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Book Author(s): JENN STEPHENSON

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4 Real Words: Reproducing Life in Remediated Verbatim Theatre – *Seeds* and *300 TAPES*

Like autobiography, verbatim performance is a truth-based genre. Where autobiographical performance establishes its contract to reality and truth in the self-storying body of the actor-subject, bonding the narrative self to visceral presence, verbatim sheds the body, concentrating truth-value in the testimony of the originary, but now absent, subject. Autobiographical performance brings bodies to the stage to speak themselves into being; verbatim theatre brings words to the stage, leaving bodies behind, and houses authentic speech in new bodies. In this way, perhaps, we can see verbatim as a subgenre or variation of autobiography in which autobiographical words are collected at the source and transported from that initial point of live contact to the stage to be reified there in a different body. Just as staged bodies seem to activate perceptions of authenticity, so too the testimony of a witness attracts a similar sense of access to realness. As Derek Paget argues, in mediatized societies documents are vulnerable to postmodern doubt, to editing and to redaction, but “the witness’s claim to authenticity can still warrant a credible perspective. This is because there is both a legalistic and a spiritual component in Western notions of witness.”¹ Yet, despite the deep-seated cultural value accorded to the testimony of witnesses, verbatim theatre, like other reality-based performance genres, is still subject to longstanding and well-rehearsed concerns about its constructedness that destabilize those truth claims.

Constructive contingency marks verbatim work in two ways. First, as testimony is displaced from its initial witnessing situation, it becomes vulnerable to adaptation. Speech is stripped of its contextual situation. The priority placed on words can elide other complementary impressions like gesture, facial expression, and vocal intonation. Then, shaped

for performance, the captured speech is edited, condensed, and parcelled out. After these initial reductions, verbatim text is reinflated, as it were, in performance, augmented in its uncanny possession of other actor bodies. Second, testimony is detached from reality in a more profound way at its point of origin by poststructural scepticism. Transmuted from lived experience to words, testimony is dependent on the citationality of language for comprehension. Following Derrida's influential argument, all language is citational, and meaning is arbitrary; words accrue sense only through conventionally sanctioned reiteration. There is no ground, merely an endless citational chain that stretches into the past without origin. What this means then for verbatim performance is that even the first articulation of a witness is a performative construction, its relation to an absolutely concrete reality insecure. This is the central problem of verbatim performance. Verbatim theatre in the twenty-first century is characterized by an "apparent paradox of a form that is required to rely on the real for its political authority, whilst simultaneously remaining suspicious of the very notion of the real as dictated by the poststructuralist scepticism of this particular historical moment."² Whither verbatim in the face of this innate paradox?

A common strategy mobilized in response to this paradox has been for performances to "own" this inherent tension by invoking self-reflexive techniques that simultaneously expose the processes of construction while gesturing through that construction to the original sources that speak to authenticity. It is a careful balancing act not to bring on the collapse of the whole structure. How testimony is handled and how that handling is hidden or made visible is central to addressing the problem of poststructural scepticism in documentary. A risk in this approach, however, is that formalist meditations that dwell on the familiar caveats around generic limitations of verbatim can displace the documents entirely and themselves become the main story. As Carol Martin notes, "At its best, documentary theatre complicates the idea of documentary and of the real, of a document, and even what it means to document; documentary theatre troubles our already troubled categories of truth, reality, fiction and acting."³ Self-reflexive awareness at this metatheatrical level invites both creators and audiences to step back and to actively question the core principles that found our understanding of documentary value. Destabilizing the authority of the document as object and of the action of documentation restores balance and humility but it also creates a paralysis of unknowing. Given this veridical complication, the challenge is to move the conversation beyond this central

epistemological instability of the form. The work of documentary need not stall at remarking the point of self-reflexive not knowing. Returning to Ulrike Garde and Meg Mumford, the first question to ask is this: In what ways might this inescapable affect of insecurity be productive?⁴

Two recent productions engage this potentially paralyzing impasse between the real and its products, employing disparate strategies to interrogate the value of representing the verbatim real through iteratively replicating performative construction: *Seeds*, created by Annabel Soutar and her company Porte Parole in partnership with Crow's Theatre,⁵ and *300 TAPES*, a devised work by Public Recordings, led by co-creators Ame Henderson and Bobby Theodore.⁶ In the tradition of "new" twenty-first century documentary style of UK verbatim creators like Alecky Blythe and Richard Norton of Tricycle Theatre or Anna Devere Smith and Tectonic Theatre in the US, Soutar adopts a journalistic approach, going into the field and into the archives to engage a particular current issue. The real-life incident that furnishes the core of the play is a case heard by the Supreme Court of Canada: *Monsanto Canada Inc. v. Schmeiser*. In 1998, multinational biotech corporation Monsanto accused Percy Schmeiser, a canola farmer from Bruno, Saskatchewan, of illegally seeding his fields with their genetically modified, pesticide-resistant canola, thereby infringing on their patent.⁷ The case became a cause célèbre for the global anti-GMO movement, raising issues pertaining not only to the patentability of a gene, but also to the right of farmers to save their seeds from one crop to the next, the protection of crop and weed biodiversity, and the overall safety and regulation of genetically-modified foods. Court transcripts, media reports, and personal interviews form the corpus of testimony from which Soutar has crafted the play.

At the beginning of act two, Annabel, who appears as a character in her own play, recognizes an implicit connection between what she does as the maker of documentary theatre and what Monsanto is doing making genetically modified seeds. "To begin with, we are both in the business of ... life. We use life as raw material and we modify it in order to produce something that we then call our 'invention.' We both describe our mission as 'making the world a better place' – Monsanto by feeding a hungry and growing world; me by telling stories in which a multiplicity of voices reflects something I perceive to be important about the world."⁸ Although at the beginning of the play, Annabel starts with the question "What is life?," by the end she has shifted the terms of her query, asking, "How do we want to see life modified?" The matter is

no longer framed as a question of moral volition: “Should life be modified?” but rather she tacitly admits that this is a foregone conclusion and shifts to the practical how.

Where *Seeds* considers the question “Who owns life?” in light of Monsanto’s bid to patent a gene, *300 TAPES* asks the same question through an encounter with blurred memories and identities “leading [the creators] to question concepts of ownership with regard to personal stories and movement.”⁹ Exploring this common territory, *300 TAPES* draws its verbatim roots from a different performance genealogy than *Seeds*. To generate raw material for *300 TAPES*, the three actor-creators, Frank Cox-O’Connell, Joe Cobden, and Brendan Gall were handed microcassette recorders and each tasked with recording 100 autobiographical memory monologues over a period of weeks. Each story had to be short – they are generally less than eight minutes, and average three to four minutes. The stories were recorded privately, with the actors working sequentially from earliest memory to the present without backtracking. In terms of tone, the speakers were asked to imagine telling the story in a bar or similar small-group social setting to a group of friendly strangers or new acquaintances. The anecdotes are conversational, loosely organized, and candid, often in a self-deprecating way. Returning to the rehearsal room, each actor handed his newly recorded and as yet unheard tape to one of the others, who played it back through headphones, reciting the text in real time, trying to synchronously voice what he is hearing. This technique of auto-reciting fosters a non-matrixed performance style where the technical challenge of the task keeps the performer off-balance and inhibits the creation of character. This approach to verbatim occupies the intersection between documentary and auto/biography. Seen in the work of experimental companies like Nature Theatre of Oklahoma and The Wooster Group, verbatim in this mode shifts the journalistic impulse from political issues of the public sphere to private narratives, taking everyday speech as readymades in the style of Marcel Duchamp to be reframed in performance as performance. Retaining speech disfluencies like “um” and “ah” and the pitched rhythms of oral language, the text becomes musical. Like Annabel in *Seeds*, the makers of *300 TAPES* take the modification of life as a given; reproduction is their principal *modus operandi*. As co-creator, Theodore says, “In fact, one of the inspirations of the show is the lie inherent in verbatim theatre ... A stage piece is artificially arranged. *300 TAPES* is choreographed storytelling, where reconstructing and reassembling people’s lives has an enhanced effect.”¹⁰ The question

remains, “How do we want to see life modified?” Here, reproductive remediation happens not at the level of the genome but at the level of the phoneme.

Liz Tomlin poses a much-needed critique of the current focus of verbatim scholarship. She writes, “The sceptical climate ... has subsequently ensured that academic debate and analysis are rarely focused on the issues raised by the source material but are rather compelled to interrogate the validity of the form itself, particularly in relation to any implicit or explicit truth claims it might be seen to be making.”¹¹ Moving beyond generic formal analysis of verbatim work and its well-understood fraught connection to the “truth,” I propose to take up Tomlin’s challenge and consider how the specific strategies employed to manage epistemological uncertainty operate to support (or undermine) issues, just as Tomlin says, that are raised by the staging of this source material. How does the self-reflexive ambivalence to truth of mediatized verbatim engage with the specific stories of *Seeds* and *300 TAPES*? Both productions make the case that life is made to be copied. From a purely biological perspective, this is indeed the purpose of life – to reproduce. The GMO debates suggest that there are good and bad ways to reproduce life and that in artificially rewriting the genetic text this process is not ethically neutral. Creation of self through autobiographical storytelling is also a generatively iterative process. Ethical considerations also inhere to personal narratives. In parallel with Soutar’s concern with commercially modified genomes, the question of ownership of these narratives is likewise a point of interest for Public Recordings. Whose story is this and who has the right to tell it? What are the stakes for memory and identity when stories become unmoored from their original voices and bodies? Facing the ubiquity of reproductive modification and of the remediation of life by narrative, by performance, but also by technological innovation, we are invited to consider the principles that might be invoked to govern such remediative processes and also the effects of that remediation. It is useful in this light to consider what kind of social value – positive or negative, optimistic or pessimistic – is awarded to reproductive copying, characterized by splicing, mutation, and augmentation or degradation.

Reproducibility has always been a feature of a work of art and also a point of anxiety.¹² Plato, in his argument concerning ideal forms, proposes that all things exist “in nature” first as ideas, made by God who is “the real maker of a real bed, not a particular maker of a particular maker of a particular bed, [creator of] a bed which is essentially and by

nature one only.”¹³ Objects in the world are secondary copies of these ideal forms. The carpenter is also the maker of a bed. The painter who then creates an image of the appearance of the bed is neither a creator nor maker, but merely an imitator. He is “third in the descent from nature.”¹⁴ The artist, then, is not in contact with reality but only with a second-order imitation. As such, these works are so far removed from the original, being degenerate copies, that they might, in fact, be harmful. As Elin Diamond succinctly summarizes, “What Plato distrusts is that mimesis implies difference – the copy is not the model; the character not the actor; the excited spectator not the rational male citizen, yet both occupy the same ontological space.”¹⁵ This is one of the pillars for Plato’s ultimate conclusion that artists are not truth-tellers and as such should be excluded from his utopian republic.

For millennia, manual replication has been sanctioned as the province of apprentices learning their craft, amateurs taking impressions for souvenirs, and in a limited sense by entrepreneurs seeking profit. But as Walter Benjamin observes in his 1936 seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” mass replication facilitated by technology is something new. Visual and audio recording technologies, from cameras loaded with film to microphones and recording devices using analog tapes or digital file formats, allow unprecedented facility not only for capturing the original artefact through recording but also for rematerializing that recording in alternate forms, in alternate times and places. Breaking technological replication into two phases – capture and playback – shows how verbatim performance is both similar to and different than the examples of reproduction cited by Benjamin. Verbatim performance as practised in both *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* makes use of audio recorders to collect testimony and preserve it as data in a radically different material form from that of the original event. Verbatim, as a genre, values exact replication. But unlike film or photography or radio broadcasting, the playback component of verbatim is non-mechanical as the text is voiced by human actors. It is worth considering what difference this hybrid composition of mechanized and non-mechanized reproduction makes to how we differentiate value between the original and the reproduction. Do we view the actor-reciters as working in an artisanal context or as merely playback machines in human form?

Both *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* explicitly exhibit and reflect on the human labour of copying in their verbatim presentations. As manual craft, these performance processes carry those appealing markers of authenticity identified by Gilmore and Pine,¹⁶ bearing the unique qualities of

artisanal handiwork, marked by limited accessibility in time and space and in number, being ephemeral, local, and scarce.

Working in the American theatre today is like being a cobbler or a glass-blower in a world of e-commerce, virtual realities, political tumult, celebrity culture, illiteracy, digital imaging and cyberspace. We are like practitioners of an ancient artisan craft, anachronistic in a world of mass production and advanced technology. Only the rarest individuals today prefer their shoes handmade or their kitchen glasses handblown. We are not the medium for the masses. We are like the monks preserving a library from antiquity – that rare entity, once so prized, of a storyteller and players recounting adventures for those gathered around a sacred campfire.”¹⁷

As attractive as that exclusive and exalted image may be, we need to avoid the easy sentimentality of seeing all theatre as the equivalent of a pair of bespoke shoes. Rather, having acknowledged the context of “manual” or embodied replication in verbatim in a cultural moment that is affectively aligned against technologized mass production, one question to ask is: “What value accrues to this labour?” Other questions are: “What is the effect of the inevitable errors and imperfections that arise in the handmade copy?” “And how do these errors shape our understanding of verbatim in general as a form and specifically of the testimony represented?”

Benjamin notes that throughout history handcrafted copies were “usually branded as a forgery,”¹⁸ an accusation that curiously does not, in his view, accrue to mechanical copies. From where does this implicit negative value judgment of the manual copy arise? Perhaps it is because the manual copy feels like a copy; its status as a copy is evident somehow, possibly through imperfections of the likeness. It is a copy that reveals its differences from the original and so therefore is less. Or perhaps it is the opposite; it is because the copy doesn’t feel like a copy. There is in the forgery a sense of deceit. The copying process is hidden and so once it is discovered we condemn it as trickery. A “truthful” copy – truthful in the sense of being perfect and/or truthful in the sense that it confesses to its status as a copy – would not attract similar negative valuation. Anxiety flourishes when our desire for authenticity collides with the possibility of a forgery so good that we may never know the truth. Paradoxically, in a culture that craves authenticity, we are surrounded by fakes as never before. Having an informed citizenry is the foundation of modern democracy. However, in a post-truth world where the

art (and technology) of spin has become amazingly sophisticated, traditional sources of information have become increasingly unreliable or disregarded. "Photographs are faked, ... articles in newspapers turn out to have been entirely fabricated, weapons of mass destruction cannot be found in Iraq."¹⁹ Everything is manipulated (or can be) and in this context our default position is distrust. One important way this void is being filled is through grassroots dissemination of knowledge, through crowd-sourcing and citizen journalism. Documentary-style verbatim theatre has stepped into the journalistic void in an effort to give hearing to voices not typically raised in public and present insight direct from not-the-usual sources. But verbatim theatre does not stand entirely above the fray. In an attempt to offer access to authentic truth, verbatim employs exactly these manipulative technologies of reproduction and remediation and so gets caught up in Benjamin's concerns with the source of authenticity and his attachment to a clear distinction in value between the original and the copy, be it mass produced or hand-crafted, acknowledged or unacknowledged. Affects of authenticity, then, do not arise merely as a factor of the true content but are also enmeshed in the nature of reproductive mediation of that content, its crafted processes, and the visibility of those processes.

Mechanical reproduction can alter space. Part of the attraction of mechanical reproduction is that the copies can travel to meet the beholder in a way that the original can't, especially if there is a change of medium, for example when a painting becomes a photograph of a painting or a symphony becomes a radio broadcast of a symphony. In tension with the desire for authenticity, there is a profound "desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent towards overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction."²⁰ Reproductive technologies also alter space by bringing the object even closer than direct perception can admit, opening new enriched vistas of perception by creating enlargements of details through zooming in or slow motion. Access is at odds with presence as technology permits the transportation of the live work of art from there to here and from then to now. And it is this sacrifice of presence that Benjamin mourns. He writes that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."²¹ This quality of presence is bound up with the historical provenance of the work,

manifesting in the conditions of its creation, and in the physical changes it has endured over time, as well as changes of ownership. Presence both in the present now as immediately accessible and as it gestures to the continuous life of the work (what Mariah Horner calls a “sense of since”)²² are central to the invaluable quality of authenticity that Benjamin characterizes as “aura.” The reproduction is detached from the original both by technological means of copying that offer new perspectives like enlargement or slow motion and by the ability of the copy to travel and enter into new contexts in ways impossible for the original.²³ Although the reproduction has the ability to bring the work into the proximity that audiences desire, it lacks aura. To this view, authenticity is antithetical to reproduction.

As a bold corollary to this initial assertion, Benjamin seems to claim that not only does the copy lack aura, but that the aura of the original is threatened by reproduction.

The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated ... Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object.²⁴

In the age of mechanical reproduction, aura withers. Continuing, Benjamin also seems to suggest that this depreciation of the aura of the original work of art applies not only to secondary mechanical remediation but also to the primary representation of the work of art from life.

This holds not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie ... Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former.²⁵

Philip Auslander makes a similar point when he notes that Michael Kirby’s concept of non-matrixed representation “provided a beachhead for mediatization within artistic practices that resisted mediatization.”²⁶ As Kirby writes, “in non-matrixed representation the referential elements are applied *to* the performer and are not acted *by* him.”²⁷ For Kirby, and

Auslander, mediation is not mainly (or only) technological, it is perceptual. The meaning of the work as art or as performance is created by the frame of representing or recording. This suggests that there is no qualitative difference in this regard between technological remediation and perceptual remediation. Both are part of a chain of citation and representation. Verbatim speech remediates recorded testimony just as testimony remediates lived experience. What I am suggesting then, as an extension rather than a disagreement with Benjamin, is that each layer of mediation is in conversation with realness and authenticity. Just as the aura of a work of art (DaVinci's *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre Museum) is valued (or devalued) in conjunction with and relative to the real-world object it represents (a human face), so too subsequent pairs of reproduction and "original" are also likewise valued or devalued. Consider the aura of the painting of the *Mona Lisa* as authentic *vis-à-vis* its myriad copies on mugs, notebooks, and desktop backgrounds. In this auratic chain, each subsequent layer of remediation retains a relationship to the real and to liveness in its creation and its provenance. Talking about different locations of liveness in technological representation, such as how the televisual live is "now" but not "here," or how stadium Jumbotron replays are "here" but not "now," Steve Wurtzler writes, "The degradation of the live is compensated for by the inscription into the 'real' of its representation."²⁸ Which brings me to ask: Where is the original live in *Seeds* and *300 TAPES*? How is the absent real, being not "here" and/or not "now," inscribed into its representation? How do the different relative layers of realness and authenticity speak to the plays' concern with reproduction as imperative to the creation of life both in a biological and an autobiographical sense?

Until there was the capacity for recording, there was no need for the concept of liveness. As Baudrillard points out, the live is defined by the recorded and vice versa. The same might be said of related terms like "real" and "presence" and "authentic" and their correlatives "not real," "absence," and "fake." The relationship between these pairs of terms is not one of precession but is rather one of mutual dependence.²⁹ By definition, then, that which is live is that which can be recorded; it is the original that is subject to representation. However, in verbatim performance, the dualistic pairs of live/recorded and original/representation become tangled in a chiasmic relationship where what comes to the stage "live" is the representation and what is recorded is the "original" document. Any originary live event located in the first speech of testimony, for example, that is the antecedent of the documentary recording, is

absent and as such is directly inaccessible in performance. Auslander points out that rock concerts and stand-up comedy are instances where “mediatization is now explicitly and implicitly embedded within the live experience.”³⁰ The live performance is the conduit for reification and recreation of an always and necessarily absent original live. For the audience of a rock concert or standup comedy routine, the live experience follows the recording and does not precede it, since for many the encounter with a particular musical group or comedian is first through the comedy album or podcast or radio broadcast or digital streaming equivalent. Not only does the live come second, already mediatized, but, like a film, the original live event does not even really exist as such. The live event that underpins the oeuvre of a popular musical or comedy performer is not contiguous with the recording, which is composed of edited and re-sequenced fragments performed specifically to be recorded. And so is a record of an event that never was. Verbatim theatre, too, is a genre where mediatization is embedded in and predicated by the live performance. Verbatim re-enactment purports to be a re-living (or re-enlivening) of a recording. A significant difference for verbatim is that although, like the concert or the stand-up comedy event, it is the re-enactment of an absent prior live, the intermedial recording that predicates its authenticity is rendered inaccessible. Whereas the treasured CD or MP3 of a song or sketch comedy routine anchors the bridge to the real for the concertgoer, the testimonial recordings foundational to verbatim are acknowledged, acknowledgment that is essential to the truth claims of the genre, yet these archival recordings (for the most part) remain unheard by the audience.

Realness in verbatim theatre is held in tension between these two poles, between the absent lived historical real and the re-lived real of the re-presented representation. In the autobiographical performances of *Winners and Losers*, *100% Vancouver*, *RARE*, and *Polyglotte*, these two sites of realness cohabit in one body, as self-storying performers re/ embody their own experience. And as previously argued, this generates in the singular autobiographical body an ambiguous ontological duality, fostering for the audience perceptual insecurity where the “self” is both present and absent. Verbatim theatre leaves the body behind and attempts to transfer that “self,” that lived historical real as text. In this respect, absence is a key feature of the genre. But likewise, citationality, the representation of that absence, is also key. It is a core assumption of poststructuralist thinking that everything is citation and “there can be no sense of a pure or authentic original to which the notion of

adaptation can refer.”³¹ *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* absorb this poststructuralist ethos as story, dramatizing its implications in form and in content. Just as we cannot sensibly talk about the original signifier attached to its signified in language, we cannot sensibly talk about original DNA. All DNA is citation. Likewise, there is no authentic originary self. Each story is a new version, and each is as legitimate as the one before as the self is accreted in reiterative performance over time.

The crisis of an embattled self is over, because any sense of a central point or fulcrum for being or from which to evaluate experience has disappeared. The metaphysics of presence, which orientated us to experiential time and space, is no longer meaningful; the self has no location as such, no witnessable presence to which we can coherently respond ... The self appears in myriad locations, untamed by criteria of authenticity.³²

Being unmoored in both space and time, all selves – narrative and genetic – constitute different ontologically equivalent types of citation; none take precedence. In the pages that follow, I will move to look at these two selected performances more closely, examining various dramaturgical and scenographic strategies employed by the artists to consider how the formal operations (and frustrations) of absence and presence in verbatim performance are leveraged thematically to comment on the plays’ issues.

First, how do *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* engage with absence? One place to start is with the titles of both plays. For *300 TAPES*, the paradox of present absence resides in the tapes themselves. The title draws our attention to the tapes that exist on the stage as historical artefacts. In their racks and in the hands of the performers, the tapes as artefacts are visible and tangible, recognizable and attractive as containers of original testimony voiced by original witnesses. The data is present right there in those little boxes and yet they remain profoundly inaccessible and silent. Occasionally, in the play, the real does bubble up and the stories on the tapes spill out. When Joe’s headphones come unplugged we hear a tantalizing fragment of a phrase, before the plug is restored and the sound is quickly stuffed back in the box. Sound cues sometimes overlap with the live replicating voices to let us hear the sounds of tape hiss, rewinding, or “osculating” room tones.³³ A sound cue dubbed “Slate 3” is an audio collage constructed from the declared names and date stamps in the opening seconds of each tape. Even these teasers themselves are mediated, recordings of the original moments of

anecdotal autobiography which, although raised to our attention, still remain hidden. The thing itself is necessarily obscured, but we can see and experience absence by what surrounds it, like the gravitational signature of a black hole. This performative lacuna and the indirect focus on that empty space is a key feature of verbatim performance.

In *Seeds*, likewise, the real bubbles up indirectly through metaphorical pointing to absent realness by substitutes. In the frenetic prologue, one of the actors dressed as a lab technician in a white coat holds up an egg; he then cracks it into a pan placed on a hot plate. An overhead camera captures the egg, displaying it on the large upstage screen in all its glorious realness as it sizzles. Like States's dog on the stage, the egg is a source of phenomenological fascination in its fictionally resistant *en soi*. The egg is a seed. Other seeds also feature as metaphorical markers of the present absence at the heart of *Seeds*. In scene fifteen, as Trish Jordan, the Monsanto rep, is outlining the evidence against Schmeiser, "*A bag of seed falls from the sky, landing next to [her] with a loud thump.*"³⁴ These both are and are not the actual seeds that were subjected to testing to prove their specific resistance. Another point of ambivalent absence relates to the fact that Annabel Soutar was pregnant with her second child during the research phase of creating this verbatim work. In the premiere of *Seeds* in Toronto in February 2012, actress Liisa Repo-Martell, who played Annabel as The Playwright, was herself in the second trimester of her pregnancy as she performed the role. Here, the actual pregnant body of Repo-Martell points to the absent original of Annabel, in the manner of all verbatim performers. In addition, the obvious realness of Repo-Martell's own body carries phenomenological excess triggering the effect of *en soi* and drawing attention to the ambiguous fictionality of her own seed. This effect is magnified when at the beginning of act two The Playwright has an ultrasound screening of her incipient baby. The screen fills with the black and white footage of an in utero fetus. The inescapable question (at least for me) is grounded in the real world: Who is this? Is it Annabel's daughter? Liisa's son? Unless it is a CGI fabrication, it really is some real baby somewhere. Again, as with the frying egg, the audience is enraptured by the resistant realness of an object that is not easily subsumed into the fiction. These seeds presented in this context are members of that very rarefied class of theatrical objects that resist mediation and come to us as is. They remain raw. And by trafficking in a profound presence of realness point to other "raw" objects that are absent. "Objects only become present in themselves when this total context [of the theatricalizing frame] is somehow

broken or disrupted.”³⁵ The effect of these objects is that in the same way that excessive remediation distracts us from the outcome and we get caught up in the process, resistant lack of mediation does the same thing. These selected objects get hung up in world^a.

As Andy Lavender writes, “Theatre has always traded in nowness, and at various points in its history has developed new ways in which to heighten the spectator’s awareness of the present moment.”³⁶ Connected to this sense of now-ness is the corollary sense of here-ness. The resistance of these objects to fictionality and their determination to assert their actual-world materiality points to the here and now of the theatre event. These objects participate with the audience and with actors in the immediate work of making theatre together. This is not the aura of real presence of autobiographical actors. This is not the presence of charisma. It is Power’s “literal mode of presence,” being present rather than having presence. These objects are more like *Winners and Losers*’ Jamie and Marcus’s ping pong ball, which expresses “being present” in itself, than like Jamie and Marcus themselves, who “have presence.” Power recognizes that presence is typically at odds with representation, not contradicting Derrida’s dictum that there is nothing outside of representation. This line of thinking echoes Benjamin’s assertion that the copy has no aura, no autonomous value in presence, but Power goes on to argue “that presence is a *function* of theatrical signification. To understand how presence is staged we must look at how theatre (re)presents its illusions.”³⁷ To this view, “presence is not something fixed that theatre has but is the subject of a constantly shifting interplay between theatrical signification and the context in which a performance takes place.”³⁸ In this context, these objects, in resisting theatricality, carve out a certain quality of realness against which other theatrical representations are tested. They also, as mentioned, stand in for, and assert their presence in contrast to, other ostensibly ontologically equivalent real things that are absent. Extending Kristeva’s idea via Diamond regarding the viscerally present body as the locus of the hysterical true-real that destabilizes mimetic truth,³⁹ these objects also have the potential to express a similar disruptive realness that (impossibly) precedes signification.

Beyond these stubborn objects that resist representation to point to the real, representation is also a tool to counter absence, literally making that which is absent, re-present, present again here and now. Both *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* establish narratorial, scenographic frames, positioned in an intermedial ontological space between the testimonial real

and its fictional repetition, that foreground the processes of verbatim. These frames make present the process, effectively replacing the absent original with a new present. There is now a new real: it is the act of representation that is present. The document is absent; documentary is present. Presenting metaphors for construction, these frames depict the spaces of the procreative work of remediation. Annabel's exploration of the story of Percy Schmeiser is framed by the setting of a laboratory where white-coated lab technicians bustle about with their experiments and peer into microscopes. Two dominant features of the set are the green Astroturf floor and the large screen extending the length of the upstage wall and rising from just over the actors' heads to the grid. Within this space, the stage is cluttered with rolling chairs, workbenches with articulated swing-arm lamps, illuminated racks of yellow flowering canola seedlings, computer monitors, shelves with glass vials, and moveable metal tray tables. This world of the laboratory inserts an intermedial performative space where the actors of the ensemble become, first, lab techs, who then subsequently assume multiple roles as the people in Annabel's account. In the prologue, these lab techs buzz around Annabel. They interrupt what she is saying to give her words when she pauses. Annabel is offered the aforementioned fried egg on a plate; just as she moves to eat it, the entire table is whisked away. In the conclusion of this section, Annabel offers an apologia for what she perceives to be the unfinished nature of the work: "So I'd like to begin this evening in a spirit of ... humility ... by saying that ..." ⁴⁰ We never find out what it is that Annabel wants to say as she is interrupted by one of the technicians who confidently pronounces: "One thing we know for sure: DNA holds the key to life." ⁴¹ And then off the play goes, with a brisk positivism into scene one, beginning with the recorded transcript of a television commercial from Monsanto. In this opening, Annabel seems harried, pressured by the techs, moving more quickly with the story than she is ready for. They are building the fictional play world around her, scripting her into it. In the very last moment of the play, the techs, having again shed their character costume pieces, stand in their white coats, arrayed near the seated Annabel. Again she offers a disclaimer: "But I am just one person" (*The PLAYWRIGHT looks at the other actors onstage.*) "Not really." ⁴² In addition to gesturing towards the laboratories of Monsanto, this stage space is the laboratory for making a play where the ensemble of lab techs, assuming various characters, are the building blocks of Annabel's story: the A, C, G, T nucleotides that recombine to produce the narrative sequences of genetic code in DNA.

Getting a glimpse of the work at the cellular level, this scenographic frame displays the remediating process of theatrical reproduction.

The scenographic space of *300 TAPES* also represents a place of playful mediation and reproduction. Arranged in a circle divided into segments, the set resembles the inside of a microcassette tape spooler with its spoked wheels. Magnified exponentially, we are inside the machine. Suggesting the teeth of a cassette spool, the floor is marked with six white chalk rectangles equally spaced around the perimeter of a circle. The three actors' chairs and their three hanging racks of cassettes are aligned with three of these rectangles. The audience surrounds the set in a triangular arrangement. As they recite their stories, the actors move around the space in a consistent circular pattern, sometimes looping the entire space, sometimes moving stepwise from station to station. The cassette racks move along hanging tracks and can be repositioned, pulled by the actors. At the beginning of the performance the floor is clean, the black paint only marked by the six chalk-filled rectangles. But as the stories unwind, the actors track through the chalk, leaving trails of white footprints as testimony to their serpentine paths. If the space indicates the wheel with its teeth, the actors are the tape. As the play progresses, the actors move their three chairs closer to the centre of the tape wheel, creating smaller circles, and bringing the actors closer together, shrinking the acting space. The effect is to suggest that there is less and less tape on the spool. In addition to actualizing the cassette mechanism writ large, the environment of *300 TAPES* exhibits those tapes as objects. At various points in the performance, often between monologues, the three actors perform what they call "tape box choreography" which involves gestural routines of clicking the plastic tape cases open and shut, shuttling tapes and cases in and out of their pockets, winding the tapes with their fingers, slamming closed the lids of the cassette players, and so on. Drawing attention to the materiality of the tapes themselves, the actors, like Annabel's lab techs, emphasize the labour of verbatim recombination.

In addition to the figurative embodiment of testimony by the ensemble, *Seeds* also subordinates the documentary process to the fictional realm through a kind of deictic pointing. In act one scene six, Annabel interviews Tony Creber, a lawyer for BIOTEC Canada. He enters the scene talking: "Believe it or not, I believe in fairness." Annabel, scrambling behind him, says "Wait, wait, wait. I need to turn it on. Can you say that again?"⁴³ He repeats this same statement into her digital audio recorder. This quick interjection effectively foregrounds the recording process,

illustrating another method whereby the actual-world work of creating the play is recapitulated inside the fictional frame. In *300 TAPES*, the moment of recording is overtly re-enacted at a couple of points when the actors begin a story auto-recitation with a declaration of the date stamp and title – “June 19th Dilly Dallying.” Near the end of the third loop, a voiceover track plays chopped up fragments of these normally unheard stamps: “June 19th. This is the first version of this story.” “... recording on June 20th” “Brendan Gall. August ... ” “This is Frank’s story number four.” In addition to pointing to the documentary process of capturing testimony, this is a very rare explicit marker in the play that names the performers, equating the bodily present auto-reciters with the labour of their absent aural autobiographical counterparts.

“In memory, as in history, the past cannot exist beyond the construction of those in the present,” observes Tomlin. Thinking about how the past travels into the present, she cites the Wooster Group’s “long tradition of performers who are ‘haunted by those absent others whom they reference.’”⁴⁴ This sense of possession of the actor by the character inherent in all theatrical performance is heightened in the auto/biographical relationship of the present verbatim reciter to the absent testifier. Overt theatricality places quotation marks around the characters, making them visible and marking the space occupied by these historical ghosts. When theatricality is minimized or effaced through normalization, the ghost is elided into the actor. In *Seeds*, the character of Annabel is exempt from the layered liminal ontology of the lab technician ensemble. Instead she is subject to a more traditional transposition, where she is portrayed by Repo-Martell both in the framing world of the laboratory as our narrator-guide, and in the next nested fictional world, where she plays her historical self as the interviewer in the recorded encounters with her various witness-subjects. Verbatim truth conventions and the lack of overtly signposted mediation encourage our sense that through Repo-Martell we have access to the original person of Soutar. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin identify two “logics” of remediation that shape our preoccupation with contemporary media: immediacy that is characterized by transparent mediation and hypermediacy characterized by opaque mediation. The transposition in which Liisa Repo-Martell presents Annabel tends towards transparency. This is not to say that we naively believe Liisa to be Annabel but rather that the remedial interface of the actor-character transposition is so familiar that it effectively disappears from our awareness. Inside the appropriate audience belief stance, we are able to look through Liisa and provisionally see

Annabel. The character of Percy Schmeiser shares this quality of transparent mediation with Annabel. Unlike the other witness-subjects of Annabel's interviews, Percy is not portrayed by the lab tech "code messengers." He moves directly from the actor Eric Peterson to a historical character generated by Annabel's edits, seemingly skipping the interstitial level where the mediating work is being done. In the final tableau, when Annabel acknowledges the ensemble, asserting that this is not just the work of one person, Percy rests downstage right in his armchair. It is as if he is not on the stage at all but at home in Bruno or is Annabel's projected image of him there now. This aloofness from mediation results in a different "feel" for this character, rendering him both solid in terms of his real-world immediacy and at the same time distanced from the play-making process. It feels at times as if the other characters are interacting with a ghost. It is as if Percy is the recording itself coming out of the machine. He is very real but not real here.

By contrast, Cox-O'Connell, Cobden, and Gall are both real and here, ("Frank," "Joe," and "Brendan" are also here insofar as their recorded autobiographical stories are contiguous with their present selves) and yet, the actor-character transposition evident in *Seeds* is problematized by the rules of auto-recitation in play in *300 TAPES*. The effect is still one of immediacy through transparent mediation, as with Annabel and Percy in *Seeds*, but it is achieved not by an easy transposition that facilitates a seemingly unencumbered conduit between the actor and his or her real-world correspondent. Instead *300 TAPES* sets up conditions to disrupt transposition so that direct connection does not exist and indeed to suggest that it need not exist. The devising rule of *300 TAPES* that required the initial speakers to hand off their privately recorded tapes to another actor for recitation in rehearsal is extended into performance, thus dispersing autobiographical testimony into different bodies. So for example, the story "Dilly Dallying" is told by Joe in the first and second loops, but by Frank in the third loop; the original speaker of "Dilly Dallying" is Brendan. The story that recounts, in order, all of one boy's childhood Halloween costumes, is recited simultaneously by all three actors. It is not revealed in performance whose costumes these actually were. The effect of this switching and sharing is to sever the usual autobiographical ownership of the recited story from a historical body or self. This sense of disconnect is further strengthened by our awareness that the original author is present but may or may not be the speaker. As the versions of the stories swirl, the history of these three becomes one, a fragmented collage of quotidian middle-class Canadian

boyhood of men of a certain age, “a composite portrait of that nameless [generation] wedged between X and Y,”⁴⁵ replete with hockey, summer camp, walking to school, first kisses and breakups, a decade of Halloween costumes, parents, siblings, neighbours, casual mischief, and the usual embarrassments and wonders of growing up.

Like the character Annabel, with her tape recorder and her questions, who re-enacts Soutar’s initial investigations, the actors in *300 TAPES* perform their participation in the labour of documentary creation. In addition to the later work of auto-reciting the pre-recorded stories, their dual role in the original documentary task as both testifier and recording witness is captured on the tapes and re-performed inside the production. As self-reflexive testifiers, the three men editorialize on the stories they are telling as they are telling them, drawing attention to the gap between the younger protagonist-self of the story and the current speaker. One way this happens on the tapes is through associative digressions. Starting off with one intention, the meandering speaker sometimes ends up elsewhere. In “Halloween,” Brendan adds being a scuba diver in grade three to his list of costumes. He recalls that he went out “with my mom and dad. They went together with some other people, which was a weird anomaly. They did not hang out at all, so they must’ve been having a good week or something. It didn’t last. But I went as a scuba diver.”⁴⁶ Another tactic of the testifier is editorial commentary by the present speaker that is at odds with what the younger self knew or felt. “I don’t feel like that costume was so great ... I went as ... Man! ... I thought I did better but I didn’t. I had bad Halloween costumes ... What the fuck was I doing?”⁴⁷ Something in the act of speaking memories opens space and the speakers learn as they are talking. The act of speaking in this context invites secondary consideration and what you think you had or were is perhaps not the case upon reflection. Further in this vein, the testifiers also backtrack reflecting on something that didn’t in fact happen – “but I think at the last minute I decided that was dumb so I didn’t wear it”⁴⁸ – and so non-events are recorded at par with those events that did transpire. The gap between past and present selves manifests in acknowledgment not only in knowledge or understanding between the two but also when the present listener acquires insight through the immediate act of testifying, adding a revealing metacommentary that bridges both testifier and documentarian. At the end of the tape “Daisy,” Joe talks about his younger adopted sister Daisy and their relationship: “Ya. It’s kinda interesting in my stumbling through after story telling talking about her is probably a little bit more

revealing than the stories themselves. So it goes. Uuuuhh. Yep.”⁴⁹ In the sedimentation of current thoughts on past memories, we are reminded of what we already know, that even the “original” documents are products of the moment of capture; they are not direct copies of history. One cannot escape the current moment. In these self-reflexive interstices, past and present, testifier and documentarian encounter each other.

Another way that the labour of the recording process is reflected in the tapes is in moments of meta-awareness of the speaker as documentarian. This is evident in the inclusion of extra-testimonial comments on the mechanics of recording, both those that are intentional as in the recitation of names and date stamps or creating a title for the tape, and those that are unintentional, arising through errors, memory problems, and contingency in the recording context. Often the tapes begin with self-talk about the plan of what to talk about: “I am going to try to go through and remember everything I went as for Halloween. So ... I think the very first Halloween that I remember going out, my mother made me a sunshine costume.”⁵⁰ The self-imposed stare of the red recording light adds subtle pressure to accurately log the documents and makes the speakers trip: “This is Frank on Toronto 18 ... er ... Toronto 18th? What the fuck? This is Frank on August 18th ...”⁵¹ Each of the speakers at different points takes note of their own uncertainty about the stories, the factual content but also the scope: “When I was five years old which is the end of kindergarten, beginning of grade one. I could be wrong.”⁵² “I’m obviously forgetting a ton of Halloween costumes. That’s alarming. That’s like five costumes. What the hell else did I go for. Clearly I dressed up every year for Halloween. I should remember that.”⁵³ It is also worth recognizing the stories that manifest as silence, the stories that don’t get told. First of all, there aren’t really 300 tapes.⁵⁴ Second, only about a dozen tapes are heard in the show in some form or other. Finally, some remembered “episodes” inevitably get skipped over. One rule of the devising process required that each actor record his memories in sequence from earliest memory without backtracking. Memories arise but, presenting themselves out of sequence, they must be excluded: “What else? So many things ... So many wondrous things ... uh ... none of which I can think about right now ... or remember. Huh.”⁵⁵

Another way that the work of deictic pointing to the initial documentary process is accomplished in *300 TAPES* is through literal re-performance of that labour via a kind of gestural verbatim where specific prior movements comprise a potentially iterative vocabulary. Like Annabel’s

recorder, the recorders of *300 TAPES* exist both elsewhere in the past in world^a as a tool of documentary capture and they appear here and now, also in world^a, as part of the playback apparatus. The transmission of an original object from there-then to here-now acts as a potent bridge, linking these two poles. Like broadcast recording technologies, like live video streaming, focus on the recorders as a single object in both real locations functions as a transparent broadcast medium, effectively eliminating temporal and spatial gaps. A complication in this transmission process, however, is that these objects, like autobiographical bodies, have a dual ontology. These “autobiographical” props are both actually themselves comporting their lived history and also representing that previous existence in world^b. Beyond their immediate use as props in the role of recorders in the fictional world, the recorders are actual objects with provenance: cued up with tapes ready to record, held up as microphones for recording, cuddled while speaking, buttons pressed, lids flipped. The physical work of handling the cassettes is also re-performed, becoming a parallel verbatim text that is codified into repeatable “dances” or sequences. During the devising process, the Public Recordings company crafted and documented twenty of these sequences. For example, one sequence nicknamed “The Original” goes in part like this:

Hit rewind; Recorder in right hand
 Cross to box
 Look at recorder; waiting for it to stop; with recorder door facing up
 Open, Flip so “tape speed” faces up.
 “Ash it” [tap like a cigarette]; close it
 (Take out tape with left hand)
 Recorder to back pocket (right hand)
 Switch tape to right hand
 [...]
 Step out with left foot
 All cross into centre – chin scratch (right hand)
 “Oh shit I forgot” (left fast stop, pivot right)
 Back to box; hands on knees
 “Oh no I was right”
 Cross to Box
 Pick up tape – right hand (dummy)
 Drop tape (dummy)
 [...]



4.1 Frank Cox-O'Connell in *300 TAPES*. Photo courtesy of Ame Henderson. Photo credit: Trevor Schwellnus.

In this manner, not just text but also the movement of cassettes and recorders along with the actor bodies are performed verbatim, replicating not just the content of narrative documents but also the documentary process as a site for reproduction.

The cumulative effect of this attention to the liminal space between the original document and its performed duplicate is simultaneously a recognition and an effacement of the manipulations inherent in the documentary process. Both effacement and recognition contribute to the generation of the desired authenticity effect. In their survey of how digital media strive to render the user interface transparent, Bolter and Grusin suggest three techniques for making the creative mediating agents disappear from our active perception.⁵⁶ One, remediation as holistic. In this mode, transparent mediation happens all in one step. Television broadcast presents this kind of seamless presentation to the

point where we refer to the broadcast of a temporally concurrent event as being “live.” Two, transparent remediation as automatic. The replication of visual perspective by photography is rendered immediate in this way. The chemical and mechanical processes involved express an automatic character that elides both the process and the artist. And three, transparent remediation where agency is deferred; that is, the work necessary for remediation is done at a distance. Computer drawing and drafting works this way. A lot of work has been done but it is being done elsewhere long in advance of our encounter with the remediated artefact.

Each of these strategies I have identified above in *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* are strategies for creating a sense of authentic immediacy through transparency. They are examples where agency is deferred or set at a distance. Here, the remediating work of documentary is ontologically relocated away from Soutar and recomposed in the lab where it is now the work of fictional doppelganger “Annabel” and the white-coated acting ensemble of embodied documents. Likewise, the remediating work of Cobden, Cox-O’Connell, and Gall is divided and recombined among their disparate selves as testifiers, documentarians, and playback reciters. In this way, the work of documentary theatre, the selecting, editing, and arranging that significantly opens a critical differential gap between world^a history and the world^b performance, has been transmuted to world^b becoming a fictional version of itself. This then is a very effective strategy for repositioning and deflecting the inherent concern with veracity in documentary. Soutar and the *300 TAPES* ensemble acknowledge that this remediating work is being done and show it to us, rather than hiding it from us. Hidden, it becomes a locus of interest, inviting the audience to actively consider the weighting of truth and bias in the labour of verbatim creation. Not only is this labour rendered visible but its ontological situation has changed. As part of world^a, this labour is inaccessible to us. It is unknowable and therefore can be a cause of concern. Relocated to the fictional construction of world^b, it is complete in the way that all fictional worlds are complete in and of themselves. Whereas the actual world is always wholly determinate with every detail complete, fictional worlds are by nature not fully determinate, that is they are full of holes where they do not accurately map the actual world in a one-to-one copy.⁵⁷ However, in our experience of the fiction, we do not perceive this indeterminacy as lacunae to be filled; we just recognize that these elements are simply not part of the fabric of this complete-in-itself fictional world. The overall effect of this

strategy of inserting an intermedial frame-world that houses the labour of remediating life into performance is that both productions encourage this remediation to be transparent and stable. We can see what is being done. It is fully comprehensive and fully visible, thus the mechanism “disappears.” In the case of *Seeds*, we trustingly read the results as an authentic transposition. In the case of *300 TAPES*, we are encouraged in the attitude that it doesn’t matter; authenticity, that is, the precise location of the bridge from representational to the real, becomes irrelevant as a feature of our experience.

One of the reasons that Annabel finds questions about genetically modified foods so pressing is that, as she notes, “our perception has changed.” She exhorts us to look. “My fear, though, is that if we don’t look for this ... this ... this ... [...] This phenomenon ... yes, the *phenomenal* aspect of life, we won’t see it. Because it’s not that reality, or *biology*, or *life* has changed since Watson and Crick – it is our *perception* that is changing.”⁵⁸ Before James Watson and Francis Crick articulated their theory that DNA works as a kind of blueprint for reproduction, we were only able to view the working of reproduction by its effects. In terms of our knowledge, we were essentially residents of the mid-nineteenth century with Gregor Mendel, tracing the paths of heredity in plants by counting numbers of offspring plants with green peas and those with yellow peas. Another connection in the analogy between verbatim theatre and the genetic modification of organisms is their reliance on new perspectives opened by technology. Seeing life in a new way allows us to tell new stories, but also presents new obligations of epistemology for the audience-consumers of those stories. Technology changes at what level we can “know” something. Powerful microscopes allow us to see life on a very minute scale so that we can see the organism or we can read its DNA. For geneticists, there are now new biomolecular books to read and to write. Likewise, we understand the fluidity of identity creation through autobiographical narrative in new ways. New selves are waiting to be written. For Cobden, Cox-O’Connell, Gall, and Annabel, the digital recorder in their pockets allows them to capture not just words transcribed in writing but also the vocal quality of the lived words. Access to the material of life is likewise expanded through this change in scale afforded by technology. *Seeds* gives us one generation. *300 TAPES* accelerates the processes of hereditary replication, giving us multiple generations. Over time, the fidelity of subsequent copies is eroded through mutation and new forms evolve.

Ultimately, these processes of genetic change become the thematic point of focus for both productions. Form speaks to content. When verbatim theatre attempts to address its central essential tension between the truth-contract with historical lived testimony and the constructedness of theatrical re-enactment by foregrounding that construction process, it becomes vulnerable to accusations that the stories of the witnesses are being displaced by the story of the documentarian. Tomlin clearly articulates this critique of the self-dramatizing process: "The shift from public information to private narratives raises the stakes for the ethics of performance because the citation of testifiers, as distinct from the citation of testimony, can too easily become the representation of testifiers, whereby the 'self' of the other is reconstructed by the performer for the purposes of the artistic project."⁵⁹ Too much emphasis on the work of construction tends to unbalance the narrative of verbatim towards the collector-processor of testimony and away from the source of testimony. I want to argue here that both *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* manage to avoid this pitfall by placing their focus not on the journey of the verbatim artist-journalist – the "white knight" at the centre that Tomlin counsels us to avoid – but instead on the mechanism of the documentary itself. Thus, verbatim in these two plays is not just a formal structure but resides at the fulcrum of the work where it participates not just in a meditation on form but is itself thematized as content. *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* are about unending citationality or reiteration as the means for mutation, degradation, evolution, and change. In this way, the process is the protagonist. As Josette Féral writes, "performance gives us a kind of theatricality in slow motion ... giving the audience a glimpse of its inside, its reverse, its hidden face"⁶⁰

On the one hand, making the labour of crafting verbatim work explicit and visible is an effective strategy for addressing the central tension of the genre, caught between its allegiance as a truth-based form and its necessarily aesthetic construction as performed. On the other hand, the re-performance of this labour itself is a representation, enmeshed in fictional worlds. In act two scene five, Annabel self-reflexively dramatizes her own process and marks a particular point of frustration. Seated at her own kitchen table, she debates whether or not to include the testimony of Dr Vandana Shiva, an Indian environmental and anti-globalization activist. Annabel's difficulty is that Shiva's views regarding the dangers of consuming genetically modified foods are unsubstantiated, as far as Annabel can tell, by peer-reviewed science. In performance, Shiva, embodied by ensemble member Bruce Dinsmore adorned in a

sari and earrings, stands upstage left separated by a square of light from the more naturalistic setting of Annabel's kitchen. From this position, she interjects the comments that Annabel is thinking about editing out. In the scene following, ostensibly an interview with Dr Ann Clark, other characters crowd in contributing their own views, disagreeing with each other and trying to influence Annabel's opinion. Historically, this group melee did not happen. Testimony was collected individually, then spliced together to create this fray. But rather than a debate between actual people, I am suggesting that this moment is an uprising of post-editing fragments. Bits of testimony are competing to be selected by Soutar/Annabel for inclusion in the final text. It is another moment where the process of documentary creation is re-performed inside a subordinate fictional world.

Whereas *Seeds* chooses as its dominant approach splicing together fragments of dialogue, *300 TAPES* displays reproduction through loops. The play is structured in three acts or three loops; each loop repeats the same stories and gestures. At the end of the play, the actors reset for a potential fourth loop. In its reiterative loops, *300 TAPES* displays multiple generations of speaking-recording-speaking in sequence and we witness an accelerated reproductive process. In addition to simply re-speaking recorded texts through auto-reciting, the actors also make new copies of the texts inside the performance. During the third iteration of the story recounting the one child's lifetime history of Halloween costumes, the actors form a circle. Gall wears his headphones but hands his machine to Cox-O'Connell, who speaks into the microphone; Cox-O'Connell's machine is in Cobden's hands and Cobden speaks into the microphone; Cobden's recorder is in Gall's back pocket. Gall speaks but does not record. The effect of this arrangement is that each actor is hearing a version of the story, but also simultaneously voicing a new version of the story – sixth generation, seventh generation, eighth generation. Verbatim text moves from generation to generation through technological re-recording using the machines but also through human recording and playback in the three-act/three-loop structure of the performance. A basic rule of the game dictates that any new material arising spontaneously in an early loop is to be incorporated verbatim into subsequent loops. If an actor coughs or stutters in the course of a speech, then this sound or action is "recorded" and is repeated in the next iteration. In one of the archival videos of the performance, during the story "Dilly Dallying," Cobden accidentally (?) disconnects his headphone cord from the machine when putting it in his pocket, and the sounds of the

tape are heard briefly; he then scrambles to reconnect the plug, cues up the tape again and continues; an action sequence that became necessarily embedded in loop two – performed again by Cobden – and in loop three – performed by Cox-O’Connell, re-performing the ethos of capturing live action and remediating it through reproduction. All the ephemera of live performance – errors and flubs, choreography that is out of sync, or double takes of “oops I forgot,” – must be repeated and so are neatly absorbed into the new loop, becoming representational in the next round, genetic mutations that become part of the basic DNA of the offspring.

In performance, the mediatized scenography of *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* amply illustrates this new perception, immersing the audience in a hypermediated experience. The opposite of the immediacy proposed by transparent mediation, hypermediacy presents an excessively mediated, self-conscious style. Through layering, fragmentation, and distortion, we are reminded of the ineffable mediating frames that stand between the viewer of the work and the original experience it represents. Bolter and Grusin recognize the desire for the real at play in both kinds of remediation but mark their different sources: “Transparent digital applications seek to get to the real by bravely denying the fact of mediation; digital hypermedia seek the real by multiplying mediation so as to create a feeling of fullness, a satiety of experience, which can be taken as reality.”⁶¹ That is, the layered and multiple media presenting an opaque interface deliver the authentic but in a different way. Here, the authentic lies in our real experience of the media, in the pleasure we take in the meta. Excessive hypermediacy indirectly “reminds us of our desire for immediacy.” Playful and subversive, it compels us to consider our lack.

Lawrence Grossberg, writing about audience perception of authenticity at rock concerts, connects the playfulness of hypermediacy to what he calls the authentic inauthentic. The authentic inauthentic arises when performativity is not only explicitly acknowledged but made to be self-referential. You know that I know that you know that this is a performance. “Authentic inauthenticity says that authenticity is itself a construction, an image, which is no better and no worse than any other ... The only authenticity is to know and even admit that you are not being authentic, to fake it without faking the fact that you are faking it.”⁶² Grossberg argues that within the context of the live performance of popular music, authenticity lies in sound rather than in sight. As distinct from the recording of a song, it is only in the live situation that

one can see the actual instrumental production of the sound, as well as the correlation between the emotional timbre of the voice and how that labour is marked on the singer's body. The principal element of value in the live concert is not the visual spectacle but the live production of sound. Grossberg also argues that sound has a more authentic phenomenology than sight, since sound is experienced as a fully immersive environment as opposed to sight, which is unidirectional. There is also more of a sense that sound is beyond control, washing over you and entering into you. During site-specific audio walks where you-the-audience-member roam actual-world environments while listening to headphones, you are in the visual space, but the sound is in you, psychoperceptually in the brain space between your ears. The sound quality of *300 TAPES* attempts to replicate that aural landscape. By contrast with the authenticity of the ear, "[t]he eye has always been suspect in rock culture, after all, visually, rock often borders on the inauthentic"⁶³ with its elaborate costumes, spectacular effects, extravagant personae. Thus, Grossberg argues for a two-channel perceptual model, balancing authentic aurality with authentic inauthentic visuality. Although he is talking about the culture of rock music, this same pattern is discernible in how authenticity manifests in verbatim. First, like popular music in concert, oral testimony is also a genre premised on an ideology of the authentic; the essential *raison d'être* of the event is an opportunity to access realness. Second, like rock music, that authenticity and sense of realness is located dominantly in aurality, through the musicians and through the witnesses. The pairing of rock music with television in the creation of music videos parallels the pairing of oral testimony with theatre in the creation of verbatim, linking two media of authentic aurality – music and testimony – with two media of acknowledged performative visuality – television and theatre. This dichotomous mapping may be overly simplistic in its application to verbatim performance in general but it does productively open avenues for thinking about visual hypermediation in contrast with bids for aural transparency of mediation in *Seeds* and *300 TAPES*.

The strategy of authentic inauthenticity need not necessarily lead to visual excess. Rather, it is the knowing wink, that any construction is a construction. Authenticity is always performative with any staged element "achiev[ing] and maintain[ing] its effect of authenticity by continuously citing ... the norms of authenticity for its particular [genre] and historical moment, and these norms change along with changes in the prevailing discourse of authenticity."⁶⁴ Andrew Goodwin observes

that, for example, “within the established codes of rock music, the act of ‘revealing the machinery’ rarely involves making the narration visible, but instead is a *guarantor of authenticity*.”⁶⁵ He cites the pervasive music video mise en scène of the rehearsal room or warehouse space. The rehearsal room or warehouse is a (clichéd) maker space for a band; this is where (we imagine) the real work of making music happens. *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* present the metaphorical maker spaces of a laboratory and a tape recorder reel, but notably, *300 TAPES* also overtly resides in the literally real maker space of a theatre. The theatre does not disappear. Theatre in the round ensures that we can see fellow audience members in their role as audience members visible through and across the performance space. We can also see Anna the sound operator and Trevor the lighting operator. The floor is standard black Masonite. The walls are visible. A structural pillar is incorporated into the blocking. The actors wear “street” clothes and sit in crappy theatre chairs. And in this way, *300 TAPES* manifests a “slacker” not-a-design design, gesturing to the authentically inauthentic theatre as theatre.

Hypermediality in *Seeds* also manifests in authentically inauthentic design elements. One use of the large upstage screen in *Seeds* is to display imagery that helps to communicate the location of the scene. Rather than visually replicating the original places, creating the pictorial documentary equivalent of verbatim copying, the screen tags each scene with a kind of distorted shorthand, an iconic visual quip. The Schmeisers’ kitchen features two outsized partial windows flanked by a section of patterned wallpaper also at a very large scale relative to the actor bodies below. The office of lawyer Terry Zakrewski is depicted by a beige wall adorned by framed diplomas, which distort as they recede quickly away from the viewing plane. Scenes with Monsanto public relations representative Trish Jordan are marked by an enormous partial image of the Starbucks mermaid logo. Another example of hypermediacy in the scenography of *Seeds* arises in the use of the screens for broadcasting live video feed of the actors. When characters address the journalistic media, onstage tripod-mounted video cameras operated by the lab techs capture their images to be projected above. In addition, these shots never replicate the frontal view afforded the audience; instead they render our doubled perception as almost Cubist, contrasting the live actor with a mediated extreme side or reverse angle. As with the static setting imagery, the original archival visual material of the televised footage of the speech or press conference is notably not used. Although the use of screens and the framing of Soutar’s interview

subjects as expert talking heads evokes the truth-claims of televisual documentary on the one hand; on the other hand, by making visible the cameras and their operators and by layering the live actor with the screen actor, it taps into the playful disruption of hypermediacy. Liz Tomlin points to this interplay, noting its power, where the spectator's perspective shifts "between, on the one hand, the performance of construction on the stage and, on the other, the filmic performance on the screens in a highly charged strategy for deconstructing the representation of the real whilst highlighting its powerful and ideological potential for persuasion."⁶⁶ The window or screen of remediation is marked as such and we are acutely aware that the ontology of liveness of image on the screen, usually an indicator of immediacy and intimacy, is undermined through this process of re-capture, re-recording, and re-presenting as patently a third-order representation. It is also noteworthy in this context that these zoomed in close-up images are remediated as black and white. Black and white imagery bears cultural associations with newsreels perhaps or with archival footage and so acts as a truth marker, but as a corollary to that impression, the alteration of the original, now broadcast in black and white, also marks the image as remediated.

The vivid green colour of the stage floor serves a specific remedial purpose, providing a contrasting background for the special effect of chroma key compositing, also known as a "blue screen" or in this case as "green screen." Returning to Bruno, Saskatchewan to talk to Percy Schmeiser's neighbours, Annabel phones the house of Schmeiser's employee Carlyle Moritz. Moritz's wife answers, telling Annabel that Carlyle cannot come to the phone; he just went out. Upstage behind Annabel, one of the lab techs pulls a toy tractor on a string along the floor. Out of the blend of this live image together with a prerecorded landscape, the screen shows us a tractor rolling through a green field alongside a road. On the one hand, this technology has the potential to offer us a compellingly transparent, but faked reality. On the other hand, as it is staged here, the processes and vagaries of the technology are exposed in such a way that they act as a hypermediated experience. In addition to the dual interplay between the real object and its video counterpart, distinguished by their contrasting scale and angle of perspective, the compositing of the two video paths is far from seamless here. First the tractor rolls through the meadow, its tow string clearly visible, until it bumps into the giant shoes of the technician. Finally the camera is pulled away before fully fading out, and the screen image is blurringly jolted. Whether intentional or not, the result is authentic

engagement with the workings of green screen remediation. This process of blending two real but disparate inputs to create a novel compound image is parallel to that of genetic modification, filling in spaces with data imported from elsewhere.

Hypermediation in *300 TAPES* arises principally in the processes of auto-reciting. Like green-screen technology, auto-reciting is also premised on the hybridity of the live and the recorded to create something new. A core characteristic of hypermediation as it draws attention to overt or excessive mediation is the adding or layering of frames. Bolter and Grusin give the example of the way television screens for news broadcasts are broken up into multiple panels, often featuring split screen images and a ticker-tape “crawl” of headlines or other facts across the bottom. By marking up the window, the window itself becomes visible. The window, previously transparent and unremarked, becomes discernible in the experience of hypermediacy as does the perceptual work of seeing through it. Auto-reciting operates in a similar mode by marking up the usual invisibility (or in this case inaudibility) of the text as text. Auto-reciting displaces the assumed authority of the text; text is unsettled as performance draws its textuality to our attention. Like an actor carrying a book of *Hamlet* (or Annabel’s binders of court transcripts stored in the baby stroller), *300 TAPES* makes the text physically present through a kind of friction. The technical challenge of auto-reciting opens a gap in the usually seamless automatic process of coding, decoding, and recoding of text. This friction that expands or slows the process acts as a reminder that presence in writing (or in this case magnetically encoded analog sound) is difficult to locate. Using the example of a shopping list, Derrida points out that the sender of the shopping list is not congruent with the receiver, even though you may be writing to yourself.⁶⁷ In this respect, *300 TAPES* evokes Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*. As Elinor Fuchs writes about the play,

Beckett ... uses the mechanical device of the audiotape to rupture both the fabric of presence on the stage created by the actor’s alignment of voice and gesture, and the seeming presence of life to itself with its seamless “now.” The audiotape, an unsettling juncture between voice and writing, present and retrospect, saves voice as inscription, as writing, but also stands as an image of the problem of writing itself.⁶⁸

As with the seeming co-presence of Krapp and his younger taped-selves, the three actor-reciters of *300 TAPES* and their only slightly antecedent

taped-selves also experience this rupture of presence. The formerly unified and coherent narrativized autobiographical self breaks into parts; parts that are able to speak to and through each other. In addition to opening this juncture between temporal versions of the “same” self, *300 TAPES* further disrupts our notion of self-storying by refusing to put the voice back into the same body. Rents in the fabric of presence are multiplied as the stories migrate from body to body in such a way that autobiographical “ownership” or synchronicity between narrative self and the somatic experience of the body become disconnected.

Another way that the stories of *300 TAPES* are hypermediated is through error. As argued in the previous chapter in connection with the work of Sara Jane Bailes, failure exposes the mechanisms of construction, inviting reflexive awareness on the failed illusion.⁶⁹ In this context, that shattered window or screen functions as hypermediation by revealing the now broken glass. Playback errors are an inevitable part of the semi-spontaneous nature of *300 TAPES*. Headphones get unplugged, cassettes are dropped, actors backtrack on choreography. However, because one of the devising rules of the production requires any “error” to be repeated in subsequent loops, errors need not be taken as faults but are merely new information – a mutation in the code – to be replicated into the basic structure. Mutations also arise when the performers ostensibly reciting or gesturing in unison drift out of sync. At the beginning of “Halloween,” the three reciters take time to align their tapes and press play simultaneously. Despite their effort, the coordination is not precisely perfect. And so their recitations inevitably vary with lags and delays, some slight extension of vowels or pauses that create minor variances. It is difficult to describe but the effect in performance of the overlapping speech flowing together and then diverging and then recombining in unison again is mesmerizing and musical. The most pronounced results of looping mutation feature in the distortions that arise as the reciters create and re-speak generations of tapes. “Halloween” has seven generations. The overall effect of reiterative human playback is that the words start to break down into disparate syllables and other non-semantic noises, ultimately becoming gibberish. They also become more musical, rising and falling in pitch. Intonation also varies with the sounds (and some identifiable words) being elongated or delivered in truncated staccato. Some clear phrases are interspersed with breathing, sighing, growling, buzzing, and repeated stuttered words: “that that that.” Through this mediated game of broken telephone, words evolve into other words; “sunshine” becomes over seven

repetitions “ship of a sand.” At one point in the seventh generation of “Halloween,” the speaker blurts out “I don’t know what that part was” as (presumably) the recorded text becomes incomprehensible and his powers of oral imitative transcription momentarily fail him. Consistent with the attitude of the production, I think it is important not to see this breakdown as loss, or at least not only as loss. Something of the original sense is lost certainly as the generations go on but something new and unexpected emerges in its place.

In her exploration of the question of whether there can be a feminist mimesis, Elin Diamond follows Luce Irigaray’s ideas about mimicry to imagine a playful but alienating mimesis generated specifically through multiple distorted reiterations. Quoting Irigaray, Diamond writes, “To play with mimesis is ... for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it.”⁷⁰ Diamond continues, “This move from ‘subordination’ to ‘affirmation,’ from ‘play’ to ‘recover[y]’ pushes the irony of multiple reflection into dialectical struggle. Mimicry can function, in other words, as an alienation-effect.”⁷¹ Mimicry as mimesis is overcharged through endless repetition and deliberately distorts the original to create space, and to talk back against strict control of representation. It manifests in the production of “a funnyhouse concatenation of irreconcilable selves ... Forms with ‘false offspring.’”⁷² This seems to be to be an accurate description of what is happening in the looping distortions of *300 TAPES* that engender narrative progeny that are both like and unlike their “parents”; a fecund production that is both subversive and joyful. The attitude throughout the production is that these “errors” of replication are not failures but are “natural” aspects of reiterative reproductive processes.

More than merely structural features of hypermediacy, performing, reciting, lying, misunderstanding, and breakdowns of communication are recurring motifs of the stories themselves. In the story “My Little Ole Baby,” the speaker recalls the time when at just five years old he wrote a song about his baby sister that had similar lyrics and a similar melody to a pop song that was popular just afterwards. (The dopelganger song is “I Can’t Dance,” produced in 1991 by the UK band Genesis.) The story highlights this coincidence and the outrage of his child-self that someone else had copied his song. This pop song is to his mind an imperfect replication of his song, caught somehow in the zeitgeist. In the show, when he can’t remember the name of the band, one of the others blurts out “Genesis.” Provocatively, he also notes that

"I think there is a recording of me singing it." And so this new recording is also a replica of that remembered long-ago recording. His own historical memory of the event is inevitably coloured by his experience of hearing the recording since then. It is even possible that this recording (and the pop song by Genesis) have reshaped his memory of the song itself. Sometimes the memory of a photograph can replace the memory of the event and it is difficult to be certain which one is authentic, as the replica overwrites the original. Between the original song, the recording of the song, and the popular Genesis song, it is difficult to determine the order of genealogical precedence for the song that is recorded, and subsequently auto-re-sung in the production. As a key motif, this notion of dispersed uncertain ownership resonates in this anecdote but is recognizable as a feature of the whole production.

Along the same thematic lines, another tape presents a metacommentary about the failure of hybridizing live and recorded performances, not in auto-reciting but in karaoke. Cast in a school review as Elvis, the speaker is embarrassed when, instead of the expected eight beats on the click track as an introduction, the audio operator starts the tape late and he only gets four beats. His opening vocals get clipped by the song's first chord. He thinks he has made an embarrassing mistake and that people are laughing at him. In retrospect, he realizes that people were more likely amused by his pint-sized golden Elvis impression of "Heartbreak Hotel." At the end of this story on the tape, Frank does an imitation of the click track and his singing and the recorded instrumentation to show us how it should have gone and sets the record straight.⁷³ The story "Getting Dumped" also points to a kind of reiterated speech and its failure. In an effort to reconcile with a summer camp girlfriend, the speaker (with the assistance of an older counsellor) crafts and rehearses a speech designed to get her back. On the tape, he describes how perfectly he delivered it. But it fails to change her mind.⁷⁴ The anecdote captures the mawkish emotion of preteen love in the speech and also its curt brutality in her monosyllabic "No." It also perhaps provides a counter-commentary on the theme of imperfect iterations, demonstrating that this meticulously rehearsed and most perfect replica failed in its aims. As a complement to stories about failed recitation, there are also stories of breakdowns in representation where listeners fail to understand what is being shown or communicated. In "Daisy," after meeting his new sister, adopted as an eleven-year-old from China, for the first time, Joe launches into a long speech of welcome and asserts his love for her. His ardent effort to connect is deflated as he recounts when

she responds, "I don't know you say."⁷⁵ Brendan documents a common Halloween problem: that people fail to recognize his costumes: "I had to tell people who I was a lot. I remember that."⁷⁶ Of course this is what autobiography is: telling people who I was.

Beyond thematizing error and uncertainty, misfires of transmission or reception, one story in *300 TAPES* stands out as an example of fabrication, not lying, but actual fabrication as creative making. In the story dubbed "3 Flights," Joe-Brendan recounts flying from Toronto to Montreal, to Toronto and back to Montreal in one day for various work projects. He concludes this account with "and that makes me the best ever ... That, and ..." And then his thoughts spin off, imaging all the marvelous art projects that he will create. He is "gonna" to do a carbon footprint project that involves walking around on carbon paper or perhaps in shoes made of carbon paper. He is "gonna" to write a book about the intersections between hacking and dancing. He is "gonna" screen print the bottom of a skateboard with the word "Taliban" and present it to celebrity skater Tony Hawk. He is "gonna totally reinvent the colours pink and grey."⁷⁷ This story is unique among those included in the performance plan in that it is not historically autobiographical but rather performatively projects that self into the future, with all the things "I'm gonna do." And by association who I'm gonna be, i.e., "the best ever." In the context, then, of *300 TAPES*'s concern with change through mutation manifested both in its form and in the content of the selected stories, this future-oriented embroidery demonstrates the results of those mutative changes. It is also interesting to note that for each of his proposed projects, Joe-Brendan also accounts for its documentation as a blog or a book or a presentation at "an obscure arts festival in Afghanistan," or as a film on a website. His projects are both the work itself and (like so much live art) its documentation. Like the tapes and their data in *300 TAPES*, documentary representations of the event are as much part of the work as the original live action. "3 Flights" eschews the attachment of verbatim to a real-world historical past, and by doing so in the context of the other stories, neatly encapsulates the play's investment in the fecund possibilities of reiterative replication, where the stories become unmoored from autobiographical ownership, from semantic sense, and from reality.

Ostensibly, the core business of verbatim theatre, as a reality-based genre, is authenticity and epistemological security. The intent of the form is to transport the historical real to the stage. In practice, however, as mentioned at the outset, direct transference of the document

by verbatim work is inevitably compromised by poststructural scepticism embedded both in the vagaries of performance praxis and in contemporary understanding of the impossible relationship of representation to an absent real. The question then of how to employ the features of this (epistemologically flawed) form in support of particular issues has been answered in different ways by *Seeds* and by *300 TAPES*, although as demonstrated the two plays share many stylistic and thematic elements. The presence of objects with a high degree of *en soi* that mark the absence of the document, paired with techniques of transparent and opaque mediation, suggests a particular view of how we are to assess the epistemological stability of these stories. In the case of *Seeds*, elements of transparent mediation give us an impression of direct access to Annabel's research, but also laminated onto this is the overpowering authentic experience of how the research was accumulated, selected, and modified. The play is structured in such a way as to allow the transference of real historical experience directly to the fictional reflection. Although we are shown the mediating processes at work, they are constrained in certain ways that allow them to be quickly effaced, rendering an immediate experience of Annabel's story. We don't doubt what we have been told; we doubt the epistemological project itself. Looking at the other half of the scenographic equation, the persistent hypermediated presentation paradoxically communicates through its delivery of more, more, more data that although this may all be true there is still more that remains to be known. Ultimately, Annabel's search for truth comes up empty. As she unearths more of the story around Percy Schmeiser and how pesticide-resistant patented Monsanto seed ended up in his fields, Schmeiser's claim that the unwanted seeds blew in from a passing truck makes less and less sense to her. Poking around, Annabel talks to someone who gives her the name of a local farmer who, he says, sold Schmeiser the GMO seeds illegally. When Annabel tries to interview this mystery person, she cannot make contact. He refuses to talk to her. Despite everything she has learned, despite the hundreds of hours of recorded interviews and the thousands of pages of court transcripts and media reports, this one piece of information is beyond her ken.

Importantly, the ambiguity of the play's conclusion does not lie in a sense that all the evidence has been presented and we are invited to draw our own conclusions. Rather, the openness of the ending tells us that the evidence, any evidence, will always be incomplete. It is impossible to transcend the limits of what we can know. The pregnant

Annabel, at her obstetrical appointment, is asked by the ultrasound technician: "So, you really want to know?" "Yup." "Well, it looks like you got yourself another little girl in there."⁷⁸ On the screen above is projected an ultrasound video of the fetus. This hidden life, made visible through technological remediation, is now a thing we can know. Formerly there were things that we weren't responsible for because we didn't know. But now, as Benjamin notes, "[b]y close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action."⁷⁹ Despite our advancing technology, we still can't look inside the seed DNA to really know what is going on, we can only see outcomes. The same is true for Annabel's view of Percy. We can't see inside to really know what he did or what his intent was; we can only see the external outcomes of these hidden workings. Annabel says: "But for me there is one irrefutable truth about Percy: his resistance ignited a worldwide narrative about GM seeds that continues to sprawl in contradictory directions even today."⁸⁰ The recent history of modern science furnishes a long list of things that were great until they weren't: leaded gas, thalidomide, dioxin, PCBs, DDT. What we don't know is: Does genetically modified food belong on that list? This is reminiscent of philosopher Nelson Goodman's problem of projectable predicates. The classic example is "All emeralds are green." All the emeralds I have ever seen are indeed green, but can I say that this is definitively true of all emeralds? Is it a defining feature? Alternatively, Goodman offers another statement: "All emeralds are grue." That is, all emeralds are green until some unknown future time or circumstance when they could be either green or blue. So the question for us is: Are GMOs green or are they grue? The debate offered by *Seeds* is invigorating. The play gives us large doses of authenticity both in our transparent engagement with the historical real and through the enervating stimulation of hypermediation. But even in this overcoded experience of the authentic, the end is an epistemological stalemate. The lesson of the play is how to live with the full knowledge that we can never fully know.

This uncertainty is a feature of *300 TAPES* as well, where despite exposure to personal stories recounted "directly" from original audio documents, remediation destabilizes epistemological knowledge that allows us to connect the representation to its originary reality. As with

all autobiographical encounters, which purport to offer access and connection, Brendan, Joe, and Frank remain essentially strangers to us. Not only can we not know them in the present, as evidenced by genetically modified foods in *Seeds* and the problem of Goodman's green/grue emeralds, we cannot know their future either. In the first story of *300 TAPES*, "Dilly Dallying," Brendan recounts a time when as a small child he got stuck crawling into a drainpipe: "Think about how you got there, and the fact that you did get there. And that if you really think hard about it probably means you can get out of there."⁸¹ Yes, probably. Despite past evidence of lived experience and of scientific inquiry, the knowledge of the future remains probabilistic. Another point of commonality between the two plays rests in the ethical relationship between autobiography and first-person biography. What happens when you give your story to someone else? In *300 TAPES*, the stories and their associated identities become blurred. It is impossible to determine "who" this is. Rather than grapple with the ethics of appropriating other people's stories and by extension their experiences and their identities, *300 TAPES* suggests that this appropriative blending is to be expected and perhaps even embraced. Autobiographical correspondence or ownership is not relevant here. As the creators remark in their program notes, "As we all listened to these stories, we realized that there were overlaps and synchronicities between them." These narrative similarities were augmented by the looped, recombinatory practices of the devising rules for the production until "eventually everything you remember seeing and hearing is undone and reprocessed into something new."⁸² A process that is not unlike genetic reproduction, giving away your "self" through copies of DNA passed from parent to child.

Significantly, neither production is creating clones. As "verbatim," they are failures. By introducing human factors – errors and other imperfections – into the copying process, *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* disrupt the ostensible fidelity of verbatim. Benjamin, perhaps, has nothing to fear from these copies being not fully mechanized. In the context of the proliferation of mass produced identical copies, these obvious forgeries seem quaint. The crux of the argument here is that verbatim as a form, as it is employed by *Seeds* and *300 TAPES*, has value that lies elsewhere, apart from claims to authenticity and truth. Mutation is a necessary and inevitable part of remediation. Change is part of representation. This change is not necessarily "growth" or "progress" – not in the sense of a neoliberal good; nor is it degradation and loss, or at least not as negatively associated with those words. It is just change. Is it good? We

can't be sure. Maybe. Aura, located in original testimony, is lost, but new kinds of presence manifest. The child does not lack aura for being part of an endless citational chain. The real becomes newly located in creation, in new organisms of genetic modification and in new stories of retelling and narrative modification. Cormac Power writes, "theatre perhaps realizes its potential as a viable artform when it asserts itself not in terms of presenting the 'live' real or a purely fictional, but as a site where reality and unreality overlap to reveal their mutual instabilities."⁸³ At this site of overlap where different relative levels of reality are manipulated is the point where process becomes visible. Baudrillard, thinking about the nature of simulation, argues that in a society dominated by hyperreality, signs have changed from reflecting reality to disguising reality. "The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes that territory – *precession of simulacra* – that engenders the territory."⁸⁴ He continues, "no more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: it is genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks and models of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. [The operations of simulation are ...] nuclear and genetic, and no longer at all specular or discursive."⁸⁵ Arguably, *Seeds* and *300 TAPES* are functioning at this molecular level both in the sense of genetic and phonemic manipulation and yet they resist the creation of an indistinguishable hyperreal by managing to restore imperfection and mutation. The human playback restores a feeling of realness, perhaps not to the source, but instead to the process and then to the source indirectly as part of the chain of citationality. Realness resides not in the document but in the shared act of documentary, in the active consideration of its mutative processes, when the process becomes the story; not an impossible clone of experience, but a story-child, simultaneously both recognizable and distinct from its testimonial parents.