ANNA DEAVERE SMITH'S
TWILIGHT: LOS ANGELES, 1992:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXAMINATION

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Anna Deavere Smith's one-person performance piece *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* has raised complex issues in the world of theatre. A series of monologues based upon the actual words of people involved in and affected by the LA riots of 1992, *Twilight* is one artist's attempt at inter-racial investigation and cultural analysis. Smith's unconventional approach to playwriting, as evidenced by her unique interview re-creation technique, has evoked a polyphony of critical and scholarly critique and analysis. Much of this discussion has revolved around issues of location in an effort to recognize the influence of various disciplines on Smith as both theatrical artist and cultural analyst. This thesis is an examination of Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* and its interdisciplinary approach to theatre.

A study of Smith as "cross-disciplinarian" leads to conclusions about the future of theatre as legitimate cultural research. The disciplines of journalism, ethnography, and performance studies will serve as the basis for a discussion of how Smith confronts issues of neutrality, authority, and the representation of the "Other" within the discursive contexts of each respective discipline. In order to realize the connection between theatre and other disciplines, *Twilight* will be compared to other performative texts which serve as points
of reference, precedent, and departure in Smith's work. The performative texts chosen for this interdisciplinary study include: the "living newspapers" of the Federal Theatre Project, Emily Mann's Execution of Justice, Zora Neale Hurston's Mules and Men, and John Leguizamo's Spic-O-Rama.

In Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, Anna Deavere Smith crosses interdisciplinary boundaries in the name of cultural analysis, providing a strong argument for the inclusion of theatre within the discourse and rhetoric of other disciplines. Smith's performative attempt to bridge the gap of race relations in our country is a working example of how theatre can include the work of other disciplines in the name of cultural examination. This thesis is an examination of the possibilities and limitations of this argument.
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INTRODUCTION

In discussing Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Gordon Davidson addresses the unique issues raised by Smith's work in the world of theatre. "This is not playwriting in any conventional sense ... It's a form of anthropological, social, and cultural research that comes through interviews and how they knit together."¹ Academic discussions of Smith's work and scholarly interviews of Smith have generally located Smith's one-person performance pieces within a specific discipline, as if somehow this might make the complex issues raised by her interview re-creation technique more readily accessible. However, Smith is usually quick to avoid any form of singular definition. "I don't think I'm placed squarely in any tradition ... I think that my work, for example, is theater, but it's also community work in some ways. It's kind of low anthropology, low journalism; it's a bit documentary."² Critics have labeled her one-person performances as everything from "new history"³


to "a barely disguised illiberal agenda"\textsuperscript{4} to "the most powerful social argument on Broadway."\textsuperscript{5} In all of these cases, issues of neutrality, authority, and the representation of the "Other" dominate the critical discussion of Smith's creative technique and performance methodology. What has emerged is a polyphony, similar in nature to the variety of voices Smith re-presents on stage.

\textbf{Twilight} is the fourteenth in a series of one-woman performance pieces entitled \textit{On the Road: A Search for the American Character}. Smith began the series in 1979 by walking up to people on the street and saying, "I know an actor who looks like you. If you give me an hour of your time, I'll invite you to see yourself performed."\textsuperscript{6} In time, her focus shifted from individuals to groups of people at gatherings, conferences, or as members of a community. Some of the \textit{On the Road} pieces have been specifically commissioned and performed for a select group at academic or social conferences, while other pieces have been developed for larger theatre audiences.


\textsuperscript{4} Stefan Kanfer, "Twilight Tragedies," \textit{The New Leader} 5 May 1994, 22.

\textsuperscript{5} Kevin Kelly, "Anna Deavere Smith Tracks the Rage of LA," \textit{Boston Globe} 5 May 1994, 30.

\textsuperscript{6} Anna Deavere Smith, \textit{Playbill} 92 (no. 7): 18. Program for \textit{Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities}.
However, each piece is issue-oriented, with the title often revealing the theme: Building Bridges Not Walls (1985); Gender Bending: On the Road Princeton University (1989); On Black Identity and Black Theatre (1990). In 1992, Smith's On the Road Series broke into the mainstream of American theatre with her Pulitzer-Prize nominated Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities, a series of portraits of the people involved in the Crown Heights riots which pitted blacks and Jews against one another in August of 1992. When the city of L.A was besieged by similar violence following the Rodney King verdict, Gordon Davidson, artistic director of the Mark Taper Forum, remembered Smith's performance in Fires and commissioned her to create a similar piece in hopes of addressing and healing some of his city's deepest racial tensions. Smith spent nine months interviewing 175 Los Angeles residents about the riots. Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, first produced at the Mark Taper Forum in 1993, is the result of these interviews, edited down into a series of short monologues. In many ways, it is the magnum opus of the On the Road Series, as well as an exciting foray into the interdisciplinary possibilities of modern theatrical performance.

This thesis will examine Anna Deavere Smith's Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 by focusing on its interdisciplinary approach to theatre. By virtue of the discussions it has raised, Smith's work has proven that there is much to be done in order to understand how other academic disciplines relate
to theatre and performance. Instead of attempting to classify Smith and *Twilight* within a singular discipline, I will discuss Smith's fusion of elements from three specific disciplines: ethnography, journalism, and performance studies. These fields have been chosen for two reasons: (1) because they are most often associated with Smith's work by critics, interviewers, and Smith herself; (2) because these fields are both defined and challenged by issues of neutrality, authority, and speaking for the "Other." A study of Smith as a "cross-disciplinarian" will hopefully lead to conclusions about how the future of theatre could be related to cultural research. Smith has been instrumental in breaking down the walls of miscommunication in an effort to promote cultural awareness in areas which suffer from extreme racial tension. Thanks to pieces such as *Twilight*, she is now viewed as a prominent voice in race relations and a powerful social force within the theatre world. This thesis will examine her status as cultural critic in light of the interdisciplinary issues raised by *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*.

In addition to the interdisciplinary research methodology deployed in this study, Smith's work will also be viewed in comparative analyses. One of the major purposes of this study is to understand the useful ramifications of future interdisciplinary theatre work. Thus, comparative analyses not only realize the connections between theatre and other disciplines, but highlight the distinctions within theatre as well. Comparative analysis will be used to
recognize *Twilight*'s relationship to historical precedent within specific traditions. The pieces which have been chosen for comparison are representative examples of a particular theme or tradition and have connections to the various disciplines mentioned earlier. They are all performative texts which either emanate from recent movements in American theatre or a creative tradition within one of the disciplines being investigated. This thesis is concerned with exploring the interdisciplinary possibilities of theatrical presentation, and therefore, performative texts are necessary for a comparative framework.

Journalism, ethnography, and performance studies have been chosen not only because of their immediate relation to *Twilight*, but also because of their recent historical impact on theatre as an art. One might argue that theatre emerged as a form of journalism, first in the historical dramas of the ancient Greeks in which stories were "retold" to the audience by the likes of Sophocles and Euripides. Later, theatre was used as a means of reporting the Gospel and dogma of the Catholic Church all over Europe in the form of medieval passion plays. In the twentieth century, two decidedly journalistic forms of theatre were to emerge: the "living newspaper" and the "docudrama." Evolving from the cabarets and massenspiels of Piscator and the Friebuhne in Germany, the notion of "re-creating" actual events on stage as a means of informing and inciting the masses had a visible impact in the "living newspapers" of the Federal Theatre Project in the
late 1930s. Later, in the 1960s artists such as Peter Weiss and Roalf Hochhuth would experiment with "docudrama," a form of theatre which purports to be a dispassionate and neutral examination of history based on documents and facts. Twilight is, in many ways, an extension of the living newspaper and the docudrama as it relates a specific historical event through actual testimony from those involved in it.

Twilight seems to draw from the reportorial aspects of all of these prior theatrical genres, but one thing that sets it apart from them is that Smith uses her theatre work to comment on journalism as a discipline and a profession. "It's about reiterating heard voices in a different way than they have been processed in the media." Thus, there is a unique opportunity in Twilight to shift the focus of traditional theatre research towards the possible implications of theatre as a form of legitimate journalistic reporting. By rejecting psychological realism while capturing "the personality of a place by attempting to embody its varied population and varied points of view in one person -- myself," Smith has arguably positioned herself as a theatrical version of the "investigative journalist." The thesis will examine the possibilities and limitations of this argument.


8 Smith 18.
Ethnography, the anthropological writing of culture, would at first glance seem very distant from theatre. As a legitimate, defined, academic field, ethnography is relatively young, having its origins in the works of Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, Margaret Meade, and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. These scholars established ethnography as the science of venturing into a relatively unknown or "primitive" culture, observing and collecting data about it through a process known as "fieldwork," and then recording this data in the form of a scholarly text. According to modern ethnographic theorist James Clifford, ethnography emerged as the academic collection of culture. He states, "[S]ince 1900 inclusive collections of 'Mankind' have become institutionalized in academic disciplines like anthropology and in museums of art or ethnology." 9 Lead by scholars such as Clifford, much attention is now focused within ethnography on its founding principles. For example, E.E. Evans-Pritchard in his ethnography The Neur and Napoleon Chagnon in Yanomamo: The Fierce People question the legitimacy of notions like "participant-observation" and "native-informant," paving the way for alternative views of ethnography. What has resulted is an acute awareness of the objective limits of the study of culture and the realization that the notion of the "indigenous ethnographer," one who is

actually native to the culture being studied, may very well be closer to the scientific ideal for the discipline. Furthermore, issues such as "ethnographic authority" and the epistemical ramifications of speaking for the "Other" lend strong support to the argument that creative expression can and should be a valuable part of the traditionally scientific ethnographic text. *Twilight* represents a "call" of sorts for an exploration into the possibilities of a theatrical event as a performative ethnographic event. Very little has been done in this area, and it is an issue which needs to be explored as both ethnography and theatre begin to take on similar appearances in the name of cultural critique.

The historical influence of ethnography on the practice of theatre is not as readily apparent as is the influence of anthropology on the study of drama. In landmark works such as *The Anthropology of Experience*, *Performance Theory*, and *The Anthropology of Performance*, theatre researchers such as Victor Turner, Edward Bruner, and Richard Schechner undertook the anthropological study of theatre and drama across cultures and produced, as it were, the discipline known as "performance studies." Like ethnography and journalism, performance studies has been dominated by issues such as authority, the right of experience, native versus paid or distant informant, and the ramifications of speaking for the "Other." Essentially, performance studies has taken these issues and focused them on matters of ritual, myth, folklore, and religion as expressed by performative conventions in
everyday life. Inherent in the discursive network of performance studies is the "Other" -- how it is represented, recorded, translated, and critiqued by the performer on stage, no matter how formal or informal that stage might be. In many cases, performance studies and theatre have been justifiably confused in the name of research -- it's undeniable that there is much murky water muddying the discursive boundaries of the two fields. Nonetheless, it is my intention to study the practice of theatre and the realm of performance studies as two unique disciplines, each of which informs the other. This thesis will examine how and why Smith is able to bridge the discursive gap that exists between them.

The study of any particular performance is aided by cultural analysis and interdisciplinary discourse. But such study is also hampered by the ephemeral nature of performance. At hand for examination of Smith's work in *Twilight* are videos, a published text, reviews, and Smith's own words about her work in a number of published interviews.¹⁰ The available materials provide a background for establishing the conventions and techniques employed by Smith. However, no significant scholarly attention has been

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¹⁰ Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (Anchor Books: New York, NY, 1994). Though the published version of *Twilight* includes monologues and characters that were excluded from the various stage productions of it, it still the only extant version which can be readily referred to for the purposes of scholarship. Therefore, all references throughout this thesis will be to the published version of Smith's text.
given to the specific issues which will be explored in this thesis. In an essay published in the Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Charles R. and James C. Lyons examine the complicated relationship between Smith as playwright and performer, and the notion of Twilight as a "performance" text within the context of modern critical theory. Janelle Reinelt discusses the ramifications of Smith's performative presence in her article for TheatreForum. The only other major scholarly article specifically about Smith is Sandra Richards' "Caught in the Act of Definition: On the Road with Anna Deavere Smith," which appears in a book dedicated to feminist performances. While all of these articles serve as points of reference for an interdisciplinary study of Smith's work, none of them are specifically focused on investigating Twilight from an interdisciplinary perspective in any extended fashion. Likewise, the two major academic interviews of Smith published in The Kenyon Review and The Drama Review tend to skirt the interdisciplinary issue in favor of discussions that focus on the social import and location of her work. Furthermore, these interviews use Fires in the

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Mirror as the source for the discussion rather than Twilight. Smith's thoughts do appear in numerous interviews published in radio and television program transcripts, newspapers, and magazines. However, it is important to note that while much attention has been devoted to the words of Anna Deavere Smith, very little in the way of analysis has accompanied it.

The only accessible analysis of Twilight, other than the few documents previously mentioned, is the multitude of published reviews of the production. Of all of the available materials appearing in scholarly journals, a series of reviews of Twilight in Theatre Journal (issue 46) prove to be the most useful for the purposes of this investigation. They are the only reviews of Twilight published in a scholarly journal (there are literally hundreds which have appeared in various newspapers and periodicals across the country). There have also been many general interest or biographical pieces written about Smith and/or Twilight, appearing in publications ranging from American Theatre to the Los Angeles Times. She has been mentioned in two published Ph.D. dissertations, one focusing on racialized violence in Africa and America, the other on staging gender, race, and sexuality


through psychoanalysis.\textsuperscript{16} Recently, Smith has been the subject of a number of papers given at conferences and panels around the country. However, the vast majority of these papers are yet to be published. Given the lack of published scholarly work on Smith or \textit{Twilight}, the necessity of an extended study of her work is readily apparent. Furthermore, since the interdisciplinary possibilities of Smith's pieces are only given limited attention, a comparative analysis of the interdisciplinary ramifications of \textit{Twilight} is at once unique and important.

\textit{Twilight} is also representative of a particular theatrical tradition which is intrinsically linked to any discussion of the play's interdisciplinary merits. The solo-performance, known informally as the "one-person show," is Smith's performative genre of choice. Scholars such as Robert Benedetti, Dwight Culler, Joseph Gould, Alan Sinfield, and Paul Gray have written articles and devoted chapters to various aspects of this genre. A portion of Eugene and Margaret L. Bahn's \textit{A History of Oral Interpretation} deals with the emergence and location of this genre in a very wide historical context. However, in terms of recent scholarship, John S. Gentile's \textit{Cast of One: One-Person Shows from the Chautauqua Platform to the Broadway Stage} provides the most

complete, and perhaps the only extensive documentation of this American tradition. Gentile analyzes the evolution of the professional one-person show as a theatrical and cultural phenomenon in the United States since the second half of the nineteenth century. For his methodology, Gentile breaks down the history of one-person shows into fifty year intervals, beginning with the mid-nineteenth century, and discusses representative examples of various kinds of popular one-person performances during each time period. In his concluding section, Gentile divides the one-person show, as it has evolved in the last fifty years, into three distinct categories: monologists, writer performers, and the biographical one-person show. Despite its breadth, there is little room in Gentile's analysis for an artist such as Smith. She does not fit comfortably into any one of Gentile categories. Though Smith has chosen the one-person show as her performative genre, little precedent from within the various historical manifestations of this genre (as classified by Gentile) exists to serve as a point of reference. Certainly, part of the explanation for this omission lies in the fact that Gentile's book was published in 1989, before Smith's rise to national recognition after Fires (1991) and Twilight (1993). Perhaps Smith's work can then be viewed as a further development of the one-person show in America -- a development that crosses disciplinary

boundaries. Thus, this thesis extends the documentation of a theatrical tradition by exploring how Anna Deavere Smith recognizes other disciplines as she exists within theatre.

Twilight will thus be analyzed as it relates to specific issues within the fields of ethnography, journalism, and performance studies. Since the emphasis of this thesis involves finding the tools for including theatre within discussions of these respective fields, modern theorists and analysts from within each field have been selected for the purposes of cross-disciplinary analysis.

Chapter one will focus on Twilight and its relationship to journalism. The purpose will be to explore how Anna Deavere Smith is confronted by the issues, challenges, questions, and dilemmas which dominate the critical discourse of contemporary journalism. Modern media critics, such as John Fiske, Paul Weaver, and Theodore Petersen will serve to ground a discussion of the changing faces of media representation in the modern age and the place of Twilight as legitimate journalistic reporting. First, Twilight will be discussed as a response to mass media and the "media event." After analyzing Twilight as a kind of "alternative press," I will focus on Smith as investigative reporter. Stephen Klaidman's The Virtuous Journalist will provide the basis for understanding the ethical and social role of the reporter as it relates to Anna Deavere Smith and the LA Riots. Limited comparison between Smith's representation of the LA riots and those of other journalistic media will serve to highlight the
reportedly conventions employed by Smith in her creation and presentation of *Twilight*. The "living newspapers" of the Federal Theatre Project and Emily Mann's *Execution of Justice* will be referred to as examples of the traditional relationship between journalism and the American stage. These pieces will also serve as a means of comparison regarding the possibilities and limitations of theatre as it finds materials in a media event and serves to account for such an event journalistically.

Chapter two will place Smith’s work within the field of ethnography. *Twilight* will be identified as a performative ethnographic text by referring to the concepts and critiques of scholars such as James Clifford, Dwight Conquergood, and bell hooks. The purpose of this chapter will be to show how Smith functions as "native-informant," "indigenous ethnographer," and anthropological fieldworker actively engaged in a participant-observation study of a given group within society. Just as Clifford and recent ethnographers are struggling with the dilemma of "ethnographic authority" and cultural representation, it will be argued that *Twilight* evidences the same kind of struggle, drawing even deeper comparisons between Smith and ethnography. Attention will also be given to a previous performative ethnographer, Zora Neale Hurston, who presented her anthropological research in the form of a creative text. Finally, the performative turn in ethnography as a discipline will be analyzed in hopes of
painting *Twilight* as an extended example of this interdisciplinary shift.

Chapter three will provide an analysis of *Twilight* as cultural critique within the realm of performance studies. Issues of neutrality and authority have surfaced in the previous discussions of ethnography and journalism, so these issues will come to the forefront of this discussion of *Twilight* as "culture performed." In examining culture as performance and performance as culture, performance studies theorists give much attention to the socio-cultural and theatrical "location" of the performer. Different performative roles in society such as priest, medium, and healer are often the basis for discussions of the nature and meaning of drama and performance in everyday life. Using the work of John Grim, Victor Turner, Richard Schechner, and Dwight Conquergood, Anna Deavere Smith will be metaphorically compared to the "shaman" as performer. "Liminality," one of the core issues within the methodological framework of performance studies, will serve as a key terminal in guiding this discussion. Specifically, the liminal positioning of Smith in "speaking for Others" will be investigated in order to determine the epistemical ramifications of the performance methodology employed in *Twilight*. The theatrical/cultural dilemmas inherent in the dramatic representation of the "Other" will be interspersed with a discussion of *Spic-O-Rama* by John Leguizamo, a one-person performance artist who also focuses on issues of cultural representation. While similar
dramatic conventions are employed by these performers, nonetheless decidedly different approaches to character portrayal and ethnic representation result. The characterization of "liminality" as it relates to the structural differences between Twilight and Spic-O-Rama will be investigated in order to further ascertain how Twilight can be viewed as an interdisciplinary bridge for future discourse between performance studies and theatre as cultural critique.

With the advent of entire departments in major universities being devoted to fields such as "cultural studies," "folklore," "women's studies," and "performance studies," it has become readily apparent that theatre research must meet the challenges of interdisciplinarity. Artists such as Smith are beginning to bridge the academic and performative gap between various disciplines. In speaking about herself, Smith refers to her work as "a call" that "asks for a response. It's about capturing unheard voices."18 The interdisciplinary framework of this study is one theatre researcher's attempt at a possible response. Anna Deavere Smith feels that the search for our collective and individual character involves understanding the polyphony that surrounds us. In academia, this means understanding those "other" disciplines which produce research in "different

18 As. qtd. in Blanchard, 35.
voices." Using *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, this study is a
metaphoric exploration into the realm of interdisciplinary
understanding.
CHAPTER I

"LOOSENING THE STRAITJACKET": TWILIGHT AND THE DISCIPLINE OF JOURNALISM

Of all the disciplines which resonate within Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, journalism is perhaps the most obvious and the most relevant. To identify Anna Deavere Smith's connection with journalism, one need look no further than the words of virtually every one of her critics, analysts, and interviewers. While the piece is often discussed as everything from "a devastating docudrama"1 to "journalistic performance,"2 Smith is labeled as "America's theatrical roving reporter"3 and "the alter ego of a consummate journalist."4 Smith herself even refers to her work as "low journalism; it's a bit documentary."5 The connection between


Smith and the investigative and/or objective journalist is apparent in her well-documented interview re-creation technique and media-oriented performance method. Nonetheless, while many journalistic terms and comparisons appear in the existing critical analysis of *Twilight*, no one has actually examined the ramifications of viewing the piece specifically form the perspective of critical discourses within the discipline of journalism. Perhaps, this is due to the complex problem of locating and defining journalism as a discipline in a world of changing technology and cultural discourse.

This chapter will explore how Anna Deavere Smith, through her production of *Twilight*, confronts issues, dilemmas, and questions which dominate the critical study of modern journalism. The discursive parameters of journalism are far too wide to be fully realized within the context of this particular critical discussion. However, some of the key issues and questions raised by modern media analysts can be directly applied to Smith's theatrical work. First, there will be a brief introduction to how *Twilight* can be viewed as a response to mass media and the "media event." This will be followed by an analysis of *Twilight* as "alternative press." The next part of the discussion will revolve around Smith as investigative reporter. This section will discuss how issues such as the avoidance/awareness of personal bias, the dramatic positioning of the modern reporter, and the media's "methods of misrepresentation" resonate in Smith's investigative methodology and performative strategy.
Throughout this discussion, the evolution of American theatrical "docudrama" with specific reference to the "living newspapers" of the Federal Theatre Project and Emily Mann's *Execution of Justice* will be analyzed in order to more clearly realize the interdisciplinary ramifications inherent in the connection between journalism and theatre. In identifying how Smith realizes the journalistic possibilities of theatre, I will argue that Smith actually accentuates the theatrical possibilities inherent in the discipline of journalism, thus fostering a legitimate version of news reporting in the process.

*Twilight, Mass Media, and the "Media Event"*

The most immediate issue of journalistic relevance in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* is the multidiscursive "event" which Smith was commissioned to explore. Riots rocked the streets of Los Angeles following the initial verdicts of "not guilty" for the police officers accused of beating motorist Rodney King. The criminal case was volatile because the beating had been captured on videotape by a passing motorist. This tape, seen all over the country via television, elevated the whole incident into what media analyst John Fiske labels a "media event." According to Fiske, "[T]he term media event is an indication that in a postmodern world we can no longer rely on a stable relationship or clear distinction between a
'real' event and its mediated representation."\(^6\) While the constructed nature of historical events is most certainly not dependent upon them being "media events," the media nonetheless has an intricate role in the perception of those events. Discussing the meaning of reality as transmitted by mass media, Fiske asserts that the way an event is contextaulized is never determined by the different ways this event is actually experienced. The only way we can really know an event is by putting it into discourse -- the social power to give it one set of meanings rather than another. Thus, an event is always continuous with its discursive construction.\(^7\) This continuity between a "real" event (the actual beating of Rodney King) and its mediated discourse (the televised amateur video) produces a "discourse event" or "media event."\(^8\) Fiske defines discourse as a continuous process of making sense of events and circulating them socially in an effort to explain the media's role in society as a purveyor of realities. In this sense, Smith's descriptive emphasis on "capturing unheard voices ... and ... reiterating heard voices in a different way than they have


\(^7\) Fiske 4.

\(^8\) Fiske 5.
been processed in the media,"9 can be viewed as a desire to enter the discursive struggle over the King "media event."

It is important to note that it is not Smith's use of the theatrical medium as a journalistic forum which makes her work unique. Media events have long served as the impetus for American docudrama. As we will see, what sets Twilight apart is the manner in which it contributes to and comments upon this tradition. In analyzing the historical evolution of "documentary theater," Attilio Favorini observes that, in general, American documentary dramas have been "more responsive to events than communitas."10 Enmeshed in the propagandist traditions of their immediate German ancestors, American documentary dramas first emerged as an activist art form. Much of this socio-political maneuvering was in direct

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10 Attilio Favorini, Voicings: Ten Plays From the Documentary Theatre (Hopewell, NJ: The Ecco Press, 1995) intro., xxxii. In this introduction, Favorini provides a complete history of the evolution of documentary theatre. Beginning with Herodotus, and covering the complete span of Western theatre history, Favorini documents this tradition, citing specifically its "birth" in the cabarets and massenspiels of Irwin Piscator, and Brecht's "Epic Theater." While the documentary origins of Smith's work are certainly rooted in her European ancestors, (i.e. Piscator and Felix Gasbarra's In Spite of Everything!, Brecht's Galileo, Rolf Hochhuth's The Deputy, and Peter Weiss' The Investigation) it is the intention of this essay to explore how Smith fits within the American version of this tradition for the purpose of analyzing her relationship with the unique traditions of American journalism. For a more complete history of the evolution of documentary theatre, See Favorini; Mathew K. Wikander, The Play of Truth and State: Historical Drama from Shakespeare to Brecht (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); John Willet, The Theatre of Irwin Piscator (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978); The Documentary Tradition from Nanook to Woodstock, ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1971), and Derek Paget, True Stories? Documentary Drama on Radio, Screen, and Stage (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).
reaction to the rapid evolution of mass media. While this evolution resulted in major changes in how news events were reported and transmitted to the public, it had an even greater effect on the public's perception of these events. No longer was it necessary for the public to read and formulate their own reactions to the news based upon their individual experiences. Soon, everyone experienced major events in much the same manner -- first by hearing them on the radio, eventually by witnessing them for themselves on television. "News events" became "media events." It is Favorini's contention that American documentary dramas have often reacted to this evolution by utilizing the theatrical forum to disseminate information and comment on news events. What is interesting is that Smith employs the conventions of this tradition and at the same time extends them. The "living newspapers" of the Federal Theatre Project, perhaps the most visible historical example of American documentary theatre, provide representative material for a comparison to Twilight. The basic philosophical tenets of both works are the same -- utilizing dramatic performance in order to explain social conditions as affected by news events and newsmakers. According to Halle Flannagan (one of the major forces behind the creation of the first "living newspapers" produced by the Federal Theatre Project in the late 1930s), the struggle of all the "living newspapers" was "the struggle of the average citizen to understand the natural, social and economic forces around him and to achieve through these forces, a better life
for more people."\textsuperscript{11} Like Smith's "search for the American character," the "living newspapers" were concerned with the depiction of events through the news media of their time. According to Lorraine Brown:

No medium in the American theater was better fitted to present the essence of social and political happenings in the 1930s -- albeit welfare, the advance of science, racism, the effort of labor to organize, the fight to preserve civil liberties, or the problems of youth -- than the "living newspaper."\textsuperscript{12}

These early predecessors to \textit{Twilight} inform much of Smith's work. However, the fundamental departures taken by Smith and dramatists such as Emily Mann in their more recent documentary dramas evidence a distinct shift from Favorini's observations about "events" versus "communitas" as sources of inspiration and investigation in American documentary drama.

These departures involve differences in both "reporting" technique and journalistic intention. According to Favorini, the "living newspapers" were concerned foremost with commenting on the events they presented. "In dispelling popular myths (though perhaps disseminating liberal myths) about the topics they engaged, they focused reasoned intentions on complex issues."\textsuperscript{13} Whereas the "living

\textsuperscript{11} Halle Flannagan, introduction, \textit{Federal Theatre Plays} (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 1989) x.


\textsuperscript{13} Favorini xxiv.
newspapers" utilized current events and social situations as material for "a campaigning theater of reform," more recent "docu-dramatists" have implemented different strategies in the name of journalistic theatrical reporting. Representative of this trend is playwright/director Emily Mann, whose work both predates and informs Twilight. Mann's Execution of Justice (1985), a docudrama revolving around the 1979 assassination of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone and the city's first openly gay elected public official Harvey Milk by city supervisor Dan White, marks a shift in the nature of American documentary theatre because it "bears the marks of its place of origin." Like Twilight, all of the dialogue in Mann's play is "found" -- molded out of actual trial transcripts and interviews conducted with people involved and affected by the trial. Mann also implemented techniques pioneered by the "living newspapers" by incorporating film footage and dialogue from a documentary film about the assassination and trial called The Life and Times of Harvey Milk as an essential component in the dramatic performance.

While the conventions employed by Mann in Execution of Justice prove that she, like Smith, owes much to her Federal


15 It should be noted here that, in fact, Mann was initially hired to direct Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 at the Mark Taper Forum in L.A., but departed from the project near the beginning of its run for reasons that neither Mann nor Smith can discuss due to contractual agreements.

16 Favorini xxxiii.
Theatre predecessors, it is in her journalistic intention where her departure from tradition informs *Twilight*. In Favorini's opinion, Mann (unlike her predecessors), is not driven by a desire to expose a miscarriage of justice. Rather, she is driven to examine its execution -- to "look at the design by which justice is carried out and fully to reveal its contours." In *Execution of Justice*, these "contours" are the topography of San Francisco; it is not set at the trial of Dan White, but rather in multiple locations across the city. In Mann's own words, "it becomes a different play when performed outside the Bay area." Mann focuses on "communitas" as it is/was affected by a discourse or "media event," as opposed to simply responding to the reported event.

Taking her cue from Mann and the "living newspapers," Smith incorporates actual footage of the riots and the King beating into *Twilight*'s performance text. What makes Smith's strategy unique, however, is that she is also utilizing this very footage as a point of journalistic reference and investigation. Whereas Mann relied upon footage as a primary source of exposition and critical departure, Smith is more concerned with accentuating the intimacy of her one-person performance with representative video images. Through multiple video screens which surround Smith on stage, the audience glimpses, as if it were looking through a large

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17 Favorini xxxiv.

18 As qtd. in Favorini, xxxiv.
window, the Rodney King beating and the subsequent looting in Los Angeles. But these images are not new; they have saturated the media. Smith's use of them in a theatrical setting comments on these images and reflects upon this saturation. Furthermore, Smith uses media conventions to accentuate her position as documentarian. For example, reviewer Joyce Guy commented: "When the performance opened with a slide projecting the name of the piece and its author on an overhead screen, I felt as if I was about to watch a television documentary."¹⁹

Video images are significant in Twilight, as is Smith's attention to the pervasiveness of the video medium. Fiske analyzes the impact of video on the King trial and ensuing riots and provides a possible opening for discussing Twilight as legitimate media representation. Fiske points out that a media event is "hypervisual" because it is technologically distributed and thus inserted unpredictably into different social contexts -- the various mediations give the event numerous social realities.²⁰ It is Fiske's contention that the King trial videos can then be divided into two categories. The raw footage of the actual home video is what Fiske labels the "videolow" -- low on quality, but high on authenticity. The courtroom enhancements of this and other videos are the "videoehigh" -- high on quality, low on authenticity.²¹ Using

¹⁹ Guy 115.

²⁰ Fiske 126.
Fiske's terminology, Twilight can be viewed as a metaphoric extension of "videolow." According to Fiske, the equation of low power with high authenticity has been conventionalized in film and television by low tech modes of representation via the hand-held cameras of cinema verite, naturalistic documentaries, and the miniature videos of "reality TV." In her introduction to the published version of Twilight, Smith claims: "The video of the Rodney King beating, which seemed to 'tell all,' apparently did not tell enough...." While Smith recognizes the "aura" of authenticity surrounding video images of the beating and the riots, she nonetheless translates the notion of "videolow" with specifically theatrical intentions. Smith feels that the search for the true character of L.A. in the wake of the riots lies in understanding and naturalistically portraying the words and emotions of the people involved and affected. The video images provide a backdrop, serving more as visual reinforcement of the dramatic action. Thus, Smith recognizes that the authenticity of "videolow" can be extended in a theatrical setting. This is not without precedent in recent theatre history. In analyzing the journalistic intentions of Emily Mann in Execution of Justice, Favorini states:

21 Fiske 126-7.

22 Fiske 127.

[The play's intent is not to assign guilt, nor to
indict society; instead it attempts to restore to events
a fullness that the trial attenuated. In the words of
White's jailer: 'What was left unsaid was what the
trial should have been about.' 24

Smith's journalistic desire to "reiterate unheard voices in
different ways" recognizes "theaterlow" intentions similar to
those of Mann in Execution of Justice. For both artists,
"theaterlow" recreates the oral/audio traditions inherent in
theatrical artifice and social communication. For evidence,
one needs to look no further than Smith's description of
Twilight as

first and foremost a document of what an actress heard
in Los Angeles. The performance is a reiteration of
that. When I did my research in Los Angeles, I was
listening with an ear that was trained to hear stories
for the specific purpose of repeating them with the
elements of character intact. 25

Thus, Smith's investigative methodology, as informed by
Mann's intentions in Execution of Justice, extends Fiske's
discursive analysis of the video images of the King trial and
ensuing riots, bringing Twilight a step closer to
journalistic presentation in the process.

24 Favorini xxiv.

25 Smith, intro., Twilight, xxiv.
Twilight as "Alternative Press"

Smith's metaphorical use of the theatre as a means of "alternative" journalistic investigation is reflective of some of the discursive issues surrounding the media's depiction of the looting during the riots. According to Fiske, the mere usage of the term "looting" immediately placed this behavior within the context of a law-and-order struggle. But in Smith's opinion, "looting" to those who engaged in it (versus those who reported it) was multidimensional, and always racial. "[I]t could be, for example, both a form of public speech and statement of self-assertion. 'Looting' enabled the racially silenced to be heard and the overlooked to be seen."26 Delving into social-linguistic theory, Fiske theorizes that by repeatedly using terms such as "masses," "mobs," "senselessness," and "lawlessness," mainstream media absolved white society of any responsibility for the uprisings. "The mainstream media's refusal to see anything from a point of view other than its own repressed any alternative knowledge that there was an order, a purpose, and a sense to the uprisings."27 It is important to note that, while Twilight is reflective of this liberal perception of the marginalizing effect of mainstream media, it does not resonate with it. Smith's work is more of an exploration of the possibilities of multi-perspective

26 Fiske 170.

27 Fiske 180.
dramatic re-presentation than any kind of indictment of the cultural failures of journalism. In *Twilight*, looting is examined from a multitude of perspectives, most of which belong to the individuals actually affected by it. First, Smith re-creates the reactions of the Korean-American owners of stores that were ransacked during the rioting. Chung Lee, store owner and President of the Korean American Victims Association, is depicted by Smith in Korean with a screen behind her showing English subtitles:

> And next I called my neighbor's store and the gentleman—uh, the man told me, "Your store's been completely looted!"

> Well now, uh... I realized then that the riot had begun, so even though our stuff was thrown out there, we decided to give up any sense of attachment to our possessions. (83)

Smith recreates further, emotional testimony in her depiction of Richard Kim, a Korean appliance store owner:

> there are hundreds of people and your store's being looted/ at this time. So we packed up our van, four people, five people, including/ myself and we headed down there. I already knew people were carrying guns, already knew my mother was shot at that corner. So it was like going to war. (87)

These victims are then juxtaposed with the bystanders and participants in the looting. For example, Katie Miller, a black woman from South Central, LA, explains the looting differently:
I think this thing
about the Koreans and the Blacks . . .
that wasn't altogether true,

and I think that the Korean stores
got burned in the Black neighborhood that were
Korean-owned,
it was due to lack of
gettin' to know
the people that come to your store--
that's what it is.
But I didn't loot this time.
I was praising the ones that had,
you know,
you oughta burn that sucker down. (129-131)

Smith purposefully re-presents as many points of views as
possible in order to communicate the complexity of the issue.
Thus, it can be argued that Twilight represents "one
reporter's" search for "repressed alternative knowledge" and
and the journalistic account of such "multidiscursivity."

In Twilight, Anna Deavere Smith is able to
metaphorically employ the theatre as a form of alternative
press. Much of the subtext of Smith's On the Road series is
concerned with the inclusion of new characters in our human
dramas that have not usually been portrayed on our stages.
Smith feels that even white mainstream theater could be more
interesting and honest "if people of color were integrated
into the drama rather than used as walk-on stereotypes." 28
Fiske calls for similar multicultural changes in modern
journalistic discourse. In Fiske's opinion, attention to
multidiscursive contexts helps to make sense of how the same
events can be perceived and experienced differently. "[W]e

28 Smith, intro., Twilight, xxi.
will never build a multicultural society out of nondiscursive people." Smith's work, as evidenced by the multicultural montage of characters depicted in Twilight, indicates that perhaps the theater is one possible forum for the realization of Fiske's multidiscursive challenges.

In terms of theatrical convention, the juxtaposition of viewpoints proves to be a key element in communicating these alternative journalistic notions. In analyzing Execution of Justice, William Kleb looks at Mann's use of juxtaposition. This analysis also applies to Twilight. Kleb focuses on the first scene of the play, which juxtaposes a conservative San Francisco Cop with the nun-in-drag Sista' Boom-Boom. The effect is a journalistic account of hostile points of view in an intense social struggle. According to Kleb, such juxtaposition specifically and dramatically appeals to the emotions of the audience. This kind of juxtaposition is also recurrent throughout Smith's construction and presentation of characters in Twilight. At one point, the audience listens to Angela King, aunt of Rodney King, emotionally relating her feelings about her nephew's beating:

You see how everybody rave when something happens with the President of the United States? Okay, here's a nobody,

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29 Fiske 190.

but the way they beat him,
this is the way I felt towards him...

I wanted justice...

what I saw on that video,
on that TV,
that was a
mess.(58-9)

This is immediately followed by a monologue in which Sergeant Charles Duke, LAPD use-of-force expert and a witness for the defense (depicted by Smith wearing full uniform, holding a baton), analytically categorizes the event as simply an example of improper technique:

    Powell holds the baton
    like this
    and that is
    not a good . . .
    the proper way of holding the baton
    is like this...

    The whole thing boils down to . . .
    Powell was ineffective with the baton. (61)

The next person recreated by Smith is Josie Morales, an uncalled witness to the beating. She exclaims, "I just knew in my heart/this is wrong--/you know they can't do that."(67) Smith, like Mann before her and much like modern television and print journalists, uses dramatic juxtaposition repeatedly to highlight the emotional resonance of the "found" words of actual people. Smith's method of juxtaposition serves a more extended ideological purpose as well. It is a dramatic tool which aids her multi-perspective, "alternative" journalistic investigation of a "discourse event."
Smith as Investigative Reporter

Smith touches upon another key issue within the field of modern journalism with her use of "found" speech. One source of critical contention within the study of journalism has been the effect of mass media on interpersonal communication. In "Mass Media and Their Environments," Theodore Petersen proposes that a "problematic" relationship has developed between the mass media and cultural discourse. In Petersen's opinion, the efficiency of technology in revolutionizing mass media brings with it a countervailing danger that the media has become too efficient and disperses too much information and opinion too rapidly.31 Petersen fears that the media has preempted much of the discussion that people once carried on face to face. He feels that there are some issues which are so important that a responsible citizen should be stirred to action through interpersonal communication versus relying upon the deluge of information and easily accessible components offered by mass media.32 Within the field of journalism, this kind of critique has inspired a return to "hands on" reporting. The relatively recent emergence of interpersonal news presentations such as "human-interest segments" and "town meetings" are examples of this trend. In Twilight, Smith recognizes that the theatre too can be a part


32 Petersen 25.
of this genre of journalistic presentation. The importance and immediacy of interpersonal communication forms the very core of Smith's investigative methodology. "Armed with a tape recorder and a manner that must invite frank confession, she interviews a wide cross-section of people connected with a significant current event, as any enterprising journalist might."33

Twilight's essence does not rest, however, in "media saturation," nor does it capture and maintain the easily distracted eye or ear of the average news viewer, listener, or reader. Rather, Smith investigates an event by exploring the complex diversities of language, gesture, and intonation. In a sense, Smith is staging her own version of a mimetic "town-meeting." As well, Smith's performance is essentially the re-presentation of a series of face-to-face encounters. Her attention to detail in each portrayal can be interpreted as an attempt to recapture the value of interpersonal communication which Petersen feels has been lost in the various media of modern journalism. Smith seems to concur: "I am first looking for the humanness inside the problems, or the crises. The Spoken word is evidence of the humanness."34


34 Smith, intro., Twilight, xxiv.
Smith struggles with recording, editing, and transmitting this "humanness" in order to re-present a multi-dimensional view of the event. This places her squarely within the performative predicament which every modern investigative reporter must confront: the problem of neutrality. In his book The Virtuous Journalist, Stephen Klaidman argues that modern journalists should observe fundamental matters of moral conduct, one of which is respecting the rights of others.\textsuperscript{35} According to Klaidman,

\textit{[J]ournalists write about human conflicts, and when they try to balance competing perspectives they must select what is important. Each act of selection is evaluative, but that does not prevent the selection from being objective, balanced and fair.}\textsuperscript{36}

It is his conclusion that unbiased coverage, which Smith attempts in Twilight, can only be achieved if journalists maintain a skeptical awareness of their own personal biases and follow practices designed to prevent these biases from infecting their presentations.\textsuperscript{37} Smith attempts to maintain this "skeptical awareness" in her interview re-creation technique by placing the audience at the forefront of her performance methodology.

I address the text like a poem. I work on 'us' and 'we' whenever anybody, regardless of race, says them, I


\textsuperscript{36} Klaidman 90.

\textsuperscript{37} Klaidman 91.
don't want to confront the audience, or make them feel that it's you and me. My experience of the interviews I included was that there was an 'us' before I left.38

Smith's journalistic self-awareness is thus transmitted through her scrupulous attention to the text and her representation of interviewees. The result in Twilight, as Ina Jaffe notes, is "a sort of civic Rorschach blot on which audience members can impose their own points of view."39

Many of the measures Smith takes to ensure the avoidance of bias and the maintenance of neutrality in Twilight have precedence within the tradition of American documentary theatre. According to Stuart Cosgrove, the initial idea for the "living newspapers" of the Federal Theatre Project took a more defined shape when the American Newspaper Guild was invited to work with the unit.40 Originally designed to be a short news bulletin, eventually the New York "living newspaper" became a fully staffed organization numbering approximately 130 journalists, researchers, playwrights, and performers.41 The unit functioned like a real newspaper, complete with editors, departments, deadlines, and reporters, attempting to achieve veracity in theatrical reporting. This journalistic imperative is also found in Smith's creative

38 As qtd. in Martin, 48.


40 Cosgrove x.

41 Cosgrove xi.
process. Concerned more with issues of neutrality versus veracity, Smith employs her own "news staff," similar to that of the New York "living newspaper" Unit to aid in the creation of pieces such as Twilight. Smith combats her own personal biases by using a team of five dramaturgs who serve as listeners, filters, and editors. Recalling this process in Twilight, Smith writes,

My predominant concern about the creation of Twilight was that my own history...would make the work narrower than it should be. For this reason, I sought out dramaturges [sic] who had very developed careers and identities, outside the theater profession. I was interested not only in their ethnic diversity, but in the diversity that they would bring to the project in terms of areas of expertise.42

This "editorial board" helps Smith remove any remaining vestiges of herself in her mimetic journalistic document while at the same time achieving fairness, balance, and truth in her presentation. With editorial "self-awareness" and acknowledgment of the importance of neutrality, she emulates Klaidman's "virtuous journalist." Moreover, Smith bridges the gap between journalism and theatre, between the actor and the reporter, a task made all the more difficult by the necessity of her physical presence for the transmission of her report.

The reactions of Twilight's reviewers concerning the nature of her performative presence suggest that the theatre world also recognizes the relationship between Smith's journalistic positioning and the artifice of theatre.

42 Smith, intro., Twilight, xxi.
According to Todd London, "she never manipulates, but instead lets our sympathies go where they will. She remains aloof from her characters, even as she captures them incisively...Her ending exemplifies a mindful, hands-off attitude." 43 Sean Mitchell recognizes Smith's presence as both the interviewer and the performer, and the way in which such presence is intrinsically linked to her final product. "Uttering the interviewees' words and indicating their accents, stances, and gestures, she simply approximates her experience of the interview for the audience." 44 Throughout these discussions, Smith constantly reiterates her positioning, calling herself "a repeater...or a reiterator, rather than a mimic..." 45 Even established theatrical reviewers such as Robert Brustein, often color their reaction to Twilight with a journalistic tint. "Smith is not only an objective ear but a characterizing voice, and just as she shapes the text through editing and selection, so she achieves her emphasis through gesture and intonation ...." 46 From this representative sampling, it is quite clear that Smith's critics connect Twilight to journalism and accept Smith as a documentarian/journalist.

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43 London 45.


The question then remains, what of the connections between *Twilight* as journalism and *Twilight* as theatrical entertainment? In "News As Entertainment - The Search for Dramatic Unity," William A. Henry explores the position of modern journalists in relation to the "Platonic ideal" to which they aspire. It is important to note that many media analysts introduce theatrical concepts and terminology in their work. However, Henry's argument proves especially valuable for the purposes of this thesis not only because it is representative of this interdisciplinary trend, but specifically because Henry directly relates the notion of dramatic unity to modern news presentation. According to Henry, the news has become "...a branch of performed literature...."47 Like all other performed literature, the news is less concerned with the interpretive voice or metaphysics than with the story. Henry observes:

> [the news] never lets ideas exist in the abstract. Ideas belong to people who fight for or against them. Ideas belong to groups whose lives will be enhanced or threatened by them....Except in scattered do-gooder stories ... no one can win without making someone else lose."48

His point, though philosophical and sweeping in nature, has interesting ramifications in the tradition of documentary drama. Henry claims that news reporters, in their search for dramatic unity, try to define the story by creating


48 Henry 145.

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antagonists and protagonists in order to get the audience to identify with one side or the other.

This phenomenon happens somewhat differently in *Execution of Justice* and in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. According to William Kleb, in *Execution of Justice* Mann "generates a powerfully effective force-field around her play and assigns the audience a specific role within it." Mann utilizes the real components of the White trial in an effort to "re-create" the psychological/emotional state of the original jury and cast the audience as that jury. The audience then "re-experiences" what the original jury experienced. This theatrical experience follows Henry's thesis. According to Henry, it is easier for reporters to persuade the public that the story is important by showing how it disrupts individual lives, rather than by standing back and calmly explaining how it will affect large groups.\(^{50}\) By showing how the trial affected the individual lives of the characters involved, Mann implies a subjective duty for her audience, namely to identify with either the defense or the prosecution, the protagonist or the antagonist. The major difference being that Mann does not shade her presentation so as to lead her "jury" to choose one side over the other.

It can be argued that Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* moves away from the "dramatic positioning" found in

\(^{49}\) Kleb 333.

\(^{50}\) Henry 146.
Execution. While the "voice of the common man" certainly resonates throughout Smith's work, it is expressed in a different manner indicative of a change in journalistic intent. Smith's two-hour theatrical "news segment" veers far from the tenets of traditional narrative philosophy. Terms such as "kaleidoscopic," "polyphonic," "multi-perspective," "panoramic canvas," "sprawling scope," and "verbal collage" dominate critical discussion of *Twilight*. Smith herself also avoids narrative definition, claiming, "...I'm just trying to create possibilities for dialogue, to decentralize the race question, to try to bring more voices to it that don't get heard."\(^{51}\) Smith is also quick to denounce the necessity for dramatic unity, a catharsis, or a "solution" within the context of her work. She would rather "just give us the facts" and let us decide for ourselves. Henry's claims about the "Platonic ideal" to which news reporters aspire do not comfortably apply to Smith's work as dramatic journalist.

If, as Henry argues, the constraints of dramatic unity have resulted largely in the melodramatic positioning of modern reporters as avengers or champions rather than objective conveyors of the news, then Smith shows how the theatrical reporter can employ performative techniques to avoid this dilemma. Henry's argument is representative of a tradition within the discipline of journalism that establishes the reporter as author. In this analytical mode, the reporter is viewed, in effect, as "the writer of the

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\(^{51}\) As qtd. in Stayton, 30.
playlet, establishing the shape of the conflict and the narrative voice." This is often due simply to the unquestionable performative presence of the reporter in connection with the event being reported. While many assume moral roles such as conciliator, avenger, authority figure, friend, or peace maker, the reporter is still in theory supposed to avoid such roles. "His bias may pervade the process of reporting and editing, but he will not acknowledge his role by performing." 53

Smith seems to both acknowledge her role as journalist in the event while at the same time distancing herself from that event through her re-creative acting technique. She is present as listener, editor, and reporter. The audience witnesses fragments of interviews which she has conducted and then re-created. Nonetheless, each step in Smith’s creative process reiterates her desire to remove herself completely from her portrayal. First she tape records the interview, asking questions to evoke personal or distinctive responses from each of her interviewees. She then takes a Polaroid photograph of the interviewee, and finally rehearse the person’s words again and again. She does this by listening to the tapes of the interview and repeating the words until she sounds, feels, and looks as close to the person as possible. 54

By the time the performance has developed, Smith intends that

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52 Henry 147.

53 Henry 148.

54 Statyon 28.
all vestiges of her personal self are removed so that her performative self can transcribe the interview as accurately as possible. Smith's desire to remove her personal presence from the presentation also precludes the development of a "unifying voice" amongst the people she portrays on stage.

You see my work, at least at this moment, isn't about unifying. A unifying idea is not enough. It's why I really don't put my own point of view into the piece, because once you put forward a powerful voice, be it truth or not, it makes the other voices seem smaller.55

Like the producers of the "living newspapers" and the playwright Emily Mann, Smith positions herself as an investigative reporter. Yet Twilight is indicative of a shift from the "voice of the common man" to the voice of collectives. By neutralizing the dramatic presence of the "reporter" in Twilight's performance text and focusing on the multiple sources for a given event, Smith expands upon the journalistic challenges inherent in documentary theatrical presentation.

**Twilight as Journalism: "Loosening the Straitjacket"**

While many of the journalistic dilemmas that Smith struggles with in the creation of her document are performative in nature, some are more closely linked to the her journalistic depiction of society. Social critique is

certainly not a new issue within the rhetoric of modern journalism. There exists a long tradition in this field of analyzing the various ways in which the media fails to accurately represent or reflect American cultural and social conditions. Within this tradition, various critical methodologies have been introduced to explain the media's behavior in socio-political contexts. One particular sector of American media critique has its roots in a Marxist tradition. Michael Parenti's *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the News Media* is representative of this mode of journalistic discourse. Parenti argues that the modern press "serves many functions, but its major role, its irreducible responsibility, is to continually recreate a view of reality supportive of existing social and economic class distinctions." In advancing an essentially Marxist interpretation of the role of mass media in our society, Parenti outlines several "methods of misrepresentation" implemented by the media in order to frame the news so that it reinforces class, race, and gender divisions. In *Twilight*, Anna Deavere Smith not only recognizes Parenti's methods of misrepresentation, but tries to work against them in the structure and method of her presentation. Though her work is not filtered through a Marxist lens, many of Smith's journalistic struggles are related to Parenti's observations about the media and its role in society.

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Parenti explains one method of misrepresentation which revolves around selectivity and deliberate omission on the part of the reporter and the editor. News selectivity is most often located on the side of those who have power, position, and wealth. "The press may sometimes link disorders among the urban poor to the conditions of inner-city life, but no linkage is made between such obviously harsh conditions and the economic injustices of the system that produced them."\(^{57}\) This idea could have been lifted from the program notes of any one of the "living newspapers" of the Federal Theatre Project. It also applies to *Twilight*. Smith depicts a diversity of viewpoints, from L.A. district attorney Gil Garcetti to Elvira Evers (a poor pregnant Panamanian woman who, along with her child, barely survived a misguided drive-by shooting) to the various members of the Park family, a Korean family ravaged by the violence of the riots. Smith repudiates the media's traditional race and class depictions in the name of cultural awareness.

I believe that the solutions to these problems will call for large and eclectic groups of people. I also believe that we are at a stage at which we must first break the silence about race and encourage many more people to participate in the dialogue.\(^{58}\)

Seeking to avoid the "method of misrepresentation" that results from "selectivity," Smith includes and accentuates

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\(^{57}\) Parenti 9.

\(^{58}\) Smith, intro., *Twilight*, xxiv.
class and race distinctions and portrays voices from as many of the groups involved and affected by the event she is documenting as possible.

Two other methods of misrepresentation on the part of the media which Parenti recognizes involve "lies" and "false balancing." The result of such methods is "face-value transmission" -- the withholding of countervailing response or adequate confutation to the information being spread to the public. According to Parenti, what is really needed is "more content and broader context, the inclusion of facts that do not fit the prevailing ideology." 59 For Anna Deavere Smith, this "broader context" involves locating and portraying the voices of the marginalized. Smith is not the first to utilize this strategy in the creation of a documentary theatrical text. Emily Mann effected this broader context by including a "chorus of uncalled witnesses" interspersed throughout Execution of Justice. According to Kleb, by implementing this kind of convention, Mann shows how documentary drama can combat the false-balancing and face-value transmission of modern media misrepresentation by creating a "kind of vocal collage, to raise a number of specific points pertinent not only to a critique of the trial but to a broader social and political context as well." 60 In assaulting the "false balancing" of the media, Parenti points out that both sides might not be all sides, and when

59 Parenti 195.

60 Kleb 336.
reporters fail to realize this it creates "a misleading impression of open debate and pluralistic choice in the media." Perhaps this is why critics such as David Richards give credit to Smith's attempt at extreme social inclusivity in her depictions, and in the process validate her technique as journalistically effective.

Their perspectives might be wildly different, but all these people in their fashion are struggling to put sense into senselessness and to find the justice in what looks like injustice run rabid. By the end, the piece has transcended specifics and become an expression of the eternal search for order in an anarchic world.

As Smith introduces different perspectives based upon racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, she expands upon Mann's notion of a "chorus of uncalled witnesses." In Smith's search for the character of a community, she attempts to capture its unheard, excluded, or skewed voices. Thus, Smith's theatre is specifically invested in avoiding the notion of "false balancing" as it affects modern news reporting.

Perhaps the best metaphor for Anna Deavere Smith's fusion of journalism and theatrical artifice is provided by Hillier Kriegbaum in his book Pressures on the Press. Kriegbaum feels that the time has come for the modern press, in its search for identity as a profession, to "break-out of

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61 Parenti 200.

62 Richards 44.
the straitjackets of journalism." 63 Though he stresses the necessity of maintaining traditional measures of journalistic competence, Kreighbaum argues that these measures often become figurative 'straitjackets' that prevent creative innovations that would better transmit the impact of events. 64 Smith proves that American documentary drama can recognize and respect the purpose of journalism, while at the same time utilizing the artifice of theatre to loosen the figurative restraints of traditional journalistic media. *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* is an example of an artist loosening the "straitjacket of journalism" by re-envisioning "reporting" in contemporary American theater. As well, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* exemplifies the power of theatre to comment on the discourse surrounding a major media event and respond to the notion of the media event itself. Furthermore, Smith's work proves that there is much room for further exploration into the legitimate placement of theatrical artifice within the discipline of journalism. With precedents like the "living newspapers" and *Execution of Justice*, Smith redeploy the convention of "found" dialogue and interview re-creation. *Twilight* consistently engenders reactions which validate its inclusion within the realm of legitimate journalism. For example, reviewer Chrisptcher Meeks notes, "[D]espite the media saturation of the riots and their aftermath, one leaves


64 Kriegbaum 99.
this show knowing more."\textsuperscript{65} Anna Deavere Smith has indeed created a theatrical manner of informing, her own means of practicing journalism.

CHAPTER II

"THE PREDICAMENT OF CULTURE": TWILIGHT AS ETHNOGRAPHIC TEXT

In his introduction to Writing Culture: The Poetics and the Politics of Modern Ethnography, James Clifford describes modern ethnography as "an emerging inter-disciplinary phenomenon. Its authority and rhetoric having spread to many fields where 'culture' is a newly problematic object of description and critique."¹ According to Clifford, a series of historical tensions with origins in twentieth-century critical theory have repositioned anthropology with respect to both its object of study and the authority of the ethnographer. Thus, a newly recognized group of cultural documentarians have entered the scene -- "indigenous ethnographers." Described as "insiders studying their own culture," their "new histories" offer different angles of vision in the depiction and representation of culture(s).²

Following this development, Anna Deavere Smith can be viewed as an extended version of Clifford's "indigenous


²Clifford, Writing, 9.
ethnographer." She presents "new histories" of given communities in the form of a performance text. Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* realizes an interdisciplinary connection between theatre and ethnography. Both the reviews of Smith's performances and Smith's own comments about *Twilight* are more concerned with its merit as a socio-political documentation rather than its value as theatrical art. Much of the same type of cultural critique that has traditionally been applied to ethnographic texts has also appeared in the wide variety of reactions to *Twilight*. Smith and her critics often compare her research to that of a "fieldworker" and her role as a performer to that of an ethnographer. In this chapter, then, I will examine the acknowledged relationship between Smith's work and ethnography. *Twilight* will be analyzed particularly in light of new concerns in the academic discipline of ethnography regarding "local re-appropriation" and the authority of the ethnographer. Drawing from the theories of James Clifford, bell hooks, Dwight Conquergood, and others, I will explore the possibility that *Twilight* constitutes a performative bridge between the disciplines of theatre and anthropology. Integral to this argument, the notion of "interpretive communities" as developed by reader-response theoretician Stanley Fish, will serve as a methodological framework for understanding "communities" in both disciplines. As well, Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, perhaps the first recognized African-American ethnographic text produced from a
native-informant perspective, will serve as an historical precedent for Smith's work. Such theoretical and comparative resources provide a foundation from which to study ethnography as performance text and examine the aesthetic and academic ramifications of translating field research into creative text.

Smith as Anthropological Fieldworker

In The Predicament of Culture, Clifford suggests that modern ethnography, seen generally, provides "diverse ways of thinking and writing about culture from a standpoint of participant observation." So defined, this approach to cultural study allows poets and performers to be ethnographers, for they are what social scientists label "native informants." Anna Deavere Smith states that she wants to "capture the personality of a place by attempting to embody its varied population and varied points of view in one person -- myself." Her research process and performance methodology locate her within the penumbra of Clifford's expanded definition of the ethnographer. Though she is not necessarily "native" to the situation (in this case, the

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4 Clifford, Predicament, 9.

5 Clifford, Predicament, 10.

situation revolves around an event in which Smith neither participated nor directly experienced or witnessed), she nonetheless assumes a presence similar in many ways to Clifford's native informant. First, Smith did live in LA for a period in her life; therefore, she is not completely alien to the surroundings or the culture. Even though Smith does not speak the same first language as all of her interviewees (a few were more comfortable speaking in Korean with a friend or relative serving as translator), she nonetheless shares with them the geographical and cultural commonality of being an "American," and the experience of being identified as part of a "minority." Moreover, Smith's ability to understand and recapture nuance -- the sounds, gestures, inflections, intonations, and mannerisms of her subjects -- with accurate precision is intrinsically linked to her native positioning and culturally informed self-awareness. As an "informant" Smith is, most certainly, actively engaged in studying society on a grand scale. However, like the ethnographer, she focuses her study on the examination of one particular locale and undertakes a participant-observation study -- the difference being that her research is told through performance rather than a traditional, written document.

The "predicament" of Clifford's title refers to problematic notions such as neutrality and ethnographic authority. He defines this predicament as "a pervasive condition of off-centeredness in a world of distinct meaning-
systems, a state of being in culture while looking at
culture, a form of personal and collective self-fashioning."7
According to Clifford, this theoretically precarious reality,
not limited to scholars, artists, writers, or intellectuals,
is a response to the twentieth century's unprecedented
"overlay of traditions."8 Smith's work is an example of such
an overlay. While theatrical in nature and presentation,
Twilight is overlaid with other disciplinary convention and
technique. For example, Smith's investigative process is
virtually identical to the research methodology employed by
the modern anthropological fieldworker. According to Smith:

[E]ach ... performance evolves from interviews I conduct
with individuals directly or indirectly involved in the
event (in this case, the Rodney King trial and ensuing
riots in LA) I intend to explore. Basing my scripts
entirely on the interview material, I perform the
interviewees on stage using their own words.9

Thus, her ethnographic techniques are translated into
theatrical text and vice versa. Smith utilizes the basic
techniques of the fieldworker -- data gathering, analysis,
and recording through observant-participation. More
importantly, since she is constantly negotiating differences
in perception and identity within a "culture," Smith too must
struggle with the ideological constructs of Clifford's
"predicament." According to Clifford, "[I]ntervening in an
interconnected world, one is always, to varying degrees,

7 Clifford, Predicament, 9.

8 Clifford, Predicament, 11.

9 Smith xviii.
'inauthentic': caught between cultures, implicated in others." Thus, in light of Clifford's predicament, issues such as the "authority" of the ethnographer as an accurate documentarian of culture and the scientific legitimacy of an artistic presentation of an ethnographic text have begun to dominate modern ethnographic discourse. Smith faces very similar interpretive dilemmas in *Twilight*.

**Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*: Creative Precedent**

In order to investigate Smith's exploration of the interpretive dilemmas inherent in creative ethnography, it is important to recognize the existence and influence of precedent within the history of American cultural documentation. Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* can be viewed as *Twilight*’s artistic and anthropological predecessor. Like Smith, Hurston was an African-American woman dedicated to studying and preserving the unrecorded verbal heritage of a particular section of American culture. She pursued this goal in *Mules and Men*, which is a collection of black folklore including stories, songs, customs, and superstitions narrativized through a first person account. First published in 1935, *Mules and Men* redefined the role of the "indigenous ethnographer." According to noted cultural critic bell hooks, Hurston "...broke new ground by pushing anthropological work across boundaries, giving it a place in

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mass culture, taking it back to the same place from which African-American folklore had emerged.\textsuperscript{11} Fresh from her studies at Barnard College under the tutelage of eminent twentieth-century cultural anthropologist Franz Boas, Hurston decided to return to her hometown in rural Southern Florida to "...collect some old stories and tales...{B}efore everybody forgets all of 'em."\textsuperscript{12} What resulted was a methodological approach in which Hurston placed herself within the ethnographic text as both a participant and an observer.

Both \textit{Twilight} and \textit{Mules and Men} evidence methodologies that cannot be accounted for in one discipline. This crossing of disciplines is echoed by Clifford. In advancing his claim that poets, writers, and performers should be included as legitimate contributors to the discipline of ethnography, Clifford argues against the unnecessary and confining division between art and science. According to Clifford, the modern division of art and ethnography into distinct discourses has restricted the former's analytic power and the latter's subversive vocation as cultural critique.\textsuperscript{13} Hurston's struggle with the division between art and science predates Smith's struggle in presenting \textit{Twilight}.

\textsuperscript{11} bell hooks, \textit{Yearning: Race, Gender, and Politics} (Boston: South End Press, 1990) 143.

\textsuperscript{12} Zora Neale Hurston, \textit{Mules and Men} (1935; New York: Harper and Row, 1990) 8. All subsequent references will be listed parenthetically within the text and are to this edition.

\textsuperscript{13} Clifford, \textit{Predicament}, 12.
as legitimate cultural documentation, and is likewise reflected in Smith's ethnographic/performative positioning. According to scholar Theresa Love, Hurston's goal "was not merely to collect folklore, but to show the beauty and wealth of genuine Negro material."\(^{14}\) Thus, Hurston's characters were often members of the "black masses," and accordingly, to the anthropologist their economic and cultural isolation made them the proper source for folk materials in the purest form. Consequently, her decision to write about the ways of the common folk required the use of their dialect as a means of achieving verisimilitude.\(^{15}\) This aspect of *Mules and Men* is crucial to an understanding of Hurston's scientific versus artistic struggle. According to Love,

...Ms. Hurston's use of Black Dialect forms substantiates the theory that she is willing to sacrifice her interest in anthropology - which discipline would emphasize the need for photographic descriptive passages - for the sake of artistic expediency.\(^{16}\)

However, when compared to Smith's minutely detailed, precisely interpreted character translations in *Twilight*, especially when taken in the context of Clifford's argument concerning the division of art and science, Love's contentions in the above passage appear to be misguided. It can be argued that Hurston's "embellishments" did serve


\(^{15}\) Love 50.

\(^{16}\) Love 52.
interests of scientific documentation. When Hurston relates her experience of a story, she attempts to emulate the dialect of the person who told it to her. For example:

Joe Wiley chuckled. 'If them mockin' birds ever speck to do dat man any good they better git some box-cars to haul dat sand. Dat one li'l grain they totin' in their bil ain't helpin' none. But any how it goes to show you dat animals got sense as well as peoples.' (95)

Dialect re-creation is one of the multitude of conventions that form the core of Smith's presentational strategy as well. Aside from depicting her Korean interviewees in either full Korean or heavily accented English, Smith also re-presents every sound, every "uh" or "um" that is uttered by her other characters. This precision is heard in Rudy Salas, Jr., the first person depicted in *Twilight*:

> And then my my grandfather,  
> N. Carnacion',  
> uh,  
> was a gringo hater 'cause he had run-ins with gringos when he was riding. (1)

Thus, Smith's empirical interest in exact translation is reflective of Hurston's creative approach to ethnographic documentation. In both cases, scientific exactitude is not sacrificed for the sake of artistic expedience. Rather, it is inseparable from it.

The conflict between science and art is not the only duality which Hurston, and later Smith, would confront in their respective struggles with Clifford's predicament.
According to biographer Robert Hemenway, Hurston was forced to reckon with "two concepts of culture."\textsuperscript{17} First, there was the implicit suggestion that although black folklore might be a valuable expression of an uneducated people, it was still of a "low order." The other was a reaction to the elitism of academia. According to Hemenway, "...her commitment to folklore as a field of study was an inchoate challenge to the cultural imperialism that could declare ... vertical judgments."\textsuperscript{18} Thus Hurston, like Anna Deavere Smith, was ambivalent about the "academic" study of folklore for she had difficulty reconciling vertical judgments with the pluralistic premise of anthropological theory. For Hurston, there was no "right" or "wrong" way to study "primitive" cultures. According to Hemenway, this is reflective of her double identity as a serious academic and a creative artist. "The type of reportorial precision required of the scientific folklorist bored Hurston, she was used to assimilating the aura of a place and letting that stimulus provoke her imagination."\textsuperscript{19} Smith, a professor of theatre and popular culture at Stanford University, has most certainly struggled with similar issues in the world of academic theatre.

Since I was a girl my creative life has been about trying to find a way of being me in my work. I felt very oppressed by the formal structures of theatre, the first


\textsuperscript{18} Hemenway 100.

\textsuperscript{19} Hemenway 101.
one being the role of an acting teacher in a classroom. When I became the acting teacher, there was this expectation that I was going to be this authority who resolved everything and came up with the answers.20

Smith's struggle with academia is reflective of Hurston's previous attempt to reconcile two concepts of culture in a creative ethnographic study.

bell hooks adds a slightly different hue to this discussion in her analysis of Hurston's ethnographic self-fashioning. As hooks argues, it was precisely Hurston's anthropological training which fueled her artistic endeavors. According to hooks, Hurston's attitude towards anthropological work altered as she searched for the best possible approach to presenting her research. She chose the style of the folk over academia to ensure that black folk culture would not disappear in academia.21 hooks feels that Hurston used an anthropological framework in order to enhance her own writing. Hurston's own comments on the matter verify her connection with Anna Deavere Smith as native, indigenous informant and also illustrate the similar ideological challenges which faced both women in communicating ethnographic texts:

It was only once I was off in college, away from from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of glass of anthropology to look through at that."22


21 hooks 141.
22 Hurston, intro., 1
Here is an educated woman, much like Smith, who recognizes the difficulty of assimilating "scholarship" and the study of mass culture.

I needed my Barnard education to see my people as they really are. But I found that it did not need to be too detached as I stepped aside to study them. I had to go back, dress as they did, talk as they did, live their life, so that I could get into my stories the world that I knew as a child.23

Although it appears that Smith is primarily concerned with focusing Hurston's "spy-glass," she is nonetheless affected by Clifford's predicament, or her self-conscious positioning as native informant within the performative ethnographic text of Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992.

Ethnographic Issues in Critical Reactions to Twilight

Much of the critical reaction to Twilight is often in response to Smith's "spy-glass" approach and performative presence as native informant. In Twilight, reviewer Judith Hamera sees two specifically ethnographic challenges facing Smith as an artist re-presenting the L.A. riots. The first challenge lies in selecting and documenting witnesses "in all their subtle, sacred (in-) articulateness."24 Hamera gives Smith credit for doing this skillfully. But she feels that there is a more subtle second challenge in this kind of

23 as qtd. in hooks, 142.

documentation. Hamera argues that Smith should consider the work of contemporary ethnographers similarly charged with recording and representing "Others."²⁵ This challenge first involves locating the matrix in which the studied voices are embedded, and then applying an apolitical organizing ideology to select which of them to present and which to leave out. Specifically, Hamera refers to Zora Neale Hurston. "Over forty years before it became academically fashionable, Hurston was owning and owning up to her own voice, her limitations, her role as narrator-editor."²⁶ Hamera thus takes issue with a perceived lack of artistic impact in Twilight due to Smith's zealous use of the "spy-glass" approach. Hamera eventually sees the possibility of artistic license as an effective means of cultural commentary.

While critic Kevin Kelly does not directly address the ethnographic ramifications of Twilight, he still chooses to focus on the play as cultural commentary rather than artistic creation.

It's a vocal history of the LA riots drawn from myriad sources...a verbal collage notching bits and pieces, voices and attitudes, rampant violence and momentary kindness, soulful abjection and abject selfishness into a monologue meant to shake up our shared conscience".²⁷ Like Kelly, most reviewers are unable to examine Twilight in anything but specifically social, cultural, and political

²⁵ Hamera, 116.

²⁶ Hamera 116.

terms, focusing on its worth as cultural critique before its artistic merits. This perspective solidifies Smith's connection with Clifford's observations about the confining division between modern art and ethnography. When Kelly labels *Twilight* "the most powerful social argument now on Broadway," he proves that critics are willing to view Smith's work as interdisciplinary in intent.\(^{28}\) Taken in this context, it can then be argued that perhaps Smith can be viewed as "post-modern" artist/ethnographer, commenting upon the relationship between ethnography and theatre by fusing the two into a singular practicable discipline.

However, there exists another community of critics who have not been so willing to accept *Twilight*'s worth as either cultural critique or ethnographic experimentation. Again, much of this criticism, revolves around Smith's relation to the material being presented, the piece's theatrical viability, and specifically ethnographic issues. In reviewing *Twilight* for *Theater*, Shawn-Marie Garrett immediately locates the stage action as "a roundabout form of testimony" which suffers from "the strained 'theatricality' with which the whole event glitters."\(^{29}\) Garrett also claims that the "potential of Smith's theater is drastically limited by its dependency on the real."\(^{30}\) Sandra Tsing Loh asks "at what

\(^{28}\) Kelly 30.


\(^{30}\) Garrett 108.
point does documentary realism stop and theatrical artifice begin. . . . I missed a catharsis."\(^{31}\) This struggle to locate and accept Twilight's theatricality is reflective of the lack of available historical and/or cultural conventions for accepting Smith's ethnographic self-fashioning. Perhaps, her critics are looking in the wrong place. Reviewer Sean Mitchell claims that "there seems to be no clear precedent for what Smith has done at this professional level. She appears to have established a new genre, and at the moment she is a genre of one."\(^{32}\) Mitchell's difficulty in identifying Smith's work derives from an unwillingness to search for anything but a specifically theatrical precedent, whereas he should be looking for a performative one, such as Mules and Men. Mitchell actually proposes possible reasons for the Pulitzer Prize jury's decision to disallow Twilight for final consideration based upon the argument that its language was not invented but gleaned from interviews. His attention to Twilight indicates that the issues raised by Smith concerning the relationship of ethnography and theatre have been problematic for the theatre community on many levels. It would seem that the theatre community, represented here by the Pulitzer committee, lacks the interdisciplinary knowledge or willingness to interpret pieces in anything but strictly theatrical viewpoints.


\(^{32}\) Mitchell 7
Graciela Hernandez' analysis of *Mules and Men* provides the tools for making the critical connection between these two disciplines that Smith's reviewers (save for Hamera) seem to lack. In exploring the implications of using blurred genres and literary strategies in narratives of fieldwork, Hernandez puts forth an argument which is directly relevant to the Smith debate. She argues that, "[T]he strength of Hurston's work ... lies in her ability to turn the anthropological venture on its head and to suggest when the limitations of knowing an 'Other' are exceeded or foreclosed."³³ According to Hernandez, Hurston's immediate claim to the "spy-glass" of objectivity is only one dimension in the construction of her performative/scholarly persona within the text. Hurston also claims anthropological method as a useful tool with which to evaluate the creative aspects of a culture. This invests her with a certain amount of legitimacy as well.³⁴ Hurston will not simply be collecting the pieces of folklore in a haphazard manner. "Instead, she implies that these accounts will be systematically obtained and translated within a theoretical framework."³⁵ Thus, her creative interpretation of these tales is a result of the framework she constructs for the audience. She attributes to herself both the scientific authority of an anthropologist

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³⁴ Hernandez 353.

³⁵ Hernandez 353
and the authentic authority of a community member, proving that the two are not mutually exclusive. In Smith's case, the dramatist does not have the luxury of setting up her "anthropological" framework in an introduction or preface before the presentation of her text. Nor does she have any specific training in anthropology. As well, the fact that her text is more of a collage than a narrative leaves much of its interpretation to its audience. Nonetheless, it seems that Smith ascribes to herself the same methodological techniques for creative interpretation of the "Other" that Hurston did in Mules and Men. In a sense, Smith inherited Hurston's creative framework for bridging the discursive gap between anthropology and theatre in the depiction of cultural sources and events. This might simply have gone unnoticed due to the academic distance between the two disciplines and historical distance between artists.

"Interpretive Communities" and the Performative Turn in Ethnography

One means of understanding how Smith bridges the gap between art and science lies in the notion of "interpretive communities." According to Stanley Fish, meaning does not derive from any intrinsic stability in the text. Rather, it is the stability in the makeup of the various communities which interpret a text and, conversely, in the opposing

36 Hernandez 355.
positions they make possible.\textsuperscript{37} Fish's argument rests upon the notion that, at least in academia, every method of interpretation produces an opposite or different method of interpretation. Fish defines interpretive communities as groups of people, in this case the disciplines of ethnography and theatre, who have tacitly agreed to certain principles of textual interpretation.\textsuperscript{38} In relating this notion to theatre audiences, Susan Bennett makes it clear that "interpretive communities" exist prior to the act of witnessing the performance or reading the text, and they therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. Furthermore, Bennett recognizes Fish's assertion that interpretive communities are not stable, holding privileged points of view, but represent different interpretive strategies held by different cultures at different times.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, it can be argued that one of the core issues surrounding \textit{Twilight}'s critical reception is the inability of the \textit{theatrical} community to interpret, within its own discourse, a text which also addresses the technique, convention, and discourse of the discipline of ethnography. It is interesting to note that Hurston had to deal with the


\textsuperscript{39} Bennett 43.
very same issue within the anthropology/ethnography community.

One manner in which Smith and Hurston muddy the discursive waters between these two interpretive communities is in their recognition of the influence of performance on ethnography as a discipline. In an article entitled "Poetics, Play, Process and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology," Dwight Conquergood puts forth the notion that the language of "performance" and the "performance text" have penetrated ethnography as a practice. "The conversation between anthropology and performance studies has moved beyond the recognition that social life is performative. A growing number of ethnographers are taking performance as both the subject and method of their research."40 The work of Victor Turner. Edward Bruner, Richard Schechner, and others has resulted in an ideological shift away from the perception that performance is an act of culture. These scholars have studied performance as a record of culture. Now, ethnographic research is often discussed as performance and performative in nature, thus opening up a forum for greater possible dialogue between and within the interpretive communities of ethnography and performance.

Two key terms introduced by Conquergood in his analysis of this discursive network also help to define Twilight as a performative/ethnographic text. The first of these is

"poetics," which Conquergood defines as the fabricated, constructed nature of human realities. Thus, ethnographers are attracted to those cultural fabrications in which ambiguity and artifice are most conspicuous in order to emphasize that "cultures and persons are more than just created, they are creative. They hold out the promise of reimagining and refashioning the world." In this case, the theater is the cultural fabrication to which Smith is attracted as a social scientist. "Theater can mirror society. But in order to do that theater must embrace diversity. It must include new characters in our human drama that have not been portrayed on our stages."

On another level, the "poetics" of ethnographic research is likewise constructed and creative. "Participant-observation is based on artifice, and requires the willing suspension of disbelief by both parties to the encounter." Thus, Smith's interview recreation technique can be seen as an extension of the dramatic "poetics" of participant-observation. Furthermore, in order for Smith's technique to be successful, it relies on this recognition of artifice by not only the interviewer and the interviewee, but more importantly by the audience which witnesses the re-creation of the event.

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41 Conquergood 83.

42 Conquergood 83.

43 Smith xxi.

44 Conquergood 83.
The "poetics" of participant-observation is clearly a major factor throughout Hurston's ethnography as well. Miriam Decosta Willis notes that Hurston could not avoid having a creative, personal impact on her research because of her participant status. She had to be more than the traditional observer,

...she had to be the *participant* from *pars, partis* (a part) and *compare* (to take), meaning the one who takes part. And she participated in life to the fullest, playing the role (for she was an actress as well as a writer) of folklorist, maid, anthropologist, novelist, ... and even Voodoo queen.45

Hurston went to great lengths to actually live the reality of her subjects. One vivid example from *Mules and Men* is the story she relates about a particular trip to study Voodoo in New Orleans. On this trip, she was initiated into a cult and had to lie naked, face-down, on a couch covered with snake-skin for three days.46 Hurston, like Smith, recognized the poetic artifice of the participant-observer relationship, actually focusing on the willing suspension of disbelief as a source of ethnographic inspiration. Both women have been willing to subsume their identity into the field research process in hopes of "getting closer" to the reality of their research subjects.

Another aspect of the poetic dynamic of Hurston's research methodology which is also reflected in *Twilight*, is


46 *Mules and Men*, 199.
discussed by D.A. Boxwell in an article entitled "'Sis Cat' as Ethnographer: Self Presentation and Self-Inscription in Zora Neale Hurston's Mules and Men." The key to Hurston's recognition of artifice, according to Boxwell, revolves around her unabashed self-inscription into the text of Mules and Men in ways that allowed her to "valorize" both her personal identity as an African-American woman and her professional identity as a serious ethnographer. Boxwell feels that Hurston's presentation of herself as a strong ordering force in the text focuses attention on the subjective presence of the ethnographer, and reflects the poetic artifice of the participant-observer relationship. For example, Hurston is often sought out by her informants, the tellers of the "big ole lies," instead of the reverse (the norm in anthropology). The story tellers in her hometown constantly worry that she is becoming bored or disinterested, and they challenge each other on to tell better tales. According to Boxwell, "[I]t is almost as if her presence is required for the rich oral culture to come into being."47 Much the same argument can be made for Anna Deavere Smith, for she presents herself as the medium through which the words, feelings, and frustration of her subjects can finally be expressed. Despite the dramatist's neutrality on issues, her physical presence makes an impact due to the intimate communicative artifice upon which it rests. Due to the sensitive nature of her research topic, Smith must often

47 Boxwell 611.
ingratiate herself with her subjects in a humanistic manner (as did Hurston) in order to gain their trust. In the words of journalist Linda Winer, who spent a few days with Smith observing her interview process,

[W]hat strikes you most, however, is the intimacy. No matter how daunting the structure, in the middle is just this tall, 42-year old, light-skinned African-American woman with her compassionate face and her tape recorder. She leans forward and prods, but with self-deprecating pleas, 'Help me' or 'I don't quite understand.'...She scrunches up her fine features and asks the hard questions...She can barely speak when a Korean grocer admits he never told his children what the neighbors did to his store because 'I don't want to hurt my kids.' He weeps quietly, and she weeps with him.48

The success of Twilight as cultural analysis in performance rests upon Smith's valorization of herself as both creative artist and keen social observer. This is belied through a perceived sense of familiarity with the people she depicts. It can be argued that Hurston's emotional and psychological self-inscription into her text set historical precedent for Smith to investigate the poetic/performative intimacy of ethnographic research.

Another ethnographic technique creatively implemented by Hurston and reflected in the work of Anna Deavere Smith is the "arrival story," the poetic description of the fieldworker entering the native scene. According to Boxwell these stories usually serve to introduce the ethnographer and then allow him or her to recede from the description that follows for the purpose of participant observation. Not so

for Hurston. She revels in her own "arrival stories" without subsequently fading into the background. Boxwell notes that at the beginning of *Mules and Men*, Hurston has the townspeople introduce and name her to the reader, thereby making her the subject of the work.49 Still, she metaphorically reminds us of her position as observer.

As I crossed the Maitland-Eatonville township line I could see a group on the store porch. I was delighted. The town had not changed..."Hello, boys," I hailed them as I went into neutral. They looked up from the game and for a moment it looked as if they had forgotten me. Then B. Moseley said, "Well, if it ain't Zora Neale Hurston!" (7)

Smith also performatively "shifts into neutral" as she re-creates her interview experience. Although she is never named or even personally referred to, Smith's performative presence is still virtually inseparable from the stories she represents. In this sense, both *Mules and Men* and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* are collections of ethnographic "arrival stories." For Hurston, each shift to a different porch, party, or community gathering marks a new "arrival." For Smith, each interview, each unique personality being portrayed is a new "arrival." As Smith shifts from character to character, she juxtaposes different races, sexes, ages and cultures. This rests on the audience's recognition of poetic artifice -- for the audience, in a sense, takes the place of Smith during the research process, "arriving" at each new interview, experiencing each new personality. Smith owes this notion of "arriving at the Other" to ethnographers such as

49 Boxwell 611.
Hurston who were willing to explore poetics in the process of scientific research.

Conquergood also recognizes "process" as an element of discourse that has helped to effect the performative shift in ethnography. "Instead of static structures and stable systems with variables that can be measured, manipulated, and managed, culture is transacted through performance." The result in modern ethnographic research is that culture becomes an active verb rather than a noun. Metaphors of motion and sound -- energy, movement, flow, polyphony, cacophony, etc.-- compete with spatial images and abstractions that have long dominated scientific writing. Performance becomes the site of struggle where competing interests intersect and different viewpoints and voices get articulated. In an interview with Carol Martin, Smith explains how she uses her research/performance technique to "find the tools for thinking about difference as a very active negotiation rather than an image of all of us holding hands." In a sense then, Smith is translating Conquergood's anthropological observations to the discipline of theatre, viewing difference as a cultural agent to be expressed

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50 Conquergood 83.
51 Conquergood 83.
52 Conquergood 84.
through a cacophony of different voices and heard through the variety of positions represented in a particular society.

**Twilight as Ethnographic Text**

Having established the link between artifice and ethnographic presentation in *Twilight*, it is important to identify what features of *Twilight* are specifically indicative of an ethnographic text. In describing what locates a given text as ethnographic writing, Clifford gives six criteria for determination. An examination of these six elements and how well they do or do not connect with *Twilight* will help to further locate the piece within the boundaries of ethnography. For *Twilight*, the issue of location is of primary importance in understanding how and why it should appeal to this particular interpretive community. Clifford's first claim is that the text can be located contextually -- it draws from and creates a meaningful social milieu. The text can also be identified rhetorically in that it uses and is used by expressive conventions.\(^54\) As a text, it certainly appears that *Twilight* draws from and re-creates certain aspects and participants in society in hopes of achieving some form of meaningful cultural discourse. It uses the expressive conventions of language, appearance, and speech, and has been used in further expressive discourses. Smith's milieu is LA after the riots as embodied by a cross-section

\(^54\) Clifford *Writing*, 6.
of people. These people struggle with their own cultural or ideological responses to the King event, as well as with the expressive conventions and restrictions of the culture at large.

Clifford's third criterion for locating a text as ethnographic writing centers upon a readily recognizable relationship to institutionality as well as to the problematic nature of that relationship. It is his claim that ethnographers write within and against specific traditions, disciplines, and audiences. When asked to locate her writing or her process within a certain tradition, Smith is often quick to avoid location. "No, I don't think that I am placed squarely in any tradition. I have always been on the outside and have been an observer who steps in and then steps back out." Smith readily accepts her work as theatre, but she also recognizes it as "community work in some ways. It's a king of low anthropology, low journalism; it's a bit documentary." Smith actually avoids being identified with any distinct interpretive community, for it is her desire to utilize theatre to build an interdisciplinary bridge to connect them all.

Smith's placement of herself in a variety of academic disciplines and traditions is not the only way in which her

55 Clifford Writing, 6.


57 Lewis 56.
work reflects Clifford's assumptions about the issue of institutionality in ethnographic writing. The "audience" for her research is multiple. In her interviews, the audience is herself. As she works on the piece the audience becomes her dramaturgs, directors, and (by extension) herself as creator and listener. When she presents the piece, the audience is both her assumed self watching and recording the interviews as well as the spectators viewing her performance. Smith not only assumes different levels of identity for both herself and her spectators, she also challenges the various academic communities which seek to explain her methodology and the text it produces, to interpret outside of their normal discursive parameters. In the process, the relationship between institutional stability and the various interpretive communities which co-exist in a piece like Twilight is often tentative and malleable. Thus, Smith is constantly shifting within a variety of disciplines and audiences, much along the same lines as the ethnographic writer.

The final three distinguishing criteria presented by Clifford provide an introduction to the issue of ethnographic authority and how it has affected both Hurston's and Smith's texts and critical reactions to them. Clifford claims that an ethnographic text can be located: (1) generically, since it is readily distinguishable from a novel or a travel account; (2) politically, in that the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested;
(3) historically, because all constraints and conventions are constantly changing. The fact that Smith chose to "sum up her thoughts" by recording and re-creating the thoughts, feelings, and words of the native inhabitants of LA helps to locate Twilight generically as ethnographic in both form and nature. Furthermore, according to Smith, the political representation of culture is one of the primary motivating forces in her fascination with the LA riots and her subsequent attempt to capture their essence on stage. "Who owns what of what culture and how that becomes part of another culture is in many ways at the bottom line of how we negotiate who and where we are." Viewed historically, it certainly seems that Twilight "is very much a piece of the moment, an address to a city by a visitor who spent time here and summed up her thoughts for the stage."

The real issue which seems to define both Twilight and Mules and Men as performative/ethnographic texts (and to dominate the reactions of the various interpretive communities to them) is what Clifford labels "ethnographic authority." In discussing the historical limits of traditional ethnographic writing, Clifford claims, "it is now more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another, as well as of the

58 Clifford, Writing, 6.

59 Lewis 55

relationships of knowledge and power that connect them."\textsuperscript{61} With the question "how is unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account?" as a framework, he then examines the best approaches at hand for accomplishing these modern ethnographic goals.\textsuperscript{62} Similarly, Smith is guided by what she calls "the question" in her research. "This question about who can say what, who can enact which culture, is like 'The Question.'"\textsuperscript{63}

Clifford focuses on the question of 'who can say what' and recognizes that "precisely because it has been hard to pin down, 'experience' has served as an effective guarantee of ethnographic authority."\textsuperscript{64} But if "experience" is authority, how does an observer authenticate his/her understanding from outside the actual experience? This subsequently resulted in the emergence of "interpretive anthropology" based on the model of textual reading as an alternative to experiential authority. More precisely, this means looking at culture as a series of texts to be interpreted.\textsuperscript{65} Clifford observes that recent works have chosen


\textsuperscript{62} Clifford, "Authority", 120

\textsuperscript{63} as qtd. in Richard Slayton, "30 Character Solo Piece \textit{Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992}," \textit{Los Angeles Times} 25 April 1993: M2.

\textsuperscript{64} Clifford, "Authority", 130.

\textsuperscript{65} Clifford, "Authority", 130
to present the discursive process of ethnography in the form of dialogue. In dialogue, interlocutors actively negotiate a shared vision of reality. Thus, current ethnographic writing seeks new ways to adequately represent the authority of the informants' experience. One such method envisions the ethnographer with "Flaubertian" omniscience, moving freely through a world of subjects, while affected by the interlocution.

Zora Neale Hurston can be viewed an indigenous ethnographer who pushed the boundaries of ethnographic authority so that artists and scholars such as Smith and Clifford would be forced to struggle with it as a concept years later. According to Hemenway, Mules and Men is an ethnographic text that provides a forum for the adventures and insights of a complicated experience. One option would have been for Hurston to stress the personal significance of the multitude of events and personalities from which she had to select. But Hurston, like Smith, uses her authority to do the opposite. Instead she chooses to portray herself as a "self-effacing reporter ... to dramatize the process of collecting and make the reader feel part of the scene." Furthermore, Hurston's recollections are purposefully without

66 Clifford, "Authority", 134.
68 Hemenway 165.
69 Hemenway 166.
scientific analysis. What makes her approach unique is that, even though Hurston always remains close to the shore of her description, directing the narrative away from her inner-self and towards the words of her informants in the fashion of the scholarly folklorist, her self-effacing persona celebrates the art of the community and invites the reader to participate in its collective rituals. "Instead of observing a pathologist performing an autopsy, the reader keeps in sight a midwife participating in the birth of a body of folklore."70

Hemenway's description of Hurston's technique as lying "somewhere between scientific reporting and personal journalism" in which Hurston the narrator admits only to "the desire to hold up a microphone to nature" can also be applied to Anna Deavere Smith's realization of ethnographic authority. For it appears that in Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 Smith uses Hurston's "microphone" and "spy-glass" and, in the process, realizes Clifford's observations concerning the changing face of ethnographic authority. Clifford sees the challenge to his utopian vision of

"plural authorship that accords to collaborators not merely the status of independent enunciators, but that of writers" in the notion that plural authorship confronts "a deep Western identification of any text's order with the intention of the single author."71

Smith's struggle to achieve this "Flaubertian" omniscience, this editorial approach to collective authorship, is

70 Hemenway 166.

71 Clifford, "Authority", 140.
highlighted by a strong critical call for either more or less of her own voice in *Twilight*. Judith Hamera criticizes Smith for her attempt at neutrality:

   Indeed, the ideologically sophisticated audience ...immediately suspects the claim to the apolitical, to "neutrality". They want, and wanted, an authorial owning up, if for no other reason than to assay the author/editor's investment in, and her capacity to be moved and changed by, the voices she offers to move and change us.\(^{72}\)

On the other end of the spectrum, Stefan Kanfer sees *Twilight*’s central flaw as being "an illiberal agenda concealed by a mask of objectivity."\(^{73}\) Kanfer attacks the piece on the grounds of a perceived inability on the part of Smith to faithfully represent the voices she portrays. Labeling the piece "analytically shallow," Jan Breslaur concurs with the criticism of both Hamera and Kanfer:

   Politically, Smith's message seldom transcends the rhetoric of race relations...What's missing are voices of reason from people who have given serious thought to the political economics of Los Angeles."\(^{74}\)

Smith has been criticized for depicting negative stereotypes and caricatures in order to get her message across, and for omitting certain riot participants, namely the Latino underclass, from her final collage. What is interesting is that these critics are struggling with Smith the *ethnographer* more than Smith the *performer* (her mimetic abilities are

\(^{72}\) Hamera 117.


universally praised), questioning her "authority" — her right and ability as neutral interpreter of polyphonic experiences.

Much of the criticism leveled against *Mules and Men* seems to predate many of the reactions to *Twilight*. Scholar Gwendolyn Mikell notes that despite Hurston's anthropological/personal understanding of racism and colonialism, she has been criticized for either her direct attempts at political analysis or alternatively for the lack of it.75 Others accuse Hurston of "obsequiousness in inter-racial environments."76 According to Mikell, the key to understanding such contradictions is found in Hurston's authoritative presence as a character in her own research. "As such, her instinctive political analysis is developed over the course of her work, and reflects points of commonalty and divergence between her own and her subjects positioning within mutli-racial settings."77 By contrast, Hemenway, much like Hamera responding to *Twilight*, claims that one of Hurston's deficiencies revolves around the notion that her self-effacement makes the reader want to know more about Zora's reaction to the community she is studying than the community itself.78 Part of Hamera's criticism of *Twilight*


76 Mikell 33.

77 Mikell 33.

78 Hemenway 168.
is that Smith does not capture the subtle nuance of Hurston's immediate lack of authorial "owning up." Hamera claims that Hurston "undercut the 'ventriloquism' of representation-without-self-implication by letting those she recorded speak to us about her interviewer/recorder persona."\textsuperscript{79} Hurston's struggle with the implications of ethnographic authority in the creation of a performative/ethnographic text is reflective not only of Smith's similar struggle, but also of the difficulty of filtering racial and cultural analysis through the "spy-glass" of the supposedly apolitical, objective indigenous ethnographer.

A possible answer to the problem of connecting Smith and Hurston's respective discussions of culture and race-relationships with Clifford's notions of ethnographic authority lies in the cultural critique of bell hooks. In her collection of essays \textit{Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics}, hooks criticizes Clifford's \textit{Writing Culture} for giving no attention to black ethnographers who have been either "indigenous ethnographers" or who entered cultures where they resemble the people they are studying or writing about.\textsuperscript{80} In questioning the academic and social location of the subjects to whom ethnography as a discipline addresses itself, hooks opens the door for artists such as Smith to enter the field. hooks cites a specific need for different

\textsuperscript{79} Hamera 116.

\textsuperscript{80} hooks 126.
forms of self-reflexive critique, noting that there is "power in having a public audience for one's work that may not be particularly academic, power that comes from writing in ways that enable people to think critically about everyday life."\textsuperscript{81} According to hooks, artists such as Smith can draw from this "new ethnography" to celebrate the "polyphonic nature of critical discourse," to hear one another, literally and metaphorically, "speak in tongues," bear witness, and patiently wait for revelation.\textsuperscript{82}

A possible response to some of Smith's critics is hooks' claim that, "engaging in intellectual exchange where people hear a diversity of viewpoints enables them to witness first hand solidarity that grows stronger in a context of productive critical exchange and confrontation."\textsuperscript{83} hooks extends Clifford's critique of ethnographic writing further in the name of progressive cultural practice, to become a means of developing cultural critical consciousness. Clifford proposes that "looking beyond quotation, one might imagine a more radical polyphony that would 'do the natives and the ethnographers in different voices.' This will result in a more utopian form of authority to serve as the instigative force in ethnographic research."\textsuperscript{84} hooks, in the interest of

\textsuperscript{81} hooks, 129-30.

\textsuperscript{82} hooks 133.

\textsuperscript{83} hooks 6.

\textsuperscript{84} Clifford, "Authority", 140.
artist/ethnographers such as Smith, argues "the notion that cultural criticism by black folks must either be confined to the question of positive or negative representation or function in a self-serving manner ... must be continually challenged." 80 hooks views Hurston as a pioneer in this regard -- her chapter on Hurston is entitled "Saving Black Folk Culture." Because Hurston was able to place herself close to her heritage, presenting herself as "just plain folks," and conveying "the power and beauty in the act and art of storytelling," hooks feels that Mules and Men is an important piece of performative ethnography. 86 Thus, perhaps for hooks, Smith's "authority" in Twilight, like Hurston's in Mules, is not as damaging as critics charge. Authority is an ideological construct based on a tradition of academic constraints that impede the colorful expression of cultural discourse. Smith's position as ethnographer is then, by extension, justified and important, as she is adding to the study and writing of culture by examining its polyphonic nature.

In Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, Anna Deavere Smith places theatrical activity within the penumbra of the changing face of ethnography and vice versa. She is Clifford's "native-informant/new historian" and hooks' version of the "indigenous ethnographer." When asked about the theoretical intent of her work, her response is

85 hooks 7.

86 hooks 143.
indicative of the interdisciplinary bridge she creates between ethnography and theatre. "I see my work as a call...[I]t asks for a response. It's about capturing unheard voices. And its about reiterating heard voices in a different way than they have been processed in the media."87 Indeed, Smith's Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 is a "call" to both disciplines and to the interpretive communities which reinforce them as each struggles with the "predicament of culture." In a sense, Smith has taken the baton passed by Zora Neale Hurston, exploring new techniques for holding the "spy-glass of anthropology" up to nature and putting a creative twist on what she sees. That the call has been heard is evident in the struggle of the various interpretive communities to locate Twilight within the parameters of a singular discipline.

Chapter III

"Soul Flight" in Twilight:
Anna Deavere Smith and Performance Studies

Anna Deavere Smith's performative construction of the "Other" is one of the dominant theoretical issues which permeates her work. Speaking for the "Other" is also a key area of discourse and debate within the disciplines of journalism and ethnography. However, as the previous chapters have noted, little analysis exists which addresses the relation between theatrical performance and such disciplines as journalism and ethnography. Fortunately, the discipline of "performance studies" provides useful interdisciplinary attention to the construction of the "Other." This chapter will investigate Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 by realizing its connections to performance studies. First, the essential characteristics of the discipline of performance studies will be located and related to some of the performative issues surrounding Twilight. Second, the metaphor of "actor as "shaman," which has developed in the discourse of performance studies, will be introduced and applied to Smith's performative presence in Twilight. Essential to this investigation will be the notion of "liminality" as it applies to the actor. To aid in this discussion, Smith's
performance will be compared to that of John Leguizamo in *Spic-O-Rama*. In their respective attempts to depict ethnicity, class, race, and gender, these two one-person performance artists seem to have much in common. At the structural level, both pieces are set up to create a liminal dynamic. However, Smith and Leguizamo characterize their liminality differently in the name of cultural critique. A discussion of this distinction will help to both further locate Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* within the realm of performance studies and to amplify the connection between this discipline and theatre studies.

**Introduction to Performance Studies**

In order to identify performance studies notions in *Twilight*, it is important to locate the discipline itself. In two short essays which appeared in 1986, scholar Phillip K. Zarrilli attempts to wade through the murky discursive currents which surround this discipline and identify a working definition of performance studies. While Zarilli does not claim to be the definitive performance studies authority, his articulation of the basic elements of performance studies is useful in understanding the work of Anna Deavere Smith. First, Zarilli notes that performance studies centers upon the notion that performance is part of everyday life.¹ This

concept is one of the guiding principles behind Smith's performance methodology and interview re-creation technique. In Smith's Search for the American Character, she seeks out the essence of people's character, accentuating their moments of "organic poetry," bringing their naturally dramatic presence to life on stage. An example of Smith's recognition of the performative nature of real people involved in everyday life is her description of her first encounter with Maria, a juror in the King Trial whom she portrays in Twilight.

She's like an organic actress. Not only did she say remarkable things, but she went into acting. She got up and started acting out all the different jurors in order to give me this display of how the jury for the second Rodney King trial, the federal trial, came to its verdict. So how could I back away from that. Not only was she giving me extraordinary language, but she was showing me how to perform it.²

Each monologue re-presented by Smith in Twilight amplifies a particular moment, edited down from her original transcript, in which she recognizes and transmits the artifice -- the performative essence -- of everyday life as expressed in the words and expressions of her real-life interviewee.

Zarilli's second distinction is that performance studies (as opposed to theatre studies) focuses on "cultural performance" as an encapsulation of culture, the study of which can reflect upon collective myths and histories. In Twilight, Smith recognizes the LA riots of 1992 as one of these occasions. In her performance, she dramatizes our

² Transcript of Interview conducted on The Charlie Rose Show (Denver: Journal Graphics, #1106) 29 April 1994: 5.
"collective myths" in hopes of presenting alternative voices from a variety of social locations. The play begins with Rudy Salas, Sr., a Latino painter and sculptor, relating a story about why his grandfather was a "gringo-hater" (3). Throughout the monologue, Salas explains how his "myths" about race were formed as he grew up in America, culminating in this exclamation:

But, you see, I still have that prejudice against whites./
I'm not a racist!
But, I have white friends though,
but I don't even see them as whites...

My enemy. (5-7)

The monologue is then followed by a very different perception of "the enemy" as related to Smith by Stanley K. Sheinbaum, former President of the Los Angeles Police Commission. Sheinbaum relates a story of how he went with other police officers to interrupt a gang-meeting and was later harassed for spending two hours speaking with the gang members instead of staying with his fellow police men. He was officially reprimanded because, "You went in and talked to our enemy."

With both Salas and Sheinbaum's perceptions, Smith is able to dramatize the need to move past ideological assumptions for the sake of future race-relations.

Gangs are their enemy.
And so
I marched down to Seventy-seventh
and, uh, I said, "Fuck you,
I can come in here
anytime I want and talk to you."
Yeah, at roll call.
I said, uh,
"this is a shot I had at talking to these curious people
about whom I know nothing
and I wanna learn.
Don't you want me to learn about 'em?" (14-15)

In implementing juxtaposition in her dramatization of
collective and individual myths, Smith is able to both
highlight the tension surrounding this event and at the same
time investigate the "cultural performances." The essence of
Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 lies in Smith's recognition that
the LA riots and the various myths and histories of the
people affected by and involved in them provide a chance to
"perform culture." And, in the process, present us with
alternatives based upon this performance.

"Soul Flight": The Actor as Shaman

Another of Zarilli's sources of distinction provides the
metaphor necessary for placing Anna Deavere Smith within the
discourse of performance studies. According to Zarilli,
performance studies scholars approach performance as a "fact"
of culture.³ In applying this notion to theatre studies,
Zarilli contends that

(performance studies) means undertaking a broad
interdisciplinary approach to the development of the
scholar-practitioner — pursuing a curriculum which would
include folklore, cultural, symbolic, and semiotic
anthropology, non-western performance and comparative
aesthetics.⁴

³Phillip K. Zarilli, "Toward a Definition of Performance Studies:
Part I," 373.

⁴Phillip K. Zarilli, "Toward a Definition of Performance Studies: Part
Like Smith, performance studies scholars call upon the rhetoric of other disciplines similarly invested in the study of culture and the performative/theoretical construction of the "Other." For example, inspired by anthropology, modern performance studies theorists have sought to place the origins of theatrical performance in the rituals of primitive societies. Focusing on the evolution of "mimesis" as it relates to primitive cultural performance, performance studies scholars often center their investigations on the various aspects of the evolution of cultural forms of "reenactment" into more advanced forms of performance.

Inherent in this discourse are allusions to the religious rituals of primitive societies as the mimetic origins of the evolution of theatrical performance. The image of the actor as shaman, a gifted communal faith-healer who mediates between the supernatural and the community in many tribal societies, has long been a source of reference within the rhetoric of performance studies. An investigation of Smith’s metaphoric "shamanic" presence in *Twilight* helps to further locate her work within the rhetoric of performance studies and emphasize why this connection is important in understanding her role in the modern theatre.

According to anthropologist John Grim, among tribal peoples the shaman is "the person, male or female, who experiences, absorbs, and communicates a special mode of
sustaining, healing power.\(^5\) Viewed as the community's "connection" to the supernatural, the image of the shaman is most often associated with spirituality, mysticism, myth and holiness. The metaphoric connection between the actor and the shaman lies in the transformative powers traditionally associated with shamans by their communities. Grim notes that the shaman is viewed as the "stopping place" of supernatural energy, a human being capable of utilizing a special mimetic power to communicate "personal experience of spirit presence."\(^6\) Thus the shaman serves as a dramatic "spokesperson," informing the spirit world of the community's needs and vice versa.\(^7\)

The shaman's mimetic power involves complex reenactment of rituals, personal experiences, and myths of the community, much like Smith in *Twilight*. The role of shamans in their communities is reflected in Smith's performative process. One need look no further than Claude Levi-Strauss's acknowledgment of the shaman as performer to understand where the connection begins. "The shaman does not limit himself to reproducing or miming certain events. He actually relives

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\(^6\) Grim 5.

\(^7\) Grim 11.
them in all their vividness, originality, and violence."

According to Dwight Conquergood, shamans derive their powers from listening to others and absorbing their realities as they seek to "perform the patient's affliction." Thus, like Smith with her interviewees, shamans enter into a dialogical relationship with their patients. The patient does not become the object of medical treatment but rather a co-performer in his or her own healing. "While [shamans] cure, they take into them their patient's possessions and obsessions and let the latter's illnesses become theirs." Smith's process of interview re-creation, in which she ascribes to herself a physical transformation of the feelings, emotions, intonations, words, and gestures of her subjects, is akin to the positioning of the shaman in primitive societies.

Studying the idea of "actor as shaman," Lori Abbatepaoio claims that "shamanism becomes a metaphor for what the actor does in his/her search to fill the theatrical 'shell with significance.'" Abbatepaoio recognizes several similarities between the actor and the shaman to serve as the basis for this metaphor. First, the actor and the shaman both utilize dramatic action, chants, masks and dance. In doing so, both

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9 Conquergood 44.

10 Conquergood 45.

seek to create an atmosphere of heightened emotion in which the audience will feel healed, treated, and/or educated. Both the actor and the shaman attempt to "make the invisible visible" as they seek to be significant and healing in their community.¹² This makes for rich comparison with Anna Deavere Smith. Smith explains her socio-political intentions in terms reflective of this "shaman" metaphor.

I knew that by using another person's language, it was possible to portray what was invisible about that individual. It struck me that this could work on a social level as well as an individual level. Could language be a photograph of what was unseen about society just as it reflects what is unseen in an individual? (emphasis added)¹³

For Smith, the word, or more appropriately, the unspoken word, is the focus of her attempt to make the invisible visible and fill the theatrical space with social significance. According to Smith, the "American character is alive inside of 'syntactical breaks,' in the difficulty people have when they speak of issues of race, class, and identity."¹⁴ Thus, it is her intention, through mimicry of this difficulty as manifested in actual conversations, to reflect America's struggle with the notion of identity and difference. Metaphorically, Smith can be viewed as seeking to

¹² Abbatepaolo 13.


¹⁴ Anna Deavere Smith, intro. Fires, xvii.
heal our collective souls through the shamanic invocation of the invisible.

Smith's performance methodology is also "shamanic" in her chameleon-like shifts between the characters she presents. Michael James Winkelman describes the transformative powers of the shaman as trance induced "soul flight." In this state, the shaman's spirit is thought to depart his or her body and travel to the spirit world, simultaneously transforming itself into an animal or representative of the spirit world.¹⁵ Conquergood views this trance-like "soul-flight" as the primary source of mystical shamanic power. "The spiritual power of the shaman comes from this presence achieved through an absence, this performative ability to leave one reality, enter and participate fully within another reality, and then return."¹⁶ For Smith, her physical embodiment of different points of view, her theatricalized "soul-flight," is an example of the performative power of transformational thinking. "If more of us could actually speak from another point of view, like speaking another language, we could accelerate the flow of ideas."¹⁷ Performance studies theoretician Richard Schechner views Smith's shamanic ability to transform herself as a


¹⁶ Conquergood 49.

performative "doubling" -- the simultaneous presence of
performer and performed. Furthermore, it is precisely because
of this "doubling" that Schechner feels that Smith's
audiences, like those of the shaman, "learn to 'let the other
in,' to accomplish in their own way what Smith so masterfully
achieves."\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, Smith metaphorically undertakes a
shamanic "soul-flight" in the name of cultural critique as
she "incorporates" the characters of \textit{Twilight} in performance.

\textit{"Threshold People": The Dilemma of Liminality}

As noted by Conquergood, the transformational
"doubling" powers of the shaman produce interesting
contradictions. "[Shamans] are structurally invisible and yet
they fill the room with their charismatic presence."\textsuperscript{19}
Spiritually, according to Conquergood, this leaves the shaman
hanging suspended between earth and heaven, between human and
spirit, present and absent.\textsuperscript{20} Conquergood, Grim, and others
rely on Victor Turner's analysis of "liminality" to describe
this state of being "between." Turner writes,

\begin{quote}
the attributes of liminality or \textit{liminal} personae
('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since
this condition and these persons elude or slip through
the network of classifications that normally locale
states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities
are neither here, nor there; they are betwixt and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Schechner 64

\textsuperscript{19} Conquergood 47.

\textsuperscript{20} Conquergood 46.
between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.\textsuperscript{21}

"Liminality" implies a marginal placement within the social structure. According to Grim, this means that while the shaman performs a vital function in the community, that service also places him or her on the margins of society. For the shaman, liminality means being a part of the community while at the same time maintaining a position outside of the community through a connection to the spiritual world.\textsuperscript{22} According to Grim, shamans "cross the threshold into another world and return again to the conventional world. In this ambiguous position they move at times to the center of society and then return to the margins."\textsuperscript{23}

However, any interpretation and/or application of this notion in performance is necessarily metaphoric, for it is a term created to describe the indescribable. The shaman, then, is most often recalled as a metaphoric terminal, in this case to investigate the actor as "liminal personae." Terms such as marginal, liminal, threshold, and ambiguous are rooted in this metaphorical analysis. "Ritual," or in the case of the actor "performance," is the acting out of liminality between the physical and spiritual, center and margin, visible and invisible.\textsuperscript{24} The actor is seen as a


\textsuperscript{22} Abbetapaolo 11.

\textsuperscript{23} Grim 13.
mediator between the worldly and the otherworldly, removing his or her soulful presence in order to transform his or her physical presence in an attempt to make the invisible visible. "By removing his/her own social mask and exposing the complex nature of that humanity, the actor aids the audience members in confronting and healing themselves." 25 Thus, the actor, like the shaman, performs his/her liminality in order to "heal" the audience.

For the actor, the metaphorical dilemma of liminality lies specifically in the duality which the term implies. In positioning themselves on the threshold of performance and reality, actors must struggle with "how to achieve this healing revelation of the internal forces within an atmosphere which seems more conducive to maintaining focus on external miseries." 26 For Anna Deavere Smith and John Leguizamo, the differences in their respective struggles with this notion of liminality define their one-person performances. Both actors engage in the depiction of ethnicity, race, class, and gender by performing a variety of characters. In the process, the metaphorical dilemmas of liminality surround these depictions and affect the location of their performative selves. Although the metaphor is necessarily ambiguous, it does nonetheless serve as a

24 Abbatepaolo 14.

25 Abbatepaolo 17.

26 Abbatepaolo 20.
valuable tool in contrasting Smith's "shaman" metaphor with
Leguizamo's decidedly different construction of liminality.
In the process, this metaphor shows how Smith's work can be
ensconced in the discourse of performance studies and still
have ramifications in theatre.

The Exorcist and the Shaman: Contrasts in Liminality

The metaphoric dilemma of liminality is in no way
limited to Smith's work in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. The
aesthetic ramifications of being on the "threshold" have
multiple applications throughout the modern theatre. All
actors must construct the "Other," and thus, in the process,
struggle with their own liminal positioning. Performance
artist John Leguizamo's contrasting version of this liminal
struggle in his one-person show *Spic-O-Rama* amplifies Smith's
metaphoric location within the rhetoric of performance
studies. The distinction is important because both actors
employ similar dramatic conventions in their respective
performative investigations of ethnicity, race, and gender.
But it is the difference in their approach to and
characterizations of liminality which seems to define and
separate their work. A comparison of the two will further
locate and clarify the shamanic metaphor.

In *Spic-O-Rama*, Leguizamo presents Latino characters
'ripped' from the barrios and streets of urban America and
gives them an unapologetic voice on stage. Anemona
Hartocollis places Leguizamo at the forefront of a generation of artists who are changing the shape of Latino representation in American art. According to Hartocollis, these artists are "trying to take it out of the barrio into the mainstream, yet intent on preserving their sense of connection to their roots." 27 She asserts that these artists talk not about escaping their roots, but rather finding strength in them. They are looking for a universal message in their Latin identity -- an esthetic rooted in the ties of immigration that cut across national boundaries. 28 Leguizamo attempts to examine this liminal social "esthetic" by creating characters based on Latin stereotypes and making them come to life through raw, often controversial humor.

Leguizamo summarizes his performative exploration as, "I love the world I come from, and only because I do can I poke fun at it." 29 He makes an important point about his position as a performer and member of his community. It is precisely his ethnic heritage that gives him license to create raw, uncompromising Latino characters and challenge modern Latino perspectives. Unlike Smith, Leguizamo attempts characters only within his own ethnic background. Leguizamo uses his ethnicity as a battering ram to drive his messages about


28 Hartocollis 19.

identity, culture, and ethnic relations in America into the hearts and minds of his audience. In Leguizamo's eyes, he is not a transformational shaman, incorporating the experiences of others in defining his performative self. Rather, he metaphorically refers to himself as a "theatrical exorcist," calling forth Hispanic stereotypes and purging them from the subconscious through illumination on the stage. "[W]e must bring out these characters in order to grow into other roles." 30

Performing the "exorcist," Leguizamo begins Spic-O-Rama with an announced comedic disclaimer: "This Latin family is not representative of all Latin families. It is a unique and individual case. If your family is like this one, please seek professional help." As seen through the eyes of nine year old Miggy, the piece itself satirizes a Hispanic household. The five member family is getting ready for the marriage of their oldest son, Krazy Willie, a Desert Storm vet still caught in the throes of adolescent machismo. Along the way Leguizamo introduces us to Raffi (a dyed-blonde Laurence Olivier wannabe), wheelchair-bound Javier, their long-suffering mother Gladyz, and their hopeless, bitter, philandering father Felix. Through humor, Spic-O-Rama reveals the frustration, love, and heartbreak of unrealized dreams common to Hispanic families.

Leguizamo struggles with the liminal/performative dilemma. Leguizamo struggles with the identity of the Latino-American family by trying to comedically exorcise its demons through distinctive, uncompromising character portrayal. Krazy Willie struggles with the notion of being a veteran of a war where he resentfully recalls, "I risked my life, shot people who look like us, but with towels on their heads, to protect our American way of life. Where's my respect?"\footnote{John Leguizamo, \textit{Spic-O-Rama}, (New York: Bantam Books, 1994) 34. All subsequent references will be page numbers included parenthetically within the text.} Leguizamo, utilizing the threshold of performance, makes us aware that it is not to be found either in this household or on the street. Krazy Willie unloads his problems on an unseen friend, hinting at a future carbon-copied from his parents life, full of infidelities, poverty, and children. Perhaps the most tragic of Leguizamo's creations is Raffi, the brother who is so desperate to pass for a "gringo" that he bleaches his hair, affects a practiced English accent, and claims to be the love-child of Laurence Olivier. Frank Rich feels that Raffi is Leguizamo's saddest character, struggling to "bridge over that cultural divide" with such comedic, but disturbing utterances as "I don't know why people insist on knowing themselves. It's hard enough to know what to wear."(13) Although comedic, many of these moments are the result of the author/performer struggling with his own socio-political and performative identity. Leguizamo the "actor"
comments upon his marginal Latino location through the "exorcism" of his characterizations.

In an interview with Edna Negron, Leguizamo refers to Spic-O-Rama using the "exorcism" metaphor. "It takes all things Latino people think about themselves, how the media see us, our inferiority complex, and puts it out there, exploits it and explodes it."32 For Leguizamo, the title itself represents overcoming the evils of life. "Being called a 'spic' at age nine was a total shock ... that word would turn up time and time again and it affects your formative years -- creates toxic shame."33 He describes the title as also symbolically connoting the Hispanic struggle for attention in a medium where they are not effectively represented. "So, I figured I would use a title the screamed 'Hey someone's ignoring us? Why are we being ignored?'"34 Leguizamo's struggle with liminality is realized in his presence as performer, author, and member of a marginalized sector of the community.

Whereas Leguizamo emphasizes his own identity in the creation of his one-person shows, Smith is more concerned with subsuming her personal presence in Twilight. An obvious difference is the fact that Leguizamo is creating characters while Smith is attempting to portray real people. Another


33 Leguizamo, intro., Spic-O-Rama, xviii.

34 Leguizamo, intro., Spic-O-Rama, xxvii.
difference exists relating to liminality metaphors. Many critics and analysts more closely relate Smith to shaman or "healer" rather than exorcist. Richard Schechner provides the most extensive examination of Smith's performance methodology in relation to a "shaman." In Schechner's opinion, "Smith does not 'act' the people you see and listen to .... [S]he incorporates them."\(^\text{35}\) Schechner uses the "shaman" metaphor because to him it seems as if Smith is not creating her own interpretations of these people, but somehow actually allowing them to temporarily inhibit her body.\(^\text{36}\) "Smith works by means of a deep mimesis, a process opposite to that of 'pretend.' To incorporate means to be possessed by, to open oneself up thoroughly and deeply to another human being."\(^\text{37}\) Furthermore, Schechner points out that Smith composes her pieces much as a shaman might investigate and heal an ailing or possessed patient. Smith consults the people most closely involved, opening up to their intimacy, spending lots of time with them face to face, going far beyond simply interviewing -- all of which eventually produce "shamanic invocation" of their persona.\(^\text{38}\)

Schechner's comparison of Smith with the shaman, while arguably literal and ensconced within the discourse of a


\(^{36}\) Schechner 64

\(^{37}\) Schechner 63.

\(^{38}\) Schechner 64.
particular interpretive community, is nonetheless a vivid example of how Smith's work extends beyond the scope of "theatre studies" into the realm of "performance" and the "performative" in the name of cultural critique. It is important to note that Schechner is not alone in applying this liminal metaphor to Smith in *Twilight*. Critics and analysts of *Twilight*, and even Smith herself, often attempt to locate and discuss her work in similar "shamanic" terminology. Todd London views Smith as providing a "talking cure" of "inclusive oral history," remaining aloof from her characters while capturing them incisively.39 One reviewer argues that Smith "does peoples' souls."40 Janelle Reinelt observes that "Smith's material presence on stage makes her visible as the one who conducted the interviews and now 'conducts' them through her body, with both its electrical and musical nuances...."41 *Twilight* has been referred to as "a multi-perspective Rashomon,"42 and an "urban Rashomon ... a 'dialogue' with the other."43


Unlike Leguizamo, Smith's marginal ethnic social positioning is not a key element in her liminal struggle with the construction of the "Other." For Smith, liminality is a dilemma of performative location as an actor re-presenting reality. She is not the "author" of the words being spoken. The characters are not created. They are invoked. They are "real" people whose words she is reiterating in an atmosphere of performance. Cornel West recognizes Smith's willingness to struggle with the liminality of her performance as an attempt at social healing. West feels that as a citizen, Smith knows that there would be no vital public sphere for addressing these kinds of issues without the genuine bonds of trust. As an artist, "...she knows that public performance has a unique capacity to bring us together -- to take us out of our tribal mentalities -- for self-critical examination and artistic pleasure."\(^{44}\) For Smith, the stage is a place for investigation and inquiry, an area for "medicinal" discovery.

We now have the opportunity to be a part of the discovery of a larger, healthier, more interesting picture of America. I went to Los Angeles as a part of this process. . . I have felt in this project, more than once, an increased humility and a greater understanding of the limitations of theater to reflect society."\(^{45}\)

Smith's recognition of the limits of the theater to accurately reflect society is reflective of the ambiguity inherent in the construction of liminality as it relates to

\(^{44}\) Cornel West, forward, Fires in the Mirror, by Anna Deavere Smith (New York: Doubleday, 1992) xxii.

\(^{45}\) Smith, intro., Twilight, xxii.

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the actor. Nonetheless, Smith is still driven by the notion that theatre can serve as a forum for social change. This notion informs her metaphoric "healing" process.

Indeed, Twilight as a performative event is often associated with "healing." Reviewer Jan Stuart refers to *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* as:

> group therapy on a national scale, based on the belief that we each have to dump our ugly personal baggage out on the table for all to see, before we can then get down to the difficult process of healing."

In this sense, Smith is a metaphorical shaman because she takes intense moments of racial conflict and allows the actual people involved in them to come to life through her body in a "shaman" like manner. The audience, like the shaman's tribal community, is compelled to reflect upon the nature and meaning of their own socio-political identity as it relates to the "reality" that is placed before them.

Another aspect of her healing process is the community to which Smith addresses the piece. In Smith's words,

> I see the work as a call. I played Twilight in Los Angeles as a call to the community. I performed it at a time when the community had no yet resolved the problems. I wanted to be a part of their examination of the problems."

Like the shaman, she crosses the "threshold" of liminality in an attempt at invocated social healing.

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47 Smith, intro., *Twilight*, xxiv.
The word "twilight," which resonates thematically throughout the piece, in and of itself implies metaphoric liminal images. Smith's invocation of her interviewees creates and sustains these images for the audience. For example, the words of Homi Bhabha, a literary critic/writer/scholar, from a monologue Smith titles, appropriately enough, "Twilight #1."

This Twilight moment
is an in-between moment.
It's the moment of dusk.
It's the moment of ambivalence
and ambiguity.
The inclarity,
the enigma,
the ambivalences,
in what happened in the L.A.
uprisings
are precisely what we want to get a hold of

The fuzziness of twilight
allows us to see the intersections
of the event with a number of other things that daylight obscures for us,
to use a paradox,
We have to interpret more in,
twilight. (232-233)

The words are not Smith's. The language is not Smith's. The intonations are not Smith's. The message is not Smith's. This is but one character in a variety of viewpoints she represents. It is one alternative invoked and re-presented through her mimetic transformation for the audience to consider. The "fuzziness of twilight" is the gray shade of ambiguity which envelopes her performative presence. This liminal positioning is the essence of Smith's theatricalized version of the healing process. Many of her observers feel
that Smith's performative "twilight" is reflective of the uncanny empathy, respect, and attention she gives in her interviews as communicated in her retelling of them on stage.

[S]he -- like a great shaman -- earned the respect of those she talked with by giving them her respect, her focused attention ... Empathy is the ability to allow the other in, to feel what the other is feeling. Smith absorbs the gestures, the tone of voice, the look, the intensity, the moment-by-moment details of a conversation.\textsuperscript{48}

In contrast to Leguizamo, Smith is not focused upon exorcising the evils of ethnic marginalization in order to purge the soul of the audience and produce some sort of catharsis. Rather, she is concerned with how the liminal role of the actor can effect a healing cultural consciousness.

Yet, ethnic marginalization is a topic of Smith's performative "soul-flight." In examining the ability of minority women to shift identities within society, Maria Lugones provides an interesting metaphor for Anna Deavere Smith's expression of her own liminality. Lugones puts forth the notion of "world traveling," a loose example of "soul flight" from a minority, feminist perspective. According to Lugones, a "world" refers to a non-Utopian construction of life based on descriptions of experience and identity.\textsuperscript{49} The shift from being one person to being another is akin to traveling between worlds. The issue of liminality is dominant

\textsuperscript{48} Schechner 64.

in this sense because, "those of us who are world-travelers have the distinct experience of being different in different 'worlds' and ourselves in them."\textsuperscript{50} Smith's manner of filling the theatrical "shell with significance" is reflected in Lugones ideas about the benefits of "world" traveling. "The reason why I think traveling to someone else's 'world' is a way of identifying with them is because by traveling to their 'world' we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves within their eyes."\textsuperscript{51} Smith's displacement of self while at the same time establishing her physical presence, is a performative version of Lugones' "world" traveling. This metaphor resonates in Smith's avowed "search for a response" by setting an example of social co-identification and communication.

The essential differences between the one-person performances of the "shaman" and the "exorcist" are rooted in their respective intentions. For John Leguizamo, the one-person show is his chance to give society a loud Latino wake-up call. "America has the Emperor's New Clothes syndrome. Many Americans believe anything the media tells them. We have a lot of dispelling to do, but we can't change what is being said about us until we can get close enough to whisper into the emperor's ear."\textsuperscript{52} His interest is in fighting stereotypes

\textsuperscript{50} Lugones 396.

\textsuperscript{51} Lugones 401.

through mockery and abrasive retaliation in the form of shock humor. Perhaps Stephen Kanfer, writing in The New Leader says it best: "[E]xcess is Leguizamo's shtick: he is presenting a world of people who overstate to make themselves heard above the din of the barrio. They have found their laureate and he has found his subject." 53 For Anna Deavere Smith, "access" rather than "excess" is the performative point. Healing through discourse rather than monologue is the ultimate goal of her performance. In utilizing the techniques of shamanic communication and transformation in creating and performing Twilight, Smith desires to get the audience to "give in to the notion of letting the 'other' in." 54 In the process, Smith implements performance studies terminology and methodology within the context of theatre research and analysis. Unlike Leguizamo, Smith investigates liminality inclusively, attempting to associate the different languages, cultures, and viewpoints of the community. Both Smith's performance methodology and political expression as an artist seem to be more "inclusive" versus the "intrusive" or perhaps "exclusive" approach of Leguizamo. This difference is a structural difference revolving around the characterization of liminality in performance.


54 Schechner 64.
Performance Studies/Theatre Studies

It is my contention that *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* can be examined as a bridge between the disciplines of theatre and performance studies. A brief survey of recent academic observations about the disciplined nature of traditional theatre studies methodology will help to cement this connection. In the past few years, theatre scholars such as Jill Dolan, Bruce McConachie and Janelle Reinelt have noted the benefits of discourse between the discipline of theatre and the interdisciplinary field of performance studies. In her article "Geographies of Learning, Theatre Studies, Performance, and the 'Performative'," Jill Dolan sketches "a model of exchange between theatre and other fields and disciplines, rather than one in which the performative evacuates theatre studies." 55 In order for this to occur, Dolan feels that we must first understand that performance and the performative are not the same, partly because performance studies has always crossed institutional interdisciplinary lines while theatre scholarship belongs to a unique, particularly narrow tradition. 56 Simply stated, theatre studies has been focused on studying theatrical performances as products or reflections of culture, while performance studies has revolved around the notion that dramatic performance is a fact of culture with roots and


56 Dolan 423.
applications that are not always specifically theatrical. Dolan observes that the explosion of critical theory in the mid-1980s and the growth of "area studies" programs (Women's Studies, African-American Studies, Gay and Lesbian Studies, Asian-American Studies, etc.) resulted in a proliferation of performative metaphors which have redrawn disciplinary maps with alacrity. For theatre studies, the implication of this ideological shift has been restrictive in terms of limiting the terminology and rhetoric of the discipline to traditional theatrical metaphors and discourse.

This development has left theatre historiographers such as Bruce McConachie calling for a "new historicism" within the field. According to McConachie, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary in order to open up the ideological assumptions, formal categories and historiographic conventions which have dominated the study of theatre. McConachie's version of "new historicism" would focus on the historical erasures and/or representations of class, race, gender, and ethnicity in American theatre in order to "emphasize the changing means by which the theater has helped to construct and maintain images of the 'Other.'"

57 Dolan 419.


59 McConachie 269.
Anna Deavere Smith provides a working example of how theatre, by borrowing from the discourse and traditions of other disciplines, can help construct and maintain ever-changing images of the 'Other.' The wealth of performance studies influenced reactions to *Twilight*, especially those centering on the "performative" aspects of Smith's methodology, makes a strong connection with the interdisciplinary possibilities of theatre studies as addressed by Dolan and McConachie. Furthermore, as critics find new ways of analyzing Smith's "construction of the 'Other'," McConachie's "new historicism" is closer to being realized. In a metaphorical sense, Smith realizes the liminal position of the discipline of theatre itself in her attempt to recognize its social applications. Smith as "shaman" is merely a metaphor drawn from the discourse of another discipline likewise concerned with the construction of the "Other." It is important to remember that Smith is first and foremost practicing theatre. By locating her work within the rhetoric of performance studies, the theatrical aspects of her work are more enhanced for they are grounded in specifically performative notions. Indeed, Smith recognizes the "twilight" between the two disciplines, bridging the narrow gap between them through her ideological "soul flight."
CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis has been twofold: first, to explore the interdisciplinary ramifications of Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, and second, to relate these findings to the future of theatre as a forum for cultural research. In order to identify Smith's interdisciplinary approach to theatrical production, I have identified a few specific traditions which resonate within *Twilight*. It is the contention of this thesis that by applying the discourse, rhetoric, theory, and critique of other disciplines to a specific theatrical text, the role of theatre as cultural analysis is more fully realized. The various theatrical traditions which inform *Twilight* -- American docudrama, the one-person show, historical drama, performance art, etc. -- are extended by Smith's interdisciplinarity. Likewise, it can be argued that pieces such as *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* challenge the various academic traditions examined in this thesis to expand their theoretical vocabulary to include theatrical notions. In the process, the role of theatre as cultural analysis is expanded.

In selecting the discipline of journalism as the first discursive network within which to understand *Twilight: Los
Angeles, 1992, I had the advantage of a specific theatrical tradition to serve as an informative and comparative reference. It is not a great leap to compare Smith to the investigative reporter or to locate Twilight as a form of alternative press. Twilight's critics and analysts provide an ample source of metaphor in these areas. However, by looking beyond the boundaries of theatre and examining this critical framework within the discursive parameters of the discipline of journalism itself, it becomes evident that Smith's relationship with this tradition is stronger than metaphor. In recognizing Twilight's attention to mass media and the role of the "media event" in both its text and performance, the theoretical location of theatre within the boundaries of modern journalistic discourse is likewise justified and extended. Twilight is an example of modern stage journalism, but it also reflects the tradition of American docudrama and the rhetoric of media critique. The tradition of American docudrama as represented by the "living newspapers" of the Federal Theatre Project and Emily Mann's Execution of Justice, evidences the problems, questions, and challenges of journalistic theatrical presentation that Smith also confronts in Twilight. By reconstructing the investigative reporter and the media event in theatrical production, Anna Deavere Smith has possibly renewed the important place of journalism on the American stage.

Ethnography presents a different set of challenges within the context of this study. First, there exists no
substantial theatrical tradition which resonates specifically with ethnographic notions. Second, ethnography is an academic craft, as opposed to a practicable professional discipline like journalism. Critical discussion of it is therefore dominated by a different set of rhetorical issues. Nonetheless, the notion of neutrality and the epistemological ramifications of "speaking for the Other," key issues in modern ethnographic discourse, are of major theoretical significance in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* as well. Smith's interview re-creation technique and "native-informant' positioning place her work within the ideological parameters of modern ethnographic research. Furthermore, the existence of creative precedent from within the discipline itself proves that there is room for the inclusion of ethnography, as realized by artists such as Smith, within modern theatrical discourse and vice versa. The connections between Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* amplify the need for more critical discussion in this area. Scholars such as bell hooks, James Clifford, and Dwight Conquergood have begun to recognize creative texts as legitimate source material in the "writing of culture." By extending their discussions through comparison to creative ethnographic works such as *Mules and Men*, the role of ethnography in *Twilight*, and by extension future theatrical production and research, is realized.

Performance studies, in and of itself, presents unique challenges to this study because it has more of the
characteristics of a theory or approach to study as opposed to an actual discipline. Unlike journalism and ethnography, one cannot "practice" performance studies. Rather, it is a form of scholarly analysis, which spans academic disciplines bringing with it a complex relationship to the discipline of theatre studies. This study includes performance studies for two reasons: first, performance studies specifically focuses on the performance of everyday life and "speaking for the Other," and second, perhaps the traditionally vague distance between performance studies and theatre studies can be decreased by looking at a piece such as Twilight. As well, by comparing Twilight to another similar work, John Leguizamo's one-person show Spic-O-Rama, the relation between theatre and performance studies appears. Both artists are confronted by the dilemma of "liminality" as it applies to the actor in performance. In examining how Smith realizes the actor as "shaman," the connection between theatrical presentation and a key performance studies metaphor is solidified. By including a comparison of how Leguizamo constructs liminality differently in a one-person performance which employs many of the same theatrical conventions and techniques as Twilight, the role of performance studies rhetoric gives needed analytical distinction to modern theatrical research.

The usefulness of this study as theatre research lies in its application to specifically theatrical traditions. In extending the parameters of Twilight to include other disciplines, it remains clear that Smith's work is, first and
roremost, theatre. For example, the one-person show is a theatrical tradition which is extended by Smith's interdisciplinary approach. In analyzing the "biographical one-person show" -- the only one of his categories which shares any direct similarities with Twilight -- John S. Gentile concludes that:

[W]hile it is true for some solo shows part of the magic of the performance is physical re-creation ... many of the most acclaimed one-person shows do not even attempt physical verisimilitude. Their success is due to the actor's ability to convey the essence or ... the spirit of the impersonated figure.¹

Twilight's success rests upon Anna Deavere Smith's ability to convey the essence of the people she impersonates through her physical presence. In this sense, she is very much a part of the tradition of one-person performance as recognized by Gentile. But Smith's interdisciplinary approach also extends this tradition. Smith's journalistic positioning allows her to achieve greater verisimilitude as she re-creates her various interviewees for the audience. Her ethnographic research methodology suggests that culture can be effectively and creatively documented in a performative text.. In dissecting her liminal positioning as actor through metaphoric shamanic invocation of the people she portrays, Smith proves that one actor can successfully re-create a multitude of personalities by combining duplication with suggestion. Thus, the presence and influence of "other"

¹ John S. Gentile, Cast of One: One-Person Shows from the Chautauqua Platform to the Broadway Stage (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 143.
disciplines in Twilight clarify the play's function as performative cultural analysis.

According to Anna Deavere Smith, Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992 is "first and foremost a document of what an actress heard in Los Angeles."² What is interesting is that in making this claim, Smith recognizes her skills as an actress, rather than journalist or ethnographer, as the most essential in her "listening" process. "I think what's more important than interviewing skills -- because I've never trained as a journalist or an interviewer, or an anthropologist; I was trained as an actress...I'm listening with the ear that I was trained with."³ Yet, as emphasized throughout this study, Twilight's social purpose is specifically concerned with capturing a multitude of viewpoints so that we might all better be able to understand the "Other" in the complex, multi-racial environment of America. Thus, as Smith repeatedly lets a variety of "Others" inhibit her body before us, she is in fact challenging us to move past our "trained ears" and listen to the differences which both divide and define us. This metaphor of listening with both a collective and individual critical consciousness is necessarily mixed because in Twilight a "trained ear" is trying to "untrain" or "retrain" us. Thus, this metaphor is also applicable to the notion of interdisciplinarity in Twilight. For though she is

² Smith, intro., Twilight, xxiv.
not trained as a journalist, ethnographer, or "shaman," Smith nonetheless recognizes their respective roles in her process. Thus, Smith "listens" to other academic and disciplinary voices with the "trained ear" of an actress, finding a place for them in her cultural research.

In Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, Anna Deavere Smith crosses disciplinary boundaries in the name of cultural analysis. In the process, she provides a strong argument for the inclusion of theatre within the discourse and rhetoric of other disciplines. Furthermore, Smith's work presents a progressive challenge to the field of theatre to undertake more cultural analysis in future productions. In challenging her audience to "listen" with an untrained ear, so she challenges contemporary theatre professionals to look past their own training towards new modes of interpretation and analysis. In Twilight, Smith's performative attempt to bridge the gap of race relations in our country provides a working example of how theatre can include the work of other disciplines in the name of cultural examination. Smith feels that the search for our collective and individual character requires understanding the polyphony that surrounds us. In academia, this means listening to those "other" disciplines which produce research in "different voices." Perhaps the words of Twilight Bey, a gang-truce organizer and the final person re-presented in Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992, provide
the best metaphor for Smith's interdisciplinary awareness and
the challenges it presents to theatre professionals.

and with me stuck in limbo,
I see darkness as myself.
I see the light as knowledge and the wisdom of the world
and
understanding others,
and in order for me to be a, to be a true human being,
I can't forever dwell in darkness,
I can't forever dwell in the idea,
of just identifying with people like me and/
understanding me
and mine. (255)
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