Speculative Linking in the Network: Rethinking Comparison in Transnational Feminist Rhetoric

Florianne Jimenez

Abstract: The transnational is about a multi-sited and dynamic view of power: rather than viewing power as merely transferred between fixed places, spaces, and people, power itself is always contingent. Methodologically, this makes the intellectual and ethical task of the transnational rhetorical scholar complex. In response to this complex task, this article proposes a method of speculative linking: a transnational method for analyzing multiple texts via a generous and ethical mode of comparison. In this article, I test the method of speculative linking by placing two texts and two discursive fields in conversation with one another: Eve Rodsky's Fair Play, a book about rebalancing domestic labor in heterosexual households, and WORK IS WORK, a zine written by migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong to protest the Mandatory Live-in Policies. Informed by approaches in transnational rhetoric and comparative rhetoric, I argue that engaging with networks via speculative linking invites transnational feminist rhetoricians to create new theoretical frames that speak across, but still recognize, vectors of difference.

Tags: method, rhetorical analysis, transnational, transnational feminism, Philippines, migration, labor

Doi: doi.org/10.37514/PEI-J.2025.27.3.04

The sub/inter-discipline of transnational feminist rhetoric emerged at a moment of increasing ethnonationalism, concerns about uncritical cosmopolitanism, and a desire to push back against a white feminist co-opting of transnational figures. In their 2008 article, "Configurations of Transnationality: Locating Feminist Rhetorics," Hesford and Schell took the field of composition and rhetoric to task for "the risk of institutionalizing certain forms of resistance, romanticizing mobility and hybrid identities, and tokenizing individual writers over and above a contextual and geopolitical analysis of alternative rhetorical practices" (462). Hesford and Schell were speaking to a cultural and intellectual moment in the field that viewed global diversity as an additive stance — expanding our reading lists and canons to include non-US and non-white voices, but not disrupting the epistemologies and geographies of the discipline. Their special issue on feminist rhetorics and transnationalism drew attention to "the disciplinary defining of rhetoric and composition around U.S.-centric narratives of nation, nationalism, and citizenship, including its focus on feminist and women's rhetorics only within the borders of the United States or Western Europe, and explores its potential complicity in reproducing institutional hierarchies" (463). Since Hesford and Schell's special issue, transnational rhetoric and transnational feminist rhetoric have become dynamic and active sites of intellectual exchange with their own methods and terminologies.

Since then, the field of transnational rhetorical studies has moved beyond transnational as qualifying a *place* (i.e. scholarly and popular interest in people and places beyond North America), and towards a way

Florianne Jimenez is an Assistant Professor of English – Rhetoric and Composition at the University of New Hampshire. She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on race and rhetoric, composition theory, transnational rhetoric, and academic writing. She has published work on Filipino rhetoric and writing, literacy and writing under American colonial rule, and resistance in student writing. Her current research focuses on writing education, race, and class in the early 20th century Philippines and writing into post-colonial citizenship.

of seeing — a lens and method that illuminates matrices of power, asymmetries, and inequalities because "we must see how sites across the globe are influenced by both the exchange of local and global all at once" (Dingo, Riedner, and Wingard 518). Fixed and bordered notions of the national and nation-state no longer suit contemporary conditions of increased global mobility and connection. Our analyses must come from an orientation that blurs distinctions between and among nations and national practices (Dingo 8), and instead account for "how various scales of power link diverse nations, regions, and people and shape them in similar and different ways" (Dingo, Riedner, and Wingard 518). If we were to proffer an object or method of analysis, transnational studies "traces how individuals build social fields across real or perceived borders to accommodate and resist difficult circumstances" and "examines how cross-border connections—kinwork, affective ties, or long-distance nationalism—occur among spaces, inclusive of the US" (Lorimer Leonard, Vieira, and Young vi-vii). The transnational is about a multi-sited and dynamic view of power: rather than viewing power as merely transferred between fixed places, spaces, and people, power itself is always contingent. Methodologically, this makes the intellectual and ethical task of the transnational rhetorical scholar complex: to be a transnational rhetorical scholar is to know multiple places, spaces, and people *well enough* to describe links between them. The responsibility of the transnational rhetorical scholar, then, is conceptual breadth.

The intellectual move away from the nation-state as a unit of analysis, and towards conceptual breadth, is not just an ethical mode — it is also a response to the contemporary neoliberal moment. Ideologically, we are surrounded by "neoliberal ideas of private property, free markets, and free trade; the idea that the state's role is to preserve a national economy; and the ideology that valuable subjects are those who are part of a normative political economic system" (Dingo, Riedner, and Wingard 519). In an era of increasingly interconnected people, combined with the strong economic and corporatist logics of everyday life, our methodological assumptions about rhetoric, such as audiences, publics, and persuasion must be rethought (Hesford and Schell 466). More crucially, the neoliberal moment calls for transnational rhetoric and transnational feminist rhetoric to account for "how transnational power relationships themselves work" and describe how "transnational relationships tie people and places together across borders" (521).

I recognize the fear and risks of conceptual and geographical breadth in our analyses, particularly from a feminist stance. In "Under Western Eyes", many years before the emergence of transnational feminist rhetorical studies, Chandra Mohanty criticized feminist writing on Third World women for "assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality. . .and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship" (19). In other words, (some) Western feminists attempting to write about subject-positions that they did not occupy displayed a lack of knowledge and self-reflexivity required to go beyond "the production of the 'Third World woman' as a singular, monolithic subject" (17). And in rhetorical studies, scholars have critiqued approaches that attempted to go beyond cultural boundaries but merely demonstrated a deficit orientation to non-Western cultures, and/or imposed Western terms and frames on non-Western speakers and situations. For instance, Scott Lyons, in "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What do American Indians Want From Writing?", points out that George Kennedy's *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction* traces the history of rhetoric on a developmental scheme that relies on Western notions of the Other, an

oral/literate binary, and a move from animal rhetorics, to "oral" indigenous rhetorics, and concludes in Greek and Roman civilization (459). In going overly broad in our analyses, do we risk misrepresenting spaces, places, and subject-positions that are epistemologically, geographically, and culturally distant and different from us? Moreover, do we, as rhetoricians located in and supported by institutions in the Global North, risk speaking over certain perspectives? But on the underside of this question: if we go too narrow because we're afraid to speak over other, different perspectives, do we also lose, as a discipline, the opportunity for theorizing?

This article explores previous approaches to comparison in rhetorical analysis in transnational feminist rhetoric by proposing a method of speculative linking: a transnational method for analyzing multiple texts via a generous and ethical mode of comparison. In this article, I test the method of speculative linking by placing two texts and two discursive fields in conversation with one another: Eve Rodsky's *Fair Play*, a book about rebalancing domestic labor in heterosexual households, and WORK IS WORK, a zine written by migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong to protest the Mandatory Live-in Policies. Informed by approaches in transnational rhetoric and comparative rhetoric, I argue that engaging with networks via speculative linking invites transnational feminist rhetoricians to create new theoretical frames that speak across, but still recognize, vectors of difference.

Comparison as epistemology in rhetorical studies

"Comparison" as an epistemological and intellectual stance has a long history in English studies and rhetorical studies. Scholars have held comparison as method with simultaneous wariness and hope. Susan Stanford Friedman argues, "If the danger of comparing is the potential erasure of the particular and non normative, the danger of not comparing involves the suppression of the general and the theoretical" (756). In other words, the act of placing two or more somewhat similar and dissimilar objects next to or in conversation with each other creates new levels of abstract knowledge. Comparison, particularly of incommensurable things, can cross multiple, diverse identity categories while also generating information about shared ones.

In rhetorical studies, the comparative approach has also introduced new rhetorical traditions, particularly those outside of the rhetorical canon. Early instantiations of "comparative rhetoric", as a sub-discipline of rhetoric, were primarily concerned with introducing rhetorical scholars to histories of rhetoric in non-US spaces and non-English languages. These rhetorical traditions, however, were still described through and tested by Western rhetorical concepts. As exemplified by George Kennedy's *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Comparison*, this imposing of Western rhetoric upon non-Western contexts often saw these contexts and their rhetors as developmentally backward or less "rhetorical". In later decades, comparative rhetoric would maintain its interest in histories and locales beyond the West, but would instead define national/local rhetorics on their own terms. Comparative rhetoric would also recognize globalization and interconnectedness as an exigence for reassessing our rhetorical methods. As LuMing Mao noted in 2013, "[Global discursive practices] call on us not to take at face value what is the most authentic of authentic detail or what is the most native of native knowledge" (211). In other words, similar to Hesford and Schell's

warning about our methodological assumptions, comparative rhetoric invites scholars to constantly question their cultural epistemologies: how does one *know* a cultural fact? Transnational feminist rhetorician Bo Wang thus calls on rhetoricians to exercise self-reflexivity and recognize the contingency of rhetorical meaning: to "recognize that our interpretations of […] texts are always conditioned by our own time and space" (387). In sum: the narrative of comparative rhetoric in our field is characterized by an increasing self-reflexivity and a willingness to dispense with the notion of "universal" rhetorical terms.

To "compare," in comparative rhetoric, is an intentional and purposeful action. "Comparison" is not about adjudication among multiples of which one is "better" or "truer", nor is it about placing rhetors, traditions, and contexts in agonistic relations. Mao, Wang, Wu, Lyon, and other key figures in comparative rhetoric insist that "the trope of comparison aims to cultivate a mode of thinking that moves away from divides and binaries abstracted from context and promotes nuanced analysis and discursive open-endedness" (240). In this vein, *ethical* comparison is about placing texts and rhetors in productive and generous conversation, with the hope of generating knowledge beyond what Friedman calls "the infinite regress of things" (756). As a method, "speculative linking" in the analytic of the network is informed by comparative epistemology. In revisiting the notion of the network via speculative linking, I strive for a *both/and* approach in transnational feminist rhetoric: to have *both* conceptual breadth *and* maintain distinctions between identities, while still being open to the possibility of contextual enmeshment and entanglement.

Speculative linking and the network as method

Rebecca Dingo, in *Networking Arguments*, develops an analytic that captures the conceptual breadth that was the ambition of transnational rhetorical studies. Enter the analytic of the *network*, which "not only examines rhetorical acts as they relate to identity categories or historical moments but also engages how complex networks of relationships affect rhetorical meaning" (14). In other words, it is no longer sufficient to think of rhetoric as occasion-bound, nation-bound, or even bound to the individual rhetor — transnational feminist rhetoricians must consider "how arguments are transnationally networked and how neoliberal economics and neocolonial power relationships are often exigencies for particular arguments and representations of women, their needs, and their place in the global economy" (15-16). The natural implication of a *networked* stance toward rhetoric is the ability to study *circulation*: how texts are affected by motion, and also affect the people, ideas, and capital implicated in their motion. It also implies the ability to study power: its concentration along some nodes and limitation along others, and how it structures relations on various scales. In Dingo's specific analytical case — policy arguments — networking as a method "expose[s] how domestic and international policies are transnationally and rhetorically linked through complex neoliberal and gendered ideologies and how the commonplace terms that circulate within these policies are dependent upon each other" (19). The network's breadth, or should I say spread, is thus meant to demonstrate, in concrete terms, unexpected or unarticulated relations between women.

The analytic of the network and its connotation of multiple nodes makes a generous assumption of the transnational feminist rhetorician using it: that the transnational feminist rhetorician knows *enough* about multiple sites in order to describe and articulate historical, ideological, and political links between them. Another implication of the network is that its notion of "links" and "nodes" that it conveys may be too literal and material, and thus limiting the scope of arguments that our subfield can make. When talking about the rhetorical bed from which the network emerged — analyses of World Bank and IMF policies — the need to demonstrate historical and material relations makes sense. But since the range of rhetorical texts our subfield pursues is wide, perhaps the *network* and *links* must be refigured in some way. In other words: when we limit our network thinking to demonstrating pre-given, traditional, supranational institutional linkages (e.g. historical encounters, trade relations, aid relations, colonization), do we lose opportunities for "decolonization, anticapitalist critique, and solidarity" (Mohanty 3)?

I also wonder about the epistemological underpinnings of the network as gaze/analytic, and whether or not it represents a white, Western, Eurocentric epistemology. Unfortunately, pursuit of that question, which requires tracing transnational feminist rhetoric's epistemological assumptions and comparing them to white-identified epistemologies, is outside the scope of this article (and would far exceed its word limits). However, I return to the visuality of the network as a metaphor: if the transnational as networked is a gaze, whose eye is doing the gazing? And whose eyes *can* have a gaze that commands such breadth? The orientations that have always been seen as "neutral", "generalizable" in the field of rhetorical studies are also the same orientations that transnational feminist rhetoric aims to disrupt. Perhaps there is value in articulating the networked, as well as our other analytical methods, as arguing *from* specific, embodied places and times.

"Speculative linking", then, is not about placing random texts in conversation with one another and then finding order in the randomness. Rather, it is about an intellectual orientation that links texts with aporia, absence, and potential affinity. To put it in plainer terms: speculative linking acknowledges that, in an interconnected and heterogeneous communicative landscape, we all could be talking across difference, space, and time and finding more similarity than not. In the networked readings I explore in the next section, I place two texts about labor in comparison with one another to see if a productive transnational conversation about labor politics is possible, even as these texts speak from completely different times, spaces, and subject-positions.

A networked, speculatively linked reading of *Fair Play* and *WORK IS WORK*

A vast gulf divides *Fair Play* and *WORK IS WORK*: the two texts could not be more different in terms of circulation, audience, exigence, purpose, and material composition. *Fair Play*, a New York Times bestselling book, emerged from former attorney Eve Rodsky's frustrations with the imbalance of domestic labor in her marriage. She writes, "…I was still shouldering two-thirds of the work required to run a home and raise a family, a statistic I wasn't aware of at the time but was undeniably living. I was still the she-fault parent charged with doing it all…" (12-13). Rodsky acknowledges that this is not just her problem, nor is it a new

one: "Since women began writing about this in the 1940s, we haven't made enough progress in sharing the burden with our partners or finding an answer to this problem that men could buy into. Same sh*t, different decade" (12). As Rodsky polls her friends on their marriages, fumes at her husband, and continues working both in and out of the home, she realizes that she needs a structured, concrete solution. Enter her *Fair Play* deck: "a figurative game played with your partner, with four easy-to-follow rules to be applied sequentially, along with 100 playing "cards" to represent all of the invisible tasks that go into running a home" (21). The game, she says, was inspired by the corporate strategies and management solutions that she witnessed and used in her work as a lawyer and manager to inspire organizational change. The book and the game have spawned a documentary (backed by Reese Witherspoon's *Hello Sunshine* production company), a social media movement, a podcast, and a "policy institute" that aims to "raise public awareness of the need for 'care justice', which includes but is not limited to raising awareness of the undervaluation of care work, the lack of affordable care, and the importance of care for the health and well-being of the general public" (Fair Play Policy Institute). The momentum (and profitability) of *Fair Play* is also sustained by the "CareForce", a collective of advocates, funders, policymakers, researchers, and storytellers engaged in care advocacy, and "Fair Play facilitators", professionals who are certified in using Rodsky's game in coaching, therapy, and/or counseling. Clearly, *Fair Play* has demonstrated circulation and impact across media: though its approach to household inequity seems suspect, its principles and suggested approach seem to resonate with a wide audience.

In contrast to the mythical rise of Rodsky and her *Fair Play* text, *WORK IS WORK*, a zine produced by migrant domestic workers and advocates, has more modest beginnings. Produced by the Mission for Migrant Workers of St. John's Cathedral in Hong Kong in 2015, the zine is written entirely by women migrant domestic workers (MDWs) from the Philippines and Indonesia who participated in seminars and workshops on zine-making and advocacy sponsored by the Mission. The exigence for the zine-making workshops was Hong Kong's Mandatory Live-in Policy. Enacted in 2003, the Mandatory Live-in Policy forbids foreign domestic workers from living outside their employer's residence, and requires this to be stated clearly in any employment contract. The law was ostensibly put in place to discourage foreign domestic workers from taking part-time jobs and undocumented work, thus protecting the local Hong Kong labor market. The unfortunate result of the Mandatory Live-in Policy, particularly in Hong Kong where families live in small residences, is that domestic workers who live in employers' homes are subjected to overwork and limited time off, deplorable and unsuitable living conditions, and verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (Yam 104-107).

As an organization, the Mission for Migrant Workers recognizes that intervention in Hong Kong's Mandatory Live-in Policy requires work on multiple fronts. As a result, the Mission provides different levels of assistance and advocacy for migrant domestic workers, ranging from legal clinics and open fora via their Facebook page, to conducting ethnographic and qualitative research on the experiences of migrant domestic workers. The zine, according to the Introduction by Cynthia Abdon-Tellez, was a positive experience for the women who participated in its creation. Abdon-Tellez writes, "As the project progressed, the participants were able to find their interest in simply expressing their thoughts as a person. […] As they were provided a space to express emotions, insights, and vulnerabilities in their own creative form or style, they discovered

how these would serve to empower them along the way" (4).

The pieces in *WORK IS WORK* cover a range of topics, genres, and media. Some women write first-person narratives about their paths to domestic work in Hong Kong. Others write third person profiles of other women MDWs. Other women have contributed sketches, drawings and photographs, and sometimes they combine text and visual media. The narratives express a variety of affects toward domestic work — all of the women believe in the work that they perform, but some express anger and dismay at the unjust conditions they encounter. The women describe, in detail, strict and overbearing employers, withheld wages, overwork/limited time off, and reneged contracts. Another constant theme in the women's writing is the challenge of distance from their home country and their families, coupled with the pressures and rewards of providing financially from afar.

The limited circulation of *WORK IS WORK* belies the rhetorical and literate goals that the zine has accomplished. As a material, physical production, the zine's old school, print-based nature entextualizes these women's experiences, making it more concrete and embodied than an ephemeral digital form. The zine also provided an avenue for MDWs to participate in and potentially shape the dialogue on Hong Kong's Mandatory Live-in Policy, while also offering protection to participants from retribution or backlash. The end of the zine lists names of all writing workshop participants and contributors, but most individual pieces are attributed to a pseudonym. This provides anonymous cover for women sharing specific and potentially revealing experiences, especially those that detail exploitation and abuse at the hands of employers, while also naming the women as participants in an advocacy effort.

The writer of *Fair Play* and the writers of *WORK IS WORK* could not be more different, especially in terms of racial, class, ethnic, and national identity. They have different relationships and orientations to reproductive labor: the writers of *WORK IS WORK* are paid for their reproductive labor (albeit unfairly), while Rodsky and, ostensibly, the woman served by the *Fair Play* system, participates in unpaid domestic work. In addition, the writers of *WORK IS WORK* labor in vulnerable conditions: not only do they live and work in employers' homes 24/7, they are also excluded from the Hong Kong nation-state by not having access to citizenship or permanent residency. While the female audience of *Fair Play* in the Global North are not immune from poverty, overwork, or physical or emotional abuse in the home, the working and living conditions that surround them are not stated by Rodsky to be a problem — nor are they part of the conversation at all. The rhetorical stakes in these two texts could not be more dissimilar, and it seems almost unproductive to allow them equal space in the same conversation. The complete failure of Fair Play to acknowledge any kind of racial, class, or ethnic differences in among women, in contrast with the transparency of *WORK IS WORK's* writers' subject-positions is particularly problematic: I feel ethically complicated about even mentioning or amplifying *Fair Play*. The danger of a movement like *Fair Play* is that there is zero recognition of how, historically, white women's attempts to free themselves of reproductive labor have occurred on the backs of working-class and women of color. Simply put: in making calls for, say, "more affordable care" — who would actually perform the work of care affordably? History would tell us: very likely, the women of color. The

history of care work and reproductive labor in the United States, which Rodsky claims to have researched herself, *is* intersectional. In 1985, Evelyn Nakano Glenn took Marxist-feminist analyses of women's subordination to task for overlooking the experiences of women of color. Several years later, she would expand her analysis to argue for the necessity of viewing labor stratification as simultaneously raced and gendered: to understand it as only raced, or only gendered, only continues to reify white patriarchal dominance (33-34). Over two decades later, sociologist Rhacel Salazar Parreñas extended Glenn's argument beyond the borders of the United States to argue for an "international division of reproductive labor" where "In both [migrant-] sending and receiving countries, most women have not achieved a gender-egalitarian division of household work; instead, they have used their race and/or class privilege to transfer their reproductive labor with responsibilities to less privileged women." And in rhetorical studies, Rebecca Dingo's network model argues that "feminists must consider not only a woman's local circumstance but how her circumstances *relate to* and are *informed by* supranational policies, colonial history, and even our practices here in the West (11). Approaches like Glenn's, Parreñas', Dingo's, show that if we are to continue aiming for feminist solidarity in our politics, women across national, race, and class lines must recognize their enmeshment and complicity in each other's situations.

To deploy speculative linking, I'm choosing to begin with these two texts' point of overlap. To network with speculative linking requires a willingness to place two seemingly dissimilar texts next to one another, and begin from a point of overlap. The shared core of both conversations is materiality: *How are women's material experiences affected by inequities in the distribution of reproductive labor?* To say that both of these conversations have a shared core is not to argue for their moral or ethical commensurability, especially given the specific and vulnerable context of Filipina migrant workers in Hong Kong. Despite the incommensurability of these experiences, the shared core of these conversations reminds us that labor politics under neoliberal capitalism is and should remain a central concern of transnational feminist rhetoric. A method such as speculative linking, I argue, can build conceptual bridges between the uneven distribution of reproductive labor in the home, and the long-standing acknowledgement in transnational feminism of the gendered and racialized division of labor (Glenn) and the international division of labor (Parreñas).

Reading *Fair Play*

Neoliberal ideology celebrates the enterprising, self-sufficient individual: the human who turns to (or creates) private, normative solutions, rather than to state-supported care. Foucault describes this figure as homo economicus: "homo economicus as the partner of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings" (226). Put another way, there is a particular set of values that an individual should hold to succeed under neoliberalism: "entrepreneurship, competition, individual choice, self-interest, and self-empowerment" (Dingo 10). Culturally, we might see these values playing out in mainstream/social media feminist movements and figures from the last two decades: examples are the exhortation to women to "lean in" at work from Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg, the celebration of the "girlboss", and the veneration of "side hustles" or "hustle culture" for women to make more

money.

The celebration of neoliberal values runs through the ethos that Rodsky crafts around the origin of Fair Play. She constantly uses corporatist vocabulary to describe the home and her place in it: in her words, she was "CEO, task manager, *and* worker bee of [her] family's never-ending to-do list" (9). The point of tension in her story that yields the Fair Play system is Rodsky's inability to reconcile her success as a corporate woman (a boss at work, who leans in) with her frustrations as a wife and mother at home. Rodsky continues building her ethos when she realizes that her identity as a corporate success outside the home is the solution: "For more than a decade, I'd consulted with hundreds of families in my professional life by providing my expertise in organizational-management strategy. […] By treating the home as our most important organization, wouldn't my household run more smoothly? *Heck, wouldn't this work for every family?*" (20). In applying corporate solutions to the domestic sphere, Rodsky further reifies neoliberalism's approach to reproductive labor: treat it as a private, individual matter — but it's up to *you* to choose and execute the most optimal solution.

Other corporatist strategies infuse the rhetoric of *Fair Play,* such as the use/adaptation of corporate-speak. Rodsky's book introduces various acronyms, which are a fetish in corporate communication, and encourages couples to discuss these terms and introduce them into their communication.

- CPE: Stands for "Conceive, Plan, and Execute", which is one cornerstone of the Fair Play system. The principle of CPE dictates that each partner must be completely in charge of all aspects of a domestic task — realizing that it has to be done, figuring out the steps required to do it, and then seeing the task through to the end. CPE, according to Rodsky, is inspired by the project manager role in many organizations, and is recognized as the most efficient approach to work (115-116).
- MSC: Stands for "Minimum Standard of Care", or the standard that a partnership holds for a functional, well-maintained household. The MSC, according to Rodsky, should be designed collaboratively by the family, and used to hold partners accountable. According to Rodsky, the MSC was inspired by a principle she learned in law school: "Any action taken by a citizen should reflect the shared values and traditions of that specific community" (148).
- RAT: Stands for "Random Assignment of a Task", or a task whose CPE or MSC is highly undefined and causes tension in the home. Rodsky claims that RATs are "one of the top reasons men resent their wives, admit to affairs, and express a desire to divorce" (236), and encourages women to stop participating in this habit of "emasculating finger-pointing" (237) by referring back to the CPE.

These acronyms and their usage in a partnership are fundamental to the Fair Play system, further reinforcing Rodsky's endorsement of corporatist strategies to a systemic problem. The seemingly small changes in communication style she encourages are a synecdoche for the Fair Play system and its corporatist ideology itself: If women would just fall in line with this approach, they can truly get ahead.

Reading *WORK IS WORK*

The question that Rodsky's text begs feminist rhetoricians to ask is: *Can neoliberal problems be addressed by neoliberal solutions?* Is Rodsky working within the system in order to disrupt it, or is she merely pushing women and their partners to make themselves more "fit" for the system? Rhetorically, Rodsky does acknowledge that she is endorsing a private solution to a public, systemic problem. On the way to creating the Fair Play system, Rodsky left a job that didn't provide her an adequate lactation space nor flexibility in her working arrangements (even when she offered to take a pay cut): thus she had no choice but to leave her dream job to become an independent consultant (8-9). While this moment does offer the opportunity for systemic critique, Rodsky is quick to almost *excuse* the toll that *any* paid work outside the home exacts on women. Rodsky claims, via her female friends, that "when you free up time spent in an office, you quickly fill it by doing more at home, including more that isn't necessarily kid-related" (9). In other words, the issue is not that capitalism has structured work to be hostile to family life: the problem is how women choose to structure their time at home.

While Rodsky's rhetoric and response to the inequities of reproductive labor is corporatist, the rhetorical response offered by the writers of *WORK IS WORK* is based in arguments on racial and class equity, the power of community, and human rights. I'm calling the rhetorical strategies that the writers of *WORK IS WORK* employ *corporeal* rhetorics: strategies of writing that place material bodies at the center. Through analysis of selections in *WORK IS WORK*, I argue that by employing corporeal rhetorics, the migrant domestic workers of *WORK IS WORK* offer viable solutions to the injustices of reproductive labor, not only in the immediate context of Hong Kong's Mandatory Live-in Policy, but under neoliberal capitalism writ large.

The body has always been a productive discursive site for feminist rhetoric and transnational feminist rhetoric. Abby Knoblauch, in 2012, defined three major categories of embodiment in the field of composition and rhetoric: *embodied language, embodied knowledge,* and *embodied rhetoric*. *Embodied rhetoric,* as defined by Knoblauch, is "a purposeful decision to include embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning-making within a text itself" (52). Knoblauch argues that *embodied rhetoric* offers a strategy for resisting the flattening and homogenizing impulse of the academy and its writing genres: "…writers utilizing an embodied rhetoric work against what might be seen as the potential hegemony of (some) academic discourse, thereby beginning to enact [Adrienne] Rich's politics of location" (59). Following Knoblauch's lead, Ashley Canter proposes a theory of *affective rhetorical resistance* for transnational feminist rhetoric. Canter proposes that affective rhetorical resistance, or resistance performed across media in words as well as in physical bodies, is an analytic that offers rhetorical scholars "a new way of reading seeming silence, of reading bodily movement along with words, in order to see rhetorical activism" (n.p.). As rhetorical frameworks, Knoblauch's and Canter's ideas allow rhetorical scholars to account for the role of the body, both physical and textual, in rhetorical studies.

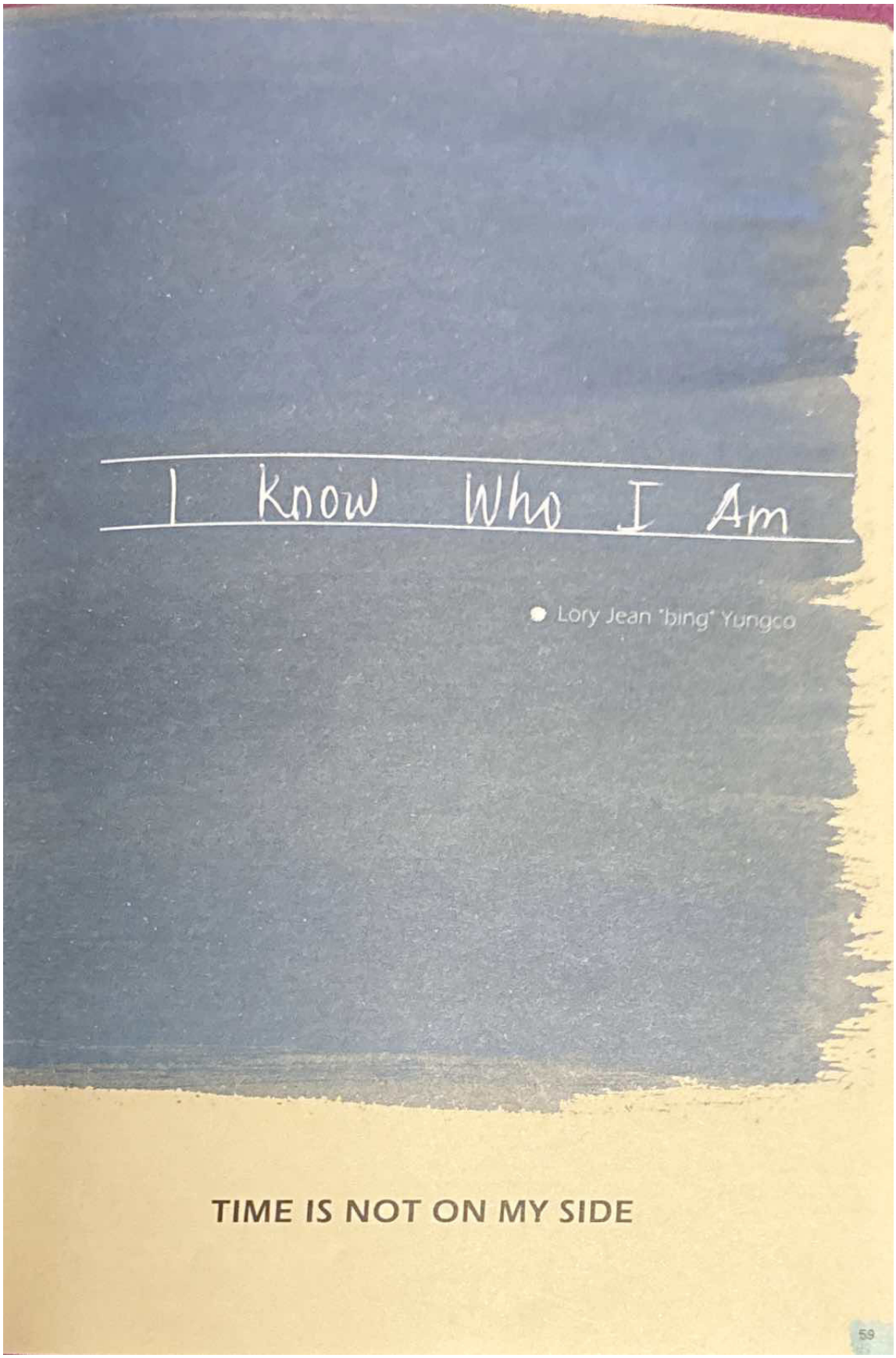
Following Knoblauch, Canter, and other rhetoricians interested in the body, I propose a theory of *corporeal rhetorics*: the strategic use of discourse across multiple modes that calls attention to the body as a site, producer, and consumer of labor. Where Knoblauch and other feminist rhetoricians emphasize the politics of location, and where Canter emphasizes the physical body's use as rhetoric in resistance, I emphasize how the body is incorporated into circuits of labor and exchange under neoliberalism. In talking about corporeality, or about the body, I'm gesturing to how neoliberalism rests upon "the formation of human capital" (Foucault 229). Simply put: neoliberalism, in encouraging entrepreneurship of the self, also creates a market for the *care* of the population. Enter industries of *reproductive labor*: what Karl Marx described as the work required to sustain human life for future generations.

Corporeal rhetorics is thus informed by how reproductive labor and the body are inextricable from one another: Performing reproductive labor, to care for the bodies of others, requires another body being taxed, expended, and (perhaps) re-sustained. On a global scale, for migrant women such as the writers of *WORK IS WORK,* this happens on two levels: these women work in foreign countries and perform reproductive labor for their employers' families, in order to earn enough to ensure the care and sustenance of their own families in the home country. Migrant domestic workers, under neoliberalism, use their bodies to work so that the bodies of others are sustained. This notion is captured through Neferti Tadiar's theory of *life-times:* "a concept for foregrounding the texture and qualities of experience and times of living otherwise absorbed within value and waste" (71). The concept is directly informed by the conditions of migrant domestic work, where "the appropriation of 'feminized' labor is inextricable from the appropriation of the worker's whole bodily being,[. . .] in the specific (gendered, racialized) context of live-in migrant domestic servants at the beck and call, or the unlimited disposal, of their employers (whose disposition over servants is not restricted in time)" (96). I find theorizing such as Tadiar's, which is directly informed by a specific experience shaped by gendered, racial, ethnic, and class marginalization, a double-edged sword. On one hand, *life-times* brings to light the totalizing power of neoliberalism over laboring bodies. On the other hand, we should also be aware that *life-times* requires careful deployment: otherwise, its radical edge, specifically its emphasis on what is at stake for women's bodies under neoliberalism, can be erased. Nonetheless, I believe that theories like Tadiar's, when applied in transnational rhetoric, can serve as conceptual bridges between compared texts and rhetors. Specifically, *life-times* offers *corporeal rhetorics* an explanatory logic for how rhetors narrate the value and waste of the body.

In *WORK IS WORK*, corporeal rhetorics emerge in participants' multimedia (written, hand-drawn, photographed) representations of their bodies at work under the Mandatory Live-in Policy. As many scholars and advocates for migrant domestic work have noted, the Mandatory Live-in Policy creates conditions that leave MDWs vulnerable to abuse and overwork. Many domestic workers live in cramped quarters, and/or sleep and rest in makeshift spaces like the feet of children's beds, a rolled-out mat in a corner in a living room, or even in bathrooms, with little assurance of privacy or quiet. In addition, despite Hong Kong laws that entitle migrant domestic workers to 24 hours' rest every week, many employers defy this rule and severely limit MDWs' time off — one writer noted that she only received Christmas, Easter, Lunar New Year,

and her birthday off. These policies confine MDWs to employers' homes and schedules, and thus immobilize them not just on a national scale, but also on an intensely local level.

A multimodal piece, "I Know Who I Am / Time is Not On My Side", represents these binds viscerally. The piece is two texts that are laid out for the reader to take in simultaneously: a poem, credited to a writer named "Bing", "I Know Who I Am", on an upper visual plane, and a question/response text, "Time is Not On My Side" on a lower visual plane. Spanning 8 pages, the two texts are an inventive dialogue on freedom and confinement.

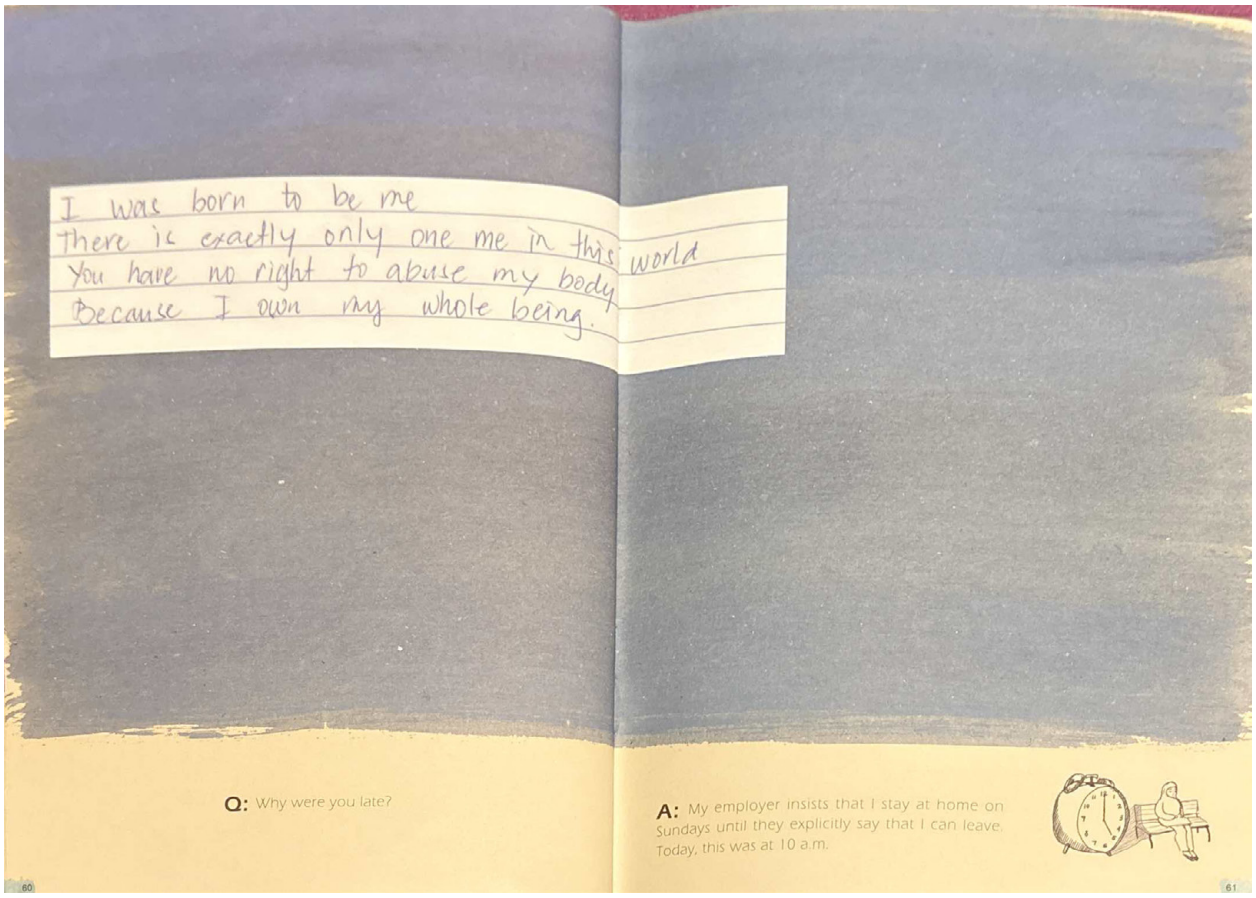


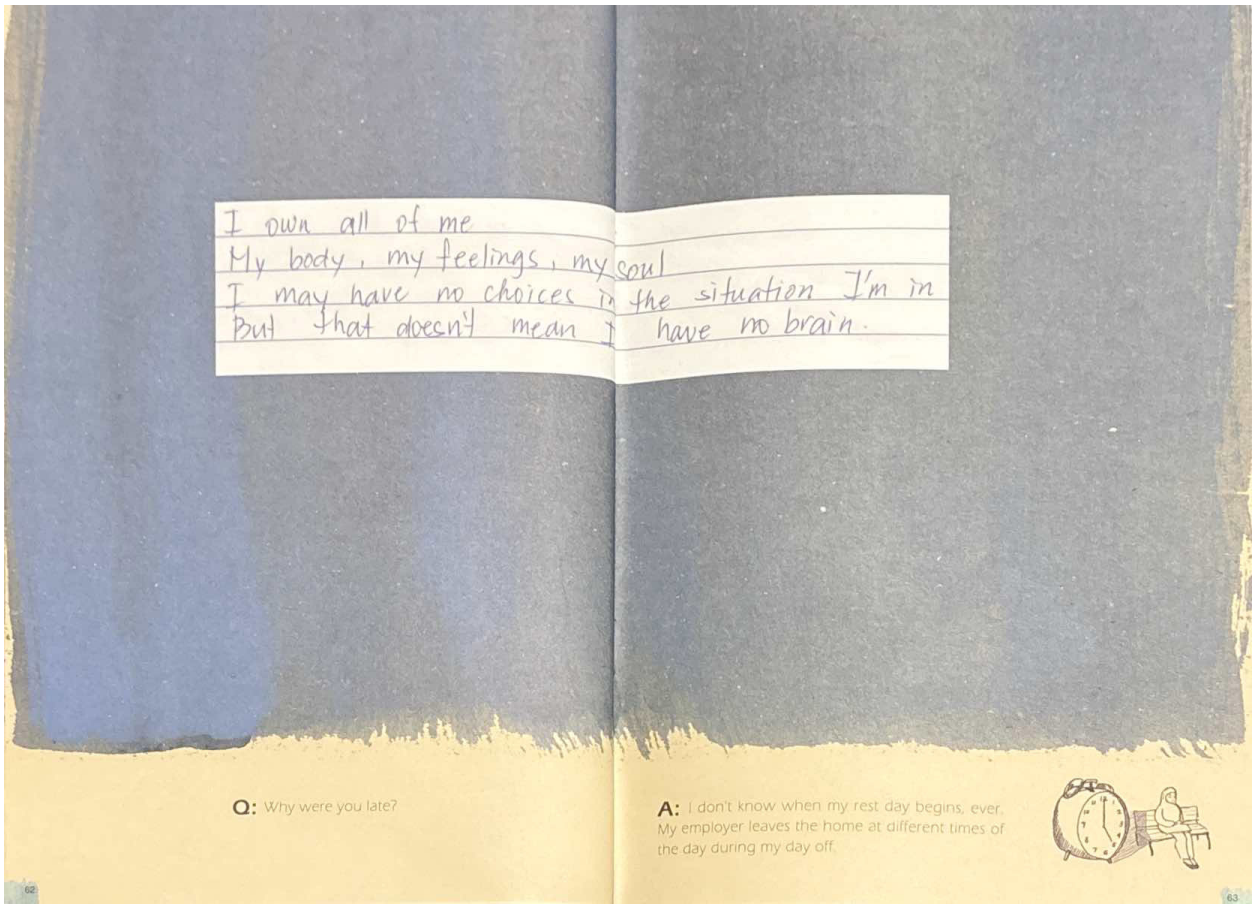
I Know Who I Am

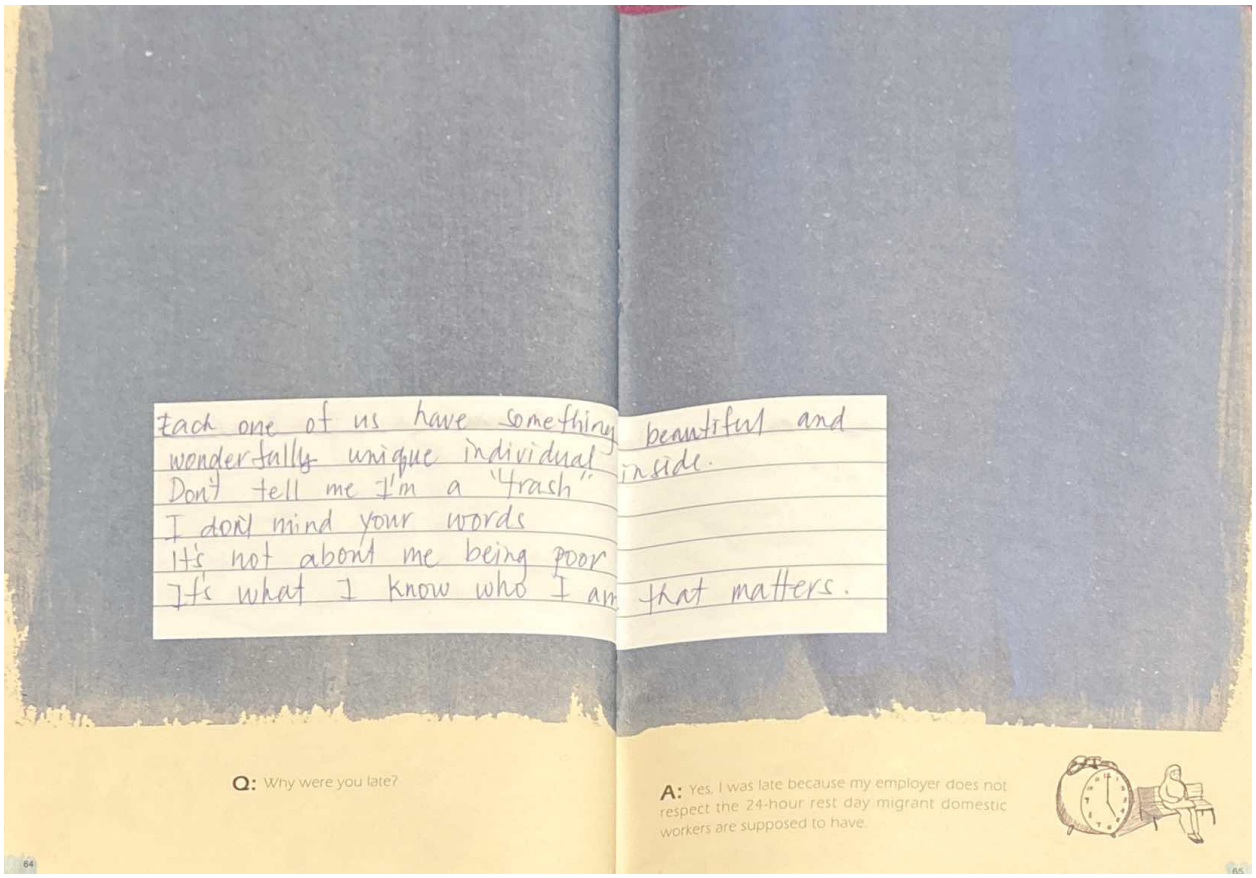
Lory Jean "bing" Yungco

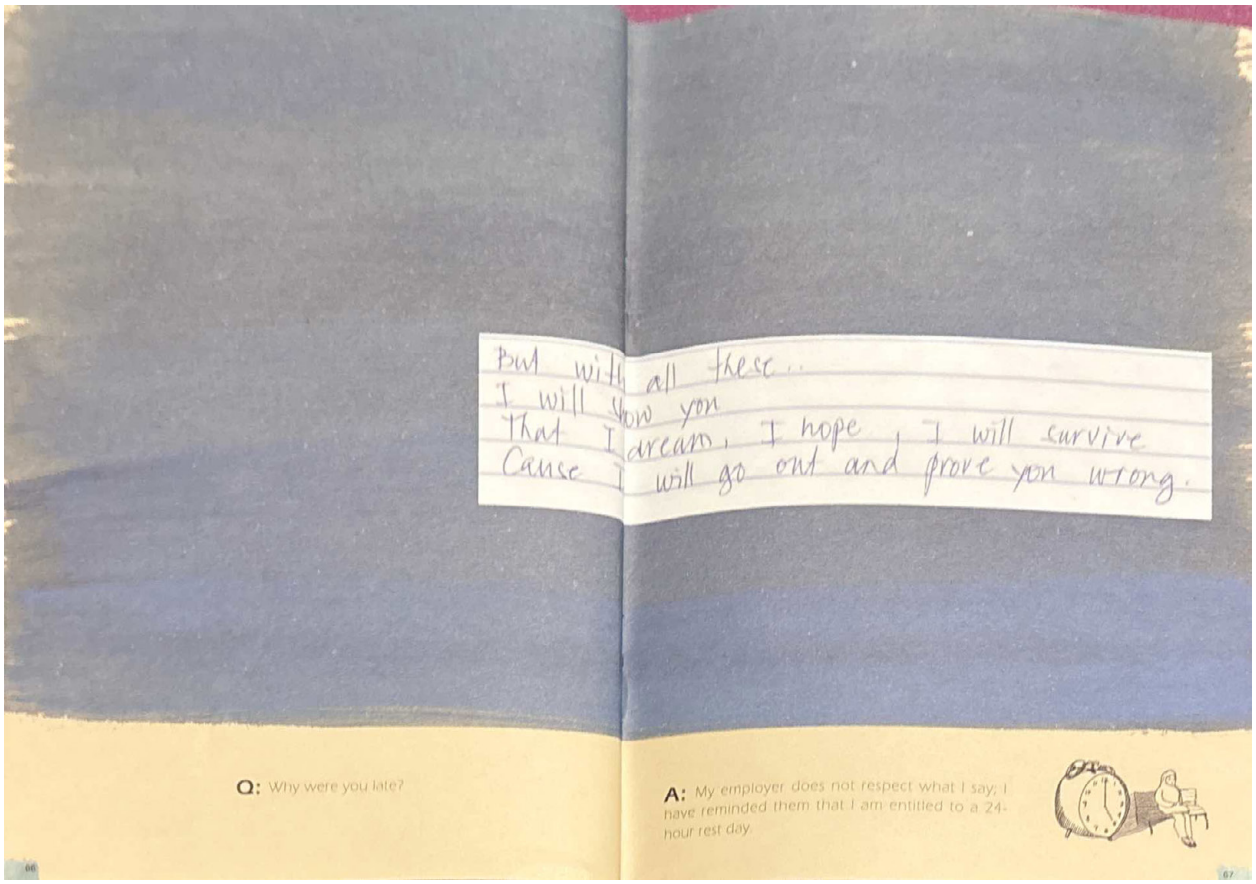
TIME IS NOT ON MY SIDE

59


I was born to be me
There is exactly only one me in this world
You have no right to abuse my body
Because I own my whole being.
Q: Why were you late?
A: My employer insists that I stay at home on Sundays until they explicitly say that I can leave. Today, this was at 10 a.m.
60
61


I own all of me
My body, my feelings, my soul
I may have no choices in the situation I'm in
But that doesn't mean I have no brain.
Q: Why were you late?
A: I don't know when my rest day begins, ever. My employer leaves the home at different times of the day during my day off.
62
63


Each one of us have something beautiful and wonderfully unique individual inside.
Don't tell me I'm a "trash"
I don't mind your words
It's not about me being poor
It's what I know who I am that matters.
Q: Why were you late?
A: Yes, I was late because my employer does not respect the 24-hour rest day migrant domestic workers are supposed to have.
64
65

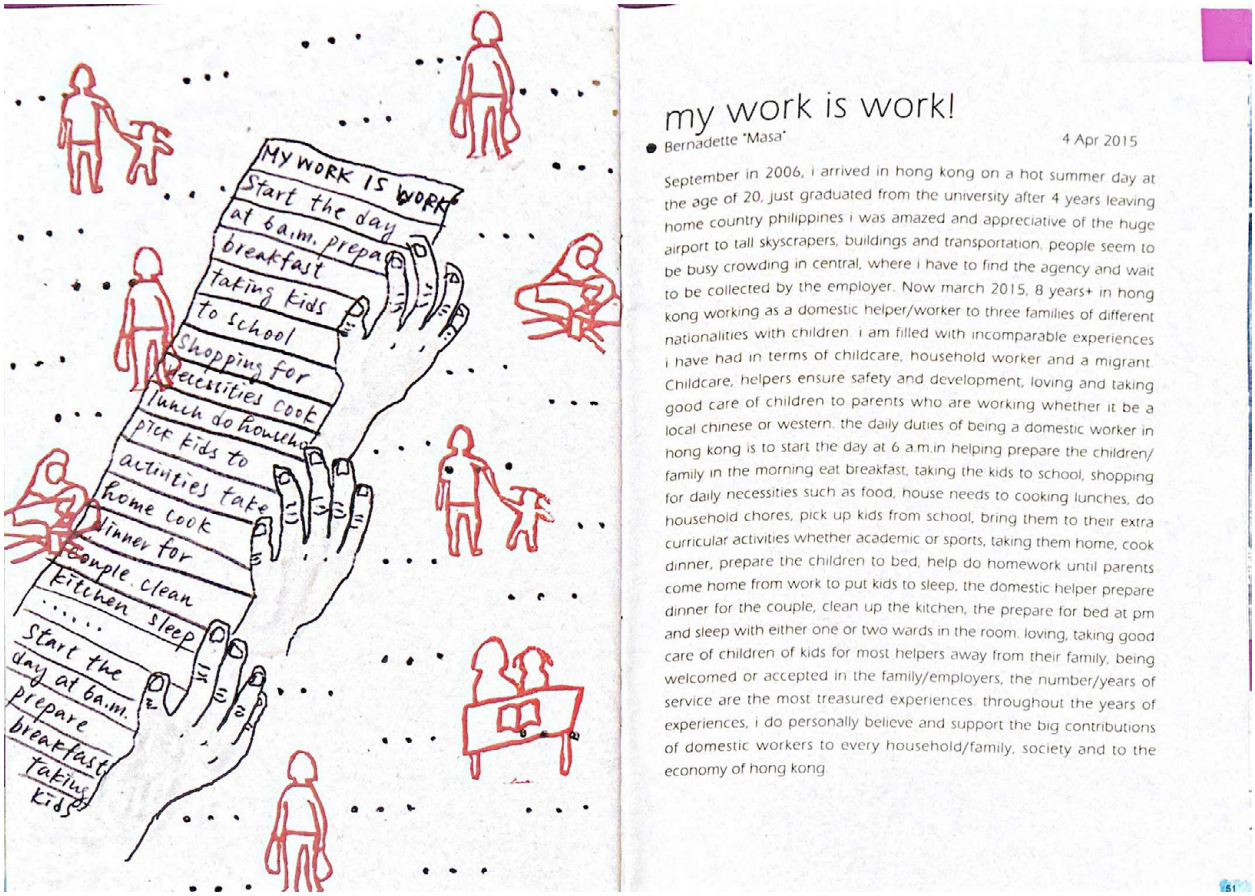

But with all these..
I will show you
That I dream, I hope, I will survive
Cause I will go out and prove you wrong.
Q: Why were you late?
A: My employer does not respect what I say; I have reminded them that I am entitled to a 24-hour rest day.
66
67

"I Know Who I Am" is a declaration of defiance. The writer speaks directly to someone who is physically and verbally abusing her by claiming agency and ownership over her whole self. Even as she hears messages that demean her, the writer refuses to submit to these messages that reduce her intelligence on account of social class. At the end of the poem, Bing claims that through knowing herself, Bing will claim a better future that her abuser cannot even apprehend or imagine. In contrast, "Time is Not on My Side" describes feeling restricted in space and time: decisions such as whether a migrant domestic worker can leave their employer's home, and when, are entirely ruled by someone else's schedule and affect. Despite national laws and international agreements that claim to safeguard domestic workers against overwork and exploitation, the employer(s) invoked in these responses still hold sway over a domestic worker's body and time.

The two texts' themes and voices are in tension with one another: "I Know Who I Am" operates as a strong declaration of human wholeness, and the writer stands with ideas of self-worth. On the other hand, "Time is Not on My Side" is firmly grounded, almost quotidian, in its capturing of the migrant domestic worker's habitus: small details such as being able to leave the home must be negotiated. By describing how the body is restricted in space and time, "I Know Who I Am / Time is Not on My Side" depicts how the body is constantly negotiating power: the migrant domestic worker is constantly navigating employers, national laws, and the employer's home, while also engaging with complicated notions of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and belonging. In fact, both "concrete" material conditions and discursive identities mesh and blur to create the binds upon women: such are the conditions that reduce women to *life-times*. The visual rhetorical choices, however, impose the body of the migrant domestic worker upon the text: the reader cannot help but know that this text is *from* the body. By using photographs of handwritten text rather than typesetting the poem, and using a hand-drawn illustration as a watermark for each page, the multimodal text makes clear to readers not only the expenditure of the body involved in *writing* the poem, but also the expenditure of the body as the *exigence* of the poem too. Unlike the Fair Play system, which disembodies reproductive labor into cards, *WORK IS WORK* insists that the reader associate reproductive labor with the life-times of the migrant domestic worker body.

Both WORK IS WORK and *Fair Play* argue for visibility, albeit in very different ways and to very different ends. In *Fair Play,* Rodsky realizes that part of the issue with her partner not doing his "fair" share is that he didn't *see* her work. In her words, "You can't value what you don't see, right?" (17). Rodsky then begins making a list called "Sh*t I Do" to show to her husband, which yields some empathy, but is not the ultimate solution. In similar fashion, WORK IS WORK visually and discursively represents the work of migrant domestic work ers. For instance, one mini-essay, "my work is work!" lists all the daily duties of a domestic worker in Hong Kong who works for three families. The essay is accompanied by a hand-drawn illustration of a piece of paper enumerating all the tasks. While both texts *make labor visible*, each text's approach to and purpose for making labor is radically different. Rodsky argues, similar to her corporatist rhetorics in the earlier section, that "Visibility = Value": "I'd begun to create a comprehensive list that makes the invisible visible… and thereby, quantifiable" (18-19). In contrast, the point that the writers of WORK IS WORK are making is that "Visibility = Resistance" — that if only readers knew, and could *see*, their struggle, they might

stand in solidarity with these women. In other words: while Rodsky uses visibility to further systematize the distribution of reproductive labor, the writers of WORK IS WORK use visibility to *break* the system, because the system only benefits from notions of privacy and secrecy.



Conclusion

What I hope speculative linking, and these two readings of wildly different texts offers, is a broadened conversation that amplifies nuanced and more activist voices, and holds regressive perspectives to gentle account. Though *Fair Play* and *WORK IS WORK* are two vastly different texts, speculatively linking the two texts clarifies how, rhetorically, labor politics shapes women's material experiences. As a framework, speculative linking of texts allows us to read temporally, materially, and ideologically disparate texts, and models a broader notion of the textual archive possible in rhetorical study. My hope is that transnational feminist rhetoricians claim expanses between texts, and their incommensurability, not as a conceptual gap, but rather, a space to imagine differently, to offer new readings, and to place various women's voices into conversation.

Works Cited

Canter, Ashley. "Silently Speaking Bodies: Affective Rhetorical Resistance in Transnational Feminist Rhetoric." *Peitho*, Vol. 24, No. 3. Coalition of Feminist Scholars in Rhetoric and Composition, 2024. https://cfshrc.org/article/silently-speaking-bodies-affective-rhetorical-resistance-in-transnational-feminist-rhetoric/

Dingo, Rebecca. *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing*.U of Pittsburgh P, 2012.

Dingo, Rebecca, et al. "Toward a Cogent Analysis of Power: Transnational Rhetorical Studies." *JAC : A Journal of Composition Theory*, vol. 33, no. 3/4, 2013, pp. 517–28.

Fair Play Policy Institute. "Who We Are." Fair Play Policy Institute, https://fairplaypolicy.org. Accessed 20 January 2025.

Foucault, Michel. "Chapter 9: The Birth of Biopolitics" *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979.* Davidson, Arnold I., et al. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230594180.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Why Not Compare?" *PMLA : Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 126, no. 3, 2011, pp. 753–62, https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2011.126.3.753.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1992, pp. 1–43, https://doi.org/10.1086/494777.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression." *The Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1985, pp. 86–108, https://doi.org/10.1177/048661348501700306.

Hesford, Wendy S., and Eileen E. Schell. "Introduction: Configurations of Transnationality: Locating Feminist Rhetorics." *College English,* vol. 70, no. 5, 2008, pp. 461–70, https://doi.org/10.58680/ce20086360.

Knoblauch, A. Abby. "Bodies of Knowledge: Definitions, Delineations, and Implications of Embodied Writing in the Academy." *Composition Studie*s, vol. 40, no. 2, 2012, pp. 50–65.

Lorimer Leonard, Rebecca, Kate Vieira, and Morris Young. "Introduction." *Literacy in Composition Studies*, vol. 3.3, 2015, pp. 3-23. https://licsjournal.org/index.php/LiCS/issue/view/45

Lyons, Scott. "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?" *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2000, pp.447-468. https://www.jstor.org/stable/358744

Mao, LuMing. "Beyond Bias, Binary, and Border: Mapping out the Future of Comparative Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly,* vol. 43, no. 3, 2013, pp. 209–25, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2013.792690

Mao, LuMing, Bo Wang, Arabella Lyon, Susan C. Jarratt, C. Jan Swearingen, Susan Romano, Peter Simonson, Steven Mailloux & Xing Lu . "Manifesting a Future for Comparative Rhetoric." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2015, pp. 239-274, DOI: 10.1080/07350198.2015.1040105

Mission for Migrant Workers. *WORK IS WORK*. Hong Kong: Mission for Migrant Workers, June 2015. Print.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. F*eminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity.* Duke UP, 2003.

Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work.* Second edition., Stanford UP, 2015, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804796187.

Rodsky, Eve. *Fair Play: A Game-Changing Solution for When You Have Too Much to Do (and More Life to Live)*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2019.

Tadiar, Neferti X. M. *Remaindered Life.* Duke UP, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478022381.

Wang, Bo. "Engaging Nüquanzhuyi at the Turn of the Century: The Making of a Chinese Feminist Rhetoric." *College English*, vol. 72, no. 4, 2010, pp. 385–405, https://doi.org/10.58680/ce20109972.

Yam, Shui-yin Sharon. *Inconvenient Strangers: Transnational Subjects and the Politics of Citizenship*. The Ohio State UP, 2019.