

**PRODUCTIVE TENSIONS:
A THEORY OF DOCUMENTARY THEATRE**

by

Alexander Ferguson

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Theatre)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2009

© Alexander Ferguson, 2009

ABSTRACT

Perhaps the most basic tension in any theatrical performance is that of the *actual* and the *fictive*. There is always a doubling of performer (actor-character), time (now-then), and place (here-there) in theatrical representation. Performance theorists such as Fischer-Lichte, Boal, George, Schechner, and Turner all argue that between the poles of actual and fictive, between that which is materially present and that which is absent and referenced, lies the liminal state. The liminal state is a self-referential state that collapses binaries of here-and-there, now-and-then, and subject-and-object. This thesis examines how the *idea* of the document in documentary theatre complicates the basic representational tension of *actual-fictive*, adding other tensions that enable the liminal state (which I call the *event-state*) to occur. Drawing on the work of Fischer-Lichte and others, new theoretical concepts particular to the genre of documentary theatre are introduced, such as *actual-documentive*, *embodied document*, and *emergency-time*. Using examples from *Nanay: A Testimonial Play* (which I directed in Vancouver, Canada, and Berlin, Germany) I propose a theory of documentary theatre.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	III
LIST OF TABLES	IV
LIST OF FIGURES	V
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	VI
DEDICATION	VII
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 THE EVENT-STATE.....	10
3 THE DOCUMENTIVE.....	16
4 EMBODIED DOCUMENT	22
5 GENRE: REALISM, SATIRE, REALITY	30
6 AFFECT AND IDENTIFICATION	35
7 EMERGENCY TIME	45
8 EVENT-STATE WITHOUT ACTORS: THE SPECTATOR IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ARTIFACT	49
9 CONCLUSION.....	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	67

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	A Table of Tensions I.....	41
Table 2	A Table of Tensions II.....	48

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 The “Elder Care” scene.....	1
Figure 2 The “Yaletown” Scene.....	16
Figure 3 Affective Laughter.....	35
Figure 4 The Yaletown couple’s child.....	42
Figure 5 Jocelyn as Marlene	43
Figure 6 The “Object Room” 1	49
Figure 7 The “Object Room” 2	50
Figure 8 Framed testimony with artist’s drawing	52

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the professors in the UBC Theatre Faculty that shaped my thought in one way or another during the completion of my MA degree: Jerry Wasserman, Kirsty Johnston, Errol Durbach, and Ernest Mathijs.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the domestic workers who lent their stories to *Nanay: A Testimonial Play*, to the activists who have given themselves to the cause, and to the brilliant theatre artists whose talents gave the project “presence.”

1 INTRODUCTION

Figure 1 The “Elder Care” scene: Karen Rae as Nadine



(Photo by Caleb Johnston).

Vancouver Actor Karen Rae plays Nadine, an artist and university professor struggling to find appropriate in-home care for her aged mother who suffers from Parkinson’s disease. The setting is the mother’s kitchen, where Nadine prepares her mother’s pills, rolls cigarettes, and blows smoke out the kitchen window. The set is just shy of full naturalism but has enough detail to help the spectator complete a realistic picture. Nadine is in a chic, neo-hippie ensemble: amber thigh-length sweater, wooden bead necklace, brown shawl, knee-length wool skirt, knee-high leather boots, and hair tied back in a ponytail. The script has been extracted verbatim from testimony. The acting style is realism, with the convention of direct address. This is one of the scenes featured

in the documentary play *Nanay: A Testimonial Play* which was performed in 2009 at the PuSh International Performing Arts Festival (Vancouver, BC) and at the Hebbel am Ufer (the HAU, Berlin). *Nanay* is about Canada's federal Live-in Caregiver Program, a migrant labour program that brings primarily Filipino domestic workers to Canada to provide live-in care for the children and elderly parents of Canadian families. It's a temporary work visa program but it also offers those who successfully meet its conditions Landed Immigrant Status after two or three years of work as a "nanny." Nadine represents one of the many Canadians faced with the traumatic and costly issue of elder care. Through the development and rehearsal process, the creative team (including myself as director) arrived at the naturalistic setting described above. This scene – one of ten installations – took place in a nook in the upstairs gallery of Chapel Arts in Vancouver. The spectators were very close, between one to two meters from the performer. Through experimentation with set and costume, and through improvisation, Nadine became a burdened, edgy woman, aware of the ethical dilemma of exploiting cheap foreign labour but unable to find an affordable, appropriate alternative. Rolling cigarettes was something we arrived at in rehearsal as a way to help Karen Rae give Nadine a little more edge and therefore the scene a little more drive. The actual Nadine (a pseudonym to protect the original subject's identity) did not smoke. Nor did she dress as a chic neo-hippie. Nor did the scene take place in her mother's kitchen. These choices were arrived at in rehearsal as the best way for Rae to animate the scene and give life, and dramatic "truth," to the character/subject. UBC Geography Professor Geraldine Pratt, who had conducted most of the research for *Nanay*, and who was co-editor of the script with Caleb Johnston, strongly objected to these choices. She felt that we were compromising the factual integrity of the

subject and that we needed to be “alert to misrepresentation -- of what they said, and to some extent the conditions in which they said it” (Pratt email). Factuality had been violated in a number of ways. For one thing the original interview took place during a walk in the forest. Clothing style, tone of voice, and the physical posture of the actor did not arise from study of the subject, whom Rae had never met. In addition, Pratt felt that rolling cigarettes was beneath the dignity of a university professor. It seems that for Pratt some level of photographic likeness would have to be employed to represent Nadine in an ethical manner.

This raised the following question for me: to what extent is truthful representation in a documentary play dependent on naturalistic reproduction? It would have been challenging to recreate a walk in the forest, but aside from that, if the sense and the truth of the testimony were more than just textual data on a page that could be edited for clarity and dramatic sequence, then the conditions of the spoken testimony had already been seriously altered – changing the order of a speech changes its meaning; creating a dramatic arc where there isn’t one changes meaning; if emotional content, connected to the order and natural flow of testimony is meaning, that meaning had been changed. And none of these issues addresses the “factuality” of gesture, intonation, and rhythm – all powerful expressions of meaning. For such reasons, during two years of developing the show as director, I had increasingly come to mistrust the authorial nature of the document. I had come to feel that once the document in a testimonial play is carefully examined, the authorial nature of the testimony is revealed as unstable. What is a document in documentary theatre? Is it possible to represent it or is something else being represented – not a document, but the *idea* of a document, something I call the

documentive. This became the crux of the issue for me. How does the idea of the document support the political agenda in a documentary play? How does it complicate representation – in a practical sense?

This paper is not about ethical representation. It's about what happens on stage in a documentary play. In a documentary play in which actors represent real people (as opposed to characters imagined by a writer), how does that which is referenced – the “real,” the document – shadow the performer, the performance space, and the spectator in a way that is particular to the genre? Erika Fischer-Lichte, David E.R. George, Richard Schechner, and Victor Turner all argue that performance is ultimately about the creation of a liminal state, a state in which performer and spectator come together, a state that is part here and part there, that dissolves distance (without necessarily dissolving difference), and that ultimately transforms the participants (Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative* 88-89; George 30; Schechner, *Between* 111-113; Turner 41-43). Fischer-Lichte and George call this state an event. I use the term *event-state* in order to separate the word “event” from its use in Event Theory, Happenings, and the like. George writes that it is in the event-state encounter that we construct our truths (George 30-31). These truths are qualitatively different from cognitive knowledge arrived at outside of the event-state. The liminal state does not reference another reality. Rather it generates experience. This experience, in turn, creates knowledge. I argue that documentary theatre requires the liminal state to construct its truths as much as fictional theatre does, but that it adds very specific and very productive stresses to the actual-fictive tension.

Relying heavily on Fischer-Lichte's concept of “oscillation,” I transpose some of her terms and introduce new concepts. Actual-fictive becomes actual-*documentive*. Her

concept of *embodied mind* becomes *embodied document*. I replace *character* with *subject*. And I introduce the concept of *emergency-time* as a pressure on performance-time. I explain my reasons for introducing these terms in the body of the essay. Like the theorists mentioned so far, I believe physical space (as in set design or, in a sited piece, the given architecture or theatricalized surroundings) is far more important as a carrier of meaning and locus of experience than a scripted or imagined space. The same goes for the performer's body. Embodiment is the medium and message. Professor Pratt's objections have to do with what Dwight Conquergood calls "scriptocentrism" (147) – a privileging of text, in this case "document" or transcribed testimonial, over the embodiment of that document (which I term *embodied document*). Pratt's concern with the veracity of the representation perpetuates the old fallacy that the script is the dominant controlling factor in performance; that it is not just speculative but can dictate physical action, vocal rhythm, intonation, and unambiguous meaning (George 28; Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative* 29-32). The desire, as Fischer-Lichte puts it, to disappear the material body in favour of the semiotic body – which valorizes the written word, the ideology of the text favoured by certain 18th and 19th century drama theorists – is something that has never succeeded in practice (29-32). There are simply too many other variables in live theatrical performance for the script to become such a controlling force. That is not to say that the referenced script or document, as imagined or "heard" by the spectator, performer, and director is not exerting pressure. It is. It's one of the productive tensions that allows for the event-state. To deny the influence of the text in a performance that is as text-heavy as so many documentary plays are would be delusional. Conquergood, while aggressively challenging the self-interest of academics that insist the

world can be interpreted as text, cautions against setting up an ideology of performance to replace the ideology of the text (151). In all fairness the quality of a text will have a powerful impact on its embodied performance. It is also likely that while one spectator receives a performance primarily as embodied, a literary-minded spectator might produce the image of a printed text, as it is being spoken, in her mind. But as text, a script is materially absent. It is only present as spoken word. Otherwise it is an imagined or remembered text. This is a crucial difference.

In performance, theatre artists *reconstitute* the testifying subject's words, add water, add the flesh and blood of performers, restore gesture, vocal intonation, and generate that indefinable thing called presence. But what is reconstituted is not the original subject in its original time. It is something particular to the here-and-now of performance. This is where the spectator comes in, with a perspective that is diametrically opposed to the writer's. For the spectator performance is primary. She has no direct access to the document such as it is – a transcription. As noted above, the document can only be imagined. The basis upon which that imagined document is constructed is the performance. The spectator has nothing else to go on.¹ Therefore, in

¹ In a play that presents the audience with original documents of some kind, the spectator-document relationship might shift slightly. For example video footage of subjects might blur the line between documentary play and documentary film, introducing further complicating dynamics to the experience. The two productions I have seen of the documentary play *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, edited by Rickman and Viner, use footage of Corrie as a young girl at the end of the play, presenting the audience with the “real thing” in a kind of performance coda (Seattle; Vancouver). This “document” had a powerful impact on me, adding a further tension to the actual-documentive binary. During the performance I found it hard to not accept the video of Corrie as more authentic than the actor playing Corrie. But afterwards the video-Corrie, affective as she was in her own right, was hard to extract from the actor-Corrie who had been instrumental in detailing the character/subject's personal history and intimate feelings through the performance of her diaries. While watching Corrie on video I was overcome by the “aura” of the moving image, to use Benjamin's term (221-23); but upon reflection I found that my complete picture of Rachel Corrie included both of the actors I had seen play her – in Seattle and Vancouver (there's a little more on “aura” and “atmosphere” below in the section “Event-State Without Actors: The

performance, the document is really something other than a document. It is the idea of a document. What is referenced in performance is not the document but the *documentive*. I use this term the way the word *fictive* is used in performance theory. It describes a quality rather than a concrete thing. It implies a concept, an absence. It acknowledges the constructedness of the document as well as the ephemerality of the source of the

Spectator in the Presence of the Artifact”). The document and the *documentive* – the idea of the document – mutually polluted one another.

For a fascinating examination of the instability and ambiguity of the document see Lepecki. He describes a lecture/performance by Walid Raad entitled *The Loudest Muttering Is Over: Case Studies from the Atlas Group Archive* in which documents, apparently from an archive of the Lebanese civil wars (1975-91), are presented. The authority of these documents – notebooks, photographs, and eight-millimeter films – is given credence through suspect performance means. For example the lecturer’s “accent operates both *geographically* – conferring on the expert’s voice the phonetics of an ‘authentic’ Middle Eastern man; and *performatively* – his accent emphasizing the central role of the scholar’s vocal apparatus as an instrument for claiming and securing authorship and authority” (Lepecki 90, his italics). Raad’s accent was in fact put on. It turns out that the documents themselves were invented by Raad (96). Despite the fact that Raad explained at the beginning of his lecture that the Atlas Group is “an imaginary” foundation (93), it seems that all but the most attentive spectators accepted his presentation as authentic. Says Raad, “This confirms to me the weighty associations with authority and authenticity of certain modes of address (the lecture, the conference) and display (the white walls of a museum or gallery, vinyl text, the picture frame) (93). Lepecki comments that Raad’s “dramaturgy of history [...] unmasks the role of the historian as an author” (94). Yes, but not for those who are unaware of, or refuse to accept the fiction as such.

This kind of audience “complicity” (94) was a factor in *News of the World*, a show I co-created with David Bloom, Robin Greenwood, and Marcus Youssef in March 2009. The show mixed documentary and documentive elements. It included spoken transcripts from testimony or newswire services, projected websites and Youtube videos, and scripted fictional sequences. At the launch for the show our featured guest David Beers, editor of the Tyee.ca, didn’t show up. We decided to recruit an audience member to play him. To our surprise the audience member had thorough knowledge of the Tyee and was something of an expert on the history of journalism – able to quote relevant facts from antiquity to the present. His performance was so authoritative that most of the spectators refused to believe he wasn’t David Beers. As in the case of Raad above, the “modes of address” created the illusion of veracity. It’s hard to see how having actual documents, or David Beers himself, would have created a greater sense of authenticity for the spectators. In the “Object Room,” a *Nanay* installation that is discussed in detail later, the spectator did have the opportunity to see or handle authentic documents. A combination of authentic and faked artifacts created an impactful “aura” on the spectator. The aura derived not from the authority of verifiable documents but from the general “atmosphere” of the room which was haunted by the idea of the document (more on this in the relevant section). This essay will not go further into performances which present, or purport to present, actual documents in performance, as that is not its focus; but I would hazard to suggest a fuller study into the issue will reveal that even the bona fide artifact in documentary theatre is more documentive than document.

document (someone talking about something at some time in the past). In the case of documentary theatre that is based on interviews, this imagined or remembered text is itself a reduction of an oral recollection. We do not have veracity, only construction. This construction is as valid as any other. It's also very useful. Using the cache of factuality or "verbatim" testimony is a strong political tactic in a theatre of advocacy. And even though memories are unreliable (from a forensic point of view), they carry the charge of authenticity. As Michael Green of Calgary's One Yellow Rabbit said at a 2006 forum on documentary theatre, there's something "magical" about a script based on words that were spoken by real people (Green). When we hear "This is a true story," we adjust the way we listen. We may listen more attentively or more critically. We may doubt what we hear or give it more credence. This is one of the productive tensions that documentary theatre uses to enable the event-state.

The construction of truth, based on the idea of a document, in performance becomes embodiment in theatricalized space. This embodiment/space is co-habited by the spectator. Depending on the type of performance, she is at one end of the space (the auditorium) or enfolded within it (as in some of the modules in a sited performance like *Nanay*). In either case she must negotiate the multiple tensions of representation that documentary theatre produces. She must validate or reject the *documentive* truth presented. Critical to this assessment are the truths generated in the event-state. The event-state is one of "pure potential" (George 22). It is an encounter, a contact. It is generative of experience. It *creates* knowledge. But knowledge, which requires cognition and is therefore created out of critical distance, only comes *after* the event-state, which is a temporary condition. The spectator and performer retreat from experience into

judgment. In documentary theatre this retreat is necessary. The spectator is encouraged to think critically about what happened in the generative state. How does it colour the rest of the performance? Does it strengthen the political agenda of the artists? Does it reveal cracks in the argument? The encounter has been an intimate one, qualitatively different from what happens outside of the event-state, and notably different from reading testimony or data. Without the intimacy that embodiment provides, and without the event-state encounter, there is little need for documentary theatre, as other means of dissemination of a political message would suffice.

Much of the following analysis draws from and expands on theory from fictional theatre, its considerations of how representation works, how the event-state is created, how time is felt. This is because most of the literature on documentary theatre is concerned with the veracity of the document, ethical representation, and documentary theatre's place in the greater political discourses of the day, but does not always consider what is uniquely theatrical about this kind of theatre, what the mechanics are that make documentary theatre more than a just a report or another kind of journalism. This essay is about how documentary theatre exploits the mutual co-presence of performer and spectator in the event-state, a state which generates experiential evidence, out of which knowledge is derived.

2 THE EVENT-STATE

Any performance in which a performer stands in for someone else (for example, an actor representing a character) plays on the tension between the actual and the fictive, between that which is materially present and that which is absent and referenced. In *The Transformative Power of Performance* Erika Fischer-Lichte details the process whereby the spectator's attention swings between the performer body (the actual) and the character represented (the fictive). She calls this an "oscillation" (*Transformative* 17; *Reality* 19). The theatre artist (director, performer, designer) exploits this opposition by foregrounding, at different times, the performer body or the character. But whichever end of the binary is highlighted, the other end remains in play to a lesser or greater degree; even when focusing on character the spectator never completely loses sight of the performer body, and vice versa. In a production that attempts to subsume the spectator in a fictional world, the goal will be to minimize spectator awareness of the material facts of auditorium, stage, lights, performer body, etc. In a performance that tries to break down theatrical representation, attention will be drawn to the materiality of the performer-body and performance space.² Fischer-Lichte describes performances that weight the scales on one side or the other, but she is mostly concerned with those in which the *actual*, the performer body, is foregrounded. For example, in Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Giulio Cesare*, directed by Romeo Castellucci, the character Antonio is played by a very frail and elderly man, not a trained actor, who has had a microphone "implanted in the place

² Perhaps doubling disappears in performances in which the performer is "playing himself," but for the purposes of this essay I am exploring theatre in which performers speak prepared text and rehearse most aspects of performance.

of his larynx which made audible his tortured, voiceless attempts to articulate himself [...]” (*Reality* 15). The man’s physical and vocal attributes, unusual in a theatre performer, hold the spectator’s attention and become the primary focus of the performance. That which is being referenced by the character name “Antonio” recedes. But not entirely so. Antonio remains in play as part of the basic tension that creates the oscillation in the spectator (*Transformative* 88). Castellucci compounds this tension by featuring other performers who are bulimic or obese. The spectator, unable to keep up the shuttling between performer and character, eventually ends up suspended between the two, in a liminal state that is neither actual nor fictive, but which also keeps both in play.

The audience stumbles in their perception and experiences a constant oscillation between phenomenal body and character. [...] While the acting and staging techniques [...] repeatedly fixes [*sic*] the attention on the performers’ phenomenal bodies, the dramaturgy allows the audience to focus on the character from time to time – more or less frequently depending on the situation and the performance. (*Transformative* 88)

Fischer-Lichte and David E.R. George call the liminal state an “event” (*Transformative* 161-180; George 8-9). For the sake of separating the word from other common uses and from Schechner’s applications of the term to Happenings, ritual and the like (Schechner, *Magnitudes* 290-95), I will use the term *event-state*. The event-state is “transformative.” It’s an experiential phenomenon that can occur in performance. In Fischer-Lichte’s frameworking, the event-state transforms those involved by emphasizing the materiality of the performance elements – most specifically (but not exclusively) the performer-body. It does so in part by encouraging the spectator to become acutely aware of her role in co-creating the performance.

In George's model, the spectator and performer are at either ends of a relational axis. This "axis both joins and simultaneously separates" (30). As in Fischer-Lichte's oscillation, this joining and separating creates a state in which the spectator and performer vacate the ends of the axis and come to mutually inhabit the axis itself, the liminal state in which the "spectators sit and swing, and experience" (30). In this state the spectator and, ideally, the performer are engaged in an "experience" that is not representational – it doesn't reference anything else. It generates "first-hand knowledge" (Stevenson ctd. in George 30). Diane Taylor speaks of performances as reconstitutive acts that "generate, record, and transmit knowledge" through embodiment (Taylor 21). She asks, "If...[we were to] look through the lens of performed, embodied behaviors, what would we know that we do not know now?" (xviii). The implication is that certain kinds of knowledge can only be discovered in performance, because they require co-presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by "being there," "being a part of the transmission" (20). Before producing that knowledge however, the event-state, or as George sometimes puts it, the "experience," is "simply the direct, immediate, particular, singular apprehension of a contact – between an 'object' and a 'subject'. Experiences thus postulate and even construct objects and subjects as their two assumed, necessary poles but, until they do that, while they remain pure experiences, while they sit on the threshold, they are nothing but an axis, nothing but a connection, a relationship" (George 30). George believes that it is in the event relationship that we construct our "truths" in performance (31). For this reason, theatre artists try to extend this state for as long as possible. But eventually spectator and performer will "vacate" their co-habitation of the axis itself and return to the poles.

There is [...] in any act and process of experiencing, an inevitable tendency to vacate this seat, to move from the act and process of relating to the postulate of a *relationship* and from there to the deduction of the poles – which are then reified, hypostatized into object and subject.... This process happens very fast and compulsively: we are forever turning primary experiences into ‘knowledge’, forever constructing metaphysical binaries out of thresholds. (30-31, italics his)

The event-state is as important in documentary theatre, as it is in fictional theatre. Without it, the document remains just that – a document. It remains textual. Data, textual narrative, policy, political agenda – these can be disseminated by other effective means such as the conference, the press release, and the protest march. In the event-state, documentary theatre goes from referencing the document to embodying it. George laments the temporary status of the event-state; in documentary theatre it is essential that it be temporary. It is critical both to take part in the event-state and to retreat from it. Like fictional theatre, doc theatre depends on the event-state to generate a primary experience that will make the polemic and the data corporeal. This corporeal sense of the play’s argument will be a touchstone upon which the spectator constructs her “truths,” her judgment of the issue. While this experience is a crucial part of the argument, the spectator is alternately asked to critically assess the political agenda of the playmakers. The spectator must pass judgment and, if she agrees that an injustice has been committed, take corrective action. On the one hand she is presented with documentary evidence; on the other she takes part, through the event-state, in the creation of evidence. She retreats from the event-state in order to critically assess the knowledge gained in that state. So there is a necessary seesaw between critical distance and intimate participation. The seesaw is meant to arm the spectator, to spur her to action. George calls the event-state

one of “pure process” (31), which means anything can come from it; change can occur – the constructedness of the status quo has been revealed as such; change can be imagined. Documentary theatre usually advocates some kind of change. The event-state – if it occurs – is part of the argument for change. It’s supposed to encourage action and agency on the part of the spectator.

In most of the theatre performances Fischer-Lichte describes, there is an opening for, and an expectation of, spectator involvement. Of one particular performance she notes, the “*mise en scene* established certain situations to which all participants were exposed and to which each individual responded differently” (*Transformative* 164). The spectators physically intervened in the performance. This is not obviously the case with other performances she describes, like Castellucci’s *Giulio Cesare*. In this kind of performance the audience is in the more traditional *passive* mode. “Passive spectator” has come to mean someone who sits and receives and by definition does not act. George challenges this notion. These “physically inert bodies are [...] the necessary precondition of a cognitive and emotional intensity [...]” (George 28), meaning they require stillness in order to focus concentration.

For all too long spectators have been equated with readers as decipherers of meaning. Classically, a spectator is supposed to ‘read’ a director’s meanings which are themselves readings of the author’s meaning which are themselves readings of the world’s meanings.... That may have some validity in the context of a given text; it has no validity in the context of a performance which is not an exercise in linguistics or in hermeneutics but one in semiosis. Performances create significations as they unfold but they do more than that: they create their own shadows, their own alternatives too. Or rather spectators do that: speculate on possible alternatives. The ‘passive spectator’ is as much a fiction as

the prediction that they will obediently follow the narrative's path towards closure. Even in traditional theatre-of-narrative-and-character, the spectator never was the passive sponge directors may wish them to be. (28)

Fischer-Lichte also challenges the authorial model of theatre: "The director, although he is the ultimate decision maker, is not comparable to the author of a poem, who creates his work of art on his own" (*Transformative* 164). She tracks the development of a work through planning and rehearsal stages and notes the number of co-creators involved in the process, from actors to designers to technical people. Finally it is in performance that most bets are off; there are too many variables to contend with, most significantly the spectator, who completes the "autopoietic feedback loop" (co-creates the event) (164). This "loop" is affected only by what actually appears in performance, regardless of what was previously planned (164). Depending on the kind of performance, the amount of spectator agency the theatre artists will risk giving to the spectator varies. Using *Nanay* as a case study, I will explore scenarios that exploit the more traditional performance-audience relationship, in which spectator and performer space are clearly separated, as well as a scenario in which there are no performers, only spectators and aesthetic space. These examples approach the actual-fictive tension in different ways, each with the intent of creating the conditions for an event-state to occur.

3 THE DOCUMENTIVE

Figure 2 The “Yaletown” scene (A slide projection on a scrim of Patrick Keating and Alexa Devine)



(Photo by Andrew Lyon)

Let me introduce an example from *Nanay*, the “Yaletown scene,” that employs the same tactics used in fictional theatre but is shadowed by actual-fictive tensions in a number of ways. The performance takes place on the second floor of an art gallery/performance space known as Chapel Arts. The ceiling is about eight feet high, the floors carpeted. The setting is intimate. The room’s architecture creates a slight proscenium arch between one gallery and the next. In other scenes the audience has mingled with the performers, but here we have taken advantage of the arch to create a conventional theatre-like situation. Putting a projection scrim across the arch has reinforced the separation between spectator and performer. At the same time, this

distance is slight – the spectators are no more than two to four meters from the performers. Spectator-to-spectator distance is also less than usual: they sit together on benches and must make physical contact with one another. An image is projected onto the scrim that shows a couple in matching white terry-towel bathrobes, holding coffee mugs. They look out at the audience from a bedroom. Text on the image introduces them as “Richard and Stephanie” who live in Vancouver’s Yaletown and have two small children. The image is underscored with a version of the bossa nova classic “Waters of March (Agua de Marco)” by Antonio Carlos Jobim. It skips along lightly, featuring the whispery, vibrato-less, female vocal performance typical of the style. Matched with the image, the effect is comedic. After witnessing the previous scene, in which Nadine struggles to find affordable care for her mother, the new image and music seem to suggest that the problems of the Yaletown couple are less weighty. The image dissolves to reveal the very same two actors, now live behind the scrim, wearing the same costumes and standing in almost identical positions in the exact same bedroom (looking out at the same audience of course). The bossa fades. Richard and Stephanie speak to the audience. They smile and project the feel of a successful, well-adjusted couple. (The following stage directions were not scripted; they reflect what occurred in performance.)

RICHARD: When Stephen was six months old, we chose a Filipino nanny because we heard that they were very caring for the very young ones. So we basically *only* interviewed Filipino nannies.

STEPHANIE: We found out about Marlana from a friend of ours. How we worked it out was like this: we had 2 bedrooms upstairs and one room that we used as an office. So we sacrificed that. (*She produces the information booklet*) In the information booklet it told

what a live-in caregiver is entitled to have. And it was a room with sleeping arrangements, and a lock on the door. Although no one's ever locked the door.

The couple smiles at the absurdity of having to lock the door, as the previous musical track fades up. They sip from their coffee mugs in unison, taking a long draught, sighing together, smiling contentedly at each other. A warm glow, as if from the rays of dawn light filtering softly through balcony windows, lights them from stage left. They address the audience again.

RICHARD: And then we *also* gave her separate bathroom facilities. And she didn't need a separate phone, but we gave her one. We gave her a TV, a desk, an answering machine.

A dirty "polluted" light arises from stage right. Richard and Stephanie turn to view it. They look troubled.

It's different than working in Singapore or Hong Kong. Marlana told us stories of where the nannies were sleeping. It wasn't a pretty scene.

STEPHANIE: They're treated like second-class citizens in other countries!

RICHARD: At first she wanted to call us 'Madam' and 'Sir'! But we said, 'Wooahhh, wait a minute.' I think she was kind of taken aback by that! And we said to her:

RICHARD AND STEPHANIE: "That's not the Canadian way!"

Lights fade on the couple. A slide of Richard and Stephanie in the exact pose they will be seen next is projected onto the scrim. Bossa track underneath. (Pratt, Nanay 13-14)

The above scene raises a number of issues regarding its status as part of a documentary play, including issues of embodiment, theatricalized or aesthetic space, performance style, and how performance time is pressured by represented time. How each of these was treated in the production complicated the spectator's relationship to the document. Documentary theatre has often positioned itself as a moral corrective to the

entrenched privilege represented by the corporate media (Martin 12). It attempts to reframe the way public opinion has been shaped by the corporate media (Paget 59). It either re-interprets evidence provided in the mainstream or draws attention to what was omitted from such accounts. It can also present its own researched documentary evidence. As Martin notes, “so much documentary theatre has been made in order to ‘set the record straight’ or to bring materials otherwise ignored to the public’s attention [...]” (14). At the advent of German documentary theatre in the 1920s, director Erwin Piscator claimed to be providing “conclusive proof,” based on “scientific analysis of the material” (92). Almost a century later Martin contradicts this position: “Governments ‘spin’ the facts in order to tell stories. Theatre spins them right back in order to tell different stories” (14). By stories, we mean “true” stories. Doc theatre derives its authority from reference to the verifiable document, which is a “true” story. In a fictional play, that which is referenced is *fictive*. In a documentary play, it is *documentive* – the transcription of testimony. I’ll illustrate this by adjusting the terminology of the basic binary: in the place of *fictive* I’ll put the word *documentive*. The binary can now be stated as actual-*documentive*. By *documentive* I mean documentary evidence that the *actual* (the materially present performer and performance space) is referencing. Included in “documentary evidence” is personal testimony, the original testifying subject, published documents, anything on public record that is being referenced, unpublished first-hand accounts, etc. The *actual* is the performer and the performance site (and everything and everyone in it). Following the fictive theatre convention of having an actor stand in for a character, the actor in documentary theatre stands in for a *subject* (an actual person who has given testimony that has been recorded). And where a piece of stage furniture, a prop,

or, say, a lighting state might denote an imagined place, object, or time of day, in doc theatre these elements denote or signify an *actual* place and time, concurrent with performance or remembered. The theatre artist weights the scales evenly, or on one side or the other. The spectator oscillates between the actual (the performer body) and the *documentive* (referenced evidence).

In the above scene, all of the words spoken by the two actors were extracted “verbatim” from an interview and edited by two researchers, Caleb Johnston and Geraldine Pratt. The testimony, therefore, is a primary-source document. But it is not forensic. It’s a highly subjective document that has gone through the following interpretive stages: an event or series of events has occurred in the past; the subject who took part in these events recalls the events; these recollections (imperfect memories) are recorded; the recording is transcribed; if the recording is not in English it is also translated; the transcription is then edited (including being re-ordered) by the writers to provide a performance text; the performance text is then embodied by an actor who performs it in a theatricalized space configured by the director, scenographer, and other designers. The actor creates a physical life that may have little to do with the physical life of the original subject. The subject’s testimony has not been corroborated – no investigator has inspected the scene of the crime, so to speak. We are dealing with very personal, very subjective remembrances. Which is not to say that they are false or dishonest. But legal or journalistic standards have likely not been adhered to. In court, a judge and jury carefully scrutinize evidence. In a play that asks the spectator to be judge and jury, as a documentary play does, the spectator is asked to examine the evidence, both as it is embodied before her and as she imagines it in its referenced state (the

original transcription, recording, oral testimony, or memory). Therefore to Fischer-Lichte's oscillation, a swinging between the poles of actual and fictive, documentary theatre adds a further oscillation by replacing fictive with *documentive*. The spectator also swings between "true" and "false," between what she assesses as valid evidence and invalid evidence. She tries to determine whether the playmakers' intent and methodology are trustworthy (to the extent they are transparent). "Depending on who you are, what your politics are, and so on, documentary theatre will seem to be 'getting at the truth' or 'telling another set of lies'" (Martin 14). In documentary theatre the "archive" (the document) and the "repertoire" (performance) are blurred (10). Following the poststructuralist line, Carol Martin not only insists on the constructedness of every narrative, but also argues that "There is no 'really real' anywhere in the world of representation" (14). But while live performance is always ephemeral, the "repertoire" (Martin uses Diane Taylor's terminology) is not *un-real*. Martin is correct in noting, "The hidden seams of documentary theatre raise questions about the continuum between documentation and simulation" (11). It is this seam that the spectator picks at in the *documentive* end of the binary. But as Taylor, George, Fischer-Lichte and Boal all argue, knowledge is *created* in performance, in the event-state. Representation does not disqualify constructs as un-real; it heightens awareness of the constructedness of the real and, through the actual-documentive tension, allows us to take part in the construction of a new "real." So, while the spectator wrestles with the referenced document and the artists' methodology, she also becomes a co-creator of the representation by engaging with the material factors before her, primarily the actors.

4 EMBODIED DOCUMENT

In the Yaletown scene Patrick Keating, who plays Richard, and Alexa Devine, who plays Stephanie, are the dominant material factors of the scene. They embody verbatim testimony. However, they are first met in a dis-embodied state, appearing in a still image projected onto a scrim. In this respect they exist as an object to be observed. When the image dissolves, we see the live actors behind the scrim. For a few moments they are in tableau, not moving. So an after-image of the couple-as-artifact lingers. The projected text also has disappeared, but it too leaves a trace. The spectator has the opportunity to consider the “document” before her; to interpret the signals sent during the transition from image to live action, such as the costumes, the stance of the actors, and the music. The document then comes to life. It speaks and moves. It is embodied. What has been held at a distance now becomes magnified through this particular aestheticisation of space (Boal 19-20) and the actor’s living, breathing presence, which is in close proximity to the spectator. Already there is a tremendous push-and-pull on the spectator. Richard and Stephanie have been introduced as actual people, living in Yaletown. The projected textual information is meant to be understood as factual. The setting looks like a plausible replica of a Yaletown bedroom. The actors begin to tell their story. The words spoken are verbatim testimony. A very complex relationship of spectator to embodied performance has begun. It started as subject-object: the subject-spectator observing the object-image of the Yaletown couple. That object-image ghosts the following scene, which itself began as a tableau. But now Richard and Stephanie are speaking, up close and personal. Over the next few segments the performers, together

with the scenographic elements, will try to break down the subject-object relationship through a number of *affective* measures. The “otherness” of the couple will be challenged as the spectator is encouraged to identify with, and become implicated in their perspective.

Embodiment is one of the keys to understanding the transformation of the subject-object relationship – a relationship that has been posited by past theatre theorists as the basic fact of performance – into a subject-subject relationship which makes the event-state possible. Fischer-Lichte points out that the dualistic split between text and performance has always been a conceptual one, that it does not hold up as the basic experience of performance which, while it is occurring, becomes a primary mode of experience for all participants (*Transformative* 29-37). George also relegates the script to a secondary level of importance.

The text was always only an approximation – a derivative – of the potential of performance which writers imagine in-the-head and which is the real *a priori* metatext which precedes verbal transcription and transformation. Drama texts were only ever hypotheses of future possible realizations and re-transformations: they never were nor could be performed *as they are*, and the theatre was and is only the medium through which they pass. (12, italics his)

Schechner notes that even in rehearsal the text is not so much a directive as it is a contingency: “It’s not so much a thought-out system of trial and error as it is a playing around with themes, actions, gestures, fantasies, words: whatever’s being worked on” (*Between* 120).

The production doesn’t ‘come out’ of the text; it is generated in rehearsal in an effort to ‘meet’ the text’. And when you see a play and recognize it as familiar you are referring

back to earlier productions, not to the playscript. An unproduced play is not a homunculus but a shard of an as yet unassembled whole. (*Between* 120)

This view challenges what is sometimes almost a precept in documentary theatre, the sanctity and authority of the document. What George explains is the impossibility of preserving that sanctity in theatre, documentary or otherwise. If it were possible to perform scripts “as they are,” then we would be able to produce an authoritative Othello; Laurence Olivier’s would be the same as John Gielgud’s (States, *Phenomenological* 30). Between the Vancouver and Berlin productions of *Nanay* different actors played two of the female parts. The verbatim text remained the same. Delia Brett, who replaced Alexa Devine, produced a bitchier, more assertive Stephanie. Erin Wells replaced Karen Rae as Nadine in the “Elder Care” scene. The scene was reconceptualized for the new and very different performance setting at the Hebbel am Ufer theatre. At the HAU the scene took place in the fourth floor lobby of the theatre. I wanted to break down even the vestiges of separation between spectator and performer areas that were part of the spatial configuration in the Vancouver version. In Berlin, Wells/Nadine began as if she had been invited by the theatre company to tell her story. She emerged from the audience, stood close, and presented slides of her mother and her mother’s domestic worker. Wells’ performance was edgier and emotionally more transparent than Rae’s. Same script, different emotional impact.

Whatever the source for a particular performance has been, textual or otherwise, we do not read performances as texts; we take them in through the particularity of the performer, kinesthetically, acoustically, visually, and sometimes through physical contact. The performer is not materially fragmented, nor is she part body and part mind. She is in Fischer-Lichte’s terms “embodied mind” (*Transformative* 99). She is a *presence*

that the spectator recognizes as a non-dualistic being. “The term presence,” writes Fischer-Lichte, “stresses the becoming-conspicuous and becoming-present of the ordinary, experienced physically as an event” (99). In this “becoming present” the spectator is able to feel the particularity of her *own* being as embodied mind. Fischer-Lichte writes:

Presence does not make something extraordinary appear. Instead, it marks the emergence of something very ordinary and develops it into an event: the nature of man as embodied mind. To experience the other and oneself as present means to experience them as embodied minds; thus, ordinary existence is experienced as extraordinary – as transformed and even transfigured. (99)

Even so, imagination comes into play. Guided by how the theatre artists have weighted the performance, meaning at which times they have foregrounded the actor or the character, the spectator will shuttle between the two until she arrives in the event-state. Bodies materially present in theatricalized space and bodies imagined coincide and conflict to create a double vision (This vision becomes single in the event-state.) In fictional theatre the double vision is of actor-character. In documentary theatre, character representation is not of a person imagined in the mind of a playwright but of an actual person. Therefore we must replace the word “character” with the word “subject.” The binary of actor-*character* becomes actor-*subject*. How does this alter the affective presence of the performer? In Fischer-Lichte’s description of the performer as embodied-mind a quality of presence is transmitted from the performer to the spectator. The performer body is “brought forth as energetic” (97). This energy “can be sensed by the spectators as it circulates in space and affects, even tinges, them” (98). This energy is linked to consciousness, which for Fischer-Lichte can only be expressed through the

performer's body (97-98). The spectators "sense" the energy/consciousness "through their bodies" (97). "Through the performer's presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind" (99). Presence has to do with how the performer is foregrounded, how she inhabits space, and how she negotiates the power relationship with the spectators (50).³ To a certain extent it is from the force of her presence that she draws authority and achieves authenticity. Documentary theatre qualifies this authenticity by claiming to reference authoritative documentation – like the testimony given by a subject. The subject herself *is* documentary evidence. The performer embodies that subject-evidence. At the *actual* end of the actual-documentive tension, the materially present embodied mind (the performer) becomes a site for further tension: she utters words that have been spoken by an actual person. These words have a special kind of authority – they have been documented and are verifiable (such is the pretense). Therefore, the added tension that documentary places on the materially present performer is *also* documentive. The documentive exerts pressure at both ends of the binary. Because of this added contradiction, Fischer-Lichte's term "embodied mind" can

³ Fischer-Lichte defines three types of presence which are hard to separate. The "weak concept of presence" describes "the sheer presence of the actor's phenomenal body"; phenomenal as opposed to semiotic – actor body not character

acter (*Transformative* 94). This kind of presence impresses itself on the spectators "through purely physical eroticism." The actor mysteriously affects the spectators, "claiming their undivided attention" (95). The second kind of presence – the "strong concept of presence" – is similar but creates heightened self-awareness in the spectator: "The spectators sense that the actor is present in an unusually intense way, granting them in turn an intense sensation of themselves as present" (96). In the third kind – the "radical concept of presence" – the spectators not only feel themselves as intensely present, they feel themselves as "embodied mind": "Through the performer's presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming – he perceives the circulating energy as a transformative and vital energy" (99). For Fischer-Lichte the erasure of the mind-body dichotomy represents a "civilizing process," one that, in the realisation of mind-body unity, confers happiness upon the individual (99).

be replaced with *embodied document*. The actual-documentive tension is performed as such.

Let me illustrate this further. The document in a testimonial play is an *idea*. This idea is documentive. I use documentive as an adjective to describe the quality of the evidence rather than using the noun “document,” which denotes an actual thing. I describe the document as idea, as *documentive*, for the following reason: the spectator has no access to the document except through the utterances of the performer. She must imagine the document, and the basis for that imagined document is the performer’s embodied utterances, gestures, etc. The spectator must build her picture of the document based on the performance. The directional flow between performance and document begins with performance, not the other way around. Performance is primary. It would be another matter if the spectator had previous access to the documents being referenced. In this case however, embodied performance is the first point of contact with the document which, because it is only imagined, is an idea. Therefore the referenced document itself is *documentive* rather than document.

To summarize:

- In a documentary play that doesn’t give the spectator access to referenced documents the performer defines the document for the spectator.
Performance comes first. The document is imagined based on performance. It is therefore *documentive*.
- Embodied-document (performer) is *documentive* (performer becomes document).

- The documentive resolves in the performer body and gives authority, or special character, to the performer's presence.

Because *Nanay* was produced twice before the writing of this paper, I was able to observe different actors performing the same role. As noted earlier, the differences were marked: each actor's relationship to the document was *documentively* distinct. In the role of Nadine both actors, Rae and Wells, were Caucasian and of English descent. From a semiotic perspective we might say that "within a range of a certain typology" (States, *Great* 165) different possibilities of expression and meaning were "bodied forth," to use Garner's expression (13). The authority of the document rested on the particularity of each performer, and each performer produced a different *documentive* experience. I will use one more example that I think further undermines the plausibility of the primacy of the document over the documentive. I saw two different productions of the documentary play *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, one at the Seattle Repertory Theater (2007) and one in Vancouver produced by Newworld Theatre (2008). The subject of the play is Rachel Corrie, a twenty-three year old blond, blue-eyed, Caucasian woman. In Seattle she was played by Marya Sea Kaminski, a slightly older blond, blue-eyed, Caucasian woman. In Vancouver Corrie was played by Adrienne Wong, who is of half-Chinese, half-English descent (She tends to be "read" as Chinese Canadian by audiences, an identity she unpacks in her play, *Mixie and the Half-breeds*.) The Seattle production took a very literal approach to the text, staying firmly in the style of realism. The Vancouver production had a more abstract setting and at times Wong displayed a more stylized take on character movement. The script, extracted from Corrie's diaries and emails, was the same in both circumstances. But these were two very different Rachels. Kaminski was

visceral where Wong was cerebral. Kaminski is, and sounded like, an American from Washington State. Wong is, and sounded like, a Canadian from Alberta. Kaminski went for visceral intimacy. Wong went for thoughtful intimacy. At the peak moment of both productions I was moved to tears. The quality of that emotion was different in each context. Where did the authority of the document lie? It lay with the performer. Kaminski and Wong embodied Corrie in ways that were particular to each of them. They became embodied document. The script itself, in performance, was never a document; it was documentive.

5 GENRE: REALISM, SATIRE, REALITY

As the spectator simultaneously takes in actor and subject, she entertains a double vision. That double vision coheres in the material unity of the performer who, during the event-state, becomes embodied document. At other times, through gesture and vocal tone, the actor is able to distance himself from the illusion of character and draw attention to the meta-theatrics. In the Yaletown example, distantiation (Pavis 109) is aided by the juxtaposition of projected still images with live action, and the ironic use of musical underscoring. Thus the spectator flows in and out of identification with the actor/subject, who himself flows in and out of the illusion of character.⁴ The logic of this is almost inescapable when dealing with a performance that employs the rhetoric of fiction under the pretense of presenting authoritative documentary evidence. (It employs the rhetoric of fiction in the sense that it has been edited to create a dramatic arc that did not exist in the original interview.) The paradoxical nature of the enterprise is further complicated in the Yaletown scene by the use of satire. Satire can create distance. Boal makes this point when discussing genre:

Whatever the form of theatre, the actor always establishes a binary relationship with the character she is playing - attraction and repulsion, fusion and dissociation. According to style or theatrical genre, the distance between actor and character can increase or diminish. In drama or tragedy, this distance diminishes; in comedy or farce it increases. It

⁴ Schechner describes “effective” performance as a “paradigm of liminality” (*Between* 123). “All effective performances share this ‘not-not not’ quality: Olivier is not Hamlet, but also he is not not Hamlet: his performance is between a denial of being another (= I am me) and a denial of not being another (= I am Hamlet). Performer training focuses its techniques not on making one person into another but on permitting the performer to act in between identities; in this sense performing is a paradigm of liminality.”

diminishes in a Stanislavskian performance and increases in a Brechtian performance. It is smaller for the actor, greater for the clown. (23)

As director I chose to satirize the couple in the Yaletown scene, partly because I wanted to highlight the race- and class-based prejudices of the couple and draw out their sense of entitlement, and partly because it was through satire and not other styles that we were best able to animate the subjects. For some spectators, however, realism is a marker of truth. The use of satire or parody violates that sense of truth. Realism is equated with moral integrity. Van Alphen notes this problem: “Documentary realism has become the mode of representation that novelists and artists must adopt if they are to persuade their audience of their moral integrity – that is, their reliance on cognitive intentions and their rejection of aesthetic considerations” (qtd. in Salverson 20). British playwright David Hare, a proponent of documentary theatre, proclaims that “All revolutions in art [...] are a return to realism”; he condemns most other “art forms,” which, “in the hands of metropolitan elites, tend to drift away from reality”; he asserts that theatre that uses “real people” is “a welcome corrective to the cosy art-for-art’s-sake racket which theatre all too easily becomes!” (qtd. in Bottoms 56). But as Bottoms points out, “realism and reality are not the same thing,” and “unmediated access to ‘the real’ is not something the theatre can ever honestly provide” (57). The creation of the event-state qualifies Bottom’s view. As noted earlier, it generates first-hand experience. It creates a “real.” Bottom’s separation of “realism” and “reality” is conceptual. The aesthetic is as real as the non-aesthetic depending on where you’re standing. But his point regarding the dubious moral cache of realism is correct. For Hare realism is the standard of moral authenticity. Does this mean documentary plays must forever be bound to the genre? It sure didn’t start out that way when Piscator threw every stage trick he knew at what Attilio Favorini calls “the

Ur-text” of the genre – Piscator’s 1925 play *In Spite of Everything!* (xviii). The past century of documentary theatre has provided examples of non-realistic staging too numerous to count. George argues that realism is in fact counterproductive to inducing the liminal state: “Realistic theatre sought to overcome [space-time doubling] by merging the two ‘realities’, constructing the one ‘here’ as a mirror image of the other, reducing the binary to one preferred choice. Either the theatre ‘disappeared’ – into a quasi-realism – or the realism disappeared – into a pan-theatricality” (George 21). Bert States adds the following: “what we call realism is no closer to reality than many forms of representation we would call stylized [...] The suspension of disbelief does not depend in the least on what we would today call a photographic likeness of the image to reality. It depends only on the power of the image to serve as a channel for what of reality is of immediate interest to the audience” (*Great* 185). In States’ view that image has a shelf life. The overuse of a style eventually robs it of its ability to surprise. It becomes a lifeless cliché, “invisible”; innovation is required to recapture the spectator’s attention (186).

One of the reasons for moving away from realism in *Nanay*, whenever possible, was to offer the spectator a fresh lens through which to view the play’s main issue. The majority of actor-driven installations in the show were performed in a realistic style, although settings varied from naturalistic to symbolic. Some non-Filipino spectators were offended by the satiric representation employed in the Yaletown scene. They let their displeasure be known in the talkbacks and on survey forms. They complained that the couple was unfairly ridiculed. For them satire had no connection to truthful or ethical representation. On the other hand many non-Filipinos, and *all* the Filipinos I spoke to, saw it as an accurate reflection of the situation. Depending on the spectator’s comfort

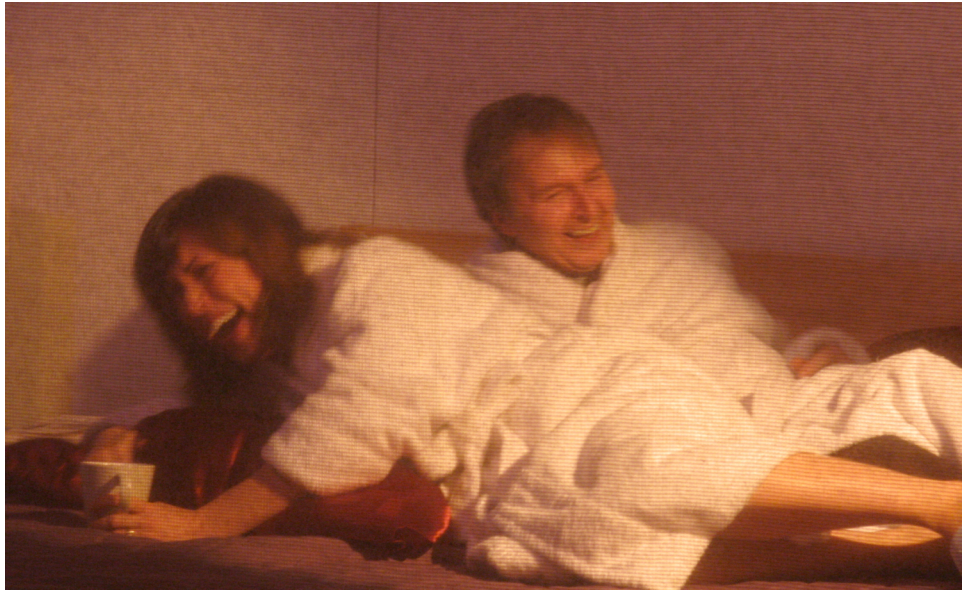
with a given theatrical style, conventions associated with satire either diminished the authenticity of the embodied-document or conversely gave it greater authority. As we continue through the Yaletown scene, we'll see how anti-realistic modes were employed as a foil – a challenge to the more automatic identification that comes (for some) with realism.

At the outset of the *Nanay* project, we decided to attempt to create conditions for intimate contact between spectator and performer. This would be part of the seesaw of the play: we would try to pull the spectators into the subject's perspective during the scenes, then allow for reflective distance as they traveled from one installation to the next. In the Yaletown scene, more than the other scenarios that featured actors, we tried to create a seesaw within the scene itself. In Vancouver it came right after the Elder Care scene featuring Nadine. That scene was performed as straight-up realism. In response to Karen Rae's performance many non-Filipino spectators expressed their sense of connection to Nadine's plight. Here realism, with the aid of close proximity and direct address, was affective, meaning Rae's performance produced an empathetic response in many of the spectators (there's more on affect and affect theory coming up in the next section). Within the performance codes employed by that style Nadine seemed like a "real" person, and many non-Filipino spectators felt that they could sympathize with her plight. Nadine was also affective for some Filipino spectators (some of whom were domestic workers), but in a different way. To them she was the enemy, the oppressor, and they felt no sympathy with her whatsoever. As performed in Vancouver, Rae as Nadine seems to have elicited uncomplicated responses in the spectators – they were either for or

against her. The Yaletown scene attempted a more subtle and complicated affectivity, even when painting in broad strokes.

6 AFFECT AND IDENTIFICATION

Figure 3 Affective Laughter (Where's the document?)



(Actors behind a scrim. Photo by Andrew Lyon)

After presenting the Yaletown couple as the ridiculous and smug “other,” I tried to break down distance and encourage identification through the use of affective laughter. At one point Richard condescendingly remarks that his Filipino nanny’s dream is to work at McDonalds. Stephanie sighs knowingly. In rehearsal we turned this into a shared chuckle, and then extended it into full-blown laughter. I then constructed an entire mini-scene in which the couple do nothing but laugh hysterically at the thought of the domestic worker’s dream of getting out of live-in domestic work and into a job at McDonalds. This was pushed to such an extreme that the actors, affecting each other, often found themselves in fits of convulsive laughter. In rehearsal those of us watching became infected by the laugh. In performance the spectators usually reacted the same way. The intent was to implicate the spectator in the couple’s worldview by having them share a

laugh – if we can laugh together we must have something in common. Affect theory is a large subject to deal with in detail in this paper, but let me briefly offer some support from that quarter for my choice of employing affective laughter as a tactic. While affectivity does not necessarily exclude psychological causality, the principal means by which one human being triggers an emotional response in another is through intensity of expression – surface expression (Frank 151-152): “it offers an understanding of expression in terms of intensity and exteriority, not interiority” (152). In other words: you yawn, I yawn. There need not be a deep psychological trigger for my response. “What counts,” writes Frank, “is expressive intensity rather than emotional authenticity” (151). Does this mean that emotion is not felt beneath the surface? Regardless of what is *beneath the surface*, if such a region exists, it is only on the surface that emotion can be revealed (special psychic abilities notwithstanding). This may be a conundrum. It is likely that most of us feel interiority to ourselves. And through logic and empathic understanding we can assume that others also feel their interiority. Does the idea of surface affect eliminate interiority? Perhaps Schechner addresses this: “The so-called surface of emotion – the look on the face, the tone of the skin, the tilt of the body, the placement and moves of muscles – is also the emotion’s ‘depth’” (*Magnitudes* 322).⁵ In affect theory surface *is* depth. Or from a phenomenological perspective (which overlaps

⁵ I’m aware that Schechner and Turner have been challenged on their structuralist views of ritual and theatre across diverse cultures. For example, in reference to the essay I have just cited, Gilbert and Tompkins write, “Attempts to find both ritual and drama in as many situations/cultures as possible do not provide a greater understanding of either: instead, both ritual and drama are reduced to criteria that support [...] homogenising arguments. [...] Schechner’s [models ascribe] ritual status to so many activities that ritual becomes diluted to the point of being any meaningful activity that has a sense of ceremony, an actant, and an audience” (55-56). I’m not in a position to assess the validity of Schechner’s and Turner’s work cross-culturally or outside of the Western theatre “ritual,” but their models seem to hold true for a number of Western theatre genres, and perhaps even represent “a form discoverable in all theatre” (Carlson 17).

with affect theory), it is only through surface that depth is accessible. An actor reveals himself to us in his visible aspects. Through apprehension of outward appearance we intuit the totality of the actor's phenomenological presence, and understand our connectedness (intersubjectivity) with him; we are of the same world (Merleau-Ponty ctd. in Garner 3-4), and the world is real, not a delusional mental projection. In apprehending the "other," we do not start with an *a priori* (a psychological history; a back-story); we go on the best evidence we have – that which is apparent.

In most of the *Nanay* scenes we offered a minimum of back-story. The stories, although they were spoken in the past tense, were mostly confined to a short period of personal history that could in a sense be re-lived by the performer in the performative present. The subjects presented didn't do much looking back for causal origins to their present problems; they looked for solutions to their current predicaments. Their actions were goal-oriented. To put it in the parlance of a certain "cybernetic" acting theory, a subject does not run to the door to escape the bear that is chasing him, he runs to the door in order to get on the other side and safely lock it; he is also considering contingencies such as running out the back door and onto the roof if the front door doesn't lock (Cohen 33-36). The nanny is not coming to Canada to escape poverty; she is coming here to stake a claim on a different future. From an affective point of view the spectators don't need to know all the causal factors that lay in the past in order to make sense of, and identify with, the situation before them. Intensity of expression is enough. The actor's presence will do it, with the help of scenographic "intensity." Perhaps more than any other moment in the Yaletown scene, during the laughing sequence the actors broke illusionistic pretenses and undertook the direct task of trying to make the audience laugh with them. It

is worth noting that in doing so they were also breaking a social taboo, one that is also observed in theatre (often for the purpose of violating it). In conventional theatre the audience and performer areas are usually carefully divided. When a performer does look directly at the audience it's usually from a safe distance (which is not to say the spectator isn't intimidated by the act). The more intimate the setting, the more invasive the gaze. Depending on the spectator (and performer) direct contact will be terrifying, exciting, or possibly both. Adam Frank describes the dangers of this encounter and its potential for mutual humiliation:

Or think of the basic situation of attending live theater, one situation in which we understand ourselves to be permitted the experience of uninhibited staring at the face of a stranger; but think, too, of the potential for acute embarrassment if your stare, as an audience member, is suddenly returned by the performer on stage and you are picked out for some interaction. This may be one reason why live theater or performance is considered "risky: in a way that, say, film never is: the risk is specifically one of humiliation, and not only for the performer who may make a mistake and the audience member who may experience the vicarious shame of this mistake. More basic, I think, is the shame that can at anytime take place upon the reinstallation of the taboos on looking: the risk of the humiliating acknowledgement of the structural, affective conditions of live theater. (163)

Frank puts his finger on what makes the live theatre experience so unique, exciting, or potentially dreadful. Theatrical performance often risks breaking the social taboo of not looking directly; it tries to make its own "boundary issues" the audience's (166). In a sited play like *Nanay*, where the all participants are in extremely close quarters, obvious mutual looking is difficult to avoid. Normally in theatre the *look-look* relationship

operates within the relatively safe boundaries of conventional roles – spectator and performer. When these roles are destabilized and the spectator becomes an “actant,” or the performer surrenders his power position, the predictability of the performance outcome is put at risk (*Transformative* 42), deliberately so in most of the performances described by Fischer-Lichte. In *Nanay* the role of the spectator as *passive* watcher was most obviously destabilized in the “Object Room” (a room that had no actors and featured a replica of a domestic worker’s bedroom; I will describe this scenario in detail later) and the “Talkback” (a facilitated discussion between spectators, which included non-stakeholders as well as employers, domestic workers, activists, and the theatre artists). To a certain extent, “role-reversal” was in play, altering the terms of co-presence and allowing for a high level of unpredictability (See Conclusion and *Transformative* 40-51). But even in the slightly more conventional configurations, boundary transgression for the purpose of creating intimate affective identification was the goal. The power dynamics are complex. In such an intimate setting, the individual spectator has a greater potential to influence the performer. He has more agency than usual. On the other hand, the performer, due to convention and preparation, is in a stronger power position (*Transformative* 179). He has greater capacity to set the terms of the *look-look*. A courageous spectator can destabilize this power position. He need not be terribly overt. He may withhold expected laughter or make a well-placed derisive grunt that becomes a critical commentary.

The dynamics of affectivity described above are not specific to a documentary play. They are part of a complex set of tensions that help induce the event-state in any theatre performance. But in a documentary play each of these tensions is under further

pressure from the documentive. Affectivity is one factor that helps to break down the “othering” of performer and spectator. In the process the spectator moves from imagining document or assessing the documentive to taking part in the creation of evidence.

Through infective laughter critical distance collapses. On the one hand the Yaletown couple have been set up for mockery: they wear matching white terry towel bath robes, often move in concert, and sip from their coffee mugs at the same time. But as director I was also going for comfortable, cosy, and likeable-despite-their-faults qualities. I wanted to show that it is the system, not just individuals, that is to blame. I deliberately copped the feel of a coffee commercial, underscoring the projections and transitions with bossa nova, going for the trope of a fresh-brewed, after-sex smile. In the context of the scene, this trope can be interpreted as satiric, parodic, or ironic. It is also (to some) comfortably familiar. The gambit was that this familiarity would help with the moment of affective laughter. Regardless of familiarity with that cliché, the simple affectivity of laughter would be enough. If the performer becomes embodied mind, then the spectator may be able to feel himself as embodied mind. Distance is dissolved. The tension between embodied performance and referenced testimony produces the desired oscillation that allows for spectators and performers to become mutually engaged in an event-state.

Below is a summary of some of the tensions explored so far.

Table 1**A Table of Tensions I**

Fictional Theatre	Documentary Theatre
Actual-fictive	Actual- <i>documentive</i>
Performer-character	Performer- <i>subject</i>
Embodied mind	Embodied <i>document</i>

Tensions create the non-dualistic event-state

(Not directly represented in this schematic are realism – anti-realism, and spectator
distantiation-identification.)

As the Yaletown scene progresses, two other subjects are introduced. The comedic feel that has been governing the live actor scenes is interspersed with slide projections not only of Richard and Stephanie, but also of one of their children and of their domestic worker. The child, ostensibly the couple's son, first appears jumping on the couple's bed in a slide projection.

Figure 4 The Yaletown couple's child (Slide projected on the front scrim)



(Photo by Andrew Lyon)

The idea was to present pseudo-documentary evidence that would remind the spectator that the couple do have legitimate child care needs and are trying to find the best solution they can for their boy. The child is not an embodied-document but an image. The images of the child are not satiric, although there is a hint of irony. They counter the satire and offer another lens through which to view the subjects: yes, the couple is a bit ridiculous and unaware of their privilege, but are they ultimately dismissible? This position is further complicated by the next subject introduced: the domestic worker – again in projected still images.

Figure 5 Jocelyn as Marlene (Slide projected on the front scrim)



(Photo by Andrew Lyon)

In the photo shoot for this scene Jocelyn, a domestic worker, stood in for Marlene, another domestic worker. The domestic worker is seen shooing the child off the bed, and then standing alone staring out at the spectator. Until now the room has been presented as the couple's boudoir/playground. Suddenly it becomes a place of work. For the couple it represents family togetherness. For the nanny it represents loss. The song "Waters of March" ends with the lyrics: "It's the promise of Spring/ It's the joy in your heart." During performances I always found the culmination of this scene, the final lyrics with images of Jocelyn/Marlene standing alone, hitting me in a very emotional way. As I watched Jocelyn I wondered, "Whose Spring? Whose joy?" As in the earlier McDonald's laughter sequence, I was unable to distance myself from what was occurring before me. I was in an event-state. The two event-states, one of laughter, the other of loss, were

produced by exploiting the tension inherent in any theatrical representation, but also in ways particular to documentary theatre. Familiar theatre styles such as satire and realism were employed but created unusual resonances when inhabited by actual-documentive tensions such as the performer as embodied document, the spectator as assessor and participant, and projected images that referenced *documentive* subjects.

7 EMERGENCY TIME

Another basic fact of the actual-documentive tension is that what is unfolding before the audience in real-time also represents another time – the time at which the subject represented gave testimony, which must have occurred in the past. In fictional theatre, that other time may have been selected for its allegorical or metaphorical value: although what is being represented is not occurring elsewhere at the time of performance (Hamlet is not currently contemplating suicide in Elsinore), the spectator is asked to consider a current issue through the lens of the given fiction. She has the option of taking time to reflect on what she has seen. In fictional theatre “the relationship between the text and contemporary reality varies according to the amount of chronological distance between them” (Pfister 275). The spectator may be watching an actor performing Hamlet at Bard on the Beach in Vancouver in 2009 while the fictional story takes place in the pre-Elizabethan past. As Pfister points out, “it is by no means always the case that the greater the amount of time separating the content of the play and the context of its performance, the greater the level of mediation or indirectness of the relationship between the text and reality, or that greater proximity or even simultaneity is bound to imply greater immediacy” (276). Depending on the given production *Hamlet* can feel as immediate as a documentary play that deals with the latest news flash. Fictional and documentary theatre deal with the same time doubling, what Pavis calls “stage time” and “dramatic time” (409). “Stage time” is

time experienced by the spectator when faced with the theatre event, factual time related to enunciation, to the here and now, to the unfolding of the performance. This time

unfolds in a continuous present, for the performance time takes place in the present: what happens in front of us happens in our spectator's time scheme, from the beginning to the end of the performance. (409)

"Dramatic" time "is the time of the fiction. It is not tied to the enunciation *hic et nunc* but to the illusion that something is happening, or has happened or will happen in a possible world, the world of fiction" (409). Documentary theatre complicates both of these time frames. What Pavis calls "factual time," the unfolding of the performance in the continuous present of "stage time," is an undeniable feature of performance. But how the spectator apprehends factual time changes according to how she chooses to "reformat" her consciousness. Factual time that represents fictional time is one thing. Factual time that represents another factual time, as doc theatre does, creates challenging optics in this exercise of temporal doubling. Watching *Hamlet*, the spectator is at her leisure to consider whether the Prince made the right decision all those many years ago. Of course, it's just as likely that the spectator will be caught up in the action as if it is happening at the moment, and only stop to reflect on it later. But the quality of listening to a play that begins, "This is a story I made up," is different from the quality of listening to one that begins, "This is a true story." When documentary theatre represents an issue that is current, and is a "true" story, it ups the stakes. It claims that an injustice is occurring somewhere else *right now*, and that real people are suffering real consequences. Dramatic time as outlined in a fictional script "is not tied to the enunciation" of the here and now, "but to the illusion that something is happening." In documentary theatre the script *is* tied to the here-and-now. The performance is tied to the belief that something that is *not* an illusion is happening, something unjust. Therefore it is incumbent upon the spectator not to just reflect, assess, or judge, but to take action to stop an injustice. Performance time is

pressured by *emergency-time*. While watching the performance and oscillating between actual and documentive, assessing evidence as valid or invalid, ascribing or not ascribing authenticity to the embodied-document, the spectator must also begin to consider whether or not to take action, and how soon. Now? Right after the performance? In a week? In a month? How long can the injustice be allowed to continue? Emergency-time is another tension, particular to the genre, that documentary theatre introduces to the basic binary inherent in all theatrical representations.⁶

The Yaletown scene, unfolding as it must in performance-time, is pressured by emergency-time. The comfort of the Yaletown couple is sharply contrasted with the images of the domestic worker, cut off from family, familiar culture, doomed to a cycle of low-wage jobs, hoping to get landed immigrant status so she can sponsor her family and be reunited with her children and husband. During the ten installations of *Nanay* the spectators learn that a third of the women who come to Canada as domestic workers through the Live-in Caregiver program have left their own children in the Philippines (Pratt, *Circulating* 4). For a number of reasons the mean time of separation between mother and child is about eight years. Many of the women, although well educated, get caught in a long-term cycle of low paying jobs. Marriages break up. The women often suffer abuse, including sexual abuse, at the hands of their employers. Filipino youth in BC, often the children of domestic workers, have a very high-drop out rate. And on and

⁶ Obviously not all documentary plays deal with temporally pressing issues. In a play that deals with more removed past events, or events in which the stakes are not current, emergency-time will not be a factor. In positing emergency-time as a pressure I am considering plays like *Guantanamo: Honour Bound to Defend Freedom*, in which the fate of detainees at the notorious American military prison in Cuba is currently in the balance, or *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, in which the lives of Palestinians in Gaza are currently at stake, and of course *Nanay*, in which domestic workers are currently living in abusive situations and are racing to meet the conditions of the LCP within a government-imposed time restriction in order to avoid being sent back to the Philippines.

on. Emergency-time means these consequences are occurring as the performance unfolds. It's like another voice talking in the ear of the spectator as she tries to watch, listen, and negotiate the other tensions. As she swings between the multiple oscillations documentary theatre offers, she may find herself in the event-state, a state of pure potentiality. George believes that one of the things spectators enjoy is agreeing or disagreeing with the choices made by the artists (28-29). In doing so they imagine other possibilities. The event-state, co-created by performer and spectator, creates new knowledge, and shakes up the status quo. Documentary theatre is about changing something. Like other theatre, it harnesses the spectator's imagination by discombobulating her sense of here and there, you and I, allowing her to imagine other social paradigms. The pressure of emergency time is intended to lend urgency to her imaginings.

Table 2 **A Table of Tensions II**

Fictional Theatre	Documentary Theatre
Actual-fictive	Actual- <i>documentive</i>
Performer-character	Performer- <i>subject</i>
Embodied mind	Embodied <i>document</i>
Performance-time vs. <i>fictional</i> -time	Performance-time vs. <i>emergency</i> -time

Tensions create the non-dualistic event-state

8 EVENT-STATE WITHOUT ACTORS: THE SPECTATOR IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ARTIFACT

To this point I have used the performer as the most pertinent example of the documentive, the embodied document. I would now like to look at a *Nanay* installation in which no actors were featured, and in which we presented items or artifacts (sometimes pseudo artifacts) that might commonly be understood as documents. The “Object Room,” as we liked to call it, was a small dark corner of Chapel Arts in which we constructed a replica of a domestic worker’s room in a Canadian home.

Figure 6 The “Object Room” 1



(Photo by Caleb Johnston)

The room was actually a composite based on a number of descriptions provided by domestic workers, some of who were involved in the assembly of the installation. The installation consisted of faux wood-panel walls familiar to Canadian rec rooms of the 1960s and 70s, a bed, a dresser, a bedside unit, a TV, posters, and personal artifacts like a rosary, crucifix, passport, cell phone bills, letters, etc.

Figure 7 The “Object Room” 2



(Photo by Caleb Johnston)

On the wall across from the bedroom replica written testimonies in which the nannies described their living conditions were set in frames. Below them a paper scroll was rolled out on a long table providing a surface for spectators to write commentary. In keeping with the nannies’ own descriptions of their living quarters, the room was cramped, dark,

grim, and conveyed a sense of compromised privacy. An audience guide invited spectators to handle the nannies' supposedly personal objects.

Three kinds of documents were presented in the room. First, the replica: obviously this was only a representation of a nanny's room, but it contained a number of authentic personal artifacts, as well as some that were faked. Faked or not, judging from commentary on the scroll spectators seemed to accept the replica as having an air of authenticity:

IT'S A SAD COLD PLACE, EVEN I CAN'T IMAGINE MYSELF BEING IN IT,
WHAT AN UNFORGETTABLE PLACE. I REALLY NEVER THOUGHT OF IT THIS
WAY. (Scroll commentary; caps original)

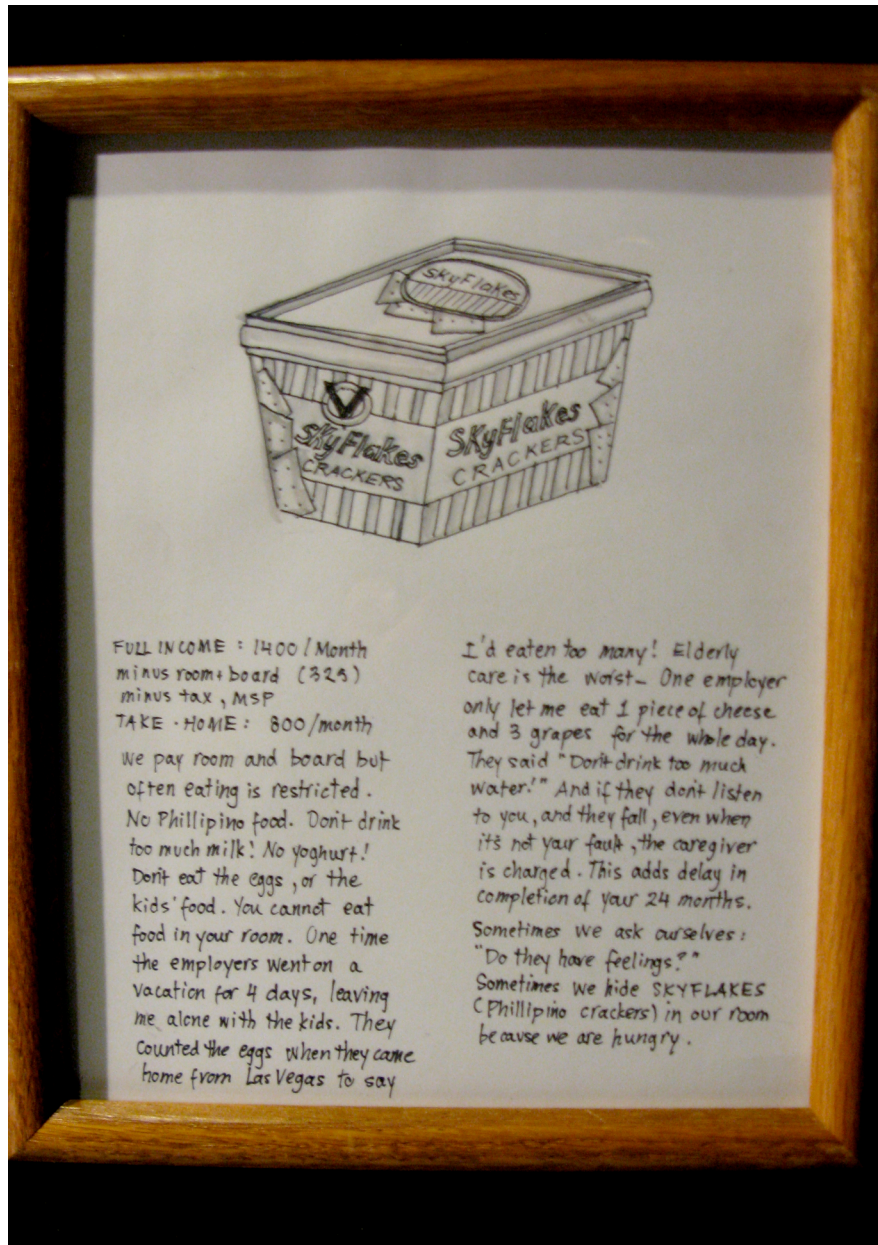
It's so depressing. (The room). (Scroll commentary; bracketed comment in original)

"...I remember my nanny (Rowena), the room she had in our house...it was exactly like this; the single bed, the bed side table, the small T.V. ... I never saw any pictures of her family..." (Scroll; brackets original)

To use Walter Benjamin's term, the "aura" of the original rooms survived (Benjamin 221-23). Or to be more precise, as this was not a mass reproduction but a one of a kind replica, which was itself a composite, the room could be felt as an original work of art with a unique history tied to the current geographical location (220). At the same time this original work of art was representationally doubled, tripled, or quadrupled since it represented several other rooms, each with a unique history; the objects in the replica represented, or were taken from, those other rooms. It was a curious document, one that might be considered a curious forgery – slippage between fact and representational art

was, in this case, too various to isolate. Yet it's impossible to deny the "authentic" impact the room had on the spectators: "The pain in this room is haunting. The LCP should be scrapped and our dignity restored and upheld" (Scroll).

Figure 8 Framed testimony with artist's drawing



(Photo by Caleb Johnston)

The second document in the room was the set of framed testimonies. These were verbatim transcriptions, but hand-written by designer Tamara Unroe and accompanied with her drawings of objects that could be found, in an I-Spy fashion, in the installation itself. This was as close to an actual document the spectator ever got in *Nanay*. The framed testimonies were primary-source documentary evidence. And yet, perhaps because they were hand-written by the designer and not type-printed on official-looking paper, they projected less aura than the bed installation which was in fact a less stable example of documentary veracity. The third document in the room was the scroll, a document under construction by the spectators; as the days of performance passed it filled up with impassioned commentary on the LCP, the room itself, and other related issues. Together, these three documentive elements, with the presence of the spectators, created what Gernot Boehme calls “atmosphere,” a term he uses to describe the way a setting can, through the material objects present, and in its totality, create affective presence.

Atmospheres are not bound to a place but nonetheless pour into, and thus shape, the space. They neither belong just to the objects or people who appear to radiate them nor to the people who enter a space and physically sense them. They usually constitute the spectators’ first sensation on entering the auditorium and enable a very specific experience of spatiality. None of this can be explained by reference to individual objects because atmospheres exist in the interplay of elements and usually form a carefully calculated part of a theatre production. (Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative* 115)

Fischer-Lichte says the kind of presence exuded by “things” is not quite the same as that found in embodied performance, and yet “something emanates from them which is distinct from the visual or aural perceptions of a person, which can nevertheless be

physically experienced when seeing or hearing that thing; something, which pours itself out in the performative space *between* the thing and the perceiving subject – a specific atmosphere” (116, italics hers). Fischer-Lichte emphasizes the in-betweenness of the experience, again pointing up the potential for oscillation and liminality. Here, without a performer as catalyst, the event-state is no less possible.

One former Filipina domestic worker who entered the room was paralyzed upon confronting the replica. Charlene Sayo, one of the audience guides, reports that the woman was overcome in a kind of cathartic flashback, shedding tears as she stood immobilized before the bedroom replica:

One woman was standing in front of the bed. She was kind of whimpering or crying. And she was just standing there, like, straight. [...] She had her hand over her face. It was like she was grieving for her own experiences. And at the end she told me that the room was exactly like her room, that this is exactly the room that she slept in, more or less. Um, you know the same kind of bed, how dark it was, the one drawer, the one night stand, like the sparseness of the room was really how she lived and where she slept for two or three years. (Sayo)

During the talkback, I watched another domestic worker who had recently left the Object Room speak of how her spirit had been “lifted” by the experience. In another example, while Sayo was watching yet another domestic worker dealing with her grief, a female employer approached her and spoke in hushed tones:

This woman comes up to my side. She says, “This room is really terrible.” I said, “Yes it is.” And she goes, “But you know, I never treated my nanny like this. [...] She had a big room, she had a comfortable bed, she had a big lock on her door. I just made sure the room was really clean and that she had everything she needed.” [...] It was interesting

how some people were confessing their own experiences to me, and then trying to almost clean themselves off. [...] But I didn't know what she was confessing to. Whatever sins she thinks that she had. And then I'm seeing this domestic worker totally grieving for this experience that she had. (Sayo)

The scroll and the first-hand accounts bear further testimony (create testimony) of both event-state experiences and assessment-state experiences in the Object Room. They also illustrate the “aura” of the room, its “atmosphere” or presence. Sayo describes the experience of being there as a witness as “surreal”:

It was weird, like, for me to stand there like a witness at a funeral. Like a pallbearer. And at the same time being a priest, [to whom] somebody is confessing. That was like a really surreal moment for me 'cause I was in this weird position, and like it also had this religious air because of all these crosses in the room. [...] It was dark too. (Sayo)

The Object Room might be called documentive space, which in this particular theatre context means it is an aesthetic space that has been infected with the idea of the document. Aesthetic space is a space marked off, or conceived of, as theatrical or performative. Like all other theatre phenomena it is essentially doubled (Boal 22). It is the here that is also not-here. *Here* overlaps with memory and imagination, with past and future. In this case we were dealing with domestic workers' memories and how they overlap with the spectators' associations/memories in three different zones – bed replica, framed testimony, and scroll – each of which claims to be, or to reference, evidence. The spectator was in a three-way tug-o-war spatially and temporally: three documents (bed, frames, scroll); three time/states: memory (the past – but whose past?), present (here-and-now), imagination/future (projections and dreams). At best this is an understatement of the tensions in play. All of the documentive tensions outlined earlier in this paper were

also present, on top of which the spectator now had to negotiate relationships with fellow spectators (and the guide) in a much more independent manner than she had in other installations. Again, the nature of the document in documentary theatre is inextricably bound up with the typical features of any theatre production and, despite the claims that it is a “radical” form of journalism (Paget 59) or historiography, which it may well be, documentary theatre relies on the rhetoric of theatre fiction to make its case – as those disciplines rely on the rhetoric of fiction to make their cases (White 122). Aesthetic space is part of the fictive/documentive rhetoric (as the argument progresses it becomes increasingly difficult to separate categories):

Aesthetic space exists whenever there is either separation between the actor’s space and the spectator’s, or dissociation of two times – ‘today I am here and yesterday I was here’. Or today and tomorrow; or now and before; or now and later. We coincide with ourselves when we integrate, into the present we are living, our memory of the past and our imagination of the future. (To coincide with ourselves is to be two in one, as we are on stage.) [...] Actor and spectator can be two different people [actor and observer]; they can also *coincide in the same person*. (Boal 19, his italics)

Documentary theatre is no less subject to this phenomenon.

The final sentence in the above quote introduces a feature that is particularly salient to the Object Room: in an aesthetic or theatricalized space, the actor and spectator can “coincide in the same person.” For my purposes I will apply this assertion to the person who has entered the theatre as a spectator and, in the Object Room, has become the actant. In the Object Room the spectator was mostly left to explore on his own, without the controlling factor of a performer speaking lines or otherwise influencing events through her special presence. His relationship was with the objects in the room

and other spectators (although the guide sometimes became influential in setting the tone, was used as a resource person, and sometimes as a confessor). In the objects presented and in the general atmosphere, the spectator had to confront the memories of the domestic workers. These overlapped with his own memories; he might contrast the replica with his own bedroom, as more than one spectator testified on the scroll: “This room is bigger than mine”; “Kinda looks like my room” (Scroll). Affectivity was created by the special presence of objects configured in aesthetic space – the atmosphere being the totality of this configuration. In Boal’s discussion of aesthetic space, the usual actual-fictive dichotomy is both established and collapsed through the alternate establishing and erasure of critical distance. His terminology parallels the Brechtian distantiation-identification binary, but does so through the psychological lenses of memory and dream. When we speak of identification or distantiation in theatre, we pit two ways of perception against each other. In identification we become immersed in the identity of another, we buy into an illusion. With distantiation, we hold the other at a distance and examine it/him. Boal alters the terms of this dichotomy. He states the binary as memory-dream. In the memory state “the observer observes, the spectator sees: she feels, is moved, thinks, remembers, imagines. She remains a subject, separate from her object” (22). In the oneiric (dream) state “the dreamer does not observe: here she penetrates into her own projections, she passes through the looking-glass; everything merges and mixes together, anything is possible.” The degree to which the memory state is analogous to Brechtian distantiation is variable. We can see how, in memory or in imaginative projection, distance can easily break down – in Boal’s conception, this breakdown may represent the moment one transfers from the memory “dimension” to the oneiric dimension. The

relationship is very fluid. Memory-oneiric seems to be another way of describing oscillation, or the coming in and out of the liminal state: “The aesthetic space is endowed with the same plasticity as dreams and possesses the same substantiality of physical dimensions and solidity of volumes. We are ‘there’ in the dream just as the aesthetic space is ‘here and now’. That is why, in theatre, we can have concrete dreams” (21). This is another way of describing the event-state. I introduce Boal’s terminology in order to further destabilize the notion that a document is necessarily forensic or “scientific.” What role do dreams play in the document? Can dreams, such a fundamental factor in human perception, be denied a rightful place in a testimonial construction of past events or future projections? Theatre, says Boal, is a concrete dream. While a dream or theatre design may be fantastical, in the here-and-now of theatre experience it can’t help but express itself through material presence – in Fischer-Lichte’s sense, *hyper* presence. In the event-state, which I am equating to an extent with Boal’s oneiric dimension, the ordinary has become extraordinary. The things and people around the spectator have acquired special presence. As a result the spectator has arrived at a heightened awareness of his own presence. Memory, dream, and imaginative projection merge in concrete here-ness. One spectator, an employer, feels compelled to hold the guide’s hand and say, “Understand me now.” A second spectator, a domestic worker, is frozen before the replica of her past, a past that is not really hers but a composite of a number of domestic workers’ pasts. A third spectator, neither domestic worker nor employer, is struck by someone else’s past and must pour her thoughts out on the scroll. Theatre has become document and document is the messy expression of human conflictedness. The event-state has transcended verifiable truth for the purpose of creating felt evidence.

The other part of Boal's analysis of space supports documentary theatre's need for a *retreat* from the liminal state: "The aesthetic space possesses gnoseological properties, that is, properties which stimulate knowledge and discovery, cognition and recognition: properties which stimulate the process of learning by experience. Theatre is a form of knowledge" (20). As both George and Fischer-Lichte have pointed out (George 30-31; Fischer-Lichte 179), the liminal state is temporary; Boal's oneiric dimension eventually gives way to critical assessment. In the Object Room this has occurred without the aid of actors. The room itself is a document that stimulates "knowledge and discovery." Most spectators – according to our survey forms, over 50% (Pratt, *Nanay* 2) – had a direct link to the issue presented, and therefore were dealing with their own memories of being subjected to dismal living conditions in their employer's homes; or, if they were employers, were able to compare the replica with the conditions they had provided for their nannies. In these cases memory and distantiation tipped over into the oneiric or liminal dimension. Thus, the event-state occurred without the aid of actors, but through spectator relationship with space and object. Document was a complex of intersubjective memory, real and fake artifact, transcribed verbatim testimony, and co-constructed testimonial scroll.

Role reversal had taken place.⁷ The spectator had become the actor in a documentary play, and therefore had become embodied document. She had become the nexus and the touchstone for felt truth. All evidence was documentive rather than document. Perhaps it was only with difficulty that she was able to extricate herself from

⁷ Fischer-Lichte describes performances in which the performer gives up her power position in the hope of having the spectator take action that will alter the outcome of the performance. I discuss this further in the conclusion. For Fischer-Lichte's analysis see *Transformative* 40-51.

this felt condition in order to calmly assess its validity. Calm assessment may be difficult with the knowledge of an ongoing injustice – the pressure of emergency-time. Was the spectator now subject or observer? What could she point to as authoritative document? In a documentary play that throws the spectator into direct encounter, exploiting that which is most characteristic of a theatre experience, there are no easy answers to these questions. Documentive tensions had compounded the usual theatrical tensions making the liminal event-state unavoidable, at least for some. Evidence had been referenced, embodied, transferred from actor to object or spectator, and ultimately generated through the event-state.

9 CONCLUSION

Throughout the main body of this thesis I have destabilized the authority of the document in favour of the documentive. It may seem at times that I have been trying to undermine the credibility of documentary theatre. Rather my goal has been to take an honest look at what constitutes a document in this kind of theatre and offer a meaningful framework – both to the theorist and practitioner – for approaching a documentary play. In analyzing my own work through the process of creating *Nanay* as a director and writing about it as scholar, I have become much more conscious of the practical challenges of staging a documentary theatre work. Shuttling between practice and theory (a productive oscillation in itself), I have had the opportunity to reflect on my methods and to revise them during the rehearsals of two mountings of the play. Listening to spectators and artists in Vancouver and Berlin, I have learned that I cannot underestimate the responsibility that comes with the statement, “What you are about to hear is verbatim testimony.” In an article on the verbatim play *The Colour of Justice*, produced in the UK by Tricycle Theatre, Janelle Reinelt writes of the audience’s “deep collective urge to link knowledge to truth,” even though spectators may have an understanding of how truth is mediated in a given context (Reinelt 82). The run of the play paralleled an ongoing public inquiry. At the conclusion of play and inquiry, “there was a certain kind of relief in the testimony and conclusions of the [...] hearings — the ‘truth’ was finally indisputably recognized, based on repetition of, dare I say it, the ‘facts’” (82). I respect the power of testimony. But I have also learned that its power lies only partially in the veracity of transcription. Greater power lies in the authority it lends to the documentary theatre

enterprise, ambiguous as that authority may be. Cashing in on the verbatim stamp of approval the theatre artist eventually takes his leave of *documentary* evidence in order to create *documentive* evidence through the event-state. As I have written earlier, this is what makes it theatre and not document. To return to Diane Taylor's question, "If...[we were to] look through the lens of performed, embodied behaviors, what would we know that we do not know now," the answer is "A great deal." We have learned how to feel about the topic in a way we wouldn't have had we just been presented with the raw documents. The repertoire does things the archive can't. Not necessarily better things, just different things. This is not to dismiss the written account. Performance and text each have their value. As Walter J. Ong writes, where sound (orality, performance) envelops, sight isolates (Ong 71). Sound reveals interiority (a violin filled with concrete sounds different than one filled with air). It surrounds and penetrates you in a way that sight doesn't. In the presence of a performer sound has this particular affective ability to convey presence. Sound incorporates. Sight, which Ong equates with literacy, must have distance. It necessitates a subject-object relationship. Its advantage is in allowing for reflection. You read the lines, you reflect. You may re-read them for further reflection. The same goes for an image. Orality necessitates co-presence and allows for the event state. Literacy allows for private reflection. Documentary theatre needs both. On the other hand, as Adam Frank described, sight, through intensity of surface expression, can be equally affective. In fact Frank uses the literary work of Poe to make his case; through the skill of the author, printed words create affective images in the mind of the reader. These categories are never absolute; there is always tremendous slippage. I simply offer

Ong's work as another analogy to further draw out the differences between archive and repertoire.

Earlier I wrote that documentary theatre relies on the event-state as much as fictional theatre does. As George has shown, the event-state is temporary but critical. George writes of it as a state of "pure potential." For Boal, "anything is possible" in the oneiric dimension. Turner calls the liminal state "a storehouse of possibility," "a striving after new forms and structures, [...] of modes appropriate to postliminal existence" (42). Fischer-Lichte, to whom this essay owes its greatest debt (despite the fact that the book of hers I have most cited contains not a single word about documentary theatre), also acknowledges the temporary nature of the liminal state: "The transformations caused by liminality are predominantly temporary; they take effect but for the duration of the performance or for limited periods of time within the performance" (*Transformational* 179). Fischer-Lichte, George, Boal, Schechner, and Turner all hold out the promise of personal change as a consequence of the liminal condition.⁸ Fischer-Lichte and Boal suggest, or even insist, that the experience can improve the functioning of society itself. Describing three works in which spectator intervention was high, to the point of role-reversal with the performers, Fischer-Lichte writes,

they all have one notable feature in common: they negotiate processes of democratization and redefine relationships between members of a community. Each in their own way,

⁸ Although Turner makes a distinction between the "liminal" and the "liminoid." After the liminal experience, the subject reaffirms the structure of society (Carlson 19). The liminal state is more characteristic of tribal ritual, in which the goal is to return to the status-quo. This is not the case with the liminoid experience, which is more individualistic in nature and more characteristic of post-industrial societies where activities such as sport, play, or art are freely chosen (19). "Liminoid like liminal activities mark sites where conventional structure is no longer honored but, being more playful and more open to chance, they are also much more likely to be subversive, consciously or by accident introducing or exploring different structures that may develop into real alternatives to the *status quo*" (19, italics his).

they effected the implementation of civil rights, the elimination of, in some cases, latent discrimination, and the distribution of power among all participants (*Transformative* 50). In order for this to occur in the performances she describes, the artists must surrender power to the spectators. In *Nanay* this was most clearly the case in the Object Room. But even in situations with less overt transfers of power, immediate agency or a sense of new empowerment (to be acted upon later) can occur.

Such transformations create physiological, affective, energetic, and motoric changes to the body. [...] Whether the experience of the concerned subjects – caused by the destabilization of the self, the world, and its norms – leads to a reorientation and lasting transformation depends on each individual case. (179)

Fischer-Lichte is mostly, but not exclusively, referring to situations of role reversal. But as George has pointed out, a spectator is rarely ever truly passive. In the last sentence of the above quote Fischer-Lichte puts her finger on the elusive goal of affecting change. How does a documentary theatre maker measure political efficacy? “Spectators could also dismiss their transitory destabilization as silly and unfounded when leaving the auditorium and revert to their previous value system. Alternatively, they might remain in a state of destabilization for long after the performance’s end and only reorient themselves much later upon reflection” (179). Potential for longer lasting “destabilization” requires both the event-state and the following assessment-state: “[Liminal] situations provide a space removed from daily activity for member of a culture to ‘think about how they think in propositions that are not *in* cultural codes but *about* them’” (Carlson 19, italics original). The event-state provides the “anti-structural” experiential moment (18), while the post-liminal state allows for critical thinking “about” new knowledge acquired. But how do we know for sure if any of this happened?

Although this paper has been about the mechanics of documentary theatre, I end with this problem of measuring efficacy because the goal of overtly political documentary theatre is always to effect change. To my knowledge there has never been a systematic study of what percentage of spectators take political action after going through documentary theatre performance. If such a study exists I would love to read it.

In the meantime I offer the following anecdotal reflections on the two productions of *Nanay* I directed. In Vancouver I spoke to spectators who felt empowered by the show, to others who were offended, and to some who were indifferent. At a post-production forum for the Philippine Women's Center I was moved by testimony after testimony by domestic workers and activists who spoke of how much it meant for them to have their stories told in a public forum like *Nanay*. I spoke to a non-Filipino Canadian couple that decided to become actively involved in the issue after seeing the show. I read a survey form filled out by one of the spectators who wrote, "This might be good politics but it isn't theatre." I listened to a theatre colleague tell me that the talkback was more complex than anything he had seen in the employer installations, implying that I had failed to engage him in a meaningful way. In Berlin I watched Dinah Estegoy, a former domestic worker who accompanied us to the HAU, square off against officials from the Philippine Embassy in Germany; I watched her anger rise as the officials repeatedly denied that their government was in any way complicit in the LCP or the corresponding Philippines LEP (Labour Export Program) that for decades had enabled and encouraged out-migration of Filipino labour. A group of migrant workers from Argentina joined in the fray. I saw our actors, designers, and crew – all Canadian, some of Filipino descent, some not – become politicized through working on the show. The common denominator I found in the stories

(of those who were not indifferent to *Nanay*) was that it was the living document, the embodied document, the document of atmosphere that shifted each person's sense of the issue. It was when they were unable to distance themselves from what was occurring before or around them in performance – when they had entered the event-state, so to speak – that the plight of the domestic workers (and of some of the Canadian employers) mattered to them. Change is a curious thing. Who really knows how it happens? Perhaps these instances are as good an indication as we're going to get, short of the day when the LCP is scrapped, of whether the event-state in documentary theatre leads to social change.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. (1935) New York/London: Pimlico, 1969. 217-251.
- Boal, Augusto. *Rainbow of desire: the Boal method of theatre and therapy*. Trans. Adrian Jackson. London; New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Bottoms, Stephen. "Putting the Document into Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective?" *TDR* 50.3 (Fall 2006): 56-68.
- Brittain, Victoria and Gillian Slovo. *Guantanamo: 'Honor Bound to Defend Freedom'*. London: Oberon Books, 2004.
- Carlson, Marvin. "Performance and the social sciences." *Performance: a critical introduction*. 1996. New York and London: 2004. 9-30.
- Cohen, Robert. *Acting Power*. Palo Alto: Mayfield, 1978.
- Conquergood, Dwight. "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." *TDR* 46.2 (Summer 2002). 145-156.
- Favorini, Attilio, ed. *Voicings: Ten Play from the Documentary Theatre*. New Jersey: Ecco, 1995.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A new aesthetics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.
- _____. "Reality and Fiction in Contemporary Theatre." *Fictional Realities / Real Fictions*. Eds. Mateusz Borowski and Malgorzata Sugeira. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 13-28.
- Frank, Adam. "Medium Poe." *Criticism* 48.2 (Spring 2006). 149-174.

- Garner, Stanton B., Jr. *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- George, David E.R. *Buddhism as/in Performance: Analysis of Meditation and Theatrical Practice*. Emerging perceptions in Buddhist studies; no. 11. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld Ltd, 1999.
- Gilbert, Helen, and Joanne Tompkins. *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, practice, politics*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Green, Michael. Comment made at symposium which I moderated: "Life into Art." Vancouver, Arts Club Review Stage. 29 Jan. 2006.
- Irmer, Thomas. "The Search for New Realities: Documentary Theatre in Germany." *TDR* 50.3 (Fall 2006): 16-28.
- Lepecki, Andre. "'After All, This Terror Was Not Without Reason': Unfiled Notes on the Atlas Group Archive." *TDR* 50.3 (Fall 2006): 88-99.
- Martin, Carol. "Bodies of Evidence." *TDR* 50.3 (Fall 2006): 8-15.
- My Name is Rachel Corrie*. Eds. Alan Rickman and Katherine Viner. Dir. Bradon Abraham. Perf. Marya Sea Kaminski. Seattle Repertory Theater, Seattle. 20 Apr. 2007.
- My Name is Rachel Corrie*. Dir. Sarah Garton Stanley in collaboration with Marcus Youssef. Havana Theatre, Vancouver, BC. 2 Feb. 2008.
- Nanay: A Testimonial Play*. Eds. Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston. Dir. Alex Lazaridis Ferguson. Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin ("Your Nanny Hates You" Festival). 12-15 Jun. 2009.

Nanay: A Testimonial Play. Chapel Arts, Vancouver (PuSh International Performing Arts Festival). 4-7 Feb. 2009.

News of the World. By David Bloom, Alex Lazaridis Ferguson, Robin Greenwood and Marcus Youssef. Dir. David Bloom, Alex Lazaridis Ferguson and Marcus Youssef. VIVO, Vancouver, BC. 26 March – Apr 4. 2009.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

Pavis, Patrice. *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*. Trans. Christine Shantz. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998.

Pfister, Manfred. *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.

Piscator, Erwin. *The Political Theatre*. Trans. Hugh Rorrison. London: Eyre Methuen, 1963.

Paget, Derek. *True Stories? Documentary drama on radio, screen and stage*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990.

Pratt, Geraldine. "Circulating sadness: witnessing Filipina mothers' stories of family." *Gender, Place and Culture* 16.1 (Feb 2009): 3-22.

_____. Email to the author. 19 Jan. 2009.

_____ and Caleb Johnston, in collaboration with the Philippine Women Centre of BC. "Nanay (Mother): a testimonial play." Unpublished article. 2009.

_____. *Nanay: A Testimonial Play*. Unpublished. 2009.

Reinelt, Janelle. "Toward a Poetics of Theatre and Public Events In the Case of Stephen Lawrence." *TDR* 50.3 (Fall 2006): 69-87.

- Salverson, Julie. *Performing Testimony: Ethics, Pedagogy, and a Theatre Beyond Injury*. Diss. U Toronto, 2001.
- Scroll from Vancouver production of *Nanay: A Testimonial Play*. 2009.
- Sayo, Charlene. Personal interview with the author. 1 June 2009.
- Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater & Anthropology*. Philadelphia: U of P, 1985.
- _____. "Magnitudes of performance." *Performance Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003. 290-312.
- States, Bert O. *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1985.
- _____. "The Phenomenological Attitude." *Critical Theory and Performance*. Eds. Janelle Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2007. 26-36.
- Taylor, Diane. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.
- Turner, Victor, and Edward M. Bruner. *The Anthropology of Experience*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986.
- White, Hayden. Chapter 5. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins UP, 1978. 121-134.