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I'm Scared of the Colors [or At Least we Tried]: A Collaborative Theater Project

Marissa C. Shadburn
Bard College

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I'm Scared of the Colors [or At Least we Tried]
A Collaborative Theater Project

A Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of The Arts
at Bard College

by
Marissa Shadburn

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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THE WALL is not open:
A Brief Introduction

I'm not the kind of person who takes risks. But when challenged with creating my own work, I was immediately faced with abandoning my perfectionist work ethic. Without a direction or an outside force, like a playwright giving me a platform to direct work, I felt lost. When I asked for advice on how to start my senior project during my moderation board one professor turned to me and said, "Find your senior project in Berlin." With that daunting task I set off for a semester of exciting new theater aesthetics and historical awakenings. But, by the time I returned I found myself muddled by the many things I had learned. When confronted with the senior project proposal form I grounded my thoughts with these three ideas that I am consistently sure of:

1. I love working with other people. Human relationships fascinate me.
2. I want to push myself in terms of form and process. Pursue growth at all costs.
3. I love Brecht.

Keeping these goals in mind, I decided to challenge myself with a devised project. I thought for a while that maybe I would complete a directing project, tinkering with Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *The Threepenny Opera*. But I've directed before, and I aimed to challenge myself by working collaboratively. I thought this would help me pursue growth as an artist because I would have to address the many artistic pursuits and interests of a group as opposed to myself. To mediate personal opinion with group goals I knew would be a good challenge for me.

In thinking about contemporary history and German aesthetics I finally landed on the Berlin wall as a place to start. I find this time period fascinating for a few reasons, but mainly because of the imposed division amongst people, culture and ideas. I was interested

in exploring how these political divisions affected the population as well as the individual. As Peter Schneider said so eloquently in his text, *The Wall Jumper*, “It will take us longer to tear down the Wall in our heads than any wrecking company will need for the Wall we can see” (199). I wanted to explore the tension in a divided society on a citywide scale to see how it would affect an individual in their perspective of the world. I choose to explore identity in a fractured society and to explore what it means to find unity in both nation and mind after such disparity. Finally with a project in mind I submitted a proposal for a work in progress called *Mauer*, which means wall in German (i.e. Die Berliner Mauer.)

After sitting with this project proposal for the summer, I came back to school still not ready to make anything. I did research on my own for a while and finally, I asked two people, Sam Miller and Kedian Keohan, to be a part of my project. After weeks of scholarly work I was excited to get our collaboration started. Then, I had no idea then how much this project would actually hinge on Sam and Kedian as performers, artists and people.

In one of our first meetings, I asked the two of them what they were interested exploring theatrically, Sam said that they wanted to know how to use real life *authentically* in theater. After months of working and creating, we finally returned to that question with our project now called, *I'm Scared of the Colors [or At Least we Tried]*. We drifted from our original concept of the Berlin Wall, but I was ok with that. I was willing to let go of all the research we had completed because I realized that our process was more important to share with an audience. This iteration of the piece wasn't meant to be specifically about the Berlin Wall, instead, this project is now about the creative process, memory, history, and finally, love.

Between a Wall and A Wall Place:
The Research

From the beginning I knew I didn't want to create a period piece about the Berlin Wall. Regardless, it was still important to me to be well versed in the time period because the piece had the potential to become very political, especially considering the continued existence of walls today (i.e. Korea, USA/Mexico and Israel/Palestine.) I tend to dislike theater that is 'generally' political. Theater that makes political claims without any sort of realness feels vapid and shallow. Theater that is political needs to be grounded in real history, and the performers need to have a connection to that history, which creates a purpose or intentionality in sharing this history with an audience. The ability to present a new perspective on the past is essential to creating political theater that is more than a didactic lecture.

I launched into weeks of research with the help and guidance of my advisor, Miriam Felton-Dansky, before I brought Sam and Kedian into the process. I started with articles from the time period. One in particular, "Refugee Slain at Berlin Wall" from the Chicago Tribune in 1986 was particularly important in my forming opinion and perspective on this moment in history. This article succinctly details the death of an East Berliner's attempt at an illegal crossing into West Berlin, "The young man had just climbed a ladder to the top of the 10-foot wall when guards fired 30 to 50 shots, apparently killing him...The Man, covered with blood, fell back into East German territory" (United Press International). Even though this bloody story didn't end up in the final project, it's fascinating for a few reasons, mainly because the act depicted in the text is in and of itself political. The act shows the desire of a group of people that is different from the norm. The escape is

beneficial to the individual, but it also brings attention to the larger issues of that political climate.

This short article brings massive attention to the horrific flaws of a barrier to solve post WWII international political problems. In further description of the event the author says that, "...a West Berliner who peered through a crack in the wall reported the young man was lying still, his white shirt stained with blood, and that a guard looked at the body and said, 'I got you, you pig'" (United Press International). The author framed this experience for a dramatic and emotional appeal to share the experience of living in a torn city. If the event of attempting to cross the boarder is political, then the documentation of that event is essential to the proliferation of that story and that strife. Further, this documentation scatters the story across time and history; the story equally affects someone like me in 2015 as it did in 1986. The aspects in this story of risk taking and subverting expectation, in addition to the question of what makes up a political event and historical representation, are what became a part of this project.

In addition to looking at primary materials from the time period, I also wanted to look at the Berlin wall from an artistic perspective, which drove my research into novels and movies. At the recommendation of a professor, Kedian, Sam and I watched the Wim Wenders film *Wings of Desire*. Based in a divided Berlin, *Wings of Desire* is about angels who "...assemble, testify and observe" (Wenders) the world in order to preserve reality. These angels meditate on the past, present and future. As a group we grappled with the narrative of the film, but regardless found many of the aesthetic choices and the angel characters intriguing.

These mythical and observational creatures became the foundation for the characters that start our show. The angels view the world in black and white, and can never communicate with the living, only with each other. One of the angels, Cassiel, follows, but never communicates with, an old man as he struggles to find the 'old' Potsdammer Platz, now destroyed by war and separated by the wall. Additionally, they can take what I will call the 'spirit' of objects. For example, in the scene where the main character Daniel goes into the trapeze artists trailer, he can only take the 'spirit' of the small rock, and not the actual rock itself. The only way one can truly interact with others and to see the world in color is to 'fall' and lose their angel abilities, including eternal life. We were interested in exploring these specific relationships between the angels and the world and how these interactions can create changes in identity.

Daniel's change of identity demonstrated in *Wings of Desire* takes place in a liminal void space, the no man's land section of the east side of the Berlin Wall. This is surprisingly similar to how another artistic representation of the Berlin Wall, *The Wall Jumper* by Peter Schneider, explores identity. *The Wall Jumper* is an incredible, fictional, insight into the divided world of Berlin from the perspective of a writer, composing a text of his travels back and forth. Schneider uses the narrative of this main character to show what it means to find identity in a divided city,

The story of a man who loses himself and starts turning into nobody. By a chain of circumstances still unknown to me, he becomes a boundary-walker between two German states...the more he crosses from one half of the city to the other, the more absurd the choice seems. Having come to distrust the hastily adopted identity that both states offer to him, he feels at home only on the boarder. (Schneider 22-23)

For someone who travels back and forth, their identity lies in their ability to travel, not in a singular place. This was particularly interesting to us because to live on a border means to

lack a sense of physically belonging to a place. When the characters in our piece let their home fall, they become travelers like this character that Schneider is describing, they lose their sense of home and end up existing in this void space. Schneider's exploration of the traversing of space was instrumental in our thinking about the journey that our characters would take in the trajectory of our story.

Theories of voids are commonly related to Berlin on many accounts. Most frequently, voids are thought about in regards to the architecture of Berlin during and post the Berlin Wall era. In *The Voids of Berlin* by Andreas Huyssen, Huyssen explores the idea of reading cities as text or as a compilation of images. Throughout this theory he reads Berlin's history through its architecture, in particular the void of West Berlin in East Germany, and the void left post 1989. Huyssen looks at popular city spaces, like Potsdammer Platz, and discusses how these community spaces are re-appropriated over time especially after the destruction of the Berlin Wall,

In the summer of 1991, when most of the wall had already been removed...the area was studded with the wall's steel rods left behind...and decorated with colorful triangular paper leaves that were blowing and rustling in the wind; they powerfully marked the void...as memorial. The installation increased the uncanny feeling: a void saturated with invisible history with memories of architecture both built and unbuilt. (Huyssen 65-66)

This concept of a voided 'invisible history' is what we wanted to explore in this project.

Huyssen's piece shaped the way that we made the characters story. Spaces that are considered voids aren't actually empty. We wanted to know how the 'invisible history' of these two characters could exist in a world of the play, which is a void, in addition to a voided, or empty, theater space.

Outer Space Party:
Forming the Group

I didn't want to work with too many people, at first, and I needed to work with people who I felt were compatible, while offering different skills. Sam and I had previously worked together on multiple productions. Besides for the fact that he's a great performer, he has a great talent for writing and a different perspective on theater coming from film studies. Kedian and I had never worked together before besides in a workshop a few months prior to the beginning of this project. Otherwise, I had seen her perform in many productions at Bard, and I'd always been fascinated by her ability to really transform into a character. Additionally, from the workshop, I knew that she wouldn't be complacent in the process and that she would be willing to explore and try anything.

The first thing we did as a group was to set goals. Although we discussed many ideas that excited us about theater, these were the three goals that I believe stayed the most consistent and were challenged the most through our process:

1. To find and explore the personal in the political.
2. To work together as much as possible, finding a unity of language.
3. To have a clear 'what' and 'why'. (What are we doing, and why are we doing it?)

Regardless of whether or not these goals were always met, it was important for us to set them at the beginning of the process because they became a reference point for us when big changes needed to happen. They were essential to maintaining the professional nature of the group and instrumental in helping us reach our goal of making this show.

To start, each week we would each pick a topic to research and bring in to present to the group. I wanted to give Sam and Kedian the opportunity to explore themes and ideas that they were interested in, and this was my tactic to get to know how they thought

critically about Berlin and the Berlin Wall in addition to discovering their interests. Through this kind of group research we learned about flash bulb memory, stories of boarder crossings all over the world and ways to think about space.

After weeks of research, it became clear that we had to start making. Sam and Kedian are both self-starters and highly creative people, so I tried to give them the space to create a developed rapport and a shared language. To start making work, we brainstormed a list of images and themes that we thought related to the Berlin Wall. When deciding prompts for Sam and Kedian, I would challenge them with making a piece by asking them to select a few points from this list, in addition to texts that we had read or pictures that we had found. Sometimes, I prompted them to use specific devices, like a moment of song or, inversely, moments of silence. After a short period of time they would show me what they made, sometimes they'd even make me a program, and I would give them feedback or ask them questions. Through this process of creating and editing we were able to make large portions of our show. For instance, the opening scene of the show was based on the first piece that Sam and Kedian ever made in our rehearsal process.

Our group dynamic formed very naturally. A large part of this was due to our cohesion of goals and the expectations that we set at the beginning of our process. In general we made decisions based on consensus, unless I felt very strongly about something in opposition to Sam and Kedian. I really hoped that this project would be as much theirs as it is mine, but since it's, 'My Senior Project' there was always a 'defer to Marissa's opinion' attitude. We were open minded to casting more people, but with the direction the show was heading we all agreed that casting more people would complicate our connections, which became integral to the meaning of our show. Sam did a large majority

of the writing, which Kedian and I then edited. When it finally came to making cuts in our script, we tried to make cuts together, but that generally led to indecision. So, I decided what should be cut and then run it past the group. Then, together, we would figure out how to change the transitions and staging.

Why is the Sad Man Sad? :
Finding the Structure

We successfully made way more work than we needed to, but we had trouble finding connections between the pieces. This is where we struggled most. My goal was to have a loose structure of the show by the January intercession, and that didn't happen. Instead we had the beginning of the show, with an unexplored idea graphed onto it. Returning from break, we had to decide what actually happens with these characters and find our structure.

We started with what we knew was the strongest out of everything we had made, the two characters that live in a tube, looking for Sam's shoes. The characters, loosely based on the angels from *Wings of Desire*, were compelling to use because of their extreme neutrality and their mythical status. Even though their situation is seemingly static, we felt the characters' catatonic state and the spaces between the lines of dialogue created tension, which was then only cracked by single word or inconclusive responses. They are blank slates that we were interested in developing throughout the play, single words would become full phrases, and the characters would grow out of their inability to express emotion.

The isolation of the characters in the tube is the only physical reference to walls that remained in the project. The characters isolated in this grey circle are reminiscent of West

Berliners, confined in an oasis surrounded by East Germany. By starting the characters in this secluded space, we hoped to create anonymity in the characters backstory so we could question how the characters exist in this space at all. For example how the shoes got on the other side of the wall. We established this small, confined space as home to emphasize the severity of the decision to let the wall fall and leave.

The shoes were an important goal for us. This task was compelling because it was simple and anti-climactic. Thinking about the characters and their growth, we wanted there to be some kind of problem with the shoes, so that this anti-climactic goal wasn't as easy as we perceived. The characters took a big risk tearing down the walls of their home and traveling through an unknown space, so when the shoes aren't right item, we want to know if the journey was worth it. We chose to further explore this question by splitting the two characters up. One decides to continue exploring, despite the fact that the shoes weren't right, and the other, disappointed, chooses to return to a broken home. In this scenario, the goal isn't achieved and the characters lose the only other stable possessions in the lives, their home and each other.

This was important to us because we wanted to know how personal identity changes in conversation with partners and home. These questions are quite personal to me. Leaving home to come to college has helped me to discover who I am. Without parental pressure and high expectations to be someone who I'm not, I've been able to find my own voice. So when I go back home, do I revert to who I was pre-Bard? Or, when I return will I bring my new attitude and perspective with me? I don't think the two characters necessarily outgrew each other, but they recognized that they needed different experiences, and thus allowed each other to break the duo in order to pursue growth. The

question to the audience then becomes, what would *you* have done? And how can this relationship playing out before you onstage relate to the special and important relationships in your own lives?

With the outline of the beginning and the end, we set off to figure out what was in the middle. We hoped to create a space where the characters could subvert expectation, both in their actions and motivation on stage, in addition to the audience's expectations. One way we sought to do this was through moments of magic. For instance, when we first see the characters, they appear to float to the top of the tube with the help of an umbrella. Setting this as the standard of movement for the characters helped us discover how the characters existed in the space.

After the tube falls, we tried to create a revelation of space, like when Dorothy falls into Oz and sees the world in Technicolor for the first time. The characters are now able to discover new things that they weren't before like sounds and color. This is how we decided they would pull copious amounts of juggling scarves and kazoos out of their trench coats. Frantically and excitedly they would parade around the tube as if it were a sacrifice. Finally, the music would get harder to produce and the characters would vomit color, with the help of some magic mouth coils, as if the change in space had a physical affect on them as well. A revelation of the exterior should start from the interior. This is the shift from excitement to skepticism, a space that seemed exciting and safe, is now unexplored and terrifying.

Figuring out what the characters do in this new space was the hardest part of our process. We needed to create obstacles for the characters, put their abilities to the test in order to elicit growth and justify the characters' choices to leave or stay. Given our mutual

fascination with Brecht, we decided to use interruption tactics with a kind of reverse-alienation flare. As the characters travel through the space, they would stumble upon stories, which we called 'Narrative Interruptions,' that would show other characters subverting expectations or challenging norms. This was our way to bring more perspectives into our story. These Narrative Interruptions wouldn't only inform the larger story or questions of risk and boundaries for the audience, but they would also affect the characters. After a character exits a story, they could understand something different about the world. Through these experiences the characters would learn how to better express themselves and discover their individual identities, as opposed to who they are within their partnership.

Even though this approach was very exciting because we could finally apply all the research we had done and the stories we had collected, we were having trouble finding the stakes and showing why the interruptions were even happening. As hard as we tried to find these stakes, we realized we were justifying these events too much. The action on stage could not speak for itself. We dug ourselves into a conceptual pit where we were left to ruminate and think in circles as opposed to thinking of a new idea to help us climb out of the ditch. Towards the end of our Narrative Interruption phase, we discussed ways in which we could use these narrative spaces to critique contemporary theater practice. These conversations launched us into the idea that ended up becoming the middle of the show.

We recognized that the way we could best share the amount of work we had made and show an experience of two characters trying to achieve a goal, was to pair our actual experience of the creative process with the story of the two characters looking for the

shoes. We had a beginning, and an ending, what we needed was a middle. That middle became 'us,' returning to that question we posed in our first meeting, how to show people authentically in theater. The whole senior project festival is supposed to be a showcase of 'work-in-progress' projects, and we embraced that. So, we literally presented a work in progress, and that ended up being more compelling than any 'finished' product we could have made. Of course, making this decision two and a half weeks before we opened was difficult, but it was the right adrenaline boost we needed to get us out of our creative ditch.

***The Story of Two Lovers Who Learned to Overcome All Odds by Understanding Their Differences:
What The Show Became***

Now that we finally knew what was going to happen in the middle of the show, we had to fill it with events from our process that we thought were important. We decided that the stakes should be external, so that the 'what' became the need to finish the show because it is literally happening in this moment. To give the piece another filter, we created a final idea that ties everything we made together, "We fill the voids in our lives with narrative" (Shadburn 11). This is a statement that defines most of our work and that we also believe as individuals. We additionally felt that this concept addresses some of the questions that we'd been struggling with about our structure. The middle of the show was empty; it became a void that we chose to fill with the narrative of our experience working together.

We wanted to directly present to an audience what our experience was like by exploring our entire process and the raw materials we had created. We created this 'real' story parallel to the original story of the shoes so that the two could inform each other. By

the time Sam and Kedian decide to show the audience the end of the play, the growth and development that we've been longing to create in the original 'Angel' characters, we get to see in Sam and Kedian learning to work together.

Here were the main segments that ended up in the show, besides the 'beginning' and 'end' of the play:

Peter Handke

During my period of research, I wanted to look into structure as well as content, so I read work by other theater artists including, Heiner Müller, Tony Kushner, Samuel Beckett and of course, Bertold Brecht. All these texts were influential in one way or another, but Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* was the most intriguing because of the way the text interacts with the audience and how the text criticizes contemporary theater practices. As an exercise, early in the process, I gave Sam and Kedian a passage from the text and asked them to create a piece which showed a clear narrative while only using Handke's text. Sam and Kedian took one line from the text "The possibilities of theater are not exploited here" (Handke 11) and made an absurd piece that unfortunately, none of us can remember. For the sake of the performance, and our narrative goals, we thought it would be a better experiment to actually try to exploit the possibilities of theater.

This goal was exciting because to exploit the possibilities of theater meant, to us, to completely subvert audience expectation through action on stage that could only be made possible by theater. This functions mainly by the suspension of disbelief that comes with seeing theater. If we had more time we would have added magic to this section. Magic is a warping of reality, a way to trick the audience that you're performing for. Using slight of hand magic in this realm is a way of fully exploiting this suspension because it's asking an

audience not only to believe that the circumstances of the play are real, but that the magic is as well.

In the actual piece we made we included melodrama and dance. Dance, in theater, we all feel is exploited to an extent. It is our perception that in contemporary theater practice, Dance, particularly with pop or electronic music, is commonly re-appropriated to theater as a device to show chaos or to create moments of high-energy fun. These dances are typically used to boost the aesthetic of the theater piece without actually acting in conversation with this substance of the work or with the form of dance. This exploitation *within* theater was exciting to explore because it was a way we could use a device in contemporary practice that we dislike to comment on how it is used poorly.

The Programs

For almost every piece Sam and Kedian made, they would make me a program welcoming me to the show. In honor of their efforts, I have used the titles of these programs to title of the sections of this paper. Bringing this element into the performance was a real way of showing more about how silly and special our process was, while also using material that isn't supposed to be performed. In order to fulfill the statement of 'filling the voids in our lives with narrative' we made a story out of the programs, where Kedian as a detectives interrogates Sam about the programs, which are evidence 'in the case of the missing plot.' Many of the programs that Sam and Kedian made included inside jokes, which only Bardians would understand. We didn't want to make this section to referentially funny, but we kept some of them in because it is so 'us' and it was an exciting way to really bring our Bard audience into our process.

The Article about North Korea

During our period of research, Sam brought in this article about North Korea and the regulations of soap operas. The article focuses on the story of a man, Jang Se-Yul, who defected to South Korea because of better television. Since Sam was really excited by this text, we wanted to give him the opportunity to share it. We additionally thought it would be interesting to explore how one presents an article to an audience in a straightforward manner, without manipulating it. We felt that Sam could share this article with the audience, as opposed to warping it into a story, because the content of the text already fulfills our notion of voids and narrative. Through the presentation of this text, Sam elicits the idea that the ability to see stories which depict a better life, can inspire someone to the greatest degree in order to fill their own lives with this freedom of expression. Because Se-Yul had the opportunity to see these soaps, he was able to fill the voids in his life with these television narratives, so much so that he defected.

Outer Space Party (or, a Lack Thereof)

Outer Space Party was the second piece that Sam and Kedian ever made, and although the actual piece didn't end up in the show Outer Space Party became a really helpful tool. Kedian, throughout the piece, really wants to show the audience Outer Space Party because she believes it could actually fulfill the needs of the middle of the play. Whereas Sam thinks, "It's ridiculous and pointless" and he doesn't want to waste the audience's time with it (Shadburn 8). Although this seems like such meaningless bickering, it actually demonstrates a larger issue within the creative process in regards to disagreement. In the presentation of our process we show a lot of agreement, but it didn't always happen like that. To be true to that side of the process, we choose to include a real

disagreement that could erupt into a climatic argument displaying a divide between the characters.

The Argument

During our process, Sam and Kedian faked an argument in our group Facebook message thread to prank me. By the end of the fake argument, they had tricked me into believing that they had both 'quit' my show. The reason this argument was so effective is because it was tailored to me. They were using elements of our lives that I knew could seriously offend someone. Of course, the three of us had a bit of a falling out post their prank, but once we changed the direction of the show, we knew that we had to include it some how. Using Outer Space Party as the catalyst, we decided that Sam and Kedian should have a 'real' argument to trick the audience the same way that I was tricked, while displaying a challenge of the creative process. This argument is instrumental because it leads Sam and Kedian to come to the conclusion of 'filling the voids in our lives with narrative.'

Here are a few other pieces that I want to talk about, even though they aren't in the middle section of the piece:

Flash Bulb Memory

In the beginning of our process, Kedian brought in a study about Flash Bulb memory. The study discusses how people remember significant events in their life based on their opinion of that event. We wrote a piece, based on a true story, about a woman who had to leave her child in the West in order to receive medicine for five years. Pinpointing the exact moment when she had to say goodbye to her child, we distorted her story over and over, remembering the feelings and facts of the even differently every time. We all

found this piece compelling by comparing voids with memory, but unfortunately it didn't end up in the show at all because of last minute time constraints.

The Voids Text

This is the last text that Kedian says in the show, just as Sam has left the space. Although it was written very early in the process, it became very important to us as we moved through different iterations of the piece due to our fascination with void spaces and the fear of traveling through them. One thing that's special about this piece, and the performance of it, is the excitement found in exploring a new space regardless of the scars it may cause. This text, although abstract, is the summation of many of the concepts that three of us wanted to explore, and is particularly significant to me in regards to thinking about my own experience leaving home.

"LOST"

This is the title of the song that Sam wrote for the show. Originally it was going to be one of the characters that Sam stumbled upon in the 'Narrative Interruptions,' but we kept the song in the performance for a few reasons. Most importantly, the text of the song is directly related to the experience of the two characters becoming separated and Kedian's travel back 'home.' But additionally it gave us the opportunity to explore having two actors in the same space while existing in different worlds, Kedian, in the world of the 'play' and Sam existing with the audience in the 'real' world. We were curious about how one can be alone on stage, without actually ever being alone in the space of the theater, and the song "LOST" helped us to achieve that atmosphere.

DON'T THINK ABOUT US HAVING SEX:
An Exploration of Gender in the Show

Since coming to college, I've been really interested in classes and texts that are related to the field of Gender and Sexuality Studies. For this project, I was excited by the opportunity to include this field of study, but at the same time I didn't want to pigeon hole the project into this practice, unless that is what the project was meant to be. Although GSS did not end up being the central theme, topics surrounding GSS definitely came up in our quest to subvert expectations and norms and overcoming personal barriers for the sake of finding identity. The concept that ties this project to GSS the most is the concept of performativity, and the way that Sam and Kedian performed their parallel worlds in addition to how they interacted with each other.

When we thought about creating the characters in the 'play,' we were interested in creating characters that wouldn't be considered by their gender, but rather by their actions. In Judith Butler's essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," she claims that, "...gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity...instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler 187). By allowing Sam and Kedian to play performative versions of themselves, they were able to perform the actions that are natural to the self as opposed to an ascribed gender.

With Sam and Kedian, I was interested in exploring how these two characters could maintain a non-sexual and platonic relationship on stage without audience members projecting onto a man and woman on stage that they must be in some kind of romantic relationship. Through our exploration of Sam and Kedian and their characters, we were able to create our own standards of male and female relationships. Part of the reason this platonic relationship worked on stage was because we created these extremely neutral

characters that are totally equal in each other's eyes. Sam and Kedian were also dressed in the same in essentially gender-neutral jumpsuits that did not emphasize bodily features, thus creating more equality between the two of them.

In a conversation with Kedian about the changes to the show she said that something she was equally excited and nervous about was the opportunity to perform as herself. Because of the environment we created and the characters we had explored, including ourselves, she felt like more than just a body in the space. She felt that she could truly perform Kedian as she chose. I didn't cast Sam and Kedian to play specific characters but I cast them as themselves. By allowing Sam and Kedian to create their own characters, they were able to create their own set of actions that defines the identity of Sam and Kedian, not the actions that defines them as man and woman.

***Welcome to Marissa Shadburn...A Senior Project Submitted to Marissa Shadburn:
General Musings, or, What Happens Next?***

We took a huge departure from the Berlin Wall and I would like to find a way to bring it back into the piece. One way to do this would be to bring Flash Bulb memory back. Not only was the story real, but it was also grounded in the Berlin Wall, and the issues faced in a divided society. I wish we had also found a way to use more of *The Wall Jumper*. It's an incredible story and there are certain aspects about it, like the image of someone jumping over a ten-foot wall, which would be exciting to explore theatrically. On the other hand, I wouldn't want to do a full theatrical adaptation of *The Wall Jumper*, which sounds like another project. We could bring more of Berlin back into the piece by exploring the characters from the beginning and the end of the play more. Their relationship with each other and the world is unexplored right now, so with more time, I would want to develop

these characters more. Maybe they do actually live in Berlin and we can really ground the piece in a time and a place.

In a future iteration of the project I hope to explore and specify the actors relationship with the audience. Are Sam and Kedian actually asking the audience for help finishing the piece or not? How are they different when they present something to the audience as opposed to just speaking with the audience? Although the relationship with the audience 'worked' in this form of the project, that relationship will change and need to be justified differently with a different audience of more diverse backgrounds, not just people from Bard. For this reason the piece can't continue to be about 'finishing Marissa's Senior Project,' because that doesn't bear the same urgency with a non-Bard audience.

Something special about this piece really is the amount of reality in it. Because our experiences are real, to manipulate and turn them into a fictionalized experience feels disingenuous. With this current iteration of the play, the world of the majority of the show is our world, grounded in the real stakes of completing my senior project. By creating a 'world of the play' to find stakes within, for both the fictionalized characters who live in the tube and Sam and Kedian pulls this play out of our shared reality with the audience.

But, this is just a first iteration of the piece. What we have learned by playing with our relationship with an audience and exploring the creative process can help us create a larger theatrical piece with a world of it's own. By taking the material that we have made and creating stakes within the piece, we open up a world of opportunity to play with the suspension of disbelief, which could give us the opportunity to make the story of the shoes important. Every piece that we made in this iteration of the piece fulfills the notion of "filling the voids in our lives with narrative." This ideology is where we can find our stakes

for a larger piece, especially because this statement gives us the space to explore more material related to the void of the Berlin Wall. This exploration can affect both the stakes of the characters in the tube and Sam and Kedian.

The many concepts raised in this piece, memory, history, personal relationships, voids, narrative, the creative process, personal growth, home, etc., are really exciting, but there are too many. The project is scattered. In the next version of the project I'd like to really hone in on some of these questions. I would really want to focus on personal growth, the creative process and memory. All the other concepts we're interested in could fit under those three umbrella themes. In addition to extending more of the beginning, expanding more of the middle, with more pieces and more disagreement or discussion about the actual pieces themselves would be a great way to start gleaning better insight on the creative process while giving the pieces the space to explore all the idea that we're interested in.

I'm Scared of the Colors [or At Least we Tried]:
A Conclusion

I am very proud of this project. Not only does the piece have so much room for growth, but also it already has some really beautiful moments. The way we were best able to achieve these moments was by embracing the work in progress work ethic. Things were messy, and that's ok, that meant that the performances were fresh and original. When things aren't perfect, there's wiggle room, and the space for change. This is how the last two and a half weeks of the rehearsal progress were so invigorating, and by far the most productive weeks of our entire six-month process.

This project was the perfect senior project for me, because it captured so much of my four years at Bard. Learning the balance of how to work collaboratively, while still

maintaining my own artistic visions and opinions is one of the most important lessons I have taken from my experience at Bard, and this project exemplifies that. Struggling with how to make original work is another test I have grappled with as a student in the theater department. This project is the most original piece I have ever made, while still recognizing the post-dramatic theatrical history that this show is grounded in. The piece is well rounded in its goals to explore connections between people, to find the personal in the political and to find pleasure in the work.

What made this piece work was the relationship between Sam and Kedian. This project relied on the love that Sam and Kedian have for each other, not only as people, but how much they enjoy performing together on stage. Their energy is electrifying. Their rapport and the pleasure they find in exploring performance together made this piece what it was meant to be. No other two performers could have pulled off the spastic switches between deep, intellectual concepts and performative styles. I couldn't have been luckier. I wanted to explore connections between people, to me that really meant divisions, but instead I got to explore friendship, togetherness and love. Right now, I can't imagine this piece without them, because this piece is them.

The title of this final section is the title of the final product, *I'm Scared of the Colors [or At Least we Tried]* perfectly personifies this piece. Not only does it illustrate the duality of stories within the play, but also it literally says that we tried. We proposed that title by itself as a joke. But I quickly realized that it was essential to this piece because we really *did* try. Maybe we didn't succeed in all the goals we sought to, but we did try and that's what matters most.

I'm Scared of the Colors [or At Least we Tried]

Created by Marissa Shadburn
In collaboration with Kedian Keohan and Sam Miller

[Lights up. A tube stands upstage hanging from clamps. General silence. After a long pause, finally someone speaks with a quiet voice.]

Shit	SAM
What?	KEDIAN
I left my shoes on the other side of the wall.	SAM
How?	KEDIAN
I don't remember	SAM
Why now?	KEDIAN
My feet are cold.	SAM
It's been 47 years.	KEDIAN
Has it?	SAM
Can't get them now.	KEDIAN
Yup.	SAM
Things have changed.	KEDIAN
Yup. Should we go look?	SAM
Sure.	KEDIAN

[Umbrella's appear and the two characters 'float' to the top of the tube]
I think it's raining.

SAM

mmhmm. I forgot what it looked like.

KEDIAN

It's different. *[pause]* Look!

[KEDIAN points to the shoes which are all the way downstage. By the way she points, it's clear that to them the shoes are hundreds of miles away.]

SAM

My shoes. Can you reach?

KEDIAN

I don't think I can reach them.

SAM

Can we ask someone for help?

KEDIAN

There's no one there.

[Ad-lib moment, SAM references the audience, in a new tone, and asks them for help getting the shoes. KEDIAN becomes upset with him and repeats things like "there's no one there." This moment culminates in a slap and SAM submits and bland tonality returns.]

SAM

You're right, there's no one there.

KEDIAN

We're alone.

SAM

So, what are we going to do? *[pause]* Alright, I have an idea.

[SAM tries a 'magical hand things' to levitate the shoes towards him, it doesn't work.]

KEDIAN

What are you doing?

SAM

Just trust me.

[It doesn't work]

It's not working. Let me try again.

KEDIAN

Don't hurt yourself.

[SAM tries his magical hand thing again. Conversation continues.]

Are you okay?

SAM

I'm fine.

KEDIAN

Do you really want the shoes?

SAM

Yes. I really want the shoes.

[KEDIAN, who has been watching him struggle, makes the wall fall for him. Wall Falls and a giant sound happens]

Whoops.

KEDIAN

Don't worry about it.

[The two of them stand there awkwardly on the platform which has now been revealed. Pause. The characters orient themselves with the space. SAM steps off the platform and picks KEDIAN up off of it. While carrying her, he starts to run around the tube. She, excited, whirls her umbrella around. SAM slides KEDIAN down to the floor and their hands end up in each other's jackets. They find random items. They're excited. They throw themselves a parade around the stage, pulling copious amounts of items out of their jackets. They play music and suddenly it turns terrible. They begin to throw up magic streamers. Pause. Silence, the characters reorient themselves in the space and turn into themselves.]

BOTH

Hi I'm Kedian.

KEDIAN

I'm Kedian.

SAM

I'm Sam.

KEDIAN

We wrote that back in November as part of Marissa Shadburn's senior project. Welcome to Marissa Shadburn's senior project. That was the beginning.

SAM

Don't worry. There's an ending.

KEDIAN

Just no middle.

SAM

Which is kind of an important part of the play.

KEDIAN

And to make matters worse we have no clue what it's about.

BOTH

Do you know? What it's about?

[They wait for the audience]

KEDIAN

We don't know either. We were thinking memory or voids or ghosts or identity or sexuality or dystopian young adult novels or something....

SAM

I think it would help if we went back to the genesis of this whole thing.

[SAM puts phone chord in his mouth. Hands phone KEDIAN.]

KEDIAN

A phone call, last September *[Like a phone call]* Hello? Marissa? Hi. What's up? Getting dunkins again. No breakfast was taco bell. Yesterday's breakfast was dunkins. Noooo, yesterday's dinner was Wendy's and lunch was taco bell...Anyways why did you call. Your senior project? In the luma theater? I'd love to!!! With Sam Miller? Oh. Maybe not. All right whatever. What's it about?

BOTH

BERLIN!

SAM

Marissa wanted a piece about Berlin and walls but we didn't really see the connection.

KEDIAN

But then we remembered there was totally a wall in Berlin. So we made a piece, about memory.

SAM

Since we *forgot* about the Berlin wall.

KEDIAN

We also made a piece called Outer space party. It's about the East Berlin punk music scene. Alright. Here we go. Nicole! Can you hit cue 25. It' called Outer space party.

SAM

Kedian, I deleted that cue.

KEDIAN

You son of a bitch.

SAM

Outer space party really sucks. So here's another piece we made using text by famed German playwright Peter Handke. It's about German theater and aesthetic masturbation.

KEDIAN

Same thing!

[They high-five.]

Here's "Offending the Audience" by Peter Handke.

[Both repeat the line, "The possibilities of theater are not being exploited here" three times doing different and large gestures. On the last gesture, music plays and the two characters dance, and do magic tricks, thus exploiting the possibilities of theater. Lights go crazy]

KEDIAN

So we departed from everything that grounded us: a story, a time, a place..

SAM

And things got way too conceptual. So here we are, lost.

KEDIAN

The show has started and we kind of need to know what the piece is about..

SAM

Regardless, we swear we will provide some grand meaning to you by the end of this play so it all doesn't feel like...it's completely irrelevant to the project.

KEDIAN

Or is it? If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to play detective for a moment.

[She pulls a hat and a pipe from her coat.]

Hello, I am detective Kedian Covington Keohan and I'm here to solve the mystery of the missing plot. Do you know where it is?

SAM

Kedian. What are you doing?

KEDIAN

Where were you at approximately 3pm on November 13, 2014.

SAM

I have no clue. Probably in rehearsal for...

KEDIAN

MARISSA'S SENIOR PROJECT. YOU ADMIT GUILT!

SAM

What?

KEDIAN

I found this clue. Do you recognize it?

SAM

Oh, that's a program that Kedian – er you - and I made for the show.

KEDIAN

A likely story. Would you mind reading the title?

SAM

I'm Scared of the Colors, or At Least we Tried.

KEDIAN

OOOOH did you really try? And what about this line?

SAM

Approximate runtime 1968 – 1989.

KEDIAN

That sounds like an awfully long play.

SAM

It was just a joke. And the runtime is a reference to how long the Berlin wall was up.

KEDIAN

Berlin?! Are you a communist?

SAM

This is starting to weird me out, Keohan.

KEDIAN

That's what someone guilty would say.

SAM

Kedian, can you drop the accent? We need to focus on the show here. I think we're losing them.

KEDIAN

Would you mind reading this line for me?

SAM

A senior project submitted to the department of Gideon Lester.

KEDIAN

Gideon Lester. What kind of made up name is that? Or perhaps its your alias....

SAM

YES! You caught me! Gideon Lester is my silly ridiculous alias, I'm actually famed playwright and thief of plot, Samuel Beckett! I stole the meaning from this show and I've hidden it somewhere so nuanced you're never going to find it!!! Just try and stop me as I complicate the dramatic structure of this show so much that not even Peter Brook will understand it!

KEDIAN

You'll never get away with this Beckett!!!

[They have a dramatic duel. KEDIAN "kills" SAM. In his dying breath...]

SAM

Haha, now you'll never know what this show is about. I win!!

KEDIAN

I think that was the most convoluted thing we've done yet.

SAM

Agreed. But what else can we show?

[KEDIAN grins widely]

We're not doing outer space party. I hate doing it. It makes me feel awkward and just like everything else we come up with it doesn't connect the beginning to the end!

KEDIAN

Yes it does!. The two characters become punks after wall falls down. And then their newfound freedom lifts them into space.

SAM

It's ridiculous and pointless.

KEDIAN

It's beautiful and important! *[KEDIAN prepares herself to begin Outer Space Party]*

SAM

No. I'm not wasting their time with this. We have so much more we could show them.

KEDIAN

Why do you always reject the ideas that are the most important to me? We're running out of time, Miller, I am offering a solution to help. So we're doing outer space party!

SAM

No! I'll find something. I'll find something quick and meaningful that brings this all together. You'll see.

[SAM thinks and searches his coat. KEDIAN stares at him. Laughing as he fumbles.]

KEDIAN

Soooo.

SAM

I've got it. What about a piece about North Korea? Huh? North Korea, the Berlin Wall, people wearing jumpsuits? It all makes sense right. You'll see. I'll read you this thing I found about North Korea and you'll get it. It's about COMMUNISM! Clap if you agree. *[They clap or not]* See! They're clapping Kedian. They're clapping for me and it all makes sense.

KEDIAN

Not as much as...

SAM

SHUT THE FUCK UP ABOUT OUTER SPACE PARTY, SIT DOWN, AND LET ME READ THIS

[KEDIAN is horribly hurt by this. She sits down and watches SAM talk about the Korean article]

I've always been interested in soap operas, so when one of my professors sent me an article about North Koreans defecting after seeing South Korean soap operas, I had to share it with the group. There was something so eloquent about a Math professor, Jang Se-Yul, seeing another world on television and reaching the decision that a country he was fairly comfortable in, was not the place he needed to be. As the article notes, Jang had many privileges; from getting special seats in restaurants to being able to eat in a country where many go hungry. And yet, upon watching "Scent of a man," a South Korean serial about an ex-convict falling in love with his sister, Jang had to leave. Because of these seditious acts, Jang was arrested twice. The first time he was caught, he was forced into manual labor. But that did not stop him. He continues to lie to authorities time and time again as they made his life increasingly difficult. Upon being caught the second time, clandestinely watching soaps in his living room with friends, he knew he had to go. Further punishments meant

not learning what happened on “Scent of a Man”, “Bad Housewife”, and “Red Bean Bread.” I know, the titles don’t translate well, but that’s not the point. Jang, inspired by these soaps, made the most dangerous and risky decisions a North Korean could...he defected. He risked everything just to fill his life with more captivating stories. He fled with no money, no plan, and no future. What does it say when a man will risk death just to watch soaps freely? Was he crazy for doing it? Are soap operas worth risking your life? Was Jang even living?

KEDIAN

[Rudely] Did you *really* see a connection between that and the first piece? *[SAM doesn’t respond]* Ooooooh what a surprise!!!! Maybe we should have shown them something that’s actually relevant, Like OUTER SPACE PARTY SAM!!!

SAM

I thought it would work. It made perfect sense. And your shitty piece isn’t going to make this play suddenly make sense.

KEDIAN

But we have to try. You being a dick isn’t going to get us any closer to finding the ending.

SAM

Fine we can do outer space party.

KEDIAN

It’s too late for that.

SAM

[sarcastic] No we’ll do it and everyone will like it and it will fix the play and all make sense and we’ll all hold hands as we leave the theater and walk over to two boots and make out in the bathroom. And you will have saved the play!!!!

KEDIAN

Don’t patronize me, dick.

SAM

I’m not. I really think we should do it.

KEDIAN

Well then maybe you shouldn’t have shat on my ideas for 20 straight minutes asshole.

SAM

Oh don’t act like it was my fault Kedian. You weren’t focused. You didn’t really want to finish this piece. You just wanted to do Outer space party so that everyone in the audience would like you and think you’re funny and think you’re cool and think you’re good at making theater. You didn’t care if we actually gave these people something important.

KEDIAN

Like you know anything about what's important in theater. You're a film major. I don't even know why Marissa asked you to do this in the first place. And speaking of focusing, you've been trying to focus this whole play on your ideas from the beginning. It's selfish, vain, and not helping the process.

SAM

Alright Kedian how bout you go home take a bath with your fucking cats and eat a bowl of adderall so you can calm the fuck down.

KEDIAN

How bout you try and finish this god damn play with me instead of quitting like you always do. You always spend five minutes doing something and the moment it doesn't go your way - the moment it becomes a little hard or stops focusing on you - you get the fuck out of there.

SAM

I finish everything I start.

KEDIAN

Liar.

SAM

Well then maybe I'll leave you alone on stage. And see how you do without a backbone.

KEDIAN

I hope you leave so the audience doesn't have to watch you anymore.

SAM

I quit.

KEDIAN

Of course you do.

[The argument stops abruptly]

That was an argument that Sam and I faked during rehearsal.

SAM

We did it to scare Marissa.

KEDIAN

It made us all feel bad.

SAM

We did it out of boredom

Which made us realize. KEDIAN

We fill the voids in our lives with narrative. BOTH

Which is kind of glib. KEDIAN

But its true. SAM

What do you all think? KEDIAN

[Silence]

Anyways. BOTH

Here's the end. SAM

[The two of them look DS and see that they are mere steps away from the shoes. SAM tries to put them on, but he can't. Upon close inspection, he realizes that they aren't his at all.]

Oh, my shoes. *(pause)* This isn't right.

What? KEDIAN

They don't fit. SAM

But we came all this way. *(Pause)* I want to go home. KEDIAN

Why? SAM

I'm tired. KEDIAN

But we're already here. SAM

[SAM looks past the shoes and into the abyss]

I have to go.

KEDIAN

Ok.

[The two of them have some kind of bodily interaction, which to them means goodbye but to us might mean nothing. SAM exits the space. KEDIAN turns to the audience and stares into the abyss]

I'm scared of the colors, the colors in the darkness. They're so vague, and that's scares me because in the dark, in the void, when things are whooshing by your head and you can't see them but for a split second, instead you feel them. It tempts, enlightens, satiates and abandons you all in a moment. And then you're alone again. You are left in the void as pieces of you get picked apart, and you become the darkness. First your eyes, they get sucked out into the black, and dissolve as you stare back at your lonely body. Then your legs go, so you can't run. And then your body crumbles into dust that the darkness sweeps up in a tornado and spins till oblivion.

[KEDIAN starts back towards the tube. She picks up props as she goes. SAM returns into the space and introduces a song, which he then plays. KEDIAN, during the song, finally returns home and tries to put it back together. But she cannot, the clamps are gone. KEDIAN picks up her umbrella from the beginning, opens it, and covers an imaginary SAM.]

SAM

This is a song I wrote during the process.

I HAVE BEEN FALLING DOWN A DARK ENDLESS HOLE
HIDING MY FACE AND LOSING MY SOUL

AND I STILL NEED YOU
AND I WANT YOU
BUT YOU HAD TO DISAPPEAR
SO I'LL END IT ALL
AND I'LL SEE YOU NEXT YEAR

I HAVE BEEN WALKING DOWN A BLACK, LONELY STREET
MUMBLING MY NAME, SHUFFLING MY FEET

AND I STILL NEED YOU
AND I WANT YOU
BUT YOU HAD TO DISAPPEAR
SO I'LL END IT ALL
AND I'LL SEE YOU NEXT YEAR

WHERE DID YOU GO
WHY DID YOU LEAVE
I WANT TO KNOW
I'M SO BEREAVED

WHERE DID YOU GO
WHO THE FUCK AM I
NOW THAT YOU'RE GONE
IT'S ALL A LIE

I HAVE BEEN SEARCHING AND FOUND MYSELF LOST
SKIN WEATHERED WORN AND HAIR TEMPEST TOSSED

AND I STILL LOVE YOU
THOUGH YOU LEFT ME
AND YOU DIDN'T SHED A TEAR
SO I'LL END IT ALL
AND I'LL SEE YOU NEXT YEAR

What do you think?

[The lights fade to blackout]

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***I'm Scared of the Colors
[or At Least we Tried]***

**Approximate Runtime:
1961-1989**

There will be no intermission

**A Senior Project Submitted to the department of Gideon
Lester**

©Emma Ressel

I'm Scared of the Colors [or At Least we Tried]

**A Senior Project created by Marissa Shadburn
in collaboration with Kedian Keohan and Sam Miller**

**Friday, March 27th @ 10:30PM
Saturday, March 28th @ 4PM
Sunday, March 29th @ 10:30 PM**

LUMA Theater

Tickets are FREE, reserve online or call the Fisher Center Box Office



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