

April 20, 2015

Dear Reader,

When I interviewed for this graduate program I knew already what my thesis topic and performance would be. I had a project ten years in the making and I wanted to use this opportunity to begin the conclusion of what I had been working on. From what I hear, this sort of certainty, especially at the beginning of the MFA process, is quite unusual, but then again, so is having a decade-worth of research. When I consider the past two years of this program and my thesis process as it unfolded, I remember something my former co-worker Debbie used to say, “Humans plan...and God laughs.” In any life endeavor, the road you take might always leads you down an unexpected twist or two or more. This journey most certainly has.

From 2004 until his death in 2013, I recorded oral histories with former Vaudevillian Harold Cromer. I also learned and performed his songs and dances on street corners and in jazz clubs. We became friends during my first year of undergrad and our friendship deepened with weekly phone calls, every Tuesday, until he died. Harold asked me to be his biographer in 2005. I planned to use this thesis opportunity to write a few chapters of the Harold Cromer biography and make a performance homage to his memory. I spent the summer before my thesis year looking over this decade of research, listening to hours of audio recordings and reading transcripts from my oral histories with Harold, watching videos from other researchers and perusing his paper archive as well. As I dug into Harold's life story I began to see a complexity of life in a way I hadn't before. In re-listening to the recordings I heard long stretches of time with Harold stuck in a cycle of suspicions and anger, or times where Harold performed

storytelling, not to me, but to an imagined audience, and I found discrepancies in his stories between his own telling and retelling. By the end of the summer I felt ashamed for my younger self. I wish I had had the courage or insight to cut through Harold's games and opinions to get to the "truth." But truth is slippery. Truths hold nuances and paradox. In the act of historiography, nuances and paradoxes sometimes get smoothed away. What I discovered was a story quite different than expected. I finished the summer feeling confused and frustrated with the stories I planned to tell.

A good interviewer learns how to guide her subject down an unexpected twist to reveal some new information. A great interview leads the subject to feel so open that she says something from so deep in her body, she never even knew she believed it. The best interviewers can lead their subjects gently into a state of sensitivity and vulnerability rarely felt in daily life. And by witnessing this interview, the audience learns not only about the subject, but about life itself. Studs Terkel, the father of oral history, is my long time idol. He was able to lead his subject down a deep and winding path inward, even when his subject was himself. In many ways, I researched for this thesis by interviewing myself. Like a great interview, I discovered many thoughts and beliefs that live so deep in my tissue that I didn't know them until they were said. I led myself into states of sensation and vulnerability with the belief that the deeper in I can dig, the wider I can reach.

The paper that follows is about self, vulnerability, and the potency of uncertainty for learning and growth. There are four main sections. The first is an introduction to self, identity, and art-making by looking at multiple theories of a changing, kaleidoscopic sense of self. The second section is a personal narrative about the only time Harold and

I danced on stage together. The third section is a look at the assumed benefits of Feldenkrais for a dancer. The final section is about oscillations, a movement-impulse universal in nature and sometimes art. At the beginning of each section is a quote by Moshe Feldenkrais. I became a certified Feldenkrais Practitioner in 2013. The Feldenkrais Method is a way of awareness and thought that promotes greater adaptability in all aspects of life. The Feldenkrais Method has influenced my worldview and you may witness this in my writing. I hope the following words will come to you as a study of human maturation.

Sincerely,

Annie Rudnik