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Oral History Performance as Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Maria Beach, Alex J. Bishop, Tanya Finchum, and Julie Pearson Little Thunder

Performances created from oral history collections may support innovative research and pedagogy. Employing their work on the Oklahoma 100 Year Life project and the play Centenarians as a case study, the four authors examine theoretical and pragmatic issues associated with interdisciplinary collaboration and oral history performance. Some of the questions they address include: What makes a collaborative project successful? What makes oral history a rich source of material for devising or scripting theatrical performances, and conversely, what may be problematic about it? How can oral history performance amplify voices excluded from traditional historical accounts and increase awareness of archival resources available to members of a university community and the general public? How should the performances themselves be critiqued?

Keywords: oral history, performance, centenarians, interdisciplinary collaboration, verbatim theatre

Using oral history collections as the basis of devised or scripted performances can create opportunities for collaborative research and support innovative pedagogies across different university departments and units. This is especially crucial in an era when universities tend to privilege interdisciplinary work and during an historical moment when the arts and humanities are experiencing contraction in the academy. Working collectively with peers outside of theatre and performance may also be a boon to university-affiliated performing artists, who often view creative praxis as their métier and may not publish as often as faculty members in other disciplines. Employing oral histories as subject matter for theatrical performances can create productive alliances with researchers outside of the arts.¹

Using shared work on the Oklahoma 100 Year Life project and the play *Centenarians*, a one-act play created from some of the project's interviews, as a case study, this essay examines theoretical and practical issues associated with

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Dr. Julie Pearson Little Thunder with the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at Oklahoma State University, is a Native theater scholar and playwright who has written several oral history plays, including *Centenarians*.

oral history performance as interdisciplinary collaboration. Indeed, oral history itself is already what oral historian and theorist Lynn Abrams calls “a crossover methodology, an octopus with tentacles reaching into a wide range of disciplinary, practice-led and community enterprises,” and performing oral history may expand those disciplinary possibilities.² In this essay, oral history refers to the collection of people’s stories by historians, archivists, researchers, and/or creative artists, although oral history has other meanings across times and cultures. Our essay begins with a consideration of ways oral history and performance share inherent theoretical and practical concerns. Moving on to the principal case study, we describe and reflect on our collaborative project in order to identify some of the opportunities and obstacles associated with staging oral history. Three major themes will be addressed. The first examines why oral histories can be valuable, productive subject matter for creating new dramatic work. Next, the benefits and drawbacks of interdisciplinary collaboration generally and oral history-based performance in particular are considered. Finally, we contemplate how oral history performances should be critiqued.

Performance and Oral History: Theoretical and Practical Connections

Performance and oral history are disciplines that share intrinsic similarities. This section reviews some pertinent scholarship on oral history and performance as a way to familiarize performance scholars and practitioners with relevant work from other disciplines. More crucially however, this section seeks to show how oral history’s intellectual and methodological parallels with performance can provide a compatible basis for productive collaboration with scholars and practitioners in theatre and performance who are interested in interdisciplinary work. By underscoring some of the similarities between oral history theory and praxis and their performative counterparts, we hope to demonstrate how and why oral history is extremely well suited for adaptation into performance and as the basis of collaborative research and creative activity.

Performance and cultural studies scholar Della Pollock observes that performance and oral history “enjoy a unique synergy” based on “shared and complementary investments in orality, life stories, and community building”; she also asserts oral history is inherently performative since it is “a process of *making history in dialogue*.”³ When oral historians collect narrations from the people they interview, the narrators often naturally share their recollections in a performative fashion. Historian Rhonda Y. Williams theorizes that individuals sharing their oral histories employ Voice, an attribute that is not merely the utterance of spoken words but also a whole range of expressive and gesticular languages that constitute performance.⁴ The tendency of narrators to perform their reminiscences makes oral histories particularly suitable for adaptation to theatre. Pam Schweitzer, founder of the Age Exchange Theatre Trust in the United Kingdom, noticed when she interviewed older adults to create oral history performances, they “were telling a

lot of their memories in the form of dialogue, and almost performing their stories as though they were happening in the present,” leading Schweitzer to imagine these exchanges as dramatized scenes.⁵

The dialogic nature of oral history not only exists as a narrative choice employed by many oral history subjects, it is also embedded in its methodology: a narrator shares stories in conversation with an interviewer in a reflexive exchange that ultimately shapes the story in unanticipated ways. Lara Nielsen, describing the oral history project course she taught to undergraduate drama students, asserts the interactions between interviewer and interviewee result in “a shared, multivocal, and indeed performative text.”⁶ Sometimes oral history-based performances erase or downplay the role of the person conducting interviews, but other times that second “character” may be retained or even expanded to foreground this dynamic. When dance historian Jeff Friedman created *Muscle Memory*, a solo lecture-performance piece based on oral histories of dancers and choreographers, he choreographed the work “to conserve the dialogic roles of the interviewer and narrator in the oral history interview,” dancing and performing textual excerpts from two interviews as well as material he wrote for himself as the “Listener.”⁷ Performance studies scholar E. Patrick Johnson has also written about the importance of listening, asserting that when narrators share their life histories with an attentive interviewer, “the self is affirmed through the interaction with another who bears witness to the story being told.”⁸ Likewise, Abrams calls oral history “a performance by a narrator for an audience” that may originate in a remembered story told to an interviewer, but could also include dramatic use of the material.⁹

Performing oral history adds a layer of transmission and expands the audience from the oral historian(s) originally collecting the stories to many others. For Abrams, making a public performance from an oral history interview “squares the memory circle” by inscribing a “private memory into the public consciousness.”¹⁰ It also adds to Diana Taylor’s concept of the repertoire. For Taylor, the repertoire is a performative way of learning, storing, and transmitting collective knowledge, values, and historical memory from one generation to the next within a specific sociocultural group.¹¹ The repertoire may be an autonomous form of knowledge within some groups or it may exist in tandem with archival knowledge, but unlike the archive, its authority derives not just from an original act of witnessing but also from live presence.¹² By translating works from the archive to the repertoire, oral history performance expands the repertoire itself, particularly when presenting materials heretofore deemed marginal or unimportant. Raising awareness about social issues, highlighting underrepresented and historically suppressed voices, or bringing to light neglected aspects of history are often cited as primary reasons for collecting oral histories,¹³ and staging those histories may help further those aims by sharing the narrators’ stories with a wider public audience.

Theatre artists have been creating works based on interviews with people for decades, and this type of performance may be called *verbatim theatre* or

documentary theatre as well as *oral history performance*. In *Creating Verbatim Theatre from Oral Histories*, Clare Summerskill defines *verbatim theatre* as “a dramatic production based on spoken experiences shared by people who have been interviewed about a particular subject or theme,” and *documentary theatre* as an “umbrella term referring to the creation of non-fiction plays based on documents”—artifacts that may include interviews but also other primary resources.¹⁴ She also acknowledges that *documentary theatre* is often the preferred term in the United States for what she and other practitioners in the United Kingdom label *verbatim theatre*. Summerskill’s definition of *verbatim theatre* would apply to the finished version of *Centenarians*, but most verbatim theatre projects have their genesis with performing artists undertaking to interview subjects for a planned theatrical production. Since our project began as oral histories designed to be preserved as part of a historical record (and only later used as the basis of a dramatic production), it is slightly different from most verbatim theatre productions. Therefore, we have elected to use the term *oral history performance* throughout this essay, even as we acknowledge that our project or future ones using existing oral history archives as the basis of productions may also be viewed as verbatim theatre.

Project Description: The Oklahoma 100 Life Project and *Centenarians*

The Oklahoma 100 Year Life project is an oral history collection in the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program (OOHRP). Tanya Finchum and Alex Bishop, two of our collaborators, interviewed 111 individuals who lived to be one hundred years old or more. Finchum is a faculty member in the OOHRP with a background in gerontology, and Bishop is a gerontologist in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University. Bishop and Finchum collaborated with other gerontology and psychology scholars to use a subset of these interviews to assess psychosocial theories of aging.¹⁵ At first Bishop employed the Oklahoma 100 Year Life interviews in his courses on adult development and human aging by having students analyze the centenarians’ narratives, but he decided to try a more innovative pedagogical approach by asking another OOHRP faculty member, Julie Pearson Little Thunder, to create a script out of some of the oral histories.¹⁶ Pearson Little Thunder, whose background is in theatre and who had previously written and directed three other oral history plays, led students through acting exercises, workshopping her script, and performing a reading of a one-act play based on five of the centenarians’ interviews. Students were given a reflective writing assignment, which Bishop used to assess the efficacy of this pedagogical method regarding student understanding of concepts about aging and their engagement with course material. This stage of the project was the subject of a co-authored publication, “The Oklahoma 100 Year Life Project as an Instructional Tool to Transform Student Engagement and Pedagogy in Gerontological Education.”¹⁷

The next iteration of the project was to stage the one-act play *Centenarians* with theatre students and others who had acting experience. The gerontology students who had previously performed a reading of the script had little theatre background and were unprepared to make a commitment to rehearsals outside of class time. Beyond the desire to see how more experienced actors would affect audience reactions to and investment in the piece, Bishop was also interested in determining whether or not students portraying centenarians would have different attitudes toward older adults and human aging before and after they embodied their characters. Pearson Little Thunder asked a theatre faculty member, Maria Beach, to join as a collaborator to help her recruit interested student actors and stage the production. Beach had previously served as the dramaturg for an original devised play, *Oklahoma Voices*, which had used oral histories to tell state history from the points of view of women, Black, and Native Oklahomans. For *Centenarians*, Beach served as assistant director and dramaturg. Five theatre students were recruited for the project; four of them played centenarians, and a fifth was an understudy. Oklahoma State University staff members portrayed the fifth centenarian character and two invented characters—a Writer and Luck, an allegorical character. The cast participated in focus groups before rehearsals began and after the final performance to assess their perspectives on aging and longevity. The data from these focus groups indicated that the actors' perspectives toward aging and older people did transform postproduction, and the results were presented in a poster session at the 2019 Gerontological Society of America's annual conference.

The one-act had two free public performances—one on campus in a large multipurpose auditorium in the Human Sciences building, and another off campus in a more traditional auditorium at the Stillwater Public Library. Additionally, a rehearsal was filmed and broadcast on the university's video platform. Most of the audience members at the first performance were students in the Human Development and Family Science Department, and Bishop administered pre- and post-show surveys to them. Although the results of those surveys have not been fully analyzed yet, early comparisons of the pre- and post-show questionnaires suggest spectators exhibited more positive and realistic attitudes toward aging and expressed increased empathy as a result of watching the play.¹⁸ The second performance was attended by community members and was more diverse in terms of audience ages and ethnicities than the one on campus.

Why Stage Oral History?

Oral history offers rich data about the human experience from first-person perspectives. It also provides a mechanism for storytelling and sharing individual experiences, without which some memories and stories could be lost forever. The intrinsic historical and educational value of oral history narratives makes them worthy of preservation. Staging oral history increases the visibility of the narratives,

moving them out of the archives and presenting them to a broader audience in a dynamic form. Oral history performances may also increase awareness of the archival resources available to members of a university community and the general public.

Another important aspect of oral history performance is that it can amplify voices excluded from traditional historical accounts and often underrepresented in mainstream theatre. Gary Okihiro asserts, "Oral history is not only a tool or method for recovering history; it also is a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and this history must be written."¹⁹ Oral history is a democratic form of history. A large percentage of the narratives in the Oklahoman Oral History Research Program are with ordinary people, and the information they provide is not usually documented elsewhere. Stories generated from oral histories allow for hidden voices to be heard. When theatre practitioners select narratives to include in performances, they may accentuate this inclusivity by choosing diverse stories from a variety of different demographic groups, or by focusing on a particular underrepresented/historically marginalized group. When Pearson Little Thunder wrote the *Centenarians* script, she began by asking Finchum which interviews were especially compelling stories, and also looked for subjects who were women and/or BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color), who represented three of the five centenarians in the play. The fictitious character of the Writer opens the show by talking about biases and stereotypes she had about aging, implicitly expressing some of the misgivings audience members might harbor about watching a play about old people. Pearson Little Thunder incorporated stories that would challenge common assumptions such as those articulated by the Writer, as well as selecting narratives that would complement and challenge each other. In this way she constructed the play dramaturgically to move from preconceptions about older adults toward greater understanding and empathy. Oral history performances can also help audiences deepen their understanding of their own communities or region by showing how broader historical moments or movements affected people locally, as well as depicting different cultures living within the same geographical region.

For theatre practitioners, oral history can be a rich source of material for devising or scripting performances. Oral history narratives often contain memorable characters and plots with twists and turns, which lend themselves well to dramatization. Juxtaposing thematically similar excerpts from different oral history narratives can create implied dialogue or a choral effect. However, it is important that performing artists use the material ethically. One best practice is to retain the narrators' original words verbatim as much as possible, perhaps cutting extraneous phrases but preserving the subjects' unique word choices and linguistic quirks.²⁰ The historical and cultural context of the individual narrators should also be researched and respected. Oral history involves real people and authentic stories, and it is crucial that their stories be retold with care.²¹ Some practitioners may also employ

what Alicia J. Rouverol calls “collaborative oral history,” involving narrators in the production of new works drawn from their interviews.²²

Oral history and its performance can present logistical challenges. For researchers interested in the historical and factual aspects of narratives, a potential problem lies in the retrospective nature of oral story telling. Retrospective memories may not be accurate in some cases, and narrators who are older or have cognitive impairments may forget or misremember some details of the events they recount.²³ A pragmatic consideration for performance is that permission is usually required to use oral histories that are not in the public domain. Some performing artists may fear that oral history-based performance may be overly didactic or that it might limit creativity. However, playwrights/performers like Anna Deavere Smith (who uses interviews with real people to explore current events and persistent inequalities in award-winning verbatim performances like *Twilight: Los Angeles* and *Notes from the Field*) show that oral histories may be used to educate and potentially transform audiences without sacrificing artistic excellence.²⁴

Benefits and Drawbacks of Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Our interdisciplinary collaboration on the Oklahoma 100 Year Life project and staging *Centenarians* was generally successful. All of us agreed that learning from scholars in other disciplines and interacting with students outside one’s own department were primary advantages to this type of work. Bishop noted that interdisciplinary projects can help the advancement of theoretical thinking in a particular discipline and may even initiate new sciences or disciplines. For him, *Centenarians* provided an opportunity to infuse his discipline with the humanities and allowed him to develop a new pedagogy for gerontological instruction. Finchum observed her oral history program considers collaborative endeavors as successful when they are well-received by the intended audience, engage people with oral history, and enlighten the public about the subject matter of the particular project. She considers this interdisciplinary collaboration to be significant because it familiarized another academic department with the work of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, advanced student learning, and provided outreach to the general public in support of the university’s land-grant mission. Beach and Pearson Little Thunder discussed how successful interdisciplinary collaboration occurs when all of the participants listen to one another and respect each other’s expertise in their respective disciplines. For this particular project, they felt the greatest benefits were pedagogical—particularly for the student actors (discussed more shortly).

The collaborators who identified a drawback to interdisciplinary work all cited additional time requirements. Bishop stated there are usually a lot of moving parts when it comes to putting interdisciplinary plans into action, so such work requires a bit more patience and time. When it comes to commissioning an oral history play, Pearson Little Thunder remarked many people outside of the arts fail to appreciate

how much research and labor is required to create a script. Beach was concerned that scholars in other disciplines may not understand how much rehearsal time, appropriate rehearsal space, and advance access to the final performance venue is needed to produce a high-quality performance, especially when working with student actors.

Other scholars and practitioners collecting and/or performing oral histories have documented some of their successes and failures collaborating with one another across disciplines or with community partners. James Culhane and Andrea Breemer Frantz describe interdisciplinary work undertaken by students in pharmacy education and communication studies courses to collect and transcribe oral history interviews with pharmacists. Analyzing the students' self-analyses revealed most of the students reported positive experiences despite initial misgivings about the project.²⁵ Devised theatre artist Kelly Bremner collaborated with the head of an Appalachian community school on an intergenerational endeavor in which elementary students interviewed older adults about their childhoods and then created a play based on the reminiscences to perform for the seniors. Bremner describes how the children learned about mid-twentieth-century history and their own region through the project, while seniors responded to the play with gratitude.²⁶ Some interdisciplinary collaborations may not achieve all the researchers hope to accomplish. Jacquelyn D. Hall, founding director of the Southern Oral History Program, writes that a joint effort between one of her classes and one of Della Pollock's performance courses to document school desegregation by collecting and performing residents' oral histories was ultimately declared a "fantastic failure," a worthy attempt to write an unfinished story that was impossible to present in all its complexity.²⁷ For some collaborators, differences in various participants' goals could be problematic. Historians Judith A. Ridner and Susan W. Clemens-Bruder recount how an oral history performance about the destruction of a Black neighborhood in the name of urban renewal and the civil rights activism of local residents became an award-winning musical and "milestone event" for African American community members. However, the historians felt that the playwright's efforts to elevate some stories and downplay others, to create composite characters in some cases, and to connect the relatively modest activism of the small Black communities in their region with bolder national movements distorted the oral history interviews and resulted in an overly celebratory depiction of the area's history.²⁸ This last example serves as a reminder that the desired outcomes of an oral history performance should be discussed in advance, and that sometimes the aspirations of different community partners may not align with each other.

Critiquing Oral History Performance

How should oral history performances be critiqued, particularly since many of the usual metrics associated with professional or university main stage theatrical productions (ticket sales, high production values, heavy investments of money,

talent, and time) may not apply? For nonperformance scholars, the performance's value might lie in designing assessments like pre-and post-show surveys to gauge the performance's impact on audiences. Bishop suggested further studies might compare an experimental group that receives some type of condition (e.g., watching the play) to that of a control group that does not receive any condition (not watching the play). For Finchum, an important evaluative consideration is how well a performance accurately captured the essence of the oral histories—the individuals portrayed and the meaning associated with their stories.²⁹ Bishop's preliminary findings for the public performances of *Centenarians* lead him to believe the oral history play generated greater audience awareness regarding the vulnerability and finitude of life, as well as a bit more empathy toward the realities of human aging.

For some theatre scholars and practitioners, assessing the artistic merits of a performance is a way to gauge its value, and some oral history performances may achieve a high level of virtuosity. For other projects, the process may be more important than the product. Beach and Pearson Little Thunder observed that the student actors in *Centenarians* had opportunities to explore the psychology of characters quite different from themselves. This production asked all of the student actors to portray people more than four times their own ages, primarily through voice and movement (the decision was made not to use old-age makeup or grayed hair for this production). Finding ways to identify with their characters required imagination and, in some cases, dramaturgical research.³⁰ For the theatre faculty members staging *Centenarians*, the transformations that the student actors experienced and the pedagogical value of this project both to them and to student audience members were the most important critical criteria. Other collaborative teams interested in staging oral history might gauge artistic success by popular and critical reactions to their performances, inviting external reviewers to assess the productions, or other measures.

Conclusion

Staging oral histories can provide fruitful collaborations across disciplines to produce new types of research and pedagogy. Oral history performance may be used both inside and outside the classroom to engage and educate students and other audience members about history, current social issues or events, or other topics. Oral history performances may also be a way to enhance diversity and inclusion by bringing underrepresented voices into a curriculum or public awareness. Scholars interested in this type of work should consider what they hope to achieve with a particular performance and design the project accordingly, including theorizing about the evaluative criteria that will be used to critique the performance.

Understanding that collaborative enterprises may take more time than solo research or work within a single discipline is an important consideration. If surveys, focus groups, interviews, or other research techniques involving human subjects are to be administered, then adequate time to allow the proposed research to be approved

by an institutional review board may need to be a factor. Similarly, adequate time to write or devise a performance and to cast and rehearse the production must be budgeted. Overall, however, oral history performance as interdisciplinary collaboration is an advantageous creative practice that can generate productive research, enhance teaching and learning, and raise community awareness about important historical and contemporary issues.

Notes

1. The case study described in this essay brought together university-based researchers in theatre, oral history, and human sciences. Similar collaborations might include disciplines such as art/music, social sciences, history/other humanities fields, and education. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medicine) fields where jointly authored research is already a common working practice may also productively use oral histories in their scholarship and teaching. For an example of using oral histories in a medical humanities project see James Culhane and Andrea Breemer Frantz, "An Interdisciplinary Oral History Initiative," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 71, no. 6 (2007): 1–7.

2. Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 2.

3. Della Pollock, ed., *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 1–2. Similarly, Paul Thompson also discusses oral history and theatre as "natural partners," and calls interviews "a form of performance in themselves." See Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 302; also cited by Clare Sumnerhill, *Creating Verbatim Theatre from Oral Histories*. (New York: Routledge, 2021), 3.

4. Rhonda Y. Williams, "'I'm a Keeper of Information': History-Telling and Voice," *Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (2001): 42–3.

5. Pam Schweitzer, *Reminiscence Theatre: Making Theatre from Memories* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007), 24.

6. Lara Nielsen, "Working the Field with Oral History: Talking Towards the Research Encounter in Theatre and Performance Studies," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 24, no. 1 (2009): 99–116.

7. Jeff Friedman, "'Muscle Memory': Performing Oral History," *Oral History* 33, no. 2 (2005): 37–8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40179868>.

8. E. Patrick Johnson, "Put a Little Honey in My Sweet Tea: Oral History as Quare Performance," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 3/4 (2016): 61, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44474062>. Schweitzer also affirms that when interviewees have an opportunity to speak to an appreciative listener it can be "genuinely empowering." See Schweitzer, *Reminiscence Theatre*, 8.

9. Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 130.

10. Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 139.

11. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 16, 21. Often the repertoire is maintained by and for one group of people. Our collaborator Julie Pearson Little Thunder views performances drawn from oral history archives as moving from archive to repertoire (Taylor's terms) but also sees the possibility of growing the repertoire by performing underrepresented stories for diverse audience members, who may not all belong to the specific group(s) whose stories are enacted in oral history performances.

12. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 20–1.

13. For example, David K. Dunaway recalls that oral historians during the 1960s and 1970s turned from collecting stories from well-known or elite people toward using oral history to "describe and empower the nonliterate and the historically disenfranchised." See David K. Dunaway, "Introduction," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2nd ed., ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Braun (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1996), 8.

14. Summerskill, *Creating Verbatim Theatre*, 8–9. Summerskill also devotes a brief chapter to the similarities and differences between oral history and verbatim theatre: see *Creating Verbatim Theatre*, 23–9.

15. Melinda Heinz, Nicholas Cone, Grace Da Rosa, Alex J. Bishop, and Tanya Finchum, "Examining Supportive Evidence for Psychosocial Theories of Aging within the Oral History Narratives of Centenarians," *Societies* 7, no. 2 (2017): 8.

16. "Oklahoma 100 Year Life: About the Collection," Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, 2021, <https://library.okstate.edu/search-and-find/collections/digital-collections/100/>.

17. Alex J. Bishop, Julie Pearson Little Thunder, Tanya Finchum, and Maria Beach. "The Oklahoma 100 Year Life Project as an Instructional Tool to Transform Student Engagement and Pedagogy in Gerontological Education," *International Journal of Reminiscence and Life Review* 6, no. 1, (2005): 4–9.

18. "Oklahoma 100 Year Life."

19. Gary Y. Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2nd ed., ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Braun (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1996), 209.

20. Schweitzer also discusses the importance of verbatim theatre and its uses in other theatre companies in *Reminiscence Theatre*, 45–6, 50. Summerskill devotes a chapter of her book to ethical considerations for verbatim theatre in *Creating Verbatim Theatre*, 45–59.

21. Rouverol makes a similar point, arguing that collaborative oral history requires researchers "take seriously the perspectives of our interviewees and to (re)present them fairly, whether or not we agree with those perspectives." See Alicia J. Rouverol, "Collaborative Oral History in a Correctional Setting: Promise and Pitfalls," *Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (2003): 63.

22. Rouverol, "Collaborative Oral History," 62–3. The collaborators working on *Centenarians* did not involve the narrators in the creation and presentation of the play, largely due to the fact that the narrators' advanced age made travel too challenging for them. However, Pearson Little Thunder has dramatized other OOHHP collections and some of those oral history narrators attended public presentations of those plays and participated in talk back sessions after the performances. Similarly to Rouverol, who worked with incarcerated individuals to present their stories, Jodi Jinks and students from the Oklahoma State University Department of Theatre also created devised performances with people in Oklahoma prisons under an educational writing and performance program called Arts Aloud. Jinks and some of her graduate students collaborated with groups of incarcerated men to create original pieces that the men performed for other imprisoned individuals and OSU theatre students, then the visiting theatre students took the devised scripts, rehearsed them, and re-performed the men's stories for them as a "give back." After both the original performances by the incarcerated authors and the "give backs" performed by students, talk back sessions were held. These performances came closer to the shared authority and collaborative ethos Rouverol advocates.

23. See, for instance, "Introduction to the Third Edition," where Perks and Thomson acknowledge "historians have been notoriously wary of memory as a historical source," and that "oral history has generated fierce debates...about the reliability of memory." See Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 3rd ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), xiv.

24. *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* was originally a stage play that premiered in 1993 at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles and had its Broadway debut in 1994. A version titled *Twilight: Los Angeles* (2000) was filmed for PBS and was rereleased in 2020 in the wake of George Floyd's murder and Black Lives Matter protests. A version of *Notes from the Field* premiered in 2015 at the Berkley Repertory Theatre and it was made into an HBO film in 2018. Anchor Books published both scripts: *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* in 1994 and *Notes from the Field* in 2019. Dramatists Play Service published an acting version of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* in 2002 and plans to release the acting version of *Notes from the Field* soon. Both *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* and *Notes from the Field* won Obie Awards, among other honors.

25. Culhane and Frantz, "Interdisciplinary Oral History Initiative," 4–5.

26. Kelly Bremner, "Intergenerational and Interdisciplinary, Service through Oral History in Appalachia: History, Community and Place," *Youth Theatre Journal* 34, no. 2 (2020): 142–5.

27. Jacquelyn D. Hall, "Afterword: Reverberations," in *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, ed. Della Pollock (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 196.

28. Judith A. Ridner and Susan W. Clemens-Bruder, "Taking Their Place among the Giants: Performing Oral Histories of Pennsylvania's Black Freedom Struggle," *Oral History Review* 41, no. 1 (2014): 48–76.

29. This is similar to Williams's observation that "oral histories demand 'close listening'"—paying attention not only to written text, but the narrators' performances of their words. See Williams, "I'm a Keeper of Information," 60.

30. Schweitzer recounts similar experiences working with student actors who portrayed older women in an oral history performance, recalling they "had to try to empathise [*sic*] with that person's experience and imaginatively identify with it, however different it was from their own, in order to perform it, make it theirs, own it." See Schweitzer, *Reminiscence Theatre*, 25.