are no longer reliable" (Soans 2008, 17). According to Soans, it is incumbent upon the arts and artists to reveal the truth since "[o]nly in the arts is the study of the human condition considered more important than ambition or money …[and] it is left to artists to ask the relevant questions" (2008, 17). Therefore, he endeavors to fulfil the duty that remained unfulfilled by the media, by asking 'the relevant questions' in his verbatim plays as well as in the construction of these plays during the interviews.

3. The Effects of Mass Media in *Life after Scandal*

Life after Scandal draws its narrative from interviews with well-known figures embroiled in scandals, including Neil and Christine Hamilton, Charles and Diana Ingram, Jonathan Aitken and Lord Edward Montagu. In addition to these public figures, the voices of ordinary (not famous) individuals, such as a paparazzo named Menaji and two ordinary citizens identified only as Sonal and Louise, are also included. This diverse range of perspectives, encompassing individuals from various walks of life, allows for a multifaceted presentation of events and their ramifications. By juxtaposing these differing viewpoints, the play encourages a more nuanced understanding of media effects, cultivating "a sense that there might be multiple, conflicting understandings of these realities" (Bottoms 2006, 58). Thus, instead of reinforcing one perspective, *Life after Scandal* attempts to cover as many diverse opinions as possible (related to the subject of the play).

Composed of segments of actual conversations between the playwright and individuals involved in scandals, the play blurs the boundary between actors, characters and their real-life counterparts. The actors' physical presences serve as conduits for the authentic words spoken by these individuals, who are then transformed into characters within the play. This approach compels the audience to contemplate the nature of a theatrical character in relation to a real person and how an actor navigates these representations. Moreover, the play's intimate connection to real lives and experiences prompts a reassessment of the relationship between theatre and reality itself. Since one of the central concerns of the play revolves around the pervasive influence of mass media and the extent to which it shapes individuals' lives, this focus enhances the discussion of reality, representation and fabrication in the context of media influence.

However, *Life after Scandal* has faced criticism for its stylistic choices. The lack of significant interaction between characters and the minimal action, relying instead on the narration of personal stories, a characteristic common to many verbatim plays, have been points of contention. Scottish actress Hilary Maclean describes this characteristic of verbatim theatre as the "drama is in the performance of the words not in the physicality of it" (Belfield 2018, 139). What is more salient in verbatim theatre is not the performance of the actors, but the words spoken by the actors. Even though verbatim pieces are pieces of theatre, the theatricality of many appears to be of secondary importance when the raw information revealed in the genuine and unaltered output of reportage composing pure verbatim pieces is considered. German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann (2013) describes the effect he experienced in such plays lacking theatricality as the feeling of "lack in the face of the absence of action … [as the] aesthetic appreciation is broken by a concrete questioning of the self" (109). However, it does not mean that an audience cannot experience any "affective charge" (Tomlin 2019, 111) in verbatim plays due to the lack of action, the narrative—rather than the staging or action on the stage—provides the most 'affective charge' for an audience.

In this context, British theatre director Nicholas Kent asserts that verbatim theatre is not art but rather "a journalistic response to what is happening" (2008, 165). He argues that it attempts to provide what journalism should but often fails to deliver: the revelation of truth**.** The increasing prevalence of disquieting political and social issues worldwide has intensified the public's search for truth, even within the realm of theatre. Since truths are not properly presented by the media; theatre, which is a form of art, has begun to be perceived as a source of true information by the audience. Therefore, verbatim theatre takes over the role of dissemination of information for the sake of truth yet at the expense of art.

It would be erroneous to assert that verbatim plays present the unvarnished truth based solely on their claim to veracity. As theatrical productions constructed from personal accounts, they inherently convey the subjective perspectives of the interviewees. Nonetheless, they retain the authenticity of featuring genuine words spoken by real individuals. Furthermore, the scandals and events depicted in the play, while subject to varying interpretations of authenticity, are rooted in reality, not fictional constructs. Drama scholar Carol Martin, author of *Theatre of the Real* (2013), posits that this genre "occupies the ground between the entirely made-up world of dramatic fiction and the supposedly entirely real world of

everyday life" (75). Therefore, one could argue that these plays inherently blend elements of fiction and reality, leaving the absolute truth of the events open to debate.

The play's engagement with the manipulative nature of media extends beyond its thematic content to encompass the very genre of verbatim theatre itself. The question of whether or not the media accurately portrays reality has always been a point of contention. Structured around the 'word-for-word' testimonies of real people, the play nevertheless remains a theatrical production, inherently a work of fiction. Although it represents real individuals using their own words, those words are ultimately delivered by actors, not the individuals themselves. Interestingly, when performed on stage, the impact of the play can surpass that of the actual events it portrays. As Filewod (2009) observes, "performance [therefore] threatens to become more 'real' than the actuality it enacts" (62). This heightened sense of realism, where the representation surpasses the authenticity of the original, aligns with Baudrillard's (1994) concepts of simulation and simulacra.

Baudrillard defines 'simulacrum' as a copy or representation devoid of an original referent, arguing that these representations progressively supplant reality, becoming more real than reality itself (1994, 6). He cites Disneyland as a prime example of simulacra—an amusement park, not a functioning city, that nonetheless captivates visitors through its meticulously crafted representation of American life, offering "the religious, miniaturised pleasure of real America, of its constraints and joys" (Baudrillard 1994, 12). Baudrillard likewise claims that the Watergate scandal is not a scandal but a simulacrum as "formerly one worked to dissimulate scandal - today one works to conceal that there is none" (Baudrillard 1994, 12). For him, since the media is busy concealing that Watergate is not a scandal, Watergate is a simulacrum presented as a scandal to convince people that law and justice still exist.

'Simulation', on the other hand, is the reproduction of the things constituting reality. Baudrillard states that "[t]o dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence" (1994, 3). In this sense, simulation is used to conceal the absence of reality. In his article "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" (1991), Baudrillard asserts that it was a simulation and it never happened in the way it was presented to people:

> [T]he two adversaries did not even confront each other face to face, the one lost in its virtual war won in advance, the other buried in its traditional war lost in advance. They never saw each other: when the Americans finally appeared behind their curtain of bombs the Iraqis had already disappeared behind their curtain of smoke. (Baudrillard 1995, 62)

He highlights the virtuality of the war as a dimension of simulation. He also mentions that people watched the war as a 'media event' when guided missiles were launched and targets were hit with imaging devices while they were sitting on their comfortable seats, eating and drinking something. This media event took its audience to the point that it was almost impossible for them to distinguish between the missile bombardment and the image bombardment, the reality and the simulation.

According to Baudrillard, we live in a simulation or even in a hyperreal[3] world as media constitute our knowledge of reality which is not real and "[t]he media and the official news service are only there to

maintain the illusion of an actuality, of the reality of the stakes, of the objectivity of facts" (1995, 27). In *Life after Scandal*, Louise and Sonal, who are ordinary citizens, state that they follow celebrities and scandals on the news as if they were watching a soap opera (Soans 2008, 69). This means that they also cannot distinguish between reality, representation and simulation thereby living in a hyperreal world. This blurring of boundaries can be both appealing and unsettling. The curated and often sensationalised nature of media narratives can provide a sense of order and predictability in a complex world, offering a simplified and easily digestible version of reality. This might be particularly attractive to individuals who feel overwhelmed by information overload or crave certainty. Coupled with the emotionally charged nature of much media content, the constant barrage of information can eventually foster dependence on these simplified narratives, leaving individuals vulnerable to manipulation and making them more susceptible to accepting information uncritically.

One could argue that staged renditions of events or individuals—in essence, representations or simulations—hold a greater appeal than their real-life counterparts, which represent the original or the reality. From this perspective, *Life after Scandal* can be interpreted as a simulation of actual events and individuals. While the public initially encounters scandals through media coverage, there appears to be a need, or perhaps a preference, for fictionalised accounts or simulations to gain a more comprehensive understanding or to engage with alternative perspectives. This arises from a perception that media representations, often constrained by a singular viewpoint, serve the specific agendas of the media organisations themselves. In this instance, the fictional production, the simulation, the simulacrum, is embodied in the theatrical play, *Life after Scandal*. In order to comprehend the events and their results better, the audience needed to see the theatrical versions of the events through verbatim theatre, presenting multiple perspectives about an event as the audience could neither comprehend the events and their results nor gain insight into the events without the simulation of these events and people through theatre. This need or preference emerging in the public leads us to McLuhan's aphorism 'the medium is the message' suggesting that a message or content cannot exist without a medium.

It is possible to analyse the play itself in relation to McLuhan's aphorism, 'the medium is the message'. In this instance, *Life after Scandal* functions as the medium transmitting the messages and themes of the play. McLuhan's theory proposes that any form of technology, irrespective of its communicative purpose, acts as an extension of human body parts, bodily functions or abilities. For example, eyeglasses, microscopes and telescopes serve as extensions of our eyes, enhancing our ability to see. Similarly, wheels, trains and automobiles act as extensions of our legs, augmenting our ability to move. Building on this concept, since the media (particularly the press) often serves as the primary source of information for the public, it can be understood as an extension of our eyes and ears—our senses of sight and hearing. These senses, before the development of communication technologies, were the fundamental means by which humans received information (McLuhan 1994, 4–6). Applying McLuhan's aphorism 'the medium is the message', *Life after Scandal* could then be interpreted as an extension of the audience's capacity for understanding. The play provides a depth of insight into the events that extend beyond the limitations of the information disseminated by traditional media outlets.

Before the invention of the means of communication, the only way of receiving information about an event was either by witnessing the event or by hearing from somebody about it. As it is impossible to be able to witness every event happening all around the world or have trusted people who will witness these events and inform about them, people have become dependent on the media for receiving information after the invention of the means of mass communication. This dependency on mass media brings to the forefront two significant media effects theories: 'the uses and gratifications' and 'the dependency' theories. The uses and gratifications theory[4] posits that individuals engage with media to satisfy personal needs, goals and purposes. These purposes can range from seeking information and entertainment to validating personal beliefs and finding a sense of community. Individuals experiencing social isolation or lacking strong real-world connections might be particularly drawn to media consumption as a means of fulfilling these needs. Moreover, media can provide a sense of belonging and shared experience, particularly around events of national or international significance.

However, as the dependency theory[5] suggests, this pattern of use can lead to a dependency on media over time. In essence, while people may initially utilize media voluntarily for their own ends (uses and gratifications theory), they can subsequently develop a dependence on it, giving a degree of control (dependency theory). Both the media and the play can be analysed through the framework of these theories. The public's need for information and their dependence on media as the primary source of that information form the crux of both theories. Similarly, the play itself fulfills a need, whether it be to gain a deeper understanding of events or simply for entertainment.

The play offers numerous samples of media effects and illustrates how the media operates within the lives of its audience. A recurring theme is the media's strategic use for agenda-setting purposes. This manipulation primarily serves to either conceal more critical issues or to shape public perception surrounding those issues. David Leigh, formerly investigations executive editor of *The Guardian*, elucidates the media's tactic of leveraging scandals for agenda-setting:

> These cases where people in the public eye are elevated and then dragged down and torn to pieces by the crowd are all theatre... a rather unpleasant form of theatre... Act One. Here is a celebrity to admire, fawn over, gawp at. Act Two. Get the celebrity into trouble, and start dragging them down. Act Three. Trample the celebrity into the mud to make you feel better about the feelings of envy stirred up by your initial adoration. (Soans 2007, 95)

Leigh's theatrical analogy aptly encapsulates the media's role in fabricating both celebrities and the subsequent scandals that engulf them. Similar to theatrical productions, scandals provide a form of escapism for the audience, diverting attention from real-world issues, including their own personal struggles.

This deliberate orchestration of scandals serves as a tool for distraction, diverting public attention from pressing matters. The media strategically elevates individuals to celebrity status, allows for public adoration and then orchestrates their downfall through carefully crafted scandals, all to manipulate public focus when necessary. This manipulation of public perception through agenda-setting aligns with the

agenda-setting theory, a media effects theory proposed by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw. This theory posits that the prominence of particular issues within the media's agenda directly influences their perceived importance within the public consciousness. In essence, the media's carefully curated agenda becomes the blueprint for the public's own.

The concept of agenda-setting, as proposed by agenda-setting theory, is a recurring motif in *Life after Scandal*, subjected to both emphasis and critique through the lived experiences of the play's diverse characters. This thematic focus serves to amplify the intended message of the play, highlighting the media's pervasive influence on public perception as follows:

> CRAIG. When the Andijan massacre happened two years ago in Uzbekistan ... it was marginalised by something trivial. If I remember right, it was Kylie Minogue's breast cancer.
>
> MELISSA. … I was horrified, haunted as a little girl by ... things like Vietnam and Biafra... now nobody gives a toss... we're all looking at some tits. (Soans 2007, 70-71)

Life after Scandal unfolds through a series of parallel character narratives, presenting a tapestry of shared experiences that underscore the play's central themes. This specific structure effectively underscores the pervasive nature of media agenda-setting by presenting similar experiences in close proximity.

Melissa[6], the daughter of a politician, attempts to illuminate the profound impact of media on public perception through its calculated use of celebrities and scandals. She argues that the media employs these elements as tools of manipulation, strategically feeding the public a steady diet of sensationalised information (Soans 2007, 70). To illustrate this point, she references specific instances of agenda-setting, citing 'David Kelly, Vietnam and Biafra' as examples (Soans 2007, 70-71). Shortly after an unauthorised discussion with BBC journalist Andrew Gilligan concerning the UK government's dossier on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, David Christopher Kelly, a Welsh scientist and biological warfare expert employed by the British Ministry of Defence, was found dead (Plötzky et al. 2024, 362). Melissa invokes this incident to suggest that Kelly's death, given its potential implications for government accountability, should have commanded far greater public attention. Instead, she argues, it was eclipsed by the media's preoccupation with trivial celebrity scandals. Melissa further bolsters her argument by noting that even significant historical events, such as the Vietnam and Biafra wars, failed to garner adequate public attention because the media agenda was dominated by matters of far less consequence. Roy Duncan, a film director masquerading as a Lord, eloquently captures this societal blind spot, stating that "While we're all watching these celebrities yo-yoing up and down you can bury any amount of bad news" (Soans 2007, 71). His observation aligns with Melissa's earlier assertions, underscoring the play's overarching message about the insidious power of media agenda-setting.

Craig Murray[7], whose experiences intertwine with those of Melissa and Duncan, recounts how the media, in a disturbing manipulation of public perception, diverted attention from the 2005 Andijan massacre in Uzbekistan, a tragic event in which over 1,500 lives were lost (Donovan 2019). Reflecting on this incident, Murray offers a poignant observation about the media's pervasive influence: "Everyone is living their lives through these iconic figures promoted by the media... and the trivia of what's happening

to them" (Soans 2007, 71). His words underscore the notion that because people are constantly exposed to and often swayed by media messages, the power to dictate what is salient or not —by effectively setting the public agenda—rests firmly in the hands of the media.

Certain passages in *Life after Scandal* are deliberately crafted to expose the media's power to mould public opinion. These scenes highlight how carefully chosen words can subtly, yet effectively, shape the audience's perception of particular issues:

> DUNCAN. Suddenly all this vitriol is pouring on you. You look me up on the Internet... con man, queer, violent, vindictive, psychopathic... (Soans 2007, 52)
>
> MARGARET. ... It led to Campbell blackening my name, as being a vengeful woman... you should have seen the cartoons appearing at the time... hands splayed out, the fingers tattooed with 'VENGEANCE', and all these other words... 'ANGER', 'FURY', 'RAGE', 'SPITE'... I had this witch's face... I was a virago, and every time Robin tried to stand up for a moral issue they threatened him with ridicule in the press to keep him 'on message'... (Soans 2007, 76)

The framing theory[8] suggests that the media's deliberate use of terms like 'queer,' 'violent,' 'psychopathic' and 'spite' serves to implicitly shape public perception of the individuals or groups being discussed. Essentially, associating these terms with certain people aims to cultivate an image of untrustworthiness. Consequently, audiences exposed to this 'framed' media content may subconsciously adopt the media's perspective and interpret the behaviour of those individuals or groups through the lens of these negatively charged words.

When the media negatively frames individuals or issues, it creates an unspoken societal expectation for the audience to internalise and respond to this manufactured narrative. The framing implies a sense of urgency, positioning these topics as the prevailing concerns demanding public attention and shaping discourse. Within the play, this phenomenon manifests repeatedly as various characters explicitly reference and reinforce this media-driven manipulation:

> CRAIG. … I've had to face the relentless hostility of a government, because of their absolute determination to remove someone objecting internally to what they were doing in the name of the War on Terror, and the most effective way to drive them out of society is scandal; is to blacken their name.
>
> NEIL. Suddenly you become a sort of public property for people to be moralistic and judgemental about.
>
> CHRISTINE. Millions of people who didn't even know you existed feel they can pass judgement on you. (Soans 2007, 53)

Media representation seems to possess a potent influence over public perception. When individuals or issues are presented through a particular lens, it often cultivates a sense of collective consciousness. In this scenario, the audience adopts a homogeneous understanding that reflects the media's narrative. This manufactured familiarity, even without direct personal knowledge, can embolden individuals to believe they have the authority to judge, 'be judgemental about' or comment upon these individuals or events. As

the play's characters illustrate, scandals can transform those involved into 'public property,' subject to scrutiny and judgment. This phenomenon resonates with the principles of framing and agenda-setting theories, which suggest that the media's choice of presentation can significantly influence public opinion and dictate the issues deemed worthy of attention.

McLuhan's concept of the 'global village' sheds light on the public's propensity to believe they possess intimate knowledge of media-presented individuals and issues. Just as villagers often feel deeply invested in the lives and actions of their neighbours, media consumers can develop a similar sense of proprietary interest in the lives of those thrust into the public eye. This perceived proximity, fostered by media exposure, can lead to heightened scrutiny and judgement, even when there is no direct personal connection. The play presents various instances of this phenomenon, exemplifying how the 'global village' dynamic plays out in contemporary society.

The '2001 *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?'* scandal, involving Charles Ingram, a former British Army major, and his wife Diana, exemplifies this dynamic. The Ingrams were subjected to public ridicule and accusations of cheating, with rumours circulating about coded coughs from an audience member signalling correct answers (Soans 2007, 61). Despite lacking any personal relationship with the Ingrams, the public, at large, appropriated the scandal, feeling entitled to insult, humiliate and condemn the family. This case demonstrates how media events can cultivate a false sense of intimacy and provoke disproportionate reactions from those within the 'global village.'

Adhering to the verbatim theatre principle of 'giving voice to the voiceless,' *Life after Scandal* expands its narrative scope beyond the experiences of celebrities embroiled in scandal. By incorporating accounts from everyday individuals, the play provides a crucial platform for the target audience of media narratives—the public—to articulate their perspectives and experiences:

> LOUISE. If you're watching someone famous... like Keira Knightley's got it all like... so to watch her split up with her boyfriend...
>
> …
>
> LOUISE. Makes her just like us... means I can talk about her like I know her.
>
> SONAL. Talk about their problems. You might meet a stranger, and to talk about Keira Knightley gives you a common ground.
>
> LOUISE. Scandal's even better cos it's like a soap, and you're all waiting for the next chapter... (Soans 2007, 68-69)

Louise and Sonal, presented as ordinary individuals within the play, offer a revealing perspective on the public's fascination with celebrity scandals. They view these scandals as unexpectedly useful, providing common ground for conversation with strangers and fostering a sense of shared experience. The act of discussing a celebrity scandal, for them, reduces the social distance, making these public figures seem relatable and ordinary, almost like acquaintances. This dynamic reflects McLuhan's 'global village' concept, where mass communication creates a sense of interconnectedness, shrinking the world and drawing even distant public figures into a seemingly intimate, shared space.

Accepting the premise that our world has transformed into a global village, one might anticipate certain inherent advantages in a society where individuals possess a shared awareness of one another and

a collective understanding of shared challenges. It is, unfortunately, not the case as people are more and more indifferent to each other's pains and problems as they become more connected when it should be the other way around. Even though Louise and Sonal state that they feel as if they knew the celebrities through the news, they do not feel sorry when they are in trouble. On the contrary, they get pleasure from following how the celebrities suffer as a consequence of the trouble they are involved in.

As if that were not enough, the members of the public become very eager to punish by torturing or tormenting the ones involved in a scandal even though their actions do not harm or concern the public directly or indirectly. People respond to scandals with a ferocity reminiscent of a village seeking retribution for a transgression committed within its midst. Curiously, this level of engagement rarely extends to issues lacking a sensationalised dimension. Despite being confronted with persistent global challenges, such as widespread starvation, the public's reaction pales in comparison to its fervour for scandal. In essence, the media serves as a tool readily deployed to dictate public priorities, shape perceptions and frame narratives. Yet, despite its capacity for good, it often falls short of serving the greater public good.

The notion of a media landscape controlled and manipulated by select individuals or entities forms a significant point of discussion in *Life after Scandal*. Neil designates these figures as "the Establishment" (Soans 2007, 52), while Duncan employs the term "string-pullers" (Soans 2007, 55) to describe them. Both terms convey a sense of shadowy power brokers operating behind the scenes to advance their own agendas. These individuals or organisations, it is suggested, leverage their control over the media to neutralise any potential threats to their own campaigns or interests.

Exaggeration to manipulate public perception is not the sole tactic employed by the media; it also possesses the capacity to distort or fabricate information entirely. In *Life after Scandal*, Menaji, a paparazzo, reveals that the press often constructs news content by exploiting photographs he supplies, despite these images bearing no actual relation to the narratives being crafted (Soans 2007, 47). Similarly, a former Cabinet minister imprisoned in 1999 for perjury, Jonathan Aitken recounts his own experience of being defamed by fabricated news reports (Soans 2007, 46). Through these accounts, the play underscores the media's willingness to employ any means necessary to achieve its desired ends, even at the expense of truth and integrity.

The impact of media messages, however, is inherently fleeting, necessitating a constant stream of new content to maintain its influence. As a result, audience perception tends to shift over time, either influenced by evolving media narratives or through intrinsic processes. This phenomenon of shifting perspectives is echoed by several characters within the play:

> CHRISTINE. When I came out of the jungle, people said 'Shock, horror, she's normal, just like the rest of us.' That's all we've done really... gone on being ourselves.
>
> NEIL. We haven't changed... it's other people's perception of us that has changed. (Soans 2009, 90)

These individuals who were once subject to public humiliation and scorn due to their involvement in scandals have, in some cases, experienced a dramatic shift in public perception following their participation in reality TV programs such as *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* [9]

This phenomenon can be explored through the lens of priming theory[10], which posits that media messages have a particularly potent influence on audience perception in the immediate aftermath of exposure, with this influence waning over time. While traditional media effects theories may not offer a comprehensive explanation for this particular dynamic, it could be interpreted as a secondary or unintended consequence of media exposure. As audiences become increasingly accustomed to the media's penchant for altering its presentations and embracing new narratives, their own perceptions may adapt in tandem. Another possible interpretation is that, over time, people develop empathy for those who have been ostracised by the media, leading to a degree of forgiveness. This could also account for the seemingly endless demand for new scandals and the media's constant need to provide fresh material.

The fact that the effects of scandals on public perception dissipate over time necessitates a continuous supply of fresh media content to sustain public interest. The media, acutely aware of this phenomenon, actively seeks out and promotes new personalities who can be positioned within the cycle of scandal, thereby maintaining their ability to shape the public agenda. It is important to note, however, that the relationship between the media and individuals is not always one of exploitation. Individuals may, in certain instances, strategically utilize the media to further their own purposes:

> JAMES. David Beckham understands the rules of modern celebrity... give the media a story to entertain the readers; get a new tattoo every six months, get photographed covered in blood, ... Rebecca Loos... she put her hand up, said she's had an affair with David Beckham … and carved out herself a career as a celebrity in her own right... (Soans 2007, 68)

These observations underscore the fact that individuals, such as David Beckham and Rebecca Loos in this instance, may actively leverage scandals and the media to advance their own interests, a notion also proposed by the uses and gratification theory. These celebrities seemingly utilized the scandal (and the ensuing media attention) as a means of remaining in the public eye, recognising that such visibility is crucial for maintaining their relevance and generating income.

Despite the assertion that public perceptions inevitably shift over time and that individuals may exploit scandals for personal gain, certain types of scandals appear to elicit a more enduring and unforgiving response. As suggested within the play, homosexuality seems to fall into this category. While the public may initially react strongly to a heterosexual sex scandal, forgiveness and a return to normalcy tend to occur relatively swiftly. Conversely, homosexual sex scandals provoke harsher reactions and a more protracted path to redemption. This inherent bias is readily apparent in the experiences of Duncan and Montagu, both of whom identify as homosexual men:

> DUNCAN. Soon after that, I met this old aristocrat... he told me, 'You should just disappear.'
>
> MONTAGU. I think I was meant to disappear. (Soans 2007, 50)

While nearly every character in *Life after Scandal* recounts a narrative of eventual public redemption and acceptance, two figures, Duncan and Montagu, remain conspicuously absent from this arc. The common thread connecting these individuals lies in their notoriety stemming from homosexual affairs. It is noteworthy that, particularly in the period preceding the 2000s, societal views on same-sex relationships were marked by heightened scrutiny and disapproval from both institutions and the general populace.

Consequently, Duncan and Montagu, far from being welcomed back into the fold, face a public that seemingly desires their complete erasure from the public sphere. This phenomenon aligns with the principles of the spiral of silence theory[11]. This theory posits that individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to a minority viewpoint are less likely to express their beliefs openly for fear of social isolation or reprisal. Conversely, those who align with the perceived majority tend to articulate their views with greater freedom and frequency. The cases of Duncan and Montagu, however, highlight not the behaviours of a silenced minority, but rather the active suppression exerted by the majority. The public's desire for these individuals to vanish, to remain silent, reflects an attempt to uphold prevailing social norms by suppressing any evidence that challenges these established frameworks.

Social norms, along with ethical and moral standards, are susceptible to media influence, often shaped through subtle framing techniques embedded within its narratives. The prevailing negative attitudes towards homosexuality likely stem, at least in part, from the perpetuation of these subtly encoded messages. However, a discernible shift is underway in contemporary media landscapes, with increasing efforts to normalise portrayals of homosexuality. This is evident in the growing inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters in prominent roles within films and television programs. Recent years have witnessed a notable surge in the depiction of same-sex relationships on screen, a trend mirrored by a gradual yet perceptible evolution in societal attitudes towards greater acceptance.

Heavy exposure to media content can also engender a pervasive sense of desperation, a phenomenon evident in the pronouncements of various characters within *Life after Scandal*:

> CHRISTINE. What hope had we got with tabloid filth poured on our heads every day? (Soans 2007, 52)
>
> MENAJI. What's wrong with everybody? They're all focused on bollocks. No one's telling the truth. You need discrimination, values, dignity. It's about staying free and not getting caught up in the system. Knowledge is not imprisoning ourselves with limited thinking... and that's what scandal is... limited thinking. You must see how easy it is to manipulate people with it, cos their lives are so thin because they want to concentrate on what's juicy, dodgy, and dark... cos we're fucking lost... dodgy, dark, and negative. (Soans 2007, 96)

Given the media's pervasive presence as a seemingly singular source of information, individuals are, in essence, subjected to a constant barrage of its content, often involuntarily. One consequence of this unremitting exposure, particularly to negatively charged material, is a gradual erosion of faith in humanity and the world at large. This influence is insidious, for media narratives often constitute the very

foundation upon which individuals construct their understanding of others and the world beyond their immediate experience.

The quotes cited above, attributed to Christine and the paparazzo, Menaji, offer a glimpse into this pervasive pessimism. Christine posits that humanity, perpetually bombarded with the sordid content peddled by daily newspapers, is beyond hope. Similarly, Menaji expresses a belief that scandals erode our capacity for critical thought and moral discernment. Scandals, undoubtedly, possess the power to manipulate public perception, a testament to the adverse effects of media exposure. The relative ease with which the public succumbs to these manipulations stems from an inherent human proclivity towards negativity, a shared capacity for evil that predisposes us to focus on the darker aspects of human nature. This pessimistic worldview finds resonance in the concept of 'mean world syndrome,' a phenomenon examined within the framework of cultivation theory[12]. This theory posits that prolonged exposure to media, particularly if skewed towards violence and negativity, can cultivate a distorted perception of reality, leading to heightened fear, mistrust and in extreme cases, despair. This syndrome, the theory cautions, carries potentially severe long-term consequences, even extending to an increased risk of suicide among those who succumb to its corrosive influence.

Baudrillard likewise touches upon how heavy exposure to media content may affect people as follows:

> The fact of this implosion of contents, of the absorption of meaning, of the evanescence of the medium itself, of the reabsorption of every dialectic of communication in a total circularity of the model, of the implosion of the social in the masses, may seem catastrophic and desperate. (Baudrillard 1994, 83)

Several characters reveal that they have contemplated suicide as a result of relentless media pressure (Soans 2007, 45). This extreme reaction, arguably, stems from the 'mean world syndrome' engendered by their experiences, a psychological state characterised by heightened fear, cynicism and despair.

Beyond its thematic content, the play's very genre, verbatim theatre, possesses an inherent link to media critique. Verbatim theatre, with its reliance on interviews as source material, shares a kinship with journalistic practices. However, unlike traditional journalism, verbatim theatre encourages its audience to engage with the work not merely as a theatrical production, but also as a repository of accurate information. As Hammond and Steward (2008) argue, verbatim theatre causes its audience to "approach the play not just as a play but also as an accurate source of information… [They] trust and expect that… [they] are not being lied to" (10). This inherent claim to veracity distinguishes verbatim theatre, positioning it as a potentially more reliable source of information compared to traditional media outlets.

In the case of *Life after Scandal*, its verbatim nature serves as a direct critique of the manipulative tactics employed by the media. Constructed from interviews and adhering closely to the actual words spoken, the play offers a multiplicity of perspectives often absent from mainstream narratives. Considering the media's propensity for selective omission, strategic emphasis and embellishment to enhance audience appeal, Soans' decision to employ the verbatim form takes on added significance. By adhering to the unfiltered voices of those directly impacted by media practices, the play not only critiques but also actively challenges the manipulation and distortion characteristic of many media narratives.

Throughout *Life after Scandal*, the play consistently underscores the media's role as a tool of manipulation, often wielded by individuals or institutions seeking to advance their own agendas.

Conclusion

The examples taken from the play *Life after Scandal* offer compelling evidence of the media's pervasive influence, shaping perceptions, behaviours and attitudes as well as subtly guiding public opinion towards desired narratives. The play strategically arranges these incidents to expose this pervasive dynamic, employing techniques like juxtaposing similar events and mirroring dialogue across characters to underscore the pervasiveness of media's impact. By presenting a multifaceted account of these events grounded in the lived experiences of real individuals, the play provides a necessary counterpoint to the often-sanitised or manipulated versions disseminated by media outlets, thereby fostering critical awareness among its audience. Furthermore, the play raises crucial questions about placing unquestioning trust in the media, often presented as our primary source of information. Through the act of constructing an alternative space for exchanging information—the theatre—*Life after Scandal* effectively illuminates the often-invisible yet significant ways in which media moulds and manipulates public perception.

The play gives voice to journalists and photographers as the representatives of the media as well as the ones involved in scandals like Jonathan Aitken and Lord Edward Montagu. Instead of presenting one perspective like the media does, *Life after Scandal* presents multiple perspectives related to a topic. Apart from verbatim plays' claim to veracity, the multifaceted (re)presentation of the events in these plays is their most distinctive characteristic which makes them different from journalism even though some techniques of verbatim theatre and journalism are similar to each other as both utilise interviews and words of the interviewees by editing them.

Despite the possibility of manipulation during the interviews (by the questions asked by authors) as well as the editing process, these plays cannot possibly be as manipulative as the media since they do not reinforce a single perspective about an issue. In this way, these plays are "help[ing] those who are diametrically opposed to seeing the viewpoint of the other side" (MacArthur Foundation 1996) and overemphasise the notion that "we have to be able to tolerate more than one voice" (Proffitt 1993). They also make the audience question the 'official truth' and anything presented by the media by highlighting the fact that there may be another side of the same story. Instead of putting the blame on someone or presenting an issue in a certain way, unlike the media they present both sides concerning an issue and leave the decision for determining who is guilty, innocent, right or wrong as well as believing or not, to the audience. The playwrights thus introduce a democratic practice into a world that is shattered under the weight of enormous acts of truth violation.

رد فعل المسرح على وسائل الإعلام: حياة روبن سوانز بعد الفضيحة

يليز بيبر فانجولو
قسم اللغة الإنجليزيّة وآدابها، جامعة أتاتورك، تركيا
محمد أونال
قسم الترجمة التحريريّة والفوريّة، جامعة أتاتورك، تركيا

الملخص

إن تأثير وسائل الإعلام على الإدراك العام، الذي غالبًا ما ينطوي على التلاعب بالمعلومات، يثير المخاوف بشأن دورها في تشكيل الخطاب العام. ومع ذلك، فإن العلاقة بين وسائل الإعلام والأفراد معقدة وليست دائمًا علاقة استغلال. من خلال بناء مسرحيات من الكلمات الموثقة للأفراد، يقدم المسرح الحرفي استجابة فريدة لهذا الواقع الوسيط، وتحلل هذه المقالة مسرحيّة روبن سوانز "الحياة بعد الفضيحة"(2007) لاستكشاف كيف يتفاعل المسرح الحرفي مع التمثيلات الإعلاميّة للفضائح البارزة وينتقدها من خلال فحص تجارب الشخصيات الرئيسيّة والتركيز الموضوعي للمسرحيّة على الحقيقة والتلاعب، وتطبق هذه الدراسة نظريات تأثيرات وسائل الإعلام، بما في ذلك تحديد الأجندة، والتأطير، ومفهوم "القرية العالمية"، لإظهار كيف يكشف المسرح الحرفي عن الطبيعة المصطنعة للسرديات الإعلاميّة ويقدم وجهات نظر بديلة حول العلاقة المعقدة بين وسائل الإعلام والأفراد والإدراك العام من خلال تقديم روايات متعددة ومتضاربة في كثير من الأحيان لنفس الأحداث وتضخيم الأصوات المهمّشة، ويكشف التحليل أن المسرح الحرفي يتحدى روايات وسائل الإعلام السائدة، ويقدم عدسة نقديّة يمكن من خلالها فهم التلاعب الإعلامي ومقاومته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مسرح فيرباتيم، تأثيرات وسائل الإعلام، روبن سوانز، الحياة بعد الفضيحة، وسائل الإعلام.

Endnotes

[1] This concept is also referred to as 'medium theory' or 'technological determinism'. To illustrate his theory, McLuhan uses the example of a light bulb. As a medium, the light bulb enables activities like brain surgery and night baseball, which would be impossible without it. In this instance, brain surgery and night baseball represent the content made possible by the medium of the light bulb; without the medium, the content cannot exist. Expanding upon this example, McLuhan argues that the existence of a light bulb influences human interaction by allowing people to stay awake longer and socialise more. Consequently, the medium itself holds greater significance and influence compared to the content it facilitates (McLuhan 1964, 152).

[2] Post-truth, chosen by *The Oxford English Dictionary* as the word of the year in 2016, is defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Post-Truth, *Oxford English Dictionary* 1985).

[3] The 'hyperreal', as defined by Baudrillard, constitutes a realm of simulation and simulacra, where the simulated representation surpasses the authenticity of the reality it depicts.

[4] The 'uses and gratifications' theory, developed in 1959 by communications scholar Elihu Katz, centres on how individuals actively engage with media for their own specific needs, such as acquiring information or seeking entertainment. Katz's theory posits that media do not inherently exert influence over individuals, persuading or manipulating them into specific actions. Instead, he suggests that individuals actively utilise media to fulfil their own unique purposes, rather than being passively influenced by them.

[5] The 'dependency theory', alternatively referred to as the 'media system dependency theory' (MSD) or 'media dependency theory', emerged in 1976 through the work of Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach and Melvin L. DeFleur. The theory posits that the primary need for media lies initially in its capacity to facilitate communication and disseminate information. However, as our reliance on media has escalated, it has transitioned from a tool for communication to an ingrained necessity. Dependency theory highlights the audience's objectives as the driving force behind media reliance and investigates both large-scale and individual factors that shape the motivations underpinning this dependency.

[6] To protect her privacy and maintain anonymity, the character chooses to conceal her real name, opting instead for the pseudonym 'Melissa' throughout the play (Soans 2007, 28).

[7] During his tenure as the British ambassador to Uzbekistan from 2002 to 2004, Craig Murray brought to light human rights abuses perpetrated by the Karimov administration. These revelations led to significant friction with his superiors within the Foreign Office.

[8] A media effects theory that stemmed from the agenda-setting theory. Developed by Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman (1974), the framing theory, focuses on both how the media present news stories and how the public makes sense of the stories presented in the media. The way how and what

the media highlight and what they conceal—the way they frame stories—leads people to perceive them in a certain way.

[9] *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* is a reality television program, originating in the United Kingdom in 2002, wherein a group of celebrities cohabitate in a jungle environment for a period of several weeks, engaging in various challenges and vying for the title of 'King' or 'Queen' of the Jungle.

[10] During the 1980s, the field of political science witnessed the emergence of 'priming' theory, a concept developed by scholars Shanto Iyengar, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. This theory expanded upon the foundations laid by the earlier agenda-setting theory.

[11] Media theorist Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann first proposed the spiral of silence theory in 1974. This theory posits that individuals are less likely to express dissenting views or challenge prevailing opinions when they perceive themselves as belonging to a minority standpoint. Essentially, the theory seeks to understand and explain the factors that contribute to self-imposed silence, particularly within the public sphere.

[12] George Gerbner's (1969) 'cultivation theory' explores the profound, long-term impact of television on its viewers. It argues that because industrialised, mass-mediated storytelling, particularly through television, has become the most pervasive form of entertainment, audiences are exposed to a skewed version of reality often characterised by violence. This distorted reality frequently depicts women, the elderly, and racial minorities as victims of violence, while white men are often portrayed as the perpetrators. According to cultivation theory, prolonged exposure to this type of content can lead to heightened fear and insecurity, a distorted view of the world, and potentially, an increased inclination towards violence. While the consequences of such exposure may emerge gradually, the theory stresses their significant and enduring impact over time.

References

Adams, Catherine. 2020. News on Stage: Towards Re-Configuring Journalism through Theatre to a Public Sphere. *Journalism Practice* 20 (1): 1–18. DOI:10.1080/17512786.2020.1771754.

Ball-Rokeach, Sandra J. and Melvin L. DeFleur. 1976. A Dependency Model of Mass Media Effects. *Communication Research* 3 (1): 3–21.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1994. *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1995. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. by Paul Patton. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Belfield, Robin. 2018. *Telling the Truth: How to Make Verbatim Theatre*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Biber Vangölü, Yeliz. 2020. Verbatim Tiyatro, Politika, Gerçeklik ve Otorite Sorunu. In *Çağdaş Britanya Tiyatrosu ve Politika*, edited by Yeliz Biber Vangölü and Dilek İnan, 11–42. Istanbul: Çizgi Kitabevi Yayınları.

Bottoms, Stephen. 2006. Putting the Document into Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective? *TDR/The Drama Review* 50 (3): 56–68. DOI:10.1162/dram.2006.50.3.56.

Braman, Sandra, et al. 2020. 'We Are All Natives Now': An Overview of International and Development Communication Research. In *Communication Yearbook 24*, edited by William Gudykunst, 160–86. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing. http://people.tamu.edu/~braman/bramanpdfs/014_natives.pdf (accessed May 16, 2022).

Brown, Paul, editor. 2010. *Verbatim: Staging Memory & Community*. New York: Currency Press.

Burnside, Julian. Introduction. 2003. *From Nothing to Zero: Letters from Refugees in Australia's Detention Centres*, edited by Meaghan Amor and Janet Austin. Melbourne: Lonely Planet.

Cozens, Claire. 2004. New York Times: We Were Wrong on Iraq. *The Guardian*, May 26. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/may/26/pressandpublishing.usnews (accessed September 8, 2021).

Dawson, G. F. 1999. *Documentary Theatre in the United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form and Stagecraft*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Donovan, Jeffrey. 2012. Uzbek Ex-Spy Accuses President of Massacres. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 2. www.rferl.org/a/Former_Uzbek_Spy_Seeks_Asylum/1195372.html (accessed June 5, 2019).

Filewod, Alan. 2009. The Documentary Body: Theatre Workshop to Banner Theatre. In *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, edited by Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson, 122–37. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gerbner, George. 1969. Toward 'Cultural Indicators': The Analysis of Mass Mediated Public Message Systems. *AV Communication Review* 17: 137–48.

Goffman, Erving. 1986. *Frame Analysis*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Hammond, Will, and Dan Steward. 2008. *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*. London: Oberon Books.

Hurston, Zora N. 2006. *Dust Tracks on a Road*. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

Iyengar, Shanto, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder.1982. Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs. *American Political Science Review* 76 (4): 848–58. DOI:10.2307/1962976.

Katz, Elihu, and Paul F. Lazarsfeld. 1955. *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications.* New York: Free Press.

Keen, Colette F. 2017. *Behind the Words: The Art of Documentary and Verbatim Theatre*. PhD diss., Flinders University. DOI:https://www.academia.edu/34581568/Behind_the_Words_The_Art_of_Documentary_and_Verbatim_Theatre.

Kent, Nicolas. 2008. Nicolas Kent. In *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, edited by Will Hammond and Dan Steward, 176–87. London: Oberon Books.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. 2013. A Future for Tragedy? Remarks on the Political and the Postdramatic. In *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary*

Performance, edited by Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll, and Steve Giles, 87–110. London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama.

MacArthur Foundation. 1996. Anna Deavere Smith - Macarthur Foundation. *Macfound.Org*. https://www.macfound.org/fellows/class-of-1996/anna-deavere-smith (accessed June 5, 2019).

Martin, Carol. 2013. *The Theatre of the Real*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*. London: Routledge.

McManus, Donald. 2010. Great Souls, Big Wheels, and Other Words: Experiments with Truth and Representation in Verbatim Theatre. In *Text &Presentation*, edited by Kik Gounaridou, 193–209. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

Najera, Marcos. 2014. *Final Report on Professional Development Activity: "Tectonic Theater Project LA Workshop"*. Los Angeles: Mark Taper Forum.

Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth. 1974. The Spiral of Silence a Theory of Public Opinion. *Journal of Communication* 24 (2): 43–51. DOI:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x.

Paget, Derek. 1987. 'Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques. *New Theatre Quarterly* 3 (12): 317–36. DOI:10.1017/s0266464x00002463.

Paget, Derek. 2008. New Documentarism on Stage: Documentary Theatre in New Times. *Zeitschrift Für Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 56 (2): 129–41. DOI:10.1515/zaa.2008.56.2.129.

Plötzky, Florian, et al. 2024. Lost in Recursion: Mining Rich Event Semantics in Knowledge Graphs. *Proceedings of the 16th ACM Web Science Conference*.

Post-Truth: Oxford English Dictionary. 1985. *Oed.Com*. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/58609044?redirectedFrom=post-truth#eid (accessed September 5, 2021).

Press Conference by the President. 2021. *Georgewbush-Whitehouse.Archives.Gov*. https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/08/20060821.html (accessed September 5, 2021).

Proffitt, Steve. 1993. Los Angeles Times Interview: Anna Deavere Smith: Finding a Voice for the Cacophony That Is Los Angeles. *Los Angeles Times*, July 11. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-07-11-op-12049-story.html (accessed June 5, 2019).

Roberts, Donald F., and Christine M. Bachen. 1981. Mass Communication Effects. *Annual Review of Psychology* 32 (1): 307–56. DOI:10.1146/annurev.ps.32.020181.001515.

Soans, Robin. 2007. *Life after Scandal*. London: Oberon Books.

Soans, Robin. 2008. Robin Soans. In *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, edited by Will Hammond and Dan Steward, 188–97. London: Oberon Books.

Tomlin, Liz. 2019. *Political Dramaturgies and Theatre Spectatorship: Provocations for Change*. London: Bloomsbury.

Wake, Caroline. 2010. Towards a Working Definition of Verbatim Theatre. In *Verbatim: Staging Memory & Community*, edited by Paul Brown, 1–19. New York: Currency Press.

WMD Intelligence Was Wrong, Admits Blair. 2021. *The Irish Times*. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/wmd-intelligence-was-wrong-admits-blair-1.991214 (accessed September 8, 2021).