

My History of History

A Performance Forum

ABSTRACT Rooted in the conceptual and received notion that personal histories are necessarily imbricated in larger historical, social, and political narratives, “My History of History” is a performance forum that engages individual and collective responses to pivotal historical moments. Each of the ten auto/historical performances featured here seeks the liminal space between the personal and the political to ask and answer the following questions: How do we feel, shape, remember, and embody socio-political-historical narratives? In times of adversity, debate, upheaval, loss, etc., how do we give voice to and trace a particular moment in history? How does this history linger in our selves, our bodies, and our stories? **KEYWORDS** Performance; History; Memory

MY PRESIDENT WAS ALSO BLACK

This is hardly the day or time. It is my husband’s birthday. And it is mid-afternoon on the eve of Christmas 2016. Dinner needs to be cooked. Instead, I am lounging on an armchair in our living room, lost in the words of Ta-Nehisi Coates’s most recent essay, “My President Was Black,” in *The Atlantic Monthly*; a piece of writing that I predict will become one of the greatest essays about race and politics in the history of American letters.¹ When the magazine arrived earlier in the week, I was afraid to read it. Like many liberals and progressives in the United States—but one who is a recent immigrant, a new citizen, and a woman of color—I have been lost in the collective trauma and disgust unleashed by the unlikely presidential win of celebrity businessman Donald Trump. After all, Barack Obama was the first American president I voted for, a black president. And when he won, I thought the gates were wide open for the first female presidency in the United States. We know now that this remains a dream deferred. But, let me not digress.

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As I read Coates's essay, I expected a requiem, a kind of tender long goodbye to our one and only black president, by one of the most influential black writers of the past decade. Very soon, I realized I was reading history, not just the history of a black presidency, but the history of a black man, a writer, an American citizen, who was telling us "his" story of the first black American presidency. I mourned along with him in these lines that I have read and re-read:

This would not happen again, and everyone knew it. It was not just that there might never be another African American president of the United States. It was the feeling that this particular black family, the Obamas, represented the best of black people, the ultimate credit to the race, incomparable in elegance and bearing.²

As I continued reading, I wondered, how would *I* write *my* history of my black president? Yes, *my* president was *also* black. What would I say? What would my experience and story, as a new immigrant of South Asian descent, bring to the story of America's first black presidency? Would I write about marveling at junior senator Obama's speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, which occurred around the same period I was getting ready to defend my doctoral dissertation in the small town of West Lafayette, IN? I was not yet a citizen. Would I write about his May 2004 profile in *The New Yorker* entitled "The Candidate,"³ which became the central topic of the first phone conversation I had with a man from Chicago, IL, a man I would marry the following year? We were both not yet citizens. Would I talk about the moment in the 2008 primary when I watched Obama's famous race speech in Pennsylvania from my condominium in Bangkok, Thailand, where I was teaching for a semester; a speech that elicited shouts of pure joy, a speech that clinched the democratic nomination (in my eyes) for him? Would I address the intense conflict I felt as a woman of color forced to choose between a black male and a white female candidate, because loyalty to one felt like such a disavowal of the other? I was (still) not yet a citizen. Would I write about both the intense joy and sorrow I felt in taking US citizenship in 2011? Joy, because I could now participate fully in this democracy, and because Obama would run for a second term and I would add my vote/voice to history. Sorrow, because taking US citizenship meant renouncing my Indian citizenship, in a sense rejecting the country where I was born, rejecting home. Or would I write about that moment in October 2012, when my black president came to my campus to campaign for his re-election? And a month later, I would vote for Obama. Would telling my story matter?

DOES MY STORY MATTER?

This last question, “would telling my story matter?” has been the simple, yet profound impetus for this performance forum entitled “My History of History.”⁴ The idea for this forum originated a few years before the 2016 election. It was inspired wholly by this thoughtful stanza from Matthew Goulish’s 39 *Microlectures*:

How do we understand something? We understand something by approaching it. How do we approach something? We approach it from any direction. We approach it using our eyes, our ears, our noses, our intellects, our imaginations. We approach it with silence. We approach it with childhood. We use pain or embarrassment. We use history. We take a safe route or a dangerous one. We discover our approach and we follow it.⁵

My interest in these lines, indeed my gentle obsession with them, dovetailed with my intellectual and personal interest in how we human beings, tell, sense, and live along with historical events. What do such personal accounts of history contribute to our collective sense as historical subjects? What do live audiences and readers learn from such accounts? Oral historians have long believed that individual and collective responses to pivotal historical moments show us how personal histories are always imbricated in larger historical, social, and political narratives. Speaking to the power of testimony in oral history performance, Della Pollock writes:

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.⁶

The performances that you experience in this forum are public enactments of private experiences. As a first conceptual move, they merge Goulish’s approach to “understanding” with a performance-based approach to both oral history and autobiography. At the same time, the performances enact another conceptual move, one that addresses the sensory. They embody “affective atmospheres,” what Ben Anderson describes as entities that

are a kind of indeterminate affective “excess” through which intensive space-times can be created. . . . They are indeterminate with regard to the distinction between subjective and objective. . . . they are impersonal in that they belong to collective situations and yet can be felt as intensely personal.⁷

These performative and affective moves were encouraged by a set of memory triggers given to the participants, also taken from Goulish:

- 1) They were asked to choose a specific incident from their past
- 2) They had to find a historical event that occurred approximately at that time
- 3) They created a performative environment, in text and performance, that expressed the feeling of the memory in relation to that historical event
- 4) They drew out, mapped, wrote, and performed, a confluence of moments that were linked (or not) with each other⁸

In order to coalesce the sensory, the affective, and the performative, the performers asked themselves the following questions:

- How do I feel, shape, remember, and embody socio-political-historical narratives?
- In times of adversity, debate, upheaval, loss, how do I give voice, emotion, and form to a particular moment in history?
- How does this history linger in my identity, my body, and my story?

In short, I was asking the performers to “show”—affectively, performatively, autobiographically—why their telling of their story mattered.

THE PERFORMANCES

The performances range in breadth and depth from personal memories of 9/11, the Iraq war, and military tattoos, to the armed conflict in Colombia, the death of newsrooms, the death of Michael Jackson, and the controversial trial of O. J. Simpson. In a hair-raising performance about love and hate, Lisa Trocchia-Balçkīts enacts her experience of the 9/11 attacks from Crete, Greece, where, on that day in 2001 she became engaged to her partner. In protest and grief, but also in solidarity and joy, in “Be Hair Now,” Lisa shows how her dreadlocked hair became her “peace witness” and her opportunity to experience the intersections of privilege, knowing, and knowledge. Remembering his village, thousands of miles away in Mauritania, Africa, Sidi Becar Meyara enacts memories of teenage years spent listening to the radio with his father. The news of the twin towers also reaches them via this same radio. Meyara’s performance, “A Muslim’s Experience in Post-9/11 America,” intersects those earlier moments of radio-listening with his arrival

in the United States and the haunting influence of the twin-tower attacks on his life here as a Muslim student. In “Repeat,” Stevie M. Munz performs a story about the military, sibling love, and family by showing how she re-experienced family military deployments and displacements in her sister’s decision to enlist in the army during the Iraq war. Sean Gleason’s “Freedom’s Call” centers on the custom of a military tattoo and examines the climate and atmosphere of a mid-western city post-9/11. Gleason’s inventory of ordinary affects examines the ways in which violence, fear, and boredom mark the post-9/11 American military psyche.

From 9/11 to popular culture, in “O. J., Dad, and Me,” Steve Granelli puts forth a riveting performance about his relationship with his father filtered through the family’s friendship with O. J. Simpson and his infamous and publicized 1994 murder trial. Following this, Alane Presswood’s “Death of an Idol” explores themes of youth, loss, and independence during the last summer she spent in her childhood home in Philadelphia, PA. Presswood’s memories intersect with the death of pop-cultural icon Michael Jackson, an idol she inherited from her mother. In “My Life in Newsrooms,” Christy Zempter mourns the death of traditional newsrooms where she worked as a journalist from the early 1990s to mid-2000s. Linked with the shift from print to digital is the death of a beloved colleague whose loss cannot be separated from the end of journalism as Zempter lived it.

The next two performance scripts engage personal stories of US state and general elections. Justin J. Rudnick traces his personal experiences surrounding a proposed state-wide ban on same-sex marriage in 2006 to show how one simple, single vote created a space of possibility for him to create a queer identity. Rudnick approaches “hindsight” as a performative that can help disentangle one significant storyline from the history of his identity. From here we move to the 2012 US general election and Kristen E. Okamoto who was living in Germany at the time. In “Whose Election Is It?” Okamoto performs a story that shows how Obama’s re-election became significant because of its insignificance in her life as an expatriate. Okamoto’s cobbled together autobiographical reflections show how North, South, German, American, Democrat, or Republican intersected to enact the arbitrariness of borders and boundaries.

We end as we began: with another hair-raising, suspense-filled, and poignant performance. Camilo Perez’s story takes place amidst the 1990s violence in Colombia. The characters in “The Gold Medal” are three objects—a gold medal, a gun, and a steak—that illuminate how an ordinary citizen lived one frightening personal moment in his country’s recent violent history. Perez’s

performance urges us to ask simultaneously: What would I have done in his place? Have I ever experienced this fear? Is this what violence can do?

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERFORMANCES ARE/AS GENERATIVE ENCOUNTERS

The performances in this forum illuminate the generative nature of autobiographical performance, an idea that is steeped in Victor Turner's notion of "performative reflexivity," which he described as "a condition in which a socio-cultural group, or its most perceptive members, acting representatively turn, bend, or reflect back about themselves."⁹ Each performer and every performance doubly enacts such a performative reflexivity: first when performers create their own performances by accessing personal memories linked with historical events; second when "we" audience these autobiographical performances. We/the audience engage in a reflexive turn, what Bryant Keith Alexander considers the "critical move of making sense of lived experience triggered by a performance of bending the critical eye inward."¹⁰ As the participants in this panel recall, remember, and recollect to perform, they draw out, cajole, and invite audience members into a reflexive loop with the hope of triggering new autobiographical performances that engage civic life. Ultimately, for me, as an organizer and an audience member, they generate "encounters with the unforeseen. . . not merely the prefigured."¹¹

For instance, when Granelli performs his story about O. J. Simpson, his father, and himself, I find myself recalling that I watched the trial on television from my parents' bedroom in New Delhi, India, and was astonished, even confused by the American racial landscape. I was twenty years old and in my final year of college. When Meyara performs "A Muslim's Experience in Post-9/11 America," I find myself returning to my international graduate student self on that warm fall Tuesday in West Lafayette, IN, where, overnight, all of us non-whites re-experienced our foreignness in new, more oppressive ways.

Performance scholars Craig Gingrich-Philbrook and Amber Johnson illustrate the critic's reflexivity in their responses to the performances. Gingrich-Philbrook argues that these autoethnographic scripts, which are read rather than performed, "do things with experience that go beyond merely citing it," they forge a "we" and "they speak alone, but listen together, and that, as ever, is the point of performance." Johnson provides her response as a witness and a live audience member who was there as the stories were publicly staged. Johnson's response here is alive and enacts a poignant critical reflexivity whereby she "becomes" another one of the performers in her moving generative response.

In her own words, she shows how, “within the critical performance space, we all become vulnerable to reinvention.”

This forum illustrates how history is lived and performed by both the “I” and the “we”—in the everyday, by our senses, by our bodies, and in our stories. In remembering, storying, and performing, the participants show how everyday actions and affective enactments of history (broadly defined) are integral to understanding how we make meaning of critical events in our lives. We hope that each performance is an invitation to the readers and audience members to consider that telling, showing, and performing history is at once a public, but also a most private, act. ■

DEVIKA CHAWLA is Professor in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University. I would like to thank the ten performers and the two respondents for making this forum a possibility. I would also like to thank Stacy Holman Jones for her encouragement with the creation of the forum. Correspondence to: Devika Chawla, School of Communication Studies, Ohio University, 431 Schoonover Center, 20 E. Union Street, Athens, OH 45701, USA. Email: chawla@ohio.edu.

NOTES

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Be Hair Now

Performing Knowing

ABSTRACT Challenging ways of knowing, especially about love and hate, I share my experience of the 9/11 attacks from Crete, Greece, where on that same day in 2001, I became engaged to my partner, now husband. Out of protest and grief, toward a solidarity of difference, I perform how dreadlocks became my “peace witness” and an opportunity to experience intersections of privilege, knowing, and knowledge. **KEYWORDS** Personal narrative; Performance text; Creative nonfiction

We were so totally and completely in love that afternoon—
exploring the wild mountainous coast of southern Crete together,
hyper-connected to the one truth in the universe.
We stand on the highest point of land, on a mountain,
on the crumbling rock walls of a Minoan palace,
on the ruins of Pax Minoica, an unprecedented civilization existing for a
thousand years in peace.
I lean out over the rubble at cliff’s edge, entranced by the beauty of the
Libyan sea,
outstretch my arms, winglike, against the strong breeze and
I am Icarus!

That deep peace, that deep love,
was real.

The vibe was strong. It felt like love was the driving truth of the universe,
so much so that we,
after four years together—and no intent of ever doing something as bourgeois
as getting married—spontaneously proposed to each other. We were overcome.

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Later, that same day, we walked the streets of Koutouloufari, Crete,
strolling past outdoor cafes and restaurants that seemed a little too crowded,
a bit too animated,
for almost the middle of September.
People were standing in a cluster outside a bar, peering inside at the TV.
I leaned in to get a better look and felt a completely dissociative moment.
As I realized I was watching the skyline of New York City
and the Twin Towers in smoke and flames,
I felt an irreconcilable emotional schism. Because of the time difference, this
violent hate event had occupied the same exact minutes of the day as a peaceful
experience so powerful
I had known from the depth of my soul that the universe *was* love.
So what the hell is that all about?
What is knowing anyway?

After that,
the day the United States dropped bombs on Iraq, I felt powerless to change
anything.
Then it came to me that, like the sadhus, who choose to separate from the
dominant culture,
like the Rastas, who choose to become cultural resistance,
I could choose another way of knowing. I stopped combing my hair on that day.
I started on my dreaded journey.

My hair became grief locks, my warlocks, my peace witness.
This act of resistance became a daily and valued yoga for me to know othering
and privilege. What I know now is that my locks subject me to the abuses of
profiling and assumption.
I've been treated more poorly than you'd like to know just because of my hair. . .
and it is important for me to attend to these very raw ways of knowing what it
feels like,
when violence is so often based on looks,
the ways that looks can make people feel fear.

But looks are just what we believe we know.
There are others, who, because of the way I look, believe I am righteous, worthy
of respect.
But of course, whether mistreated or honored because of my locks,
no one really knows anything about me.

So what *can* we know?

We are sure we know when we feel.

We think we know when we see.

Knowing is just so contingent. . .

Unties and removes headscarf and with it, three feet of dreaded locks that were cut off just prior to the performance. ■

LISA TROCCHIA-BALĶĪTS received an interdisciplinary PhD from Ohio University affiliated with the School of Communication Studies and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. This piece was included in a performance panel presented at the 2016 National Communication Association annual convention. The author thanks Devika Chawla for her mentorship. Email: trocchial@greenmtn.edu.

A Muslim's Experience in Post-9/11 America

ABSTRACT This is a narration of the centrality of 9/11 in a Muslim's life, highlighting its continuous presence by drawing connections between the present and the past. Beginning with listening to radios as a teenager, an experience that I shared with my father, this performance script connects the initial reactions to hearing the news on the radio to my experiences in post-9/11 America. It touches on the experiences of having to hide one's religious beliefs so that the students do not perceive their teacher differently. It shows the power of this event and its haunting presence. **KEYWORDS** Performance; Body

RADIOS! That was the thing for my dad and me. We always listened to radios. He always got me this small radio, which was usually a smaller version of the one he had. Even though he is an illiterate man, he was fluent in French. That was what he listened to. He listened to Radio France International all day long.

The news was always the same, and it all seemed—despite its significance—rather far away and un-impactful. Radios carry the good and the bad. Listening to radios is like watching the news on a regular basis. The more you listen, the more hearing about death and violence becomes a normal thing.

I remember waking up on that day, praying, and turning on my radio to BBC Arabic to listen to the 6 a.m. news. That was when I heard what had happened. Planes crashing in New York! The terrorists! All of a sudden, my slow world was now moving faster and faster.

I ask my father: “Did you hear about what happened to the Americans?” He says no. He pulls out his radio. For the next few days, we continue to compare stories.

Despite the importance of 9/11 and its catastrophic consequences (the destruction of Iraq was the most visible to all of us), I mistakenly thought that its impact would stop there. This was the case until I came to the United States.

As a Muslim living in post-9/11 America, you have to live up to the expectations of being a good Muslim. If others are proud of being from different

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religious traditions, you are always doubtful whether you should be proud of your own.

Remembering what happened always brings up this haunting feeling of shame, a feeling of shame that accompanies you. You remember how you come from a place where people still think that 9/11 was justified, that it was right to kill those innocent civilians.

In thinking about it all, you realize that violence is being done to you. You always question yourself and whether you should be open about your religious beliefs with your students.

How would they look at you? Will their views towards you change? Will they give you bad evaluations just because you are different? So, talking about your religious beliefs turns into a terribly designed quantitative experiment. You tell one class and not the other. Those feelings are confirmed when you read your students' papers and find out about the feelings they have towards Muslims. Muslims are guilty until they prove themselves innocent.

Memories are selective. Some experiences of pain are deemed more important than others. In some ways, memories are like news broadcasts. They too are selective. They choose the right stories (those deemed worthy). They focus on those whose pain is deemed more important. This is how some stories get told while others are forgotten. Memories function the same way. Some stories are deemed worthy of remembering while others are forgotten, or rather, ignored. These are the things radios teach those who listen to them. ■

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Repeat

ABSTRACT In this letter, written to my sister, I connect memories from our childhood to present-day lived experiences. By presenting my memories as fragments, I reveal them as ruptures that are layered with history and unresolved feelings. Through reflection, I show how the choices in the present repeat the history of the past. A family history tied to the military, sibling relationships, and life choices are all re-experienced. **KEYWORDS** Memory; Siblings; Military; Identity

We weren't always like this. It was hard for you and me. We're not simply opposites like many say. We approach living, breathing, and loving in vastly different ways. We started off together, but our paths quickly diverged, as you went one way and I went another. They tried to force us, push us, and place us together. They'd say, "you're sisters," "be friends," and "like one another."

Come here. No, come a little closer. Come sit with me. It's gonna be alright. You know it always is. Put your head in my lap and just talk to me. Your small and frail arms would tremble as you gripped my legs. You would whisper, "I'm scared." Your crying was hard and deep. The tears streamed down your cheeks. We'd climb into bed and pull the covers over our heads as they screamed at each other. Was it the drink? A woman? The Army? It didn't matter. I knew, when the sun came up, it would all be over.

You know, I didn't see it coming. I was tucked into my four-poster bed. I was prepared for rest, but not for your call. Your voice was almost a whisper. The words "I enlisted" left your lips and my heart started to tremble. Where was the floor? Where was the ceiling? The room was spinning. How would I protect you? How would I know you were safe? You were too little, too young, and too naive.

First, one letter arrived and then there was another. See this entire stack? I saved them all. Your voice was changing. Your language was different. Did I still know you? Did the smell of vodka still remind you of her? The days turned

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into weeks and then into months. And then I saw you. I barely recognized you. There were no words. You looked so different, so much older, and I was scared that you didn't need me anymore. Would we ever make a blanket fort again? Would we ever keep each other awake till the early morning hours?

I knew it would happen, but did I see it this way? No. Who was he? An Army Ranger with the Airborne Division? You said he was "just a friend," but we both knew that wasn't true. December 1st came and now you share his surname. You were there in a place across the Atlantic and I was here. Where was he? Training you would say. Iraq once? Afghanistan twice? What's Iraq? Or Afghanistan? What does the Middle East mean? 9/11? The War on Terror?

You know each time it happens there's a hardboiled egg. This was her way and now it's mine. Tucked into my four-poster bed, I carefully peel away the shell. Will you be okay? Will you be safe? Another tour you say. I guess that's okay. You'll be there and I'll be here.

Me? I'll just be eating an egg, one after another. ■

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Freedom's Call

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, June 2010

ABSTRACT I can't tell my history without taking you to the Ohio town where I grew up. It's a military town, and this essay revolves around a particular military custom known as a tattoo. Here, the location (a military base) and activity (a celebration of military strength) combine in an American performance of freedom that is implicitly backed by threats of violence. In this way, a small-town celebration on the 4th of July suggests that to live in post-9/11 America is to inhabit a place of tumult, fear, and boredom. **KEYWORDS** Personal narrative; Affect; Performance text

After September 11, 2001, the base reeks of a palpable anxiety. We live under a constant threat of the unknown. We hoard duct tape and gas masks. We speak of the nearby deli-mart as if it could be the next high-profile terror target. But eventually, like the rest of the country, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base realizes the impossibility of everyday life at threat level orange. We wake up, shaking the sleep of the security state from our eyes. Fear, anger, and hatred sublimate into a fierce brand of fuck-you patriotism; a nervous antipathy, skittish and held close to the chest. These colors don't run. The tattoo is back on.

At the entrance gate, there is a cursory pat down, a metal detector, and a half-hearted enclosure of orange plastic fencing. A young, skinny airman tells me he needs my knife. It's summer so his sleeves are rolled up, and I notice a gap between his bicep and blouse. He has none of the bravado of most junior enlisted men, only the look of a man wholly underwhelmed by his job.

- Come on man. . . I just got off work and forgot 'bout it. I ain't gonna stab no one.
- Sorry, rules are rules.

I walk out of eyesight, crouch low, and drive the knife—blade first—into the dirt next to a weather-beaten “no trespassing” sign.

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Inside, the once-green grass has been scrubbed brown by the passage of foot and season. Waves of people crash against each other in roiling eddies of red, white, and blue. The crowd is mostly drunk, mostly sunburnt, and fiercely patriotic. It's a rowdy mix of Vietnam ball caps and suspenders, denim cut-offs with dusty flip-flops, and flabby arms akimbo on broad hips. Country music pumps over the loudspeakers. Everyone's on edge and ready for a fight.

Night. Phosphorescent flowers rip the sky with neon blooms. White-hot willows crackle in long-burning tendrils. After the fireworks, we want more. We jockey for position. Fights break out as the intoxicated crowd floods the exits. The air smells like saltpeter, and I decide that I want to be a Marine.

Near the closest exit, two men circle each other. The smaller of the two fighters has his shoulders rolled forward in a southpaw stance, but his footwork tells me he's drunk. The crowd clamors for the first punch:

- Give 'im hell!
- Kick his ass.
- Hit him!

After a halfhearted fight, the southpaw stumbles along, pressing a white tee-shirt against his bloodied brow.

The show is over, but a fender-bender stops traffic. Cars idle bumper to bumper in the night heat. The woman next to me hangs her leg out the car window, the back of her knee folded against black rubber trim. A purple scar rings her ankle. She fishes out a soft-pack, holding her cigarette between thumb and forefinger as she smokes. I watch from my truck, thinking about the day this city changed. Ms. Meyers rolled a black TV into our classroom, and we watched as the second tower collapsed. Bankers fell like raindrops from a hundred stories up.

Not a hundred feet from the cops, blue-inked arms slap a steering wheel. The driver, arching his back against the seat, puffs his cheeks in frustration. Glancing sideways, he checks the rearview mirror before pulling a tallboy from a white foam cooler. He cracks the top, watching the police direct traffic as he sips.

Heat radiates from the tarmac. The police wave me on. ■

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O. J., Dad, and Me

ABSTRACT The family friend who was once referenced consistently as a point of pride was distinctly re-categorized in June 1994. Our family was split on how we should feel about the most famous and infamous man of that year, O. J. Simpson. The way we negotiated our relationship through the trial of the century represented a significant marker in how I perceived my father. The man whose opinion I treasured more than anyone else's now believed something that was so unfathomably incorrect; it dealt a crushing blow to how I viewed my father's credibility and left me forever changed. **KEYWORDS** Creative nonfiction; Performance text; Personal narrative

Walking down an impossibly narrow staircase into the basement of my parents' house in Buffalo, NY, the first thing that will catch your eye is a row of industrial Singer® pedal sewing machines to your left, and a large workbench for cutting fabric directly in front of you. Above the waist-high workbench is a corkboard where, if you look hard enough, you'll find one Christmas card. That well-worn Christmas card originally had snowflakes made of glitter, but at some point over the past twenty-seven years they've fallen off. It simply reads, "To Sam and Fam, Merry Xmas, O. J. Simpson."

O. J. Simpson was a family friend who I never met, but he knew my name. My father is a tailor who ran his own shop, and being that football players have a tough time buying off-the-rack at local menswear stores, my father became the unofficial official tailor for the Buffalo Bills in the 1970s. The only name from that football team that still resonates is O. J. Simpson, for whom my father made suits for throughout the 70s, 80s, and until right about. . . June 1994. For the uninitiated, that's when O. J. killed two people, allegedly.

My memory of the chase in the white Ford Bronco, the trial, the acquittal, and the civil suit include an immutable commentary track, courtesy of O. J.'s tailor, my father. I remember during the trial, when the channel turned to CourTV, I'd hear my father exclaim, "I made him that one!" signaling that one

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of Dad's creations was being seen by millions. We couldn't really figure out how to monetize the publicity though. . . . I remember making the joke that my father should put a sign in the window of his old shop: "John Granelli Ltd., the preferred clothier of celebrity murderers."

Dad turned to me, and in a flippant but direct tone, he said, "What? He didn't do it."

"DAD! YES HE DID! HAVE YOU BEEN WATCHING?"

"No he didn't. He's a nice guy. He could never do those things."

"Apparently he could, and he did. O. J.'s guilty."

"You have no idea what you're talking about, you don't know him, I've talked to him; he didn't do it."

"Just because you've talked to someone doesn't make them innocent. His blood was at the crime scene."

"He's a really nice guy. He always asked about you guys. Remember he signed that picture for you?"

As the trial progressed I watched Dad dismiss DNA evidence by saying, "They screw that stuff up all the time." I heard him say, "His hands were all screwed up from football, he couldn't hold a knife," and the *pièce de résistance*, "They say he beat her before, but she looked happy when I met her." When O. J. was found not guilty, I was in the middle of a school day, and remember dreading the inevitable "I told you" that would come as soon as I got home. Dad carried a self-satisfied look when I did see him, and before he spoke I mumbled, "He still did it."

This marked the first prolonged disagreement that I had with my father, and remains a point of contention twenty years later. The man whose words had been canon for all of my life had a chink in the heroic Dad armor for the first time. All at once he was stubborn, unwilling to listen, and now I had to take his perspectives with a grain of salt. The disagreements come much more frequently now as he parrots conservative talk radio and dismisses academia as "heaven for liberals." I think back to that stupid trial, that stupid murderer, those stupid suits, and that stupid Christmas card hanging over my father's workbench as a reminder of the time I stopped believing everything he said, and for the first time, saw him as dead wrong. ■

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Death of an Idol

ABSTRACT This performative essay explores the connections between beloved popular culture figures and individual experiences of growth and change through my simultaneous experience of the death of singer Michael Jackson and the final weeks I lived at home with my parents. **KEYWORDS** Performance; Affect; Michael Jackson; Adolescence; Home

My mother is an eighties girl; this simple fact is key to understanding a significant portion of my personality. Mom came of age in the era of big hair, leg warmers, and, as she would put it, “real dance music.” Therefore, while my peers were jamming on N*Sync and Spice Girls, I was still playing George Michael, Billy Idol, and Michael Jackson on repeat. One of my earliest childhood memories is Mom busting out an impromptu tap solo to a vinyl copy of “Rebel Yell”—but the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, held a place in our household that no other artist could ever occupy.

I know Jackson ignites controversial opinions among many people. But to me, he was a childhood hero, an inspiration. *Thriller* was the first album I purchased for myself. Today’s popular performing artists—Adam Levine, Justin Timberlake, Lady Gaga, Kanye West, Bruno Mars, I could go on—regularly cite MJ’s syncopated beats and slick performances as a major artistic influence. The effect he had on music is timeless, but the self-styled Peter Pan was not. There are certain points in life that stand as cleavages; they divide everything around them into a Before and an After. One of my top five is the death of the King of Pop. Michael Jackson died on 25 June 2009. Twenty-one days after I graduated from high school. Forty-nine days before I would pack up my belongings and leave my childhood home for good. I have an excellent relationship with my parents, but I made it quite clear when I left their house that I wouldn’t be returning to my sleepy hometown. I didn’t return home to stay the next summer, and my old bedroom became an office. None of those changes struck me with quite the same impact as Michael’s death. You assume your pop culture

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icons will always be there; you never know how an absence will affect you until it occurs. When my childhood hero died, at that moment, in that house, a distinct phase of my life also ended, and I felt eighteen years of shared history suddenly become a fixed point in the past.

I do not regret my choice to leave home without looking back, but maybe if I could reach back I would advise my past self to hold on to childhood just a little tighter. Once you let go, you cannot get it back: how ironic that it took the death of a man notorious for clinging too tightly to childhood to prove that to me. Adulthood will come soon enough, I would say. Your childhood heroes cannot live forever. You will feel the sting of rejection and heartbreak; you will discover you are not straight, you are not an extrovert, you hate beer, and yes, even on the eighteenth try, you will still be allergic to marijuana. You will wish to run back to your childhood bedroom, covered in collaged photos and dance posters, and hide for just the next ten minutes.

When I got to college, I discovered that not everyone shared my abiding passion for Michael. No amount of insistent arguing seemed to change their minds, but that was okay; my unsupported fondness for eighties power ballads kept me linked to my home and my mom amidst the whirlwind that constituted that first year away. And if I learned nothing else from Michael Jackson, I learned that when those hard times come, all you can do is dance. ■

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My Life in Newsrooms

ABSTRACT This piece examines my experience as a print journalist, beginning in the early 1990s before the advent of mass online distribution of the news and ending in the mid-2000s as digital news sources proliferated. The performance script focuses on the sensory experience of the newsroom—the sounds and smells, as well as the visual imagery and the tactile sensations—and how that experience was transformed as the industry changed over the course of my seventeen-year career. Ultimately, the piece is a reflection on what was lost over the years. **KEYWORDS** Journalism; Performance text; Newsrooms

When I started J-school, CNN was six years old.
The whole 24-hour news cycle was new, and not particularly pressing.
People still read the paper then; we must have believed at least some of them
always would.
The bigger issue was *USA Today* with its gaudy color and 12-inch stories. Was
this where newspapers were headed?
Jesus, we hoped not.
I started as a sports writer at the daily in my hometown.
In the mornings, the newsroom was full of sound—phones ringing, reporters
talking, the AP photo printer clicking out black-and-white pictures.
At night though, it was mostly quiet.
After the stringers wrote their stories and left, there were never more than a
couple of us around. Sometimes I'd hang out in the darkroom with the
photographer while she ran film.
Every now and then, I'd have to process film myself, and the complete darkness
of that room always struck me.
With no other voice to orient me, everything became a matter of touch.
I had to feel for the church key on the counter to open the canister.
Then I had to fumble with the metal spool until I got the film connected to it.
Leaving the darkroom felt like stepping out of a cave into daylight.

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Between the darkroom and the newsroom, there was a little area with a light table, where we would study contact sheets or negatives through loupes.

It was the brightest spot in the building.

Once the stories were edited and the photos were dry, we'd take everything into the composing room, where the hum of the wax roller lay just under the voices of Marty Brennaman and Joe Nuxhall calling the Reds game on the radio.

The walls were lined with paste-up boards, their trays full of pica poles, blue pens, and X-Acto[®] knives, and the room smelled like hot wax and cigarette smoke.

It all ran together in the daytime, but at night it filled your senses.

None of us could imagine ever doing anything else.

Drinking was a big part of it.

After deadline on Friday and Saturday nights, we'd go to a bar called Teeny's. We'd drink until closing and then go back to my friend Henson's attic apartment and listen to Tom Waits until five or six in the morning.

During the week, we'd go to the Royal.

It was seven or eight blocks from the office, and after a few pitchers of beer, we'd walk back in the small-town, middle-of-the-night dark.

Sometimes Henson would fall asleep on the couch in the warehouse area where they kept the pallets of Sunday fliers while I pasted up the agate page at three in the morning, still pretty drunk.

Eventually, I moved to a bigger city and a bigger newsroom, and it was mostly the same for a while.

But already things were beginning to change.

One day I came to work, and the whole art department was gone.

Then the axe hit the newsroom.

I never got fired, but I had to go.

I started my life in newspapers in an edifice, literally. In a great, brick building that felt like it had been standing for a hundred years.

Seventeen years later, I ended that life in a suburban office park where everything felt makeshift and disposable.

There was no smell of hot wax or smoke, no light tables or darkrooms, no wire machine clicking out photos.

Sometimes in the evenings, if the sports guys were around, you could still hear Marty and Joe calling the Reds game, but the satellite radio signal cleared up all the static.

It was Joe's last season. He died in November.

It was my last season, too, though I'd go back in a minute if I could believe there was anything left of the thing I fell in love with in those early years. ■

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Hindsight

ABSTRACT As a reflexive practice, hindsight enables a subject to re-observe how moments in the once-present past come to bear on a now-present future. Such observations enable us to make (new) sense of our life's trajectory, re-casting seemingly inconsequential moments as "prophetic" happenings. In this essay, I revisit a series of connected moments in my past to examine how actions I took as a then-heterosexual man influenced the construction of my now-queer identity. **KEYWORDS** Hindsight; Memory; Queer; Identity

In November 2006, my home state of Wisconsin placed an initiative on the general election ballot. The famed "Question 1" proposed amending the state constitution's definition of marriage to one man and one woman. At the time, I was a nineteen-year-old college sophomore, in the fourth year of a four-year relationship with my high-school girlfriend, and I had finished a summer-long mission trip during which I preached the good news of Jesus to unsuspecting vacationers on the beaches of South Carolina. I—or rather, that "past-I"—believed homosexuality was sinful. The ballot initiative provided him/me a chance to *do* something about America's "growing gay problem." So, in November 2006, I strolled into my polling place to vote for my very first time. I was directed to a cramped booth surrounded by makeshift curtains where I was sure I would vote in favor of limiting marriage. I picked up the shortened and dull pencil, maneuvered my hand to Question 1 on the ballot—and voted *against* the ban.

Later that night I sat comfortably at my Bible study, in a cramped but cozy dorm room surrounded by my closest friends. We settled down, and I was surprised as our leaders began by asking how we had voted on the marriage amendment. As I listened to my peers, my friends, explain why they agreed that marriage should be between opposite-sex persons, my heart began to flutter. I didn't know why I voted the way I did. How could I explain the feeling that washed over me in that tiny voting booth, filling me with an unfamiliar

certitude? How could I describe the fire that ignited in my chest in that moment when I committed myself to a decision that seemed so wrong, just as it seemed so unequivocally *right*? When it was my turn to answer for my vote, I heard my shaky voice pronounce “I voted against the ban.” Confusion and disappointment radiated from my leaders, upperclassmen who I deeply admired and whose approval I desperately craved. My eyes burned a hole in the floor as I weathered their righteous refutations. I was embarrassed, yes. But I was not ashamed. That night, some seed of conviction took root deep within me. It would take years to sprout, but it was strengthened by this winter that failed to freeze it.

Hindsight is a funny thing. I like to think that, in the moment of my vote, the cosmos aligned and inspired me to save my now-queer self from the humiliation of actively impeding my own human rights. I don’t know if I *actually* believe this to be true, but I do know that it doesn’t matter. The ten years that separate me from the person I used to be have brought with them some tumultuous experiences: my abandonment of the church, my liberal indoctrination, my coming out, and a number of interactions both good and bad that have cultivated my now-present identity.

Hindsight is rather illuminating. ■

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Whose Election?

ABSTRACT In November 2012, Barack Obama was re-elected as President of the United States. Meanwhile, I was 3,000 miles across the Atlantic living and studying in Friedrichshafen, Germany. The re-election of Barack Obama became significant because of its insignificance in my life. It felt at once distant and immanent. What I hope to recover in these cobbled-together moments of autoethnographic exploration is a sense of interconnectedness. North or South, German or American, Democrat or Republican, our civic and individual lives are indebted to the otherness of others. Indeed, borders are arbitrary. **KEYWORDS** Autoethnography; Performance text

FOUR MORE YEARS

5 a.m. Darkness still envelops the small rectangular space. Suddenly the door to my room, my borrowed home for the past three months, allows a ray of fluorescent light to abruptly enter. In broken English, a male voice yells, “WE WON!” I am startled. Disoriented. Another male voice follows, exclaiming “FOUR MORE YEARS!” “What?” I reply bewildered. All of my roommates have been up all night watching the election results roll in on a projection screen. “Our future depends on this,” they state gravely. I roll over and glance at the clock. It is 11 p.m. at home, still Tuesday night.

BRONNENBERG, NOT BRANDENBERG

Ding. My phone sounds, alerting me of a new message. I look down at the small screen of my borrowed cell phone. From: “American Libby,” the screen reads. “Can you believe these Germans? It’s not *their* election, it’s *ours*.” The words “we” and “ours” circle through my head. I feel the simultaneous tug of both outsider and native as I reconcile my strong connection to both my home country and my borrowed one. Torn between two worlds. Ripped from the pages of my life history. “Okamoto” my last name reads on my visa application—but. . .

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ethnicity? “I am part German,” I am quick to tell those around me. “My grandmother’s last name was Bronnenberg,” as if in some way trying to justify my place in this foreign country. Oh, like the gate? Someone asks me. No, BRONNENBERG, I say, struggling to emphasize the difference between my matriarchal lineage and the Prussian vestige.

NEIN FUß

“Nein Fuß!” I nervously pluck my headphones out of my ears as I see a middle-aged woman barreling towards me from the front of the bus. She approaches me, swatting my foot from the seat in front of me. I am puzzled. I feel invaded. Shamed. Humiliated. I have disrespected my host country. Again I feel as if I am living in a borrowed space, on borrowed time.

Southern Germany. THOSE Schwäbisch, I recall hearing. As one German magazine reads:

The real difference between Germans isn’t between east and west, it’s between north and south. Indeed, had the Allies split up Germany between north and south after World War II, the Wall might very well still be standing.

I consider again “We” and “Our.”

NO PURPLE

Today, election day, she wears noisy red, white, and blue tights adorned with tiny American flags. “This is a BIG day,” Libby tells me. Her eyes are wide in anticipation. For me, there is nothing particularly unusual about this Tuesday. It is not unlike any other weekday. “WHY did you vote for THAT guy?” her flatmates inquire. “I’m from the South.” Libby quips back. She is from the South. The South is not the North. Only red versus blue, no purple. 332 to 206—the final tally. Each of our home states reflects the antithesis of our vote. As much as she has tried to conceal her political affiliations, Libby says she feels as if her red is showing.

POSITIONING THE SCRIPT

From August through December 2012, I was granted the opportunity to study abroad. The re-election of Barack Obama that November became significant because of its insignificance in my life. It felt at once distant and immanent, far-away and nearby. Almost like a dream that you are not sure is real when you awake the next morning, much like the affect evoked in the opening moments

of this essay. By November 2012, I had been living abroad for three months and was nearing the end of my stay in my “borrowed home.” I use the word borrowed intentionally. Rather than adopted, or temporary, the word borrowed evokes the sense of discomfort as well as gratitude and indebtedness that I felt during my time in this space. This space, for me, was never fixed. It encompassed many different countries, cultures, and customs. I patched together this constellation of stories, events, people, and places. What I hope to demonstrate in these cobbled-together moments is a sense of interconnectedness. North or South, German or American, Democrat or Republican, we are linked in our humanity and are, in many ways, indebted to the otherness of others. ■

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The Gold Medal

ABSTRACT Objects are not just material things but containers of memories. They occupy a particular place in our life trajectories, and as we re-encounter them in the act of remembering, as we assort them in new assemblages through the act of storytelling, new layers of meaning, affect, and emotion may emerge. In this performance script, the intersection of three objects—"a gold medal," a "gun," and "a steak"—become an avenue to explore my past experiences and re-visit, re-think the issue of the normalization of violence in my home country, Colombia. **KEYWORDS** My history of history; Performance studies; Autobiographic performance

It was already dark when we finally arrived in Medellín, Colombia. I couldn't wait to share with my family the satisfaction of beating Brazil in the final of the 1997 South American Waterpolo Championship. I jumped off the bus and decided to walk back home, cutting through a path near the river. With each step, the smells and flavors of the beef stew my mom had promised to cook at my return, seemed to be closer. That piece of slow-cooked *sobrebarriga* meat was, for me, the flavor of home.

I was distracted when I felt the cold metal tube of a gun against my head. My body just froze. No welcome parade, this was the way my city received me after winning the gold medal for Colombia. A gun to my head. A reality check.

April 1997 was not only the month of one of the major achievements of Colombian Waterpolo, it also marked the creation of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC in Spanish), a coalition of paramilitary groups with an army of 20,000 members that began to operate through what they called "*Limpieza Social* (social cleansing)," or the extermination of difference but from a "social" perspective. Unfortunately, insecurity levels in Colombia were high, and social cleansing made sense for many people; they considered it normal and necessary.

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A voice from behind me said, “*Quieto pues marica, ya sabes como es pues* (Stay still motherfucker, you know the drill).”

And indeed, I knew the drill; like the Barthesian punctum on photography, this was exactly the thing that bothers me. The manual of etiquette to follow during a robbery was part of my semiotic equipment, it was normal. My body froze not only because of fear, but also because I recognized the situation as normal. Like: *Fuck! Now it's my turn.*

“*Dame la maleta pues pirobo* (Give me the bag, pirobo),” he said.

And then he added: “*y sabes que, me gustan esos zapatos tambien* (and you know what, I like those shoes too).”

I took off my shoes, and my pants followed along with my shirt, and with just my underwear on I managed to say: “*Hey pero por lo menos dejame la medalla home* (Hey but leave me the medal at least man).”

He just laughed and took the medal out of the bag, throwing it to me. “*Abi tenes campeon* (There you go champ).” And then he disappeared by the river.

Champ, yeah sure! But champ of what? Colombia has been always the champ of magical realism. Got a gold medal to remind me of that. I walked the rest of the way home barefoot and in my underwear. But what was naked that night was the social reality of the country. Being the victim of a robbery could make you change your mind about social cleansing. But how could I blame this guy when he was only the product of the socioeconomic conditions of the country? Maybe I am too romantic, but I still think that we were not that different. . . we both wanted that beef stew Mom was cooking. ■

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We Listen Together

Performance, Pedagogy, Politics

ABSTRACT In this brief essay, the author responds to a performative panel of essays by students of Devika Chawla. He situates his reading of the event betwixt and between typical modes of performance studies research, demonstrating how the panelists reveal narrative's power to reflect on the layering of time, power and privilege, and ways of knowing. **KEYWORDS** Performance studies; Narrative; Personal narrative

Performance studies practitioners use three modes: choosing a conspicuous performance (as might occur on stage) for study; treating a behavior in everyday life *as if* it were a performance and extending performance terms, metaphorically, when describing that behavior (e.g., Irving Goffman's use of "front stage" and "back stage"); and using performance, itself, as a mode of inquiry into a phenomenon (e.g., Anna Deveare Smith's use of performance to explore, among other things, the place of race in US American life).¹

But performance is tricky; its several guises make locating it difficult, especially if "locate" means "fix in a singular location." These three modes of performance are more *ways of looking at performance, epistemically* than *ways of categorizing performance studies activity, ontologically*. Enactments of performance studies, then, often yield heuristic insights when viewed by two or all of the modes, not just one. As I watch the video of these presentations at the 2016 National Communication Association (NCA) annual convention, I think about "performance" in multiple ways.

Although moving presentations of autobiographical meditations, these are not conspicuous, aesthetic performances. They are not memorized. There is no blocking—no metaphoric staging or group work; they are evocative *readings* of autoethnographic conference papers, manuscripts presented. They resist business-as-usual, lackluster, workaday presentations of "convention conventions." These readings are deeply felt; they respond to audience feedback, like

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the best conspicuous performance. They also offer personal disclosures, with various levels of risk, in ways comparable to solo autobiographical performance over the last several decades. They reside at the thresholds among different ways of conceptualizing performance. Would I like to see these narratives brought together in a group performance? Absolutely. Group performance can radically undermine the feel of the autonomous subject in ways the solo-authored, individually presented essays otherwise embody.²

But, that said, from other perspectives on performance, I cannot confidently say “this is not a group performance.” Devika Chawla and her students bring their classroom community to a national audience. The pedagogy runs the way a performance does—the professor, as director, negotiates power and collaboration in the devising of texts the community will fashion into a collective enactment of inquiry into the notion of history. The group crafts an order, constructs a flow, develops themes to elaborate and phrases—such as “my history”—to function as analytical motifs that unify the panel as a whole, just as conspicuous, aesthetic performance works to achieve unity.

From this perspective, I see their labor, metaphorically, as performance. I bring the language of devising to reading this labor,³ viewing the performance at NCA as a record of their collective inquiry. As such, I recognize that *they* have viewed this work as performative, viewed their activity as collective inquiry (performance as method), and represented that work in a conspicuous act before an audience that recognizes itself as *their* audience. And, so, then: isn't this a performance? Interesting developments in contemporary performance art consider making, itself, aesthetic. In these practices, elements of performance generally invisible to audiences have unique value. Composition and rehearsal are tangible ways to create art and community rather than merely preliminary to “actual” performance.⁴

From this perspective, my watching of the video of the presentations and reading the essays exposes me to collective reflection on the layering of time, the stratification of privilege, and a critique of knowledge. The whole project reflects on time in a way that combines a fundamental characteristic of personal narrative with a philosophical perspective on the emergent and emergency dimensions of that characteristic. Richard Bauman separated personal narrative into the “narrated event” (the elements of the story told, from the past) and the “narrative event” (the situation of the storytelling, in the present).⁵ Each of these stories, by definition, has these two aspects. Walter Benjamin has famously argued that storytellers and historians “seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”⁶ When these panelists isolate a narrated

event, their narrative events of telling those stories of *then* comments on emergency conditions *now*. Stevie M. Munz's narrative about growing up with parents who behaved in frightening and unreliable ways lays bare "a feeling that rarely leaves you. It lingers within you, even after time and with distance. Years have passed and there are miles in between, but it's all still there." For her, the layered past asserts itself as a warning about a present condition. Alane Presswood takes another tack: the past as refuge, where one might "wish to run back to [one's] childhood bedroom, covered in collaged photos and dance posters, and hide for just the next ten minutes." That room seems quite real, as a resource for memory, despite her argument that "[o]nce you let go [of your childhood], you cannot get it back." However, for those of us like Munz, losing our childhoods might seem like a blessing, raising questions of what we might call affective privilege—what it means to negotiate pasts of different weights when the present poses political problems.

Several of the essays/performances engage precisely this question. Sean Gleason describes "the impossibility of everyday life at a threat level orange" on an Air Force base. I mean no disrespect to those in uniform when I think hard about that word, "impossibility." Impossible for whom? One value of these narratives side by side is that Gleason's story occurs on the same stage as Sidi Becar Meyara's reflection on what it means to live as a Muslim in the United States. "Memories are like news broadcasts," Meyara tells us. "They too are selective. They choose the right stories (those deemed worthy). They focus on those whose pain is deemed more important. This is how some stories get told while others are forgotten." Together, these narratives demand that I ask whether US media ever views the threat level of everyday life for villages and cities under the threat of bombing in conflict situations as "impossible." Gleason and Meyara sharing a stage reveals something either of them alone could not: The dangers faced by military personnel and locals, while not identical, are systemically linked. The performance literalizes the possibility that we *must* be concerned about both. Kristen E. Okamoto's contribution insists, in fact, on this simultaneity. Okamoto deftly deconstructs nationalism and the way citizenship in "different" nations arbitrarily divides intelligibility and value as if they were property—property one is not supposed to share with a foreign national. But consequences know no borders, whether we are talking about plague, pollution, economic collapse, refugee crises, or any other emergency stemming from one nation's choice of a leader and that leader's choice to launch this or that program or missile. Chawla's use of performance pedagogy makes this collectivity possible. When and where I wish the stories had been combined, layered, and

staged in dialogue, I long for my reading to be more explicit for audiences who may not make connections. But my longing does not mean those connections are not possible or featured by the assignment and presentation in this more individualized form.

As one might expect from students of Chawla, whose own work on narratives about the Indian Partition in *Home Uprooted* reflects on knowing and its limits in the sharing of stories,⁷ many of these essays explicitly thematize epistemic questions about narratives in emergencies. Lisa Trocchia-Balçits reflects on the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attacks to question her own sense of embodied knowledge of the love in the cosmos, providing a useful critique revealing the probative limits of individual affect. Christy Zempter's poetic excavation of newsroom culture mobilizes a mourning of the loss of knowledge-producing communities. In this case, what we might think of as "real" journalism, the first draft of history imperiled by the free association and ethical immaturity of blog and meme culture that trivializes emergencies. Steve Granelli shows how our interpersonal relationships—in his case, the relationship between father and son—pose questions that reveal the wrong side of history is often occupied by someone we love. Justin J. Rudnick articulates the embodied consequences of differences in what communities "know" about the others they demonize and dominate, visiting such consequences on resistant members who may nonetheless insist what he does: "I was embarrassed, yes. But I was not ashamed." Just as we do with our pasts, we wear what our communities know, or think they know, about us on our bodies.

I want to close my reflection by acknowledging Camilo Perez's narrative as a particularly well-formed performance. The text I was given most closely resembles a script for conspicuous performance, complete with stage directions. The group's positioning of this piece last is wise, for it embodies both poles of what we might think of as a continuum of knowledge and its relationship to time. Time is, after all, the core issue of narrative for both Bauman and Benjamin, and it is thematically foregrounded by this inquiry into how personal and political history intersect. Perez's account of his robbery sets two time scales into motion and shows how, viewed synchronically, they reveal the fabric of history. On the one hand, he demonstrates duration and repetition when he says "I knew the drill. . . . The manual of etiquette to follow during a robbery was part of my semiotic equipment, it was normal." Here, with the word "drill," he summons a range of associations, the Butlerian "stylized repetition of acts"⁸ over time that produce culture—whether those are the drills that normalize military procedures that, whatever one might think of them, are designed to produce

death, or the privileged knowhow of a wealthy athlete who knows how to stand when being measured for a bespoke suit. It is no accident that “drill” is sometimes also used in rehearsal, to name the repetitive enactment of a particularly complex vocal or physical section of the performance. To know the drill is to have survived such repetition, to have enacted these procedures so widely discussed and depicted that they do feel “normal,” and are part of one’s “semiotic equipment.”

On the other hand, Perez also sets an epiphanic, singular, immediate time-scale in motion. In the wake of the robbery, dealing with the embodied consequences of having known the drill and survived the robbery, he tells us, “I walked the rest of the way home barefoot and in my underwear. But what was naked that night was the social reality of the country.” This artful figuration itself reveals the pulse of a gestalt; the sense of sudden coming together of a pattern that feminist consciousness-raising groups sometimes called a “click” moment. We do not have to take it literally and presume that Perez’s robbery *actually revealed every social structure and truth in an exhaustive way* to appreciate its narrative effect. Coming last in the sequence of stories, it affords me a chance to use it as a *mise en abyme*, a key, a reading instruction for the performance as a whole.

Across these narratives, students, stripped bare by history, persist. They theorize. They do things with experience that go beyond merely citing it. That they do so together says something important about the collective place of stories, what we might think of as the root or building block of qualitative inquiry. Chawla has created an opportunity for performers and audience to forge a “we” across the divide of the stage edge, a boundary no more real than the boundary between nations or identities—if by “real” we mean inviolable, permanent, ontologically absolute, oppositional, mutually exclusive. One by one, the performers take the shared stage. They speak alone, but we listen together, and that, as ever, is the point of performance. ■

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My History of History

Autobiographical Performance as Critical Pedagogy

ABSTRACT This autobiographical performance acts as a response to relevant historical moments laced within the performances of *My History of History: Autobiographical Performance as Critical Pedagogy*. **KEYWORDS** Critical pedagogy; Autobiographical performance

Autobiographical performances of history act as metaphors of critical exigency, calling the body into being, and *knowing*, simultaneously, within a specific context. Autobiographical performance asks the storyteller to be vulnerable, open, honest, imaginative, mindful, intentional, connected. Sometimes connected to deeply rooted pain that tugs at the roots of our collective consciousness. Sometimes connected to moments of perceived simplicity until matters of the heart darken our memories and leave our stories fragmented then sewn together like a quilt bursting at the seams with secrets. This is the work of *enfleshed knowledge*.¹ The work of getting our hearts and minds dirty with the stuff of reflection. This is the act of exploring new possibilities with the expectation of change, engaging the performance of possibility, moving through the spaces of resistance within the academy to affect social change, and exploring critical performance pedagogy.²

As I sit in the audience and witness the intentional connection of history, story, and reflection, I can't help but think of my body sharing those spaces with each artist.

I see myself locking my hair at 21, just two days
before I would board a plane
on 9/11,
only to get stuck on the tarmac, deplane,
and learn that our world would never be the same.
7 years later,
I cut them off

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trying to escape the pain
of upheaval and loss.

I place myself back in Texas, in a toxic home
stuck
in a toxic marriage.

Although we don't argue in front of the children,
I know they are growing sick from the toxicity
when school calls for a change of clothes.
They are urinating on themselves.

I see myself at 13,
unable to understand the intersectional importance of the
O. J. Simpson trial,
but I know that being a woman means no justice.
And that becoming a woman for some humans
happens when blood finds its way out of the womb.
And that Nicole's womb will never bleed again,
yet mine starts around the time her body bleeds to death
on the front porch of his estate.

I sit in the cleavages of my life
Cleavages that divide a distinct before that is never the same after.
The death of Whitney Houston.
The first neurological panic attack I survive.
Two births.
The divorce.
Her.

I am reminded of the cultural shifts that occur on the job
when those in power threaten our freedom of speech.
Memories of late-life coming out to my parents
when it was illegal to be married.
Watching the first and only black president
be inaugurated
into the White House.
What it means to empathize
with those who wish to do us harm.

I am pushed and pulled in and out of story, in and out of history, in and out of present day reality. I feel. I cry. I witness. I breathe. I share. I wonder. I fear. I cry more. I feel more. This is the work of the intentional professor. This is the work of the engaged student. This is the work of embodied learning.

Autobiographical performance requires students to learn, understand, apply, and critique through doing. We become open books, connected to open histories that beg for re-interpretation. In the weaving of history and personal memory, we engage learning as a critical performance, alongside the performance of story.³ Within the critical performance space, we all become vulnerable to reinvention. We expose the malleability of perception. We become the objects of gazes and the gazers. We witness each performer and audience member embrace possibility in the disquieting space that links together the common with unchartered territory and assumed values with transgressive behavior.⁴ Together, we grow into complexity. ■

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