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Memory, Remembering, and Histories of Change

A Performance Praxis

DELLA POLLOCK

The feminist philosopher, Julia Kristeva, recently declared that, "faced with the invasion of the spectacle, we can still contemplate the rebellious potentialities that the imaginary might resuscitate in our innermost depths. It is not a time of great works, or perhaps, for us, contemporaries, they remain invisible. Nevertheless," she argues, "by keeping our intimacy in revolt we can preserve the possibility of their appearance" (1997/2002, p. 13). Referring primarily to the intimacies of psychoanalysis, Kristeva articulates a praxis of mundane transference and disclosure that goes well beyond claims for compassion and unproblematized "empathy."[1] What she calls the "invasion of the spectacle" describes in many ways the introversion of the extroversion Guy Debord found in the rise of capital. The essential movement of the spectacle, for Debord, "consists of taking up all that existed in human activity *in a fluid state* so as to possess it in a congealed state as things which become the exclusive value by their *formulation in negative* of lived value" (1977/1983, entry 35). The society of the spectacle Debord describes is one in which appearance subsumes lived relation:

> The world at once present and absent which the spectacle makes visible is the world of the commodity dominating all that is lived. The world of the commodity is thus shown for what it is, because its movement is identical to the estrangement of men among themselves and in relation to their global product. (entry 37)

Capital, once the operative secret of the ideological machine, now becomes mirrored in the extent of goods produced: "Capital is no longer the invisible center which directs the

mode of production; its accumulation spreads it all the way to the periphery in the form of tangible objects. The entire expanse of society is its portrait" (entry 50).

For Kristeva, this expansionism is also an "invasion." The consolidation of production and its products as "spectacle" turns inward on the subject, surrogating the self-*seen* for the *scene* of subjective interaction. Accordingly, sustained and deliberate intimacy may be a nascent form of revolt. At this juncture of psychoanalysis and social theory is the counteractive movement of *lived relation* and the vitality of a collective imaginary that may turn spectacle inside out into visionary possibilities and the "rebellious potentialities" of "great works."

In this essay, I will address a critical performance practice that links the work of preservation and imagination in order to "preserve the possibility" of great acts through what Kristeva considers the revolutionary work of intimacy. This evolving praxis entails paring down the exchange of memory to the unsteady contingencies and risks of mutual remembering. It in turn suggests the power to intervene on Debord's "society of the spectacle" through the resurgent, lived value of public re-remembering.

I will focus on two aspects:[2] first, one version of historical intimacy I have come to call "listening out loud," and, second, its manifestation in a recent public event, "Desegregation and the 'Inner Life' of High Schools," which in many ways took spectacular claims for integration as its nemesis. The event did not so much question or critique pervasive, sedimented conclusions about the achievement of integration or even the lack thereof but mobilized a rough concord about work yet to be done. Through its modest but hard-won intimacies, it preserved the possibility of a critical and hopeful racial politics covered over by triumphalist (or declensional) accounts of *Brown v. Board of Education*.[3]

Integration is a good story. It embeds a vision of radical breach and redress into a narrative hardened by repetition into fact and the "past." A story of change may thus become a history hardened against change. In general, and in the particular instance of the desegregation performance project, "listening out loud" interrupted the spectacular condensation of story and history, drawing on oral history exchange to dissolve even liberal pride into a pool of (re)new(ed) rememberings.

Oral histories draw (historical) fact and (storied) symbol into the precarious, cocreative process of memory-making. Doing oral history involves staging a conversation in the relatively artificial context of the interview.[4] It engages its participants in a heightened, reflexive encounter with each other and with the past, even as each participant and the past seem to be called into being and becoming by an as-yet unknown future. The interviewer is herself a symbolic presence, invoking not only other, unseen audiences but promising—as if by bodily contract alone—that what is heard will be incorporated into public memory and acted on in some way, that it will make a difference. Oral histories thus write the past into the present on the promise of an as yet unimagined, even unimaginable future. They *dream* the past—performing *what happened* as an image of *what might happen*. Entwining *what is* with the normative claims of *what might be*, oral histories tell the past in order to tell the future—not to predict, to reveal, or to foreclose on it but to catch it in ethical threads drawn in the act of telling.

It was with this performative vision of oral history in mind that, in the spring of 2001, I embarked on a collaborative project with my colleague in the Department of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the director of the Southern Oral History Program there, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, a project that we came to call "Desegregation and the 'Inner Life' of High Schools." The project involved coordinating our respective courses on oral history, and oral history and performance, around issues of desegregation in Chapel Hill and the southeastern region more

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generally. It culminated in an afternoon of performances and presentations that retold the substance of student interviews to a gathered audience of approximately one hundred friends, interview participants, invited guests, interested local residents, scholars, and family members.

The event drew into tight focus the open, uneasy correlation between two social and aesthetic *goods*—integration and identification. While desegregation may be described as the restructuring of major institutions for formal equity, integration suggests a more personal, often unquestioned commitment to *knowing the other as one's self* on the logic that: if I become you, I know you as me, and social differentiation—and the hierarchies tenuously balanced upon it—collapse into "color-blind" sameness. Integration as or by identification recommends the assimilation of the raced "you"/other to the unraced "I"/one—or, at best, I to you, ignoring altogether the limits of "becoming" an-other in the name of eliminating strangeness and estrangement. What we discovered, among so many other things, was that intimate strangeness might be a lived value that could answer to estrangement even insofar as it dramatized the limits of representation. In the end, we achieved what one student called a "fantastic failure": while the temptation was to believe that we could create integration-as identification-by-imitation (or mimetic representation), it quickly became clear that this was no more possible than it was desirable. In the end, all and everything we could offer was the ashen glow of broken and breaking memories fanned into the fire of creative possibility by the rough intimacies of student interviews and reperformance.

I stumbled onto the process I am calling "listening out loud" over a dozen years ago as part of developing a regional performance tour based on interviews with workers in the textile industry.[5] On the face of it: a simple exercise, listening out loud takes up Trinh Minh-ha's eloquent charge: "To listen carefully is to preserve. But to preserve is to burn, for understanding means creating" (1989, p. 121). Begun in the spirit of preservation that drives much oral history practice—the desire to save stories from both political obscurity and the ravages of mortality, listening out loud sets fire to the thing saved: through the course of conversational interviews, improvised retellings, scenic description, poetic transcription, and public rehearsal, the story as a historical artifact goes up in the flames of committed understanding, becoming the molten energy of re-creation. The stories the students tell in the end are not verbatim. They resemble the first-told versions only or, perhaps, at their best, in their evocation of the "innermost depths" of the storyteller. They reflect as much on the transformative process of listening, telling, and retelling as on what is told. And in the case of the desegregation project: they burned—through distrust and sentimentality—into something like the heart of possibility.

The practice begins with an informal interview, a conversation that focuses primarily on one person and then the other. This conversation may occur over the course of several meetings and days, or in two short periods during a long class session. When I initiate this process, students typically start scrambling for paper and pens and wondering where they can obtain a tape recorder. Assumptions about what composes an interview kick in. Clearly the first assumption is that it involves a recording device of some kind. I tell them they can use only the technology of the ear. That they must listen body to body, heart to heart, not so much recording as absorbing the other person's story. I then generally talk with them some about what it means to *listen hard* and to learn something *by heart*.

The room is suddenly stuffy. The students are nervous. We all shift and fidget. I have taken something away from people I hardly know. Something that is clearly important to them. I stay my course. We talk about their

confusion and anxieties. I suggest that the interview conventions they had expected to use might have kept things somewhat cooler; I encourage them to explore—and to use—the rising heat.

Simultaneously invoking and refusing assumptions cultivated by the spectacularity of TV talk shows and conventional social survey techniques generates a performative framework for what is often, then, a supercharged interaction. Challenging some of the residually positivist critique of oral history method, this exercise initiates a subjectivist approach that requires something as yet unnameably *more* of the participants as human beings in intimate, temporal-historical relation, one to the other. I indicate that this is an exercise, an experiment, a first trial, a *try out*, an audition, an auditory experience; you will be *audience* to each other, I tell them, easing a quick slide from the experimental controls and gridlike patterning of some social science to the confusion and chaos of embodiment.

I then ask them to tell each other's story (the story each heard) *in one to two minutes, in the first person*—using "I" but not using names, substituting "This is what I heard:" for the usual "Hi. My name is. . . ." (The room soon echoes with rounds of "*This is what I heard:*" "*This is what I heard:*").

Keen to impersonation as a form of comedy and caricature, the students are immediately leery of exaggerating superficial qualities or details. Their astuteness on this point seems to be enhanced by a sudden, reflexive awareness that they don't want anyone to impersonate *them*. They start looking around the room to see who will *see* them, or is it: who *won't* see them: who will be party to someone else's mis/representation of them? If they weren't already, they are now beginning to feel really out of (representational) control.

I have to say that I don't try to ease as much as to condition this anxiety by, first of all, encouraging them to think of the "return" performances as an extension of the primary act of *listening hard* and as a variation on the kind of secondhand storytelling that we do everyday, incorporating others' memories into the body of our own and then again into others' through public reperformance.[6]

I also exhort them to work from below appearances. I point them away from both the external features of the performer and their correlate in the surface text—or what could be called the word-score of the performance each received—toward resounding images; patterns of emphasis, hesitation, and silence; qualities of voice and interaction. This is usually enough to shift them out of a kind of deer-caught-in-the-headlights defensiveness into active curiosity. It suggests *a more literary than journalistic interest*, affirms *the listener's role in making meaning*, unburdens the entire project of the kind of text-centrism that favors the text-*artifact* to the relational *art* of telling, and introduces the pleasures of *mutually attentive improvisation*.[7]

Finally, I suggest that their concerns already signify readiness to *get it right*. I can't tell you how often students express their resistance to this process as fear about not "getting it right" and desire to "get it right," their perfectly justified concerns about what might happen to their stories in performance leading them immediately to *get* the ethical issues at the heart of oral history practice—including the impossibility of ever representing another person exactly and the problem of obscuring or patronizing someone else's story by presuming to speak *for* him or her—and so, at least in part: *already* getting it right.

What's "right" in this case is not the kind of empathic identification that is often taken to be a self-evident good in performance and communication studies. Empathy is a good thing. But it is not always the right good thing.

I was consulting with a colleague recently about the possibility of developing a prison writing workshop into a performance. She shared with me some of the remarkably accomplished poems and stories from the workshop. I asked her participants possibly f work. "No!," she balk own, in her own voi expected this response voice and narrative a has gained momentur on owning one's voice cal valence in the con denied. I was sympath of the reiterations of (its implications for, at ism. Despite my colle and the vast body of f ported them, I couldn politics of her quick than it resisted the in recreating the story as doxically, even perv estrangement.

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workshop. I asked her how she felt about the participants possibly performing each other's work. "No!," she balked. Each should do her own, in her own voice. To some extent, I expected this response. It is a ready claim on voice and narrative as private property that has gained momentum from feminist claims on owning one's voice and that gains a political valence in the context of all other rights denied. I was sympathetic and yet suspicious of the reiterations of (capital) ownership and its implications for, at best, rugged individualism. Despite my colleague's good intentions and the vast body of feminist theory that supported them, I couldn't help but feel that the politics of her quick "No!" reflected more than it resisted the invasion of the spectacle, recreating the story as commodity, and paradoxically, even perversely risking further estrangement.

I offered the listening out loud practice as a rough model for another way of looking at things. When I briefly described performances the students gave in return for each other's accounts, "Oh!" she said, "total empathy!"

I agreed at the time, pleased to think that my short take on narrative exchange had jostled the commonsense stability of the private property model. My colleague quickly identified the difference between a performance that was about separate people telling their separate lives and one that was about what could happen *between* people in that process. The image of "total empathy" carried a utopian vision of alliance and understanding across difference. It suggested qualities of warmth, trust, and solidarity from which the incarcerated women with whom she was working were personally and institutionally guarded. And yet I had to back off from both "total" and "empathy."

There is nothing complete about the kinds of identification that occur in the return performances. Nothing "total." In fact, it seems that it is the incompleteness and sometimes raw partiality of these performances that makes them both particularly unnerving and exhilarating. Empathy is clearly a principal dynamic here, but it would be a mistake to overemphasize its value, especially at the expense of countervailing dynamics—dynamics that emphasize social difference without reverting to individualism. While I recognize the political power of identification, through the next few examples I want to consider the performative force of *disidentification* along two main axes: *differentiation*, or the delineation of identity boundaries, and *misrecognition*, or the dialectics of identity play and replay. These dynamics work, I would argue, precisely because they *work against* the grain of empathy.[8] In so doing, they distinguish performance from spectacularity in Debord's sense. They keep historical intimacies from being taken up "in a congealed state as things which become the exclusive value by their *formulation in negative* of lived value" by keeping them unstable, ongoing, difficult, highly reflexive (down to the most minute detail), and often very messy.

Differentiation may be most evident in the Brechtian sense of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (roughly, "alienation effect") of the familiar becoming strange, here, however, tuned to the strangeness of sudden familiarity.

A female student recounts—play by careful play—the details of her male interview partner's crowning, high school football game: "I received . . . and then I ran . . . he tried to intercept but I . . ." Everyone laughs with her, gently, recognizing what she clearly knows: that she is not the "I" of whom she speaks. And yet laughter turns to something like awe at the fact that she doesn't miss a beat. With almost no time to prepare, she moves through the long, measured sequence with perfect regard for its integrity and for the meaningfulness of each, apparently slight detail left in her reverberant care. She is like someone trying to speak with due courtesy in her foreign host's tongue.

Another student starts only to find herself suddenly weeping through her friend's

account of moving from India to the United States. She didn't know, she says later, she didn't know. The friend trails tears too, her back straight, gazing in silent repose into the eyes of people listening to her although she isn't speaking and, indeed, doesn't have to. Her eyes well with a sense of vindication and recognition; her friend and teller's with sorrow, indignation, surprise, and some dismay. She feels *for*, *with*, *on behalf of*, and *in response to* her friend. This isn't a mimesis of feeling in the sense of a direct copy. The performer isn't feeling—and doesn't pretend to feel—what her friend felt. But the friend's—or first performer's—feelings are doubled, and doubled again—one body to another, and past to present. Both the primary teller and the listener/teller are moved in corresponding but markedly different ways. Both weep now with the power—and grandeur—of bringing the depths of their private encounter into the light of public regard. Both also weep with the genuine pain of becoming isolated in their relationship, of being separated in strangeness: of entering *unknowing*, suddenly *not knowing* what they thought they knew or presumed too well to know: each other.

Misrecognition may mean seeing one's self in a kind of funhouse mirror—with painful clarity and/or pleasurable curiosity:

One student, after hearing his proxy teller faithfully report that "my father left me" at an early age, noted that, in all the years he'd told this story, he'd never used the phrase "left me." We all winced. A violation. A repositioning of the teller as a pathetic victim. The performer apologized, stricken with guilt. No, no, the initial teller responded, to our visible discomfort. This will forever change how I think about my story. We thought he was joking. No, no, he insisted more adamantly, indicating that he neither now saw himself as the distorted image of the abandoned kid, as if the performer's version were the correct one, as if the performer knew better than he who he really was; nor was he bitterly distancing himself from someone who had been "left." Rather, for the first time, he gave himself permission to think about why he never used this phrase, about how much cultural baggage this conventional locution carried, and how he had alternatively constructed his sense of himself in story. He ended up happily *in between* the story he told and the story he heard, in a place of heightened *reflexivity* and *re-creativity*: pivoting on a phrase, having heard himself remade in another's image, he began to *wonder* about himself and his story, and felt encouraged to rethink/remake both.

Another student responded to hearing herself mirrored in an account of a broken family, alcoholism, and abuse with some consternation: "That was so depressing! I'm a cheerful person!" Coming back hard on her listener-teller's litany of facts, she nonetheless felt confounded by the bleakness of the facts as such, and the extent to which they neglected or obscured her sense of herself as "cheerful." She resisted the apparent elision of the facts of her life and her attitude toward them, finding a difference there that she wanted to hang on to—and yet that continued to hang in the air, despite her protestations: a figure of shifting and contested perspectives. She wanted her story back. We wanted to give it to her—but there was no going back exactly. Her history as story had become irretrievably part of collective rehearsal.

In both of these instances, misrecognition involved an element of *recognition*: I never use that phrase; that was so depressing!—and *refusal*: in response, each student basically said: that's not me. But neither made simply regressive claims on their "original" stories. Neither said *he or she got it wrong; here's what I said*. . . . Both, rather, found themselves in the peculiar place of being critically distanced from the "me" they initially represented and from the "not me" they saw represented by their partners. Each was left to work through the performative dialectics of what Richard Schechner, combining insights from the psychoanalytic work of ritual studies by Arnold Bateson, and Victor Tur not me"—the self who defined than he or sh replay.[9] Beyond the op "not me" is the possibili tender spiral outward i than a foundational rea playful figure of a doub We'd normally say tha cancels out the first, retu "me." Within the perf this exercise, however, t a reflexive object—" That's not me! . . . but i

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psychoanalytic work of D. W. Winnicott and ritual studies by Arnold Van Gennep, Gregory Bateson, and Victor Turner, has called the "not not me"—the self who is no more originally defined than he or she is lost in mimetic replay.[9] Beyond the opposition of "me" and "not me" is the possibility of a self turning in a tender spiral outward into remaking. Rather than a foundational reality, "me" becomes the playful figure of a double negative: "not not." We'd normally say that the second negative cancels out the first, returning us to the positive "me." Within the performative grammar of this exercise, however, the "I" is displaced into a reflexive object—"me" twice-removed: That's not me! . . . but it's also *not* not-me!

This student, moreover, might as well have been saying: That's not right or that's *not not-right*, morphing as she did everyone's initial fears about getting it right or wrong into points of collective inquiry—what happened in the transfer from the initial teller to the listener-teller to us? What discursive constraints or imperatives led her listener to convey a more "depressed" or self-pitying tone than she either thought she conveyed or performed in the first place? Is one version more "right" than another? On what basis would we make that call? Accordingly, what's "right" begins to shift tectonically from a figure of either validity (a measure of accuracy: he got the facts "right" after all) or ownership (as in: who has rights to this story?) to a figure of value. The question becomes: what *good* is lost or gained in the triangulation of this story between teller, listener/teller, and secondary listeners, of whom the first teller is now one? Matters of textual fidelity and property rights melted into ethical intimacy; and the smaller, the more intimate the practice of ethical engagement the students pursued, the more passionate the public inquiry that ensued.

There is an element of unrequited love in this practice—a desire for total empathy or perfect mirroring that can never be and maybe should never be fully realized, and yet that propels the exchange forward. The distances provoked by disidentification help to shift the I/you, self/other relationship with which the participants typically begin into a tentative I/thou ethic of respect and appreciation. In turn, the performative relay sets up a play of ideal selves, linking personal investments in being seen and being seen well to desires to see and represent each other as well as possible, resulting in what I can only call consistently and remarkably dignified performances. The strange imbalances and asymmetries of this exchange seem to increase its affective weight, suggesting why one student described the experience in this way: "*I feel what she's feeling so much more . . . and so remember it more.*" It may also be why these stories seem to lodge themselves so fully in collective memory, becoming points of ongoing reference and return, creating *more* yet—more stories, more reflection, more—and more intense—disidentification, more sensuous, embodied responsiveness.[10]

The practice seems to yield at least this hard lesson: a story is not a story until it is told; it is not told until it is heard; once it is heard, it changes—and becomes open to the beauties and frailties of *more* change; or: *a story is not a story until it changes*. Indeed, until *it* changes or until it changes *someone else*,[11] until it becomes part of the vital histories of change it recounts. Finally, then, for now: the practice defies the color-blind fantasy of integration as identification or knowing the other as one's self. In this practice, the "I" who becomes "you" who is "not-not-me" trembles at the shimmering horizon of all that "I" don't know about "you"; the "I" I become in telling your story is one *who doesn't and can't possibly—in any kind of full or total sense—know you*, who learns the limits of representation—and begins to enjoy and to remember the selves that emerge within those limits nonetheless or maybe "*so much more.*"

The desegregation project would elaborate the minimalist "listening out loud"

practice into minimalist reperformance by listening, telling, relistening, and retelling again, preserving the stories told in the heat of cocreative understanding. Begun with great enthusiasm, the project came to a sudden halt when Jacquelyn first sought support from the leaders of the alumni association of the local, formerly black high school. The president of the Lincoln High School alumni association, Ed Caldwell, initially refused, arguing that the university had studied the hell out of the black community without making the promised difference, without giving anything back. He invoked the long and painful history of the relationship between the University of North Carolina and the black community when he insisted that our project would be for us alone, to sit on the shelves of the library, never heard from again. He eventually agreed to avail us of critical contacts but cautioned us to tread lightly on ground that had, apparently, already been trammeled.

We proceeded, chastened—even mortified—and tense. The provisional result was an afternoon of presentations and performances for an invited audience of interview participants and invested community members that culminated in these comments from Ed, who returned performance for performance by rising from his seat in the front row, turning toward the audience, and recounting, first of all, his first memories of learning history—learning "who you are," who he is—through stories his grandmother told to him on her front porch while he watched his pals run down the street to play. He then became insistent:

Let me say this:
I think it's very hard,
for both
black,
white,
Asian,
or whatever,
to try to mix,
if they don't feel comfortable.
But you know,
it's the growth,
of the individual:
when you
can step
beyond
what the
tribe—
I'm going to call it the tribe—
expects you to do,
you can start to,
to buck the tribe,
and say,
"That's not for me."
And that means,
within yourself,
you're beginning to grow
and that you're an individual.
Tribe's going to try to knock you down
and make you conform. . . .
But you know,
it took me a long time to,
to study religions and whatever,
and I have evolved.
And I am not about to let
no professed Christians tell me how to think.

(Audience laughs.)

And I'm going to move about,
based on my growth.
I'm not going to let the tribe tell me,
that this is the way we've always done it and this is the way that we do it.
And I think that,
when you begin
In high school yo
the young people
emotional
fortitude,
and whatever,
to stand outside
of the peer grou
just as many bla
get on those blac
as white kids get
And it's not easy
to buck them,
and say,
"I'm an individu
But when you d
you, you have b
And that's what
That's why we c
the,
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and whatever
because we as in
will not stand u
our peer groups
our churches,
our buddies . . .
And, what's bee
being here toda
is that you all w
think.
I cried as much

(Ed gestures toward the front row, his fri Gilgor, who was, at photographic docum for the local museu with them.)

when you begin to grow—
In high school you wouldn't expect
the young people to have the
emotional
fortitude,
and whatever,
to stand outside
of the peer groups—
just as many black peer groups may,
get on those black kids,
as white kids get on them.
And it's not easy,
to buck them,
and say,
"I'm an individual."
But when you do,
you, you have begun to arrive.
And that's what's going on.
That's why we can't get rid of
the,
the professed segregation,
and whatever
because we as individuals,
will not stand up to our friends,
our peer groups,
our churches,
our buddies . . .
And, what's been so heartfelt,
being here today,
is that you all were beginning to
think.
I cried as much as you did Bob.

(Ed gestures toward a white man sitting in the front row, his friend of many years, Bob Gilgor, who was, at the time, producing a photographic documentary of Lincoln High for the local museum; the audience laughs with them.)

Ah, I mean it's just been,
exhilarating to me.
And,
Jacquelyn Hall,

(Ed points a mock scolding finger at Jacquelyn who is standing on the sidelines of the audience.)

Girl,
I came up there,
to your class,
and I was very strong—

(Jacquelyn smiles broadly and answers, "Yes!")

about what I expected to come out of
this.
And it has passed
my expectations.
You've got— *(extends his hand out over the entire audience)*
you're all just great.
I've got you as missionaries
going out to do . . . whatever.
Okay,
sometimes
you're going to have to be challenged
by
people that are not as far evolved as
you are. But you know you've got
to stand up.

(Gestures toward Bob in the front row.)

This is my best friend.
Okay.
We have lunch every Wednesday.
And we talk about different things.
I give him—

(Bob stands and interrupts Ed with a hug. They remain standing together with their arms

around each other's shoulders. Audience members laugh, clap and make warm, surprised comments. Bob speaks over the tumult: "He's my brother. He is. He is. He's a man of character." Ed continues:)

And his children,
they come to me as if
I'm Uncle Ed.
They talk to me.
And that's,
that's what,
what *has to happen.*
So, this has been great.

(Ed looks at and addresses one of the performers, Shannon Best, in her seat in the audience.)

Young lady,
I cried the whole time you talked.

(Audience laughs and nods and comments in agreement.)

You're a strong person.
You decide to do whatever—
And then you found out that your uncle
had evolved.
So.
That's it.

(He raises both hands up in surrender, tears welling.)

I'm going to sit down.

(Audience claps as Ed and Bob sit.)

I've let Ed go on here much as he did after the performance for any number of reasons, not the least of which is that it is important to hear and to see how deeply rooted his praise was in personal memory, collective memory, public reflection, affective investment, political critique, and hope. He sits down on the edge of hope. This was no formal praise. No pat on the back for a job well done. Even what at the time felt like the worrisome length of Ed's comments (would he stall out conversation with monologue?) proved to be a vigorous refusal of another kind: a refusal to let his praise stand uncontextualized, to let the performance go without nurturing its deepest roots and furthest reach, to fail to articulate the depth of his own turnaround from suspicion of the university's part in spectacularizing black history to this final confidence in the promise of the work to which he now paid witness.

I could stop here and make this a story of personal and political heroism: University Project Wins Over Black Leaders; Professors Beat the Political Odds—but I can't, of course, without succumbing to the same logic of liberal apologia and redemption that has secured fantasies of color-blind integration in the U.S. cultural imaginary. Doing so, moreover, would foreclose on the possibility of entering the intimacies of reperformance into the collective memory and imagination of how we might continue to make and remake histories of change. In the next few pages, I'd like to offer any number of examples of how, to the contrary, performances conditioned by listening out loud preserved the possibility of histories of change.[12] I'd like to describe Melanie's explosive improvisation on the memories of a white elementary school teacher nearing retirement whose passion could not be hidden under either her own or Melanie's shy demeanor. I'd like to tell about Kit's interviews with his distant aunt and her best friend, both schoolteachers, who drew Kit into a taut triangulation of gender, generation, and color. I wish I could describe the steady force with which Constance carefully folded and piled clean laundry, performing a kind of homage to her mother's domestic labor while telling us what her mother had never before told her: how class at least as much race kept her

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isolated in the first years of integrated schooling, and then kept her out of school, caring for her home and family under threat of an alcoholic father. Each of these performances, like each of the others, was crossed through with what the student previously didn't know, what he or she might not have known, and awe-ful/grateful recognition of how much yet then remains to be known. At the very moment of retelling, acquaintance, aunt, mother became more intimate and more strange, the strangeness of each intimacy revolting against, above all, the *knowingness*—angry, pious, naïve—that sustains closed narratives of integration and preempts ongoing inquiry into the nature of raced relations.

Each performance opened up issues of racial politics that far exceeded the relatively narrow thematics of desegregation. This was perhaps nowhere more clear than in Shannon Best's performance—the one to which Ed Caldwell referred at the end of his comments when he said "Young lady/I cried the whole time you talked" and on which I will now focus, if only as a direct complement to Ed's strongly affective, although in no way simply "empathic," backward and forward spiral of remembering and reflection.

As part of an early assignment that asked students to reflect on the first time they encountered color (the first time they recalled becoming race-conscious), Shannon revealed her surprise as an eight-year-old watching TV and seeing her grandfather on the screen dressed in the garb of a grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. A tough white girl, braced for anything it seemed, Shannon went on to describe some of what you'll read below: the course of her engagement to Eddie, the black guy she'd been dating for some time, her family's bitter response, and her return dismissal of them. Shannon was at a loss as to whom to interview for the course project. I encouraged her to consider talking with members of her family. She was dumbfounded, sure of what she would find there: flat bigotry, toxic hatred, or what she repeatedly called "ugliness." Why bother?

She proceeded nonetheless, discovering first of all that the study of desegregation required as much a study of whiteness as of blackness. Shannon's assumption that we should all be talking with African Americans suggests that the history of desegregation was something that happened to African Americans alone—that "they" were integrated into "our" world. While well-intended, this assumption continues to black out the role of whites in both enabling and inhibiting integration, sustains the white myth of integration as a done deal, and further distances whites from a history to which they may be otherwise dedicated by assigning "rights" and implicitly responsibilities elsewhere. Pivoting, however unconsciously, on the assumption that one person or group can own a historical narrative, Shannon initially, respectfully disowned this one, in effect saying: this is not my story.

To the extent that Shannon identified with a history of oppression, she also separated herself from it by caricature and the performance of disgust.[13] She not only knew but knew all too well what fools her family members were and she wanted none of it. And yet returning to her family of origin, Shannon, like other white students, found complexities that challenged her segregated sense of herself—a sense that, more often than not, depended on the same us-them/high-low thinking for which these students blamed their father's or mother's or uncle's or grandparents' race hatred.

Shannon was an accomplished performer. The course of this project can only be described as a gradual stripping away of her training, leaving her personally and professionally vulnerable, appearing somewhat less than spectacular, even amateurish and unprepared. She began working with the interview material early in the semester, in one presentation staging the whole scene of an emerging race riot at a high school in Greenville, North Carolina, at about a ten-foot remove from the audience,

"acting out" the story, mimetically substituting a closed umbrella for the lug wrench pulled from the trunk of a car, and so on. When I suggested that she return to the listening exercise and restart by just telling the story of the interview, she replied, suddenly streaming tears: "I can't. Please don't make me. I can stage it. I can block anything!" Shannon desperately wanted to avoid the kind of vulnerability she knew a less imitative approach would require.

The performance she gave as part of the final afternoon event was a complete surprise to me and to everyone else in class, including, it seemed, Shannon. I'd seen it coming—but not this far. As spectacle, the performance failed brilliantly. The appearance/text were out of rational(ized) control. Shannon began talking too soon. She never managed to get her costume straight; the jacket that was meant to resemble her uncle's remained awkwardly wrapped around one shoulder. Her one attempt at using props mimetically—smoking a cigarette the way her uncle did—never got past the rhythmic tamping down of the tobacco, a gesture that incidentally may have been more telling than any more realistic long drag that might have followed. All smooth surfaces seemed to break against a courageous, extemporaneous confrontation with her past and our present.

Shannon began speaking before she'd fully risen from her seat in the audience. In a quick, defiant voice edged with anxiety, she called out as she strode toward the single chair waiting for her at the front of the room:

My fiancé is black.

Does that shock anybody?

[This is as much a confession as a dare. It is also a setup, positioning the audience in the place her parents occupied in her story of their response to a similar confession.]

Shocked my parents

when I

first introduced him

to them, three and half years ago. . . .

(Shannon sits down as she speaks and looks directly at the audience. She pushes her hair back behind her shoulders and leans into the back of the chair, placing her hands with taut assurance on the armrests.)

Their response was:

"Well there goes your tuition."

They said they wouldn't pay my tuition any more if I continued to see him.

Well,

my response to that was,

"I'm gonna continue to see him."

They basically told me that no one in my family was to know

about what I was doing or who I was seeing.

And that was the point where,

I decided to find out a little about my family's history.

[A contest of knowing begins. To the extent that what Shannon told is supposed to remain a family secret, it becomes the basis for unearthing others.]

And

I found out that my grandfather was a former ah grand wizard of the KKK.

And that,

my uncle was

a junior Klansman,

and was involved in a lot of racial fights the

first year of integration—which was his sophomore year of high school.

And

I was angry,

and I was upset,

and,

I,

I wanted, I want

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I was angry,
and I was upset,
and,
I,
I wanted, I wanted

(She sits up tall and leans toward the audience. Her hands seem to search the air for what she "wanted" then and now.)

to interview my uncle
because I wanted to prove to myself
how ignorant and closed minded
and just
uneducated my family was.
I wanted to prove that to myself.

[Shannon makes an initial reflexive shift beyond her insistent desire to justify her hurt and anger into desire to know what could possibly justify causing such hurt and anger. At the very point of "proof," her family is becoming less known, less familiar, more strange. She expands her inquiry to broader contexts of segregation.]

But I also wanted to find out how
someone's color could bring out
that amount of
hatred
in a person
based primarily on
his
race.
And I knew that my uncle had only
known,
or had only associated with,
two black people before
schools were integrated his sophomore
year of high school—
and these two black men were, ah—
worked for, my, my grandfather
which was his father—
and he told me that,
these two black men they would, ah,
they would come over to his house
outside work,
and his father would go outside and
they would talk and laugh, and
smoke and drink and just
have a good time.
And he said that he went over with his
father to their house one time,
and they sat out under the carport
and they,
they smoked and they,
laughed and they
conversated,
but they never went in each other's
houses.
Because that's the way things were.
You didn't go into someone of another
race's house.
So—
When I went to
interview my uncle,
I went straight into the racial fights.
I wanted to know all about the racial
fights.

(Shannon looks down, briefly trying to adjust her jacket, one sleeve of which is turned inside out. She abandons the jacket, looks up again, and begins to speak now as her uncle, telling his story from his/her perspective. Her voice takes on a low, wry tone.)

[This is now an explicitly hybrid performance. When Shannon begins speaking as her uncle, it is clear that she is both not herself and not exactly him; she is not-not-him.]

Oh, (she/he laughs)
you talking about the day of the riot?
Yeah.
I remember.
It was all,
it was all because this ah black kid,
walked in the school
and, ah,
there was this dead raccoon,
hanging by a noose
on his locker.
And I remember: I was walking out of school that day,
with this girl—
and there were these twenty black guys
who rushed in from another area.
I didn't know what was going on.
I found out later they had just beat up this white kid
across campus.
And ahmmm,

(Shannon leans back and throws her right foot across her left knee.)

they were almost inside the door, and stopped.
And one of them looked at me and said,
said something like,
"What kind of shit you got to say?"
And when he said that,
they all pretty much stopped.
And I knew at this point,
I was getting my ass kicked.
So,
I just basically looked at him,
and I hit him.
And they commenced to do what I pretty much thought they were going to do.

(Audience laughs.)

And ahmmm,

(Shannon has taken out a pack of cigarettes. She begins to tamp down the pack against the palm of her other hand, making a loud, rhythmic clapping noise as she speaks.)

I was on the ground,
and all these people were just walking by,
and I'm sitting there kicking and screaming.
None of the white kids really wanted to get involved in what was going on.
But I had this one friend
that walked by.
He was looking,
and he was like, you know:
"What's going on?" and "who's under there?"
And ahmmm,

(Shannon abandons trying to open the pack of cigarettes and yet continues banging it against her palm. She continues to speak in her uncle Ken's, plain, reportorial style.)

he saw me kicking and screaming,
at the bottom of the pile,
and he looked at them and he said,
"You black sons of bitches."
Well that got them off *me*.
They jumped on him!

(Audience laughs.)

And we're all scrambling around, on the, on the ground,
and these teachers walk out and they're all like,
"Y'all need to leave."
And they are screaming.

And I see the Na
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And I see the National Guard pulling up
and all these police, so
we walk out to the parking lot.
To my car.
And I open the trunk.
And
I get out a lug wrench.
And,
by this time, we pretty much know it's a full-fledged riot.
At least seven hundred people by then.

(Shannon pauses briefly, uncrosses her legs and sits up straight. She begins to talk directly to the audience as herself now.)

Well,
when I walked into
my uncle's
place of business that day,
he told me that story,
and then he said he had a little bit of work to do on the computer so—
"go back to the back" and introduce myself to his partner,
Barry.

[Her voice still shaded by her uncle's dry/wry tone, Shannon now draws the immediacy of talking with us into tight proximity with the immediacies of the interview scene itself. She conjoins the vulnerabilities of telling and having been/being told.]

So I walk back to the back,
of the office,
and all I see is this black guy standing there,
and I walk by him, and he stops me and is like,
"Can I help you?"
And I said "Oh, I'm, I'm Ken's niece and I'm just looking for his partner."
And he says, "You're looking at him."
And
my face,
turned really red,
right then,
and I held out my hand and
and I shook his hand—to cover up my embarrassment—
and I'm thinking to myself, how,
how can I assume that this is not his partner,
because he's black?
I mean what does that say about me? I'm sitting here,
putting all this criticism on my family—
and I'm sitting here assuming the same thing.

[Shannon dis-disidentifies. Here is the double negative at work, undoing Shannon's primary sense of herself. She is the one who is "shocked" now—although shocked less at the fact of Barry's skin color than at her own resilient expectations about it.]

I was pretty confused at this point, so I go back into the room where my uncle is,
and I look at him, and he just starts smiling at me,
and he's like, "I know what you're going to ask."
And ahmmm,

(Shannon leans back in the chair. She breathes in, looks up and begins speaking as her uncle again.)

[Shannon relays her own silence, her own not-knowing and even her

uncle's sly kindness in not making her "ask" what he suspects she will ask in deference to Ken's gentle voice. We see and hear now two more expansive selves: Ken's filled out by Barry's and Shannon's filled out by Ken's.]

Barry,
Ah, Barry yeah,
he's my friend.
He'll change someone's whole world,
about, about the way they think about race,
about the way they think about the black race anyway.
I remember in 1985
I put an ad in the newspaper
basically asking for money
to start this business.
I needed some help starting this business.
And he was the only one that responded.
So
I took him up on his offer,
and we started this business.
And up until that point,
slang was used pretty regular around my house.
It was ah,
basically,
'n' this or 'n' that
or jokes about it, and it was just a regular thing.
But it's been at least nine or ten years since that word has come out of my mouth.
He,
he was,
my hero.

(quietly) Barry was my hero.
I am not around it any more.
I do not allow anyone to use it in my house.
And, if I do,
come across the situation where slang is being used, I separate myself from that situation.
And that makes it hard when I get around old friends.
Because for them it's just
an everyday thing.
But ahmmm,
now, the way things are set up at my office,
something happened to me,
that I'm entrusting my children,
and my wife,
and my family,
to Barry.
He is the godfather of my children.
Everything I have will go to him when I die.
And ahmmm,
I don't know,
Barry's just,
just an amazing guy.

(Shannon sits forward and shifts into speaking in her voice, now softened considerably by having passed through her Uncle Ken's.)

Well,
after my interview with my uncle, I am sitting there
realizing how stupid I am,
and how many years I've wasted not getting to know this man that I am related to,
and what a wonderful person he is,
and at that moment,
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my fiancé walks in the door looking for me,
and my heart pretty much drops to the ground,
because nobody's met,
him,
in my family.
And I look at him and I look at my uncle and I'm just speechless.

[Shannon's previous silence—conveyed only by echoing witness to her uncle's words—is now doubled. In the heightened context of reperforming the interview scene, she becomes the humble(d) third party to a performance of family/raced relations that leaves us all on a threshold of hard-won but tremulous possibility.]

I don't know what to say.
And my uncle sticks out his hand and says,
"It's nice to meet you."
And my fiancé said, "My name's Eddie, and I'm, I'm Shannon's fiancé."
And [my uncle] looks at him,
and he said,
"Welcome to the family."

Shannon registered change in the ongoing changes in her own body, mind, heart, voice, and story, change that was homely in appearance and magnificent in its homeliness. Her story is frank, aching, confused. It is a story of being caught out by and now caught in an unfolding history. Soliciting her uncle's memories, she was as much remembered to them as she remembers them now like a second language, a first maybe. A forgotten language of familial love and possibility, in whose grammars she is relieved of both spite and its peculiar clarity. Listening out loud, Shannon testifies to her uncle's transformation, witnessing in turn her own displacement and reflecting on its meanings. This performance was something like a handshake with history: a start, a touch, a call, an act of remembering and awakening, a performative recollection of what Shannon didn't know and may yet *not know*, all the more tender and resplendent yet for *not knowing* what happens from here. Uncle Ken has the last and what is in effect the first word—spoken to Eddie and reported by Shannon, all reaching tentatively across great racial divides: "Welcome to the family."

A story is not a story until it changes. Shannon's performance, like others, slid from textual verity and containment to radical contingency. It drew her into the vortex of disidentifying with a history she knew all too well. Recreating that history meant recreating—refashioning—her most basic sense of herself, allying with her uncle and with our guests and her peers in a compact of cowitness.[14] In so doing, she challenged the performative force of her prior expectations, even insofar as they colluded with her family's racism in the delimitation of precisely this kind of transformation and change. Racism, Patricia Williams argues, is a spectacular discipline:

> [It] is a gaze that insists upon the power to make others conform, to perform endlessly in the prison of prior expectation, circling repetitively back upon the expired utility of the entirely known. Our rescue, our deliverance perhaps, lies in the possibility of listening across that great divide, of being surprised by the Unknown, by the unknowable." (1997, p. 74)

In the end, the desegregation project and the listening out loud practices that fed it were about the great intimacies that may be achieved in small acts of listening across "that great divide," about keeping those intimacies "in revolt" against, especially, performativity as the compulsive reiteration of raced expectations,[15] and so about preserving—in fleeting moments and clumsy gestures—the possibility of great

acts. They were and are about embodying listening as an antidote to *knowingness*. They were about feeling "*so much more*" and so remembering *more*, and so, finally, about preserving histories of change as *more*: more feeling, more memory, more—and better—change.

NOTES

1. See Berlant (2004), *Compassion*, for critique of the common sense politics of compassion and empathy.

2. For a supplementary introduction and complementary versions of oral history performance, see Pollock (2005).

3. See Jacquelyn Hall's definitive critique and elaboration of the Brown history, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," in which she observes its foreshortening by accounts of both conclusive triumph and decline (2005).

4. See Sam Schrager's fundamental insight: "What the oral historian does is to provide a new context for the telling of mainly preexistent narrative" (1983, pp. 78–79).

5. This early project is recounted in Pollock (1990).

6. Per Walter Benjamin's now-infamous declaration: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (1969, p. 87).

7. See Conquergood's critique of text-centrism in Dailey (1998).

8. Judith Butler argues, for instance, that "although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of disidentification is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestations" (1993, p. 4). See also Muñoz (1999).

9. See Schechner (1985, pp. 111–115).

10. At its best, oral history performance enacts what Kelly Oliver calls "the response-ability in subjectivity" (2001, p. 139): the self as a responsive agent who speaks what she sees. This self is inextricable from "others." It does not subsume or speak for others any more than it bespeaks an inalienable distinction between self and other. For Oliver, in the praxis of witnessing, "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" (p. 223).

11. Thanks to Laurie Lathem for helping me to extend this formulation. See her essay, "Bringing Old and Young People Together: An Interview Project," in Pollock (2005).

12. All performances quoted and discussed with the students' permission.

13. See Sara Ahmed, "The Performativity of Disgust," (2004, pp. 82–100).

14. See Conquergood's effort to answer Johannes Fabian's call for a turn "'from informative to performative ethnography'" with "an ethnography of the ears and heart that reimagines participant-observation as co-performative witnessing" (2002, p. 149).

15. Per Butler's now-classic formulation of "performativity" (1990).

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