

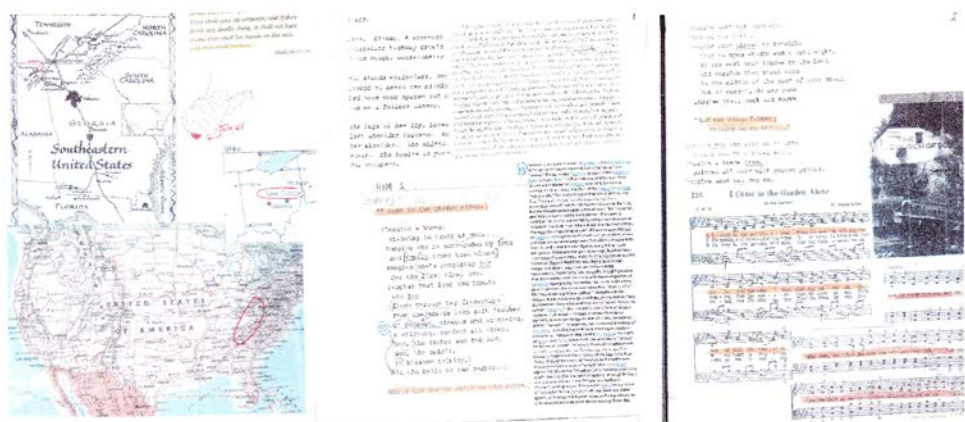
I Come To the Garden Alone
 Imagine a Woman,
 standing in front of you.
 Imagine she is surrounded by love
 and family truer than blood.
 Imagine she's imaging joy
 for the first time, joy.
 Imagine that love and family
 and joy
 flows through her fingertips
 from the scales like soft leather
 of *Nahash*, sinuous and straining,
 a writhing, perfect pit viper,
 God, the father and the son,
 God, the spirit,
 in blessed trinity,
 in the belly of the serpent (1).

Part II. Introduction to the Process of Performance

In *Mud Nostalgia*, a one-woman play written by theatre historian and playwright Dr. Mark Evans Bryan, the main character testifies her experience in snake handling. With an opening film sequence of footage of snake handling from the documentary, "The Holy Ghost People" (1967),¹ the performer enters the sparse and dimly lit stage, hand bandaged. Examining the rich spiritual dimensions of holiness religions in the Appalachian region, the woman in the play struggles to understand her life and faith, and the ways she has been betrayed by the man she loves and the faith she follows. The play combines flashbacks to happier times, reflections on a life of faith, and attempts to reconcile her beliefs with the hard moments in her life.

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¹ See <http://archive.org/details/HolyGhostPeople>



As is evident in the excerpt above, the woman speaks directly to the audience, invoking their imaginary participation as they experience her struggle with her identity and her actions within that identity. However as the play progresses, she bears witness to religious tradition and a tragic event, yet she simultaneously challenges the ways that life stories get told and seeks out audience recognition as she reveals who she is in relation to family, religion, and societal expectations of womanhood. As the character's life is retold through the performance, dominant narratives of snake handlers, charismatic church-goers, and women-who-“stay” are challenged. As such, the play—particularly its creative processes from script writing, rehearsing, performing, and audience talk backs—challenges what it means to embody testimony and memory.

This essay focuses on the script of *Mud Nostalgia*, particularly the performer's “visually landscaped” archive of the script, a notebook containing her notes and interaction with the script. The Notebook itself sometimes appears on stage, depending on where the play is performed. If the performer is in an alternative setting such as a hotel ballroom or church as opposed to a traditional theatre space, the Notebook is used to emphasize the non-theatricality of the performance. In this case it becomes a partner in the dialogue of the play and is set prominently beside the performer as if to share the space.² In this examination of the Notebook, we suggest that the “process of performance” illustrates how life history and narrative intersect, and the implications for performativity. In doing so, we highlight the relationships between text, performer, archivist, and spect-actor and suggest that because the relationship is unavoidably *mediated*, there is ethical responsibility to witnessing. We also suggest that this unavoidably mediated text troubles our notion of the archive and consequently asks us to rethink Derrida's archival hermeneutics.

As he explained in an interview, playwright Mark Evans Bryan says that *Mud Nos-*

² After working on this article together, the authors are considering a production where Katrina appears on stage with Sue. Katrina would be located almost off-stage, sitting in the background with the Notebook, silently reading it and taking notes, with the intent to create another layer of interaction with the text.

talgia originated through “connecting interviews” with the actor Sue Ott Rowlands, who inspired the play. At the time, both Sue and Mark were at Ohio State University, she as a faculty member in theatre and he as a graduate student. He was working on a play titled *Middle True*, but after a series of interviews and collaborations, they decided to work on a play together, which eventually became *Mud Nostalgia*. While *Middle True* was begun before this collaboration, their work together shifted the two pieces to become Parts 1 and 2 of a larger piece titled: *Mercury Seven with Signs Following*. In each of these plays, and indeed in much of Bryan’s work, the metaleptic nature of the script reveals Bryan’s self-consciousness of narrative form, the interplay of layers of storytelling, and the role of repetition in highlighting audience interaction and response. When asked about his writing process, he explained that the conversations he had with Sue were particular to his work with her as a performer. He said, “I wanted to capture *her* voice and in the plays. Her perspectives and experiences merge with my imagination” (Interview). There are moments in each of the plays that are autobiographical. They draw both on Sue’s life experiences and Mark’s. Which details are which are incidental, but the fact that the plays are semi-autobiographical for both playwright and performer highlights this interaction and layering of texts upon texts.

Mud Nostalgia, like most of Bryan’s plays, makes deliberate use of parentheticals, stage directions that are both stage directions and dialogue that the character speaks. Bryan says these parentheticals are a way for the director to communicate with the actor and to speak to the audience about storytelling. In *Middle True*, for instance, the character in that play speaks the stage directions out loud. The unnamed character in *Middle True* says, “She pauses. Traces a line. Right from her belly to her narrow curved neck” (*Kenyon Review*, p. 64). These are the same lines that appear throughout the play in the stage directions. Engaging in layers of storytelling, then, speaking to the audience about storytelling, and this level of repetition provides readers of the text a way to see worlds interacting with worlds.

This metanarrative of theatre is often discussed in theatre and performance studies. In discussing Michael Redhill’s *Goodness*, for instance, Jenn Stephensen says, “In repetition, the question turns the object of interrogation from a direct experience ‘How does it feel?’ to a metaexperience of the experience: ‘What does feeling feel like?’ and ‘What does it feel like to be asked the question how does it feel?’” (97). Stephensen’s analysis of *Goodness* highlights the text as fostering an “engaged moral responsibility for that story taken up by a listening witness. As Kelly Oliver writes, ‘Just as the various parts of the body cannot function without the circulation of blood and oxygen, the psyche cannot function without the circulation of affective energy ... We have an ethical and social responsibility to be vigilant in our attempts to open up the circulation and flow of affective energy in all of our relationships’ (20)...[Goodness] advocates for an active and ethically responsible audience witness--what I am calling a performative witness--generating a hopeful witnessing strategy arising directly out of the play’s looped metatheatrical structure of stories within stories” (Stephenson 97-98).

Stephensen’s notion of performative witnessing can be seen in *Mud Nostalgia* as well. If we go back to the opening lines of *Mud Nostalgia*, the character repeatedly (a

mere 18 times) asks us to “imagine.” Because we are asked over and over to imagine, we become aware of being *told*, to “imagine.” The result is a metaexperience of the experience of imagining: Not only are we *asked* to imagine (a woman, what she looks like, a snake), but we’re also asked what it feels like to be *told* to imagine. The result is a heightened sense of dialogue and provides from the beginning of the play the play’s stance on storytelling. For Stephensen this kind of repetition results in “an active and ethically responsible audience witness.” In the case of *Mud Nostalgia*, however, the ethics do not move from performer to audience in a linear fashion. Rather, the ethical responsibility lies in the suspension of the ethical shift as spaces in between playwright and performer, performer and director, and performer and audience open the possibilities of what it means to be an ethical witness. Similar to Heddon’s autobiographical “performances of possibility,” *Mud Nostalgia*, reveals “otherwise invisible lives” (p. 2, 3). In *Mud Nostalgia*, however, the revealing happens differently, a critical distancing occurs, and the audience is reminded that they are participants. Not only is the performer forced to contend with script convention (i.e., speak the stage directions), the audience is forced to contend with observer conventions (i.e., participate in the play, realize one’s implication in the play), and significantly, the performer is challenged to respond to an audience’s particular way of witnessing. We can see this in a later moment in the play when the character creates a critical intimacy with the audience in the following lines.

Part III: Excerpt from *Mud Nostalgia*

I heard the voice of Jesus
 slow,
 impossibly slow,
 like the blood flowing
 in the vessels of the snake,
 from its heart all the way to the moon.

And He held me there.
 Whispering slowly in my ear,
 breathing on my neck.

She stops and opens her eyes. For some time now her eyes have been closed as she recounts her revelation. She realizes she’s said too much. She sees bandaged hand before her and drops it, into the folds of her clothing. She looks very embarrassed.

I don’t know what you think right now.
 I don’t know what you think about me.
 But when I open the dough-boy biscuits,
 from the refrigerator,
 and they pop,

and the cardboard peels away
in the tiny explosion,

I know that is not Jesus;
I know that is science.

That is 2,315 miles from door to door.
That is man walking on the moon.
That is doctors from universities.
That is computers at libraries
with hundreds of way-off newspapers
inside them.

I know the world,
The secular and the vernacular.
Don't you dare think I don't (18-19).

Part IV: Critical Intimacy and Creating an Archive (well, what kind of archive?)

When this moment in the character's life is narrated, an act of witnessing takes place, implicating both the audience and performer. The audience is subjected to the performer's reflexivity and it is this critical intimacy that draws attention to the lived experience of the performance together with the narrative representation of a life. She speaks directly to the audience and the audience response influences her way of presenting the character's thoughts and actions.

This sense of collaboration invokes a multi-layered metalepsis, which occurs not only within the script itself, but also during the creation of the script and the rehearsals as well. Ott Rowlands, Bryan, and Director Bruce Hermann have collaborated on this and several plays, and in *Mud Nostalgia* have revised it significantly based on audience reaction and a reconceptualization of the character and play. This is true of another of Bryan's plays, *fig.1*, written also for Ott Rowlands. The processes of creating both plays are complex ones where writer/director/performer negotiate text, staging, lines, etc. During rehearsals for *Mud Nostalgia*, as in *fig.1*, collaborative interaction is present during rehearsals for the plays where director, performer, and stage manager collaboratively make decisions about set, projections, hand movements, and emphases on particular words. Collaboration, dialogue, and negotiation are consistent with the writing of the script, the creation and staging of the performance, and in turn with the audience.

However, it is not merely the collaborative dialogues between playwright/ director/performer/audience that led to this play. *Mud Nostalgia* is text driven, and this is acutely visible in the Notebook created for this play (and which the actor does for all her performance projects). As seen in the scanned pages from these books (see imag-

es at the start of this essay), there exist in these pages rich dialogues between the text of the script and several other sources, including the actor. Conducting archival and other research, Sue tapes each page of the script to a bound notebook, then writes around the text, fastens photographs, related research, dictionary entries, maps, costumes, book covers, encyclopedia entries, newspaper clippings, quotes from other literary sources, etc. into and around the script. One can see and feel the tape that holds the artifacts—the book is visceral in a way that many two-dimensional books are not. Reminiscent of Anne Carson’s *Nox*, Sue’s visual landscape provides the process of discovery and interaction with the script. However, whereas Carson’s eulogy to her brother is a hermeneutic on how to “look back” on her brother’s life, the *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook resists interpreting the script in any hermeneutic way. The layers of text (she pastes items directly over top of others as she continues to respond to the text) do not instruct the reader on how to interpret the script. Rather, the processes in the Notebook reveal the affordances of responding to and archiving in this way. The reader of the script can “see” the performer’s interaction with the playwright, see the interaction with her research, and witness not only her response, but also her agency within that response. For instance on page 34, the performer’s “dialogue” completely covers up the playwright’s stage direction and later she just scribbles it out. More recently found images or research are pasted directly on top of the older ones, creating a palimpsest of research, much like Virginia Woolf’s “palimpsest of memories” in *The Waves* (Brenard, 2004: 11).

What this two-dimensional representation of nested texts highlights is the collaborative and dialogic process of witnessing. With this dialogue, readers are given access into the process of moving the script to the stage...and back again. In this way, we have reconsidered what it means to archive. Since Derrida’s provocative *Archive Fever*, contesting traditional notions of what an archive is and can be has been the project of many historians, archivists, and other researchers. The permissive archive, as espoused by Jason Scott Warren argues that permission must be given by those in so-called authority and that the ways that archives are constructed are bound in structures of power, both figuratively and literally.³

In “Archive Fever,” Derrida and Prenowitz meticulously delineate the structure and purpose of an archive, particularly its implications in terms of reconstituted hierarchies. As they explain, archives historically provide a certain kind of status to documents, “which are not always discursive writings, [and] are only kept and classified under the title of the archive by virtue of a privileged topology. They inhabit this unusual place, this place of election where law and singularity intersect in privilege. At the intersection of the topological and nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and authority, a scene of domiciliation becomes at once visible and invisible.”

³ Specifically we are thinking of examples like the Turkish government’s restricted access to archives, the U.S. National Park’s archives and lack of funding for cataloguing; state hospital restrictions releasing records based on the “protection of privacy” of patients. In these cases and others like them, issues of access, permission, and decision-making are often contested.

(p. 10). For Derrida, then, the act of archiving is a necessarily power-laden act, arguably violent, which makes decisions about what counts within an accepted topology about any given event, subject, community. For Derrida, “There is no political control without control of the archive, if not memory” (p. 10-12). Jeanne Perrault and Patricia Levin’s examination of Nicole Jolicoeur’s “archival play” of 19th century photographs closely attends to the complicated ways that reappropriating archived material lends “insights into identity and aesthetics” (p. 129), even while we must examine the ethics in those reappropriations. Their analysis of Jolicoeur’s work widens the lens which we can cast on the function and uses of an archive. Perrault and Levin say that Jolicoeur “wants to allow the already captured subjects the possibility of maintaining their ambiguities, to allow them to exceed the narrow inscriptions they have forever been made to signify.... [Jolicoeur] wants to offer the possibility of remobilizing the history of the subject as a caught image by making the infidelity of the technology visible to the viewer” (p. 129). This emphasis on the constructed nature of the photograph, and by extension of the archive, troubles the notion of an archive while simultaneously raises additional ethical questions about the ability to archive.

K.J. Rawson, in “Archive This! Queering the Archive,” also challenges what it means to archive institutional and individual histories, particularly when some information is purposefully erased or withheld. As she argues, institutional archives often “privilege some while oppressing others” and suggests queering the archives as a way to resist such privileging. For Rawson, queer archives account “for the past that confronts historical erasure and omission, incorporates affects and trauma, and undermines an unequivocal embrace of longevity” (p. 238).⁴

Archives are typically thought of as static repositories for archive-able material: material selected in a hierarchical way by someone in some position of authority to make those selections. As such, as Derrida points out, “archive” inherently means power, order, putting in order. In the spectrum of the archive as we’ve outlined it (see figure below), on the left side is what we see as Derrida’s notion of the archive, permanent, akin to strict order, not necessarily transparent. On the other end of the spectrum is the performance—more elusive, less permanent, yet not necessarily able to be transparent in the layering/decision-making possibilities (although performances have very clever theatrical devices to highlight the mediated nature of performance—see the Tectonic Theatre project as an example, and Laurie Anderson’s work), and one might argue that video taped performative and highly self-conscious performances can do so. Clearly there is debate about this. Somewhere between them then, are living texts, those like the “visual landscape” of the *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook (and others like it such as Frida Kahlo’s *Diary*). The *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook, however, in its very construction, acts as an archive, which challenges and disrupts, and makes us rethink how work is catalogued, saved, and layered for future work and interpretation. As Jean Arasanayagam’s poem “Fear” suggests, there is a distinction between creating

⁴ See also Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings* where she challenges what counts as trauma and argues for the cataloguing of the everyday.

an archival space and ending up in one, a difference that lays bare the powerful decisions that can be made in documenting particularities. There are differences between archiving to remember (such as scrapbooking),⁵ archiving so one does not forget (say, as a memory device for actors), and archiving as a way of understanding what we do not understand. We ask, therefore, what are the moments of intersection between remembering and understanding?

It is our project in this essay, then, to demonstrate how performative processing, as enacted in the *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook, is an ethically responsible approach to archival practices that questions what gets privileged in our archiving practices. For us, this physical, permanent yet highly evolving, changing, flexible form highlights the transformation, the impermanence, the dialogic aspect of text, script, performance, analysis, archive. In this way, then, we use the word archive with trepidation yet optimism: we see a notion of the archive that demands an engagement with identity. Because as our analysis of the *Mud Nostalgia* visual landscape shows, EVERY text is mediated. Therefore it's not just the archives of Derrida's examples that are power laden. Indeed, any archivist has agency. Any one can archive, everyone who archives makes decisions about what to include, what to leave out. If we attribute that agency only to magistrates/archons in Derrida's example, then we acquiesce that power. If we claim, rather, that archiving is a relational process, a living process, then we recognize the subversive act of anyone who is not a magistrate (that is in a position of relative power) who archives some sort of material. On one end of the spectrum are permanent written records, the other the so-called ephemerality of the performance. And somewhere in between are the "living texts," a new conception of "archive" where the *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook is an example of a living, dialogic archive.

In our discussion of the *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook, we are not necessarily contesting Derrida's notion about the archive as hierarchy (power); rather, we focus on how choices are made and what those choices can reveal about textuality and performance and that indeed, one does not necessarily have to be in a position of authority (ie a magistrate) to document. So this example of visual landscape reveals these layers of choice and decision-making. What we suggest challenges Derrida's notion that only governments or regimes in power can have any agency in deciding what gets archived. Many are charged with archiving as there are layers of processing that may or may not be revealed. For us then, the important question lies in what the implications might be if we reveal and make transparent those processes. When something is archived that breaks expected barriers for what's generally accepted as archive-able, disruption of historical narrative occurs.

⁵ We want to be clear, however, that we agree with Smith and Watson's assessment of narcissism. While autobiography has been critiqued as being narcissistic, Smith and Watson highlight the gendering of that criticism and argue that the female subject's self-absorption stems from identification as being the other, which in turn can be interpreted as a political act, an act of resistance to being the other (13).

The *Mud Nostalgia* play and notebook have had several moments of disruption, not only in terms of the character and cultural assumptions about her way of life, but also in its performances, and more recently, at an academic conference. When moments of interruption and disruption occur, an audience often becomes uncomfortable. In academic conferences, for instance, we expect a paper to be read or at least be an organized talking about a project. When we presented at one such conference, audience members expected a traditional presentation of our work. However, Sue performed the lines from the play, alternatively singing and speaking lines as the script was written (lines from hymns are layered into the spoken lines). At first, the audience members were stunned, and several looked at each other, at me, and at their programs to remind themselves where they were. For about three minutes, Sue performed the lines from the first few pages of the play. For the first 15-30 seconds of those three minutes, the audience was clearly uncomfortable. Their expectations had been disrupted. However, once that passed, they visibly settled into their seats, some smiling, pleased at the disruptions, pleased at their fortune at seeing a play during what they thought would be a traditional paper.⁶

It is also important to note Katrina's reaction to this moment. In the days before the conference, we practiced our paper several times, revising, moving text around. During "rehearsals" Katrina never felt like she was interrupting the script or Sue's performance. She mostly felt like she had the privilege of the performer to speak the lines of the play that she was analyzing and that it would be a very creative, interesting, unique way to bring the art/artist to a typical academic conference. However, during the actual conference, when Sue held "communion" with the audience, she took the lines to a level other than rehearsal and then Katrina was quite aware of being an intruder on the performance. This was clear in the collective body language of the audience—they clearly wanted Sue to continue with the play, rather than have Katrina interrupt their pleasure/communion with the play and Sue's performance. In addition, Katrina found herself, quite surprisingly, being deeply moved by the lines she had heard and read so many times before. She wrote this in her notes after the conference: "I wasn't a spectator. I was sitting right next to [Sue] as she belted out her lines, and could watch the audience's response to her. When it was my turn to start reading the academic [portion] I'd written around the script I was jolted back to myself as analyst away from myself as spectator." This moment was not expected and illustrated another example of the transformative aspects of performance.

As our presentation of the paper, particularly Sue's performance, disrupted the traditional academic format, similarly the *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook disrupts traditionally conceived notions of the archive. For Sue, constructing the visual landscape is not planned; rather, it is a working document and "it's not precious." She takes the script, cuts it apart, pastes it in a journal, then researches and pastes more together with the script. There's no attempt to cover up the decision-making process and there's no

⁶ Several audience members approached Sue after the session and commented on their reaction to the performance.

“seminal” version—often “the” version that gets archived and the public is “allowed” to see. Rather, she tapes over things, she doesn’t remove them, just layers more on top, if necessary reprinting portions of the script, re-taping, writing more notes. For the actor, it’s a working document, a documentation of the process of research and performance. It’s anchored on a text, in this case the script of a play, thereby bringing its dialogic nature to the fore. For the “reader”, however, it’s a layered, textured piece of art that reveals an artist’s process—not unlike the palimpsest in oil paintings and Virginia Woolf’s desire to create in *The Waves* a feeling of palimpsest. Its anchoring to the script highlights its archival nature. The *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook reveals a communion with the text whereby its purpose is as a working document that leads to a performance, where the communal energy moves from script to performer to audience and back again.

We’re very interested in this question in terms of artist’s processes. Museums not only show finished work but also show the sketches and multiple versions of paintings or sculptures to examine the work of the artist, to gain some insight into the way art works, the way an artist works, to understand the piece of art more deeply. Seeing a painting on its own is enough—you don’t have to have the other things necessarily to have a moving, profound experience. But there are additional experiences and understandings one can have in seeing the work leading up to what was “published” what was performed, what the artist selected for exhibition, what they (or their agents/editors/curators/directors) were striving for in public display.

Revealing these processes are akin to life itself and the stories we layer together to make a narrative of our lives. For instance, below is a key moment from the play when the character reflects on the ways she tells stories to herself and the implications of those tellings on the ways we understand tall tales, deception, lying, storytelling, and what gets recorded in a permanent record.

Part V: “It’s tricky”

And your fourteen-year-old self convinces
your fifteen-year-old self
that
this is very, very good.

Nobody knows whatsoever is in their heart
until after the thing.
Until long after.
It’s tricky.

And what your fifteen-year-old self don’t realize
is that,
in little towns in small small places,

where they sing in unison
 and bury each other according to one reason
 or another,
 you'll replay that zero-sum game again and again
 and you'll convince your twenty-year-old self,
 and your thirty-year-old self,
 that
 this is very, very good.

And it is.
 And you'll do anything.
 Because it is." (23-25)

Part VI: Performative Processing

As in the earlier excerpt, the character speaks to the audience and also goes back to her younger self, creating for the audience the ways that layered identity builds to create her as a person. She moves back on forth on the stage, deliberately, slowly, looking at members in the audience directly while reflecting on a younger self. In addition to the playwright's attention to this layering in the play, the Notebook also contains layering, where the performer's handwritten notes about "The Thing" can be seen by readers of the text. In similar layering fashion, the performer is interpreting, note-taking, memorizing, and documenting an interaction with the script—much like the character documents her interaction with her younger selves. In this way the Notebook, as an artifact, contains layers of textuality *and* performativity. Often two-dimensional archived material such as a researcher's notebook or an actor's rehearsal script (or maps, etc.) are seen as static documents, permanent records of some sort of activity that *occurred* in the past. What this "visually landscaped dialogue" suggests to us is the processural, moving, living ontology of the notebook, and furthermore challenges our conceptions of what an archive is or can be. As such, the notebook is an example of the ethical and performative witnessing that "is and must always be capable of displacing and surprising our politics and our ethics" (Cublie and Good p. 6). The live performance and the "visual landscape" are in a constant process of creating and recreating, in this way, "charting the narrative unconscious" (Freeman). And these moments are moments of possibility, the mediated spaces of the in-between-ness where the archive, as a liminal space, can create change. Mark Freeman examines this dimension of autobiographical narrative, highlighting the ways "textures" are part of memory.

The script of *Mud Nostalgia*, together with the "visually landscaped dialogue," brings the audience to a "heightened state of reflexivity and reactivity" (Pollock p. 12). This draws attention to the "uncertainty of the story itself" highlighting the emphasis on the text's affect on the audience. However, though Stephensen's example highlights deeply emotional affect, Bryan's script, and the performer's interaction with

it, is more playful. When the character says, “It’s tricky,” one is quite moved on the one hand that the character tells herself stories to recreate and refashion a self that she can live with. On the other hand, her direct address to the audience, especially after such a moving scene, underscores the entire “play” with conventions of the drama. Bryan, the playwright and also an historian of 19th Century American theatre speaks of Neal Harris’ notion of an operational aesthetic at work in American audiences in the 19th century. The playwright discusses this aspect of “play” in terms of vaudevillian notions of playing with the audience. He discusses the ways that American audiences would go into the circus tent, be tricked, then be delighted, and then bring their friends in to the tent and delight in watching their friends get tricked. What Bryan notes about this is audiences’ delight in having their expectations upturned, that while on the one hand it can be uncomfortable it is also desirable (dare we say pleasurable) to be tricked. As Bryan explains, “the mechanism of the storytelling was more interesting than the story itself.” The trick of the Magnificent Egress, for instance at Barnum was wildly popular because one would be tricked and irritated but then pay money a second time because the “joy was to go again and watch the tricking of your pals” (Interview). Bryan’s understanding that audiences wanted to “buy the narrative” is not confined to the 19th century. His own aesthetic is deeply rooted in vaudeville where the framework is presented as an event, and that event is present in the framework.

As Bryan’s script is dialogic, in turn Ott Rowlands’s *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook reveals the framework, not only of the script but also the process of the performance, as an event itself. As the dialogic nature of the Notebook shows, the performer creates a record of textual analysis and a construction of a visual record. And while some of it may serve as memory mnemonics, it’s more organic, fluid, alive, and reciprocal than that. These moments of dialogue are more than suggestive of a narrative turn. As Hermann, McHale, and Phelan say about the narrative turn: “the analysis of stories and storytelling has become a key concern in fields ranging from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, communication studies, history, and philosophy to cognitive and social psychology, ethnography, sociology, media studies, artificial intelligence, medicine, business, and jurisprudence. Marti Kreiswirth and others have written about a ‘narrative turn,’ parallel in scope to the linguistic turn...to explain this diffusion, or spread, of narrative across disciplinary boundaries” (1). In addition, “Narrative theory investigates what makes narrative a distinctive mode of discourse, regardless of the medium of the telling—whether face-to-face conversation, print, film, or the digital environments used for blogs and interaction fiction. In other words, narrative theory seeks to identify what constitutes narrative or the properties that mark a text or discourse as a narrative rather than a description, a list, a lyric poem, an argument, or some other text type” (2). However, as Stephensen suggests in her analysis of Delbo and the *Mud Nostalgia* Notebook enacts,

the play between actors and audience—as a space to stage the problematics of language as a tool both of oppression and of survival establishes witnessing as a performative

dynamic between the actors and the audience that challenges yet maintains the ‘fourth wall’ of the stage upon which the play is performed. This suggests the possibility for performative spaces as spaces that play out the problematics of the [character’s] need to reconstruct her or his personal narrative within larger narratives of history through the ethical demand that the spectators become witnesses...[which is] performative enactment of the witnessing dynamic, which demands an engaged listener who recognizes the absolute incommensurability of her or his own experience” (90-91).⁷

Implicating audiences as witnesses, Stephensen’s discussion of the ethical witnessing of the Holocaust is also relevant to performative witnessing of any text or event. For us, then, “performative processing,” extends Stephenson’s notion of performative witnessing to the process of creating the story/narrative to include reciprocity and engagement with identity, and thus challenges Adorno’s notion that the story cannot be told. Rather, the story must be told, and with an ethical witnessing that includes performative processing. This brand of ethics of testimony leads us to social change. The very stylistic structures of the play and more deeply, the dialogue with the text, resist narratives of religion, women in religion, snake handling, women snake handlers. These moments create “structures” in language (Andrews et al.) that can offer qualitative and quantitative significance. Therefore, understanding the deep structures of the text offer implications for qualitative work, narrative analysis, and narrative methodologies across the disciplines; indeed, sociologists, linguists, and ethnographers research narrative in terms of small stories and in terms of countable moments of story that occur and reoccur. In this way, this work helps us measure layers of stories to fully understand the ways that archived spaces can be filled with small and large artifacts alike and more significantly, how “archival play” is something that disrupts order and questions the materiality and performativity not only of the archive itself, but the performance as well.

In the spirit of performative witnessing, then, which brings together theatre, performance studies, narrative theory, and identity theories, we suggest “performative processing” as an ethical responsibility to witness, which attends to the geopolitics of the witnessing act and challenges the generic, performative, and spatial politics of identity. That is, performative processing extends our notion of performative witnessing by making explicit the *mediated* engagement with identity. The Notebook created around the script of *Mud Nostalgia*, as a dynamic archive, highlights the mediated relationships between text, performer, and spectator and challenges us to examine the ethical implications of interacting with text and performance.

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⁷ Here we use Stephensen’s discussion of witnessing the Holocaust to make a point about performative witnessing more generally.

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