

Spring 2020

this is the knot in my stomach

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this is the knot in my stomach

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
Macey Downs

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DISCLAIMER

The events described in this paper are presented exactly how I remember them. They are true to me, and I firmly believe they happened just in this way. If they are not true to you, not true to my collaborators, or not true to reality, please take that up with my memory.

SECTION 1: this is the start of something new

Fire, Water, Earth, Air: a four-element collaboration

In February 2019, Cheyenne Conti approached me about collaborating on our Senior Project. We had worked together before in Theater Making, and both wanted to be in the Theater & Performance festival in Luma. Cheyenne stated that she wanted to act, and I was set on directing my Senior Project. I had directed for the first time only a year and a half prior, unexpectedly taking on the 45 minute play *Being Norwegian* by David Grieg. Through this play I began to find my own voice as a director, and completely fell in love with leading and guiding theater projects while creating space for each of my collaborators to grow in the process. This led me to throw myself into directing during my junior year of college, assisting Whitney White's production of *Three Sisters: an adaptation of sorts*, taking on the stylistically challenging text of Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* during Jonathan Rosenberg's Directing Seminar, and collaborating with Ella Bennett on her Senior Project, a three-scene acting showcase. I was now ready to use my Senior Project as an opportunity to further my directing experience through a more rigorous process.

I was thrilled to have Cheyenne as a collaborator, as we both had distinct theater making styles that we felt would compliment each other well. Cheyenne created theater that was effortlessly entertaining, bombastic, and joyful to watch. I was excited to see how that would merge with my own leanings toward discomfort, aesthetics, and subtle moment-to-moment work. Only a few days after being approached by Cheyenne, however, Phil Carroll reached out to me about the possibility of collaborating with him and Violet Savage on a Senior Project. I had worked with both Phil and Violet many times in the past and appreciated each of them as theater

makers as well. Phil's work had an extreme specificity and humanness to it that I admired and strove to emulate in my own work. Violet created incredibly brave and boundless theatrical performances that I was drawn to, and I wanted to learn from and with her how to continue pushing the boundaries of theater. There was so much I could learn from each of these three collaborators, but initially I was worried that I would have to choose—during our time at Bard, we had only seen groups of two to three seniors collaborating on a Senior Project. After realizing the compatibility of each of our roles—Phil wanted to write, Cheyenne and Violet wanted to act, and I wanted to direct a new play with a small cast—we began to wonder: why has a four-person group never been done before?

Our idea to do a four-person collaboration on our Senior Project was met with mixed and polarized opinions. Some faculty and many students felt that we had not seen a four-person group during our time at Bard for good reason. How would we balance all of our schedules? How will we make sure that the workload is evenly spread between the four of us? How will we all find common ground and compromise on an idea that we are all equally passionate about? All of these questions created the first hurdle that we faced as a group—that is, deciding if a four-person collaboration was truly the right direction to pursue.

The four of us spoke frequently about this pushback, and began to strategize as to how we might meet these concerns. We decided that we would be a self-contained group and would not cast underclassmen as other actors—thereby giving Violet and Cheyenne challenging roles to work with, and reducing the amount of schedules we would need to work around. We expected that, since this project was each group member's Senior Project, we would all put in the time and effort required to make it something that we could all be proud of. We brought these concerns

and strategies to Jonathan Rosenberg, who would eventually become our Senior Project advisor, and after receiving his encouragement to pursue a self-contained four-person group with clearly defined roles, we had our team and were ready to start brainstorming.

Why this story, why now, why theater?

The four of us approached this Senior Project by finding our collaborators first, and deciding on a topic second. We then began to tackle the question that we had been asked many times: how will we find common ground and compromise on an idea that we are all equally passionate about? We knew Phil would be writing our script, and he could have gone off and just started writing, but we all agreed that the most fulfilling and exciting approach would be to use Caryl Churchill's Joint-Stock Method of collaborating. Started by the Joint Stock Theater Company, this method is characterized by involving the actors and director in a period of research and improvisation that would inform what the playwright would subsequently write.¹ We decided to implement the Joint-Stock Method right from the beginning, working together to choose what topic we would be exploring as a company.

We began our Joint-Stock collaboration with many open discussions about our interests, the kinds of theater we most respond to, any topics or theatrical styles we do not like, and any questions we were grappling with that we were interested in answering. We all found the most excitement, passion, confusion, and questions around an experience we were all simultaneously confronting: watching our childhoods fall farther and farther behind us, irreversibly transformed and destroyed, while preparing for a future filled with unknowns. We distilled this experience of grieving for our past selves into two guiding questions: what does it mean to be mourning the

¹ Angelis, April de. "Caryl Churchill: Changing the Language of Theatre." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 7 Sept. 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/sep/07/caryl-churchill-landmark-theatre>.

self? To be mourning a memory? Memory itself became the vehicle through which to explore our experiences of loss, growth, and ever-changing selves. How does something as foggy, unreliable, and subjective as memory have such real implications for the current version of our selves? We began our process with far more questions than answers.

I felt particularly excited to explore memory through the medium of theater. Like memory, theater is fleeting, existing only for a few moments before the performance itself becomes a memory. The beauty of theater exists in this liveness and temporariness—could we similarly find that the value of memory lies in the inability for past experiences to be perfectly recreated? I was interested in playing with how we could harness theater to make our audiences aware of the fleeting moment they are occupying right now, and of the layers and layers of memories that make up every other person in the room alongside them.

Generative research: finding shared experiences in specifics

The end of our junior year into the summer marked an intense period of research meant to generate ideas and material that Phil could use in starting our script. We leaned heavily into the Joint-Stock tactics of conducting interviews, researching shared topics, and finding ways of connecting our own and each other's findings to our personal lives.² Throughout the summer, I sent out weekly assignments to our company, meant to provide a structured way of engaging with research, generating material, and learning how to collaborate despite being temporarily physically separated from each other. There were two main kinds of assignments: those meant to produce research and materials, and those meant to form connections between our experiences and the experiences of others.

² Freeman, Sara. "Joint Stock." *Unfinished Histories*, 2020, <http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/history/companies/joint-stock/>.

One of our main generative assignments was to conduct semi-structured interviews with people we knew about memory. We created a list of interview questions together, which can be found in the appendix of this paper. We each conducted these Initial Memory Interviews with three to five people, audio recorded them, and typed up their transcripts so the other members of our group could read the interviews others had conducted. I then asked everyone to complete a version of our second form of assignments, those meant to form connections, by asking each member to mark every place in other people's interviews they read something that was striking to them, and to write why it struck them.

These interviews ended up being the foundation of our play, with Phil collaging snippets of different interviews together to form the first draft of our script: an episodic compilation of found text from our interviews, with no designated characters or scene breakages. Not only did this form heavily influence the final version of our script—we maintained this episodic structure with scenes tumbling into each other—but some of the content from the initial interviews also carried over into the final story we told. Below is the most explicit example, an excerpt from an interview I conducted with my friend Sam, and an excerpt from a scene in our final script:

M: Which of the 5 senses do you experience when you think of a memory?

S: Oh my god, thinking about that grape, all of them. Macey fed me a frozen grape earlier and it was the worst thing I ever experienced. It was psychologically similar to consuming one of my frozen fingers, it was horrendous.

M: Okay well describe it!

S: I can feel the grape in my mouth, still. I can feel myself biting down on it, and it feels like I'm physically repulsed by the whole sensation of it.

2 eats [a frozen grape]. They hate it.

2

Oh god! Ugh! It's like a human finger!

1

(laughs)

2

My god this is the worst thing I've ever experienced!

1

(laughs)

2

You like these?

1

Yeah they're good!

2

No, it was psychologically similar to eating a human finger. It was horrendous.

1

(laughs) I like them! They're refreshing and good in the summer!

2

I can feel the grape in my mouth, still. I can feel myself biting down on it, and it feels like I'm physically repulsed by the whole sensation of it.

Through this interview process, Sam's story transformed from just a memory he had, to a story he shared with the members of our Senior Project group, to a story shared with the characters and world of our play, to finally a story shared with audience members.

I gave other assignments throughout the summer geared toward generating material such as asking each group members to create a playlist of songs that trigger memories for them and write out the memories they trigger, prompted free writes about memory, and academic research on how people are shaped by their memories. Several of these were then met with assignments geared toward making connections between our experiences, such as listening to each other's

playlists and marking each song that also triggers a memory for ourselves, and free writing in response to scenes and monologues from Phil's early drafts. We embraced the messy, complicated web of information that all of these assignments knit together, and used our overlapping writing and rehearsal processes to begin to untangle everything into the story we wanted to tell.

SECTION 2: this is what I remember

Fighting for the play

During the summer before my senior year, I was fortunate enough to be apart of the Powerhouse Training Program as a director. I was incredibly excited for this opportunity, as my only formal training in directing prior had been in Bard's Directing Seminar class, and I felt ready to further my skills in preparation for my Senior Project. My great fortune continued when I learned that Phil would also be at Powerhouse as part of their writing program. Phil and I realized what an incredible opportunity we had to start working on our Senior Project. We used our time together to put out the first six drafts and a staged reading of our play.

My time at Powerhouse was critical in learning how the role of the director changes when directing new plays rather than already published scripts. I was grateful to be under the guidance of Caitlin Ryan O'Connell, a freelance director of new work, who advised me on how to support these early stages of Phil's writing process. After Phil wrote his first draft based off our initial interviews, him and I started frequently sitting down together and trying to discover what this play wanted to be—thinking of this first draft as a seed that would grow into something related but completely transformed through our guidance. I would ask Phil questions I had about the story, and he would ask me questions about what I was getting from his drafts. We learned that

these early stages were truly about asking question after question, which Phil would then explore through his writing. I was amazed by and grateful for Phil's willingness to just sit down and write—not worried about how what he was writing came out and not expecting it to be apart of our final product, but recognizing that everything he wrote gave us a little more information as to what the play wanted and did not want to be.

I included responding to Phil's various drafts as part of our weekly assignments to make sure the voices of Cheyenne and Violet were being heard as well despite their physical distance. I also began suggesting individualized free writes and writing exercises to Phil that were more catered to his writing process. Our time at Powerhouse culminated in a week of rehearsals and a staged reading of a draft of the script. We used this time to explore what it means to be rehearsing new and constantly-changing material with actors, and began to learn how allowing actors to improvise opened up unexpected avenues for our characters. We treated this reading as a trial run of the play's structure and language in front of an audience, knowing that these characters would change drastically once Violet and Cheyenne began to embody them. We still walked away from the summer having made some major discoveries: that our play was an episodically-structured memory play with two present-day scenes, that the play followed two characters called "1" and "2" through the story of their friendship, and that the written memory-scenes all took place from 1's perspective. We were excited to return to Bard in September where all four of us would continue fighting for the play.

Building a story

Returning to Bard brought with it uncharted territory as we navigated how to balance the overlapping processes of continuing to grow our script while also beginning to see what the story

looked like in real space and time. I organized for one of our first rehearsals back to take place in the Luma theater, where we would be performing our final piece in February. It was important to me that I rooted our world in the space it would be performed in, thinking of it as a site-specific piece for Luma. This rehearsal was truly exploratory as I gave Violet and Cheyenne viewpoints-related exercises that allowed us to uncover all the ways this space could be used, and how I felt depending on where they were in the space or what they were doing. Our hour in Luma ended up being critical to how I would later stage our play, with images noted on that day leading directly to the physicalization of scenes including the Ice Cream Scene, Skirt Scene, and Car Scene.³

Violet and Cheyenne's presence immediately spurred drastic script changes. We quickly realized that the bulk of the research we had conducted over the summer was memory-based, but that the realities of friends growing apart had since become a major part of our story. This led us to conduct more interviews about friends people had lost, as well as spend time together sharing our own childhood friendships that ended. Jonathan Rosenberg shared a New York Times article with us about a friendship that dissipated after one friend promised to call another back, and then never did.⁴ This article became a critical plot point in our story. Our play was becoming a constant conversation between writing, rehearsal, and research. What we rehearsed inspired what Phil wrote, which inspired what we would research, which again inspired what we rehearsed and what he wrote. Through this process, we began to see all these puzzle pieces coming together to form a layered and nuanced play.

³ In this paper's appendix I have included a breakdown of each scene's title along with the page numbers that scene corresponds to, for reference.

⁴ Mechling, Lauren. "How to End a Friendship." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 14 June 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/06/14/opinion/sunday/how-to-end-a-friendship.html.

Reflecting back on our own memories of friendships that had ended led us to begin questioning the reliability of our memories, and what these same stories would look like if told back to us by the friends we had lost. We turned our research to perspective, listening to a Revisionist History episode “Free Brian Williams”⁵ to learn how events we firmly believe to be true may have happened drastically differently than they do when we play them over in our memories. We learned from an episode of *The Mind, Explained*⁶ that even flashbulb memories, memories of major events that are thought to have photograph-level accuracy, are just as likely to be unreliable as anything else in our memory. This led to the next major question of our play: how do two different people remember the same event differently? We chose to explore this question by adding a new memory to our play that was repeated twice—first from 1’s perspective, and then from 2’s.

We knew that this scene would become one of the most important moments of the play—it had to be a major event that both characters would have strong but differing opinions about, and would be the only time we would see a memory from 2’s perspective. We watched the movie *Rashomon*,⁷ which is well known for dramatizing the same event four ways from four individuals’ perspectives. This movie informed a theater game by the same name, in which three of us would perform a scene four different ways from each character’s and an outsider’s perspective, and the fourth member of our group would guess which version was from which person’s perspective.

⁵ Gladwell, Malcolm. “Free Brian Williams.” Revisionist History, season 3, episode 4, 7 June 2018, revisionisthistory.com/episodes/24-free-brian-williams.

⁶ Cole, Adam, producer. “Memory” *The Mind, Explained*. Vox Media. 12 Sep. 2019.

⁷ Kurosawa, Akira, director. *Rashomon*. The Criterion Collection, 1950.

This exercise was meant to inform Phil as to how different the same event from two perspectives could be—and we learned that they often benefitted from being starkly distinct.

We decided that the event of the repeated scene would be the last time 1 and 2 had seen each other before the start of our play, and began brainstorming how that last interaction went down. There was a scene with two characters watching the snowfall in an early draft of the script that I had loved that had not made it into the current version. I asked Phil if he would explore reworking this old scene into our script, and proposed a staging idea I had in mind. What if during this repeated memory, it snowed all over the stage? This would both connect the two memories and emphasize them from the rest of the play, drawing attention to the moment's importance in their friendship. I fell in love with the progression of starting the play with a barren stage and ending with scraps scattered everywhere. It felt fitting that the story of these characters' friendship would leave hundreds of particles behind, almost like littering the stage with the hundreds of tiny moments these people shared together. The script continued to change nearly every rehearsal, but the addition of these two Snow Scenes felt like we had finally found what the story wanted to be: a recognition of growing up and the friendships that take us there, while understanding that everyone's growth looks a little bit different.

Building characters

As our story became more intact, making 1 and 2 real, lived-in, and imperfectly human characters became our next exciting challenge. Making sure 1 and 2 had a history, both together and as individuals, was one of the most important pieces of sharing this story to me. The presence of Cheyenne and Violet had turned our play from a story about a friendship to more specifically a story about a female friendship, and the specific silly moments that we all shared

growing up with our female best friends. I wanted to leave room for this story about female growth, and for these growing female characters to truly appear as they were—imperfect, loud, messy, unexceptionally exceptional, and layered. Cheyenne and Violet took on the task bravely and enthusiastically, and as a team we began to craft 1 and 2.⁸

To build a history between the characters, one of our most helpful tools was improvisation. Sometimes I would ask Cheyenne and Violet to improvise around a scene from our play, sometimes I would give them a specific prompt or event to improvise, and sometimes Phil and I would set up the room a certain way and ask them to come in and just start improvising. We treated these improvisations as facts for these characters—everything that happened in an improvisation would become an actual event in the history of their friendship, and anything mentioned became part of their character's background. I would take notes on everything they organically revealed about their characters—their favorite color, an injury they had, a party they went to, a comment about their relationship with their parents—and discuss all these impulses with Cheyenne and Violet at the end of each improvisation.

As we developed their history, we began recording everything on a long paper timeline. We started the timeline by placing every scene in the play on it in chronological order, and attaching each scene to a specific age. Violet and Cheyenne faced another challenge of playing their characters at distinct but close-together ages, and this was meant to begin establishing the nuances between being 13 years old versus being 15. We also included all of the scenes that had been in the script at the end of the summer that had not made the final cut, and treated these as

⁸ We settled on casting these roles around October, with Cheyenne as 1 and Violet as 2, after a few weeks of having them alternate between the two characters. One pairing slowly began to feel more right than the other, until we eventually could not imagine it the alternate way.

actual events in these characters' history. We finally would place each improvisation we did on the timeline, to visualize when in the history of their friendship that moment had happened. The timeline ended up being incredibly helpful in tracking the history of 1 and 2, and creating a resource off which Cheyenne and Violet could root the depth of these characters and their friendship.

The most time-intensive work we did to build these characters was a combination of given circumstance work and a method Violet had learned from *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*.⁹ For every scene of the play, we had thorough conversations as to its given circumstances, what exactly was happening, what 1 and 2 wanted from each other, and what action they were playing. This became tedious at times, but felt crucial given the episodic nature of our play. We wanted each scene to feel like it had a whole world that began before it and continued on afterward. Spending the time establishing this world within Violet and Cheyenne was difficult but necessary work to make this happen. It was through finding these inner worlds and these messily human characters that the theatrical world of the play began to take shape.

Building a world

Learning how to physicalize our play was my most daunting challenge. Phil had written such detailed scenes that tumbled and crashed into each other. How could I create this tumbling effect with bodies on stage? How would we shift from talking on the phone to straightening each other's hair to eating frozen grapes to putting concealer over a hickey to sitting on a hill watching the clouds? How would we differentiate present-day scenes from memories?

⁹ Bruder, Melissa, et al. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. 1986.

I began approaching these questions by working with Violet and Cheyenne to create a physical vocabulary for our piece. I decided I did not want to hide the transitions between memories, I wanted the audience to see each memory morph into the next in real time. We found creative ways for the end of each memory to become the beginning of the next one. The “three, two, one” countdown to throw rocks at the end of the Bee Scene morphed into a countdown for a secret handshake. 2 went from looking in the mirror at a flatiron burn to getting ready in front of the mirror for the beach. Occasionally we would see 1 become aware that she was entering another memory, and forming opinions on each one—here is a memory that she had completely forgotten about until right now, here is a memory that she thinks fondly of, here is a memory that she would rather not go back to.

I tried to see how much movement I could get away with between each scene as well, aiming for the characters to move through every inch of the stage as different memories flashed by. This is also where our time in Luma came in handy—I realized I could have moments where characters hid behind curtains, play with extreme physical distance, place characters on the edge of the stage, or have characters perform a scene with one actor on stage and the other in the audience.

The audience became critical to separating our two present-day scenes, the Ice Cream Scene and Car Scene, from the memories. I followed an early instinct I had that present-day scenes should take place within the audience’s vicinity—not only placing us in the present of our play, but also in the present moment that our audience members are occupying with us. I chose for 2 to start in the audience, wanting her to get pulled onstage into 1’s memory. I then placed Cheyenne and Violet as sitting on the edge of the stage for the Car Scene, and ended the scene

with 1 exiting into the audience before getting pulled back onstage into 2's memory. I chose to make these scenes physically distinct from the memories as well. While the memories flowed across the entire stage, these present-day scenes were rooted in one spot for the entirety of the scene.

An early idea I had in differentiating the past and the present was by having the present exist without props or set—just two bodies stagnant in space—but having each memory scene have a specific prop that transported us to that moment. This idea was an extension of the image I loved so much about the snow: starting out with a barren stage and slowly littering it with objects from each memory. We showed Jonathan a few scenes with this logic in mind, having Cheyenne and Violet really throw rocks in the Bee Scene and hold phones in the Skirt Scene. However, suggestions and comments from Jonathan as to the purity of not having any props in the Ice Cream and Car Scenes led us to explore what it would look like for the entirety of the play to be without set or props, except for the two moments in which it snows. We realized that props were not necessary to the story, as our given circumstance work combined with Phil's words created a vibrant enough world with just Cheyenne and Violet embodying the scene. Choosing to have Cheyenne and Violet alone onstage, with no blackouts, no props, and no set or costume changes felt far more radical than the previous idea. We would be asking to audience to just watch two young women grow together, and apart, onstage. I was confident that that would be enough.

Revisiting what we had forgotten

By the time we left for winter break, we had a complete staged draft of our play. With a few anticipated tweaks, the script felt nearly final, Violet and Cheyenne's characters were

becoming distinct, and my staging was coming together. I sent Cheyenne and Violet some character-work assignments over break, we returned early to review and polish what we had, and we began feeling like we were nearing the end of our process. A final meeting with Jonathan threw us for a loop when he expressed that the ending of our play was letting our characters off too easy, that it would be too comfortable for the audience. In a way the four of us had become too comfortable with our play as well, and had lost the feelings of risk, discomfort, and unknown that came with the kinds of loss and growth we were exploring.

One of the most important rehearsals of our process was only a week before tech. I sat everyone down and for the first time in a long time, we just talked. About what brought us to this story, about the discoveries we had made, about how it had changed. I reread my very first proposal from April the year before out loud, and it reminded us what had brought us here in the first place. This was not just a story about a changing friendship, but at its heart it was a story about two individuals growing up. We shifted our focus from: how does their friendship change? To: how do these individuals change? Asking this final question led us to the true ending of our play, which was significantly more complex, heartbreaking, and true to the experience of growing up than anything we had before. This experience taught me the importance of looking back to the beginning when you think you have come to the end. Memory is unreliable, and you may have forgotten something along the way.

Tech: seeing our play for the first time

My final challenge was learning how to use tech to best tell our story. I was adamant that I did not want tech to distract from Cheyenne and Violet's relationship in any way, but instead help ground it in space and time. For lighting, I drew inspiration from Greta Gerwig's *Little*

Women,¹⁰ which similarly alternated between present-day scenes and memories. *Little Women* used a color story in which the past was warm-toned and the present was cool-toned, and this felt like a beautiful way of differentiating the time-planes and the moods of memories and the present. I loved the childhood glow that a wash of warm-toned lighting across the stage gave, and the forbidding distance that came with sharply focused cool-toned lighting. This felt like the final step in establishing a theatrical vocabulary between memories and the present. While I did not expect all audience members to understand exactly what the difference between these types of scenes were, I felt that the combination of my staging and the lighting would associate distinct feelings with each of them.

The snow was both a beautiful addition and a challenge. The snow could be unpredictable and it was a struggle to get it to fall at exactly the right rate, but once it did it was breathtaking to watch. Choosing not to have any other props or set pieces really emphasized the scenes where snow fell, and connected them in a way that felt distinct from the rest of the play. The combination of the snow and 1's absence for the first time in the play during Snow Scene #2, the last scene in the play, made 2 feel intensely alone, yet surrounded by the beauty of it all—of her memories, of the growth ahead of her.

A final but critical touch we added during tech was a musical intro and outro to the play. So much of our research and conversation around memory and growing up was tied to music, and I felt like the world needed to be grounded within a musical landscape. Cheyenne had a deep emotional connection to the song “Waiting,”¹¹ and this connection combined with the song's

¹⁰ Gerwig, Greta, director. *Little Women*. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2019.

¹¹ Jones, Norah. “Waiting.” *The Fall*, Jacquire King, 2009.

mood and home-centered lyrics made it feel like the perfect intro, and the perfect way to ready Cheyenne for her opening monologue. I had intended for “Ribs”¹² to play after our piece since the fall. It was a song from all of our teenage years that perfectly encapsulated the story and feeling of realizing you have grown up. With all of these technical elements finally in place, I finally felt like I was seeing our play as it was supposed to be for the first time. I left tech with an immense appreciation for our process: all of our research, writing, rehearsing, character-work, tech, and piles and piles of questions had led to a layered piece we were all proud of.

SECTION 3: this is when our play becomes a memory too

During the Sunday afternoon performance of our piece, my whole body was tingling with the awareness of the passage of time. Awareness that this was the last time I would ever be seeing our play performed in the Luma Theater as a 21-year-old college senior, the last time I would ever be this version of myself seeing this version of this play with these versions of my collaborators who had grown into dear friends over a story about the friends we had lost. I spent the entire performance desperately clinging to every second, tortured by the knowledge that I would never be able to replicate this moment. I was aware that I was making a memory. A memory that would decay as soon as Violet and Cheyenne took their bows, that would never perfectly encapsulate the reality. Two months later as I write this paper, I can only truly recall a few snapshots of the play, remnants of the thoughts going through my head, and tinges of feeling in my chest.

This is the knot in my stomach: the fear of outgrowing these moments and these versions of myself that mean so much. The fear of not recognizing that 21-year-old college senior and the

¹² Lorde. “Ribs.” Pure Heroine, Joel Little, Golden Age Studios, New Zealand, 2013.

joy she felt watching herself onstage in this story, and watching other audience members see themselves there too. The fear of growing away from the people that I made memories with. This play comes out of a wish that I could jump back into my backyard at age 7, my elementary school playground at age 9, my bedroom at age 12, my best friend's bathroom at age 15. I now understand why 1 needs to travel through memories that will never replicate the original experience. The memories are all she has.

Now that I have come to the end of this journey, I have learned something new about the end of our play. Are 2's last moments alone in the snow an in-the-moment grieving? This feeling that I now recognize so well, when you start to mourn the memory before it is over? Maybe 2 realizes in the moment that something is coming to an end, that she will never be in this place at this time with this best friend and this version of herself ever again. Maybe she tries to grab the edges like a fluttering photograph between her fingertips, but it starts slipping out of her grip, and eventually she gives into the wind and lets go to the passage of time. Maybe only after she surrenders does she feel the snow on her face for the first time and is truly here, in the moment, if only for a moment.

There comes a moment in everything that we do where our memory becomes the truth. Becomes our truth. 1's truth of that night in the snow is that she took a leap toward independence. 2's truth is that she was left to grow up alone in the snow. That is okay. That is what makes them who they are (for now).

APPENDIX

Interview Questions:

Initial Memory Interviews:

How old are you?

What is a memory you have from the past year?

What are the qualities of this memory/what does it look like? What do you see?

What is your earliest memory?

What are the qualities of this memory/what does it look like? What do you see?

Which of the 5 senses do you experience when you think of a memory?

What is a song that triggers a specific memory for you?

What is a memory you have about...

Being cold?

Something loud?

Something dark?

Of a sports game?

Summer?

Of a taste?

About the internet?

About technology?

(etc.—pick and choose what is most interesting to you)

What's a memory you have that you're ashamed of?

What's a particularly vivid memory you have?

What's a particularly vague memory you have?

What's a memory you have when you think of ____?

Describe a time...

You got something you wanted?

You felt powerful?

You felt embarrassed?

(etc.—viewpoints inspired questions)

Past-Friendship Interviews:

Think of a person you're no longer friends with. Tell me about that person.
 How close were you?
 How did you meet?
 Why aren't you friends anymore?
 Can you remember the last time you felt like you were friends?
 When was the last time you two spoke?
 Have either of you tried to stay in touch?
 If you've seen them since you stopped being friends, what have you talked about?
 How do you feel about not being friends with this person anymore?
 Do you think you would get along now?

Shared Memory Interviews:

These interviews are to be conducted with two people who know each other. Start the interview together by asking:

Can you both think of a shared memory/experience you have together?

Once they decide on a memory they both share (do not allow them to go into any detail), ask one person to leave the room. Ask the person who remains:

Can you recall this memory in as many details as you can?

After this person finishes describing their memory, ask them to leave the room and invite the other person back them. Ask this person the same question:

Can you recall this memory in as many details as you can?

After transcribing the interviews, go back and **bold** all the places where both people recall the same details and events.

Summer Research Assignments:

June 3-10

- 2 or more interviews per person, typed up and shared in the google doc

June 10-17

- Read through everyone else's interviews and mark whenever something is interesting/striking to you in some way, bracket it in your color and write why it struck you.
- Make a playlist of songs that trigger memories for you.

June 17-July 1

- Type up your playlist on a doc in the "Playlists" folder in the google docs, and write next to each song what memory it triggers for you.
- Go through each other's playlists/read each other's memories, and every time you come across a song that triggers a memory for you, write in your color what that memory is in that person's google doc.

July 1-8

- Read Phil's draft and come up with 5 or more things you notice/observations/things that stick out to you, and 5 or more questions that you have about it. I'll also make a google doc where we can list those.
- Do a free write: Start the free write with: A memory that has stuck with me is _____. Write about this for a few minutes. Then continue your free write by answering the question: does this memory have any real impact on how I live my life? / Do I experience life any differently because of this memory? Write about this for a few minutes. Finally, answer the question: How have memories in general shaped who I am in this moment?
- Do some internet research as to how people are impacted or shaped by their memories, i.e. 'how do memories impact our lives' 'how do memories shape who we are' are some just quick common searches that come up when you start typing it in. Any interesting article you find, copy & paste the link into "Research" google doc, and copy and paste most interesting quotes underneath that link (and if you have any commentary you can include that next to/beneath the quote)

July 8-15

- Type up your free writes from last week! Please type up as much as you can, word for word. However if there is anything in there that is personal/that you'd rather not other people read then you don't have to type it up. & please put these in the Google Drive!
- Do another free write, for 5-10 minutes. Start the free write with "Memory is like a..." and keep writing. If you get to a point where you're stuck/bored with what you're writing, repeat "memory is like a..." and start going down a new path.

July 15-29

- Read Phil's second draft & respond with 5 questions, 5 responses, and include information as to how this draft feels different than the first one.
- Type up your most recent free write, again word for word unless there is anything personal you'd rather not include.
- Pick a monologue or some dialogue from either the first or second draft, write all or some of it out on a piece of paper, and then continue on with it as a free write. If it's a monologue it doesn't have to keep being a monologue the whole time, it can become a scene, and feel free to include 'stage directions' or some sort of action that occurs outside of the spoken words you write. Or don't.

Selected Production Photos:



The Bee Scene PC: Chris Kayden



The Recess Scene PC: Chris Kayden



The Flatiron Scene PC: *Chris Kayden*



Snow Scene #1 PC: *Chris Kayden*



The Car Scene PC: Chris Kayden



Snow Scene #2 PC: Chris Kayden



Snow Scene #2 PC: *Chris Kayden*

Scene Breakdown—page numbers refer to the page numbers in the appendix of this paper

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this is the knot in my stomach

a memory play

By Philip Carroll

I is alone on stage.

1

I can feel it still, very tangibly. I spent a lot of time on boats as a kid. We had this small lake just adjacent to our backyard and my dad always rowed me around it for fun. We'd spend a lot of time out there. Me and my dad would talk. It was like our own little world. Every time we went out onto the water I'd always ask him to let me row but he never let me. I began to wonder why. One time, when I am feeling especially driven, I go out into the backyard and see our dinghy floating, tied to the dock. I run over to it and jump in, untying it as quickly as possible and pushing off of the dock. I feel like a pirate, hijacking a boat. It feels good, at first. The boat begins to float further out into the lake. Our house gets smaller, slightly. I realize, pretty quickly, I'm not strong enough to row. I just float there. I get scared, and I panic. I develop this overwhelming fear of what's in the water below me. I don't remember any of this, actually. I think it's just one of those things I've heard so many times I kind of formed it in my head. I can feel it, though. The knot in my stomach. I feel alone. I feel truly lost, scared. I feel helpless. My father came and rescued me. He tells this story a lot now. And he always ends it with "the craziest part was, she wasn't even moving or trying to help herself! If not for the ebb and flow of the water she wouldn't have moved at all!" That's the punchline. It usually gets a laugh.

1 and 2 meeting each other again for the first time. 2 is working. They do not realize each other at first. 1 notices 2 first.

1

Oh, my gosh, hi! How are you?

2 ponders 1 for a moment

2

Hi! Yes, hi! How're you?

1

I'm good, yeah, I'm good. But how about you?

2

Also good, I mean, you know how it is. Just summer job and such.

1

Yeah, of course.

2

Can I get you anything?

Actors may improvise around this awkward interaction. No matter what, it must include a beat in which 2 pays for a portion of, if not all of, 1's order. In the original production, 2 worked at an ice cream shop and 1 tried to pay with a credit card, but they did not meet the "card minimum" of the shop.

2

Yeah, well, I'd love to chat more but my boss is an asshole and always gets mad when we socialize too much

1

Damn that sucks

2

Yah it does.

1

But maybe I'll see you around?

2

Yeah, see you around.

1

Would you want to like do anything, while I'm home?

2

Oh, um, yeah maybe. I mean I'm busy, but.

1

Yeah of course.

2

Um, I was thinking about Eli's party tonight.

1

Oh Eli's having a party?

2

Yeah

Oh, those are always fun. 1

Yeah 2

Yeah, maybe I'll see you there. When is it? 1

Just text him about it. 2

Yeah, ok, See you then. 1

See you. 2

Transition memory. 1 revisits the last time they spoke to 2 (1/3)

Hello 2

I want to talk to you 1

Ok 2

About last night 1

Ok 2

New memory. 1 and 2 throw rocks at a tire swing.

There it is. 2

I can't see it. 1

2
They're there. Every time I go on the swing they attack me.

1
My sister is allergic.

2
Are you?

1
I don't know. I've never been stung.

2
I'm not allergic.

1
That's good.

2
You ready?

1
...yeah

They count down from 3. 2 leads the counting. 2 throws the rock and misses the target. 1 does not.

2
Darn.

1
You missed.

2
You didn't even throw!

1
I wasn't ready!

2
We counted down!

1
You counted down! I wasn't ready.

2
When are you going to be ready?

1
I'm getting ready right now!

2
Ok, fine, get ready then.

1
I'm trying to!

Beat. 1 breathes.

2
Ok, let's get ready.

1
Ok.

2
I'm gonna count.

1
Ok.

2 begins counting. 1 joins in. They throw and hit the target. Moment of tension. Nothing happens.

1
You're sure there's one in there?

2
Yes! I get stung every time I use the swingset!

1
Do you need my help with this?

2

Yes. I can't do it myself. We need to do this now because I want people to be able to use the swingset at my birthday party. I wanna play the game where you jump through the tire swing and I had a really good plan and it is gonna be really fun but I can't do it without getting stung.

1

Ok.

2

One more try.

They count down from 3 again. They throw rocks. Moment.

New memory. 1 and 2 make a secret handshake. This can last as long as it wants to, but it must begin with the two of them touching their pointer fingers and quoting the line "ET phone home."

New memory. 1 and 2 are hiding.

2

This will work

1

I don't know

2

It will. Trust me. The teachers never look over here.

1

They're going to notice we're not back.

2

Who cares?

1

Yeah

2

See, they're rounding everyone else up but they don't even realize where we are. Once everyone else is inside, it'll be eternal recess for us.

1

That does sound fun.

2

Ok, I'm gonna go get a better look. You stay here and wait for the signal.

2 stealthily moves from one part of the stage to another. They have trained for this. 1 waits there for a few moments, watching attentively. 2 waits a few more moments and starts making hand signs to 1.

1

Um, what's the signal?

2

(Hand signs)

1

Is that the signal?

2

(2 furiously says "no" with hand signs. They re-emphasize what they originally said)

1

Just tell me what you want me to do!

2

(makes a "hush" motion towards 1)

They wait a few more moments. 2 gives 1 the signal. They do not respond. 2 gives 1 the signal again. This time is more exaggerated. They do not respond. 2 stares at 1. After a moment:

1

Is that the signal?

New memory. 1 and 2 lay on opposite sides of the stage. They talk on the phone.

1

I want to wear a skirt tomorrow

2

I don't want to wear a skirt tomorrow

1

Why not?

I want to wear my new pants tomorrow 2

Well I want to wear my new skirt tomorrow 1

I want to wear my new pants tomorrow 2

I want to wear my new skirt tomorrow 1

I want to wear my new pants tomorrow 2

I want to wear my new skirt tomorrow 1

I want to wear my new pants tomorrow 2

I want to wear my new skirt tomorrow 1

I want to wear my new pants tomorrow 2

Well I want to wear my new skirt tomorrow 1

Fine, I'll wear a skirt tomorrow. 2

Yay thank you! 1

But then can we wear a blue shirt? 2

I don't want to wear a blue shirt 1

Transition memory. 1 revisits the last time they spoke to 2 (2/3)

1

Thank you so much for understanding, honestly. Did you get home ok?

2

Yeah I did

1

Yeah I was worried about you because of the storm and everything so when I saw your text I felt relieved

2

Yeah I'm completely good.

New memory. 1 straightens 2's hair with a flat iron. This can go on for a few moments. Eventually:

2

(grabbing their neck) Shit!

1

Oh shit. Did I burn you? Did I burn you?

2

Owwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww

1

Oh shit I burned you didn't I?

New Memory. 1 and 2 get ready for the beach. At some point, the two find a time to do their secret handshake again.

1

Do you think that lifeguard will be there?

2

Which lifeguard?

1

The lifeguard.

2
Yes, they're always working on weekends.

1
(taking a deep breath) Oh my god ok.

2
What, do you have a crush?

1
Uh, yes. Are you kidding me? They're so hot. They've got such great teeth. And their eyebrows my god.

2
I don't know they're just not my type.

I reacts with disbelief. They both continue to get ready.

1
Well we're gonna fall in love and get married and raise a family of Olympic swimmers so its fine.

I eats a grape.

Do you want a grape? They're frozen.

2
You freeze your grapes?

1
Not always, but sometimes yeah.

2
That seems weird.

1
No it's good

2
I don't know...

1
No I swear try it!

2
Why do you want me to try it so bad?

1
Cause you'll like it! Come on, just do it.

2 eats it. They hate it.

2
Oh god! Ugh! It's like a human finger!

1
(laughs)

2
My god this is the worst thing I've ever experienced!

1
(laughs)

2
You like these?

1
Yeah they're good!

2
No, it was psychologically similar to eating a human finger. It was horrendous.

1
(laughs) I like them! They're refreshing and good in the summer!

2
I can feel the grape in my mouth, still. I can feel myself biting down on it, and it feels like I'm physically repulsed by the whole sensation of it.

1
Ok, ok. I won't make you eat another. All I'm saying is on a hot day, you're sweaty, you're smelly, all you need is to be refreshed, a frozen grape can really do the trick. Maybe you'd like it more with a different kind of grape. I'll have different ones tomorrow.

2

Please, don't. Never do. You know, I've always thought that like, if it came to it, I could eat a person but that grape literally just changed my whole apocalypse plan.

1

Ok, wait, you should be thanking me for dissuading your cannibalism. That's honestly dark.

2

Yeah I doubt I can handle the real thing-

1

If you couldn't handle the grape.

They laugh. A lot.

New memory. 2 puts makeup on 1's neck.

2

Just tell your mom it was a flat iron burn.

New memory. 1 and 2 lay in the grass and look at clouds. They can point to show each other what they see, if they'd like.

New memory. 1 and 2 lay in the snow

2

Don't move!

1

AAHHHH it's so cold!

2

Just do it!

1

I want to stop

2

Keep going!

1

I need to stop

12 more seconds! 2

They wait for 12 seconds

Time! 2

1 shoots up, shivering. 2 plays it cool, but is definitely cold

I have hypothermia 1

Come warm up 2

I have hypothermia 1

You can't get hypothermia that fast 2

I have frostbite 1

Alright, come warm up. 2

They huddle for warmth

That was not fun 1

But it got your heart pumping, right? 2

1 checks their heart

No 1

2 laughs

I think it's frozen 1

Beat

Can we go inside? 1

Go inside? On the first snow of the year? What's wrong with you? 2

I have hypothermia 1

I was laying there too and I'm fine 2

You're a crazy person 1

What else should we do? 2

Nothing 1

What do you normally do on weekends 2

Usually just hang out with my friends 1

But what do you like, do 2

I don't really know 1

Beat

Hey, so, do you remember that guy Ethan I was telling you about? 1

2
Yeah of course.

1
Well, he's been like, asking to hang out all day...

2
Ok

1
And, I mean, I don't want to, like, leave you

2
I know-

1
But I just need something to go my way. If he was anybody else I wouldn't.

2
No it's ok

1
Are you sure?

2
Totally, yes.

1
You understand?

2
Absolutely

1
Take my key to go inside.

2
I'll wait outside. I like the cold.

1
You sure?

2
Yeah

1
His room is like, literally 2 minutes away so I'll be like right here.

2
Yeah

1
If you need anything just let me know.

2
Ok, cool. Thanks. Have fun.

1
You too!

Transition memory. 1 revisits the last time they spoke to 2 (3/3)

1
Good, well, honestly, it was great seeing you.

2
(no response at first, then:) Yeah it was.

1
What are you up to today?

2
Not much.

1
Yeah, me neither.

2
Wait, do you mind if I put you on hold for a sec? I gotta answer someone really quick.

1
Yeah, sure thing go ahead.

2 never resumes the call. Eventually, 1 realizes this and hangs up. They sit in silence for a long time. 2 walks and sits at the edge of the stage. 1 joins them, eventually.

2 drives 1. At some point they arrive at 1's home and continue to talk.

	1
I'm so tired	
	2
Don't worry, you'll be home soon. Are you feeling ok? Do you want to lie down?	
	1
Um...	
	2
Are you feeling ok?	
	1
I just want to lie down	
	2
(trying to appease) There's a lever, on the side of...	
<i>1 searches but can't find it</i>	
	1
(while searching) I can't...	
	2
You can go to the back seat.	
	1
No it's fine I don't want to be a burden	
	2
It's no burden.	
	1
No it's fine	
	2
Are you going to be sick?	

1
No I'm totally ok.

2
Well if anything changes let me know.

Beat

1
Is this your car? This is a nice car

2
Thanks

1
How long have you had this?

2
Just a few weeks, actually.

1
What happened to your old one?

2
Nothing I just could afford a new one

1
But that car was awesome!

2
It started getting really old and like the engine started to go these past few years though

1
Poor sad car.

I begins laughing. A chuckle at first, but slowly it grows and it becomes hard for them to hold it in.

2
Why are you laughing?

(laughs) 1

(also kind of laughing) what's so funny? 2

Nothing, nothing... (laughs) 1

Come on, what is it? 2

Nothing... (laughs) 1

Jesus Christ, come on, what is it? 2

Nothing! 1

Beat. 2 is dissatisfied but does not care to pursue 1's secret anymore.

Look out! 1

2, terrified, slams on the breaks. 1 holds back laughter.

What? What did you see? 2

... 1

What the hell did you see? 2

1 bursts into laughter. 2 fumes with anger

That was a fucking joke? 2

1
Do you remember the last time I was in your car?

2 thinks for a moment

2
What does that-

1
Yes you do, come on. Don't you remember, we went to Weazer's, and-

2 remembers

2
Oh my god!

1
(laughs)

2
Why are you laughing that is fucked up! That's a fucked up thing to do that was not funny.

1
(laughing) yes it was!

2
(also kind of laughing) that's a fucked up thing to think is funny.

1
Oh come on, no one got hurt, it's fine.

2
Either of us could have. Could have hurt my car too.

1
Come on, cars don't matter.

2
When you spend thousands of dollars on one they do.

1
You didn't think that was funny?

2
You're fucked up.

1
You thought it was funny last time.

2
That wasn't a joke, you know that, right? Someone almost got hit.

1
No one got hit.

2
Yeah, well, the guy on the bike almost did.

1
Almost, though, almost.

2
You didn't think it was funny at the time.

1
What are you talking about, yes I did! You couldn't see your own face is the problem otherwise you would have thought so too.

2
You're the only person I know that thinks a near hit and run, well not a hit and run because I wouldn't run, but a hit... - you're the only person who'd find that funny. That was not funny.

1
Bec-

2
Besides, why would you think that was a good thing to just spring onto someone like, while I'm going out of my way to drive you home. You know, I'm actually doing you a fucking favor

1
I'm sorry-

2
I could have stayed at the party but you were the one who got too drunk and had to leave immediately and because I felt, for some reason, I had some semblance of responsibility to your well being

1
I'm not normally like this-

2
And because you haven't grown the fuck up I had to drive you

Pause

2
I mean, Jesus, that is not how you get people to like you. Ruining their nights and then causing them to crash their car - that is not how you get people to like you. Do you know that?

1
You don't like me?

Beat

2
I don't really know.

1
Oh.

2
I don't really know you.

Beat

1
The turn's coming up-

2
Yeah, I know where you live.

Beat

1
So you liked the party then?

2
I did

1
You thought it was fun?

2
I did

1
Yeah, me too.

2
Oh yeah?

1
Yeah

2
That's good.

Beat

1
I'm sorry for, um, laughing at your distress.

2
That's ok.

Beat

2
I really don't care.

1
ok

Pause

1
So how did you-

2
Just, shut up for the rest of the ride, please.

1
Ok

Can you do that for me? 2

ok 1

We're like 2 minutes away from your house just... 2 minutes, please. 2

ok 1

Beat

I swear you thought it was funny. 1

I don't care. 2

Beat. 1 steps out of the car

Well I'll see you around 1

Yeah see you 2

Beat

ET Phone home 1

She turns and points her finger to 2.

2 turns to 1, looks at her finger, and turns away again.

Beat

Here 1

1 hands 2 money

What's this?	2
For the ice cream.	1
Oh. You didn't have to-	2
I wanted to. Have a good night.	1
You too.	2
<i>1 leaves the car. Transition into a memory, now from 2's perspective. 1 lays in the snow. Before 12 seconds has passed, 2 joins her.</i>	
Time!	2
I have hypothermia	1
Come warm up	2
There's 1000 things happening to me right now and none of them are good	1
Like what	2
I have hypothermia	1
I'll help you	2
I have frostbite	1

I'll help you 2

... I have hypothermia 1

Odds are you go lick that flag pole over there? 2

*A game of "odds are" is improvised. If they get different numbers so be it.
If they get the same, I must talk their way out of it.*

Uggghh what do people do around here? 2

Well, when we're not licking flagpoles, there's usually things to do but everything is closed down because of the storm. It's insane you made it here. 1

My car can handle anything. 2

*2 looks at 1.
Filling the silence:*

Besides, I wasn't gonna let distance stop us from our first snow celebrations 2

Beat

Are you warm yet? I'm fine. 2

1 has completely left the stage. 2 is alone.

2 looks for 1. They're nowhere to be found.

2 explores the space. They kick the snow. They just think.

Blackout.

For a while. Then:

End of play

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