COME BACK

(via Five Stage Approach)

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COME BACK (VIA FIVE STAGE APPROACH)

By

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ABSTRACT

Come Back (via Five Stage Approach) is an evolving performance investigating methods of autobiographical storytelling as a form of performance art. In the discussion and contextualization of the process of *Come Back*, this paper carves out a definition of the *artist-storyteller* — an artist who uses narration as a catalyzing medium through which a story achieves a self-generating life beyond the moment of the performance.

Come Back (via Five Stage Approach) consists of two main narratives. The first is the story of my father, a former motivational-speaking businessman who has fallen down on his luck. The story focuses on a brief "comeback" precipitated by a survival experience. The second is the meta-narrative of my process of sharing my father's story through an invented method, the "Five Stage Approach to Creating an Effective Artistic Experience." The process takes the form of a series of focus group-inspired multi-media lectures where audience responses from one inform the next iteration. This collaborative process investigates what a "comeback" for my father could look like within the context of a performance in which he is physically absent.

A variety of performance methods are drawn upon in order to inhabit multiple modes of narration, including theatrical dramatic delivery, improvisation, and storytelling. *Come Back*'s ritual characteristics are considered through performance theorist Richard Schechner's analyses of ritualistic performance. Adriana Caverero's theory on the narratable self — insisting on relational dependence on others to narrate one's story — woven together with performance theory discussions of the relationship between mediatized content and live experience, builds the philosophical rationale for the project. Here, Matthew Causey's writings on projection and the uncanny experience of doubling via the technological screen relate to the treatment of live and mediatized versions of myself and representations of my father within the evolving performance. Further, Rebecca Schneider's discussion of *inter(in)animation* between the documented and the live, the archive and the repertoire supports *Come Back* as a self-perpetuating cycle of live performance and documentation, communicating a performance that is always the enactment of a prior ungraspable trace. The primary artistic precedent cited is Spalding Gray's performance with The Wooster Group,

Rumstick Road (1978)*,* using recordings, slides, and letters from Gray's family to explore the story of his mother's suicide. Contemporary art examples of *artist-storytelling* cited are Pablo Helguera's *Parable Conference (*2014) and Cassie Thornton's *Poets' Security Force* (2013).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction:

In his 1936 essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," philosopher Walter Benjamin laments over a disappearance in modern culture of the role of the storyteller, a disappearance brought on by the rapid speed and information overload of modernity.[1] To Benjamin, awareness of the vanishing oral storytelling craft is also what illuminates its true beauty. He defines the storyteller throughout human history as one who "takes what he tells from experience" and, through artistry, "makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale." The storyteller performs in service of the spread of wisdom, something Benjamin distinguishes from the increasingly privileged secular spread of information. He cautions that as the storyteller's place in contemporary culture is dissipating, consequently, "wisdom is dying out." Eighty years later, however, we see examples of the storyteller everywhere in popular form, offering evidence that this role has not been lost to our culture, but rather it has taken on different appearances — from the stand-up comedian and the late-night talk and/or radio show host to the memoirist, the anecdote giving lecturer, the country singer, or the Buddhist dharma talker. The methods by which oral stories are accessed might be more diverse and complicated, but the desire to tell, to hear, and to spread and gain wisdom from stories remains essential in our comprehension and growth, both individually and socially.[2]

As contemporary media culture presents an increasing challenge in distinguishing between what is information and what is a story, in order for Benjamin's transference of wisdom to occur, today's audiences and storytellers must be increasingly savvy.[3] With such immediate democratized access to content to consume, emote to, live through vicariously, co-opt, and re-insert into the information ether, everyone has become shrouded within the cosmologies of their own individualized formation (formed both by them and for them). The "vernacular" storyteller — one who meets audiences where they are and uses everyday language to construct a narrative for them — finds salient paths across these arguably

nebulous cosmologies by pinpointing and drawing out personal experiences that may extend to allegorical status, and thus resonate wisdom. I propose the term *artist-storyteller* as a hybrid role — an artist who uses storytelling as device and reference, which is then filtered through experimental and experiential terms in order to question, to mirror, and to illuminate the crises brought on by contemporary cultural circumstances and Benjamin's forewarned loss of wisdom. Therefore, *Come Back* begins with the question: What may be the role of the *artist-storyteller* in this hyper-mediated time, when public and private, invention and real, fold in on each other?

Come Back is a performance-based meta-narrative formulated out of a prompt to revisit a stalled, emotionally fraught project about my father, named (by him) "The Comeback." In order to begin, I needed to devise a system to facilitate my own *artist-storytelling* process. I therefore developed a set of guidelines for working with personal narrative consisting of five stages. This framework, given the working title of *Five Stage Approach to Creating an Effective Artistic Experience*, is intended to provide the means for developing and sharing a story that not only leads the audience to question its own role in the creation of and relationship to the story, but transforms the *artist-storyteller*'s relationship to it as well. The first four stages were conceived to act together in service of the fifth stage and ultimate goal: *recursivity*. Here, *recursivity* means a granted life to a performance that ultimately ripples out beyond the control of the *artist-storyteller* — a life that results in new developments that may feed back into the story, informing future iterations of the performance which ripple back out into life, and so-on.

The stages of the *Five Stage Approach* are based on successful aspects of past performance art work. They aim to aid in creation of a multi-dimensional performance where audience experiences go beyond passive spectatorship. In striving for an "effective artistic experience," how may the performance extend beyond a single temporal moment? The five stages have evolved to be:

1) **Urgency:** A start with a story that has strong personal meaning and lack of resolution;
2) **Risk**: The interaction between the artist and the public in the field research phase of development. Embarrassment is an essential component, as the artist

must leave her comfort zone to generate content. The more risk and embarrassment involved, the greater possibility there is for positive transformation;

3) **Projection**: An exploration of what the message may be that arises out of the Risk phase. Are there new stories arising?;

4) **Manifestation**: A determination of form through symbols, aesthetics, and methods of delivery;

5) **Recursivity/The Wishing Fountain**: The state in which the work cycles out into the world, then feeds back into the work. The ultimate goal: *Wishing Fountain* effect.

If bringing the story into life is the goal of the artistic act, how may this impact lived experience outside of this act? This distinction between "life" and the "story," between mediated and lived experience, is a messy and possibly risky terrain, and yet it is simply a heightening of relationships that have become a familiar part of our contemporary cognitive experience. The role of the *artist-storyteller* may be to somehow push the artistic act into the world beyond the moment of the performance, testing her agency, with the audience as accomplice, within the realm of the story's subject matter.

I call this desired interrelation between the agency of the storyteller, the re-animation of narrated experiences (stories), and *recursivity* of the artistic act the *Wishing Fountain* effect. The wishing fountain metaphor follows that once a coin is held, wished upon, and tossed into the fountain, there is always a slight hope that the wish will be granted. As long as memory exists of the act of tossing the wished-upon metal coin into the cycling stream of a fountain, the wisher may make associations about occurrences around them that seem a result of the wish. One's perspective changes by a suspension of disbelief in service of hope—suddenly otherwise ordinary events may seem magical or serendipitous, and we find ourselves in situations that we might not have put ourselves in before. Subsequent behavior continues to be affected until the act of tossing the coin blurs from memory and once connected events blend into ordinary experience. From another angle, the wish becomes physically attached to the coin through the oil of our fingers and the moisture of our breath. Molecules from the coin, now resting amongst many coins, become attached to the water that cycles continuously through the fountain and evaporates into the air, until inhaled by another. The

Wishing Fountain effect therefore, when occurring within the process of an artistic act, is an ecological cycle of transformation that takes over when the *recursivity* stage of the story is no longer implemented and controlled by the *artist-storyteller*. The *artist-storyteller* aims for this effect so that the story might bleed out into ordinary experience, thus dictating to her what happens next in the stage of the artistic act. There is no way, however, to guarantee the story takes on a life of its own, and no way to control it if it does.

Working with autobiography

While the *artist-storyteller* may choose any content that is urgent for her, *Come Back* focuses on the strategy of working with autobiographical material. Personal content is likely to drive the creative process further than content one-step removed from the *artist-storyteller's* experience. To borrow from medical terms, the choice of working with material that is both acute (heightened, immediate) and chronic (long-term, embedded) within the *artist-storyteller*'s personal cosmology insures her continued investment in the story and the risk, conflict, and vulnerability that come with exposure. Along similar lines, the commitment and vulnerability expressed by the *artist-storyteller* creates space for the audience to empathize, identify with, and engage deeper with the story, providing more possibility for responses to the story to be incorporated back into later iterations of the story.

Before discussing the *Come Back* story, I must identify the questions and concerns of working with autobiographical material. Benjamin states "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell;"[4] which means that once the event or subject of the story has passed, the storyteller has the distance to construct the event as a narrative; and also that stories are told with death in mind, to be passed on beyond the life of any one person or event, therefore becoming part of the greater collective body of wisdom. While coping with mortality may certainly be a component of this autobiographical project, the project is concerned more with life than it is with death. By choosing to focus on a living process of what is still happening as opposed to creating a record of what has happened, how may I establish the distance to work with personal content that will generate universal wisdom?[5] Further, what are the ethics of the pursuit of a story that focuses heavily on my father who is still living? At what point am I recklessly exploiting a subject who cannot represent himself? Is it irresponsible to use, alter, and expose material from his life without his full consent?

And what are my responsibilities in regard to generating impact of the story's development in life?

The Story

Come Back revolves around my father's story, one both a tragic and exceptional. He was once a persuasive motivational-speaker and wily, successful sales executive nicknamed Ron "Lucky" Levy, but has, over the past fifteen years, fallen into extreme dysfunction due to self-destructive behavior and extravagant emotional disorders. These disorders range from clinical depression, bipolar and narcissistic disorder to addictive tendencies, anxiety disorder, and hypochondria.[6] Clinging to the past of "Lucky" Levy, my father believes in a future where he is back in the game, yet he continually sabotages any chance for a normal life. *Come Back* focuses on a moment following Hurricane Sandy when my father, who lives in Long Beach, Long Island, chose not to evacuate and was essentially on his own (happily) in a deserted, destroyed city without power or heat for several weeks.[7] His survival experience, thanks to a manic state, invigorated him to reenter the world for a time, and he created a sales campaign, including a YouTube commercial, for electronic cigarettes. This was a symbolic rebirth. He adopted a new persona: Ron Lightman, President of Lightman Limited.

I was moved by the specificity of my father's determination and during the e-cigarette campaign in 2013, in anticipation of creating some kind of tribute, I asked to borrow his "roll-out" videos, the legendary sales presentations from his golden years at a security system company. In the fifteen years since he lost his job, he has reveled in these now untranslatable creative accomplishments and his unconventionally "show-biz" approach. He was a self-made man. I remember watching the "roll-outs" as a child, especially one modeled after the Phil Donahue daytime talk show. Exposure to my father's work then precipitated my own performance practice once he started going downhill. I see the act of asking my father for the tapes, and therefore of expressing my interest in his legacy, as the innocent initiation of what is now the *Come Back* performance. I wanted to create an art project connecting "Lucky" Levy to Ron Lightman. He insisted I name it the "The Comeback" before I even knew what the project would be. When his e-cigarette campaign failed, he went into a downward spiral. My heart sank as well. "The Comeback" was put on hold. I was unsure of how to address the task of representing his experience at a moment of mental instability.

Come Back (via Five Stage Approach) is a renegotiation of the possibility of a comeback for my father. It reflects a desire to reconstitute a story that did not end positively, to focus on the brief moment when Lucky Levy rose from the ashes to create something of his own.[8] Multiple interests drive my revisiting of the "Comeback" story. The first is that of a child trying to reify her problematic parent, and by extension rebuild herself. Then there is the drive to give my father what he wants most — a tribute to his exceptional struggles and triumphs. But my father's story observed by others differs vastly from the one of his own narration. Would he really want to hear his story told? At a nascent presentation of this project, when I first revealed a clip from my dad's "roll-out," my brother asked me who the man was in the video I shared. Even though the video was taken during the years when we were all growing up in the same house, my brother didn't believe this man could be the father that we know today. In order to create a space that may speak to such profound emotional fissures grounded in human experience, the revisiting of the "Comeback" is ultimately an exploration of contradictions between optimistic and cynical framing of the narrative.

Form and Aesthetics

I was inspired to revisit "The Comeback" this summer after my father had an idea to market himself as an eligible bachelor by having day-glow t-shirts and hats printed with the text "Rent|Lease|Buy." He planned to wear the ensemble every day, walking up and down the beach (rent = dating, lease = long-term relationship, buy = marriage). When I expressed concern, he responded, "But the focus group thought it was a great idea!" I was moved. Who was this focus group? Probably a random selection of people he found on the beach that humored him. But the mystery of whom he gathered and what occurred remains a fascination. What was once his standard business practice had morphed into a bizarre pop-up performance. My father's show of initiative to test his unconventional idea on a spontaneously corralled group inspired me to explore the form of focus group removed from the paradigm of marketing. With an obscured purpose, might it take on mystical properties?

Using "focus-group" more as concept than by staying true to its marketing form, this project consists of a series of small presentations in meeting rooms, each feeding into the

next. Upon conclusion of the thesis investigation, *Come Back* will have manifested as five presentations: three small private "focus group" performances, consisting of ten to fifteen participants; followed by two larger more "public" lectures, along with documentation of the entire process and supplementary printed materials.

Using the *Five Stage Approach* as a framing method, the performance borrows from the multimedia motivational lecture, combining live monologue performance, video, PowerPoint graphics, and participatory exercises. All components of the presentation exist as modules to be altered, organized, and reassembled. Through this process, the focus group participants reveal which themes have most resonance. While the content presented in the "focus groups" embodies all five stages simultaneously, the "focus group" presentation itself is conceived to be part of the second stage, "risk" (and resulting embarrassment), as it comprises my "field research" process of exposing aspects of the story and testing out sensitive material. The risk and embarrassment grow with each presentation as the audience changes from close colleagues, to acquaintances, to strangers.[9] The expressed goal of the activities leading up to the final performances is arrival at stage three, "projection," exposing universal messages in the narrative (again all stages will have been hit upon, yet the performance may always be pushed to a next level).

As live facilitator each time, I explain my process of following the Five Stage guidelines to share my father's story, alongside video and audio versions of my father and myself. I test out different modes of narration for myself as well as ways the audience may embody both the story and my father through meditations, visualizations, and reenactments. While each presentation is unique, recurrent themes are the tension between order and disorder, security and precariousness, the artistic drive and the desire to win or sell, technological advancement and obsolescence, and the emotional and physical storm.

The performance movements consist of: the retelling of "The Comeback" story; the "conjuring" of a storm; a video oracle-me in a bathing suit[10] offering esoteric advice and sharing remixed clips of my father's old videos; a sing-along of Lucky Levy proverbs; a revisiting or reenactment of the electronic cigarette video; reference to a collision between popular Scientist Carl Sagan and founder of Scientology L Ron Hubbard called the

Sagan/Hubbard paradox (the tension between the draw to become an enlightened guide and the desire to escape into delusion); and group and individual Lucky Levy "auditions."

The "focus groups" give feedback on their experience through basic questionnaires, live discussion at the end of each, and contributions to participatory exercises such as improvisations during various speaking, singing, or movement exercises. The "focus groups" serve three purposes: **1)** they reference my father's methodology and mirror the format of his old videos; **2)** they enable me to delegate the messy process of performing a personal, fraught story through the act of a shared ritual; **3)** they allow me to test tactics of performance delivery with the goal of effective command over the audience.

As this project explores relationship, it is not random that the "focus-group" performances are held in the conference room of the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA), my employer for the past seven years. EFA's conference room as-site not only places the "focus group" in an art (as opposed to marketing) context, it also creates a parallel between my job and my father's job. No matter how vulnerable I appear, or how much the performance goes off path, my authority at this site is palpable for the audience, just as my father appears in charge on the sites of his taped presentations.

Although unintentional, I am pleased the concluding presentations become removed from my control in stages, as the first is a small black box theater made available through a close colleague, and the final is a white box theater that I have researched and rented, following a developing pattern of starting with the very familiar, and moving to the unfamiliar.[11] The final presentations will enable me to test working with a larger audience. The first will determine what happens in the second a week later. While complete in themselves, the form of these last presentations will suggest future culminating iterations when a "comeback" may be fully realized in true "Lucky" form.[12]

Moving the form more towards a séance than a board meeting, there is a perhaps shrewd acknowledgement of my father's necessary absence, and the "comeback" becomes a channeling of a version of him through the audience as they recite his words, and through myself as I increasingly embody him throughout the performance.[13] The "comeback,"

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where accepted definitions of success are concerned, has not happened for my father in life, but it begins to happen on the site of each performance. Further, that my father was a self-taught hypnotist, and abstractly drawn toward the mystical, makes the visualizations and ritualistic activities appear as tactics he might have used.

Aesthetically, graphics in the presentations are intentionally anachronistic, with retro style such as beveled lettering, simple animation, and swoosh sounds that reference the earlier effects used in my father's presentations, as well as the childhood educational television programming I grew up watching under his roof in the eighties. This is my father's self-made world filtered through mine. Further, a salient chapter of my father's recent history involving karaoke business ideas, grants a nod to karaoke video aesthetic.[14] Source material represented includes hand-written notes, satellite storm imagery, my father's rollout videos from the late-eighties and early nineties, his electronic cigarette commercial, and an archive of recently left voicemail recordings. As the development progresses, these sources become increasingly re-mixed and altered. The storm becomes increasingly dominant. My apparel shifts from a red turtleneck, a nod to Carl Sagan (see production process) to day-glow t-shirts inspired by "RENT|LEASE|BUY," worn under a blue blazer as a gesture towards campy business-casual. Other physical materials include printed feedback forms, correspondences, nametags, and t-shirts. Evolving in form, along with the video and photo documentation, these are the material remains of the performance. [15]

RESEARCH ANALYSIS
Performance Methodology

As *Come Back* becomes a ritual for me, performance theorist Richard Schechner's theory on "actuals," which are performance characteristics that parallel tribal ritual, has been a useful reference.[16] The "actual" refers to art as an event in itself as opposed to the Aristotelian premise of art coming after experience, art as mimesis of an event or thing.[17] Schechner bases his research on cross-connections between rituals of tribal cultures and artistic movements that turn towards such rituals as guides due to contemporary "yearning" for "Wholeness," "Process and organic growth," "Concreteness," and "Religious transcendental experience." Schechner also applies five steps or basic qualities to his actuals: "***process***, something happens here and now; ***consequential***, irremediable, and irrevocable

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acts, exchanges, or situations; ***contest***, something is at stake for the performers and often for the spectators; ***initiation***, a change in status for participants; ***space*** is used concretely and organically."[18]

In Schechner's terms, I think about the "focus groups" as the *process* moment. Schechner defines processes as "fundamental elements of the performance structure," as opposed to planned theatrical outcomes.[19] I see the choice of committing to bringing my father's story into the public realm, which has until this year remained private, as a *consequential,* irrevocable act. While there are specific heightened moments such as the audition and storm channeling, *contest* could describe the entire focus group experience, as it is a challenge to the audience, which, due to the intimate size and sensitivity of the material, is essentially obliged to engage fully. *Initiation* occurs by the simple act of singling out the participants to attend. Upon arriving, they are given individual acknowledgement for being there through a written letter and live expression by me and, after going through the experience together and contributing to the development of the work, they have become part of the performance. Finally, thinking of *space* both "concretely" and "organically," designating specific sites for the performance (i.e. EFA Conference room, and the theaters for final presentation) while determining how to have it take shape beyond those sites (t-shirts worn outside, the song that gets stuck in the head, the individualized correspondences, and even through my altered interactions with my father), has helped me imagine this performance as existing over a span of time, in various configurations and spaces, as well as psychic space and spectral space, through the ghosts of the performance existing in documentation, artifact, and memory.

Loosely mapping Schechner's actuals onto my performance has helped me facilitate a deeper commitment between artist, performer, and audience, as well as a dynamic growing process of development both on "stage" and in life. His discussion of "integral" audience versus "accidental" audience has been instrumental in making the audience part of the work. The accidental audience would be a theater-going public that has learned of the publicly promoted performance and attends for entertainment, whereas the integral audience is connected to the performance, most likely as part of the community created around the performance. Schechner states, "an accidental audience comes 'to see the show' while the integral audience is "necessary to accomplish the work of the show."[20]

As narrator and facilitator, I strive for sincerity and vulnerability as tactics to connect with the audience. The challenge is appearing vulnerable while maintaining enough status to gain the audience's trust. Schechner's analysis of stand-up comedy applies here: "Disclosure is the heart of the comic's art. S/he carefully keeps to the edge – just a little too much and the act is embarrassing and painful. The audience teeters between knowing it is being put on and glimpsing brief, but deep looks into the 'real person.'"[21] Towing the line between vulnerability and control in a one-person show requires the performer to play, what artist-performer Spalding Gray terms "the many-in-the-one:" the multiple characters that embody any individual person.[22]

Considering Gray's many-in-the-one model, I have articulated various versions of myself as narrator throughout the duration of the performance. There is the primary character: the sincere and transparent artist who is making an attempt at sharing my experience with the audience. Then there are the supporting roles that the "primary me" exists in dialogue with, such as the motivational guide, the esoteric oracle, the confessional storyteller, and the private journaler. Questioning how and when to move between these variations has become significant to *Come Back*'s development.

Theoretical Grounds: The Narratable Self and the Mediatized Double
Come Back (via Five Stage Approach) is driven by contingencies: the self to others, the live to the mediatized, and the documents of the performed event to the actual event. The way in which these circumstances interweave themselves in an *artist-storytelling* practice my be framed by feminist philosopher and literary theorist Adriana Caverero's writings on the narratable self, where individuality is contingent on relational narrative, along with performance theorists Matthew Causey and Rebecca Schneider's discussions of the effects of the interplay between mediated and live experience.

Cavarero asks, "Why is the meaning of identity always entrusted to others' telling of one's own life-story?"[23] In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, a book indebted to the writings of political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906-75), Cavarero explains the "Paradox of Ulysses," – a reference to the moment in Homer's *Odyssey* when Ulysses weeps upon hearing his life narrated in public. Until that moment, he didn't fully know who he was. He weeps "not only

because the narrated events are painful, but because when he had lived them directly he had not understood their meaning."[24] Arendt's notion that "appearing is the whole of being" is used by Cavarero to explain the Ulysses parable — arguing our individual selfhood is defined through relational situations with others.[25] Rather than adopt the standard Western premise of the sovereign self and true individuality, she emphasizes the inseparable reciprocity between self and others. Those to whom she appears, while this complete picture remains hidden to herself, see the complete picture of a person.

To Arendt, the act of showing oneself to others, of speaking and engaging, is always a political act.[26] While agreeing with this argument, Cavarero amends Arendt's specific focus on heroic acts driving narrative, contending that such acts are committed with legacy and posterity in mind and stem from patriarchal tradition.[27] Here, focus is shifted to the "tenacious relation of desire" attached to biographical narration itself, as Cavarero argues a difference between "the desire to leave one's own identity for posterity in the form of an immortal tale, and the desire to hear one's own story in life."[28] This distinction between patriarchal and feminist motivations behind desires for narration mirrors the divide between father and daughter in the *Come Back* story: my father, a man fallen victim to delusions of the American dream and ego and me, a daughter negotiating the boundaries of her story by attempting to reify her father's story and encouraging others to reflect on their own personal narratives through sharing this process.

Cavarero explains that the desire for narration comes from the inborn characteristics of human memory, which is a "spontaneous narrating structure." She names this the "narratable self," which involuntarily "continues to tell us our own personal story," a situation that results in a sense of the familiar, cohesive experience that is "I."[29] The Western distinction between subject and object is problematic for Cavarero's narratable self, since "each one of us lives him or herself as his/her own story, without being able to distinguish the I who narrates it from the self who is narrated."[30] This statement parallels her argument regarding external narrative of self, which goes against the traditional division between self and other as discreet entities in favor of an ontology determined by relational contingency.[31]

This constant narrative interplay between subject and object, self and other, is driven by one's desire for the unity of selfhood. Cavarero states "the effect of a life-story, whatever the form of its tale, always consists in a reification of the self that crystallizes the unforeseeability of the existent."[32] From the moment of one's birth (which that same one cannot witness) there are countless parts of a life narrative that are impossible to know without the input from another witness. The **"forgetful one" turns to others "to stitch her narratable self together with the story into which she was constitutively interwoven**."[33] This single expression may summarize the *Come Back* project. Here I create witnesses to help stitch my narratable self together, as these witnesses have not learned the full account of my father's story, and my own in relation to it before the moment they become my audience. We are therefore left with the challenge of determining together who my father is, who I am, and who they, the audience/other are in relation.

Unreliability of autobiography occurs because memory will recount itself in such a way that it is "found to be reified" even when this is not a faithful representation. One effect is the manifestation of the belief in one event that defines someone's entire existence.[34] Another is that, in order for the narratable self to gain distance to tell her own story, she must "double" herself, make an "other" out of her self.[35] While on the one hand, this project focuses on the process of trying to confront my father's deluded self-perception by choosing a moment in his life to define him, his story is so intertwined with my own that the only way I can tell it is to create "others" of myself to help carry out the task.

While Cavarero's examples draw primarily from literature, this idea of distancing and doubling is native to performance theory. It is useful to supplement Cavarero's ideas with some of the discussions of the interplay between live and mediatized experience. Cavarero states:

> There is, in autobiography, the strange pretense of a self that makes himself an other in order to be able to tell his own story; or, rather, of a self which, using his memory as a separated mirror in which he inseparably consists, appears to himself as an other - he externalizes his intimate self-reflection. The other, therefore, is here the fantasmatic product of a doubling, the supplement of an absence, the parody of a relation[36]

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This description of the automated functions of autonarration could easily be applied to performance. In *Theater and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness,* Matthew Causey makes the following statement in regard to mediatized performance that parallels Caverero's above phrase:

> The mediated screens in live performance are both the opaque border of the representable object, trapping the gaze of the perceiving subject before it apprehends the object, and the site wherein and upon which the subject paces its phantasmic projections, while seeing itself see itself.[37]

Causey explains that this doubling occurring in mediatized performance is a heightening of the effect of the uncanny we all experience through the mediation of technology. In the moments when we hear our voice on the answering machine or echoed in a phone call, when we see recordings of ourselves played back on a screen as "morphing identities that exist within the fragility of digital space," these are experiences of the "uncanniness of technoculture subjectivity."[38]

In the case of my particular performance work, the doubling of myself does not take place live (using live feed). While the audience experiences my mediated selves for the first time, I have been repeatedly exposed as I prepare the material. Therefore the performance becomes a window into the doubling that has already occurred during the processing of images and video clips of myself to be shown alongside my live presence. All of these recordings were made alone, and in a sense, directed back at myself. I attempt to facilitate my complicated task through turning in on myself, and yet, these recordings also become discreet entities, of me but not me. In reference to Freud's theory of the uncanny, Causey states the "ego does not believe in the possibility of its death. The unconscious thinks it is immortal. The uncanny experience of the double is death made material, unavoidable, present and screened."[39] By organizing and controlling my multiple other mediated selves, I am arguably contending with mortality.

The reference to mortality echoes Benjamin and Arendt, yet the face of my mortality is irremediably wrapped up in my father's plight, thus invoking Caverero's point that the

autobiographical narrative is co-constituted through relation with the other. The narratives of others who intersect with our lives are an integral part of our own narrative.[40] In the case of my father, the doubling of myself may also be seen as the doubling between my father and myself. We are at once discrete, yet always a mirror of the other. In fact, the presence of his recorded voice or image in the context of sharing his story with individuals who have had no live encounter with him, produces a more startling effect for me then seeing my own double: This is the confirmation of my father's existence and his tragedy, and consequently my tragedy represented as real. When the audience has witnessed video of my father's younger self-in-action, then hears his recent distressed, disoriented voicemail messages that bear no resemblance to the earlier man, a further fracturing occurs. The audience must face the reality of a story that extends beyond the room and in turn, face their own mortality. Distinctions between father and daughter become less clear. My gestures and reenactments start to appear more like his, and the reference to who "Lucky Levy" is, becomes increasingly ambiguous.

Further, another layer of doubling is added by creating moments within the presented media that implicate the audience in the room as part of the work. Such instances include the parallel created through video of my father, twenty years earlier, addressing a small audience of alarm dealers in a similar staged scenario, and when documentation from prior focus group presentations make an appearance in the current presentation.

Causey, building off of Lacan's theory of projection states that the phenomenon of doubling does not just occur on the technological screen, it also:

> happens within the biological screens of body and flesh. It happens within the phantasmic screens of perception ... The subject does not apprehend the object, whether that object is the other of her own subjectivity or the other of worldly objects, but her own phantasmic projections on the representational screen.[41]

How do we contend with the opacity of our own projections? By understanding projection as embedded in common experience, thereby remaining always slightly circumspect?

      Cavarero proposes as a philosophical ethic a more positivistic viewpoint of

projection, the "ontological status of a who, which is always relational and contextual, for whom the other is necessary."[42] This follows that we are not only steered toward narration by the ego's need to confirm its uniqueness, but also by an equally strong empathetic drive to relate to and understand the other, which is "often mixed with the tendency to recognize the meaning … of one's own self within the other's story, especially if that story speaks of suffering and misery. **The comfort of similarity wins out over the relational status of distinction**."[43]

Cavarero argues that narrative construction of one's life story is not only reliant on and influenced by others, but has become irremediably influenced by the literary form of the novel.[44] She states, "making every language into a text - also turns every 'real' existent into something definable as 'extra-textual' or 'extra-discursive.' In this way the text, or the traditional form of the biographical and autobiographical genre, wins out over life."[45] By expanding the definition of "text" from the novel to contemporary media overall — including movies, television, radio, news and social media — a connection my be drawn to the argument that mediatization has reframed our perceptions of ourselves. The lived event is no longer distinct from the mediatized event, as is neither the personal experience from its self-constructed literary plot.

To the above dilemma, Cavarero proposes a solution of interplay between life and the text, because, although the text predetermines how we experience life, the text also enables us to capture lived traces. Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider, in her text *Performance Remains*, expresses a similar concept, using the term "inter(in)animation" which occurs between live performance and documentation, text and artifacts. She states "Performance does not disappear when approached from this perspective, though its remains are the immaterial of live, embodied acts. Rather, performance plays the 'sedimented acts' and spectral meanings that haunt material in constant collective interaction, in constellation, in transmutation."[46] *Come Back* begins with a trace of a past event, always representing remains, even in the process of creation. Every piece instantly becomes an artifact. The documentation becomes source material to be granted a new life in a later presentation. Through the inter(in)animation between the documented and live experience, I seek the moment of epiphany, a specter of the impossible "comeback," which may happen at any spontaneous

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moment, through me, or through one of my audience participants. Schneider describes this startling experience of witnessing the impossible in performance: "there is, indeed, another whose eyes can perhaps too easily be met – the live actor who, living surrogate for the apparently dead, reminds us that, indeed, we very well may be able to meet the eyes of an other."[47]

Artistic Precedents

Primary Reference: The Artist-Storyteller Spalding Gray and His Hall of Mirrors

As I construct a meta-fictional approach to my father's story, I have been exploring the legacy of renowned autoperformer Spalding Gray.[48] I discovered a very early work, *Rumstick Road,* that Gray co-directed with Elizabeth Lecompte in collaboration with the Wooster Group in 1978. Part of the "Rhode Island Trilogy," an experimental series based on stories of Gray's youth, *Rumstick Road* is an abstracted multi-media investigation of his mother's suicide, performed with recordings of interviews with and letters from family members addressed to Gray, projected slides of family photos, and ensemble cast improvised scenes. In this work, Spalding Gray the character emerges, introducing a tension between himself and Spalding Gray the person. "Spalding Gray" acts as passive inspector of the accounts relating directly to his own life story. He appears present and, in some cases, reenacts the recorded conversations between himself and his family, showing old family slides as evidentiary modules for the audience to interpret.

Gray's distancing methods for dealing with personal material were to give free rein of his family archive materials to the ensemble for collective improvisational riffing, and to distinguish his recorded self (represented as the "real" Spalding Gray) from his live character on the stage. Gray performs a dance with the unthinkable act, both in his apparent irreverence to his family's very personal history, and with the reference of his mother's own mad behavior and decision to end her life. The work of *Rumstick Road* as a whole, with Gray as the salient culprit, turning his family's story into public spectacle and consumed as art, raises ethical questions around exploitation of subject in non-fiction based work. Addressing this open sharing of extremely personal content, Gray remarked:

> Rumstick Road is in no way an attempt to enact my mother's madness or to enact or

recreate the experience I had of that madness[...] It is a piece of art, an entirely new thing that stands on its own. Finally, if it is therapeutic, it is not so much so in the fact that it is confessional but in the fact that it is ART. The historic event of my mother's suicide is only a part of the fabric of that ART.[49]

Gray's proclamation about the purpose of *Rumstick Road* is curious. *Rumstick Road* is, undeniably, a striking work of art that transcends the specificity of autobiography; yet by borrowing from life to make art, it cannot be separated from Gray's direct ties to the material. One of the most haunting moments in the performance occurs when Gray, alone on the stage, enacts being on the phone, using a recording he plays for the audience from a phone conversation with his mother's last psychiatrist. The conversation ends with the psychiatrist trying to reassure Gray that just because this happened to his mother, it does not mean Gray is destined to repeat his mother's actions. The psychiatrist sounds concerned, but Gray does not appear to be, perhaps because he is merely acting as a conductor, transmitting the concern to the audience. Unfortunately now, given the context of the tragic history of Gray's own suicide, it is impossible to watch the ghostly documentation of this work today without projecting onto it questions of Gray's own prescience.

Rumstick Road may only be experienced now through its documentation, such as: a recently composited video released by the Wooster Group, the artists' explanations behind the creation of the show, the first-hand analyses of the live show described by those who had seen it during its run, and the published textual documents including script and stage directions.[50] Approaching *Rumstick Road* through this collection of anecdotal data feels appropriate to its original form in which the audience was positioned as detectives along with Gray, forced to piece together the narrative from the evidence presented. A researcher of the performance today is also participating as a an audience detective. Theater historian W.D. King proposes a sympathetic view to that of Schneider and the archive, that the remaining intertextual documents of *Rumstick Road* "are expressions of an emergent voice from within the process of creation, but addressed to an ultimate audience far beyond the confines of the theatrical space and beyond the moment of the production."[51]

While Gray later moved away from avant-garde to popular theater, his explorations with the

Wooster Group proved central to his approach to audience engagement, challenging an audience to actively work to make their own associations. Theater and literary critic and Gray's biographer William Demastes, describes the Wooster Group as "willing to risk misinterpretation in the effort to expose audiences to other ways of seeing and to encourage active analysis rather than passive reception of what was placed before them."[52]

According to Ron Vawter, who acted in *Rumstick Road,* the power of the performance existed in "that place between being able to perceive and being totally unable to perceive a situation."[53] The messages brought onto the stage had been candid and originally unintended for public sharing, yet they are rife with symbolism that feels intentionally literary or theatrical. The experience of watching the Wooster Group's newly constructed digital video from film of the original performance today, hauntingly composited together with still and moving images in strange juxtapositions, further embodies this place of being simultaneously able and unable to perceive.[54] As the viewer attempts to register the footage as a document of what happened, there are visual clues and glitches that convey that the video is a construction from multiple performances and perspectives — not an actual singular event.

When Gray leaves the Wooster Group to face the audience bare, his only device being his body and his voice, he enters the process of retelling each monologue hundreds of times.[55] Suddenly the stage is just one part of a performance that takes place both on and off, a character based ecosystem cycling between "Gray the observer," "Gray the artist," and "Gray the performer."[56] Performance theorist Philip Auslander investigates this charged role as a motion towards therapeutic distancing, "the therapeutic potential Gray attributes to performance distinguishes it from acting, which he sees as being 'without consequences.'"[57] Auslander writes, "Just as the comic plot allows the writer to contain a real event in a conventional narrative form that leads to an agreeable resolution, so the performer finds a way of expressing his psychic distress through a theatrical form and gains valuable, therapeutic distance from his own emotions by doing so."[58] But Auslander goes on to say that Gray later decided that performing his life in such a way offered no resolutions for him.

Through *Come Back (via Five Stage Approach)* I set up a dialogue with Gray. I am an agnostic where resolution is concerned: I don't believe I will find resolution, nor do I believe I won't

find it. Optimistic or naive as it may be, I am open to the possibilities, as young Gray may have been when he first opened the can-of-worms in *Rumstick Road.* Preparing myself for whatever may be the consequences, my focus continues to lie in the nebulous space between the formal performance and life, between resolution and no resolution.

Precedents in Contemporary Art

While Gray's life and practice remains my primary reference and a subtext within my project, there are a number of other contemporary artists' endeavors that have influenced my thinking about form and process. Two artists' projects in particular represent a continuum of narrative performance, and a use of integral audience that I aim to fall somewhere within: Pablo Helguera's *Parable Conference* (2014) and Cassie Thornton's (and company) *Poets' Security Force* (2013) both including a congruence of myriad forms such as written correspondence, targeted audience participation, live presentation, and published documents.

The *Parable Conference* represents an interesting example of Schneider's concept of inter(in)animation, in that the performance is activated through the continual interweaving of the live event and its artifacts. Helguera initiated the project by sending personalized letters to a select audience, inviting them to participate in the *Parable Conference*, six months prior to its presentation at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music) in New York. Those who accepted then received a letter from Helguera every few weeks. The letters depicted fables of artists that read with specific biographical accounts, and always ending with an almost fantastical moralistic turn.[59] Similar to the experience of reading Borges' novel *Ficciones*, some stories more than others lead the reader to wonder if there is some basis in fact, or at least to question why this particular tale was shared with them.

Applying the Five Stage Approach framework, Helguera's letters sent out to his selected audience are a toss of the coin into the wishing fountain. From this point on, the work is brought to life over time, creating a committed following. A personalized activation of audience resulted in a charged experience for each participant. By the time the 150 or so guests arrived at the performance, we were already charmed by the experience, and by the mystery of where it would lead. This established connection altered the perception as compared to a typical theater-going experience.[60] One could not avoid looking around the

room at the others who had been pre-selected (specifically recognizable participants of the art world), to feel both included in this group and wary of this association. But the attention detail upon entering the room reminded us that the performance had already begun and all associations made were then part of it. Standing by each assigned table was a tuxedo-clad surrogate of the artist, who introduced him/herself as Pablo. My Pablo host surprised me by mentioning she heard I was an artist who blends fact with fiction, and she would love to know more about it.[61]

A supernatural feeling of individual connection to the event continued as actors stood up in rotation to narrate excerpts from all the stories, and undoubtedly everyone's ears were tuned to the stories that had be sent to them. Additionally, letter responders from the audience had been invited to read their responses in a rotation, similar to the hired actors' recitations. The final expression of the *Parable Conference* is the published book containing all of the parables presented as the letters sent to each participant.[62] The book is not a document of the event, but the next living variation of its existence.

While Helguera's work involves a large level of sociality, it remains in autobiographical territory, an extension of his personal philosophical concerns. These are the concerns of many, but the work is delivered as a controlled vision of an individual artist, tied to authorship in a very different way than the counterpart I propose: artist Cassie Thornton. whose practice embodies Caverero's ethic of narrative selfhood determined by relationality to the other. Working under the organizational name Feminist Economics Department, Thornton employs a therapeutic approach to address deep-rooted subjectivities of the common citizen. Rather than tell a story for the audience, her practice involves facilitating a new story crowd-sourced with the audience, one that may shift perspective on ones own subjectivity. Thornton's *Poets' Security Force* project in 2013 involved first recruiting New York City security guards, or security guards-to-be, to be paid hourly for creative writing on the job (a subversive act, and although minimal, a double wage).[63] Additionally, security guards participated in "shift-work," un-training/re-training seminars led by Thornton and collaborator Byron Peters out of their temporary workspace in Manhattan.

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As *Poets' Security Force* depended completely on the others' participation, it could not be controlled by a single vision and required great flexibility and openness from its organizer. Thornton had originally planned to assume that she and her collaborators take on a parafictional role as real security office administrators. [64] Early on it became clear that transparent representation as artists investigating new territory was essential to gain the security participants' interest and trust. As supposed "administrators," Thornton and Peters would have gotten nowhere. Thornton found herself a vulnerable, precarious living being working with vulnerable, precarious living material. She hadn't anticipated that once the project and her own resource limits were reached, security guards would keep sending in poems to be paid for and showing up for *Poets Security* shifts they were not signed on for. There was a real responsibility, challenge, and personal transformation required of Thornton in this project that is not easily packaged and qualified.

I see in the comparison between the sensitive and poetic aspects of Helguera's and Thornton's works considerations of the ego and the non-ego, the masculine versus the feminine, and the desire for the immortal defining gesture versus the desire to understand oneself through another in the present moment. As my father's daughter, I waver back and forth, carving out the dialectical space within these binaries.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

Performance technique immersion

To hone my performance delivery, I have been training in relevant acting methods such as dramatic monologue, improvisational comedy, and live storytelling. A recent immersive study in dramatic monologue at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London was instructive in understanding physical character embodiment.[65] Working with a director and a movement and voice coach, I gained insight into the way I breathe, hold myself, and pace my words, as well as my vocal range when performing — what I saw before as my "style," I came to understand is also a set of limitations. Additionally, I discovered how essential it is to workshop a solo performance with a team. Therefore, my decision to build in "focus group" presentations is not just conceptual, but also a practical solution to the challenge of honing self-driven solo work.

The relational characteristics of my performance led me to improv comedy and live storytelling because of their empathetic exchange between performers and audience. The following analyses come from a mini comedy immersion I have embarked on over the past eight months[66]:

Popular vernacular storytelling as a performance method functions by conjuring a range of emotional responses through calculated delivery. The calculation does not deny that the stories are true and meaningful, or that the storyteller has sincere intentions; rather, this delivery is a useful strategy for forming a connection between the storyteller and the audience. Here, comedic delivery in the form of beats is key, and all the emotional notes are expected to be hit — from humor to sadness — like an unsaid pact between performer and audience. The audience has attended the event to be moved, to be drawn in by the storyteller's story and to feel for the storyteller as a sympathetic subject.

Similar to the Schechner's prior mentioned comment on standup comedy, conventions of the storytelling art form thrive on the imperfect, casual "natural" delivery, and the performer revealing truthful, unpolished bits of herself while still remaining in command of timing and of the overall story arc. By the end of the story (if told well) the audience comes to see the performer as a fully dimensional character.

The live storytelling art form involves a reframing of one's own experience in order to relate it to an audience. The storytelling workshops have been extremely valuable to crafting the Lucky Levy story.[67] There are aspects of the experience of which there really is no pleasure in telling, yet I have witnessed that the truly disturbing aspects are what the audience wants to hear the most — the real extent of the suffering, and its impact on me. This has helped me clarify my preference for conveying the darker side through allusion and suggestion, to show rather than tell. I have also learned that by protecting the audience from the complete ugly details of my father's story, they root for him. They care about him and want him to win. Or perhaps it is because I present myself as upbeat and making the best of a situation that they feel for him because they feel for me. Even further, the more I shape the story to endear my father to others, the more patience, empathy, and compassion I feel towards him. In turn, what seemed impossible has happened: my father and I have more meaningful

interactions. This is a curious situation that I am interested in understanding further.

While storytelling methods have helped me with narrative approach, improv comedy has informed overall structure. Many aspects of improv are useful even in a planned situation, such as the act of relating to others in the moment, which requires a type of attentive presence that is counterintuitive to highly scripted performances. The main tenet of improv comedy is the "Yes and…" approach of accepting any scenario presented to you, and then building on it. This creates a supportive environment and allows the performance to develop with great elements of surprise and revelation. It makes taking risks feel less risky. An improv skit is essentially a game, or set of games, where the performers build a world together. When this really works, even though the skits are made up on the spot, a logic or progressive structure is followed that the audience can piece together. This exposure has helped me break away from developing heavily scripted performances towards a loose, spacious structure where the individual elements are related, yet independent, and open to moments of spontaneity.[68]

Project Development

Come Back (via Five Stage Approach) rose out of a prior performance I had been working on during my first year at DIAP. This first project explored my relationship to my father through a fantastical narrative connecting the popular scientist Carl Sagan and the founder of The Church of Scientology, L. Ron. Hubbard. The two ideologically opposed men had somehow colluded and became my father, inflicting on me, their daughter, a belief system called the "Sagan/Hubbard Paradox."[69] This project became heavy-handed and much too fictional for me, and I decided to put it aside in order to face the real story behind the work. Two pieces of this former project remain in *Come Back*. The first is the script spoken on video by bathing suit-clad "Michelle." Here, "she" says she is driven by a void, that we all are, and that it is everyone's responsibility to understand her own void in order to prevent disaster. The second is a clip of an animated illustration of the Sagan/Hubbard Paradox, re-introduced during the Stage Three (projection) portion of the presentation.

I began workshopping the "Comeback of Lucky Levy" story in my storytelling class in Fall 2014, and performed it in November.[70] This was a difficult, often painful process, taking

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place over several months, allowing me to test my own limits of comfort and propriety. Simultaneously, I devised the Five Stage Approach as a self-motivating method, discovering quickly its potential as content for the performance. I began recording myself on my laptop, talking through the stages. Using these recordings, along with audio of me telling the story, and imagery to set the tone, such as references to a storm and to a wishing fountain, I created a first attempt at a PowerPoint lecture framed by the Five Stage Approach, presented in the DIAP studio in December 2014.[71]

The focus group presentations were originally intended to take place in rapid succession in one month. Due to the energy involved in organizing each one, I ended up spreading them out at least a month apart.[72] I received a tremendous amount of feedback from the first one, where I shared the most raw material and exposition. Based on essential comments – such as the suggestion that I needed to leave more space around the movements and to clarify my own persona within the performance — I used the second focus group to switch what had been recorded narration to live, and vice versa. The story itself, which had only been referenced in the first focus group, or heard through audio clips of my telling of it at a live storytelling show, now became the anchor of the live presentation, while my explanation of the Five Stage Approach became a recording. I spoke from my seat, at eye level, as opposed to standing. I wanted to see what happened when the most vulnerable aspect, the story itself, was alive in the room. Sticking fully to this approach didn't work. Representing myself only as myself (meaning the sincere artist working through a process) removed essential tension from the experience. While feedback from the first focus group had been that it was hard to tell what my intention was, or to fully trust me — the second group unanimously was able to write down a clear intention of the work, and that they had full trust in me as their "guide." This communicated to me that I need to be more calculating in my delivery.

There were definitely some successes in #2 during group-generated activity, which had been built up slowly through intermittent guided visualization exercises.[73] There was one moment when everyone was asked to read "Lucky" Levy quotes out loud simultaneously, as "Lucky" Levy, creating a cacophony that freed each to be fully emphatic without being singled out. In Focus Group #1, "Lucky" Levy "auditions" were solo, but with the group doing it together, and therefore less self-conscious, revelatory moments were possible. A collective group

movement exercise, where they were asked to choreograph moves, as Lucky, pushed the awkwardness to a point where the participants may momentarily have experienced a slice of my vulnerability (and my father's) within this process.[74] The rush of these group activities emboldened the audience, and individual volunteers rose to the task of playing "Lucky" in improvised moments with me. In my last few presentations, I plan to work with these "games" as models to push further towards 1) the group chaos, 2) the group vulnerability, and 3) ultimately emboldened volunteers to embody "Lucky" Levy.

Documentation

I have been documenting the focus groups with two video cameras set up to capture the audience and me separately. I plan to do a similar setup with the larger shows. Unfortunately, although it has been adequate, until now my documentation quality has varied greatly, as figuring that part out is also part of the process. I have a plan for the third focus group that might bring better results, and I hope to hire a professional videographer for at least one of the final shows. As discussed previously, I am interested in how documentation of one event may be incorporated into the next, and also in what ways the documentation may represent the performances independently. For example, I would like to edit clips together of audience feedback only, so one can come to imagine what happened based on what is suggested in the clips. I also believe the documentation may eventually make a compelling installation along with the very large body of media that has rotated in and out of the performances (all of it could never be used in one performance). Along with videos and photos of the focus groups, I have the filled-in feedback forms, and handwritten notes left behind. Other ephemera out of my possession are the participant's letters and the hand-written notes on printed video stills that were sent to them.

Audience outreach and development: Building an Integrated Audience

In an effort to convey the delicate nature of the work, focus group participants receive a personalized email invitation from me. The message is short and mysterious, giving enough information to know they will be contributing to an important creative process. Upon arrival, participants receive a personalized letter explaining what I would like them to know about the event. Afterward, I mail participants a handwritten thank-you on the back of a printed video still of one of my father's rollouts. The first group consisted of seventeen

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artists, performers, and filmmakers who were close colleagues and friends with whom I had an established dialogue about my work. As this first one was characterized by overexposure, it was important for me to start in a trust-based situation.

The second group (fourteen people) included some close colleagues, but also a fair number of acquaintances unfamiliar with my work. There were curators, theater professionals, and improv comedians in addition to artists. I received feedback that the experience of being invited to be privy to a very personal, somewhat confessional subject within a small group made participants more likely to rise to the task of whatever I asked of them. This group suggested that a good way to bring in strangers would be through invitations by previous focus group members. I decided to use this model for the third focus group (to occur on April 20), and also for the final two performances, which will not be advertised to the public, but will consist of a combination of my growing "Lucky" focus group community, strangers they recommend, and individuals I continue to single out. I will aim for an audience size that maintains a feel of intimacy, allowing for contact with each participant.

While this method of audience cultivation works from the angle of relational narrative and speaks metaphorically to the contrast between the recognizable and unrecognizable, I have realized it is also essential to the process of exposing the work. Due to the sensitivity of the fact that my father is a real living, vulnerable person, I have needed to expose the work in stages, feeling it out each time, rather than open it up to the public before I fully understand what it is. Only by continuing with this process of increasing exposure in stages, will I determine what a completely public version of this project might be.

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[1] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 362-364.

[2] To be further elaborated in Adriana Cavarero's discussion of the "narratable self" in the Research Analysis section, 16-23.

[3] See: Lambert-Beatty, "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," 56-57. Lambert-Beatty argues that the rise of "fiction-in-the-real" in comedy results from a lack of adherence to honesty in politics and news sources. She states: "the first decade of the twenty-first century has special claim to being, if not a more lie-prone era, then one in which untruths have had especially catastrophic effects."

[4] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 369.

[5] To be further elaborated in Adriana Cavarero's analysis on Hannah Arendt's favoring of the heroic act and immortalization through narration in the Research Analysis section, p. 17

[6] Mayo Clinic defines Narcissistic personality disorder as a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for admiration and a lack of empathy for others. But behind this mask of ultra-confidence lies a fragile self-esteem that's vulnerable to the slightest criticism.

[7] Hurricane Sandy was an Atlantic hurricane that affected the entire eastern seaboard of the US in October 2012. Floods that resulted especially devastated giant sections of the New York and New Jersey coastal regions.

[8] Figurative ashes and cigarette ashes!

[9] To be further elaborated in Production Process section, 35-36.

[10] While I prefer it left open to interpretation in most cases of the performance, I chose to wear a bathing suit (a one-piece blue polka-dot suit) as an expression of vulnerability and gesture towards innocence. The backstory is that I have always been body conscious and wearing a bathing suit is anxiety inducing for me. Yet every time my brother and I visit our Father, he forcefully insists we bring bathing suits. My brother never does, but I always bring mine. We rarely swim, but when we do, it results in an awkward situation. There is a short video clip of me explaining part of this narrative through the use of a magnet board/collage. The clip was shown in Focus Group #1.

[11] Beginning with the very familiar and moving in stages to the unfamiliar mirrors the process of audience cultivation elaborated on in the Production Process section, 35-36.

[12] I suggest to my audience/collaborators a future culmination in the format of a daytime talk show, similar to my father's spoof of the Donahue Show (The Donaview Show).

[13] During Focus Group #3 which will take place on April 20, I plan to ask an audience participant to cut off my ponytail towards the end of the presentation. At the final performances of the work I will have short hair. That this hairstyle is a very recent change will be evident through footage of the focus group performances included in the final presentation.

[14] Karaoke project #1 took place when my father was higher functioning (his wife was still with him). He bought a karaoke machine and stocked it with "golden oldies," with the plan to travel to nursing homes and to sing karaoke to the patients. After realizing it was too much on his own, he put an ad in the local paper for ensemble members. A few people responded, and my father led a rehearsal, but he alluded to some of the participants as being "difficult." Eventually, the karaoke machine broke, and he went into a severe depression and gave the endeavor up. Years later, just before the Sandy episode, he had a second karaoke idea: private lessons where he would train people in mastering one or two songs so that they could impress their friends at the karaoke bar, and would not have to get drunk. This plan never got out of idea phase.

[15] Documentation process is elaborated in Production Process section. 34.

[16] I see this as an initiation ritual, as this is the first time I directly address my relationship to my father publicly, through performance.

[17] Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 29.

[18] Ibid., 46.

[19] Ibid., 48.

[20] Ibid., 220.

[21] Ibid., 45.

[22] Demastes, *Spalding Gray's America*, 38.

[23] Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 20.

[24] Ibid., 17.

[25] Ibid., 20.

[26] Ibid., 22.

[27] There may be a connection between Arendt's emphasis on legacy and death in the desire for narrations and Benjamin's argument that storytelling is contingent with the presence of death in culture (therefore stories, from this standpoint, are not only to spread wisdom, but to grant the subject legendary status). Arendt was a colleague of Benjamin, and edited and wrote the introduction for Benjamin's 1968 *Illuminations,* in which "The Storyteller" was first published.

[28] Ibid., 30

[29] Ibid.,33.

[30] Ibid., 34

[31] Ibid., 88.

[32] "existent" is a term Cavarero borrows from philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy to replace the word "subject." An existent is described as one who is exposable.

[33] Cavarero, 36.

[34] Ibid. 43.

[35] Ibid., 82.

[36] Ibid., 84.

[37] Causey, 22.

[38] Causey, *Theater and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness*, 17.

[39] Causey, 18

[40] Cavarero, 88.

[41] Ibid.,

[42] Ibid., 90.

[43] Ibid., 91.

[44] Benjamin argues in "The Storyteller," that the novel form has superseded storytelling, thereby privileging isolated experience of individuality over shared wisdom. While the reader of the novel seeks the "meaning of life," the audience to the story seeks "the moral of the story." 364-365.

[45] Cavarero, 41.

[46] Schneider, *Performing Remains,* 102.

[47] Schneider, 109.

[48] "autoperformer" is a term developed by Gray to identify autobiographically inspired solo monologue theatrical performance. It connects nicely with Cavarero's reference to "autonarration."

[49] Gray, *The Drama Review*, 39.

[50] Analysis of *Rumstick Road* is made possible by being granted access to the Wooster Group's recently released video, *The Wooster Group's Rumstick Road* (2013). Courtesy Clay Hapaz, Wooster Group Archivist.

[51] W.D. King, "Dramaturgical Text and Historical Record in the New Theatre*,"* 72.

[52] Demastes, Spalding Gray's America,

[53] Savran, *Breaking the Rules*, 101.

[54] Wooster Group, *The Wooster Group's Rumstick Road.*

[55] Early monologues include *Sex and Death to the Age 14* (the same title published as a collection of monologues in 1986) and *Swimming to Cambodia.* The popularity of the latter led to production and release as a film Directed by Jonathan Demme in 1987.

[56] Damastes, *Spalding Gray's America*, 63-64.

[57] Auslander, "Performance as Therapy,"168.

[58] Ibid.*,* 138.

[59] One letter I received depicts Massimo Tamagno from Bologna, who made an art career by describing and writing about artwork that he knew could never make. The story ends with an exhibition that drew hundreds to huge dark empty space containing a pile of trash and to its side, a parrot on a pole, repeating "the perfect art work is the one no one ever saw." Pablo Helguera to Michelle Levy, July 24, 2014.

[60] Helguera held two performances, one for the general public who had not been invited into the correspondence, and one for his selected audience. These performances were one-after-another on the same evening, and the first round of guests, leaving, passed by the second

round, arriving, thus creating an unavoidable tension between the two groups. It remains unclear whether this conflict between audiences was an intentional ploy, or a side effect of being obliged to fill a quota of attendance for the evening. Regardless, it is hard not to imagine that the "public" audience loses out, and feels left out of the full experience.

[61] Perhaps I flatter myself to think this comment was tailored to me, as we all often do when given special attention.

[62] Helguera, *The Parable Conference.*

[63] F.E.D. *Poets' Security Force.* Guards were offered ten dollars for the first page of poetry or other forms of creative expression written while on the job, five dollars for each additional page

[64] Lambert-Beatty, "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibiliy." Lambert-Beatty defines parafiction as an act of fiction inserted into a real situation in order to question and illuminate hypocrisies connected to that situation.

[65] My attendance at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, London, in August 2014, was made possible by fellowship funds awarded by the Connor Fund Study Abroad Fellowship, The City College of New York, NY. While at RADA, I studied under the tutelage of Jane Bertish (director), Lorna Marshall (movement coach) and Zabrajad (Budgie) Salam (voice coach).

[66] Storytelling levels I and II, and Improv Comedy levels I- III were all taken at Magnet Theater's Training Center in New York City.

[67] My storytelling teacher was Adam Wade, a performer who gained public recognition through The Moth Story Slams and has expanded the storytelling community by hosting shows all over New York for peers and former students. Wade performs a monthly solo storytelling show about his life called "The Adam Wade from New Hampshire Show," incorporating old home videos and photographs. Wade's instruction and support, as well as his exemplary performance model, have been integral to the early stages *Come Back*'s development.

[68] My exceptional improv comedy instructors at Magnet Theater included Rick Andrews, Elana Fishbein, and Louis Kornfeld.

[69] During the research for this precursor to the current project, I defined the term "Saganism" as an emphasis on ideological clarity, deductive reasoning, skepticism, poetics, wonder and science; whereas "Hubbardism" is an opaque and mercurial approach that calls upon shifting ideologies and fantasy, combined with a lack of ethical responsibility. "The Sagan/Hubbard Paradox" describes the counterintuitive interrelation between these two states of being: It describes the conflict between the draw to become an effective, enlightened guide, and the temptation to escape into fantasy and deception.

[70] Storytelling Level II Class Show for friends and family at Magnet Training Center, November 7, 2015.

[71] This December performance was part of DIAP's end-of-semester thesis presentation event. Presentations were limited to ten minutes. This was the event where my brother saw the video of our father and did not recognize him.

[72] Focus group dates: Sunday, January 25; Sunday, March 22; Monday, April 20, 2015.

[73] The session began with a guided scan of the body (a common meditation practice), looking for areas of tension that might be associated with a particular event or person. The following visualization, about half-way through the presentation, was to conjure a storm in one's mind, then share some of the description collectively to create a potential recipe for a storm spell. The group was then asked to sing what has become the "Theme Song" of the

project, based on a quote from my dad that states "there is a whole new paradigm shift and it's called the internet, brick and mortar exist no more." Whereas focus group #1 was shy in picking up this song, #2 self-initiated to sing it in rounds.

[74] Based on a salient childhood memory between my father and me, the song used for the movement exercise was Irene Cara's "What a Feeling" from the *Flashdance* movie soundtrack (1983). While I am not sure how it connects with the central narrative of the project, I continue to be struck by the effect the song has in changing the tone in the room towards the upbeat and relaxed (once people are no longer pressured to dance). I may consider using this strategically in future iterations.