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# Remembering

## Oral History Performance

Edited by Della Pollock

Afterword by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall

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patient attention to the essays, however, for there is much to learn from them—about the body as a medium of expression, about *doing something* with interviews, about the hard work of creation. And there is one fundamental point that historians and performance scholars certainly agree on: that stories about the past matter deeply in the present, indeed they only exist in the present.

*Remembering: Oral History Performance* makes an important, substantive contribution to an interdisciplinary understanding of oral history. We are pleased to include it in Palgrave's *Studies in Oral History* series, designed to make work based on oral history interviews available to students, educators, scholars, and the reading public. The series includes both work that is deeply grounded in interviews and work that approaches oral history theoretically, as a point of departure for an exploration of broad questions of cultural production and representation.

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## Introduction: Remembering

Della Pollock

While scholars and practitioners in any number of fields, across the university and public humanities, are turning to performance as both an analytic and a practice—as a way of both describing and entering into the creative work of social transformation—oral history and performance enjoy a unique synergy. Oral historians and performance scholars/practitioners are increasingly discovering shared and complementary investments in orality, dialogue, life stories, and community-building or what might more generally be called *living* history. By which I don't mean reenactments or heritage theater exactly but the process of materializing historical reflection in live representation as both a form (a container) and a means (a catalyst) of social action. Performance—whether we are talking about the everyday act of telling a story or the staged reiteration of stories—is an especially charged, contingent, reflexive space of encountering the complex web of our respective histories. It may consequently engage participants in new and renewed understandings of the past. It may introduce alternative voices into public debate. It may help to identify systemic problems and to engage a sense of need, hope, and vision. As live representation, performance may in effect bring imagined worlds into *being and becoming*, moving performers and audiences alike into palpable recognition of possibilities for change. Through the incorporation of oral histories into public memory, it may most fundamentally ensure that “those who have given up their time to talk, know that their words have been taken seriously” (Slim and Thompson, 2).

*Remembering* is intended to introduce some of the work currently being done at the intersection of performance and oral history.<sup>1</sup> It is not a manual.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing the specificity of oral history and performance in local contexts, it does not provide

instructions for developing oral history performances, although it does emphasize the unique integration of theory and practice, research and poetics, in each case represented here.<sup>3</sup> Each of the essays in this volume focuses intensively on specific, sensuous *processes of production and reception* and is methodologically and theoretically suggestive rather than, in any sense, prescriptive.

In turn, the essays reflect the peculiar resistance of performance to logics of cause and effect. Each author is concerned with work driven to make a difference; each moreover is working with the symbolic fabric of language, narrative, image, bodies in artful motion, and their respective interaction and interplay. As oriented as a performance may be toward change, performance does not work instrumentally. In the symbolic field of representation, effects are unpredictable, even uncontrollable. They may be fleeting or burrow deeply, only to emerge in an unexpected place, at another time. They may unfurl slowly, even invisibly, on affective currents that may compete with what we think a given performance is or should be doing. Or they may refuse to come out altogether, preferring instead to rest in the discourses of "mere" entertainment or passing pleasure.

The performance of oral history is itself a transformational process. At the very least, it translates subjectively remembered events into embodied memory acts, moving memory into re-membering. That passage not only risks but endows the emerging history/narratives with change. Accordingly, this volume turns on a promise, what I would call the essential of promise of oral history performance: that the body remembering, the bodies remembered, and the bodies listening in order to remember ("you remember, I told you . . .") will be redeemed in some kind of change—the small changes that come with repetition in different moments with different listeners; the large changes that might result from entering the memories of a whole body politic (medium-risk prisoners in Rouverol's work; striking laborers in Gordon's) into the human record of daily living. In this sense, performance is a promissory act. Not because it can only promise possible change but because it catches its participants—often by surprise—in a contract with possibility: with imagining what might be, could be, should be. As much as we may want to determine its effects—whether as a matter of intention or retrospection, it would consequently be counter-productive to do so. Whatever effects performances may have live beyond scientific controls and measures, in the ongoing reckonings of human understanding.<sup>4</sup>

What joins all the chapters is a sense that performance as promise and practice is at the heart of oral history. That insofar as oral history is a process of *making history in dialogue*, it is performative. It is cocreative, co-embodied, specially framed, contextually and intersubjectively contingent, sensuous, vital, artful in its achievement of narrative form, meaning, and ethics, and insistent on *doing through saying*: on investing the present and future with the past, re-marking history with previously excluded subjectivities, and challenging the conventional frameworks of historical knowledge with other ways of knowing. Each of the authors in this volume offers insights into the nature of oral history (as) performance, but all basically agree that the oral

historian stages a conversation in the relatively artificial context of an interview.<sup>5</sup> The interview involves its participants in a heightened encounter with each other and with the past, even as each participant and the past seem to be called toward a future that suddenly seems open before them, a future to be made in talk, in the mutual embedding of one's vision of the world in the other's. The interviewer is her/himself a symbolic presence, standing in for other, unseen audiences and invoking a social compact: a tacit agreement that what is heard will be integrated into public memory and social knowledge in such a way that, directly or indirectly, it will make a material difference. The oral history interview lifts what might otherwise dissolve into the ephemera of everyday life onto the plane of ongoing exchange and meaning-making, infusing it with the power of shifting relationships among tellers and listeners (and listeners who become tellers to tellers who become listeners) near and far.

The oral history interview is a bounded event that asserts the "competency" of the primary teller to tell a particular history.<sup>6</sup> It is framed by interpretive codes (even insofar as the tape recorder is loaded with cultural expectations) that endow that history with special meaning and value, making the interview a private/public act that uniquely joins historical accounts already shaped by prior conditions, conversations, and rehearsals with the prospect of new meanings unfolding across a panorama of reception. Understood as performance, in these among other ways, the oral history interview is an ignition point, charged by and charging its historical moment, giving so many oral historians the sense that the occasion of the interview—no more and so much more than an ordinary conversation—is *momentous*.

What then does it mean to stage oral histories? To move them from the implicit to the explicit context of public performance? What happens to the critical, interpretive vitality of the primary exchange? How does the performative process of *remembering* amplify the uncertainties and contingencies—the narrative irresolution—in history? How might the peculiar relays of *remembering* in turn enhance the *poiesis* of history—the creation and re-creation of new histories that might be the answer to crumbling communities, forgotten lives, and generations of young people lost to the presentism of tv/video/digital mediation? How might in turn *poiesis* become *kinesis*—the embodiment of symbolic knowledge in social action?<sup>7</sup>

Staged performance or "re-performance" appreciates the magnitude of the primary interview encounter by expanding it to include other listeners; rallying its pedagogical force; and trying—in some small measure—to convey the particular beauty of two people meeting over history. It moreover does so live, not only mirroring the primary telling but actively favoring oral history as a mode of *embodied knowing*—as an epistemology that lives, in Annette Kuhn's provocative words, "on the pulse" (101): precarious, contingent, sensuous, felt. Emphasizing that oral history is a performance in itself, the performance of oral history insists on the distinctive value of knowing by listening to words passed "mouth to ear . . . body to body" (Trinh, 136), words entered into viscerally charged debates about both *what* and *how* to know, and words shimmering with what may be unsaid, felt, withheld, stammered, introduced

in a pause, caught up in a breath, a sigh, an expressive rhythm, a physical or tonal gesture (see, e.g. Eisner's conversations with her interview partner, Chĩ Tõi, in the sixth chapter of this volume, or Fousekis' conversation with Carol Watts in the last).<sup>8</sup> In so doing, oral history performance challenges the textual drive toward narrative resolution and the conventional authority of more objective or objectifying modes of knowledge and representation with the power of open telling. At its best, it democratizes tellers and listeners by easing the monologic power of *what is said* into the collaborative, cogenerative, and yet potentially discordant *act of saying and hearing* it.

In so doing, oral history performance cultivates what Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga have called "theories of the flesh": the root metaphors and ideas about the world that both emerge from and "bridge the contradictions" of experience (Anzaldúa and Moraga, 23). Oral history performance refuses easy and all too conventional distinctions between experience and explanation, or body and mind—distinctions by which, for instance, scientific discourses have consistently dismissed the concrete, partial life of the "anecdote." It insists instead on the complexities of indigenous or vernacular conceptualizations of experience; the intersection of vernacular and "specialized knowledges";<sup>9</sup> and the possibility of mobilizing both through the interactive dynamics of restaging histories told and heard in interview settings.

The essays in this volume comprise something of a polemic. More or less explicitly, each author characterizes performance as central to the nature and aims of oral history. Collectively and individually, these essays suggest that performance is not so much an interesting or entertaining option as an obligation. At the most basic level, re-performance is an expression of devoted reception. It is one attempt to fulfill the promise—the sense of contractual responsibility and enormous possibility—of historical talk. Beyond the particularities of interview practice or historical method, it enacts what Kelly Oliver calls "the response-ability in subjectivity" (139): the sense that the ability to respond (response-ability) that inheres in the obligation (responsibility) to do so defines what it means to be a human self. As many of the authors in this volume suggest, beyond storytellers, we are witnesses.<sup>10</sup> We see each other and we (must) see to each other through the performance of witnessing. For Oliver, any one self is thus ontologically and ethically inextricable from "others." The self-subject as witness does not subsume or speak *for* others any more than it bespeaks an inalienable distinction between one's self and presumed other.<sup>11</sup> Rather, it gains resonance in vibrant relation to others. Accordingly, for Oliver, "the other is no longer *the* other. There is no the other, but a multitude of differences and other people on whom my sense of myself as a subject and an agent depends" (223). Oral history performance as a form of witnessing is one way of practicing the interdependence of human selves and of seeing through the past into an as-yet unspoken (much less written) future—for Oliver, one that will be, if indeed we recognize our defining role as witnesses, more just and loving.<sup>12</sup>

*Remembering* focuses specifically on *oral history-based performance*: performances that take their impetus from formal or informal oral history interviews when oral

history is understood as the re-creation of storied experience for the primary purpose of gaining social-historical perspective. It does not pretend to encompass all of the wide-ranging, related work done under the rubric of "documentary theater" or the important and equally wide-ranging work of performing autobiography.<sup>13</sup> It recognizes essential kinship with but does not focus on: family and folk storytelling; heritage drama and historical reenactments; museum exhibition and performance; a broad definition of community-based theater;<sup>14</sup> and performances of historical witness and intervention not based on oral history interviews. It is particularly concerned with the "response-ability" of the person who hears oral histories and the corresponding strength of that person's agency as someone who acts on hearing if only by telling again.

One implication of Oliver's formulation is that history cannot be held privately. No one person "owns" a story. Any one story is embedded in layers of remembering and storying. Remembering is necessarily a public act whose politics are bound up with the refusal to be isolated, insulated, inoculated against both complicity with and contest over claims to ownership. That's her story, we might say, ostensibly valorizing the teller by remaining at arm's length and failing to recognize, much less reckon with, our place in the network of social relations her story invokes. In this way, we may neutralize by privatizing a given history. As Sam Schragger has observed, oral histories are cultivated in narrative environments; they bear the dialogical imprint of many voices and perspectives.<sup>15</sup> Each is already a communal text, documenting above all the "multitude of differences and other people" that converge on any one "memory act."<sup>16</sup> Oral history performance aims to distribute the great wealth of any one or anyone's story/history: enriching each teller along the way.

Accordingly, Anna Deavere Smith's revolutionary production of *Fires in the Mirror*, followed by *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, featured what seemed an almost endless range of perspectives on the Crown Heights Riots in 1991.<sup>17</sup> Acclaimed for Smith's virtuosic replay of twenty-seven characters, *Fires in the Mirror* is as much about the poetics of historical narrative as it is about the histories those poetics uniquely engage. Concerned with the complexities of race relations in the contemporary United States, Smith looks for American "character" in vernacular rhythms and images:

Speaking teaches us what our natural "literature" is. In fact, everyone, in a given amount of time, will say something that is like poetry. The process of getting to that moment is where "character" lives. (xxxii)

Character, Smith finds, emerges "in the gaps," in those places where language fails, at those moments when it proves next to impossible to tell a whole or neat story, when the poetry of human history both rises from the rubble and falters:

My sense is that American character lives not in one place or the other, but in the gaps between the places, and in our struggle to be together in our differences.

It lives not in what has been fully articulated, but in what is in the process of being articulated; not in the smooth-sounding words, but in the very moment that the smooth-sounding words fail us. We might not like what we see, but in order to change it, we have to see it clearly. (xli)

Smith projects a cacophony of voices that, in their friction and failures, reveal the inequities that listening only for the coherence of a given narrative might otherwise obscure.

Julie Salverson complements Smith by hailing another set of gaps: those between the audience member and the lives represented on stage. Challenging what she calls an "erotics of injury"—the melancholic, often pleasurable identification with performance of/by the alleged victims or survivors of social trauma, Salverson warns against the potentially mystifying and reiterative effects of conventional empathy. She calls instead for an aesthetic of "detachment and contact":

It is no longer enough—if it ever was—to assume that theater is by its very nature about connection; now those of us who practice theater that engages with people's accounts of violent events must articulate the nature of that contact. I want to explore how theater operates as an ethical space in which a relationship between detachment and contact occurs. When, I wonder, is the meeting of lives (the narratives we construct, intuit, and perform about ourselves) about a contact that consumes the other person and reduces them to our terms? When, on the other hand, is it a contact that lets us come together differently and binds me deeply to another without collapsing either the "I" or the "other" into a totalizing "we"? (Salverson 2001, 119)<sup>18</sup>

Salverson and Smith insist on a testimonial theater filled with uncertainties and marked differences—even insofar as, for example, Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater's *The Laramie Project* is flush with questions. Placing center stage the interactions among the actor/interviewers and the residents of Laramie, Wyoming, where Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered, the play dramatizes the search for an elusive complete or total(izing) story. *The Laramie Project* has perhaps done more than any other work to popularize oral history performance.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, it has been duly criticized for smoothing over narrative disjunctions and the raw edge of homophobia that was ultimately responsible for Shepard's death, presenting a kind of *Our Town* version of contemporary, horrific violence. This has been in part the effect of repeat productions in communities across the United States in which the original actor/interviewees are re/displaced by actors playing interviewer/actors, putting the representation of Laramie and the interaction between the interviewers and residents at one further remove from the reality of audience members who might otherwise identify with the members of the Tectonic Theater company as "people-like-themselves," leading them to feel—as such—that they too might take up this

response-ability, that they might perform the role of asker/interviewer, that they might wonder harder about histories already smoothed over by time and repetition.

While this critique bears considerable weight, it also points to the (im)balance between representation and reality in all oral history performance. In addition to the gaps within and between stories (following Smith), and the gap between the lives of audience members and the lives represented on stage (following Salverson), is another crucial gap in oral history performance: that between representation and the "actual" events and tellers to which that representation refers. It would be unnecessary to pursue performance if its representational status were something to bury, hide, or escape; if its failure to provide an "authentic" experience did not in some essential way add to the understanding of history oral history promotes. While "living history" may try to collapse reality and representation to give the impression that "you were there!" all of the essays in this volume recognize the gap in re-presentation and struggle to articulate its particular value to knowing and making history.

Oral history performance is strung between reference to real events and real listener/witnesses, between recollection and anticipation of historical change. It has the peculiar temporality of the *representational real*: an engine embedded in historical time, it invokes the *beyond time* of possibility, making possibility real or at least staking the grounds of real possibilities.<sup>20</sup> In most of the projects described in this volume, the performance of reality is paradoxically a performance of possibility.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, oral history performance becomes the ethical space Salverson demands and Bruce McConachie defines in his important essay, "Approaching the 'Structure of Feeling' in Grassroots Theatre." McConachie describes a collaboration between the Williamsburg Grassroots Theatre Project and the Roadside Theatre Company in 1995–1996 based on interviews concerned with the gradual shift from segregation to desegregation in a small southern town. The project, for McConachie, exemplifies the dialectical draw forward and then back again that makes up the affective dynamics of "community-based theatre":

Community-based theatre . . . is less about representing the realities of actual or historic communities—although markers of these realities need to be present to "authenticate" the experience—and more about imagining and constructing the relationships of an ethical community for the future. The images generated in a grassroots show provide a structure of feeling that induces the audience to divide an ethical "us" from an immoral "them" and then to examine who "we" are. (42)

In all of its gaps, "betweenesses," or liminality, oral history-based performance offers less an alternative recording of the past than an ethical imaginary of a future—a future that now feels so close "we" find ourselves almost at home in it, except that we must "examine who 'we' are" before we can cross its threshold.

In this light, I am particularly moved by Natalie Fousekis' discovery, recounted in her essay here, "Experiencing History: A Journey from Oral History to Performance,"

that when she and her student-colleagues finally started literally cutting up tape logs and splicing interview transcripts—when they started playing with the gaps and messing with the isolation, insularity, and linearity of interview materials—they also finally started “acting like historians.”<sup>22</sup> Their historical investigation began with what seemed an irreverent plunge into (re)creativity. They ironically started performing their scholarly roles as historians when they stopped trying to save their interviewees’ histories not only from mortal ruin (as preservationists might) but from theatrical disrepute (as moralists after Plato’s injunctions against the unruly poet-performer undoubtedly would). The result was, as Fousekis so beautifully describes, a reluctant but steady shift in her understanding of resilient themes in the history of women’s leadership and grassroots activism, as well as of herself as a daughter, scholar, and teacher. Her own transformation is now echoed in her classrooms, where her students’ performances bring them into equally dangerous close proximity to history.

The politics of oral history performance are critical, intimate, and felt, what Madison calls a “politics of the near.” Madison began her work as a Fulbright scholar in Ghana teaching literature through performance. Her students’ performances spiraled outwards into what eventually became a public performance enacting contested perspectives on the Ghanaian “Trokosi” ritual of secluding young females in temple-shrines in reparation for crimes committed by male members of their families. The arguments that surround the Trokosi ritual draw on international human rights agendas, problems in global economics, and long-standing religious and cultural traditions. Far-reaching in its implications, the students’ work nonetheless began close to the bone of their own histories and commitments. The final performance, *Is it a Human Being or a Girl?*, grew out of the symbolic staging of literary texts that expanded concentrically to encompass urgent social issues. Moving betwixt-and-between literary texts, personal and interview narratives, local debates, and global critique, Madison found a legion of possibilities for political performance—and a politics of performed possibility:

The performer, beyond bringing movement and sound to words and flesh to feeling, opens literature to the possibility of the hidden. And, within this possibility, lies the potential for political *investment*. This political investment is of a very particular kind. It is a politics of the *near*. It is intimate and close because it circles from the boundaries of the text into our inner world. It moreover brings into focus the regulating factors governing our day-to-day lives and our personal destinies. It also puts our lives and destinies into question. Performance opens the secrets of literature because it invites embodied comparisons between undercurrents that constitute operations of power in the literary imagination and undercurrents that constitute operations of power in our lived experience. The read but unnamed and the lived but unnamed are present in the text and in life, but are often only tenuously or too partially realized. Performance promises engagement with what is otherwise hidden, oblique, or secret. This is a political enterprise.

The final performance left open the question of whether the Trokosi ritual is ultimately right or wrong. It circulated around a central gap: the unanswerable question, the single question leading to more questions, embodied in the figure of the ethnographer/recorder who repeatedly states: “I need to ask more questions.” The ethnographer’s presence heightens the reflexivity of the performance as itself an inquiry into “the read but unnamed and the lived but unnamed” politics of the ritual. In the process of excavating the “unnamed,” however, the convictions that have kept it buried become evident—and the performance becomes full of the evanescent beauty of contrary beliefs.

Laurie Lathem also struggled with the representational value of oral history performance. As a playwright teaching playwriting, Lathem confronted the ethical, political, and artistic difficulties of translating oral histories into compelling dramatic forms. While Fousekis makes the painful crossing from text to performance through scissors—and the sudden discoveries that could then be made through juxtaposition, Lathem encourages her playwrighting students to abandon their original interview narratives altogether in an effort, paradoxically, to respond to them more fully. Most of the students participating in Lathem’s Interview Project at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre had never before talked with an old person at any length. Expecting a lesson in crafting plays, they found themselves cast in the strange adventure of soliciting tales from people they’d previously pass by without a second look—and then, in the interview process, seeing them become something like celebrities before their very eyes. Lathem conveys the students’ excitement and enthusiasm, as well as their ready, resistant ethics (one student wonders: “who am I?” to mess with someone else’s story?). While she draws them into writing plays that rely on distinguishing between the interview subject and the “main character,” they struggle to remain faithful to their interviewees’ worlds and words. Eventually, Lathem notes, “somewhere between the interviews and the monologues we were now watching, the line between listening and creating had been crossed. Could anyone say where that line existed? . . . Before any writing had officially begun, the question had already been raised: whose stories were these?” The stories were and were not the students’ “own.” Nor were they, by any measure of textual fidelity, the interviewees’. The students’ final performances realized the gap between the interviewees’ stories and their own re-creations, to some extent dispossessing either student or interviewee of exclusive rights and creating something more than either might privately “own.” In the end, the students’ plays dramatized the incorporation of another’s perspective into each of their own and, in turn, the expansion of their own to reflect another’s.

For the interviewees who then became witnesses to their stories transformed through the listening/writing process, the final performances were acts of powerful confirmation of their respective histories, alive now in the memories and imaginations of a younger generation. Both the older and younger people reveled in recognition across generations. As Lathem notes, the community-building she sought began—and could have stopped—the moment the students walked into the senior

center. But as Lathem, and many of the other authors in this volume suggest, the politics of oral history performance are not unidirectional. Indeed, the most significant effects of this work may have occurred through the "doubling back" of the performance on the students whose worlds—and eyes—opened in ways beyond compare.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, it is unclear in Rouverol's work who benefited most—the North Carolina Anson County prisoners who crafted their stories into the performance, "Leaves of Magnolia: The Brown Creek Life Review Project for Young People," or the "at-risk" youths brought in to see and hear the performance. Rouverol describes in reflection, fieldnotes, excerpts from the script, and various responses to the performance, a performance process fraught with risk for all involved—for the inmates who risked power-sharing through narrative exchange, honesty and trust otherwise barred from the defensive rituals of their everyday lives, and moral inquiry into the consequences of their actions; for the interviewers/workshop leaders whose relatively weak authority made them vulnerable to challenge from the inmates and to the power of a penal system that would unpredictably require changes in the project (by preventing inmate-performers from participating and barring the initial, intended audience from attending); and for the young audience members who not only could see themselves mirrored in the inmates' storied lives but who were also literally incorporated into the performance in an interactive section that put their bodies on the same line the inmates walked. Integrated into the performance rather than positioned as, for instance, a follow-up Q&A, this section allowed young audience members to perform questions of criminal consequence *with* the inmate-performers. In the heat of these few moments of exchange, their lives became/could become interchangeable with those of the incarcerated men. In "Leaves of Magnolia," performance pushed risk and reflexivity to their respective limits, generating *real possibilities* for change.

Both Eisner and Case are oral historian/performers trying to convey, at least in part, what it means to perform oral history. Both write "towards" loss, understanding loss as a defining link between oral history and performance. When I saw Case perform "Tic(k)"—the short, one-person performance she presents here—at the Oral History Association conference in Durham, North Carolina in 2000, I looked around and also saw audience members stunned with sudden, welling tears. A sometimes playful, pointed collage that joins recollection of her grandfather's death with that of three elderly male interviewees, "Tic(k)" not only brings to the surface the mortal stakes of oral history (catch them before they die, record those libraries before they burn) but deeper bans against not only mourning those who have died but *feeling* loss, *wanting* to mourn. In the fleeting passage of performance, Case underscores both the speed with which lives pass and the living intimacies of interview-performances generally "put away" with archival materials. These are not stored in file drawers, however, but in the bodies of interviewers who become, in the interview process, "like" granddaughters, sons and daughters, mothers, fathers, and friends who remember loss, whose work is testimony to those who have passed but

who are, in the end, often left with profound desire and pain. Performance is always about to disappear. It is its peculiarly magical "now you see it, now you don't!" quality that draws us to it in the first place. But it is also its vital ephemerality that draws death close and, in this case, invites remembering not only lost lives but losing them.

Rivka Eisner and her interview-subject have worked together so intensively now that indeed they have become like sisters. A Vietnamese national living in the United States, "Chị Tỏi" (or "big sister") performs with Eisner a familial connection from which she had been effectively barred by the Vietnamese-American war: on the eve of her birth, her father left their home in the South to fight and eventually die in the North; her mother was forced underground and then eventually to the North, leaving her infant daughter behind. Chị Tỏi's story is a history of loss and separation; it is also a story of lost history—of a past that came to her in whispers, scraps, reported discourse, the remains of a charred diary, and a few family photographs. Her interview performances and Eisner's subsequent re-performances may be immediate but they are not unmediated. In this case, "liveness" means articulating the multiple layers of translation and craft that make up (for) memory.

Eisner's aesthetic becomes one of "doubling." At its most basic level, performance is a repetition. It is a *doing again of what was once done*, repeating past action in the time of acting. Because the repetition occurs in time, it differs from the original to the extent that any one moment differs from another. Judith Butler has theorized the powerful, social-disciplinary constraints on the everyday performance of gender as "performativity." But in the time of embodied performance, even the heteronormative compulsion to repeat the "corporeal style" of gendered identities can never be exact.<sup>24</sup> It is riddled with error and so, indeed, with cost. *Performativity* in the material act of *performance*, Elin Diamond argues, reveals performativity for what it is: the reiteration of gendered codes so practiced and rehearsed as to become, for all intents and purposes, invisible (Diamond, 5). Performing performativity makes the invisible—gender discourses and the disciplinary stratagems that secure their repetition—visible.<sup>25</sup> Eisner, among others, elaborates the twice-behavedness of performance, going beyond even repetition-with-a-difference toward the more radical stance of doing two, often disparate things at once, magnifying the differences performativity would quiet.

Eisner opens up the gap between the "original" and its repetitions, understanding each as differential repetitions that she stages simultaneously. Accordingly, each repetition differs not only from prior instantiations but from each other. Eisner and Chị Tỏi's worlds ricochet and rebound off of each other. Eisner doubles Chị Tỏi's story in her own words and original movement. She doubles Chị Tỏi's father's story in Chị Tỏi's recorded translation and then again in her own syncopated echo. Eisner effectively doubles up the force of Chị Tỏi's story by putting her body behind it—corroborating it in the collaborative creation and presentation of a usable (if double also in the sense of torn in two) tale of a broken family in a broken nation.

Locked in narrative identification with Chì Tòì, Eisner doesn't pretend to "be" Chì Tòì in performance. She doesn't "double" her in the sense of providing a mirror image. On the contrary, she works the hinges of their relationship and in Chì Tòì's story, seeking a likeness that travels across and between bodies, histories, and cultures—breath to breath and bone to bone—without assimilating one to the other or, in Salverson's words, creating a "totalizing 'we.'" This is one version, as Eisner explains, of the work of the interviewer-performer as a witness. What finally distinguishes Eisner and Chì Tòì, and draws them even more closely together, is that while Chì Tòì performs as a witness to a war-torn history, Eisner performs as a witness to Chì Tòì's performance: she relays in stark movement, symbol, and a symphonic layering of her own voice with the many voices that make up Chì Tòì's, what it may mean to put flesh to ghosts.

Michael Gordon collaborated with the professional company Theatre X to develop what he explicitly calls a "labor play" based on the oral histories of members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local P-40 who participated in the twenty-eight-month strike at the Patrick Cudahy meatpacking plant in Milwaukee in the late 1980s. Drawing on the long tradition of WPA theater projects and "news-paper theater," Gordon positions the play as a public forum for renewing and revising public knowledge. His specific aim is to stimulate "public discussion about such important issues as attacks on unions, plant closings, job loss, and declining living standards." Accordingly, the play, *The Line*, became a dramatic critique of the foreclosures of dominant ideology on local memory. Gordon's critical leverage importantly comes "from below," from the strikers' own sense of betrayal and broken faith. In the course of the interviews, the interviewees reflected on their class position and challenged the alleged benevolence of the free enterprise economy in which they and their families had invested lifetimes of labor and yet which, in the end, betrayed them. *The Line* is a counter-narrative. It contradicts prevailing cultural scripts in which workers exchange dedication for job security and just rewards and in which the Cudahy workers had initially, faithfully played their designated roles. Pressing an alternative against a dominant version of history, *The Line* indeed stimulated discussion of what went wrong and what should be righted. It also proceeded to right history, not only by elaborating the workers' points of view—often buried as they were under official representations—but by literally giving the workers the last, angry word.

*Touchable Stories*, the Boston-based community arts group Shannon Jackson explores, expands the terrain of oral history performance from the stage to the interactive spaces of installations and "living mazes" that focus on common ground issues of ethnic and class difference. Locating these installations in the heart of Boston communities in which interviewees may have spent as much as a year living and listening, *Touchable Stories* creates what Jackson calls "relational field[s]": spaces that manifest history in the interactions of community members around material artifacts/art objects that resemble as much as they diverge from the "real." Inviting the co-presence of community members, these events nonetheless expressly refuse to fetishize what

might otherwise be presumed to be the special authenticity of preserved objects, places, and voices. As Jackson explains, "the anonymous hands, disembodied voices, shadowed bodies, miniatures, dolls, scrimms, tapes, and videos" that make up *Touchable Stories'* installations:

resist literality and testify to the multiple technologies available to enable a moment of human connection. If this is "presence," it is one that is explicitly aware of its own production and unafraid to present a sense of discontinuity in the act of remembering. Together, *TS's* oral performances illustrate the indirect, roundabout work of tangible story-telling.

For Jackson, *Touchable Stories* positions speakers and listeners in environments that induce "infrastructural memory": awareness of a shared material relation and the operations of difference in a specific context that may, through the "indirect, roundabout work of tangible story-telling," help to form partial collectivities.

Working his or her way through the radical contextuality of *Touchable Stories'* installations, the witness is the performer, acting in the most pedestrian ways to negotiate a corner, open secret drawers, wind up a toy, even trash or "write over" conventionally untouchable (in every sense of the word—for gazing only, sacrosanct) artworks. The tactility and motility of *Touchable Stories'* work makes it, above all, an occasion for *poiesis*: for *making* memory, history, meaning and community in response. It is a dispersed interpretive context, spatializing the need beyond dialogic exchange for installations of other kinds, for installing new memories or re-remembering a past that once was or could have been, and now defines ways of being and acting in communal relation. *Touchable Stories* says history begins *here*. Touch its resonant forms. Recognize your place in its felicitous shadows and shapes. Tell it what to do *now*. And begin.

## Notes

1. All the essays in this volume are original contributions (Gordon's essay, "Memory and Performance in Staging *The Line*," is a revision of an earlier publication). Other important published work on oral history performance includes the special issue of *The Oral History Review* (1990) dedicated to oral history-based performance (essays by Della Pollock, Shaun S. Nethercott and Neil O. Leighton, and Chris Howard Bailey, and Pam Schweitzer on "Reminiscence Theatre" in Britain). On how performance is being engaged in other fields, see also Dwight Rogers, Paul Frellick, and Leslie Babinski's experimentation with performance in their efforts to improve the experiences of first-year teachers.
2. Other work that is more directive for practice and that has been critical to a variety of community-based projects includes Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, and Michael Rohd, *Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue*.



3. Following, directly and indirectly, Dwight Conquergood's 2002 mandate for performance as activist research.
4. See Phelan on her powerful insight into the afterlife of performances that disappear into the processes of "reckoning."
5. See Schragger's fundamental insight: "What the oral historian does is to provide a new context for the telling of mainly preexistent narrative" (78-79).
6. See the definitional framework Bauman offers in the title essay in *Verbal Art as Performance* as well his complementary perspective in *Story, Performance, and Event*.
7. Conquergood charts a course in performance studies from *mimesis* to *poiesis* to *kinesis*. He celebrates "the restless energies and subversive powers of kinesis," taking up de Certeau and Renato Rosaldo's respective efforts to put "culture into motion" (Conquergood, 1998, 31; quoting Rosaldo, 91).
8. See Cvetkovich's powerful discussion of interviewing lesbian participants in the AIDS activist group, ACT UP. Intrigued by the radical potential of oral history to "help create the public culture that turns what seems like idiosyncratic feeling into historical experience," Cvetkovich is also troubled by the methodological power of the interviewer/author to reveal intimacies as well as, in some cases, to maintain silence (166).
9. See Madison "That Was My Occupation."
10. In his foreword to Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days*, Victor Turner describes Myerhoff's sense of "our species as *Homo narrans*, humankind as story-teller, implying that culture in general—specific cultures, and the fabric of meaning that constitutes any single human existence—is the 'story' we tell about ourselves" (xv). Myerhoff claims "The tale certifies the fact of being and gives sense at the same time. Perhaps these are the same, because people everywhere have always needed to narrate their lives and worlds, as surely as they have needed food, love, sex, and safety" (271). Turner extends this understanding in later work, defining humankind as *Homo performans*: "If man is a sapient animal, a toolmaking animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is, no less, a performing animal, *Homo performans*, not in the sense, perhaps, that a circus animal may be a performing animal, but in the sense that man is a self-performing animal—his performances are, in a way, *reflexive*, in performing he reveals himself to himself" (*The Anthropology of Performance*, 81).
11. Answering to some extent Alcott's landmark essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others."
12. I want to note but cannot begin to encompass in this brief introduction the vast literature on witnessing and memory that grounds, extends, and challenges Oliver.
13. For complementary work on the performance of autobiography see e.g., Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor, and M. Heather Carver, eds., *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography*; the special issue of *Women and Performance* 10.19-20 (1999) devoted to performing autobiography, and e.g., Anne Davis Basting, "'God is a Talking Horse': Dementia and the Performance of Self"; Rena Fraden on Rhodessa Jones' powerful Medea Project; Jonathon Kalb, "Documentary Solo Performance: The Politics of the Mirrored Self"; Chris Anne Strickling, "Actual Lives: Cripples in the House," and Rosemarie Garland Thomson, "Staring Back: Self-Representation of Disabled Performance Artists."
14. See e.g., Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus, eds., *Performing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Community-Based Performance*; Eugene van Erven, *Community Theatre: Global Perspectives*; and e.g., Linda Frye Burnham, "Reaching for

- the Valley of the Sun: The American Festival Projects *Untold Stories*"; Sonja Kuflinec, "[Walking Through A] Ghost Town"; and Diana Taylor, "'You are Here': The DNA of Performance."
15. See Schragger.
  16. See Bal, Crew, and Spitzer, eds., *Acts of Memory*. This perspective is certainly influenced by the Bakhtinian "revolution" in thinking about voice as dialogically composed at the intersection of any number of often conflicting discursive contexts.
  17. For important critique of Smith's work, see Kondo; for helpful elaboration, see Denzin, 89-105.
  18. See also Salverson 1996, 2000.
  19. Note the grassroots history of such work in companies like Tale Spinners in San Francisco (thanks to Mercilee Jenkins for this reference) and the Roadside Theatre out of Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Note also the recent success of *The Exonerated*, by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, at The Culture Project in New York. The play, based on interviews with sixty people who had spent from two to twenty-two years on death row before being exonerated for crimes they did not commit, featured a rotating cast of celebrity actors in "readers' theatre" style. Studs Terkel's work has, of course, often been called into voice and production, perhaps most notably in Derek Goldman's adaptation of Terkel's *Will The Circle Be Unbroken?: Reflections on Death, Rebirth, and a Hunger for a Faith* at the Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, 2004.
  20. Correlating to Richard Schechner's infamous assertion, following on Victor Turner's sense of the "subjunctive" nature of ritual, that "sometimes—especially in the theater—it is necessary to live as if 'as if' 'is'" (Schechner, xiii).
  21. For a complementary perspective, see Madison on "Performance, Personal Narratives, and the Politics of Possibility."
  22. As an interesting corollary, see Tim Raphael's alternative pedagogy for pursuing issues in the history of white supremacy. Based in part on Hayden White's sense of the analogous relation between writing history and writing a play, Raphael explains: "By underscoring the similarities of the tools and techniques employed by historians and writers of theatrical 'fiction,' students would, I hoped, begin to develop a critical stance toward the implied inevitability of the historical narratives they encountered. By situating historical writings within a field of multiple narrative possibilities, I hoped to stimulate students to imagine their writing as an installment in an ongoing dialogue out of which historical 'truth' emerges as a contingent product of a contestational process waged between competing discourses" (127-128).
  23. For a complementary/alternative pedagogy, see Armstrong, 2000.
  24. See Butler 1991 and 1993.
  25. On "doubling," see also Pollock (1999), particularly ch. 4, "Secrets/Doubles."

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