

THE MARNIE TAPE:
A PERFORMANCE ON MEMORY

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THE MARNIE TAPE:
A PERFORMANCE OF MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

The Marnie Tape is an exploration of memory that relies heavily on the senses. The process involves a multimedia approach—i.e. playwriting, slide photographs, installation, performance, olfactory triggers, and sound playback paired with live music in a theatrical scope. All mediums are utilized in synthesis with performance to explore the nature of memory. Specifically, an old home video on VHS titled “the Marnie tape” is the starting point, and the main narrative component, of the intensive exploration.

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DEDICATION

To the late John T. Stanley,

It was your typewriter where I started to talk. Here, the importance of storytelling originated in my life. I narrated to this typewriter even when I didn't know how to spell. The stacks of paper and white out were waiting for my words. This is the place where the smell of moth balls reminds me of. Yours and Iva's love imprints my memory the deepest. This is to you.

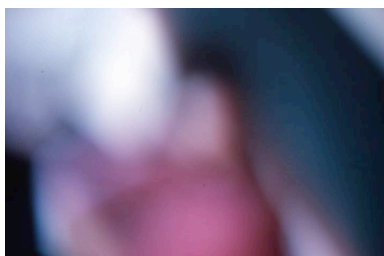
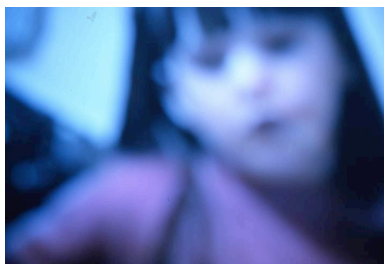
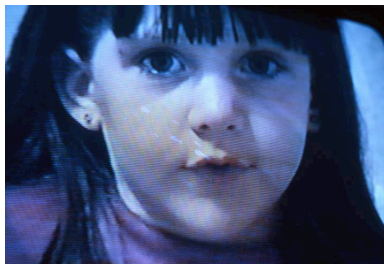
With love,

Kes

HIT PLAY

“Hello... My, my name is Kellen. And so... the story is... The story is... It's called My Friend... My Friend Named Marnie. That's the movie called. It was a long time ago. It was true, yes it was. If you didn't, if you don't know if it's true, just ask me. Now... If you wanna tape this... if you wanna tape this, ast... ask me, but if you're already on tape...that's okay. This was a long time ago for me. But, I didn't know it was. I remember it a long time ago. It was one of my friends. Her name was named Marnie and me. Let's hear the story...”

—beginning quote from *The Marnie VHS* (1990)



Marnie Tape TV Stills Series

1990 TO 2010

The Marnie Tape began in 1990. I was four years old and rarely spoke. Some cousins recall me as a mute toddler walking around with a security blanket and a thumb in my mouth. I do not remember this much, but luckily my cousin Kelly got me in a room with a huge camera on her shoulder and pressed record. Something happened on this particular day. I transformed when the camera turned on; I actually had something to say. This tape captured me monologuing for twelve minutes straight, as though I were conducting a cinematic spectacle. Mostly, I fabricated stories, both real and fake, that all focus on a childhood friend named Marnie. Years ago, I wrote the Marnie VHS off as a cute home video that served as future embarrassing footage my mother would save to replay. I tucked the tape away like a time capsule and nearly forgot about it. Twenty years after the recording, I came upon the Marnie tape when I wanted to dig deeper in my own childhood records. I was researching the act of recording memory, whether it be photographic or audial in nature. I felt a pull to the Marnie VHS tape.

The first thing I became fascinated with was this line between what was real versus what was fake. In the video, I talk about spending the night at Marnie's house. Looking back—as I say I don't remember much—I recall few play dates with Marnie when we were very young. I remember their overweight dachshund, Mousie, and the baby sister, Marcie. Arby's fries too—there is something tucked in my brain about seeing Marnie eat Arby's curly fries in her mom's car while I am in the back smelling the delicious grease. I have a solid recollection that I wanted a fry so bad but never was offered any. These are the remnants of what I remember about Marnie, twenty years later. If I refer to my four-year old self describing Marnie in the tape, there is much more. I talk about Marnie having a sunburn, about all of us brushing our teeth. The stories seem more like a little girl trying to learn how to put sentences together rather than a breaking-news recollection. Herein lies a conundrum that I face when I watch the VHS. I do not know which parts of the stories are fabricated and which actually happened.

There is a curiosity toward this blurred line of existence. It makes the exploration of memory more weighted towards feelings and senses instead of factual evidence. I became aware of how blurry memories seem the more I try to remember them. I was drawn to this blur.

In later research, I extracted the Marnie tape into fragments of dialogue and sensory components. I observed the tape's physical, tangible role; it serves as a memory, but in reality acts as a permanent, unchanging object that stores information ready to play back. Had my cousin not hit record button, the memory rendered on the magnetic film would be entirely lost. I felt a heavy longing; physically, here is a fragment of my childhood that is in the most candid, banal form. I cling to this tape because of its fleeting yet tangible objectivity.

Douglas Kahn states in *The Histories of Sound* that “magnetic audiotape turns sound into an empirical object, capable of being seen, written, and drawn directly” (Maude 63). There is a permanent, physical weight to the plastic VHS tape. It tells of the era it was recorded—the look of the video is dated and its physicality is near obsolete. The technology of the memory speaks volumes of the Marnie tape. This was back in the day when my entire family used the bulky camcorder and tapes to record the most insignificant moments of the every day. 8mm film, in comparison, has a different feel. The home videos of me and my brothers as babies are recorded on Super 8, in measured fragments of us taking our first steps mixed with three-to-four seconds of family members smiling. Everything is rose-colored and shortly-timed, whereas with VHS, there is a completely different approach. My dad would leave a camera recording for an hour in the corner of the room when we were opening Christmas presents. There was more time with this technology. That is why my twelve-minute monologue feels so right with its recording instruments. Back then, the tapes were 90 minutes and the automatic zoom had just been invented for families to tinker with. That technology tells more of the era we were in.

I am fascinated with the metaphor of the VHS as a memory fading away in my brain. The look of the tape's playback is a pixillated web of interlaced lines, much like blurred recollections that are now only fragments with inserted playback and sound. I relished the fact that I could pause, rewind, and play back the performance captured on the physical tape.

In the beginning of working with *Marnie*, I started photographing stills of the tape on my old television. I was creating a storyboard of the performance with frozen, planar stills from the TV. The photographs came out beautifully—the analog look of the oscillating television lines worked aesthetically with the zeitgeist of the technology. There was a translation that occurred, first from my actual memory of the tape, then to the VHS performance, and lastly to my photographs capturing frozen moments on film. This worked conceptually with my interests in fading memories. In the photographic works, I purposely blurred some pixels with my camera and zoomed in on the television lines with others. This began to abstract the *Marnie* work, and herein my interests grew to a more ambitious process. I grew unhappy with only critiquing the stills of the television as the sole body of work. I wanted more than just frozen photographs that were disconnected to the original video's sequence. I turned to performance work.



Marnie Tape TV Stills Series

The first experiments of performance started simply but failed. I hit record on my MacBook's video capture as I repeated the words of toddler Kellen from the *Marnie* VHS. It was a strange way to respond to the *Marnie* VHS; I literally quoted myself, twenty years later. I turned this video into critique, and the peers in my photography class were floored. There was this estranged tension going on as I struggled to remember the monologue and used language of a four-year-old. People commented on how uncomfortable they felt by seeing me talk like a child. More importantly, they were unsure of the tape's reference. I was unhappy with the reference point disconnected and absent from the performance. In contrast, I was satiated with

the performative direction and wanted to experiment in those realms further. I trusted that there was more research and future works in store for *Marnie*. Though I didn't automatically know the VHS tape would be the main concept of my thesis work, I knew to extract it more.

This was the jumping off point for my work to explore more documented memories. I began to visualize the flat, planar, oscillating lines on the television as a 3-D, tangible, recreated performance—a playback in real life, if you will. I wanted more dimension, more senses involved. I wanted sound, music, verse. I kept thinking of recollections that get triggered by smell and touch. I wanted to recreate an experience that made people feel alienated and foreign. Yet, I wanted to integrate childhood familiarities—something that we could all connect with. The *Marnie* VHS was the base of my future body of work, but I wanted more layers. I knew I was going toward a more performative medium rather than just photographic. And it made sense. The *Marnie* VHS was essentially an impromptu performance that wouldn't exist without the photographic documentation. I thought of the performance artist Allan Kaprow and the “happenings” he conducted in the fifties and sixties. He would direct a fleeting moment of people eating fruit off a Voltswagon hood. Rather than a painting or object stagnant in space, he developed environments for bystanders to experience. The photographs documenting these happenings are the only way to experience the work today, so photography plays an essential role in performative work.

In the beginning stages, my identity as an artist was questioned. In my classes that tended to strictly define sculptures as three-dimensional explorations of materials and photography as something captured, printed, matted and framed, to say the least I felt lost. I knew that instead of furthering my research photographically, I had to think more openly as my role of an artist. I definitely knew I was to compose—but was I a composer of one specific medium? Would this work be limited solely to galleries? Would it be more in the theater realm, scripted out and directed? Would it be more like Kaprow's simple “happenings”? I was torn trying to define myself as the photographer who craved more senses. I was tired of art demanded to stay within white walls of galleries. Photography was technically challenging to

me, but I wanted more—multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary, and synesthetic. I was sick of taking pictures, specifically of the flatness that the photograph evokes and represents. I wanted to work more in performance, but unlike Kaprow's direction, I looked toward directing a scripted experience. I became less rigid in my thinking, more open for anything to happen. My photography thesis class began to view me as the non-photographer. I argued that a sound recording was a photograph for the ear. Instead of looking for a frame to capture, I started listening and absorbing more.

Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* calmed the anxiety of how to define myself artistically. He defines the photograph as "not necessarily saying *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*. This distinction is decisive" (85). I immediately connected Marnie as a "has been" memory. I wanted to hear more. Barthes argues that in photography,

time's immobilization assumes only an excessive, monstrous mode: Time is engorged... That the photograph is "modern," mingled with our noisiest everyday life, does not keep it from having an enigmatic point of inactuality, a strange stasis, the stasis of an *arrest*... Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory... but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-mememory. (91)

My ears perked up. Wasn't the VHS tape essentially my memory? I inserted all my stories in the VHS as past experiences, but I also questioned the validity. Would I remember anything from the Marnie tape if it weren't recorded? Barthes explains further,

One day, some friends were talking about their childhood memories; they had any number; but I, who had just been looking at my old photographs, had none left. Surrounded by these photographs, I could no longer console myself with Rilke's line: "Sweet as a memory, the mimosas steep the bedroom": the Photograph does not "steep" the bedroom: no odor, no music, nothing but the exorbitant thing. (91)

I agreed. Marnie would not have existed without the documentation, but my memory

would have recalled an experience that shaped over time. I began to question what experience was real versus what was fake; I suddenly wondered if photography was the tool that blurred the two. From there, I decided to work more on the “mimosas [steeping] the bedroom.” It is said that the olfactory senses have the closest connection to emotion. I wanted to use this to my advantage. I wanted to recreate a memory that was more like an emotive experience and less like an object. I had to have odors, music, more. I first turned to my nose.

Moth balls were the first scent I clung to. They remind me of old, dusty closets in my grandparents’ house and lake house. The smell of moth balls is incredibly pungent. It’s the perfect example of synesthesia: the specific scent of moth balls triggers an image of towels, a crunchy terry cloth, a taste of old water. I wrapped moth balls in old twine and had my friends smell the yarn and respond. Everyone had an excited reaction. Most hadn’t smelled anything near the scent for decades. All had specific, past experiences that triggered synesthesia in their brain as they smelled. One friend commented, “Old people, my elderly baby-sitter....” Comically, my friend had no idea that smell was an actual object to keep bugs out of linens. She assumed elderly people just smelled that way. Through the decades, moth balls’ use has faded. A scent tells of a certain era; it is evocative of a time passed. This reminded me of a faded photograph in a way.

It is important to note that this period in the beginning was the absorbing process as I call it, or the period where I was eager to find scents, tastes, and textures to include in my thesis. I felt akin to a sponge, a collector—and of what, I did not know at first. Arguably, I became one with my voice recorder and olfactory senses, ready to capture future material. The absorbing process began even before I was in process of writing the script for *Marnie*.

Summer of 2010

A big chunk of this process took place in Europe on a backpacking tour through Italy, Croatia, Bosnia, and Austria. These travels happened months before I sat down to write the script. Bosnia was a country I knew little about, other than a Bosnian war refugee I met in Houston whose story shaped my life. I wanted to go see his native, post-war land. Through the

help of beautiful people I networked within the States, I departed with intentions to backpack through Europe. My main destinations were Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zavidovici, Bosnia. I used the trip as an excuse to visit Italy and Croatia before and Austria afterwards, but Bosnia was the sole purpose of my travels for that summer of 2010 trip. And why Bosnia-Herzegovina? To be honest, I have no idea. What I do know was a strong intuition telling me to go. I felt a magnetic pull toward the foreign geography. I followed the pull.

I met up with my best friend, Jessica, in the familiar streets of Florence, Italy and began recording sounds of our journey. She would leave the recorder on as we picnicked in the Boboli Gardens and walked the cobblestoned streets. I began to define certain sounds as future ambient noises for my thesis. Transitory, fleeting fragments like conversations, transportation, unfamiliar noises and ambient music from the streets became my thematic approach when selecting moments to record. Trains were a massive theme since they provided a huge majority of transit for Jessica and me through the continent. Trains stopping at the platform intrigued me. The intercom voices that flooded the empty station with foreign directions and delays were recorded. The train stations were places where I felt like I could somewhat understand the Italian or German spoken, but equally I knew I could get on the wrong train and be lost within seconds. I recorded waiting rooms, purgatories we had to sweat out. A bus ride in Bosnia became great material to record—Jessica and I were stuck on a ten-hour bus ride through eastern Europe with no air conditioning or ventilation. Feelings of claustrophobia overcame us as Bosnians stared our way and wondered why two young American girls were touring through their country. This was the first time while traveling when I felt the furthest away from home, from familiarity.

There was definitely a different feel to Bosnia as compared to traveling through Western Europe. I had little expectations that led me to poignant surprises. The heavily-Slavic language instantly alienated my Romance language tongue. The way Bosnians savored food, friendships, familial ties, and life was also foreign. A friend told me in broken English that the way most Bosnians measure time in their memory is to ask whether that moment happened before or

after the war. I was floored. In my memory, September 11, 2001 was the only event that shaped me and my country. It didn't impact me on a personal level, meaning I had no friends or family members who were killed or injured in the tremors of the attack. Next to these Bosnian women who could count on both hands the people closest to them they lost, I felt I had no time line notch that heavily determined my past. I wanted to ask myself how I measure past experiences, and it led me to recording technologies like previous photographs and home movies.

In addition, a huge part of the country that moved me were Bosnia's foreign sounds. Instead of churches and cathedrals everywhere, mosques were scattered throughout the landscapes. Hearing the adhans, or the Islamic call to prayer that blasted throughout the towns, was like candy to my raised-Catholic ears. I wanted to play back the sounds I heard in Bosnia, but to a panel of people who wouldn't recognize the recorded elements. The recordings became such a formative role of the absorbing process. I had faith that this audio would somehow be a part of the thesis work.

Furthermore, the traveling with Jessica shaped our process greatly. We'd be walking through a seaside park in Split, Croatia, and suddenly have an idea for the project. At that time, I didn't know this vague idea that I later called my thesis would involve the Marnie VHS, but I knew it had to involve triggered senses. Jessica and I spoke of a room an audience would pass through as they smelled, listened, felt, and tasted different sensory components. We'd share ideas over Bosnian coffee, ethnic food or through hostel bunk beds. Eventually I began to realize that this project wasn't only going to involve an autobiographical experience of mine; I knew Jessica's psyche would be tied



*Self-Portrait in Amela's apartment, Tuzla, Bosnia
Jess on the bus ride to Zavidovici*

in the process as well. The opportunity to collaborate really excited me. Every visual I described felt feasible to Jessica. This was the genesis of my craving to work collaboratively.

It is important to also add that Jessica and my brainstormers weren't labeled as "Marnie" or "My Thesis" until later. Mind you, our first ideas of the project differed from what *Marnie* turned out to be. However, we did know that we wanted to create a scripted experience that, like a train ride, brought an audience from one destination of memory to another and another until the last stop halted to a standstill. We wanted to evoke a journey through the geographies of the mind.

After I returned to the States that summer, the absorbing process deepened. I met up with my love, Barry, in Nevada for a road trip through the Grand Canyon and the Southwest. I brought the voice recorder with me. As we drove through landscapes we'd never seen in a country that was our own, I began to feel foreign to a place again. I recorded a song Barry played to me on his tape deck of old ragtime blues. I felt like we were in a different era, passing through time and space at once. Barry and I conversed over the vague, growing ideas that began in my head and flourished with Jessica. Barry had evocative responses to the use of smell to trigger memories. He began to play his guitar to try to explain. This was when I knew not only was I to collaborate with Jessica on the technical aspects of the play, I then knew Barry would be my main musician.



Nevada Series: Hoover Dam and the Grand Canyon

I came home feeling full as a wet sponge and needing to extract myself into my future performance. I listened back to my

recordings of the summer. A crowd passed me. A train left the platform. A couple reunited in an airport. My eye for photographic, decisive moments shifted to my ear curating audial surroundings. Suddenly, foreign noises sounded like instruments I could sample and compose with. It was at this time when a light bulb clicked in my swimming head; I knew I had to use the Marnie VHS. I wanted to play back the recorded memory of my childhood much like I played back the sounds of my summer. With the recordings leading to Marnie's recollection, the Marnie tape would become a layer next to interlaced memories of foreign lands, transitory moments, and other past, documented experiences. I wanted to keep the concept of fleeting, residual, yet banal moments to layer on top of *Marnie*. I needed a vehicle to help streamline my multimedia, multi-interest endeavor.

A DISCLAIMER

Before I go further, I have to reveal a skeleton in my creative process' closet. During this time period of absorbing, brainstorming, and defining what *Marnie* was going to be, there was a tumult of emotions tagged along. First of all, there was uncertainty. I did not wake up one morning knowing all the elements of *Marnie*. There were multiple "A-ha!" moments, mind you, yet not in sequence and layered messily on top of one another. This became a non-linear way of working for me that, at times, brought on anxiety and the blackness of the unknown. *Marnie* became very process-oriented, which, for me, was a slightly uncomfortable way of working. Because *Marnie* was collaborative in nature, interdisciplinary, and rather ambitious, I had many moments where I had no idea if all aspects of the performance would turn out. There is a nervousness here that I felt heavily, hoping that I'd compose what was in my head in a concise manner. Because the process was sporadic, non-linear, and abstracted, there was a leap of faith that occurred in my work that somehow brought me to all the vehicles I needed in order to fabricate *Marnie*. This is a disclaimer for the artistic and the scientific, the creative and non-creative types, the left and right-brained people, and for everyone in between. This is just to say that in the beginning stages, I had absolutely no idea what the end result would be. I just knew to follow the process.

BECKETT'S INFLUENCE

It's interesting to note that as I began to write the beginnings of *Marnie*, I kept reminding myself of a certain play I'm really inspired by—*Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett. The play was written in the late fifties when reel-to-reel tape was the latest technology. It involves Krapp, the only character on stage, making ritual recordings and listening back to previous tapes only once a year—on his birthday. He monologues to himself a voice-diary account of the past year, only to freeze the memories on magnetic tape. John Haynes suggests that Krapp's tapes “have commonly been referred to as the modern equivalent of a writer's journals or diaries. Yet they can also be seen as attempts to store up accounts of his key experiences, like a miser hoarding his gold” (68).

Krapp interplays with his recorded voice as though the old recordings are different selves. Ulrika Maude quotes “this reversibility, tangibility and manipulability of sound” is what Beckett “sets out to examine in *Krapp's Last Tape*: the status of sound as a near-physical object that has the ability to make us relive the past” (Maude 63). Beckett wants to “ensure that the body leaves its trace on the tape recording” (63). The years can collect dust. They can pile up in spools, forgotten. Yet, more importantly, Krapp has the ability to stop, rewind, and fast-forward the real-time recordings of the years since. Keir Elam states that “[the] tape on Krapp's machine is an image of the mind, coiling backwards and forwards in time, endlessly repeating itself with the same memories, hopes, anxieties, and preoccupations” (125).

The more I read *Krapp's Last Tape*, the more I couldn't believe how rich the Marnie VHS was to my childhood. I craved memories like the Marnie tape to play, fast-forward, and coil like Beckett's. Ultimately, I didn't want a memory to be triggered by a flattened sensory component. Krapp's memories “are evoked through the whole gamut of the senses” (Maude 16). I latched on to this. I especially held close to Daniel Albright's quotation that “the sound track of Krapp's life has become the life itself” (61).

At first, I thought *Marnie* could somehow fit into a direct response to Krapp's life.

I wrote myself in a role that mirrored myself as Krapp. This was the beginning edits of *The Marnie Tape* in play format. The play began with three characters: Kes, Kelly and Kell. I was to play Kes; I knew that in the very beginning. Kelly and Kell were chorus members that acted as malleable brain neurons firing and shaping into one vignette of memory to another. I loved the dynamic of these three characters' genesis. I kept that in the final edits of *Marnie*. What I didn't keep was my first response to *Krapp*; if I were to respond to Samuel Beckett, then surely Kes's character should be Krapp, right? I wrote Kes as an older, projected version of myself who, like Krapp, was nostalgic of past, recorded ghosts of myself. Yet, I was confused. I didn't want to act. I didn't want to have to age myself with makeup and metaphor. The first version of Kes was very dialogue-driven and had Kelly and Kell's interactions with Kes much like conversations in a cafeteria rather than a brain's playback. I hated the first written edition of *Marnie*. I had to revise. I almost threw everything out entirely.

The first edition of *The Marnie Tape's* script was a failure because of my concern of commenting on Beckett's response to memory rather than my own. Here I was, lucky enough to have a tape of my own childhood to insert into this concept of technology and memory. I knew that should be the focal point of *The Marnie Tape* and that *Krapp's Last Tape* should be just an influence. However, I wanted *Krapp* included since it deeply related to my own experience. A mentor of mine read the first edition of *The Marnie Tape* and suggested my response to Beckett should be more of a quoting Beckett than of being Krapp. I immediately took to his advice. I wrote a new script with Kes, Kelly and Kell's characters but with less dialogue that quoted rather than acted. The collected, recorded sound from the summer travels began connecting to a new character of, essentially, a playback of foley and dialogue. This was the foundation of Jessica's role playing back certain audio recordings at specific, scripted moments. These sound clips would essentially trigger a recollection, or perhaps layer to create more of an atmosphere. Jessica, whom I crowned as "Lighting and Audio Playback," was just as important of a character as Kelly, Kell, and Kes.

John Dewey describes in *Art as Experience* an "act of abstraction" that involves extracting

“what is significant” (56). He also suggests that in order “to perceive, a beholder must create [her] own experience” by this act of extracting (56). I defined this as distilling a few memories down to quotes in the script that Kelly and Kell would replay. The notion of extraction and distillation excited me—it allowed hand-picked, significant texts from recorded memories to be included in a narrative of tiny vignettes. I felt like a weaver, sewing a web of memories, related or not, in place. As I was researching more about Samuel Beckett’s work and writing the final version of *Marnie*, I began to realize an act of extracting parts of memories and inserting them in *Marnie*’s dialogue. As I say, the way I rendered my response to Beckett was to essentially quote *Krapp’s Last Tape*. I loved the line in *Krapp* when he listened back to a tape of a breakup, begging the girl, “Let me in.” I wrote in the play for the audio playback to quote “Let me in,” as Kell’s line read, “*Let me in*. I love that line. *Her eyes just slits because of the glare...*” (Stanley 7). Beckett’s quotes were played back just as a layer of foley. This way of writing began to create an abstracted compilation of dream-like visions, thoughts, recollections, and triggered senses.

In the script, I included moth balls being hidden in cigarette cases for Kelly and Kell to smell and share with the audience. As they smelled the box, Kes responded, “Linen closet. The lake house... Grandma Iva” (Stanley 4). Through the smell of moth balls, I wrote further for different senses and scents. I thought of a road trip to Oregon where I recorded the waterfall and smelled green pines. I wanted to integrate this into the script. Jessica would play back Multnomah Falls’ recorded audio as Kell recollected the sensation of wanting to be a molecule falling forty feet to the ground, “surrounded by billions of molecular friends” (Stanley 4). I wanted to integrate smell to this really intimate vignette of the script. I later thought to spray a fragrance of piney woods and moist soil. Kelly then was directed to spray this fragrance at the “Mulnomah Falls” line. The script began to resemble a map of different sensory components flowing into one another. The mash-up of all fragments I’d combined began to abstract *Marnie* into a completely new experience. By mixing the quotes up and putting them in a different context, *Marnie* began to shape into something foreign.

The Marnie tape was last in the written script. Instead of photographing stills on the television, I found quotes of the Marnie VHS to insert into the final script. Parts of the playback would loop the audio of the VHS tape, and parts would be quoted in real-time from Kelly and Kell's character. I wrote the Marnie vignette as Kelly recording the experience much like my cousin did with the VHS camera—a bystander encouraging my four-year old self to speak while letting the tape run. Kell transformed into a new memory of being a child, shy and excited to tell a story. In the script, Kell would recite her line, "Hello... my, my name is Kellen" (Stanley 5). Then, as though an echo bounced off walls in a cave, the audio playback would quote, "Hello, my... my name is Kellen." There was this homemade stereo quality to this segment in the play. An actor quoted a child's words, then the actual child echoed afterward. It became this strange, surreal response of technology and memory. Like *Krapp's Last Tape*, there was the ghost of a past self, yet it was fake, in script-form, quoting itself. It was a way to respond to my original concept of wanting the VHS tape to play back in real life.



The Marnie Tape performance stills: Kell's line of "Billions of molecular friends" paired with the triggering of the Marnie VHS

FROM OBJECT TO PERFORMANCE

My intentions for the performance started simple: I was to physically reproduce the smell, texture, and architecture of played-back memories. First, I began with the olfactory sense. Reproducing synesthesia was one of my main goals. I had smells of waterfalls, moth balls, and Arby's curly fries included in the script. Next were the sounds to play back, which included recordings of trains halting to a stop and blues playing on a tape deck as the road kept onward. The textures of the performance were just as important as the rest of the sensory components: an old 1970's-era towel, slide projections of my four-year old self telling the story of Marnie, the obsolete VHS camcorder resting on Kelly's shoulder. I wanted the set to feel like you were in a domestic space, so I installed a screen door that all the characters entered and exited through. The set was even layered with dimmers installed to bring up certain lights behind continent-shaped maps on the walls. I wanted the space to feel like a cognitive map, feeling like areas of the brain lit up during certain memories triggered. Not only did I want to create a cognitive space of memory, I craved to trigger unrelated memories in the audience's mind. If the moth balls reminded someone of their grandmother, an older baby-

sitter, or of any older memory, *Marnie* succeeded. If the sounds of the ambient noise made someone feel claustrophobic as the actors on stage recreated the Bosnian bus ride, *Marnie* succeeded. If my autobiographical experience connected to audience members' memories in a collective web of common, triggered moments, *Marnie* succeeded.



The Marnie Tape performance stills: Kell wrapping herself in an old towel; Kelly and Kell eating Arby's curly fries

The climax and ending of *The Marnie Tape* became an important integration tying together my concept of technology and memory. In the script, the Marnie VHS tape essentially played back through Kelly and Kell's recreation. Kell is reminded of Marnie and VHS tape when Kelly drops a pink headband on the ground. Kell nostalgically picks up the headband and puts it on, like a little girl. This is the moment when the performance shifts from scattered vignettes of tiny memories to Marnie's memory. The music becomes more child-like, and Kell transforms into a four-year-old persona. Kelly enters with a VHS camcorder as Kell plays with the walls like a toddler. Kelly startles Kell, and at first shy, Kell lights up once she sees the camera recording her. It's as though someone wants to listen to her story. Kell quotes, "Oh hello. My, my name is Kellen" as Jessica plays back the actual VHS sound recording. The moment feels real for a second; the played back memory feels alive yet fleeting. After the Marnie VHS play back, there is a death of the memory that plays out. Kell is left alone, grasping the foreign headband while



The Marnie Tape performance: Kell with the headband

quoting the toddler's words, "In the night, in the middle of the night, that night... that night... that... night" (Stanley 6). There is a cognitive moment where her character begins to question what childish rubbish she is quoting. She has an existential moment, looking inward. As the memory gets blurrier and further away from her, she goes to the slide projector on stage, craving imagery to envelope her. As she flips through the photographs projecting on to Kes' face, Kell becomes anxious that the memories will one day fade. The photographs projected start to become blurred colors rather than an image of a little girl. The audio begins to layer on top of itself as Kell exits, saying "Let me in. I love that line. Her eyes just slits... Let me in"

(Stanley 7). The focal point now switches to Kes.

The ending is a semi-improvisation performance piece. I knew that as Kes, my



Kes in the climax of The Marnie Tape, with the reel of VHS tape

performance work would involve wrapping myself with a reel of VHS tape, clinging the tangible spool to my physical self. It is a direct response to the object of the Marnie VHS tape being the sole source of memory, as though my physical childhood was captured inside the tangible tape. In the script, the only stage directions are “*Now all that resides is KES wrapped in VHS tape and the music blurring the memory*” (Stanley 8). Therefore, the performative aspect of the ending was malleable and open to the act. I had no idea how emotional the act would be; I thought of the performance as wrapping myself in the physicality of leftover memory. This brought a new edge to *The Marnie Tape*. It was scripted with actors, audio playback, guerrilla-style lighting, and live music as the ambient noise. Thus, naturally

it blurred the lines between theater and performance art. This act commented on my role as a performance artist bringing open-ended improvisation to the scripted playback.

During the process of directing the play and finding my role at the end for performative

work, I came upon a close-minded, academic view on performance art. In this article, Marina Abramović, the “grandmother of performance art,” states in order

to be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre. Theatre is fake: there is a black box, you pay for a ticket, and you sit in the dark and see somebody playing somebody else’s life. The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real. It’s a very different concept. It’s about true reality. (Wilkinson 1)

The Marnie Tape is not a theater versus performance art work. It integrates the two. There is the black box, there is the ticket, and there are two actors playing out scenes from my life. However, paired with this theatrical script is the “true reality” of the technology acting as a holding cells of my childhood. The play seems real because the main character, myself, wrote, directed, and acted from actual life experience. There is real and fake subject matter going on in *The Marnie Tape*; what is real versus what is fake is essentially the point. Chris Wilkinson rebuttals Abramović’s combative words with this argument: When “an audience is required to see something as both real and unreal simultaneously there arises a creative and imaginative tension that enables us to transcend the mundanity of real life, and which can create a kind of playfulness” (Wilkinson 1). Thus, the performative aspect of the ending to *The Marnie Tape* really kicked the play up a notch for myself as a performer freed to be in the moment during the act, for the audience to experience something real and fake, and for the blurring of theater with performance art.

December of 2010

We performed *The Marnie Tape* as a workshop in December, both in the Texas State University art building’s installation room and in the theater black box. At first, I wanted the performance to stand alone, without any references or information presented, to allow only a sensory experience. I also was interested to see how the different spaces shaped the experience.

The gallery event was lovely—I installed a television that showed *The Marnie VHS* in

the area that held all the art students' thesis works. My performance was held downstairs from the gallery opening, and we relied on ushers to guide audience members down to our makeshift theater in the dim-lit sculpture area. The space was by far not ideal. First of all, I didn't have any control over whether or not anyone saw the VHS tape before they saw the performance. There was a question if anyone would connect the reference to the performance that was disconnected from the art opening. The installation room was packed with people standing on ladders and temporary seating that made *Marnie* have this guerrilla feel. It felt like it was being presented in a hallway, which intrigued me, but it didn't satisfy the concept.

The black box performance was, as I assumed, more stream-lined and less raw. My musicians were able to play above us on the catwalk, and the whole experience felt more dreamy, as though the sound track was falling on the audience like snow. The seating was more comfortable, and everyone could see and hear better. I thought that this experience would be the best situation to end the thesis performance. After finishing the performances, I felt a warm release for directing my mental sketches into a 3-D experience. But there was something missing. Something didn't feel finished. I kept dreaming of combining the two locations into one warehouse-inspired, DIY black box theater—a venue that wasn't defined as solely art or theater. Little did I know that those dreams were foreshadows of the proper punctuation of *Marnie*. I kept hearing people ask what the Marnie VHS tape looked like. No one caught any reference of Beckett unless they heard me talking about it previously or extensively knew Beckett's work. I wanted to create a more streamlined experience to allow all audience members to see everything: the play *Marnie* was influenced by, the tape it references, and the performance all in one space. I had to reproduce the workshop with *Krapp's Last Tape* and *The Marnie Tape* as a double-bill.

March of 2011

Enter Transit: A budding, cooperative artist-residency program that seeks out recent graduates in transition to the professional artist community. I was asked to perform *Marnie* in their live-work warehouse co-op, and the opportunity was golden. In March 2011, Transit

hosted three nights of *Rewound: A night directed by Kellen Stanley*. In this night, the lineup was a double bill of *Krapp's Last Tape* first, with the Marnie VHS playing on a television and a projector during intermission, and finally ending with *The Marnie Tape* performance. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to direct Beckett next to my own autobiographical work.

I found my actor for Krapp in the bar I worked at. He was beyond perfect for the role: late forties, a smoker, avid drinker, not to mention a poet whose knowledge of theater was beyond what I knew. This opportunity to work with someone older and with a different mind-set than an actor was really exciting. The rehearsal aspect of *Krapp* was fantastic, especially as I kept in mind how its juxtaposition would strengthen *Marnie*. And it was extremely different working with a script that I didn't write. As I directed Krapp scene by scene, I hit different road blocks than *Marnie's* since Krapp's experiences were not my own. I had to keep in mind that Samuel Beckett has one of the most strict estates in theater today. Theater friends warned me of horror stories of students putting on a Beckett play and tweaking a tiny bit only



Krapp in rehearsals, listening to his cassette tape player

to get the Beckett estate hounds shutting their modest production down. I knew I had to shape *Krapp* a bit in order to support *Marnie's* concept. I had to trust my artistic gut and go with whatever my vision was rather than Beckett's. The process proved to be a lot different but rewarded my process on so many different levels.

One thing to note were the edits I made to *Krapp*. The original script calls for Krapp to record on reel-to-reel tape. I made an aesthetic decision to change the recording technology to cassette tapes in order to match the nostalgic era of the Marnie VHS. Thus, the three

acts of *Krapp*, the Marnie VHS, and *The Marnie Tape* would all comment on a certain decade's technology. This is important to note because of the easy, over-saturated digital era we reside in now. The time period of the technologies became very important to me. I was commenting on memories recorded by a specific era where my old self was captured. I wanted everything to match a low-fi tape culture. The elements of the cassette tape, the 35mm slide projector, the VHS camera, the tube television, and the play-back of the VHS recording all contributed to this aesthetic.

The second edit in the production of *Rewound* was the recorded quotes of *Krapp* that were played back in *Marnie*. The "Let me in" line I mentioned before was, in the workshop mode, a quote pulled from a video production of *Krapp's Last Tape*. In *Rewound*, we actually used the playback from our production of *Krapp's Last Tape* to echo and play back in *The Marnie Tape*. Just like the Marnie VHS echoed its play back as Kell repeated the line live, there was a reverb of *Krapp's Last Tape* in *The Marnie Tape* that in the workshop wasn't present. The audience felt a familiarity with the *Krapp* playback; there was a distinct, defined echo.

The experience at Transit proved very successful. It brought me to more understanding of the growing concept once formulated in my head and now in front of an audience. More importantly, all the references were contained and presented in one room, during one night, to echo one another. I was able to wrap up everything I intended to do through Transit and *Rewound*.

IN CONCLUSION

I'd like to point out that my *Marnie* actors, Marci and Kayce, were familiar with Samuel Beckett's work but had not read *Krapp's Last Tape*. There are several lines in *The Marnie Tape* where Kell quotes Krapp. For Marci, the lines read like all the other compiled, foreign memories did—there was nothing to associate with that specific text, so she just quoted the line like another language. On the second performance at Transit, both Kayce and Marci sat down and watched my tailored version of *Krapp's Last Tape*. It was amazing to see their responses; Marci couldn't believe that the line she quotes as Kell was so moving in the script of Krapp. The "Let me in" line especially hit her hard. After Krapp's performance, *The Marnie Tape* commenced with all our emotions connected to the whole of the concept. Marci recited the "Let me in" quote with more poignancy, as though she really loved that line. I must add that this night was the best *Marnie* had ever reached. There was electricity in the air; everything was buzzing. Most of the feeling cannot be explained—it's like trying to describe a beautiful moment to someone who wasn't there. The audience was just right. I felt like the crowd responded more towards Krapp. My actor who played Krapp mentioned that theater is all about the audience—"the audience is the thing," he'd say. There is something extremely rewarding when you give your all to a group of strangers and their reactions make you perform better. I will say that the trains at Transit were something we were afraid of. The warehouse was next door to a busy train track and the entire company had to be on their feet in case a train passed, which happened during every performance. On this particular night where everything finally seemed to make sense to all of us, the train quietly started when *Krapp* began. A second train sounded at the end of *Marnie*, right when Marci quoted the Krapp line she then understood. Like magic, she exited as the chaos started to crescendo to myself wrapped in VHS tape. The train was such a beautiful metaphor, a happy accident. The unplanned effect really added a nice bookend layered on the concept. An audience member well-versed in theater commented on this. He

said there are plenty of good performances for a director but very, very rarely is there a great performance in one's career. This was my first great performance. I was beyond thrilled.

After *Rewound*, I felt a wave of accomplishment. To quote Harold Churman, "if you get 60 percent of what you saw in your head onto the stage, you're doing very well" (Hauser 11). Words cannot express how satiated and successful I felt when the my company chiseled down the majority of our original vision. The process brought my artwork to unbelievably new heights. It has lead me to work more with sensory-driven approaches. I am inspired to work more in playwriting, performance and stage directing, especially combining all three mediums like I did for *Marnie*. I now must work in a collaborative nature, in more interdisciplinary approaches. Most importantly, the entire trajectory of *Marnie* has now given me confidence on any future, overly-ambitious projects and ideas.

I feel a door has closed permanently with the VHS tape in the eject position. I walk away from *Marnie* with a whole, passionate, yet foreign rumbling in my gut. I have to add that I haven't felt like a concept previous to *Marnie* has ever felt this punctuated. It was such a beautiful experience to add to my collection of recorded memories.

END CREDITS

PRODUCTION HISTORY

The Marnie Tape received its first workshop production in December 2010, in San Marcos, TX, at Texas State University's gallery opening, *Dénouement* (Mary Mikel Stump, producer) as well as the Nice or Nasty, Big or Little Play Festival (Jeremy Torres, producer).

The Marnie Tape received its world premiere at Transit Artist Residency Warehouse in March 2011, in San Antonio, TX. The production, *Rewound: A Night* Directed by Kellen Stanley, featured a double bill of *The Marnie Tape*, a play written by Stanley and *Krapp's Last Tape*, written by Samuel Beckett; the set design was by Kellen Stanley, the lighting and sound design was by Jessica Quazi, the music was written by Barry Walker and Faith Delphi, and the musicians were Barry Walker on electric guitar and lap steel and Jeremy White on accordion and piano.

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, the cast was as follows:

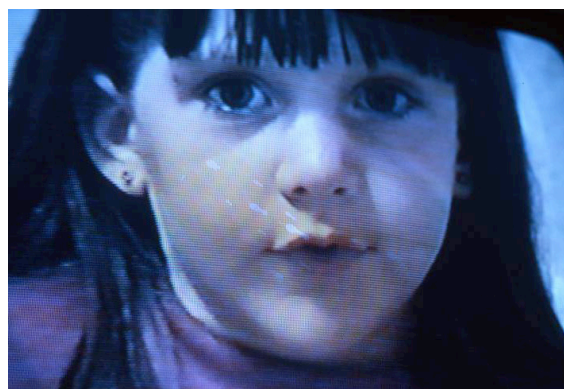
KRAPP	John Parm
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In *The Marnie Tape*, the cast was as follows:

KES	Kellen Stanley
KELLY	Kayce Kuntz
KELL	Marci Blackwell

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

Performance Photography by Topher Sipes



Installation shots of JC Mitte Art Gallery I
The Marnie VHS is looped on the television



Installation views of the set, with detail of wooden “continents.”

The set was constructed with plywood, cardboard, a screen door, mylar, Christmas lights, and dimmers. Included was a table holding the slide projector, a wicker chair for Kes to sit in, and props like cigarette boxes filled with moth balls, a pink headband, a VHS camcorder, with others.



Pre-show sound and lighting checks



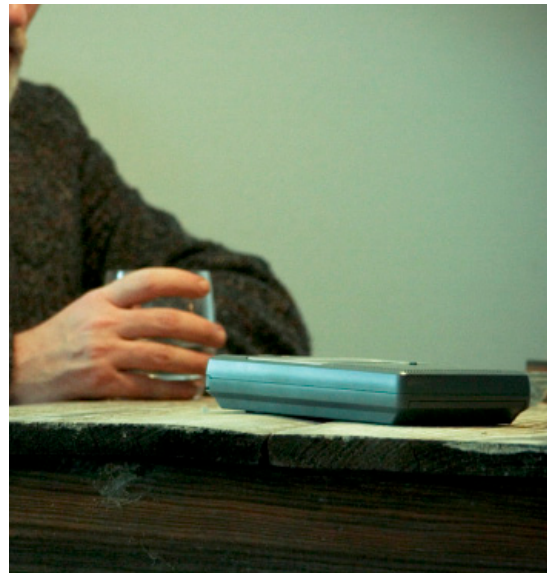
Jessica at her sound playback and
lighting dimmers station
(*left*).



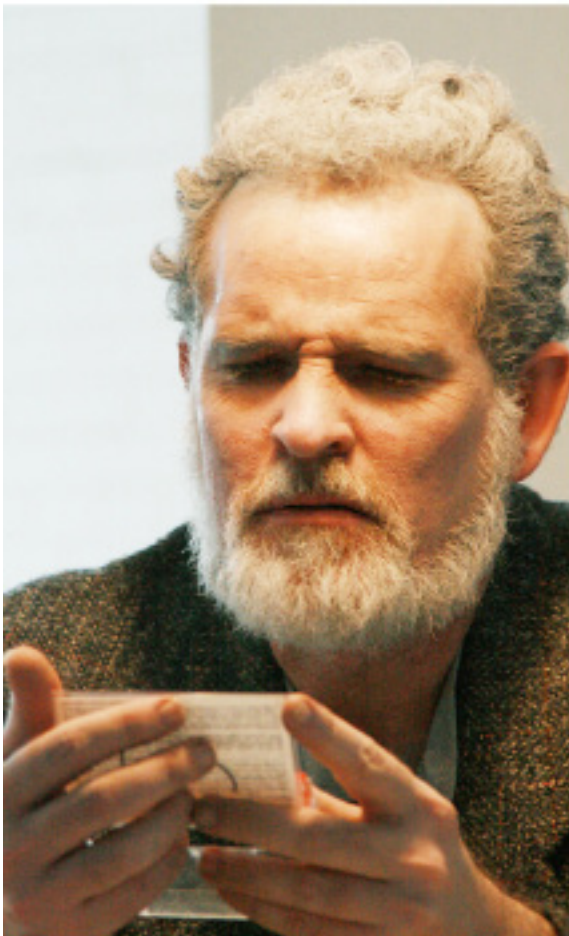
The out-of-tune piano for *Marnie*
(*above*).

Barry and Jeremy watching
Krapp for musical cues
(*below*).





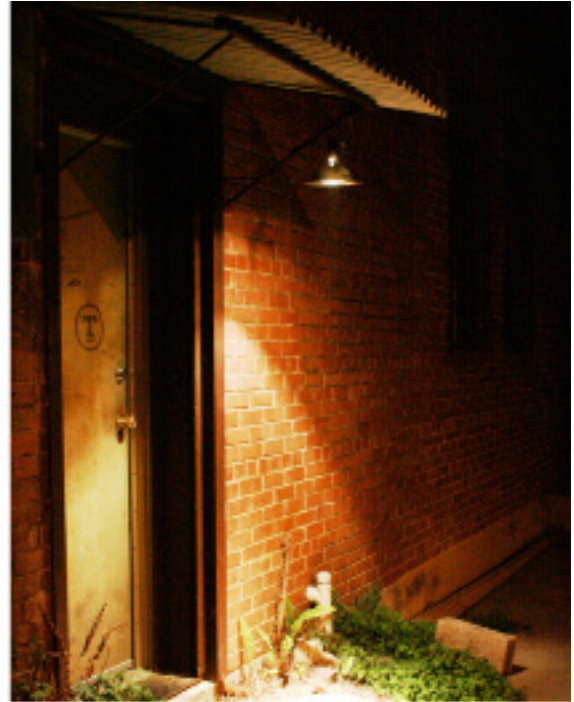
Krapp listening back to his birthday tapes,
as if they are distant, other selves.



Close-ups of Krapp



Krapp, enveloped in his past selves, his fading, recorded memory.



INTERMISSION: *The Marnie VHS* plays on Krapp's bookshelf in transit to *The Marnie Tape* (top left). The entrance to Transit (top right). The Marnie VHS is projected in a corner of gallery walls (bottom).



(*top*) Kes' silhouette enters through the screen door; (*bottom-right*) An installation view of the yellow clamp light; (*bottom-left*): Kelly and Kell's first vignette.



Kell, clinging to the towel like a faded memory.



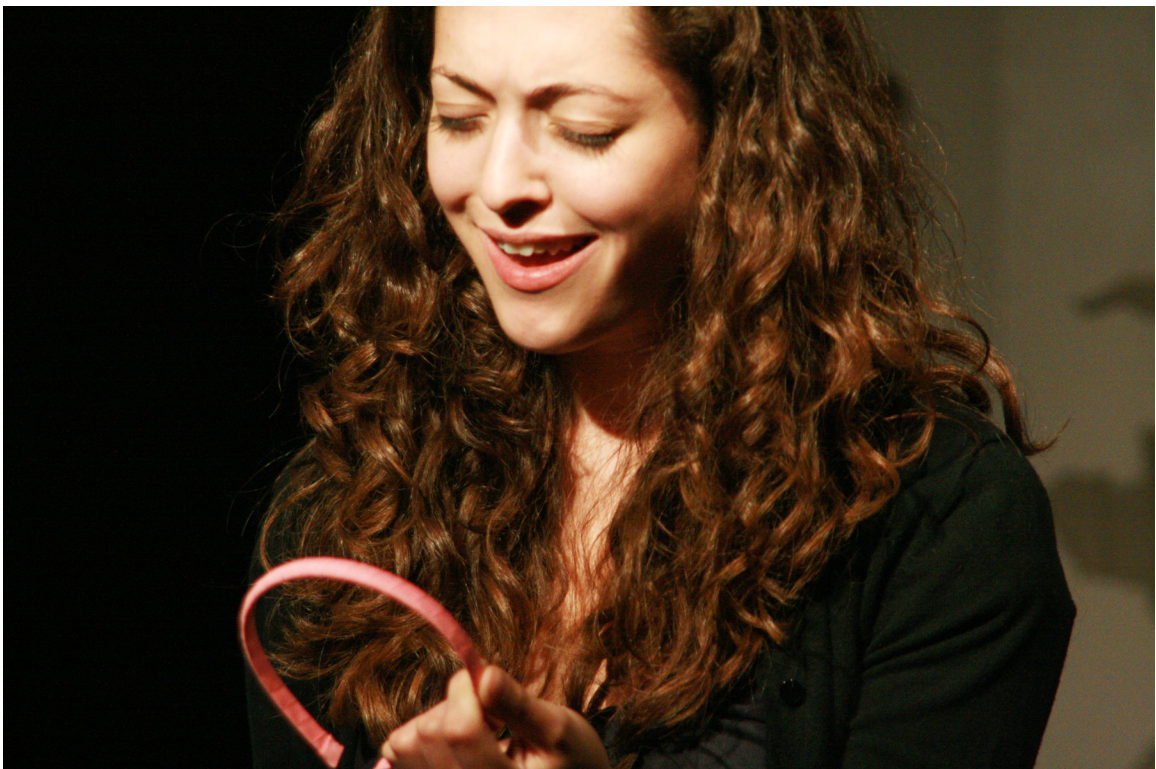
The performance played with sensory components, like (*top*) Kelly spraying a woodsy, rainy scent throughout the audience after the “Multnomah Falls” line. (*bottom*): The lighting changes to a water-like hue as Kell recites her water molecule “falling forty feet to the ground” line.



(*Top close-up*): Kelly presents a cigarette box that smells of moth balls to Kell; (*Bottom*): Kelly and Kell share Arby's curly fries to each other and the audience, but not to Kes.



(left and bottom): Kell interacts with the headband during the Marnie Tape vignette; (below): Kelly records with the VHS camera as Kell transforms into a four-year old girl

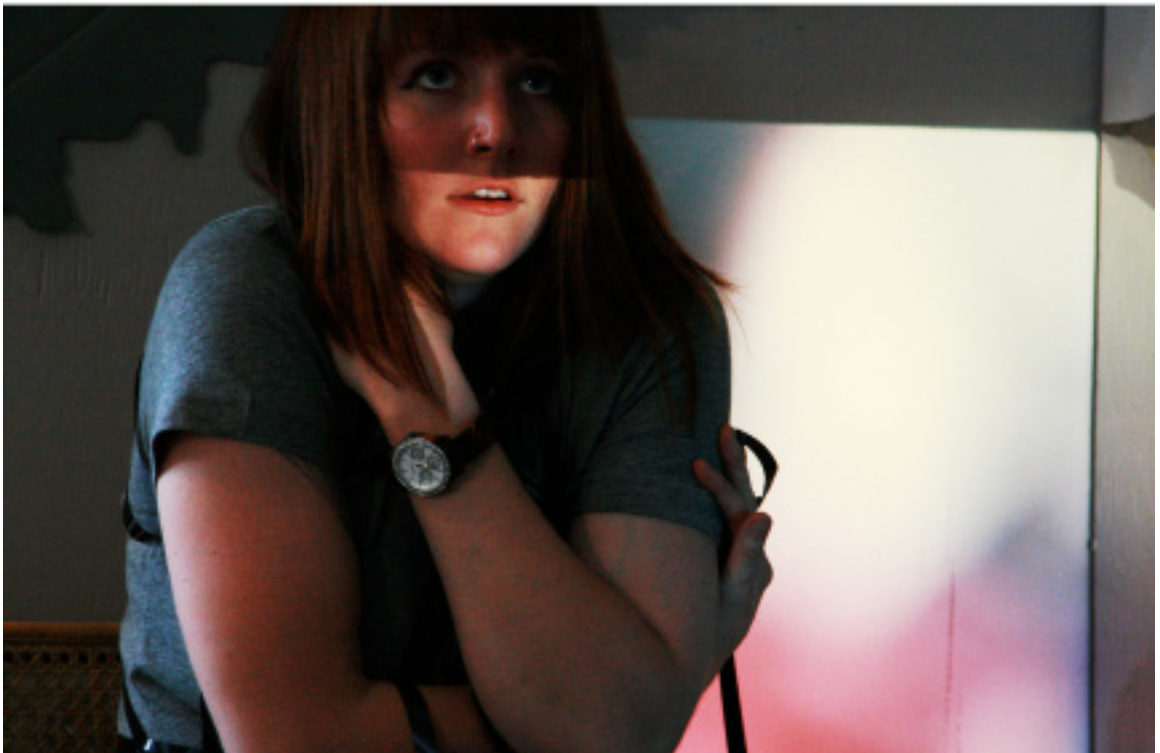




Top: Kell switches the slides through television stills of the Marnie VHS, getting more blurry and distorted. *Bottom:* Kes looks at a projection of her four-year old self staring back at her.



Kell exits. Kes begins to wrap herself in the tape. The music and audio playback begins to distort and grow louder.



Kes takes a breath after she wraps herself in VHS tape.



Kes is faced with the image her four-year-old self blurred and projected on top of her. She grasps the tape like it were a tangible memory. This is the last view of Kes before she exits through the screen door.

ARTIST STATEMENT

The Marnie Tape began in 1990. I was a four-year old toddler, painfully shy and still learning how to put sentences together. To this day, I can't recall how it happened, but somehow I babbled a ten-minute monologue in front of my cousin and VHS camera. Despite my shyness, the camera turned on and I transformed. I had to tell a story, a story of a childhood friend, Marnie... a story that I'd never remember without the record of the Marnie tape.

Fast-forward twenty years to 2010. I picked up the Marnie Tape to photograph stills of my childhood, and the tape began to reveal how poignant this documentation is to my existence. The Marnie Tape shows a fragment of myself being a child; it is a physical, tangible remnant that I can rewind, pause, and play back. The tape also represents my existence beyond me, as an object. I began writing a stage play around the narrative of the Marnie tape to make the object as memory even more concrete. I craved more; I wanted actors to replay past experiences in front of me as a sensory experience. Yet, the more I wanted the recollection intimate and three-dimensional, the more it distorted and blurred—it became further away from the actual object of the tape. In a sense, I am commenting on the distortion, and furthermore, what truth lies in a remnant of memory. I also am creating a narrative out of a past experience of mine—specifically, past experiences that wouldn't exist without the technologies that documented them. By physically blurring the memory, the act of the performance tells me something of longing and desire.

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APPENDICIES

REFERENCE

The Marnie Tape by Kellen Stanley. Script.

PROMOTION / PRESS

Poster Design for *The Marnie Tape*. Artwork by Kellen Stanley.

E-Blast and Program Design for *Rewound*. Artwork by Libby Morris.

Internet Press for CAM: Contemporary Art Month from San Antonio Current (March 2011).

Internet Press for Transit and the hosting of *Rewound*.

VIDEO

Documentation compilation includes *Rewound: A Night Directed by Kellen Stanley*, performed in March of 2011 at Transit, in three acts:

ACT ONE: *Krapp's Last Tape* (26:25), with Intermission // Marnie VHS (2:06)

ACT TWO: The Marnie VHS, edited (8:11)

ACT THREE: *The Marnie Tape* (20:32)

BONUS FEATURE: *Rewound*—The Marnie Mash-Up (6:48)

Edited by Kellen Stanley. Total Running Time = 64:02. DVD.



THE MARNIE TAPE


THESIS PERFORMANCE

DIRECTED & WRITTEN BY
KELLEN STANLEY
WWW.KELLENSTANLEY.BLOGSPOT.COM

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R E W O U N D



KRAPP'S LAST TAPE

directed by kellen stanley
written by samuel beckett
krapp performed by john parm

THE MARNIE TAPE

directed and written by kellen stanley
kelly performed by kayce kuntz
kell performed by marci blackwell
kes performed by kellen stanley

LIVE MUSICAL SUPPORT BY

barry walker on guitar and lap steel
jeremy white on accordion and piano

LIVE AUDIO PLAYBACK AND LIGHTING

performed by jessica quazi

SPECIAL THANKS

grant jacobson and the restless wind
john spain and ktsw 89.9
jason reed, john hood, jeremy o. torres,
roger colombik, and ben ruggiero

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Saturday, Mar 26, 7:00 pm - 9:30 pm

On the nights of **REWOUND: a night directed by Kellen Stanley**, Transit will be hosting a double-bill, the first play being an edited rendition of *Krapp's Last Tape* written by Samuel Beckett, followed by *The Marnie Tape* written by Kellen Stanley. Both plays reference technology's ability to document our lives has started to also change our perspective regarding memory. There will also be an projected installation of the actual *Marnie Tape* to be viewed during intermission.

The Marnie Tape is a play written, directed and produced by Kellen Stanley. It has been performed events, including a play festival and a senior thesis exhibition at Texas State University. "Marnie Tape" references a VHS tape of Kellen as a four year old talking about an old friend, Marnie. The discovering of this tape inspired *The Marnie Tape*, a play performed as a direct interpretation on memory.

It is a multi-media installation performance utilizing image projection, recorded audio playback, live musician and actors all inspiring audience participation. The VHS video plays an important role as it is quoted and played back as audio clips embedded in the performance. Also in *The Marnie Tape*, are direct quotations from Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, a one-man show involving playback voice recordings that Krapp had recorded during his lifetime.

Up until this point, *The Marnie Tape* performance has only been half-understood being that it has never been played alongside *Krapp's Last Tape* or the *Marnie Tape* VHS recording. We hope as *The Marnie Tape* last live performance having all of the integral components in a single space it will complete this all sensory performance for the viewer and the artist.

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Visual art

CAM: Rewound: a night directed by Kellen Stanley

Friday, March 25 at doors at 7pm, curtain at 7:30pm
(Also on 3/26 at doors at 7pm, curtain at 7:30pm)




Critic's Pick

Memory, technology, and documentation are crucial to both Krapp's Last Tape (Samuel Beckett's one-act, one-man play from 1958) and The Marnie Tape (an evolving thesis project by San Marcos-based artist Kellen Stanley), which act as two sides of a strange coin in Rewound: a night directed by Kellen Stanley. Internal dialogue and self-reflection also unite the two plays, which employ tapes to re-examine symbolic moments from the past. Presented as complementary works in one "double bill theatrical performance with sensory components," Stanley's Contemporary Art Month offering incorporates live actors and musicians as well as projections and recorded playback. \$7, doors at 7pm, curtain at 7:30pm Wed, Mar 23; Thu, Mar 25; and Fri, Mar 26; TRANSIT: a cooperative for artists in transition, 1907 S St. Mary's, (210) 464-7822, transitsa@me.com, contemporaryartmonth.com.

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About

Transit is a cooperative space for supporting contemporary artists.

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Transit: A Cooperative for Artists in Transition

Non-Profit Organization



Basic Information

Founded

2011, Summer

About

Transit is a cooperative space for supporting contemporary artists.

Company Overview

We are located at

1807 South St. Mary's

San Antonio, Texas 78210

Email

transit@me.com

Mission

Transit is a cooperative space for supporting contemporary artists. Our goal is to encourage artists to grow in the passage between the undergraduate degree and their next project. We focus on providing them with a sense of pride in community, collaboration, and collective creativity.

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REWOUND: a night directed by Kellen Stanley

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Time

Wednesday, March 23 at 8:00pm - March 25 at 8:30pm

Location

TRANSIT: a cooperative for artists in transition
1807 South St. Mary's
San Antonio, TX

Created by

Transit: A Cooperative for Artists in Transition

More Info

SAVE THE DATED

Opening Night: March 23rd, doors at 8, show at 8:30
Also March 24th and 25th
Tickets are \$7

We will be having two performances directed by Kellen Stanley. A double bill. If you will, Kasper's Last Tape written by Samuel Beckett and The Marine Tapes written by Kellen Stanley.

THE THEATRE event will be out to 1804, possibly. There'll not/soon for everyone to...

BVP at transit@me.com and then pay at the door.

Bar/Gr, Contemporary Art Show - food

-TRANSIT.

+ Select Causes to Invite

41 Attending See All

 John Spill
  Heather White
  Jenny Torres
  Dennis Ledone
  Gabriel Santiago
  Oster Ray Langendorf
  Gerald
  Brenda Stanley

The Marnie Tape in all its entirety (the images, video, recordings, script, characters, photographic series, and memories) is absolutely, positively

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