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Fraud: Just Fraud

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Bard College

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Fraud: Just Fraud

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts
Of Bard College

By

Reeves Morris-Stan

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2016

Acknowledgements

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I.

The Process Begins

A. Junior Year: The Curve Ball

When we were asked in our moderation papers to give an idea for what our senior project would look like I originally thought it would look like an amalgamation of styles of theater all done by one person on stage, me. Come junior year I was still struggling with what I thought the piece would be but it had changed from being an amalgamation to a continuation of my moderation piece, which was, and is to this date, one of the pieces I am most proud of. It involved me performing a sloppy ballet duet to “Waltz of the Flowers” from “Fantasia” while dressed in a human sized paper bag. I was stuck in the land of larger than life paper bags and fully intended to play around with and use an even larger one for my senior project. It was going to be a piece that spoke to the beauty I found in the department through learning the process of devising.

When we were told the guidelines for the festival I think a lot of the seniors panicked. We all had ideas of what we were going to do in a similar vein to the seniors previous to us: solo performance, playwriting, directing, and etcetera. The concept of collaboration felt like a sacrifice of our personal artistic voices for the reason of having too many people in the senior class. A lot of us were angry and frustrated with that being sprung on us, but it actually forced us to get closer and to think outside the box. Being in the festival was also the only way for us to receive funding and support from the Fisher Center.

B. Junior Year: Options

This led to the first of many “Blówcalos” held during the end of Junior year. These “Blówcalo” meetings were the place in which we all came together to discuss our initial thoughts for senior projects, what we thought we wanted to work on, types of theater we wanted to explore, forms, people who we were influenced by, and so on. It was during one of these meetings where the idea for a larger project of collaboration came into existence. Originally, it was to split up “Les Miserables”, the musical, into twenty-five minute chunks and perform the entire musical. This developed into a more thought out idea based on Jonathan Rosenberg’s Theater Making class in my Freshmen Year where they took the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and plotted out the beats in order to create a through line for all the pieces in a very abstract way. Once we had decided on this larger form, we began looking for a source text. It was a long and arduous search but the final decision came very naturally and fit our class perfectly. Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno* was a text that we had all read during First Year Seminar. It was a text that lent itself to the split nature and the abstract idea in which we were exploring the world of *Inferno* made the process even easier.

There are nine circles of hell to choose from all with their own unique stories and worlds within a larger universe. This allowed for the form of different projects to all share the same undertone and thread. We agreed on *Inferno* close to the end of the proposal process and we all had talked about what each other wanted to work on stylistically and formally, which led to some people knowing exactly who they were planning on working with and what circle they wanted to take on together. For me it was a bit harder, in the notes that Abigail Adler took during our first “Blówcalo” I am quoted as saying I was interested in, “melodrama [as a] weird ass form of theater. Physical comedy, physicality, miming, [and a] massive paper bag?” I was struggling to

find a circle that really stuck out, called to me, and fit my style. I found that many of the circles could have been used to create a world in which my very dramatic ideas would thrive. The circles I was struggling to choose from were Circle Zero: The Gates to Hell, Circle Five: Wrath, Circle Seven: Violence, Circle Eight: Fraud, and Circle Nine: Treachery. Circle Zero for its feeling of loss and theme of passage, Circle Five for its hopelessness, Circle Seven for its content and the preconceived notion of what violence really is, Circle Eight for its imagery and world, and Circle Nine for its finality. What all of these circles had in common were their extreme imagery of punishments and a feeling of despair in those. I think that all of the circles explore this to an extent, but these were the ones that really caught my eye.

C. Junior Year: The Choice

The dilemma ended up working itself out. At “Blówcalo,” we wrote out the circles with space to fill in our names. Everyone was allowed to choose their first and second choice of circles in order to split the Inferno into workable sections. After we all paired our names with two corresponding circles, we took a step back to read out the results. It worked out incredibly well, it seemed like everyone got the circle which they either wanted, or that fit their personal style well. As one of the people going into this meeting without a collaborative partner in mind, I was completely focused on which circle I wanted to work on. I had picked Circle Eight as my first choice and Circle Seven as my second. It so happened that the first person I had been in a play with at Bard had also picked Circle Eight as their first choice. I remember that it seemed so perfect to open and close out my career at Bard with a familiar face. There was a sense of closure that of course it would happen like this. The person whose name was also written next to Circle Eight: Fraud was the one and only, Kedian Keohan.

In the following weeks we talked a lot about why we were drawn to Fraud as a circle and what the common ground was between us. We were both incredibly willing and open to ideas of which direction the piece should take and as we began writing our project proposal it became clear that whatever form the piece would take, that there would be a considerable amount of cheekiness. A sentence on the description of my proposed piece stated that, “I am very drawn to the image of a pit of sludge where people are endlessly dragged back down as they break the surface.” I remember my initial thoughts on ways to create this image on stage were to start exploring vacbeds¹ as a modern and physical manifestation of being trapped and unable to escape. I think that this speaks well to the grandiose scale and theatrical imagery we wanted to create. For both of us, Fraud meant going above and beyond what we thought was an acceptable level of flash and show. We discussed theater forms such as Vaudeville and Magic shows, and how they connected to fraud. The difference in these being that the show itself was the “show”. We wanted to blow people away with lights and sound. Our first design for the show was a mylar curtain and a velvet stage. Before we even had a piece, we knew we wanted to dazzle the audience and have a certain amount of “showmanship”. Knowing this, it meant stepping outside our comfort zones and creating content that contrasted from the glitzy world it was living in.

¹ A vacbed or vacuum bed is a sexual apparatus used in BDSM play. It involves a person getting in an airtight latex container and then vacuuming all or most of the air out of it.

II.

Circle Eight; or The Multi-Faceted Physical Manifestation of Fraud

A. Preliminary Discussions: The Pledge

The beginning of the process was filled with meetings after meetings of Kedian and I trying to analyze Fraud from personal standpoints, attempting to connect our thoughts and to make a coherent foundation for our piece to build upon. We started this by asking what fraud itself meant to each of us. I found that the most perplexing thing about Fraud was that in order to be sent there, you were required to have predetermined thought before committing the crime that landed you there. Every other circle required only that you commit a crime of passion, one that would be done in the moment because you could not express yourself any other way. Fraud is a bit headier. It lives in the clouds. In order to commit fraud, you have to be aware of your crime and plan out how to successfully pull it off. You can kill someone in the throes of passion, you can take more than you need, you can destroy someone due to lack of control, but you cannot commit a successful fraud without the proper amount of thought being put into it. This is something I struggled with later on in the process. I was convinced that fraud was not a crime of passion; I believed that the only people who commit fraud are those who only thought of themselves and those who only desired more power and wealth. As the process went on I discovered that not true. Fraud can be committed in the throes of passion as well as in the best interest of someone else, but also that was a hurdle I needed to get a head start for.

The next part of the break down was quite literally breaking down cantos 18 - 31 from the *Inferno*. Dante describes Circle Eight as a huge area of concentric circles formed in

descending order. Dante and Virgil climb onto Geryon's² back and then fly deeper into Hell, viewing each of the malebolge as they descend. These are ten "evil pouches" that are broken down by the type of fraud committed: Pimps and Seducers, Flatterers, Simonists, Sorcerers, Political Corruptors, Hypocrites, Thieves, Fraudulent Counselors, Sowers of Scandals and Schisms, and Falsifiers. Each of these have their own unique punishments that correspond to the crime committed. For example, the sorcerers are destined to have their heads on backwards as they walk in a circle for the rest of eternity, "As lower down my sight descended on them, Wondrously each one seemed to be distorted From chin to the beginning of the chest; For towards the reins the countenance was turned, And backward it behoved them to advance, As to look forward had been taken from them."³ The large amount of text is what caused us the most trouble. The amount of directions the piece could have gone in are many. Kedian and I both had ideas for what fraud meant and how fraud could be portrayed but we had to breaking down what the text meant to us. Some of the foremost concepts were the worlds of the church, magic, and vaudeville. Each of these were forms of theatricality that could house fraud. The church and its power over its followers stuck out, a magic trick being truthful in its deceit spoke to the argument on fraud we thought we wanted to make, and vaudeville for the pure showmanship that it holds, a show as a show, is a show.

Honestly, the amount of information within the text of Circle Eight was more of a hindrance than something to work off of. Breaking down the sub-circles like that only led to confusion and cluttered up the path to finding a thesis for the piece. I had stronger ties to some of the circles than others and wanted to choose one type of fraudulent crime to explore, while, at the

² The grandson of Medusa. A winged beast with many faces. He has become the physical manifestation of fraud in the *Inferno*.

³ Dante Alighieri, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Matthew Pearl. *Inferno*. New York: Modern Lib., 2003: 30. Print.

same time, staying true to the text and doing it the justice I thought it deserved. There was something enticing about taking this massive chunk of text and chewing on it until something brilliant and mashed-up came out. I wanted to use all of it to create a thesis that would encompass all of Fraud instead of just one aspect.

Our first Advising meeting with Jonathan cleared that up really fast. One of the first things he said was to not get bogged down in the *Inferno*. Respect but disrespect the text, take what we wanted from it and discard the rest of it, and explore the malebolge and find one that directly related to us personally. We had to find a personal investment that was worthwhile to explore, otherwise there was no reason to be working on Fraud. We talked a lot in that meeting about the crime of fraud, its literal definition, function, and how in order to commit fraud, one had to take advantage of the human psychology. I remember thinking that concept was a lot like theater in a way. Theater constantly takes human psychology and uses it to its advantage in order to get reactions or just to reach further in process of creation. That concept stuck with me throughout the process and defined a section of rehearsals profusely.

Our first attempt at choosing a single sub-circle led us to sub-circle three: simonists. The buying and selling of the church stuck out to me because of the nature of religion in my eyes. Religion has always seemed fraudulent to me, especially the way that people are willing to blindly follow something, which has no proof behind it. Being someone who generally looks at the facts before jumping to any conclusions, the atmosphere of religion jumped out at me as fraudulent. The project lived in religion for a while. Kedian and I's first beats were reminiscent of church rituals and how they would play out much in the same way that theater rituals would play out. There was the entrance beat, where everyone enters the space with knowledge of what is about to take place, but that is as far as we got at the time. We quickly ran into problems

brought up from our meeting with Jonathan. There was not enough personal investment in the world of the church to make a valid argument. If we continued, we would only be poking satirical fun at religion, which was not what we wanted to do at all. We decided to switch gears and run with the flashier world of magic.

A magic show is something we believed could fully explore the question that we had at the time. Why do people let themselves be fooled? This is the question that we struggled with for a long part of the process. Kedian and I had discussed it during the initial meetings and both held some personal stake in it. We felt, to an extent, that we had been on both sides of the equation: someone allowing themselves to be fooled as well as being the one doing the fooling. A conclusion we came to is, a magician will play on the human psychology much in the same way frauds do. The only difference is that a magician tells you exactly what they are going to do. Essentially, they are going to fool you and you are going to let them. The answer to the question I could come up with is that people want to be fooled. It allows them to check out of their own life for even a second and rediscover the feeling of not knowing something. I think people lose the novelty of discovery as they grow up and magic is one of those things that just will blow your mind if done by a skillful magician. In the words of Cutter from "The Prestige",

Every great magic trick consists of three parts or acts. The first part is called "The Pledge". The magician shows you something ordinary: a deck of cards, a bird or a man. He shows you this object. Perhaps he asks you to inspect it to see if it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But of course... it probably isn't. The second act is called "The Turn". The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now you're looking for the secret... but you won't find it, because of course you're not really looking. You don't really want to know. You want to be fooled. But you wouldn't

clap yet. Because making something disappear isn't enough; you have to bring it back.

That's why every magic trick has a third act, the hardest part, the part we call "The Prestige".⁴

This three-part concept greatly informed the content we would make with our cast and mirrored the format of a theater piece nicely. You have the rising action, the climax, and then the falling action or conclusion. At the time we felt pretty solid on our theoretical breakdown of Fraud and the time for auditions was approaching.

B. The Audition Process

Going into the audition process was simple for us. We knew that we wanted around twelve bodies in addition to ourselves. The people that we needed to cast were going to be a major part of the devising process and so we were interested in people from all different departments who had different skills and experience on stage. The one section of the Fraud text we were still hanging onto was the ten malebolge, but we were not interested in using them in the same way. Kedian had the idea to keep them but in doing so to convert them into characterized versions of the crimes. This held us back for a long time, as it was pretty much impossible to achieve that while still abandoning the text, which we were absolutely set on. However, these ten characters were loose guidelines that we used for the casting process.

There were two rounds of auditions. The first round was general auditions in which all participating senior projects groups could see and take note of people they were interested in seeing again in a more focused and personalized call back. This round consisted of general movement prompts such as viewpoints, movement prompts, a five frames exercise, playing with text on stage, and a five elements devising prompt. What Kedian and I were looking for in

⁴ *The Prestige*. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Perf. Michael Caine. Touchstone, 2007. DVD.

people was their ability to work well with other people in small groups, their grasp on the technical aspects of theater (how well they moved, spoke, listened), but most of all their presence on stage. What was really important to me was that everyone in our project could command the space they deserved on stage. I was not interested in having negative space on stage. As long as they could be confident in their personality and presence then Kedian and I could try to coax the rest out of them.

Before round two, callbacks, we had another meeting with Jonathan. It was eerily similar to the last meeting and both of us left feeling frustrated. We still needed to find a way to escape the text and we still needed to find a question to explore. We were still a bit too abstract in our thinking and so were falling prey to the loftiness of fraud. It seemed impossible to nail down a solid question to attempt an answer at and “why do people let themselves be fooled?” was not cutting it. Unfortunately, we had callbacks to attend to and so our theoretical talk had to be out on hold for the time being.

For callbacks, we split everyone into groups of fives and gave them the title of a song they had to make where each of them had to perform a solo and then back each other up until it was their turn. This was to put them on the spot and see how they reacted to pressure and could overcome obstacles. It was very important that we had people who were able to think themselves out of a problem since we were going to be creating the piece together along with them. Being stuck in the theory of the piece was our job while bringing new perspective and solutions to the prompts given was theirs. This meant that Kedian and I had to stay a couple of steps ahead of the process in order to account for times where we would get stuck and have to figure out a way to work around the wall.

The next part of the call back was a very specific flocking prompt. We had them all create a version of Geryon, the multifaceted physical manifestation of fraud, by coming together and moving as one hive mind. This prompt again allowed us to see the level of physical ability and how well they can play off one another. Then we had them cut and splice together a vocal score using two different translations of the first sentence of Inferno. The final part of the callback was actually a game that Max Rosenberg made up. His version involved giving everyone an animal to become and then people would have to guess what animal they were. The version we made, and it was a little bit silly, but ultimately did serve a unique purpose, was called “The Specifically Detailed Reptile Game,” as a sort of a nod to the Malebranche⁵ that inhabit Circle Eight. This game allowed us to see the amount of detail and specificity within their heads and bodies which was important because of what we had in mind for our piece at the time. We needed a group of very malleable performers who could take on whatever shape the piece needed at the time. We ended up casting Abigail Adler, Gideon Berger, Sam Harmann, Kirsten Harvey, Amanda Houser, Anya Kopischke, Charlie Mai, Simon Paris, Brandt Rohde, Anna Sinreich, and Susie Yugler.

This is the part of senior project that will always blow my mind. The fact that these eleven people took time out of their day for three hours, four or five times a week for five months to work on a project that was in the process of being found is incredibly humbling and it changed my view on what fraud is completely. For me fraud became me pretending to know where the piece is going. I will forever be thankful for, admiring of, and indebted to my cast. They are what made Fraud: Just Fraud the piece that it became and they are the heart and driving force that pushed us further than I thought I could go.

⁵ Thirteen demons who guard the fifth sub-circle. They usually resemble reptiles in depictions.

C. Rehearsals Begin

Rehearsals started at the end of October 2015. At this point we were still in the magic-show-theory-land. We thought we knew where we wanted to go with the piece and that involved a magician and magician's assistant. That would serve as the form for the piece and the content of the piece would be something to do with the ten sub circles. We got stuck in this concept for a lot of the rehearsal process, but we still continued to accrue content with our performers based on this idea. The first couple of weeks of rehearsals were filled with devising prompts having to do with magic. We had them break off into duos and create a magic show with a very specific relationship dynamic of magician and assistant. Next we had them create a magic trick from scratch, which was a hard prompt to get through, mostly due to the fact that not everyone had knowledge of magic tricks and theory. These first couple of prompts were a good way to break the ice and also informed the cast the direction and feeling that we wanted the piece to have. The piece needed an environment that was filled with games, but also content that was real and sometimes serious. This led to one of the better cast bonding experiences and aesthetic decisions for the piece as a whole. For the first couple of weeks I had the cast do weekly talent shows where any old thing could be considered a great talent as long as they sold it to the audience as such. The talent show each week would have a “winner” who would get a prize--it would be something like twenty plastic spoons, or two bottles of dish detergent--and would be exempt from next week's talent show. This was important because it began the process of training the performers to sell whatever they had and to increase confidence and stage presence in order to attempt tackling fraud on stage.

Kedian and I had talked about the lack of knowledge of magic before hand and we knew that there would not be a great deal of expertise in the matter. We came to the conclusion that we

were okay with that; one really good magic trick that could be practiced over and over until it was performable was enough. The rest of the magic in the piece could be aesthetically farcical and, overall, that was a style we were interested in exploring.

The idea of what was fake and what was real became the new question we were working with. It was around this time that Kedian found “An Honest Liar”. The documentary was about James Randi, and it connected all of the themes we were playing with and also discussed fraud in detail. In fact, James Randi’s mission was to expose all frauds that claimed they had any sort of supernatural power. Randi was intent on making it clear that there was a huge difference between telling someone that you would fool them, and just fooling them. The difference was fraud as opposed to magic. We were interested in creating a distinction of real and fake within theater as a form of art by using the parallel of why people go to a magic show to let themselves be fooled versus why people will go to theater in order to watch people pretend to be something they are not. All these things led to the next iteration of our piece.

At the end of “An Honest Liar,” the viewers learn that James Randi’s life partner, José Alvarez, was arrested for identity theft and that Randi knew the entire time. The impact this had on me was tremendous. The fact that this man who was devoted to the exposing of fraud knew about a case of fraud and not only did nothing to expose it, while also enabling it, really blew my mind. What led him to this decision? It could only be explained by love. James Randi loved his partner and was willing to overlook the fact that his ability to stay in the United States was due only to the fact that he had committed identity theft. This opened up a lot of things to explore in fraud. A new question was being asked, when is it ok to commit fraud? What is the difference between lying because you need to and lying because you want to? Maybe there were some

exceptions to fraud and its extreme nature. Maybe fraud could in fact be a crime committed in the name of passion. These are things that began to permeate the work we were creating.

James Randi's nemesis Uri Geller once said, "Anyone can duplicate the Mona Lisa but that does not make them Leonardo DaVinci". This quote fueled a large part of our devising process for the next month and in reality drove us into a brick wall. We began exploring identity and what it means to take someone else's identity on stage. Actors do it all the time. They assume the role of someone else and we pay to watch them do it. We finally realized that the ten sub circles could not be turned into characters and that it was taking too much of our time and instead had our performers develop characters of themselves. In these characters, they would work through the overarching topics we were struggling with. We had blended aspects of church into the magic show mix as well and it was starting to take the shape of an actual piece. It was very much a theater piece commenting on theater and that was what connected it to fraud for me: Theater.

Right before Winter break we showed what we thought would be our twenty-five minutes of senior project to Jonathan. However, we had some major problems with both our content and our form. First, we wanted to introduce every performer equally. They would introduce themselves down a line with a sentence that was true or false about them and the rest of the cast would vote on whether or not it was true. On top of that we wanted to give everyone solo time to explore their identity and a confession they had. However, this would eat a lot of the twenty-five minutes. It just was not possible to fit eleven solos into twenty-five minutes unless that's all we wanted to do. At this point in time, the piece was an amalgamation of the topics we were exploring. There were elements of church; there were nods to Dante. It was already a mess and we were trying to cram even more into it.

The first thing Jonathan said was that he was impressed with the amount of material we had been able to generate and that the performers seemed like a very close-knit cast. The next thing he said was that the piece was repeating itself and that the question we were asking was not clear. The thing that stood out to him was the game aspect of the piece in the introduction beat. The characters all seemed clear but the game was not. What were the rules? How do you deal with a modern society while also addressing the medical punishments from Inferno? Overall, I think that he was confused due to the amount of questions being explored. We had to choose one singular question that was strong enough to carry the piece.

It seemed like there was no contemporary way to address fraud that we also held personal investment in. Kedian and I react very similarly in certain situations, which was the main issue of us working together. When we come across a problem, we tend to disengage went into Winter break not talking about it and pretending that we did not need to address the problems. I thought that if we gave ourselves some time that the piece would fix itself or that one of us would come up with a solution. Neither ended up happening.

D. The Midyear Hiccup: The Turn

Winter break involved a lot of thinking about the piece. We were both taking part in the January Theater Intensive that involved seeing a lot of theater and talking about theater in an analytical way, which I found useful. I think it functioned as a palate cleanser. Seeing a lot of shows allowed for me to understand that different approaches that people use to create theater from. To be honest, a lot of the pieces made me frustrated because they did not seem that far out of reach. It made me feel like our piece could be right there beside them as long as we were able to fix the problem of form and content. So in a way it was frustrating because it highlighted

everything that was wrong with our piece, but on the flip side, it allowed me to see all the different angles we could approach the piece from.

I remember getting back to school and having meeting after meeting with Kedian trying to get our piece back on track. We were still both kind of pretending that nothing was wrong and neither of us wanted to push ideas that we had because I think we felt that we should be able to come to a consensus on the way the piece should go. One of my best ideas was going back to magic. I wanted to structure the entire piece as a magic trick. We set it up as an ordinary piece. We somehow make it extraordinary. And then we return it back to its original form and wow the audience. This idea lacked a lot of specificity and details but it excited me. I thought we could take something like the levitation of the pentagon, and translate that into a theater piece. Imagine if we could do something that everyone knows is impossible! That is what theater allows for. It is a place where people enter ready to believe whatever they see as truth and I wanted to use that psychology to our advantage.

It was clear Kedian was not as excited about it as I was, or maybe I just was not able to articulate it well enough, but I felt like my idea was kind of ignored. After some back and forth of ideas, we came across an idea that kept true to the entire process. Kedian brought up the idea of a spelling bee. If we shaped the piece as a spelling bee it could have all of the flashy aspects that we talked about and still involve our performer's characters. We talked about it for a bit and realized that it actually shared a lot of the same concepts that we were interested in originally. It lived in the same world as a talent show or pageant and we quickly had ideas for where we could go with it. I was struck by the similarity in the type of audience members that would show up. A talent show or spelling bee's audience will consist of parents, teachers, and friends. A senior project will have an identical audience to that and it is maybe the last time that will occur in a

school setting. I was thinking a lot about what our audience would be and how our piece could cater to them. That did not last long because all of the sudden we had scrapped the idea and were onto something else.

The next thing I knew, our piece was going to be a football game. There was not a discussion about it. There was not a conversation about why. It was just going to be a football game. Kedian had an idea to make the piece a football game. They asked me to trust them and I said I did but I felt my ownership over the piece slipping. The piece became about Kedian's relationship to their father and how they were not allowed to play football growing up and I had to just go along with it. We were about three weeks from opening night and so there was no room for me to state my discontent. Those next three weeks were hell for me. Everything I had worked on during the months leading up to this now seemed useless. I had no connection with football or my childhood dreams being crushed. I do not even watch sports. All of this was completely new to me and we were just playing at what a football game was. As a collaborative partner I needed to be there for the project to support and guide the creation of the piece but I was left in the dust and out of the loop. There was no communication about why the sudden change in the piece and so I just had to roll with the punch. We had a meeting with Jonathan around this time to let him know of the change in direction we were taking and I remember him saying that I looked hesitant, to which I responded that I was but also I trusted Kedian enough to just go with it. I have never been so lost and frustrated in my life. I am not proud of the course of action I took but sometime in the next week I checked out of the piece. I think I was hurt and felt like I was no longer a creative head of the project. I felt like it was not my project anymore and I acted accordingly. I stopped putting in the time in spite of Kedian because they had not given me the time or courtesy of telling me that they were taking the piece in the way they thought it needed

to go and that I needed to let go of creative control and just be in the piece. If Kedian did not want to put the time in for me, why should I put the time in for them? I would show up to rehearsals and play my role, but then I would leave directly after not staying to chat about what I thought it needed. I began to heavily resent the piece and having my name on it. It did not feel right to have my name on a piece that I felt was not mine. It was Kedian's story to tell and I had no stake in it at all. My heart was not in the game and I am not happy about that. It was not fair to Kedian and it was not fair to our cast.

E. Leave it All on The Field: The Prestige

I finally talked to Kedian about the way I was feeling a couple of days before opening. I apologized for not being there completely and told them that they hurt me. We had gone through almost the entire process on the same page, making the mistakes together and finding ways to power through it anyway only to at the last minute split incredibly out of the blue. This talk was around the same time Don Juan was casted and so I told them that I was feeling very lost in the department and felt under appreciated. There was not a part for me to sink my teeth into all four of my years at Bard and then all of the sudden I felt as though my own senior project was not my own creation. It was heartbreaking and I had to tell one of my best friends that was what was going on. Their brilliant idea for our piece was making me feel excluded from my own senior project and I felt like I could not share in the thrill of it. We both said our part and I promised that I would put my all into the piece as I had realized, and this goes back to something Jonathan told us many times earlier in the year, the material was still there. You can't hide the process. We had spent months upon month making all this material based in questions of fraud and that shown through in our final piece. There were parts of both of us and our entire cast in it and there

was no way of getting rid of that. I wish that I realized that sooner and that maybe then I would not have accrued so much resentment during that week and a half period, but there is no going back. I was in the show and the show was mine as well.

We put everything we could into the last days leading up to opening. We were constantly looking for ways to make it cleaner and to make more sense. It said nothing, while also saying everything. It was a piece with a ton of metaphors mashed together in a way that was probably incoherent but at the same time led you to a place where you understood it all. After dress rehearsal Jack Ferver came up to us and commented on fact that everyone on the team was wearing a dress but all the positions of power were held by men, which is something Kedian and I never thought about or addressed and we quickly came up with a couple of changes to the power dynamics which put a little more equality into the piece. It was not really enough because there were certain moments that just needed a bit more effort and thought put into them but we did what we could the day before opening.

The shows went wonderfully. It was such a pleasure to perform with our cast and it was so much fun to show our work to an audience. There was a lot of pride in it as we all put in a lot of time and effort to make it into the piece that it was. There was a lot of satisfaction in the reactions it received as well. It was just coy enough, while also having some very real moments. My favorite description of my work was said by Gideon Lester after seeing my moderation piece, "It shouldn't have worked, but it did". I have ever since strived to make work that walked the line between legible and not legible and I think this piece did just that. It enabled the audience to interact with the question of identity and I think asks the greater question of "who am I?"

There are three moments of the piece that will always stand out to me as defining beats. These moments show what the piece was, what the piece became, and who created the piece. The first moment is actually the transition into the first beat in the piece. The stage goes from black to a light blue and “American Pie” by Don McLean begins to play as the mylar curtain descends. Then a whistle blows and the team runs out on stage only to begin creating a machine. For me this marks the descent into the world of Fraud. It is the same one that Dante and Virgil take, while on the back of Geryon. It shows where we started our piece. It is a land of theory and games done in the most theatrical way we could think of.

Another moment is when Coach Coach, played by me, comes out dressed as a football. All eyes are on him and there is no escape. The players then begin to perform humiliating actions onto him until he is finally caught by The Captain, Brandt Rohde, where he must concede to his love for the players. This is what the piece became for me. It became a struggle within myself. The only thing that shone through was my love and respect for my cast.

The last moment is the “Two Minute Warning”. Charlie and Simon are the only players left with energy after the team finishes the second half. They then proceed to discover their relationship through the referee vocabulary. They go through a discovery phase, the honeymoon phase, the plateau phase, the break up phase, and finally, the just friends phase. It is the most authentic moment in the piece and it defines who made the piece for me. During one of our last rehearsals, we were hustling to fill in sections of the football game. Simon and Charlie were given the prompt of two minute warning; they went off and in fifteen minutes came back with that beat. “Two Minute Warning” reminds me that our piece was made by our cast. The piece does not work without them. They are the life force; they made the piece and they owned the piece.

The fraud for me is very different from the fraud for Kedian or even the fraud for you. For me it's the fact that we made a piece about football, a subject I have little to no knowledge of. It is the fact that we used one of America's most viewed sports in order to talk about real issue of identity in the country. It is the fact that our cast put so much trust in us to guide the project in the right way when we clearly struggled to find the path the entire time. The fraud for me is that we were allowed to put our silly ideas on stage and that people showed up to watch them. In the words of someone's father talking to me after the show, "that was a lot of metaphors, and I am not sure I understood all of them". So maybe we were successful. We told you what it was and you came to see it anyway. Ta-Da!

III.

The Post Game Chat

Collaborating is hard. It is so hard. It requires you to put aside your ego and really dig around in the shit until you find a diamond. It means you have to be willing to be the dumb one and learn from someone else. It is not easy to be on the same page as someone else at all times.

These are the things I would do differently during the process. I think Kedian and I needed to talk about our roles and specify them a lot sooner. We work in very different ways but compliment each other and I think by talking about our roles we could have smoothed the process a bit more. Kedian is very good at running a rehearsal room. I am not. I have a very hard time when it comes to translating my thoughts on theater to other people. This is something I have known for a long time and it is the same reason I have a hard time directing. I have trouble putting aside my humility in order to assert my idea. It is not something I am super comfortable with and it became a hindrance in this process. If I could have taken charge in some situations we could have avoided some of the hurdles. This is something I think Kedian and I both have some trouble with and you can see in in our process. There were lots of times when neither of us wanted to step on the other's toes and so we would make no progress. I would have communicated more clearly. There were times where my ego got in the way of communication and so feelings would get hurt or things would not be clear. We needed to establish a more honest back and forth dialogue but we were both hesitant.

I do not regret anything about this process. I actually would not change a single thing. I think that everything went the way that it should and doing it differently would not have resulted in the same product. Sure I wish that things were smoother at times, but a smoother process

would have made for a weaker piece. It became so strong because we were forced to put a lot of time and energy into making it stand against the weather that kept knocking it over. In the end even my distance towards the end played a role. The character of Coach Coach needed to be a separate entity than the players on the field. The power that Coach Coach carries needs to be a looming personality, otherwise the end beat does not work. So while I will try to implement the things I learned during this process into my work, I am extremely thankful that it happened the way it happened, and that it happened with who it happened, and nothing will change that.

Fraud: Just Fraud

Created by The Team

Coached by Kedian Keohan and Reeves Morris-Stan

THE PLAYS

1. **Malebolge**
2. **Team Machine**
3. **Dick and Verne**
4. **Coin Toss**
5. **Kicker**
6. **Blimp Waltz**
7. **SOPHIE dance**
8. **2-minute warning**
9. **REEVES as BALL**

THE ROSTER

Abby “Emotional Support” Adler ‘16
 Amanda “Full House” Houser ‘18
 Anna “Dramaturge” Sinreich ‘17
 Anya “Commitment” Kopischke ‘17
 Brandt “Team Captain” Rohde ‘19
 Charles “Jealous Twin” Mai ‘18
 Gideon “Gideon Berger” Berger ‘18
 Kirsten “Wannabe QB” Harvey ‘17
 Reeves “Coach Coach” Morris-Stan ‘16
 Samuel “Waterboy” Harmann ‘19
 Simon “I Have A Question” Paris ‘18
 Susie “Head Cheerleader” Yugler ‘16

<<Transition into Fraud from Violence>>

<<Sound:American Pie>>

MALEBOLGE

Blackout.

(In the darkness, we hear SAM and ANYA breathe “huh, huh, huh”. SAM tackles ANYA to the ground. SAM helps up ANYA, SAM falls down. ANYA helps up SAM, ANYA falls down. This keeps happening until they are both on the ground, panting in exhaustion.)

Lights fade up on them.

ANYA

Between the pit and the high hard escarpment where we walked are 10 circular valleys each separated by a circular path.

SAM

Just as a fortress like that would have a series of narrow bridges that went from front gate to outer rampart. This arrangement too had its rationale.

ANYA

This is where we found ourselves.

SAM

This is where we found ourselves.

(As they pant and continue to lie together a whistle blows from offstage (Reeves), The TEAM enters high knees and in a line. SAM and ANYA join the line)

Team Machine

-Cross Stage Left (whistle)

-Turn Downstage (whistle)

-STOP High Knees

(The TEAM forms a machine that makes sound and movement.)

(COACH COACH blows whistle machine stops with one last “Crank!” from Abby)

(SUSIE begins the POINT and line beat)

SUSIE

Sam Harmann, despite your obvious discomfort with yourself, you are actually quite endearing.

SAM

Charlie Mai, I feel like you’ve run away from home...multiple times.

CHARLIE

Brandt Rohde, I think that more often than not you settle for less.

BRANDT

Anna Sinreich, I bet you throw out all your change.

ANNA

Gideon Berger, you're someone who looks better when they're tired.

GIDEON

Anya Kopischke, I bet when you were in middle school you had a phase for every month.

ANYA

Abby Adler, There are parts of your past that you will never know.

ABBY

Amanda Houser, I bet you really like it when your food touches.

AMANDA

Simon Paris, I bet you wore velcro sneakers for too long because you didn't know how to tie
your shoes.

SIMON

Kirsten Harvey, I bet your heart beats fast when Dancing Queen comes on.

KIRSTEN

Susie Yugler, You look like a Sexy Professor Trelawney.

**LINE: OUR /TEAM/ IS/ AWARE /OF /OUR /STRENGTHS AND OUR WEAKNESSES
WOO!**

(ALL LAUGH) 6x

DICK AND VERNE

GIDEON

Thank you Kimberly, for those wise words your husband told you this morning.

ABBY

The network loves a pretty face.

(both laugh)

GIDEON

That's for damn sure. What would I do without you, Dick?

ABBY

Well Verne, this would be a one-hand job.

(Sound Cue TV BEEP. They transform into PUSSY CATS and begin a FIGHT SEQUENCE that they repeat crossing from SL TO SR)

****When ABBY pulls GIDEON from SR to SL the first time, the BENCH BEATS begin loudly.****

Susie crosses SR for water.

Brandt and Sam chugging Gatorade and sitting.

Reeves and Amanda "TITS"

Kirsten and Anna slouching.

Anya giving birth and Simon helping push.

After the second pull of Gideon across the stage, The Bench BEATS stop.

Charlie sings the National Anthem incorrectly to its finish.

GIDEON AND ABBY

...ANDDDDDD WE'RE BACK.

(REEVES blows whistle)

All POSE for TEAM PHOTO. CAMERA FLASH

Coin Toss

{Simon Paris, a referee, coughs stands up from bench and takes the field}

The referee slowly takes center stage removing fur coat and whistle.

Once they arrive there, they extend their arms out.

***REF blows whistle (Enter Wardrobe as REFs from SR). TEAM lines UP.**

REF: Welcome all, to the BIGGEST GAME (wink wink) !

They take a coin out and shout at the audience.

They flip the coin and it flies away.

They chase the coin around, struggling to recover it, occasionally flipping it again, but failing to contain it. Finally, they pick it up center stage and look up at the crowd, taking them in.

REF: WHAT IS HAPPENING? (BUTTSHORTS!!!!)

They then turn around and present their ass to the audience and pull down their pants. Then, they proceed to insert the coin into their ass as they cry. Finally, they take the coin out of their ass and look at it.

REF: It's tails.

ALL: WOO! *(Throw furs)*

(ANNA has stepped forward and begun to kick)

KICKER

When I was a kid I used to fall asleep at night and Wish everyone were Dead.

((When ANNA kicks herself in the head, SIMON throws a penalty flag on the field and the TEAM proceeds to pick up furs and assembly line hang them up on Sidelines assisted by Wardrobe REFS)) Then I'd Take it all back because I would think God could hear Me. Then I'd Stay up all night Crying thinking about how I wished everyone Were dead. Sometimes I hear voices. They tell me to do things. Like lift my arm. Or Move My Leg. I have to talk to them. Otherwise they get Mad. Sometimes I think Aliens are coming for me. The other night someone told me that they were coming for me. They heard me talking to them. But I don't remember. I think They are coming for Me.

Luther Vandross. *(AMANDA as QB starts to get TEAM to HUDDLE)*

Fuck you

I hate you

I love you

I'm sorry

It's not my fault but I'm sorry

I love you

Hi

Hi

I hate you

Hi

Can you hear me?

Blimp Waltz (starts as Kicker ends)

Amanda walks off the sidelines.

Amanda: Huddle Up!

The team gathers around Amanda as Anna keeps kicking while moving backwards towards the bench. They create a semi-circle center with Amanda at the apex.

Amanda: Closer!

They scootch closer.

Amanda: A little Closer!

They scootch even closer until they are all very cramped.

Amanda: Alright, take a knee! I always wanted to be in the NFL (she turns upstage to look at the team, then turns back) and now here I am.*

**Climb Every Mountain as sung by Peggy Wood begins to play. Amanda gestures to Susie and Susie joins her in front of the team they begin to waltz. During the second verse the team partners up and begins waltzing as well. At the climax, the team begins to see something in the sky and slowly wander towards it. The team begins to lie down on their backs facing the audience. They begin to point.*

Climb every mountain
Search high and low
Follow every byway
Every path you know

Climb every mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream

A dream that will need
All the love you can give

Every day of your life
For as long as you live

Climb every mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream

A dream that will need
All the love you can give
Every day of your life
For as long as you live

Climb every mountain
Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow
Till you find your dream

ALL: Wow, look at that blimp!

MSMSMSMSM Dance

MSMSMSMSM by SOPHIE begins to play. The team crawls to positions and gets up. They begin their running in place. Then they go up in an order to perform singular motions.

The order is as follows: Amanda, Anya, Charlie, Simon, Abby, Kirsten, Susie, Brandt, Sam, Anna, Gideon

When Brandt goes up to do his motion, they strike his pose and Sam begins running around squeezing water into everyone's mouth. Brandt then gives the team a pep talk.

BRANDT

Alright everybody take a knee.

The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life.

When you're out on the field, I want you to look into the stands

I want you to look in the face of every person out there who wants you to fail

I want you to see their hate

I want you to look at the players across from you and see how much they want to hurt you

Look when we started this season, you could barely catch the ball
 You were a bunch of weaklings
 Frail little sissies with paper for skin and a hummingbird's heart
 You had weird toes, and creepy eyebrows
 Nobody believed in you
 I didn't believe in you
 Everyday I came to the field I expected to be disappointed
 Everyday I came home, I was disappointed
 it's their field, it's their dirt, and it's their fucking town
 what right do we have coming here?
 A duck can't fly with clipped wings
AND YOUR WINGS ARE CLIPPED
 Go Ducks!

(Coach walks up and places his hand on Brandt's back and then walks off. They continue with Anna and Gideon's motions and then fall to the left directly after Gideon's motion.)

2-minute warning

(CHARLIE and SIMON rise from the floor of bodies strewn about.)

Charlie: 2 minute warning
 Simon: 5 minute warning
 Charlie: 10 minute warning
 Simon: 1 hour warning
 Charlie: 5 hour warning
 Simon: 1 day warning
 Charlie: 1 night warning...
 Simon: 1 week warning
 Charlie: 3 week warning
 Simon: 1 month warning
 Charlie: 5 month warning
 Simon: 1 year warning
 Charlie: 5 year warning
 Simon: 10 year warning
 Charlie: 20 year warning
 Simon: Forever warning
 Charlie: Forever +1 warning
 Simon: Till death do us part warning!
Pause
 Together: 5 year warning

Dance

Simon: 2 year warning

Charlie: 2 year warning? 5 year warning

Simon: No, 2 year warning

Pause

Charlie: Fine, 1 year warning

Simon: 2 year warning

Charlie: 1 month – 4 second warning

Together: 10 minute warning

Simon: 2 minute warning

Charlie: 5 minute warning?

Simon: 2 minute warning.

(They walk upstage look at one another breathe and hit a pose.)

(REEVES from offstage blows the whistle)

WHISTLE- GET UP

WHISTLE- LOOK LEFT

WHISTLE LOOK RIGHT

WHISTLE-RUN TO LINE

Reeves As Ball

Reeves come on from Stage Right dressed in a foot ball costume. The team is in a line upstage. In the line upstage, they are repeating their one liners. He walks back and forth center and all eyes are on him. He then turns downstage and Nessun Dorma Plays. Then each player comes down field and interacts with Reeves.

Order is as follows: Anya, Gideon, Susie, Charlie, Amanda, Abby, Sam, Anna, Simon, Brandt, and Kirsten.

One Liners

Abby “This one’s for you, Dad”

Amanda “We can do this”

Anna “87 is my favorite number”

Anya “Not Today Anya”

Brandt “By the grace of God alone I survived”

Charlie “Who do you think you are I am”

Gideon “It’s not real life”

Kirsten “No celebrating!”

Sam “What mistakes did I make to end up here”

Simon “Big Daddy’s rolling through”

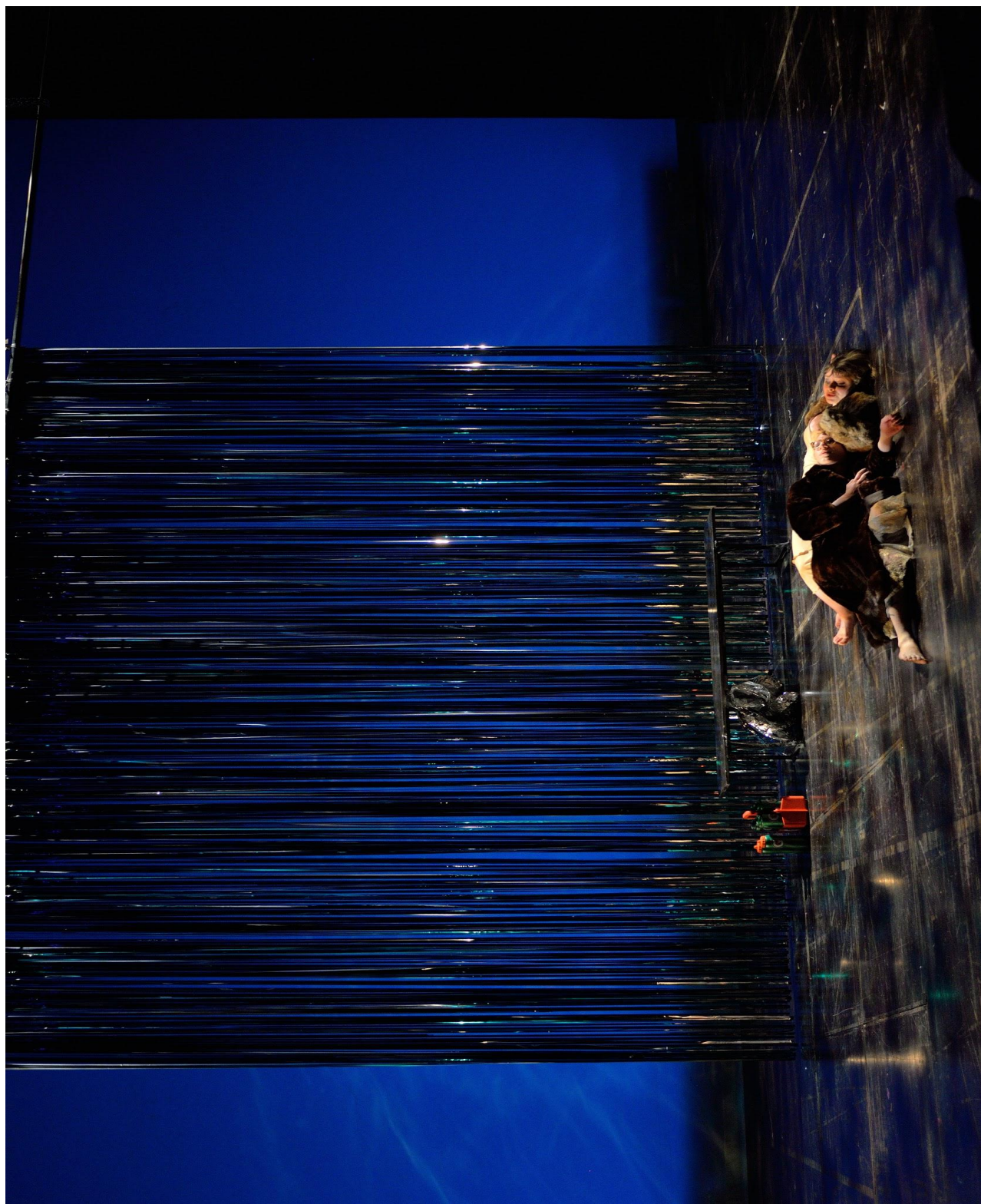
Susie “As the players stormed the field, the marching band refused to yield”

As Brandt runs up to interact with Reeves, Reeves jumps into his arms and Brandt catches him. Brandt then lifts him and yells. Kirsten walks up and puts her hand on Brandt’s shoulder. The music cuts and Reeves kisses him on the cheek.

Reeves: You are the daughter of kings. Don’t forget that.

Kirsten: I’m the daughter of kings. I won’t forget that.

Black Out <<Higher and Higher Curtain Call Music>>





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