

SPEECHWRITERS: PERFORMING POLITICS IN DOCUMENTARY

by

Andrew Bateman, BaH University of
King's College, Halifax, NS, 2010.

An MRP

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in the Program of Documentary Media

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2017

© Andrew Bateman 2017

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this MRP. This is a true copy of the MRP, including any required final revisions.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this MRP to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this MRP by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my MRP may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Speechwriters: Performing Politics in Documentary, Master of Fine Arts, 2017, Andrew Bateman, Documentary Media, Ryerson University

What role do speechwriters play in Canadian Federal politics? How do they affect the political process? In what ways do they influence how we imagine and articulate ideas? How much of the words spoken in parliament are those of the politician and how much are those of the speechwriter? *Speechwriters* is a short documentary film that explores the above questions with humour, criticism, and sincerity. This paper explores these topics by discussing notions of performativity in both the political arena and the documentary film tradition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	2
Characters.....	3
Film Structure.....	5
Historical and Theoretical Context.....	6
METHODOLOGY.....	10
Concept Development.....	10
The Performative vs Expository Mode.....	11
Recruitment & Realization.....	13
Performances: Historical, Reenacted.....	16
Reflexivity.....	23
Settings & Visuals.....	25
DOCUMENTARY RELEVANCE.....	27
CONCLUSION.....	35
APPENDIX A — PARTICIPANT RELEASES.....	36
WORKS CITED.....	37

INTRODUCTION

The words that politicians deliver publicly matter. They often influence electoral races and determine party policies. However, the public is not privy to the ways in which a politician consults, strategizes, or deliberates over the words they present publicly. Indeed, in the absence of a scandal, the processes by which a politician develops a speech, or makes a statement, or writes a press release, is for the most part opaque. It turns out, many individuals are involved in choosing a politician's words, but they are left in the shadows to privilege the politician's public persona.

The film, *Speechwriters*, sheds light on the people involved in crafting the words we hear from our politicians. By doing so, this film delves into questions of performativity in both politics and documentary in the hopes that it will enhance general political literacy in an age of disenfranchisement with our political systems. This documentary is especially important when we consider how quickly the world is shifting in response to the newly elected President Donald Trump and the rise of populist movements across Europe that threaten political projects as old as the Second World War. *Speechwriters* is a film that advocates for and creates transparency in the political process while at the same time creating transparency within the work of authoring, especially authoring films. It does so from a belief that knowledge facilitates the identification of weaknesses within a system and provides opportunities to advocate for change.

This paper outlines the structure of the film, *Speechwriters*, while drawing attention to its political, philosophical, and methodological motivations. Throughout, ideas of performativity, authenticity, and representation are discussed.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

My documentary film features three speechwriters who work for elected members of parliament in Ottawa. The speechwriters perform a speech they wrote for their politicians on camera, with the exception of one of them who reads a press release, and they speak to the techniques and considerations involved in their writing practices. Later they explain the political context under which their speeches were written and discuss their views on the state of Canadian federal politics. Interlaced with these performances and reflections are snippets of the MPs' original deliveries of the speeches along with additional archival footage from other speeches given in the House of Commons. As the film moves through these performances, reflections, and archives, it is intercut by an actor who performs a speech delivered by a president of an unnamed country in a novel by José Saramago called *Seeing*.¹ The footage of the speechwriters and their politicians gives a behind-the-scenes look at the political speechwriting process, while the interjections from *Seeing* frame the film in a wider philosophical discussion about the nature of electoral politics and democracy.

In its widest scope, the film provides an analysis of federal politics in Canada by shedding light on the role of communications in the political landscape. By doing this, the documentary also touches on the ways in which laws are imagined, proposed, and debated. In its narrowest scope, the documentary brings detailed attention to the intricacies of choosing words to deliver in the House of Commons with its focus on speechwriters. It also highlights the sheer number of people involved in anything a politician says publicly. However, the documentary also

¹ José Saramago, *Seeing*, Trans. Margaret Jull Costa (London: Vintage Press, 2007).

engages in greater questions around the process of writing, editing, and documentary filmmaking through its reflexive gestures, a topic this paper will address later.

CHARACTERS

The film opens with Darrah Teitel, former speechwriter and legislative assistant for Niki Ashton, a New Democratic Member of Parliament for Churchill-Keewatinook Aski in Manitoba. Teitel is performing a speech written for Ashton on May 8th, 2015, about removing the federal sales tax on feminine hygiene products. She explains the tax is sexist and needs to be removed, because, she says, “I am pretty sure that if men menstruated, they would never have been taxing tampons in the first place.”² Teitel is a strong political feminist and comes off that way on camera. She explains that the bill garnered a lot of media attention because “it makes people salivate to talk about women’s bodies.”³ Teitel concludes the first section of the film by recounting how she ended up working in politics. “[Theatre] is what I’ve done since I was a child,” she explains, but precariously employed and without a job, she accepted a job in politics when the NDP won a number of seats across Quebec in 2011. “Once I took that job,” Teitel recounts, “I found that it was exactly the same as what I’d always been doing, which is just spinning left-wing narratives and putting it in people’s mouths. So I honestly feel like playwriting is the perfect training for working in politics.”⁴

Teitel’s line about playwriting serves as a segue to meet Tim Welham, an actor who is recounting a story told by José Saramago from the novel, *Seeing* (2005). Later Tim performs a speech delivered by the president of the unnamed country in which the novel is based and berates

² Recorded interviews, *Speechwriters*, 2016

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

the film's audience for making a mockery of the democratic political system. Welham's personal beliefs or characteristics are left unexplored, because his role in the film is really only as an actor — he is meant to provide a delivery of the story and the speech found within Saramago's novel.

John Wiber comes next as a staffer for the Conservative Party's Todd Doherty, Member of Parliament for Caribou-Prince George in British Columbia. Wiber is reading from a press release he wrote about the conclusion of a fundraising effort and awareness-building campaign that Todd Doherty promoted. Wiber reads the release with a disaffected tone, attempting to get through the release quickly. He explains the release is boring in a scene in which he is reviewing his own footage, adding that it is a good thing the scene is cut to be made more interesting. He then explains that a press release is "sent around, it is chopped up, changed, and then, you know, sometimes it can be changed six times before it's ready."⁵ Wiber is cynical about politics, and this comes out in his posture, tone, and delivery, although not necessarily in his words.

After an interlude in which the Tim Welham is performing a segment of the speech in Saramago's *Seeing*, Sebastian Ronderos-Morgan is presented to the audience. He is a former legislative assistant and speechwriter for New Democratic Member of Parliament for Terrebonne-Blainville, Charmaine Borg. He first appears on screen doing drama exercises to warm up his lips, explaining that these exercises helped his MP when she delivered speeches in the House of Commons. He says that he is anglophone but he was hired to work in a francophone office, and, as such, he often found himself doing patchwork speeches, writing first in English to get the ideas across, and then translating them to French. Ronderos-Morgan comes

⁵ *ibid.*

off as very young and at times inexperienced but he performs a speech about the need to protect people against hate crimes, and he is seen to be passionate about this.

The three characters help paint a small picture of Canada's dynamic federal politics, offering a representation the countless people in Ottawa who assist the 338 Canadian Members of Parliament. However, more importantly, they bring transparency to the ways in which politics operate on the federal level.

FILM STRUCTURE

The film can be divided into five distinct components. The first component consists of archival footage of the original speeches delivered in the House of Commons by Members of Parliament juxtaposed against re-enactments of those speeches by the speechwriters. Included within this section are reflections from the speechwriters on the speechwriting process. The second component consists of interjections from the actor, Tim Welham, who interrupts the speechwriters to recount a story in José Saramago's novel, *Seeing*, and who performs a speech found within that novel. The third component consists of the speechwriters reflecting more broadly on the state of Canadian federal politics and the areas in which it needs to improve. The fourth component of the film consists of archival footage of various MPs speaking in the House of Commons, and this component tends to highlight points made by the speechwriters themselves, or otherwise it serves as comedic relief. The fifth component consists of reflexive gestures in which the director makes his presence, choices, and directions increasingly known as the film unfolds.

HISTORICAL & THEORETICAL CONTEXT

This project comes at a time when citizens in Western democracies are disenfranchised from their democratic systems and are electing populist parties that are challenging long-standing political conventions. On the right, this trend is characterized by an upsurge in support for far-right parties that advocate for isolationist, anti-immigrant, and often explicitly anti-Muslim policies. These parties include UKIP in the UK, Le Front Nationale in France, PEGIDA in German-speaking Europe, the Christian Democratic Party in Hungary, and now the Republican Party in the United States with Donald Trump's presidential win. On the left, the movement is characterized by political figures that are fighting for debt abolition, an end to austerity, and a strengthened social welfare net. These parties include Podemos in Spain and SYRYZA in Greece. On both sides, populist parties are experiencing the most growth in their voter bases, and they are responsible for some of the biggest shifts in the political landscape in recent years. In 2016 alone, the UK voted for Brexit and decided to start a long, complicated, and uncertain withdrawal from the European Union without a solid understanding of the associated repercussions; the American electorate elected Donald Trump as president, a man who has never held a political office and openly questions geopolitical alliances that have not changed since the end of the Second World War.

In recent years, the media periodically writes about entering an era in which facts do not play into politics. However, since the election of Donald Trump, the media sphere is inundated with stories about post-truth politics. These stories explore how politicians no longer cite credible sources; they make up their truths and present them to the public as hard facts. Trump's claim that the Obama Administration wiretapped his phones, his assertion that his inauguration

crowd was more widely attended than any previous presidential inaugurations, and his claim that his administration's ties to Russia is a made up, fake news story, are only the most glaring examples of this. The pro-Brexit campaigners and their false claims that Brexit would put 300 million pounds back into the National Health Services is another example of this.

However, the concept of post-truth politics has been around for a long time. Ari Rabin-Havt recently called attention to it in his book, *Lies Incorporated: The world of Post-Truth Politics*.⁶ He explains corporations with vested interests anonymously fund small organizations that publish citable reports but offer little to no accuracy on the subjects concerned in the reports. Politicians then cite these studies as they advocate against policies to address climate change, protect workers, or raise the minimum wage.⁷ Colin Crouch writes about a similar problem but calls it post-democracy: the process by which democratic institutions lose decision-making power to international business interests legitimized by international trade agreements.⁸ But it can be argued that post-truth politics can be linked back to what Guy Debord spoke about in his book, *The Society of the Spectacle*, a book that was published in 1967.⁹ In a follow up on his original text, Debord writes in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* that "power can...deny whatever it likes, once or three times over, and change the subject, knowing full well there is no danger of any riposte."¹⁰ Debord predicted post-truth politics way before the recent political occurrences of today, and he attributes the rise of post-truth politics to a society that is so heavily

⁶ Ari Rabin-Havt & Media Matters for America, *Lies Incorporated: The World of Post-Truth Politics* (New York: Anchor Books, 2016).

⁷ *ibid.*, iii.

⁸ Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004).

⁹ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, Trans. Malcolm Imrie (New York: Verso Press, 1990), 19.

saturated with images produced by the media. He argues, “there is no place left where people can discuss the realities which concern them, because they can never lastingly free themselves from the crushing presence of media discourse.”¹¹ As such, Debord concludes that our society “obliterates the boundaries between true and false by repressing all directly lived truth beneath the real presence of the falsehood maintained by the organization of appearances.”¹²

The film *Speechwriters* grapples with these concepts by emphasizing the performative elements of politics, something that will be discussed in greater detail below. However, *Speechwriters* is also situated within a multidisciplinary approach inspired by my background in social anthropology and contemporary philosophy. From a philosophical perspective, I am influenced by Michel Foucault’s notion of “governmentality” (the process by which governments try to produce citizens best suited to the laws and policies they create).¹³ Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “homo sacer” (the way in which a citizen is included in the law by way of exclusion, or, in contemporary terms, by way of revoking their citizenship)¹⁴ and Carl Schmitt’s notion of the “state of exception” (the process by which a sovereignty can enact a state of emergency to indefinitely suspend rights and freedoms)¹⁵ are also helping me frame the way in which I understand government’s relationship to its citizens. From an anthropological approach, I am

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 219.

¹³ See Hubert Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982); Michel Foucault, “Governmentality” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 87-104, Ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 1-52. Ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁴ See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ See Carl Schmitt, *Dictatorship: From the Origins of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to Proletarian Class Struggle*, Trans. Michael Hoelz and Graham Ward, (Malden: Polity Press, 2014).

influenced by ethnographic studies of governmental programs that fail to meet their own stated objectives¹⁶ to ask whether the controversial laws being passed are meeting their intended goals. I also take inspiration from Laura Nader's essay "Up the Anthropologist--Perspectives Gained from Studying Up" as she calls for the study of those who hold power rather than those who live the consequences of the power exerted.¹⁷

A film that transparently deals with the performative aspect of politics, while pointing to the ways in which it is itself carefully constructed, is crucial in creating an understanding of the political system in which we live. Indeed, this type of project is pressing if we want to understand how politics operate and how they should serve us. Post-truth politics and populist movements are nothing new, but they have experienced a significant resurgence and they certainly threaten a stable, democratic, and free society.

¹⁶ See Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Tania Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Donald Moore, *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Laura Nader, "Up the Anthropologist--Perspectives Gained from Studying Up" in Dell H. Hymes (Ed.) *Reinventing Anthropology*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) p. 284-311.

METHODOLOGY

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

This project was conceived as friends of mine from my undergraduate degree found themselves working in Ottawa for politicians in the New Democratic Party. From discussions I had with them during my occasional visits to the city, it became evident to me that they exerted a lot of influence over their party's political positions because they were responsible for writing most of the speeches and public statements delivered by politicians at events, in Parliament, or at news conferences. As I spent more time with them, they would often bring their colleagues out to parties or events, and slowly I realized that Ottawa was home to a large population of young political professionals that worked around the clock to support and sustain the national political system. It dawned on me that a documentary project on this group was needed.

Developing this project was rather complicated. For one, I wanted to make a nonpartisan documentary that featured staffers from all political parties. However, my strongest connections in Ottawa were to individuals working for the NDP — I had very few if any connections to anyone outside that party. For another, political staffers are media savvy and look for opportunities to make their politicians look good. If there is a chance that their participation in an interview will jeopardize their boss' reputation, they simply do not participate. Finally, there is a culture of quiet servitude among political staffers in Ottawa and they rarely allow themselves to be seen on camera. Indeed, some staffers have reported to me that if they appear on camera next to their boss, they have to buy a round of drinks for the office.

Given these obstacles, I began the project by approaching my closest friends in Ottawa and consulting them on the feasibility of the project. Their initial response: the project is very

interesting but unlikely to get traction. They then listed the concerns outlined above: staffers are meant to be off-camera, and no one wants to defame their boss.

As such, building trust in my ability to fairly and accurately represent without causing embarrassments to the staffers or their MPs became a top priority. To that end, I developed a release that would allow participants to review the footage before the film was completed and I emphasized this privilege while talking to anyone about the project. I also decided to spend as much time as necessary with potential participants before doing the shoot in order to go over everything we would cover in the interview. I assured them there would be no surprises on the shoot date. As such, I spent a lot of time meeting with potential participants and laying out in detail my intentions for the project. It is this trust-building work that got this project off the ground.

THE PERFORMATIVE VS EXPOSITORY MODE

Another way I built trust with my participants was by discussing my approach to documentary films. Bill Nichols identifies six different documentary modes developed since the introduction of the documentary genre: the expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative modes.¹⁸ The expository mode strives for objectivity and advances an argument that brings to light a problem and may suggest a solution.¹⁹ This mode is journalistic in nature and calls to mind films that uncover atrocities, like Emile de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig*,²⁰ or they may declare an impending disaster, like Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*,²¹ or

¹⁸ Bill Nichols, "What Types of Documentary Are There?" in *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 99-138.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 105.

²⁰ *In the Year of the Pig*, Directed by Emile De Antonio, 1968, DVD released in 2005.

²¹ *An Inconvenient Truth*, Directed by Davis Guggenheim, (Lawrence Bender Productions, 2006), DVD.

otherwise they may investigate crimes, like Moira Demos and Laura Ricciardi's *Making a Murderer*.²² On the other hand, the poetic mode facilitates “the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge.”²³ For Nichols, this type documentary deviates from the

straightforward transfer of information, the prosecution of a particular argument or point of view, or the presentation of reasoned propositions about problems in need of solution. This mode stresses mood, tone, and affect much more than displays of knowledge or acts of persuasion. The rhetorical element remains underdeveloped.²⁴

On the other hand, the performative mode recalls movies such as *Tongues Untied* by Marlon Riggs²⁵ or *The Body Beautiful* by Ngozi Onwurah's.²⁶ These movies bring the audience on a conceptual journey that often leaves a great deal of room for the audience's interpretations. But it also “raises questions about what is knowledge. What counts as understanding or comprehension? What besides factual information goes into our understanding of the world?”²⁷ For Nichols, the performative mode “underscores the complexity of our knowledge of the world by emphasizing its subjective and affective dimensions.”²⁸ Unlike the expository mode, the emphasis in this documentary type is on a subjective form of representation that allows for unconventional narrative structures and artistic liberties.²⁹ As such, it creates space for interpretation while deemphasizing hard truths that might be found in expository documentaries. Although I did not say I was using the performative mode to my participants, I emphasized that I was taking an artistic approach to the movie that was less journalistic in nature, and therefore not

²² *Making a Murderer*, Directed by Moira Demos & Laura Ricciardi, (Synthesis Films & Netflix, 2015), VOD

²³ Nichols, “What Types of Documentary Are There?”, 103

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *Tongues Untied*, Directed by Marlon Riggs, (Signifyin' Works, 1989), DVD.

²⁶ *The Body Beautiful*, Directed by Ngozi Onwurah, (British Film Institute, 1991), DVD.

²⁷ Nichols, “What Types of Documentary Are There?”, 130

²⁸ *ibid.*, 131

²⁹ *ibid.*

after hard-hitting truths about the political system. The idea around this approach was that they would feel less threatened by a film that was explicitly artistic and thus less definitive and more interpretive.

RECRUITMENT & REALIZATION

The film, *Speechwriters*, is about the behind-the-scenes of political processes, especially speechwriting. But in exploring what it means to write a speech, this film also ends up exploring what it means to make a film. And insofar as it explores the mechanics of both speechwriting and filmmaking, the film ultimately advocates for transparency from government officials and from authority figures in general — that includes filmmakers. In the same way that the speechwriting process is made transparent in this film, it is important to make the filmmaking process just as transparent through, in part, a record of how the film was realized.

The project was realized after numerous Facebook messages, lengthy emails, and many meetings, social events, and drinks at Ottawa's typical Irish pubs and local cafes. I talked to everyone who would listen about the project and I messaged anyone who might have even a tenuous relationship to the political environment in Ottawa. It turned out I had more connections than I thought. Friends and colleagues knew staffers who worked for Elizabeth May, Justin Trudeau, the late Jack Layton, Tom Mulcair, and Stephen Harper. I sent out introductory emails and requested meetings and I spread the word in Ottawa that a documentary about political staffers was going to get made. Some staffers responded and arranged meetings, others responded that they were interested but then ignored my subsequent emails and messages — one of Stephen Harper's former communications director was particularly guilty of this, as was one of Elizabeth May's staffers.

The first two people willing to participate were a couple I met through a classmate of mine in the MFA program, Amy Siegel. She connected me to her friend, Darrah Teitel, who had worked for Niki Ashton and whose partner, Sebastian Ronderos-Morgan, had worked for the NDP's Charmaine Borg. We met at their house and spoke about the project. Teitel expressed initial concern over copyright issues of the speeches, and Ronderos-Morgan said he was interested in theory but would have to ask his boss about whether she would oppose his participation. I checked back with them a couple weeks later and they had both cleared their concerns: they were available and excited to participate. I asked them to send me three speeches they would be willing to share on camera, and upon reading these speeches, I expressed my preference but emphasized that the choice was ultimately theirs. In both cases, Teitel and Ronderos-Morgan used the speeches I preferred.

The third person I found was a conservative staffer, John Wiber, who was working for Todd Doherty when we met. I found him through a convoluted string of connections that started at a birthday brunch. It was an old high school friend's birthday and he invited me to celebrate at his place. Over the course of the celebrations, I met a friend of his, Oscar VanderZaag, whose brother, Olivier VanderZaag, worked for the Conservative Party in Ottawa. Oscar introduced me to his brother, Olivier, over email and we met for a beer in Ottawa the next time I was there. Olivier was cautious about participating but was happy to talk to his colleagues about the project. A month later he invited me to attend a rooftop party where he would be barbecuing with some conservative colleagues. I accepted the invitation and found myself talking to half a dozen conservative staffers about the documentary. John Wiber was there and he was the most interested. We exchanged numbers and arranged a meeting.

When we met, Wiber explained he was excited about participating. He talked about the various aspects of the job he would like to speak about on camera and confirmed he had a lot of content he could share. I committed to arranging a shoot date and I asked him to send examples of the content he wanted to share. He failed to share the material with me but confirmed he was still interested when I arranged a shoot in the Senate on Parliament Hill. On the day of the shoot, I was joined by a colleague, Peter Conrad, and a Senate chaperone who was responsible for taking me to my shoot location and assuring I followed their strict shooting rules. Wiber never showed up. I heard back from him the next day saying he had an emergency meeting and had to miss the shoot. Later, he admitted he was nervous about doing the interview and felt that his participation would compromise his job security. I convinced him to do the shoot a day later by reaffirming my commitment to letting him review the footage and suggesting a shoot location change — he agreed. He showed up the next day with an uncontroversial media release. Although disappointing, I later realized the banality of his release would serve to highlight the diversity in tasks associated with the job.

My fourth participant was Riccardo Filipone, the Director of Communications for the NDP. Riccardo and I have been friends for a long time and although he assured me he would not participate at first, he eventually agreed to the project once I gained his trust. Unfortunately, he was later cut from the film because his interview did not compliment the three other interviews. This is true in terms of the interview's setting, since Riccardo's interview was shot at a friend's house instead of the same nondescript building in which the other interviews were shot. But it is also true in terms of the interview's content. Riccardo recounted a story about Jack Layton rushing down a set of stairs in Centre Block to flawlessly deliver a speech to a huge crowd of

students. Although engaging, the story diverted the film's focus from juxtapositions of the historical and reenacted speeches to an anecdote about the quick-paced nature of politics. Had Riccardo performed and read a speech while also including his anecdote, he very well could have made the cut.

The other emails and messages I sent led to some meetings but did not ultimately prove fruitful, at least for this project iteration. Justin Trudeau's lead speechwriter met with me and expressed interest but ultimately could not make the time for a shoot. Trudeau's advisor on climate change, an old university friend of mine, could not participate but connected me to Green Party staffers because she had worked closely with Elizabeth May. One Green Party staffer, Hardie Rath-Wilson, expressed interest and scheduled a shoot with me but called in sick on the day of and he subsequently stopped communicating with me. A journalist I knew from university who worked for BuzzFeed, Paul McLeod, put me in touch with the former Director of Communications for the Conservative Party, Fred DeLorey. DeLorey said he was interested but dropped communications with me after I tried calling him. Ultimately, a lot of staffers on the hill were interested in the idea but afraid about their job security. In general, there may be more participation in the future if there is wider party buy-in and after they see this film.

PERFORMANCES: HISTORICAL, REENACTED

Beyond the practical details of how this project was developed and then realized, the film makes a number of aesthetic and methodological choices in both the production and post-production stages of the filmmaking process that serve to bring out deeper questions around notions of electoral politics and performativity. One of these choices is the juxtaposition of the historical footage of the original speech delivered in the House of Commons by the Member of

Parliament with the footage I created of the speechwriters performing the speech they wrote for their MP. This juxtaposition between the historical and the reenacted footage makes a significant albeit evident point: the words we see delivered by the politicians featured in this film are not their own words. On the contrary, and quite obviously, they are the speechwriter's words.

However, more importantly, this juxtaposition also highlights moments where both the politician and the speechwriter slip out of their performative readings and provide unguarded, unprepared, and sincere reactions. This is particularly evident when, for example, Darrah Teitel fumbles on a word in her speech and asks to redo the line. The camera cuts to that exact moment in Niki Ashton's version of the speech only to see that she too fumbles on the exact same word. Later, this phenomenon repeats itself in Sebastian Ronderos-Morgan and Charmaine Borg's speech deliveries. These moments of slippage, whereby the politician and the speechwriter flub their lines, are flashes of authenticity in which the performative persona is relaxed and the unfiltered, unprepared self comes out on camera. In other words, these slippages highlight the performative by contrasting it with honest reactions from the speechwriters and politicians.

In other moments of the film, the juxtapositions also serve to confound the origin of the voice by interchanging the speechwriter's voice with the politician's voice, and vice-versa. For instance, Darrah Teitel is featured re-enacting her speech but the audience hears Niki Ashton's voice. Later, the voice swaps and instead of hearing Ashton's voice, Teitel's voice is heard while Ashton's image is on screen. This interplay between voices and images helps merge the source of the words with the deliverer of the words, creating confusion as to whose words are being performed. Furthermore, it draws attention to the performative aspect of speechwriting by creating moments in which voices are divorced from their images, encouraging the viewer to

think about who prepared and who recited the words, similar to the relationship a playwright has to her actor.

Apart from the explicit juxtaposition of the historical footage with the speechwriters performances, the speechwriters' performances themselves bring out more questions around performativity and politics. Their performances, or reenactments, bring new meaning to the original historical objects (or archival footage) as they introduce an element of the fantasmatic. According to Bill Nichols, the fantasmatic "involves a pleasure associated with a past event that is transposed into a distinctly different...domain."³⁰ In other words, the reenactments certainly represent the historical event, but it adds a new denotation to it and shifts the signification of the reenactment away from the historical moment and unto itself. Nichols explain "the very act of retrieval [of a historical event] generates a new object and a new pleasure. The viewer experiences the uncanny sense of a repetition of what remains historically unique."³¹ This fantasmatic also contributes to the documentary voice of the filmmaker, which "speaks through the body of the film: through editing -- through subtle and strange juxtapositions, through music, lighting, composition, and mise-en-scene, through dialogue overheard and commentary delivered, through silence as well as speech, and through sounds and images as well as words."³² Together, these aspects of the filmmaker's voice creates the possibility to see things anew,

to see, as if for the first time, what had, until now, escaped notice. This is not object sight but seeing in that precarious, fleeting moment of insight when a gestalt clicks into place and meaning arises from what had seemed to lack it or to be already filled to capacity with

³⁰ Bill Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Autumn), 76.

³¹ *ibid.*, 74

³² *ibid.*, 78

all the meaning it could bear. Such insight does not occur, however, until given external shape: the shape provided by the film's voice as it addresses others.³³

The speechwriters' reenactments, then, bring new meaning to the spoken words of the politician. By reenacting, speechwriters are not repeating history, they are reinterpreting it through the fantasmatic. The voices of both the speechwriter and the politician, and the way they are exchanged and disembodied in the film, create a gestalt shift in which the authority given to the politician through our institutional traditions is reclaimed by the speechwriter as the original source of the authoritative words. This moment is only possible through the speechwriter's reenactment.

THEATRICAL INTERVENTIONS OF *SEEING*

Tim Welham performs a story from José Saramago's novel, *Seeing*. He explains to the audience that an unnamed country holds an election, but on the day of the election over 70 percent of the ballots return blank. Deemed unacceptable by the ruling party, they hold a second election, but even more ballots are returned blank. Welham explains this throws the electoral system into a state of chaos. The next time Welham appears in the film, the director is seen explaining to Welham that he is now performing the role of the country's president giving a speech to his citizens. The speech berates its citizens and blames them for the chaos they created in the democratic electoral system of the country, explaining they have thrown the entire electoral system into chaos because a mandate to lead the country is impossible with such few votes. The speech is patronizing and paternalistic and pleads with the citizens to come to their senses and engage once again with the electoral system.³⁴

³³ *ibid.*, 78-79

³⁴ See Saramago, *Seeing*, 84.

These interludes from sections of *Seeing* serve to reinforce the notions of performativity and theatricality. Excerpts from *Seeing* appear in the film every time a speechwriter mentions or suggests the presence of performative elements in politics. For example, the first instance *Seeing* is brought up in the film is after Darrah Teitel mentions that she believes playwriting to be the perfect training for work in politics. After this comment, the camera cuts to Welham telling the audience the story about blank ballots in *Seeing*. Later, John Wiber says he writes press releases and edits them for tone and clarity sometimes six times before they are released. The camera then cuts to Welham delivering a line six different ways, drawing parallels between the writing and the performative processes. The film segues out of Welham's performance by introducing Sebastian Ronderos-Morgan in the middle of drama exercises meant to warm up his lips. At its most basic level, then, the theatrical interventions from *Seeing* hammer home the association between theatre and politics, as the dramatized sections of *Seeing* are interjected every time a speechwriter hints at the presence of the theatrical in the political. Viewed in juxtaposition with the speechwriters' comments, these theatrical interventions demonstrate that the performative is a part of politics in a very literal and practical sense.

More importantly, *Seeing*, also situates the film within an important theoretical and philosophical discussion about the nature of democracy, electoral politics, and power. The book is about an electorate's relationship to a democratically elected government. In Saramago's arguably hyperbolic story, the democratic governing system of an unnamed country is threatened after over 70 percent of ballots cast in an election are blank. By casting blank ballots, the electorate effectively chooses to have no representation from any of the political parties. Thrown into an existential political crisis, the government declares a state of emergency and withdraws

their services and personnel, including the police and the military, leaving the electorate with neither representation nor government support. The government officials hypothesize the move will throw the electorate into chaos and bring it back pleading for the government's services and leaders; instead, nothing changes and the electorate go about their daily lives. Increasingly more shocked, the government spends the remainder of the book attempting to coerce the electorate into believing they are needed but they do so unsuccessfully.

Seeing is not propaganda for the popular conservative ideology to reduce government size. Rather, Saramago's novel situates itself in conversation with philosophical ideas around illegitimate power and state sovereignty. Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault theorize about these concepts in their writings about biopolitics³⁵ and the rise of totalitarianism,³⁶ but the book engages most closely with Giorgio Agamben's writings on the "state of exception" as developed from Carl Schmit's thoughts on the same idea. Although it is not within the scope of this essay to enter into a detailed discussion on these terms and ideas, it is important to outline the basics in order to situate the film, *Speechwriters*, within this line of thought.

For Agamben, the state of exception is the suspension of judicial order by the sovereignty or state.³⁷ Totalitarian states rise as a result of a state's ability to do this, and the state of exception is within the realm of possibility for any and all nation states around the world. Agamben uses the Holocaust as an illustrative example of the state of exception insofar as Hitler declared a state of emergency to criminalize Jews and send them to concentration camps. But

³⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Arnold I. Davidson, (New York: Palsgrave MacMillan, 2004).

³⁶ See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Harcourt, 2001).

³⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

Agamben also argues that America's response to the attacks of 9/11 is another example, because they suspended the rights of a number of citizens and imprisoned them indefinitely without a trial. This state of exception, Agamben concludes, jeopardizes the entire Western project of unconditional and international human rights. But more importantly, it creates a form of illegitimate power insofar as a state can suspend someone's human rights. In other words, nothing is above the law, except when the state deems it necessary, at which point everyone is under the law except those governing.

Seeing brings attention to these issues. In fact, the whole premise of the book is based upon this. The government calls a state of emergency, withdraws itself and its services, and sieges the city in which this crisis took root. The leaders of the government go as far as committing a terrorist act to convince the electorate that they are needed to bring back control to the environment,³⁸ but ultimately the act of terrorism does nothing but further defile the government's reputation. Indeed, the politicians' wise and authoritative lustre is washed off as they fall deeper into desperation to regain the electorate's vote. And as such, when Tim Welham performs sections of the president's speech from *Seeing*, he portrays a depleted, desperate politician, on the verge of begging the electorate to once again comply with the electoral system. However, by then, the book has called into question political authority and its use of power, and the president's speech falls on deaf ears. Although the audience watching *Speechwriters* is not privy to all this information, they are privy to the president's desperate tone. And when this tone is placed in contrast to one of the speechwriter's enthusiastic and passionate call for people to engage in the electoral system, the audience is left wondering who is to be trusted. Both the

³⁸ Saramago, *Seeing*, 112.

speechwriter and the president are asking for the same thing; however, the speechwriter is sincere and the president is patronizing— the one ends up neutralizing the other, but, more importantly, the audience is made to feel as though the patronizing tone of the president discredits his demands. As such, the patronizing tone of the president asks the audience to question what the speechwriter says, since they are both saying the same thing. Here, the theatrical interventions counterbalance what the speechwriters stand for, and, in this way, the performance ends up feeling more real than the speechwriter's line even though the performance is based in the fictional.

To summarize, the theatrical interventions from *Seeing* are used for three important effects. First, they point to the very real and literal presence of the performative in the practice of politics. Second, they situate the movie within a contemporary philosophical debate around a very problematic characteristic of nation states — that is, the state of exception. Third, insofar as the character portrayed by the actor says similar things to the speechwriters but comes off as untrustworthy, the theatrical interventions serve to discredit and challenge the seemingly authentic ideas presented by the speechwriters.

REFLEXIVITY

The film employs a reflexive methodology. This reflexivity is used to draw parallels between the writing process and the filmmaking process while also unpacking the steps involved in making a film. The reflexive methodology is not present at first: neither the director nor his filmmaking instruments are audible or visible to the audience. However, as the film unfolds, the director's voice and directions become increasingly present; the equipment used to light the set and record the audio slowly gets included into the visual language of the film; and finally,

background cameras show the entire setup on set. Jump cuts are used later in the film; speechwriters ask to redo their performance; the actor, Tim Welham, is shown delivering one specific line six different ways. On top of that, archival footage in the House of Commons shows, first, Jack Layton saying the word “ass” instead of “gas,” and, second, a backbencher MP dozing off behind a colleague delivering a speech.

This methodological approach mimics the process of speechwriting as described by the speechwriters, while at the same time unpacking the ways in which a film is constructed by making its means of production transparent. This approach is seen, for example, when John Wiber talks about writing a press release, sending it out to his higher-ups, and rewriting it sometimes six times before it is released publicly. The subsequent cut to Tim Welham delivering a line six different ways highlights how a dramatic performance goes through the same process as a political press release. Another example of this is seen when Sebastian Ronderos-Morgan explains that there is almost always a back-and-forth with his boss, Charmaine Borg, in which they both discuss what should and should not be included in the speech. Similarly, the documentary shows the director and speechwriter discussing how to perform a speech before the speech is actually performed, showing that, similar to speeches, the film is meticulously planned, rehearsed, discussed, and then packaged for public display. As such, the film comments on the ways in which all communication materials are constructed.

Moreover, the reflexivity in the film acts as a gesture towards the transparency for which the film advocates in federal politics. That is to say, if the film is trying to unpack the ways in which politics function, it is important that the movie unpacks itself in a way that brings out

some of the decisions the director is making throughout the film. This way, the film does exactly what it demands from politics.

SETTINGS AND VISUALS

On a very simple level, the settings and visuals are easily divided into three obvious aesthetic choices: the unassuming setting for the speechwriters; the grandiose setting of the House of Commons in which the archival footage is situated; and the dramatically lit setting for the actor performing the speech from *Seeing*. The bland, undistinguished setting for the speechwriters hints to their role in the political process: unseen, unimposing, pragmatic and behind the scenes. The gothic architecture of the House of Commons, grandiose and reminiscent of religious cathedrals, imbues the politician with authority and gravitas and cements their instrumentality in the democratic institution. The dramatic lighting and dark background used in the segments with the actor dramatizes the performative nature of politics. Together, the film's settings highlight the structure of politics, but they also present opportunities to challenge their accepted conventions. For example, the footage in which the backbencher conservative MP, Rob Anders, is caught falling asleep during a colleagues speech, challenges the notion of politicians as wise and authoritative and rather suggests they are quite human and prone to mistakes. The moment where Darrah Teitel explains that she wrote the word "vagina," not "body," in her speech for Niki Ashton demonstrates the ways in which speechwriters protest against the political conventions and attempt to get a stronger message out to the audience. And the points at which the actor is seen with the house lights on and the dramatic lighting off insinuates that this, too, is a very well thought out performance.

DOCUMENTARY RELEVANCE

Documentary film is traditionally understood as a medium that deals within the realm of reality — that is to say, documentary uses as its subjects non-fiction events, characters, and objects. As such, documentary film is also traditionally understood as a medium that disavows the theatrical, as theatre occupies the realm of fiction, make-believe and the performative. On another level, politics is similarly understood to operate within the realm of the real. However, academics have made it clear that the theatrical is in fact very much a part of documentary,³⁹ and I have made the strong links between politics and theatre above. If this is the case, what does it mean to document politics, especially if performativity and theatrics are very much a part of both practices?

This film, *Speechwriters*, comes at a time when pop culture is taking interest in electoral politics. *House of Cards*,⁴⁰ for example, a show depicting a manipulative and corrupt politician doing anything he can to become the president of the United States, is one of Netflix's most popular shows. *Borgen*⁴¹ is a Danish TV series about the first woman to become Denmark's President and follows her as she becomes a shrewd politician. Most recently, *The Crown*⁴² follows Queen Elizabeth's first years as Queen and explores the relationship between the government and the Queen of the Commonwealth. These three fictional shows dramatize electoral politics and provide a behind-the-scenes understanding of political systems at work. My project, *Speechwriters*, similarly provides a behind-the-scenes look at political work; except, I

³⁹ Thomas Waugh, "Acting to Play Oneself: Performance in Documentary," in *The Right to Play Oneself: Looking Back on Documentary Film, Visible Evidence Series*, 23 (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011), 71-92; Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject."

⁴⁰ *House of Cards*. First broadcast 01 February 2013 on Netflix. Created by Beau Willimon.

⁴¹ *Borgen*. First broadcast 29 October 2011 on Danmarks Radio. Created by Adam Price.

⁴² *The Crown*. First broadcast on 04 November 2016 on Netflix. Created by Peter Morgan.

explore politics in the tradition of documentary film, a tradition that more often than not necessitates the participation of real players that face serious consequences.

The documentary film tradition covering topics in electoral politics most often relied on the conventions of direct cinema, a filmic genre that emphasized the need for the director to blend into the background and let the drama unfold as participants were observed — a method also known as fly-on-the-wall filming. A pioneer in direct cinema, Robert Drew made one of the first political documentaries of this type in 1960 called *Primary*.⁴³ Drew followed John F. Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey as they competed for the Democratic Party's nomination for the President of the United States. Over the course of the film, the viewer is made privy to the tumultuous and emotional nature of a political race, empathizing with both candidates as they compete for the title. The film is voyeuristic and the director is nowhere to be seen; the audience is left with a detailed understanding of the political strategizing that goes on behind the scenes.

D.A. Pennebaker follows in this documentary filmmaking tradition as he trains his camera on Bill Clinton's director of communications, George Stephanopoulos, and his chief strategist, James Carville, in the documentary film, *The War Room* (1993).⁴⁴ Similar to *Primary*, Pennebaker situates his film at the heart of Bill Clinton's race to secure the Democratic nomination for the President of the United States, and then later the presidency, but this time the focus is on the senior staffers involved in Clinton's successful campaign.

Both *Primary* and *The War Room* provide insight into the backstage happenings of politics, and they do this through the use of direct-cinema. The directors rely on high-profile

⁴³ *Primary*, Directed by Robert Drew. New York, NY: Docurama, New Video Group, 2003. DVD

⁴⁴ *The War Room*. Directed by D. A. Pennebaker & Chris Hegedus. New York, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2012. DVD.

public figures to tell a dramatic story, and they try their best to hide away the mechanics of filmmaking from the viewer. Their films are seen as accurate representations of both the presidential race and the people involved in these races. That said, it is important to acknowledge that an accurate representation does not disavow theatrics from the film. As Thomas Waugh argues in “Acting to Play Oneself,” there is a long historical trend in documentaries featuring performative personas. Indeed, Waugh suggests that some of the most memorable characters in cinema vérité are histrionic.⁴⁵ He writes, “these social actors become such memorable film actors because their clearly inscribed awareness of the camera amplifies their performance and transcends the representational pretense of vérité observation.”⁴⁶ The characters in *Primary* and *The War Room* are strong examples of these characters as they are followed giving pep talks to their teams and celebrating their wins. Histrionics, as such, is not an inherently negative trait that discredits the truths of documentary film. However, failing to acknowledge its existence in documentary blinds the directors of these genres from seeing and capturing other accurate characteristics of politics, the most obvious characteristic being performativity in the political.

My documentary departs from the tradition of direct cinema-type political documentaries to embrace the performative aspects in both politics and documentary. It does this in two ways. First, it makes the filmmaking process transparent and reflexive as participants perform their speeches while looking into the camera lens. This approach defies the principal pillar of direct cinema by making the presence of the camera part and parcel of the film. Second, my documentary embraces the characters’ inherent performativity by asking them to perform

⁴⁵ Waugh, “Acting to Play Oneself,” 80.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

speeches on camera. In doing so, not only is performativity in documentary highlighted, performance in electoral politics is brought front and centre.

In order to incorporate an element of the performative in my work, I look at documentary artists who use performative strategies in their own work. Two artists in particular come to mind for their work on performance in documentary: Omer Fast and his work, *Casting*;⁴⁷ and Mark Tribe with his work, *The Port Huron Project*.⁴⁸ Omer Fast's work uses the editorial jump cut to bring out aspects of the performative, while Tribe uses reenactments.

In Fast's four channel video, *Casting*, he features an American soldier recounting one story about a date he had with a German woman and another story about accidentally killing an innocent civilian in Afghanistan. However, Fast edits the footage in such a way that both stories are told at once and one bleeds into another. This editing tool serves to decentre the viewer and conflate both stories so that the truth becomes obscured and a new story, one made up of elements from the two original stories, emerges. My documentary film takes inspiration from this when the film cuts between a speechwriter, Sebastian Ronderos-Morgan, and his boss, Charmaine Borg. Unlike Fast, Ronderos-Morgan and Borg are reading from the same script; however, the film cuts quickly between the two characters and eventually merges and disembodies their individual voices so that Ronderos-Morgan's image is associated with Borg's voice, and vice-versa. Unlike Fast, this intercutting does not create a different story, but it does make an altogether different argument separate from the content of the words being spoken. Just as Fast draws the viewer's attention away from the stories being told and towards the role of

⁴⁷ Omer Fast, *The Casting*, (Four channel exhibit, 2007) <https://vimeo.com/54402885>

⁴⁸ Mark Tribe, *The Port Huron Project*, Performance piece, 2006-2008, <http://www.marktribe.net/port-huron-project/>.

authorship and editing in film, the editing choices in my film draw attention to the authorship of the words being spoken by overlapping the speechwriter's voice with the politician's. On top of that, the sharp cuts in this sequence point to the very obvious editorial choices being made by the film's director/editor and thus not only point to the authorship of the words being spoken but also the authorship of the film being presented. In Bill Nichol's words, the film's voice is coming out loud and clear.⁴⁹

In *The Port Huron Project*, Mark Tribe has actors recite and perform famous speeches delivered by activists in the 1960s around the subject of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. Actors perform these speeches in the same settings in which they were performed and with similar delivery as the original. However, their performances, and the project itself, is not very well contextualized, and intentionally so. The artist's descriptions of the project say little about the political context under which these speeches were delivered, how the audience reacted, or what political outcomes were generated as a result of the speeches. Instead, videos of the reenactments are posted online with little to no descriptions, and the videos themselves give no suggestions that more information was available at reenactment locations themselves. This lack of information on the project divorces the speeches from their original historical context and helps draw parallels to America's current-day wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some passersby who stumbled on the reenactment are seen cheering the actor performing the speech, perhaps because the speech resonates with their sentiments about the American wars in Afghanistan or Iraq. According to Paige Sarlin in her essay "New Left-Wing Melancholy: Mark Tribe's 'The Port

⁴⁹ Nichols, "Documentary Reenactments and the Fantastic Subject," 78.

Huron Project' and the Politics of Reenactment," she argues that this project is not a political project for Tribe.

It is the work of an artist who is taking history as his subject. So while it articulates a series of goals, assumptions, and values, as any political project does, the sense of vision and direction are tied entirely to the realm of cultural production and reproduction, not the transformation of culture or society per se.⁵⁰

In a way, the speeches are divorced from their content and the emphasis is on the speech's impact in a different historical context. In a similar way, the emphasis of my project is not on the content of the speechwriters' speeches; indeed, the opposite is true. The reenactment of the speech is much more important than the rhetorical arguments in the speeches, because they highlight the performative aspect of politics. The performance of the speeches highlights a cultural-political phenomenon, otherwise un-discussed, in which the highly prepared comments made by politicians are deconstructed and shown for what they are: words that are imagined, edited, rewritten, rehearsed, and then presented.

My film also borrows from documentary artists working within the photographic medium. Joel Sternfeld's *When It Changed* is a great example of documentary photography that provide deep insight into the opportunities available in political documentary films. Sternfeld's *When It Changed* uses zoom lenses to take portrait photographs of world leaders and international delegations meeting at the Eleventh United Nations Conference on Climate Change. Of the 55 portraits, the most common expression on his subjects' face is boredom, and as such, the book serves to highlight the difference between the structures of political systems, their pedantic nature, and the pressing international problem of climate change wreaking havoc on

⁵⁰ Paige Sarlin, "New Left-Wing Melancholy: Mark Tribe's 'The Port Huron Project' and the Politics of Reenactment," in *Framework: The Journal for Cinema and Media* 50 (1&2) (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2009), 142-143

populations around the world. These notions come out in my project on several levels. The most striking example is a segment in which the former Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, John Duncan, is answering a question in Question Period about what the Conservative Government is doing to address the pressing problems of safe drinking water and a lack of water treatment facilities in aboriginal communities across the country. During his statement, a backbencher MP, Rob Anders, is seen behind John Duncan slowly closing his eyes and eventually dozing off before he wakes up again to hear his colleague finish his statement. The segment is comical but the signification is damning: the House of Commons hosts important discussions impacting the lives of thousands of people, but those elected to have these discussions cannot seem to grasp the gravity the decisions, because they cannot stay awake long enough to understand. Like Sternfeld's project, my documentary contrasts the status and importance of these democratic institutions with the people who run them, people who are often left dumbfounded, unmoved, or asleep in the face of the daunting issues that face our world.

Speechwriters draws on these documentary traditions and innovations to contribute to the field of documentary and politics in three ways. First, it shows that political documentaries should not necessarily rely on direct-cinema to tell a story, because, in doing so, they ignore a fundamentally important aspect of politics, which is its performative side. Second, it draws on conceptual video work by experimental filmmakers to ask important questions on authorship, voice, and authenticity. Third, it challenges politics to embrace its performativity so that, at the very least, those who are impacted by the electoral system can begin to understand what is involved in making it work.

CONCLUSION

This project is a democratically motivated piece of work that hopes to bring transparency to the operations of our political systems. It does this by asking speechwriters to do a very simple thing: to perform a speech they wrote for their politician. This simple act does tremendous amounts of work to make parts of the political process transparent and clear to the country's electorate. Indeed, as discussed through the idea of the fantasmatic, this reenactment provides a "fleeting moment of insight...and meaning arises from what had seemed to lack it."⁵¹ The speechwriter's performance incites the viewers to ask questions about authorship, voice, and performance, and, in doing so, one small aspect of the political process is illuminated. Moreover, through theatrical interventions by an actor performing segments from the novel, *Seeing*, the film situates itself within a wider theoretical discussion that needs to be had around the nature of government and the ways in which it has the power to alienate and withdraw basic human rights. By combining the speechwriters' performance with the theatrical interventions, this documentary raises questions that are tied to documentary ideas and ideals. Most importantly it challenges the most common form of political documentaries and calls for more attention to be given to the performative in documentary and politics. Giving attention to the performative, contrary to popular belief, will present opportunities to the genre to find new truths in the world.

WORD COUNT: 9,518

⁵¹ Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject", 103

APPENDIX A — PARTICIPANT RELEASE*

PARTICIPANT RELEASE

I hereby agree to participate in the production, HOW TO MAKE AN ARGUMENT, and in any resulting cinematographic work, any related website and/or and DVD special feature supplement.

I accept that ANDREW BATEMAN (hereafter the Producer) may record my voice, appearance and/or performance and photograph me and consequently may use my name, voice, image and likeness, in whole or in part, in the Production as well as for the promotion of the Production and for the promotion of the Producer.

I understand that the Producer and/or its assign shall hold all right in this Production including all property rights and copyright, and that they may exploit this Production by all methods of distribution or transmission now known or hereafter developed in the future, including through compilations or excerpts, in perpetuity, worldwide, in all languages, versions and media.

I hereby release the Producer and its assigns and licensees, for and against and all claims, liabilities, demands, actions, causes of action(s), costs and expenses whatsoever, at law or in equity, arising out of the Producer's use as herein provided.

Although I am granting consent in signing this document, I am granted the right to withdraw my consent to participate in this production at any time during the production or postproduction process of this production.

I have read the foregoing and fully understand the meaning and effect thereof and I have signed this release.

PRODUCER

GRANTOR

Print Name: _____

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Signature: _____

Production: _____

Dated: _____, _____

Dated: _____, _____

399-2 Shaw St, Toronto, ON, M6J 2X4, 647-937-0442
andrew.bateman@gmail.com

*Each participant wrote in a handwritten note below the signatures that they wanted to review the footage before the final cut. Both myself, the producer, and the participant initialed that note.

WORKS CITED

- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- . 2005. *State of Exception*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- An Inconvenient Truth*. 2006. Directed by Davis Guggenheim. Lawrence Bender Productions, DVD.
- Arendt, Hannah. 2001. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt.
- Aristodemou, Maria. 2011. "Democracy or your Life! Knowledge, Ignorance and the Politics of Atheism in Saramago's *Blindness* and *Seeing*." In *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 9(1) 169-187.
- Borgen*. First broadcast 29 October 2011 on Danmarks Radio. Created by Adam Price.
- Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Second Edition*. New York: Routledge.
- Crouch, Colin. 2004. *Post-Democracy*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- . 2016. "The March Towards Post-Democracy, Ten Years On" in *The Political Quarterly* 87(1), 71-75.
- Danson, Andrew. 1987. *Unofficial Portraits*. Toronto: York University Art Gallery.
- Debord, Guy. 2005. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Ken Knabb. London: Rebel Press.
- . 1990. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Malcolm Imrie. New York: Verso Press.
- Drayton, Richard. 2000. *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dreyfus, Hubert & Rabinow, Paul. 1982. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ferguson, James. 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2004. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979*. Ed. Michel Senellart. Trans. Arnold I. Davidson. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

- .1991. "Governmentality." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 87-104. Edited Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- .1991. "Politics and the Study of Discourse." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 53-72. Edited Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fast, Omer. 2007. *The Casting*. Four channel exhibit. <https://vimeo.com/54402885>
- .2002. *CNN Concatenated*. Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IID_XUsl0JM.
- Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives*. 1992. Directed by Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, DVD.
- Fukuyama, Francis. 2014. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Gordon, Colin. 1991. "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 1-52. Edited Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gregg, Melissa & Gregory J. Seigworth. 2010. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Haseman, Brad. 2006. "A Manifesto for Performative Research." In *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, theme issue "Practice-led Research"(no. 118):pp. 98-106.
- House of Cards*. First broadcast 01 February 2013 on Netflix. Created by Beau Willimon.
- In the Year of the Pig*. 1968. Directed by Emile De Antonio. 2005. DVD.
- Keyes, Ralph. 2004. *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2004. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." In *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter), 225-248.
- Les Invisibles*. 2012. Directed by Sébastien Lifshitz. London: Peccadillo Pictures, DVD.
- Li, Tania. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Martin, James. 2016. "Capturing Desire: Rhetorical Strategies and the Affectivity of Discourse." In *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 18(1): 143-160.
- . 2014. *Politics and Rhetoric: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2015. "Situating speech: A rhetorical approach to political strategy" *Political Studies* 63 (1): 25-42.
- Reassemblage*. 1983. Directed by Trinh T. Minh-Ha. Strictly Film School, DVD.
- Moore, Donald. 2005. *Suffering for Territory: Race, Place, and Power in Zimbabwe*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Moser, Gabrielle (2015). "Chromophobia: Race, Colour and Visual Pleasure in Richard Mosse's *The Enclave*." *Prefix Photo* 16(2), 18-33.
- Nader, Laura. 1972. "Up the Anthropologist--Perspectives Gained from Studying Up" in Dell H. Hymes (Ed.) *Reinventing Anthropology*. New York: Pantheon Books, p. 284-311.
- Negri, Antonio & Michael Hardt. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nichols, Bill. (2001). "What Types of Documentary Are There?" In *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 99-138.
- . "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Autumn), 76.
- Primary*. 1960. Directed by Robert Drew. New York, NY: Docurama, New Video Group, 2003. DVD
- Rabin-Havt, Ari & Media Matters for America. 2016. *Lies Incorporated: The World of Post-Truth Politics*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Sans Soleil*. 1983. Directed by Chris Marker. Argos Films.
- Saramago, José. 2005. *Blindness*. Trans. Juan Sager. London: Vintage Press.
- . 2007. *Seeing*. Trans. Margaret Jull Costa. London: Vintage Press.
- Sarlin, Paige 2009. "New Left-Wing Melancholy: Mark Tribe's "The Port Huron Project" and the Politics of Reenactment." In *Framework: The Journal for Cinema and Media* 50 (1&2) Detroit: Wayne State University, p. 139-57.
- Schmitt, Carl. 2014. *Dictatorship: From the Origins of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to Proletarian Class Struggle*. Trans. Michael Hoelz and Graham Ward. Malden: Polity Press.

Sternfeld, Joel. 2007. *When It Changed*. Gottigen, DE: Steidl Publishing.

The Body Beautiful, Directed by Ngozi Onwurah, (British Film Institute, 1991), DVD.

The War Room. 1993. Directed by D. A. Pennebaker & Chris Hegedus. New York, NY: The Criterion Collection, 2012. DVD.

The West Wing. First broadcast 22 September 1999 on NBC. Created by Aaron Sorkin.

Tongues Untied, Directed by Marlon Riggs, (Signifyin' Works, 1989), DVD.

Tribe, Mark. 2006-2008. *The Port Huron Project*. <http://www.marktribe.net/port-huron-project/>

Waugh, Thomas (2011). "Acting to Play Oneself: Performance in Documentary (1990)." In *The Right to Play Oneself: Looking Back on Documentary Film*. Visible Evidence Series, Vol 23. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 71-92