

Guest article

Making the Documentary *Anatomy of a Mermaid* or How to Film Subversive Theatre Performances

Adriana Páramo Pérez
Royal Holloway, University of London

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Abstract

I approached actress Iria Pinheiro to film the creative process of her autobiographical documentary theatre play *Anatomía dunha serea* (2018), where she portrays the experiences of obstetric violence she went through during labour. She uses parody as the driving force and manages to subvert the portrayal of the pregnant woman that has been perpetuated in Western society. I soon realised my portrayal of Pinheiro on film needed to be as disruptive as her performance on stage. Activist Jesusa Ricoy (2018) claims that films have helped to perpetuate the performative image of the pregnant woman. So how could I create a subversive portrayal on the screen? In order to understand the process of filming Pinheiro without victimising her, in this article I look at Bertolt Brecht's views on the need of making theatre that does not fall into the 'culinary' and at filmmaker Jill Godmilow's ideas on contemporary documentary being 'pornography of the real'. I directed the documentary *Anatomía dunha serea* (2022) not just to show Pinheiro's experience of obstetric violence, but also to demonstrate how she used theatre as a denunciation tool. By reflecting on how I portray Pinheiro's performance on the screen, I aim to contribute to make obstetric violence visible and to expand on how to create subversive portrayals that make audiences shift existing views of the pregnant woman.

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Resumo

Achegueime á actriz Iria Pinheiro para filmar o proceso creativo da súa obra de teatro documental autobiográfica *Anatomía dunha serea* (2018), na que retrata as experiencias de violencia obstétrica que sufriu durante o parto. Utiliza a parodia como motor e consegue subverter o retrato da muller embarazada que se perpetuou na sociedade occidental. Axiña me decatei de que o meu retrato fílmico de Pinheiro debía ser tan perturbador como a súa actuación no escenario. A activista Jesusa Ricoy (2018) afirma que as películas contribuíron a perpetuar a imaxe performativa da muller embarazada. Entón, como podería crear un retrato subversivo na pantalla? Para comprender o proceso de filmar a Pinheiro sen vitimizala, neste artigo emprego as ideas de Bertolt Brecht sobre a necesidade de facer teatro que non caía no 'culinario' e tamén os puntos de vista da cineasta Jill Godmilow sobre o documental contemporáneo como 'pornografía do real'. Dirixín o documental *Anatomía dunha serea* (2022) non só para mostrar a experiencia de Pinheiro da violencia obstétrica, senón tamén para demostrar como ela utilizou o teatro como ferramenta de denuncia. Ao reflexionar sobre como retrato a actuación de Pinheiro na pantalla, pretendo contribuír a visibilizar a violencia obstétrica e a ampliar os modos de crear retratos subversivos que fagan que o público cambie as visións existentes sobre a muller embarazada.

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Introduction

I learned about obstetric violence when I read in the newspaper that actress Iria Pinheiro was creating the play *Anatomía dunha serea* (2018) recounting the physical and emotional abuse she lived through during and after labour. At the time, I was researching documentary practice and gender and I felt this was a compelling story to capture on camera. I embarked on a journey of filming her creative process. During a rehearsal of the play, Pinheiro explained how the ideas we have of labour are often framed by the images we see in films. Activist and writer Jesusa Ricoy (2018) argues that Hollywood films have helped to perpetuate a non-realistic image of pregnant women. In the same way, Kelly Oliver states that ‘Most Hollywood birth scenes show girls and women completely out of control screaming, crying, and swearing. [...] Women and girls become more like beasts snarling and snapping’ (Oliver 2012: 64). Considering Hollywood films of a variety of genres where the female pregnant body is depicted, such as horror films like *Rosemary’s Baby* (Polansky 1968); sci-fi movies such as *Alien* (Scott 1979) and *Prometheus* (Scott 2012); and comedy films such as *Ace Ventura* (Shadyac 1994), *Knocked Up* (Apatow 2011) and *How to Be Single* (Ditter 2016) —to mention just a few— I realised that Pinheiro was portraying in her play an image of the pregnant woman that was different from the one that has been perpetuated in our collective imaginary. Also that if I was to portray Pinheiro’s creative process on the screen, I would also need to create a subversive portrayal of my own. I then wondered how this could be done, taking into consideration that most of our references are mediated by non-realistic portrayals. In this article, I reflect on how I approached my practice when filming the documentary short *Anatomía dunha serea* (2022). Instead of analysing the short scene by scene, I provide a reflection on my attempts to create a subversive portrayal of the pregnant experience on the screen, drawing connections between the theatre and film forms. I draw from Brecht’s ideas on theatre and Godmilow’s thoughts on documentary films, such as avoiding emotion to make the audience think about how society is constructed. Additionally, I take these ideas forward by arguing that empathy may be useful if it is used to think critically in order to challenge audiences’ views.

Beyond Adaptation

To discuss the documentary *Anatomía dunha serea* (2022), based on Pinheiro’s creative process when putting together the play, I will start by examining the relation between theatre and cinema. Scholars (Nicoll 1936, Sontag 1966, Bazin 1967, Deridder 2018) have widely compared and confronted both mediums, establishing the formal similarities and differences between them. I look beyond the comparison of these genres to focus on the links between the two. I turn to Bert Cardullo’s (2012) idea of adaptation as a ‘mixed medium’. He talks about John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* as a single work reflected through three art forms: a play and two movies. He describes this as ‘an artistic pyramid with three sides’ in which the original work is at the top and from which other artistic products emerge (Cardullo 2012: 13). In this sense, I took Pinheiro’s work and transformed it into

video form, creating two video essays and a short documentary. *Subverting the Performative Image of the Pregnant Woman* (2021) was published on the online journal *Screenworks*. It explores how Pinheiro uses parody as a tool to disrupt the image of the pregnant woman that has been perpetuated in films. *Making Visible the Invisible*, presented at the Contemporary Womxn's Writing Conference (2021), reflects on how the representations of the pregnant Virgin Mary have framed the image of the pregnant woman that prevails in Western society, linking this to Pinheiro's subversive portrayal. The short documentary *Anatomía dunha serea* follows Pinheiro's creative process when putting the play together and launches a conversation about obstetric violence. Each of these video outputs have different stylistic and thematic approaches; they show different moments from the footage and mix them with other materials such as clips from films (in both video essays), medieval paintings (in the video essay *Making Visible the Invisible*), and animations (in the documentary). I find that the conjunction of theatre and filmmaking creates multiple artistic possibilities. In this sense, by transforming the play into video form, I managed to enlarge the life circle of the play. In fact, Pinheiro herself (2022a: 23) sees the documentary as a device that is able to reach audiences that the theatre play cannot get to.

Building on this, I would go as far as to consider my documentary not as an adaptation but rather a 'transformation' of the play. The term 'to transform' is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as 'to completely change the appearance or character of something'. I refer to the process of transformation of the original work because I feel this word allows for more fluidity when trying to understand the relationship between the play and the documentary *Anatomía dunha serea*. When we talk about adapting theatre for the screen, we usually think about stage recordings such as the many Méliés stage filmed works; the multiple Shakespeare adaptations done by the BBC over the years; the project *Beckett on Film* (2000), or, more recently in Spain, the series *Escenario o* (2020) (Stage o). However, although the play appears in the final film, I only show excerpts from a few scenes. I juxtapose these with rehearsals and conversations with Pinheiro to show how the stage performance was assembled and how the creative process of the actress relates to her personal experience. Moreover, I also include symbolic animations that relate to medicalized practices, and figures that contextualize obstetric violence in Spain. By creating new content, the documentary enlarges Pinheiro's stage performance. As a whole, I not only transfer the play into video form but also transform the original play by showing more sides to the original story.

Having explored the links between the two forms, I would also like to talk about the links between the artists behind the works. Scholars (Schmidgall 1977: 6, Sinyard 2000: 147, Hutcheon 2006: 108) explain that an artist adapting a work feels some kind of connection to the work they are intending to adapt. Hutcheon argues that 'if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know "why" [...]. In the arts [...] intention determines matters like why an artist chooses to adapt a work and how it is to be done' (2006: 107). In the documentary *Anatomía dunha serea*, I follow Pinheiro's creative process, and in this article, I reflect on my own creative process when filming her work. As Hutcheon points out, my link to Pinheiro's story and her play had an effect on my artistic decisions. My motivations affected the way I used the camera to capture Pinheiro's process and story while trying not to victimize her.

I would go even further by saying that as I filmed her, my motivations were ‘transforming’. Knowing Pinheiro’s story made me feel enraged that those kinds of abusive situations could happen to me. I started the project as an investigation into the actress’s creative process and it turned out to be a personal search to understand more about the pregnancy experience.

Context of the Play

Anatomía dunha serea is an autobiographical documentary theatre play. This practice originated in Germany in the 1920s with pioneers such as Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht. They both believed in political theatre that would generate social change. Documentary theatre is used as an umbrella term that groups plays of different natures (such as verbatim, investigative, or autobiographical), but I believe that all plays in this genre share two main aspects: they draw from factual sources and have a socio-political nature (Páramo 2021). Spain has seen many great productions of plays of this nature in recent years, such as *Presas* (2005), *Ruz-Bárcenas* (2014), *Jauría* (2019) (The Wolfpack), and *Prostitución* (2021) (Prostitution). Chévere started developing their documentary theatre practice in 2007 with the play *Testosterona* (Testosterone). Their productions have always been characterized by the use of subversive humour and for tackling social issues. Their work has been relevant not only in Galicia but in the whole of Spain, as evidenced by their National Theatre Award in 2014 for their trajectory in documentary theatre practice. In response to this, they developed the creative residency program ‘A Berberecheira’ (which in Galician means a dedicated space for growing seafood). Chévere saw this artistic *berberecheira* as ‘un criadeiro natural custodiado por xentes da zona para uso propio e goce do resto do mundo’ (‘a mollusc garden cared for by the local people for everybody to use and enjoy’) (Chévere 2019: 7). ‘A Berberecheira’ was born as a collaborative working space to support independent artists, allowing Chévere to focus on autobiographical plays. They helped to ‘grow’ three plays: *Goldi Libre* (2016) (Free Goldi), *Salvador* (2017), and *Anatomía dunha serea* (2018). This was the last project of the residency, the only one by a woman, and the first time Chévere portrayed themes related to the pregnancy experience.

Pinheiro, who comes from a cabaret background, has an extensive history of using subversive humour to represent social themes on stage. As I have previously pointed out (Páramo 2022), Pinheiro’s play comes at a time when other female artists in Galicia have also depicted the pregnancy and motherhood experiences from a subversive perspective in various fields. Poet María Lado, co-author of *Anatomía dunha serea*, wrote *Oso, mamá, si?* (2015) (Bear, mum, yes?) where she depicts her traumatic caesarean section, describing the coldness of the hospital room and staff (a theme that is also explored in Pinheiro’s play). In addition, filmmaker Xisela Franco in *Vía Láctea* (2013) (The Milky Way) films herself naked, breastfeeding her daughter in a composition that subverts portrayals of the Virgin Mary lactating. Poet and performer Estibaliz Espinosa also confronted the *Galaktotrophousa* portrayals in the pictures she posted on her Instagram in 2007 and 2018 of herself breastfeeding her children in public spaces. As Pinheiro herself states (2018), she is the first artist in Galicia to depict obstetric violence onstage. I would like to contextualize the reality of obstetric violence, as it is a controversial topic, especially in Spain. The

World Health Organization (WHO) has not yet given it an official definition, but has addressed it on several occasions (WHO 2014, 2018) releasing practices and recommendation guidelines to avoid the mistreatment of women during labour. Ricoy (2016) defines obstetric violence as a medical and social problem that consists of subduing women through practices and behaviours ignoring women's autonomy over their own bodies, sexuality, and babies. In Spain, the existence of obstetric violence has been repeatedly rejected by different medical organizations and attempts to regulate it by law have also been unsuccessful. However, in 2021, for the first time in Spain, a woman from Lugo (Galicia) managed to get the UN to condemn the Spanish government for the obstetric violence she endured during childbirth after a judicial process lasting 11 years. With this context in mind, it is worth noting the important role that Chévere played when backing up Pinheiro's story, as this reality is still being called into question in Spain.

After Pinheiro's water broke, she went to hospital and was induced to labour with barely any explanation as to what was happening to her. She received an episiotomy — a cut in the vagina — and after a few weeks the stitches came loose, which caused her physical injuries that lasted for more than two years. It also took her this long to get an official medical report stating the origin of the pain. As she states in the documentary, during this time she felt misinformed and alone. Pinheiro also wanted to denounce the SERGAS (the Galician Health System), but she was discouraged by her lawyer as there had not been any successful case up to then. Instead, she turned to theatre as a device to come to terms with what had happened to her and share it with other people. Pinheiro's performance could be compared to Anne Deavere's stage work. Charles R. Lyons and James C. Lyons describe this artist's work as 'Brechtian', for she 'stimulates the spectator to judge institutional practices' (Lyons & Lyons 1994: 60). Bertolt Brecht (1964) advocated for an 'epic theatre' that avoided empathy in order to educate rather than entertain in opposition to the theatre that was being produced at the time. He believed this was created for mere entertainment and described it as 'culinary', for its purpose was satisfying bodily pleasure just like food. Only by avoiding emotion did Brecht believe theatre would allow the audience to think critically about how society was structured. Vinci explains how the lack of empathy implies 'a detached and critical gaze and stimulates commitment and the will to change reality' (Vinci 2019: 163). In my view, although Pinheiro's play does not follow all the elements of epic theatre, it manages to achieve what Brecht aimed for: to educate the viewer and make them think about the structures that dominate our society. Pinheiro wrote the script with the poet María Lado, as she explains in the documentary: 'o que fixemos foi reelaborar dun xeito literario toda a historia' ('What we did was to re-elaborate the story in a literary form'). However, Pinheiro does not just talk about her particular situation. In the process prior to writing the script, Pinheiro, Lado, and Chévere met with midwives, activists, and other mothers with similar experiences to gain a better understanding of how obstetric violence came to be regarded as normal. In this way, the text reflects Pinheiro's personal experience entangled with other mothers' feelings and it also gives the audience a way to understand when situations become abusive and how to confront them. In the play, Pinheiro does not judge how a woman's labour experience should be; instead, she compels the audience to challenge their views on how the reality of childbirth is constructed.

Pinheiro's Subversive Performance and the Subversive Camera

Author Lara Rozados (2020) claims that Pinheiro takes control back over her body through her performance, making it a radical feminist play. I look here at Griselda Pollock's thoughts on feminist works. When talking about films, she points out that a work is feminist not because it registers the 'ideas, politics or obsessions of its feminist filmmaker' (Pollock 1987: 363), but rather it becomes political 'according to the way the work acts upon, makes demands of, and produces positions for its viewers. It is feminist because it subverts the normal ways in which we view art'. Pinheiro's play is not just about the episiotomy and the other injuries. In fact, she only tells us about these towards the end. The play shows how abusive situations are not just physical but emotional and behavioural too, and how these come to be regarded as normal. Moreover, the play shows how humour can be used as a disruptive tool. I argue that Pinheiro's play is subversive not only because she tells us about what happened to her, but also because of the way she uses parody 'to take the gendered performative experience of the pregnant woman and resignify it, disrupting the image of the pregnant experience that has been perpetuated' (Páramo 2021). In this sense, I wanted the documentary to be in line with the subversion Pinheiro achieves on stage.

Anatomía dunha serea (2022) is the first documentary short I directed. Previously, I had directed the fiction short films *Stone Island* (2010) and *Galicia. Portobello Road* (2015), depicting strong female characters that drive the story. This is also the case in the documentary, but here I also explore how to portray the female body, similarly to other Galician films by female filmmakers such as *1977* (Peque Varela 2007), *O que precede á caída é branco* (Aldara Pagán 2018) (All white before the fall), and *Nación* (Margarita Ledo 2020). Film director Margarita Ledo argues that 'se trata de rozar el modo en que el cuerpo filmado habla de las mujeres, de la experiencia de cuerpo como filme. De un filme que no existiría sin ese cuerpo' (2020: 34) ('it is about exploring the way the filmed body talks about women, it is about the experience of the body as a film. A film that would not exist without that body'). Therefore, I wondered how I could use my camera to portray Pinheiro's experiences onscreen confronting the non-realistic images of the pregnant women we usually see in films. I establish again links between theatre and film, and I connect Brecht's ideas on epic theatre to filmmaker Jill Godmilow's thoughts on documentary films. She claims that contemporary documentaries are 'pornography of the real' (Godmilow 2002: 4). Similar to what Brecht thought about theatre plays, Godmilow (2017) believes that most contemporary documentaries are made to achieve a pleasurable experience for the audience instead of giving them the keys 'to understand something'. She advocates for a type of documentary film in which empathy is avoided. In this way, the audience can think rationally about the problem the film presents instead of feeling sorry for the subject. Having this in mind, I wanted to create a subversive portrayal of Pinheiro onscreen, detaching myself emotionally and launching a conversation about how obstetric violence came to be normalized. Just as Pinheiro manages to do in the play, I did not want to make the documentary about the traumatic experience. Instead, I took this as the starting point and then focused on how Pinheiro uses theatre as a healing device.

Despite the value of Brecht's and Godmilow's ideas in pursuing an art form that would challenge audiences' opinions by avoiding emotional connection, it has been seen that avoiding empathy might not be possible

after all. Vinci states that ‘empathy, emotional and physical involvement cannot be avoided, since they are closely linked to the human biological and neurological system and activated by any kind of art experience’ (Vinci 2019: 164). In fact, this was what happened to me. As I was filming Pinheiro’s creative process, I realised I was engaging with her on an emotional level. Pinheiro (2022b) states that she went into labour at 38 years old, being ignorant about her body and unwantedly enabling abusive situations to happen to her. I felt enraged that something similar could happen to me and this became part of my motivation to film her. Author Alison Landsberg defends empathy as being useful:

In the act of sympathising one not only reinforces the victimhood of the other but also establishes hierarchies. The experience of empathy, on the contrary, is not purely emotional but also contains a cognitive component. It is characterized by feeling for, while feeling different from the object. (Landsberg 2004: 149)

Contrary to Brecht’s and Godmilow’s ideas, engaging emotionally helped me in the process of wanting to know more about how reality is constructed (Páramo 2021). By empathizing with her, I was moved to think critically. I attempted to use empathy not as an element to produce a pleasurable experience for the audience but to prompt them to think about such normalized situations that should be questioned.

I started filming focusing on Pinheiro’s creative process. The documentary short *Anatomía dunha serea* can be framed within a plethora of Spanish documentary films that follow actors preparing for roles or talking about them: *Night Function* (Molina 1981); *El testamento de Rosa* (Villaronga 2015) (Rosa’s testament); *María Converses* (Zimmerman 2016); *Angélica. A tragedy* (Fernández-Valdés 2016); and in Galicia *A viaxe dos Chévere* (Zarauza 2014) (Chévere’s journey), *O que hai que facer para non ir ao mar* (Vázquez 2014) (What we do to avoid going to sea), and *Casting* (Estévez 2019). I took inspiration especially from two of the above-mentioned films when approaching my practice. In *María Converses*, Zimmerman follows actress Blanca Portillo while she prepares for her role as Maria Magdalena in the homonymous play. The filmmaker films the rehearsals, costume tests and meetings with the director and playwright, and juxtaposes this footage with interviews with the actress. Director Fernández-Valdés in *Angélica. A tragedy* films the rehearsals for Angelica Lidell’s upcoming show. As her creative journey unravels on the screen, we see how the relationship between the documentary maker and Angelica falls apart as she asks him to stop filming because she finds the presence of the camera disruptive. These films led me to think about how I could capture Pinheiro’s performance and how the reality I would be registering would be affected by my presence and that of the camera. Like these films do, I filmed Pinheiro’s creative process from an observational point of view. This means that I would not be interfering with the reality, but would be letting it unfold in front of the camera. By making my presence and that of the camera as less intrusive as possible, I wanted to capture Pinheiro’s creative process without interfering with her methods. In an observational documentary the filmmaker cannot control how the reality is going to turn out. Contrary to what the process had been when filming my fiction short films, I started filming without having written a script. Instead, I worked from a list of themes and content I wanted to capture on camera. I followed Pinheiro

for over 3 months and ended up with 26 hours of footage of scriptwriting sessions between Pinheiro and the co-playwright María Lado, rehearsals with the theatre company Chévere and the director of the play Xesús Ron, and the premiere of the play. After I captured the footage, I wrote a treatment with the order of the selected moments and took this into the editing room.

Editing Three Relevant Scenes From the Play

We have seen how theatre and cinema can blend into each other, creating new content. However, here I would like to talk about the process of editing, which is intrinsic and unique to making a film. Film editing can be defined as the art and craft of selecting, cutting and assembling scenes. When cinema emerged, there was not an editing technique, as films were just long single takes. However, as filmmaking evolved directors realised that by putting different shots together, they could give the images a whole new meaning. Directors such as Sergei Eisenstein, Orson Welles and Stanley Kubrick believed that editing was the most crucial aspect of making a film. I too believe the editing room is where a film comes to life, as the original order of the scenes in the script can be manipulated. The editor selects which footage makes it into the final cut, as well as the duration of each shot. For *Anatomía dunha serea*, I worked with editor Hugo Alves, who helped me creating a narrative. There were three particular scenes from the play that I wanted to use in the documentary from the early stages of the process. I will now describe which scenes, why and how I combined them with animations and figures to give the documentary a meaning of its own beyond the context of the play.

In the first scene of the play, Pinheiro describes the feeling of being a mermaid. She is wearing a sequin dress that resembles a mermaid's skin while she explains why she feels like she is mutilated: 'Dende que son serea de cando en vez preciso sentir o tacto da auga onde antes tiña as pernas. Converterse en serea non é algo sinxelo, aínda que todas as mulleres levamos a posibilidade da serea dentro' (*Anatomía dunha serea* 2018) ('Since I am a mermaid, I sometimes need to feel the touch of water where I once had legs. Becoming a mermaid is not easy although every woman carries this possibility within her'). This is the only scene from the play that I use in the documentary that is not a parody. I put it towards the beginning of the film, in a similar position to where it is in the play, because it presents the essence of the problem that Pinheiro shares in a metaphorical way.

The second scene that I wanted to show was what Pinheiro calls the 'teleshopping scene'. This one also happens in the first part of the play. For this particular scene, she places herself behind a metallic table that functions, as Ron describes in the documentary, as a museum of obstetric tools that are used in labour. Pinheiro impersonates Joseph Delee, one of the pioneers in advocating for medicalized labour, as if he were a TV presenter in a TV kitchen segment. On the table, there are five obstetric tools, but in the film, I show only two of them: the speculum and the spatula. Pinheiro demonstrates with a hyperbolic performance how the tools are used on the woman's body, similar to how cooking instructions are given in these TV shows: 'As espátulas cóllense coas dúas mans e teñen dúas posicións; o modo ensaladeira e o modo toureiro' (*Anatomía dunha serea* 2022) ('The spatula is handled with two hands and they are positioned in

the “salad mode” and the “bullfighter mode”). When editing this scene, we decided to intercut it with moments from the rehearsal when the team was putting the scene together. I found it valuable to show one particular moment when Chévere and Pinheiro were researching obstetric tools on the Internet and producer Patricia de Lorenzo asked what a speculum looks like. Pinheiro says it is the one shaped like a duck used in cytology work, whilst on the screen we see a shot of this tool on the table on the stage. For me, this moment has an educational value as the producer was seeing the speculum in such detail for the first time, although one had been used in her body before, as was also the case for me.

The third scene that I found relevant to show was the ‘puppet show’. This scene happens towards the end of the play, and I placed it in the second half of the film. Pinheiro is now wearing a hospital gown and she re-enacts the moment of the delivery as it happened to her. She lays down on the stretcher in a lithotomy position (legs above hip level) and wears gloves of different colours as if they were puppets to impersonate the different staff members that were present during her labour. By giving different voices and movements to her hands whenever a character comes up, she creates the impression of a puppet show, helped by the sheet that covers her body. We decided to intercut excerpts from this scene with a conversation I had with Pinheiro about how she came up with this segment. In the documentary she tells me that when she was in labour, she felt as if she was part of a puppet show, as she could only see the heads of the people and the obstetric tools appearing above the sheet. In fact, she presents herself as a puppet as well, as her head is the only part of her body that is free and under her control. However, although she can talk, we see how she is repeatedly dismissed by the staff: ‘Ahora no estamos a eso chica, ahora estamos a otra cosa, venga empuja, así no, para abajo’ (*Anatomía dunha serea* 2022) (‘We are not doing that anymore, we’ve moved on from that, come on, push! Not like that, push down’). This part finishes with Pinheiro in the car. She tells me that in addition to physically losing autonomy, she felt confused as it was the first time she was seeing those tools and she did not know what they were used for. I reply that I am learning a lot from filming this play. It was relevant for me to include myself saying this as proof that feeling empathy can help us to challenge our views.

Filming Conversations with Pinheiro

I could have included many other segments from the play and the rehearsals, but at this point I realised that there was more to be said about Pinheiro’s story that was yet not depicted in the footage I had. Filmmaker Andrés di Tella said the following about the process of creating his documentary *Photographs* (2007): ‘I had the constant feeling that whatever was happening was happening off camera’ (2012: 39). I understood that the documentary should address the emotional context that was not shown in the play, and for this I needed to ask Pinheiro direct questions. Although I recognised that, contrary to Godmilow’s and Brecht’s ideas, empathy was helping me to think critically, I still wanted to preserve their aim of not producing mere entertainment. In this sense, I did not want to film a conventional talking heads interview where I could victimise Pinheiro for the audience’s pleasure. Instead, I positioned Pinheiro as the knowledgeable person. For this, I tried to eradicate the hierarchy

of interviewer-interviewee. I filmed Pinheiro in familiar spaces for her (her kitchen and her car) and made myself visible in the frame by being reflected in mirrors and by intervening in the conversation. Although I did ask questions to Pinheiro, I let her choose what to tell me and the order in which to do so. In total, I filmed two conversations and ended up with four hours of footage. In the edit, I picked the most relevant moments that would add to what was already revealed by the play and rehearsals, and Alves helped to make the narrative of Pinheiro's account consistent. Contrary to what happens in the play, we decided to start with Pinheiro's account of what an episiotomy is and the pain she endured. During the hour she is on stage, Pinheiro reveals this only at the end but in the 15-minute long short film we needed to tell the audience what happened at the beginning. Then, the focus of the film turns to the play and rehearsals. Towards the second half, Pinheiro's account becomes relevant again as she explains how she discovered obstetric violence. As she did not receive an explanation from the doctors about the pain she was enduring, she looked online for women in similar situations, and she then discovered that obstetric violence existed and that she had been a victim of it. We juxtaposed this conversation with moments of Pinheiro in the photo session that Paula Pez organised for the play. The photographer sets Pinheiro on a beach and lets her pose freely, and even gets her to hold a fish decorated with sequins (resembling Pinheiro's dress in the play). These are playful and evocative images that allow the audience to think about Pinheiro's account.

Symbolic Animations

At this point, the narrative of the documentary was formed by the scenes from the play, the rehearsals, and conversations with Pinheiro. I could see that I managed to transfer the parody that Pinheiro uses on the stage to the screen. However, the play was also full of symbolic and educational scenes that I had to leave out of the film because I did not want the documentary to be a mere stage recording. Instead, I wanted it to have its own identity. In this article, I have reflected on how I used my camera to capture Pinheiro's creative process, but I also searched for ways to depict themes that were not tangible on camera. As animator Richard Williams said, 'Don't do what the camera can do – do what the camera can't do' (2001: 16). This is why I decided to introduce animations. I wanted to create a symbolic world that would allow the audience to discover the meaning for themselves. I took as a reference the documentary *Jonah Stands up* (2016), in which the director Hannah Engels incorporates animated sequences made by Jonah, the subject of the documentary, taking the story forward without victimising him. I worked with animator Borja Santomé, who uses 2D drawings and animates them in stop motion, creating a symbolic world of its own. In total, I included four animated sequences and three of them are followed by explanatory slates about obstetric violence in Spain that connect the themes of the animations with Pinheiro's story.

The first scene of the documentary is an animation where we see a letter writing itself. As we read it, we realise that it is a letter denouncing the SERGAS (the Galician Health System) for abusive practices during labour. The letter ends by wrapping itself up in a paper ball that then becomes a mermaid's tale. Although in the play she does not address this, in the documentary Pinheiro mentions how she gave up the thought

of starting a legal procedure to focus on creating the play as a tool to denounce the SERGAS.

The second animated scene features a fish being split by a knife, and it comes after Pinheiro tells us about the episiotomy. It is followed by a slate that states that in Spain episiotomies are practised above the recommended rate given by the WHO.

The third animation features some cows being transported into an industrial site and being injected with oxytocin. This is intercut with the teleshopping scene from the play and they both relate to excessive medicalised labour. The slate that follows states that Spain has more instrumentalised labours than the WHO's recommended rate.

The documentary ends with an animation where we see footsteps on the beach. This relates to the last scene of the play (that we do not see in the film) in which Pinheiro wears a white jumpsuit with golden stripes symbolising the scar she was left with while she dances on top of the metal table where the obstetric tools used to be. The animation and this scene both relate to taking back control over one's body. Additionally, the animations allow the audience to take their thoughts beyond what is said on screen and in contrast the figures give a very concrete context of the reality of obstetric violence in Spain. As I mentioned earlier, by creating new content I am transforming Pinheiro's account, signifying her performance beyond the stage. In sum, the documentary has three layers of storytelling: the medical account, the creative process, and the emotional journey. For each of them, I used different footage and mediums, but I always tried to use empathy as a tool to think critically rather than just creating entertainment for the audience.

Conclusion

This article started with a discussion about adaptation. In fact, I used the term 'transformation' because I believe that I did not adapt the play *Anatomía dunha serea* to the screen but rather transformed it by giving Pinheiro's story a new identity. I filmed actress Iria Pinheiro's creative process when putting her autobiographical play together, recounting the experiences of obstetric violence she went through during and after labour. In this article, I have explained my approach to filming Pinheiro's creative process, reflecting on the use of empathy as a device to achieve critical thinking to challenge the audience's views. J. Hillis Miller sees the repetition of stories as reinforcing values in society. He states that 'we need the "same" stories over and over, then, as one of the most powerful, [...] of ways to assert the basic ideology of our culture' (Miller 1995: 72). However, I created the documentary precisely because I felt that we needed to see more of the kind of subversive portrayal of the pregnant body that Pinheiro depicts in her play, in opposition to the image that has been consistently perpetuated by Hollywood films. The documentary short *Anatomía dunha serea* can be framed within a plethora of recent contemporary films that confront the image of the female pregnant body that exists in the Western imagination: films like *Private Life* (Jenkins 2018) in the USA, *Enormous* (Letourner 2019) in France and the Spanish short *Infinite Galatea* (Maura and Pluchino 2017), and tv series such as *The Let Down* (2016–2019) in Australia, *Working Moms* (2017–2022) in Canada, and *Vida Perfecta* ('Perfect Life') (2019–2021) and season 3 (2021) of *Madres. Amor y vida* that depicts

Making the Documentary
Anatomy of a Mermaid or
How to Film Subversive
Theatre Performances
Adriana Páramo Pérez

precisely experiences of obstetric violence in a medicalised labour. I argue that the documentary is ‘another piece in the string to make visible the need to change policies in the public health and judicial systems and eventually shift perspectives in society’ (Páramo 2021). It is interesting to note that, from an academic point of view, my video work on *Anatomía dunha serea* (the two video essays and the documentary) has given me the chance to participate in several conferences such as ‘Screening Violence’ (2019) and the Annual Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland Conference (2021), as well as to publish papers such as ‘Subverting the Performative Image of the Pregnant Woman’ (2021), reflecting on my practice as a filmmaker. Moreover, the documentary was screened for the first time in Vigo in March 2022 as part of a local council’s cultural programme celebrating Women’s Day. After the screening, Pinheiro and I did a Q&A with the audience, and for many women this became an opportunity to share (for some of them for the first time in decades) their experiences of obstetric violence. This proves the need and desire to see more of these experiences on the screen and to create spaces to talk about the pregnancy experience in challenging ways. However, the journey within the festival circuit has not always been easy. It took about 6 months for it to get selected for the first time (it premiered at the Cans Festival in May 2022 in Galicia). Marta Salvador from ‘Distribution with Glasses’, the distribution company we are working with, stated (2022) that some male programmers thought that it was a difficult short because it presented a theme that did not affect the majority of the population. We have seen how obstetric violence is controversial in Spain, so I wonder if perhaps there is still some reluctance to challenge certain perspectives in our society. It will be interesting to watch the journey of the documentary in the future, and to look out for other films, theatre plays and adaptations in both mediums that depict the pregnancy experience in other subversive ways.



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Making the Documentary
Anatomy of a Mermaid or
How to Film Subversive
Theatre Performances
Adriana Páramo Pérez

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Making the Documentary
Anatomy of a Mermaid or
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Adriana Páramo Pérez

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