

Analysis of the Videostage for Social Criticism in the Intermedial Theatre of Agrupación Señor Serrano

José Manuel TEIRA ALCARAZ

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

ORCID: 0000-0003-4017-6601

jteira@ucm.es

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: PhD candidate at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid with a thesis on the dramaturgy of videostage. Telecommunications engineer from the Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena with training and experience as an actor and broadcaster, master's degree in Advanced Theatre Studies from the UNIR and master's degree in Quality in Higher Education from the UOC, with honours. Course instructor at the UOC.

English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

This paper analyses the dramaturgy of the videostage — the audiovisual medium inserted into the performing arts — in four productions by Agrupación Señor Serrano. The company uses resources such as image capture and projection, pre-recorded video introduction and editing, all in real time. Its narrative is based on a language familiar to the audience and the scathing humour that it builds by superimposing multiple signs through the videostage. Thus, the functions of video are studied in relation to its objective of generating criticism and reflection.

In order to create a theoretical basis for the analysis of the semantic interactions between the stage and the video, the main studies on intermediality, remediation, digital theatre and virtuality are explored. These tools support a proposal of analysis of the dramaturgical purposes of the videostage.

In conclusion, the study advocates the synthesis of a dramaturgical model whose objective is social criticism using technological means and the hybridisation of languages, of which Agrupación Señor Serrano is a key exponent in Spain. It is argued that its dramaturgy would not make sense if it were not for the audiovisual language, while being profoundly theatrical. This full incorporation of the videostage into the visual stage elements reaffirms the theatre's capacity to assimilate resources to enhance its core of dramatic conviction.

Keywords: production analysis, intermediality, dramaturgy, videostage, incorporated technologies, audiovisuals, Agrupación Señor Serrano, multimedia theatre, intermedial theatre

José Manuel TEIRA ALCARAZ

Analysis of the Videostage for Social Criticism in the Intermedial Theatre of Agrupación Señor Serrano

Introduction: Intermediality as a Break with Continuity

The inclusion of the audiovisual medium is common in contemporary theatre, and its code has expanded from cinema to television, music video and advertising, which has led to its consolidation as a significant element in staging: the videostage is already part of the visual elements in theatre. From Méliès to Svoboda, including Meyerhold and Piscator, several creators experimented with cinematographic integration on the stage in the 20th century. Today it is explored by directors such as Robert Lepage, Katie Mitchell and Guy Cassiers, who include the videostage in the dramaturgy of their pieces, giving it a degree of expression comparable to set or lighting design. Their staging is enriched by the expressive potential of the video integrated into the other stage elements.

The deepest level of hybridisation between audiovisual and theatrical language is intermediality: this occurs when both media enter into an interaction that substantially modifies the conventional way they each function (Giesekam, 2007: 8). As is explained next, the combination is such that the meaning of the production, while still being theatrical, is supported by the video. This is the case of the work of Agrupación Señor Serrano, a Spanish theatre company whose language is based on intermediality, as Provencio (2016, 2019) noted. This paper seeks to argue in favour of this denomination based on the analysis of the videostage in the group's productions preceded by a terminological reflection.

Videostage is one of the multiple stage resources typical of postdramatic theatre that allow for the rupture of space, time and action (Teira, 2020a: 298). Firstly, space loses its materiality when mediated, which in turn expands its limits. Secondly, the temporality of the audiovisual is outside stage temporality, inasmuch as it is produced by means of shot and editing, which the stage alone can emulate but not replicate. Finally, the action on video is fragmented, as it is always double: the action captured at a certain moment, even live, and its reproduction. Agrupación Señor Serrano exploits these

discontinuities to establish a non-linear, simultaneous and fractal discourse. To do so, it proposes a multitude of roles for video, which rarely appear isolated, as we will see, but rather overlap.

This paper analyses the dramaturgical uses of the videostage by Agrupación Señor Serrano based on its structure and content, mainly aimed at fostering reflection for the sake of social denunciation. With this in mind, we examine four pieces from its second creative period: *Katastrophe* (2011), *Brickman Brando Bubble Boom* (2012), *A House in Asia* (2014) and *Birdie* (2016), contextualised in the study of the company's poetics, which define it. Thus, we see how intermedial language is shaped by articulating the core of dramatic conviction from the videostage, where the constitution of the medium is an inescapable part of the meaning it acquires.

Monteverdi (2019) argues that in Señor Serrano the artists are at the service of the machine. Nothing can be further from reality. Provencio (2016: 121; 2019: 429), in contrast, speaks of a “fusion between dramaturgical purpose and use of technologies,” which in reality is the former depending on the latter. The theatrical and videostage devices are at the disposal of the production and the hybridisation between the parts through the stage action and the manipulation of media in real time gives consistency to the whole.

Agrupación Señor Serrano

The group was founded in 2006 by Àlex Serrano, who was first joined by Pau Palacios and later by Bárbara Bloin. They are the core of the company, along with other creators on a regular or occasional basis in each project. Serrano and Palacios bring their audiovisual interest to the stage, which from the outset makes their vision of the theatrical hybrid. The work system is usually telematic (FTM, 2018), so, anecdotally, the affinity with technology is also part of it. Àlex Serrano describes it as a “contemporary theatre” company, which means that its production structure and creative process is “atypical” (Betevé, 2018). They themselves explain that their productions take place on three scales (Agrupación Señor Serrano, 2011). The first is that of the miniature and model, barely perceptible if only the stage is seen, but accessible in a videostage. The second, the “human”, is that of object handlers, camera operators, and performers, who often play fragmented roles between scales. The third is the videostage, integrating the intermedial dramaturgy, which shows on screen the handlers manipulating the miniature and model, bringing them together and adding elements to them. The human scale is more resistant to manipulation and therefore tends to be less modified than that of miniatures, which becomes the protagonist of the screen through the videostage. It is reminiscent of models in cinema that, when filmed closely, introduce the audience *within* that place, but now also witnessing all of its manipulation.

Agrupación Señor Serrano stages its own creations, which although it insists are not documentary theatre — and it is true that such a denomination is not appropriate —, is well documented in today's society and culture (Betevé, 2018). To do this, it requires a research period of up to two years, divided



Figure 1. Àlex Serrano handling the camera in *Birdie* (2016). Source: www.srserrano.com. Photograph: Pasqual Gorriz.

into a first phase of collecting materials and then alternating the phases of writing and rehearsals through four artistic residences (P. Palacios, personal communication, 11 September 2020). Throughout their life, the pieces can undergo the necessary changes, the first months dynamic and later even dramaturgical (Betevé, 2018). This was the case with the inclusion of Donald Trump along with George W. Bush and Barack Obama in *A House in Asia*, which is well before his US presidency (Teira, 2020b: 472). Normally, there are several productions on the programme, retained according to demand: three of those listed here (apart from *Katastrophe*) continue to be performed in 2020 even several years after their premiere. The universality of the company's language allows it to tour through theatre venues around the world, facilitated by the limited spoken text and subtitling into any language.

In terms of production, they consider that their shows must fit in as many suitcases as people performing, to be portable and therefore save on costs. If in any case, as in *Brickman Brando Bubble Boom* or *Birdie*, they need a larger element — polystyrene panels or artificial grass, respectively — they purchase it at the destination, which is more affordable than moving it (FTM, 2018). This demonstrates that intermedial dramaturgy does not necessarily require complex and expensive technological equipment, as happens in the spectacular stagings of the aforementioned Lepage or Mitchell, but can be carried out using a hand-held camera, a projector and a computer.

The technical equipment is always on stage, since for them it is important for the audience to see how the piece is created live (P. Palacios, personal communication, 11 September 2020). This creates a distancing from any possible immersion, so that at no time do you forget that you are watching a stage production, which makes reflection more likely.

Three creative phases can be distinguished in the life of Agrupación Señor Serrano. Pau Palacios speaks of two with the turning point from *Katastrophe* (2011), although he recognises from *Kingdom* (2018) a series of evolutionary aspects that remain in their poetics (Teira, 2020b: 473). For his part, Àlex Serrano was already well into this third phase (Betevé, 2018). In the initial phase they had stage and video performers, who were usually of equal importance in the dramaturgy of the pieces. In the second phase, the videostage grows, the miniatures are given greater prominence, the presence of the performers is limited and stage situations are avoided. Here, as Provencio (2016: 120; 2019: 427) notes, all of the text is a voice-over or on screen. In the third and current phase, the performative action is reconciled with the evolution of the videostage in various directions: the video sometimes disappears but, when it is used, new functions are explored; the stage action is given more presence, where there is a good amount of text spoken by the performers; and the use of space is expanded and, therefore, so is the format. In this way, the second scale is broadened and the multidisciplinary character of the company's poetics is further increased.

Intermedial Dramaturgy

Before approaching the analysis of the video in the productions, it is worthwhile reviewing the terms used in the research in order to clarify the possible amphibologies in them. Speaking of intermedial dramaturgy requires paying attention to both words separately in order to then make sense of them as a whole. In any case, the terminology is applied to the company under study.

Dramaturgy

According to Ubersfeld (2002: 41), the notion of *dramaturgy* in its broad post-Brechtian sense implies the link between text, history and current ideology that are related to the audience who must receive and understand the staging. This produces the triangle of theatrical communication: the text, the staging and the audience, where the text is not necessarily written. In fact, in Señor Serrano's productions there is no pre-existing text of a literary-dramatic nature, but rather a spectacular text is created, even if it is subject to eventual changes. Thus, the dramaturgical process articulates the meanings and relationships that emanate from the underlying text through the staging elements intended to establish artistic communication with the audience. In the vein of postdramatic theatre, the group requires an active audience who *experience* the stage production (Pavis, 2018: 391) and are capable of receiving an amalgam of information through different senses that they must be quickly synthesised.

The staging, therefore, has an objective: what the creator wants the audience to feel or the perspective he or she wants them to adopt (Martínez Valderas, 2017: 61). It arises from a concrete and contemporary reading of the subject staged, which results in the proposed meaning of the production: the *core of dramatic conviction* (Hormigón, 2002: 166). This revealing phrase imposes the ideological stance of the production and acts as its backbone. The

objective of the stagings by Agrupación Señor Serrano is social and political criticism, as reflected by Provencio (2016: 120; 2019: 427), through topics such as migration, terrorism, the real-estate bubble, natural disasters, capitalism and Europeanism. This can be seen in the core of dramatic conviction of each production, from which its dramaturgy unfolds, with a narrative in the tone of a fable.

Intermediality

Intermediality could be understood as a form of multimediacy, although sometimes both terms are used interchangeably in an imprecise manner, and it would be preferable, as suggested by Gieseckam (2007: 8), to distinguish between them: although several media (multimedia) coexist, this does not mean there is an active interaction between them (intermedial). Intermedial exchange between media creates an event that is unique and impossible to construct in just one of them (Bell, 2000: 44), which is highlighted by Kattenbelt (2008: 25), who emphasises the correlations between different media that influence other media and, as reflected by Grande Rosales (2015: 10), create a new perception. However, the insertion of one medium into another does not in itself constitute the intermedial event, since it does not have to imply a semantic dialogue between them. When it occurs, Bell calls this phenomenon *dialogic media production*, an idea similar to the *digital performances* defined by Dixon (2007: 3), where digital technology is key. If Agrupación Señor Serrano creates intermedial dramaturgy, it is not only due to the use of the audiovisual medium in theatre but to the establishment of intersemiotic relations between the “physical” stage and the videostage. Intermedial actions intersect with the content they seek to activate (Scott, 2019: 111), so that temporality is constructed through the succession or simultaneity of stage manipulations captured live, editing and insertions aimed at creating a certain experience.



Figure 2. In this photo from *Kingdom* (2018) the videostage enables an image to be contextualised in the audiovisual medium by capturing the stage action with a specific background. Source: www.srserrano.com. Photograph: Vincenç Viaplana.

Within intermediacy, *remediation* can arise; that is, the recreation of one medium within another (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 45), which, as explained below, in Agrupación Señor Serrano occurs in the two ways they describe: hypermediacy and immediacy. *Hypermediacy* does not hide the limits of the medium incorporated and, therefore, proposes a distancing that seeks a reflection on content through form. *Immediacy* implies the opposite: blurring the physical limits of the video, so that it fades into the stage and forms part of the convention accepted by the audience.

Similarly to The Wooster Group or The Builders Association, Agrupación Señor Serrano presents both live and pre-recorded stage images on video. The screen presents a coherently constructed reality, which is virtual to the outside observer. The productions therefore move along the continuum of *mixed reality*, as Milgram and Kishino (1994: 1321) call it, on the scale of relationships between physical reality and virtuality. If each one is at one end of the segment, there may be a progression of images taken directly from reality, reality with incorporated digital images, inserted elements that include other real ones, or a completely virtual image.

Function of the videostage in intermedial dramaturgy

To conclude the intermedial character of each theatrical production with video and, therefore, of the creator's poetics, it is essential to determine the dramaturgical function of the videostage. Martínez (2018: 174) outlines some of them, alluding, for example, to the completeness of the narrative and the aesthetics of the production, the creation of characters, the evocation of atmospheres and the contribution of information. The methodology to carry out this analysis is based on the taxonomy proposed in Teira (2020a): *videostaging*, for scenographic functions; *multiplicative videostage*, for alterations of time, action and space; *textual videostage*, for inclusion of written text; and *characterising videostage*, for creation of characters.

Dramaturgy of the Videostage in Agrupación Señor Serrano

The productions whose videostage is analysed make up the second phase of Agrupación Señor Serrano, in which its intermedial poetics is consolidated from the shift started in *Katastrophe* (2011), which progresses in *BBBB* (2012) and *A House in Asia* (2014) and, matured in *Birdie* (2016), evolves until reaching a new phase in *Kingdom* (2018).

Katastrophe (2011)

The scale of the miniatures parallels humanity with gummy bears. Guided by screened text that tells their story in "a little valley", the handlers subject the bears to various disasters: floods, snow and earthquakes, but also toxic spills and other unnatural catastrophes. Performers sometimes wear full-head masks of coloured bears in the likeness of great gods.

The textual videostage is accompanied by innocent music to enhance the irony of the written texts illustrated in a child's style. Here it has a double meaning: it con-textualises the next scene and does so ironically, a function

that grows throughout the production. An example is the presentation of the second scene: “In time, other tribes came to our Valley. And despite the differences between us, we overcame the adversities that Nature had in store for us.” Behind it there is a village where some bears are prostrated and even pierced through with a toothpick in front of others. Moreover, the text is not digital but is written on a card shown by the camera, which increases the feeling of craftsmanship and everyday life.



Figure 3. Textual videostage with intertitles for a scene in the production. Source: Agrupación Señor Serrano.

The multiplication of points of view, which also increases visibility, is essential in *Katastrophe* as in other productions by Agrupación Señor Serrano. The subjectivity of the camera accesses the miniatures and largely conceals them being handled, which is visible in their stage performance. Thus, the videostage productions show the bear village and a foam glaciation, an earthquake on a map, a city of packaging and its bombardment by popcorn and foam or a fuel spill in the water of a small aquarium.

By means of real-time video editing, a captured action can be looped, sped up, slowed down or cut, thereby being artificially prolonged. It is used with repetitions, cuts and flashes on the glaciation, earthquake and spill. The exposure of the image is lengthened as, therefore, is its impact, enhanced by the techno music that accompanies it. This places the bears in a technified universe where they already begin to alternate their environment, which being overexploited turns against them.

The scale of the handlers-performers creates a chilling sensation when they manipulate the scale of the miniatures, when they wear the bear's head that makes them both part of the civilisation of the valley and masters of their destiny. In some cases they are the creators of the disasters that happen to the gummy bears and in others they shoot each other. Chaos is shown as a result the actions, which is manifested with violence when the videostage scale includes the bears-demiurges. It is an expansion of visibility as well as a recontextualisation, where the demiurge becomes part of the fictional space of the miniatures by being framed in the same shot.

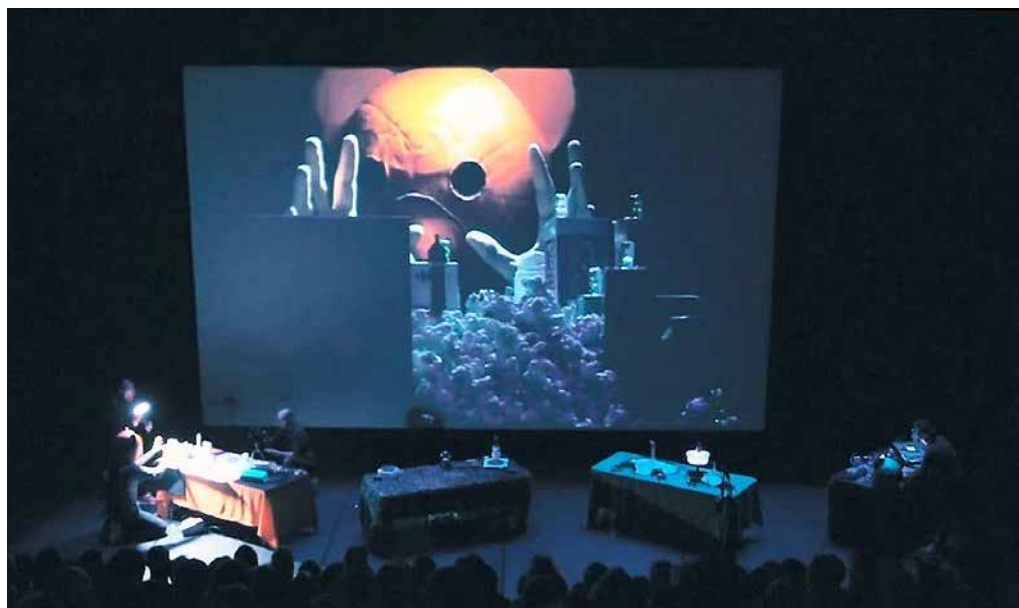


Figure 4. Enlargement of visibility, re-contextualisation and live editing when a bear-demiurge throws popcorn over a city of packaging. Source: Agrupación Señor Serrano.

The videostage can include actions that take place outside the stage; pre-recorded or live. Here it is at the audience's discretion to decide if it is really the former or the latter, in a continuous exercise by the company to get the audience to question whether what they see is true or not (P. Palacios, personal communication, 11 September 2020). An exit of the performers from the space creates a video continuation where they handle certain compounds that, inserted in glasses adorned with cocktail umbrellas, resemble small beaches. Their waters soon become muddy: the material becomes solid and overflows the glasses, while on stage smoke is released to create the illusion of stage action. The camera immediates over the buildings adjoining the World Trade Center in New York receiving the impact of the second terrorist plane. A sequence shot follows the performers back to the stage, although halfway through three children take their place, whose downward running slows and is overexposed until they disappear into a fade to white. In this episode, the dramaturgical functions of the video overlap: delocalisation of the action, immediacy of images, transformation and editing to increase the drama. Around two thirds into each production there is a intentional moment of special forcefulness and change of codes to have an impact on the audience and prepare them for the "descent into the inferno" of the final part (Teira, 2020b: 479). In this case, the aim is that, when the action returns to the stage, the audience have undergone some emotional transformation. From there, the piece's criticism becomes more raw and incisive.

In *Katastrophe* the videographic inserts, more frequent in other productions, are concentrated in the last part, which carries the greatest ideological weight, since the bears have decided to follow a leader who guides them. The videostage inserts documentary material edited from speeches by leaders such as George W. Bush, Vladimir Putin and Hu Jintao on external threats that concludes with a speech by Adolf Hitler and his subsequent cheers, which merges the image of two groups of cubs attacking each other

with popcorn and little firecrackers. The fight alternates with images of explosions and concludes by piling up the corpses of bears in a mass grave. In the style of the precursor Erwin Piscator, the alternation of documentary film relates political and social events, while enhancing the dramatic tension between stage and video (1976: 82). With the documentary it links a last videostage that shows the lead bear on a tower at the base of which there are a few others, who in their turn stand on a bear statue. At its feet a multitude of bears prostrate themselves, gradually being melted down by the heat induced on its surface. The next scene shows glasses with bears where flames burn as in gas chambers. The metaphor is clear, although not explicit.

The final videostage is dynamic textual: it uses the camera to show the word *end* with corn kernels being heated, which pop out as they become the same popcorn that was previously used for bombing. The movement of the text and its materiality are impregnated with the irony and scathingness present in the rest of the production.

Brickman Brando Bubble Boom [BBBB] (2012)

A common dramaturgical device used by Señor Serrano is the fragmentation of a character between scales. In *BBBB* the fictional builder John Brickman is miniature, performed and represented by Marlon Brando. Their lives in search of a home are projected onto the walls of a polystyrene house that is built as their empire grows.

The first use of the videostage is textual in order to title the piece, on one of the panels that the performers-handlers use to build the house. While it is projected, Palacios, who is holding the panel, blows a bubble until it explodes. The scathing metaphor links the videostage text (bubble boom) with the stage action.

The replication of actions multiplies the personifications of Brickman and serves as a narrative thread. Performer Diego Anido replicates Brando's actions on video and gives him a voice with a text that self-satirises by modifying the dialogue in his films, which begin and end with *The Godfather* (1972), which associates the builder with the mafia, and includes *Julius Caesar* (1953), where he exalts the promise of a home for all with unbeatable conditions – “To the banks!” shouts Brando through the performer's mouth, a satire of the promises that resulted in the crisis. Provencio (2016: 119; 2019: 426) warns that videostage duplication deals with “the limits of the ‘I’, its ambivalence between material reality and its virtual projection.” Instead of opting for a voice-over or only subtitles, the stage action and text reveal Brando's intangible character on video and depersonalise Brickman by multiplying him on stage and videostage. When there is no text, the stage action is accompanied by soap bubbles, which continues the association presented in the title.

As in the other productions, the videostage increases visibility and multiplies points of view while the miniatures are handled. On this scale, Brickman is a figure in a red jacket, presented from his youth in his neighbourhood, where there is an immediacy of Brando within the model of his house. A scene from *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) appears in a meta-videostage



Figure 5. The performer replicating Marlon Brando's actions in *Julius Caesar*. Source: www.rserrano.com. Photograph: Alfred Mauve.

through the mechanism of *hyperimmediacy* – immediacy within hypermediacy –, which merges one video into another that is evidenced as such (Teira, 2020a: 312). The miniature is then confronted with a figure in a suit, between which there is a pile of coins and a match, which, lit by a handler, sets the miniature behind on fire. Above it is a factory: Brickman has been bribed to burn down his own neighbourhood. Brickman's miniature leaves with a bundle on its back and moves on to a scene from *The Wild One* (1953) in which Brando flees from an angry crowd on a motorcycle. The succession of videostage resources weaves the narrative: textual videostage, cinematographic inserts, enlargement of the miniature and its handling and hyperimmediacy.

The video shows in a collage Marlon Brando's youth that the handlers present with cuttings on a map of the USA, alternated with inserts of the time, and accompanied by a live ukulele. Behind, the dark gives way to a documentary on nature and construction, in the environmentalist vein of *Katastrophe*. Later, there is also a collage of successive cuttings of political leaders in the company of business leaders, along with bank logos and toy banknotes, videostaged with a throbbing *zum* that intensifies the impact. The last pictures projected are from *The Godfather*. Thus, criticism is produced based on association by consecutiveness. Later, the story of the Polynesian island of Tetiaroa, which was owned by Brando until he abandoned it after his daughter committed suicide there in 1995, is also told by means of a collage of images and texts accompanied by a ukulele.

Digital collage is also used through videomapping on the house when the videostage combines an insert with the lights of New York on the right

side of the house with the capture of successive cuttings on Brando in the main panel. The satire is emphasised by the subsequent insertion of home renovation docureality. In a later videostage, several groups of houses behind figures with different coloured jackets, which allude to politicians, receive red houses, the colour of Brickman, to all end up this colour, including the leaders themselves. Again, the soap bubbles pass before the camera: the bubble swells. The last image is Brickman's miniature in front of the large group of red houses, behind them his mansion, and in the background a *Monopoly* board. The real-time 3D collage fabulates the spread of corruption like a mere board game. An interview with a glorious Marlon in his mansion is projected on the completed polystyrene house, after which real-estate advertising by financial entities of the late 1990s and early 2000s is shown. Again, the succession causes associations and establishes an intersemiotic dialogue between stage and videostage, in which they affect and complement each other.

A dynamic textual use of the videostage is the mobile app conversation between Brickman and the powers that be – industry, the press and banks, preceding the subsequent spread of corruption. Thus, a dialogue takes place in the context of a pop element that contributes to criticism, which is present thanks to the videostage.

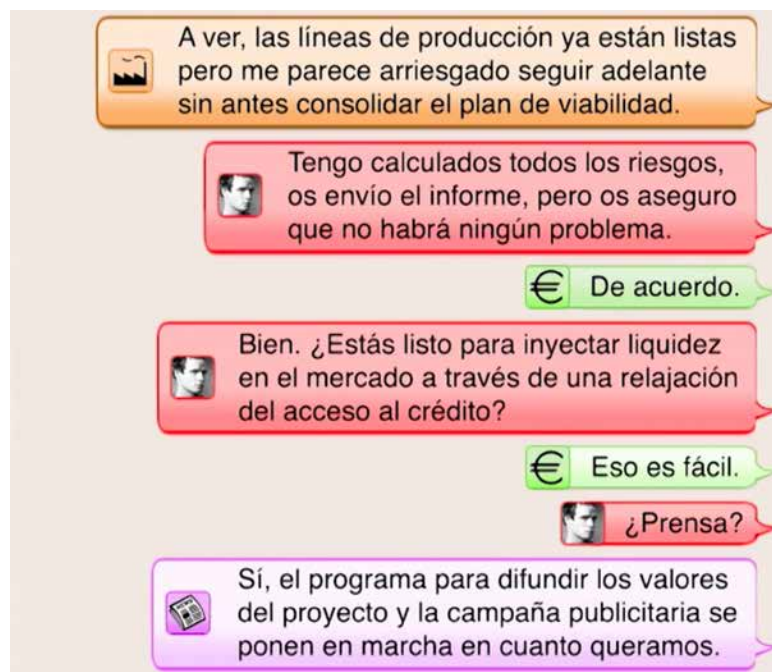


Figura 6. Conversación de aplicación móvil videoescénica entre Brickman y los poderes fácticos. Fuente y autor: Agrupación Señor Serrano.

In his decline, Brickman returns home. In an ingenious contrivance, his miniature is slowly moved forward, passing through several cardboard models that represent successive rooms in the mansion. Thus, he goes into the finished polystyrene house, with a last image of a miniature of the mansion inside a crystal ball. The fade to dark gives way to videos of the evictions that occurred due to the mortgage crisis, in an identical resource to the previous inserts.

Finally, the interior of the house is shown by expanding visibility: the videostage shows something hidden from the audience's eyes by the set design, like a voyeuristic eye. It is a miniature theme park alternated with cards that tell of Brando's loneliness in his final days, in which he spent long seasons with his friend Michael Jackson. The scene is presided over by a photograph of Brando and Jackson in a complicit attitude, and it is concluded by the mansion that, identical to Brickman's, is located in the park: Neverland.

The search for home fails in the last episode, opened by scenes from *Apocalypse Now* (1979), where Brando plays a deranged ex-military man. Inside the house, the camera shows in negative cards with text about Brickman's death alone in his mansion, alternated with a crystal ball, some Monopoly money, and the immobile performers. The model of the mansion is lifted, giving way to a small house inside of which lies the miniature of Brickman. As an ironic moral, the videostage shows on the house: "The stupid fables of men like Brickman, unable to find a home despite their wealth, are consoling myths that we the weak tell each other to resign ourselves to our little everyday miseries." A line by Brando follows: "Only the weak believe in dreams. That's why children are dreamers and the weak enjoy cinema or theatre." This is the final screening, as, as it fades, the house is smashed to pieces by the performers, in a violent action reminiscent of the first *La Fura dels Baus* productions. Meanwhile, speech bubbles fall. The bubble has burst.

A House in Asia (2014)

The Sheriff is a cowboy on the hunt for the last Apache chief, Geronimo. This allegory represents the US marine Matt Bissonete, who participated in Operation Neptune Spear to search for and capture the terrorist Osama Bin Laden in his home in Abbottabad (Pakistan). Under the pseudonym Mark Owen he published the work *No Easy Day* (2012) in which he recorded his experience in the assault. Bin Laden is not explicitly mentioned in *A House in Asia*; the enemy is Geronimo, which was also the code name of the terrorist in the operation. The dramaturgy revolves around the houses that existed: the real one, the exact copy used for training in North Carolina, and the one used in the movie *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012). At the same time, three narratives intertwine: the miniature sheriff's doll, the marine with the body of a performer and voice-over, and the cinematic Captain Ahab from *Moby Dick* (1956), obsessed with hunting the monster.

In the prologue, a performer appears to be handling an airplane in a flight simulator flying over a city where the World Trade Center can be seen. Its path towards one of the towers indicates that it is the plane hijacked by Al-Qaeda. Within the pop references that Señor Serrano integrates into its productions, we recognise the language of videogames to place the audience in the first person with its interface. Later, when the Special Forces raid the house in Abbottabad, the camera follows the action with a superimposed weapon as if it were a shooter. Once again, the first person of the videogame is used, now from the other side. Augmented reality, that is, the introduction into the captured image of elements not present on the physical stage, allows the audience to be enlarged and immersed using a code that is familiar to them.



Figure 7. Serrano seems to handle the simulator directing a plane to the Twin Towers. Source: Agrupación Señor Serrano.

The videostage extension shows the miniature of the Sheriff inside a car in the parking lot of a McDonald's while on stage it is done by a performer wearing a cowboy hat. The video multiplies the character on the three scales and thus fragments his presence. In an adaptation of Rutger Hauer's final monologue in *Blade Runner* (1982) he claims that he killed Geronimo and introduces himself as the narrator. The title of the production appears on video with western music and images on a map of Pakistan. This is immediately followed by the introduction of the characters in the code of classic film credits. References to cinema appear as catalysts for dramaturgy.

The camera shows the model of the house that, turning on itself, is replicated on video by means of live editing to present the two copies of the building. Later, various religiously-motivated historical confrontations are shown as text, superimposed on the live video of figures of Indians and cowboys of various colours that are shown on a board from the *Risk* game, reminiscent of *BBB's Monopoly*.

Google Maps appears in its Street View function that allows almost any street on the planet to be explored and many museums and art centres use for virtual tours. This tool shows the itinerary through a luxurious house where elements such as a television or a door serve as an entrance to other universes through immediacy. Editing involves sound when we see Captain Ahab through a door, but his dialogue is a George Bush speech. There he faces the miniature of Geronimo, whose cinematic replica then gives another call to arms on television. It is a new hyperimmediacy: a live capture is screened and pre-recorded material melts into it.

A new reference to pop culture appears with social networks when the video shows tweets written by the Sheriff and Geronimo, declaring hatred for each other through hashtags. The miniature of a rectangular building, the figure of an Indian holding a spear, and an inset explosion are a clear



Figure 8. Two moments of hyperimmediacy that include pre-recorded video in the picture captured by the camera. Source: Agrupación Señor Serrano.

reference to 9/11. This detonates the confrontation of miniatures of Indians and cowboys alternated with a helicopter that ends up falling (as actually happened). Gunshots and electronic music play together with the light of a torch to create the atmosphere. The scene melts into the scathing gag of Groucho Marx in a nightgown looking at himself in a mirror in *Duck Soup* (1933): they are two sides of the same coin, Bin Laden-Geronimo and the Sheriff-presidents.

The videostage maps the house and its surroundings from a bird's eye view to describe each of its parts. The captured image is used to superimpose explanatory information that evokes an assault plan, through live editing of the image.

The production's only purely stage action — a country-style dance by a group of girls — accompanies the text on Matt Bissonnette's true story, relieving the tension prior to the final scene. In it, two shots are contrasted through the video. First, film inserts of the 7th Cavalry and Ahab on the whale hunt introduce the attack by alternating with miniatures of cowboys on horseback. However, the camera passes to the miniatures of two actors talking on the set of Bigelow's film, their positions replicated by the performers in a double duplication: miniature-character, miniature-actor, performer and voice-over. The conversation concludes with the beginning of the shooting of the attack, visible on a videostage from an overhead shot through the house full of armed cowboys and Indians brought down on a ground full of blood. A live-edited loop of Ahab throwing a harpoon gives way to cowboy miniatures surrounding a large, bloody white whale, with the Sheriff on top of it. Geronimo-Moby Dick-Bin Laden has fallen.

The only projection that is not directly on the front screen uses the model of the house. It is once again the Sheriff personified by Ahab, but this time with Barack Obama's voice in his appearance in 2011 to announce the assault on the Abbottabad house and the death of Bin Laden, consolidating the Sheriff's association with American presidents, to which the company later added Donald Trump.

The epilogue returns to the McDonald's parking lot with expanded visibility, where Matt's final monologue in the same miniature inside the opening car is set against the backdrop of videos of the celebrations of Bin Laden's death. Finally, the text tells of the demolition of the three houses. The social condemnation is constructed through the consecutiveness of the live and archival videostage image, and its live editing.

Birdie (2016)

Birdie's starting point is the photograph by José Palazón, winner of the Ortega y Gasset Prize for Journalism in 2015, in which two players appear on the Melilla golf course and, in the background, the fence that separates it from Morocco with several immigrants perched, one of whom is wearing a red hoodie. On stage the green with a hole with its flagstick is shown, to which a large migration of miniatures is heading, and to one side a motionless figure with a red hoodie. The narrative intermediacy is constructed through *The Birds* (1963), as a threat: "They're coming!" says Tippi Hedren's character in the film, announcing the danger at various points in the production.

The textual videostage intertitles the acts after a prologue that explains the two meanings of *birdie* connected by the company: that of "little bird" and that of "golf stroke". Then, through the videostage detail shot, the first act narrates with a voice-over the beginning of Palazón's day of objects on a table that encourages subjectivity. It stops at the newspaper *El País* on 20 October 2014, where successive news items are linked to world migrations, including the collage of world maps and the digital superimposition of photos on those of the newspaper.

With Palazón's departure to the city to take the photo, the videostage shows an insert of *The Birds* followed by live images of postcards of Melilla with which to learn about its landscape, festivals, culture and gastronomy and, finally, the 12 kilometre fence that surrounds the city. After praising it as a meeting place between cultures, it presents its golf course, which cost 5 million euros. Then it moves on to postcards where the birds accumulate next to Tippi Hedren, an image that blends with the cinematographic insert of that moment. In a new alternation of functions, the videostage goes from enlargement to insert and then to manual collage to smoothly return to insert. Again the scathing criticism is suggested by the association.

The second act begins with the taking of the photograph, staged with miniatures. Several layers of analysis are superimposed on the frozen video image by means of the collage: its composition and the elements that appear in it, including a film insert: "They're birds, aren't they?", another from the Guardia Civil and a third that explains the golden ratio on the image. Flags of Spain, Europe and Morocco are also placed on the miniature, and the migrants are identified with the dreaded birds by superimposing cards with these drawn on the image. It ends with a "They're coming!" and the insert of the flight of the birds. The edit is now alternating between the first scale, where elements are placed; the second scale, where the superimposition is done on the static image; and the third, which juxtaposes videos on the image.



Figure 9. Photograph of the Melilla fence by José Palazón (left) and its recreation through miniatures. Source: Agrupación Señor Serrano.

The moment of disruption takes place with the stage full of smoke and the launching of coloured lasers at the audience. The video goes on to show a glass in which, using a dropper, images of fluids mixing are produced. It then shows a golf ball spinning in front of a globe. The images seek beauty in a sequential collage and end with a detailed shot of the eye of one of the performers on which a huge migration of birds is superimposed.

Finally, the camera takes a bird's eye view of the green: human babies and various animals born from a Venus of Willendorf go on an enormous migration to the hole. The videostage insert of an obstacle course is alternated with a metaphorical effect. The trip includes a sugar snowfall on the animals, military tanks, a fuel spill in which some drown and a water zone. The risk assumed by those who leave their place of origin with nothing appears linked to the history of humanity. One of the figures is a photographer, as an impassive recorder of events. Videos of wars and migrations are inserted until arriving at the scene of flight of *The Birds* seen before, but without birds in the sky. The voice-over had warned that the birds can be a projection of our own fears, so now the videostage is linked to the verbal narration by editing a previous insertion. Another part includes banknotes and animals crossing the water in a boat, where the video dissolves for a moment into a bucket into which several of the figures fall, in an obvious simile with so many dead trying to find a better place. A refugee camp takes those who survive but an insert shows a bird catcher. One is never completely safe.

Finally, the videostage shows the miniatures that knock down the fence that surrounds the hole and blocks their way. The handlers are putting some of them through a hole, their destination is uncertain, a metaphor for the uncertainty before the end of the journey. The fade leaves the voice-over alone talking about the origin of life and a spotlight falls on the figure with the red hoodie. The performers begin to pick up the objects while the voice-over, subtitled on video, is revealed as the migrant in the red hoodie, reflecting on ephemerality and the future: "I've only been here 45 minutes, but it seems like an eternity with this sun and this posture." A fan directed towards the audience accompanies the final moment in which the hooded figure on stage, the performer who has remained motionless throughout the production, comes down from where she was, at the same time that the voice-over announces that she is starting to fly.



Figure 10. Photographer in the migration into which an insert of “They’re coming!” is dissolved. Source: Agrupación Señor Serrano.

Conclusions: Dramaturgical Functions of the Videostage and Intermediality

As stated at the beginning, although the use of a videostage, that is, an audio-visual medium incorporated into theatre, does not in itself imply an intermedial event, Agrupación Señor Serrano makes this the essential premise in terms of form and content of each production: the performance is dramaturgically conceived in such a way that it cannot exist without the video. That is the main distinction with respect to productions in which the videostage, although having a dramatic meaning, is not the anchor of the concept, and its elimination could eventually be replaced with other stage elements. For example, a videostage character could be played by an actor or even a voice-over, even though its personality is transformed. In Señor Serrano, however, the vision of the camera cannot be replaced by another resource that allows the desired narrative, since it is articulated on its formal structure.

This integration of video in dramaturgy gives rise to the intermedial and implies that the videostage is used with various dramaturgical functions throughout the productions, within the textual, scenographic, multiplicative or characterising senses set out in Teira (2020a), which here foster sociopolitical criticism.

The textual videostage usually has a narrative character, which Señor Serrano dresses with irony and a critical sense. With their origin in silent film intertitles, video texts are also used in video games for explanatory purposes. Static text appears in *Katastrophe*'s intertitles on the bears or *BBBB*'s intertitles on John Brickman, consisting of still or only slightly animated text. Dynamic text appears as a support for a second meaning, as is the case of the letters *end* in *Katastrophe* becoming the popcorn that bombarded the bears.

Videoscenography implies giving a scenographic function to the videostage, which in Señor Serrano happens at the meta-videostage level; that is, within the video. There is scenographic enlargement when the perceptible space increases through virtuality, as in the *BBBB* mansion or the house of *A House in Asia*.

The multiplicative videostage turns out to be the most common, in its object of alteration of spatial, temporal and/or action perception.

The multiplicity of points of view is essential when duplicating the action on the miniature and its detail shot. It also includes a recontextualisation by avoiding showing the handling in the video; therefore, it puts forward a reflection on the mechanisms that operate in the creation of videostage images while creating a new fictional space in them, an effect similar to that produced in the works of Katie Mitchell, such as *Fräulein Julie* (2013) or *Orlando* (2019). Added to this is the expansion of visibility, which, from a practical point of view, is the most common of the functions, since it expands the scale of the miniature, which from the audience would hardly be perceptible otherwise. At the stage exit of *Katastrophe* or inside the house of *BBBB* it allows the audience to see the action that happens beyond their view, which is impossible to access otherwise. Something is supposedly hidden from the scene so that it only has a videostaged character, as in the interiors of *Bajazet* (2019) by Frank Castorf, in a voyeuristic effect of access to something private.

The videostaged collage produces simultaneity of diverse images whose association remains in the hands of the audience. In *BBBB* there are several projections on the walls of the house that associate documentary content with the miniature fable. It is also produced by the immediacy of action captured live, such as the explosions in *Katastrophe* or the migrations in *Birdie*, which build the dramaturgy by resignifying the basic image of the discourse by contrast between one and the other. Collage is also done by hand, capturing compositions made from scraps of dissimilar materials or stacking images on cards, such as the images of real-estate corruption in *BBBB* or the Melilla postcards in *Birdie*.

Remediation appears with combinations of hypermediacy and immediacy, and the simultaneity of both, hyperimmediacy, such as Brando at home in *BBBB* or Geronimo on television in *A House in Asia*. The inserts of cinematographic or documentary origin are also numerous, and their alternation with the image of the live camera causes an apparent consecutiveness. For example, in *Katastrophe* they are the speeches of high level leaders; in *BBBB*, the films of Marlon Brando; in *A House in Asia*, the hunt for Moby Dick; and in *Birdie*, the scenes from *The Birds*. The remediation of actions on stage from a videostage recreates the action of a character on video, as happens with Marlon Brando in *BBBB*. The contrast depersonalises the character by fragmenting his identity and enhances his fabled persona.

There are also videostage characters created through characterising videostages, which are always mixed; that is, they have a stage and videostage presence, since they are either a camera image of miniatures of the physical stage or they are cinematic inserts replicated by miniatures or performers. The bears of *Katastrophe*, the John Brickman of *BBBB* or the

cowboy of *A House in Asia* are known thanks to their miniature, which are made visible to the audience through video. The physical presence complemented by the videostage image depersonalises by generating an alter ego, making the character's corporeity evanescent.

The numerous dramaturgical functions of the videostage used by Agrupación Señor Serrano are inseparable from the sense of its staging, which evidences its intermedial dramaturgy with the objective of social criticism. Sustaining the core of dramatic conviction on the video implies, therefore, that the staging is not possible without the videostage element. A symptom of this is that from the conception of the productions, the videostage is conceived as a dramaturgical support; it is not an element introduced a posteriori or with a particular function.

Nevertheless, it is clear that intermedial dramaturgies hybridise the theatrical medium with the audiovisual in such a way that the proposal as a whole is articulated through the dialogue between the two fields. This is a wide and rich continuous space, full of possibilities linked to technology, but, above all, to creativity in the hybridisation of languages. Companies like Agrupación Señor Serrano follow these roads in which there are still great opportunities to explore.



Bibliographical references

- AGRUPACIÓN SEÑOR SERRANO. *Katastrophe. Dossier*, 2011.
- BELL, Phaedra. "Dialogic Media Productions and Inter-media Exchange". *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. (Lawence, KA: University of Kansas), 2 (2000), pp. 41-56.
- BETEVÉ. Entrevista a Àlex Serrano, companyia Agrupación Señor Serrano - Terrícoles | betevé. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PppxukCHvUg>>, 26 September 2018. [Last accessed: 1 March 2021].
- BOLTER, Jay David; GRUSIN, Richard. *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Massachussets: The MIT Press, 2000.
- DIXON, Steve. *Digital performance*. Cambridge, Massachussets: The MIT Press, 2007.
- FISCHER-LICHTE, Erika. *Estética de lo performativo* (3rd. ed.). Translated by D. G. Martín and D. M. Perucha. Original in German, 2004. Madrid: Abada Editores, 2017.
- FTM: Fundación Teatro a Mil. Clase Magistral: Viviendo del fracaso | Agrupación Señor Serrano. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZgecG6ho4Q>>, 30 July 2018. [Last accessed: 15 September 2020].
- GIESEKAM, Greg. *Staging the screen*. Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- GRANDE ROSALES, María Ángeles. "Mundos que se desvanecen. Tecnoteatros y performatividad". *Caracteres* (Salamanca: Editorial Delirio), 4, 2 (2015), pp. 8-17.
- HORMIGÓN, Juan Antonio. *Trabajo dramático y puesta en escena*. Volume 1. Madrid: Publicaciones de la ADE, 2002.
- KATTENBELT, Chiel. "Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions and Medial Relationships". *Cultura, lenguaje y representación* (2008), pp. 19-29.

- MARTÍNEZ, David. "Videoescena en la dirección escénica (I)". *ADE-Teatro* (Madrid: Asociación de Directores de Escena de España), 173 (2018), pp. 173-181.
- MARTÍNEZ VALDERAS, Jara. *Manual de espacio escénico. Fundamentos, terminología y proceso creativo*. Granada: Tragacanto, 2017.
- MILGRAM, Paul; KISHINO, Fumio. "A Taxonomy of Mixed Reality Visual Displays". *IEICE Transactions on Information Systems* (Tokyo: The Institute of Electronics Information and Communication Engineers), E77-D, 12 (1994), pp. 1321-1329.
- MONTEVERDI, Anna Maria. Digital performance. Anna Maria Monteverdi. Dietro l'immagine: "Birdie" e il "teatro documentato" di Agrupación Señor Serrano al Tea-tro sociale di Gualtieri: Intervista ad Alex Serrano (2 August 2019). <<https://bit.ly/2VDw3MS>>. [Last accessed: 23 February 2021].
- PAVIS, Patrice. *El análisis de los espectáculos*. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2018.
- PROVENCIO, Julio. "Dramaturgias intermediales en el teatro español del siglo XXI: el caso de Agrupación Señor Serrano". In: Mónica Molanes and Isabelle Reck (Eds.). *Teatro hispánico en los inicios del siglo XXI: híbrides, transgresiones, compromiso y disenso*. Madrid: Visor, 2019, pp. 425-432.
- PROVENCIO, Julio. "El lenguaje intermedial de la Agrupación Señor Serrano". *ADE-Teatro* (Madrid: Asociación de Directores de Escena de España), 161 (2016), pp. 119-123.
- SCOTT, Joanne. "Time in Intermedial Theatre". In: Crossley, Mark (Ed.). *Intermedial Theatre*. Londres: Red Globe Press, 2019.
- TEIRA ALCARAZ, José Manuel. "Hacia un análisis de la función dramática de la videoescena". *Acotaciones* (Madrid: Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático), 45 (2020a), pp. 291-322.
- TEIRA ALCARAZ, José Manuel. "La crítica social de Agrupación Señor Serrano a través de la dramaturgia intermedial. Entrevista a Pau Palacios". *Anagnórisis* [online], 22 (2020b), pp. 467-484.
- UBERSFELD, Anne. *Diccionario de términos claves del análisis teatral*. Translated from German by Armida María Córdoba. Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2002.