

5-2012

Creating Self: A Theatrical Exploration of Identity

Beth D. Templeton

Buffalo State College, templebd01@mail.buffalostate.edu

Advisor

Dr. Cyndi Burnett

To learn more about the International Center for Studies in Creativity and its educational programs, research, and resources, go to <http://creativity.buffalostate.edu/>.

Recommended Citation

Templeton, Beth D., "Creating Self: A Theatrical Exploration of Identity" (2012). *Creative Studies Graduate Student Master's Projects*. Paper 160.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/creativeprojects>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

Creating Self: A Theatrical Exploration of Identity

A Project in
Creative Studies

by

Beth Donohue Templeton

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2012

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

Creating Self: A Theatrical Exploration of Identity

A Project in
Creative Studies

By

Beth Donohue Templeton

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2012

Dates of Approval:

Dr. Cyndi Burnett
Assistant Professor

Beth Donohue Templeton
Candidate

Creating Self: A Theatrical Exploration of Identity

by

Beth Donohue Templeton

An Abstract of a Project

in

Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2012

Buffalo State College
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

This project explores the relationship between creativity and identity, specifically as they interact through artistic practice. Using research into theater, gender, identity, and creative impulse a performance piece was developed for the stage. The piece used text, improvisational and written music as well as scripted and improvised speech to explore five major area of the human experience. The first iteration of the project culminated in an invitation to stage workshop performances at a local theater and work continues on the development of the piece. While the research focused on questioning the creative impulse of others, the art making revealed that the richest answers could be discovered through looking inward. The delicate balance of engagement and observation that ensued allowed a unique look into creativity, identity, and art through the unexpected lens of my own experience.

Keywords: Creativity, theater, music, improvisation, performance

Beth Donohue Templeton

Date

Acknowledgements

For the opportunity to work on a project that is as terrifying as it is inspiring, I owe a great debt of thanks to many people. Please know that if I name you here, it is with the utmost gratitude and respect. If I have forgotten to list your name here, where it will be preserved, digitally, until such time as it is not, it does not mean that I am any less grateful. Or that your name is not, forever, written upon my heart.

To Dr. Cyndi Burnett, advisor, professor, inspiration and friend, you were the unspoken idea that finally got said and the fire beneath my feet, Dr. John Cabra, who turned assessments into understanding with a gentle patience as unwavering as his determination and Dr. Gerard Puccio, who answered my original e-mail and invited me onto a transformational path of discovery, thank you.

To Chris Brandjeis, actor, teacher, collaborator and friend, I am grateful for the discussion, the feedback, the “aha!” moments and your part in the generation and continued development of this project. To Jackie Albarella, a true and loyal friend, who is as generous with her design talents as she is with her time and to my many cast-mates this year, who allowed me to bounce ideas off of them, ask questions and generally monopolize dressing room conversations in favor of creative inquiry, thank you.

The project itself will be dedicated, as are all of my performances, to my husband and our children. You are the connection, the question, the impulse, the joy. It has been a deep and powerful experience exploring creativity with you and around you. Brian, your focused work on the music only deepens my respect for you as a performer and a partner. Family is a touchstone for everything that is good and true and theater is the communication of the complexities of being human. Working at the intersection of the two has been a powerful and joyful experience.

Table of Contents

Section One: Background to the Project.....	1
Section Two: Pertinent Literature and Resources.....	5
Section Three: Process Plan.....	11
Section Four: Outcomes.....	18
Section Five: Key Learnings.....	22
Section Six: Conclusion.....	27
Appendix A: Concept Paper.....	32
Appendix B: Script.....	45
Appendix C: Light Plot.....	52
Appendix D: Video Palette.....	54

Section One: Background to the Project

Purpose and Description of Project

Embarking on an exploration into creativity and identity was like jumping into a wide and deep pool of individual experience and using the various swirls and waves as an instruction manual as I tried to learn how everyone manages to swim. I grabbed the life raft of theater, wiped the water from my eyes and was treated to a shower of rainbows as the sun hit the water. I wanted to know how the creative impulse is translated from hint or intuition or inspiration to a form that communicates to the public at large. Studying individual creative processes and the creation of personal identity and relationship to creativity through arts practice might uncover new thinking around the study of creativity. Breaking down the elements of creative practice in the arts could provide a peek behind the curtain of mysterious “artistic” work and create new understanding about creativity and our place within it. Having worked as an actor for the last twenty-five years, I benefit from having developed a deep knowledge of theatrical context, and I felt that any study of creative practice in the arts would best begin in the theater. Building upon this idea, I decided to develop a skill I had not yet developed within my artistic domain, and one which I had long wanted to explore: I would create a solo performance as the culmination of my research into creativity and identity.

“Question,” “Cabaret,” “Communication,” “Language,” “Music,” “Other,” “Self.” These words emerged from my card sort as I was grappling with the qualities I wanted in my Master’s Project. After a round of converging with hits, I decided to evaluate the measure of importance

each word held in my mind. What emerged from the sort were qualities and intention. I wanted to create an environment of authentic questioning, without imposing the questions. The project would be composed of parable, ritual and music. I would trace out an exploration of identity within and of creativity. I would use creativity itself, whatever definition I synthesized out of the many nuanced definitions I had encountered, to trace the development of identity. My stage would be the stage and my context, theatrical with a dark underpinning of cabaret and some Brechtian alienation so things wouldn't get too sentimental. I didn't have a desire to teach, I wanted to invoke. Instead of inform, I wanted to engage my audience and tease out their own need to know. But how to do this? And to what end?

I incubated on the simplest act of theater: ritual. I brainstormed the myriad rituals that exist in our modern lives and generated challenge statements: "How to best explore creativity through ritual?" "In what ways might I create an interesting piece of theater about creative identity?" "How might I use the theatrical medium to invoke a reflection on personal creativity?" An idea emerged from this process that seemed a solid first step: madness. If Ritual/order was on one end of the spectrum, then Madness/chaos must be on the other end. I would explore the link between creativity and madness. I would research eminent "Creatives" and their stereotyped reputations of madness and develop text around their relationship to their own creativity. I would explore depictions of the struggle between madness and creativity in some classic works of theater and through music and sound and see what emerged from it. Could our own creative identity be subject to this scale? Is part of the process of developing our own creative identity, finding our place on this scale? And what about the individual human experience? Is there a relationship between classic plays that seem to touch an inner landscape so intimate it feels shocking, and the personal struggle to forge our sense of self through creativity? Words have

been written that touch the emotions in such a way that the speaker seems to be channeling some universal knowledge and touching the essence of what it means to be human. I embarked upon a journey to find the intersection of some of these words with madness, ritual and the act of creating self.

Rationale for selection

What contribution would this exercise make to the field of creativity? In many ways the project itself was the answer to this question. In the beginning, the best determination I could make was that I “felt” it would be worthwhile; that it might uncover truths about creativity, identity and art making that could be useful to others. In addition, I hoped that the performance itself would provide a catharsis to the viewer. That, through the viewing, she or he might uncover their own questions and, through this challenge, emerge changed to some degree. Such a transformation is demonstrated through Daniel Coyle’s concept of deep practice in his book: *The Talent Code* (2009), the difficult challenges presented to Brazilian soccer playing youth as they trained in the inner-city, indoor, game of “futsal,” (Portuguese for “soccer in the room”) was a driving force in their development into a nation of soccer champions. Through the struggle of playing a similar game with a smaller, heavier ball, smaller teams and in a cramped concrete space, the youth developed amazing physical dexterity and skill. When they transferred these skills to the wide expanse of a regulation field and larger teams, their ability to handle the ball and escape from impossible situations in play became incredibly difficult to beat (Coyle, 2009, p. 25-27). Applying this theory to the audience, we present them with a theatrical piece that does not offer to narrate their thoughts, but simply invites them to think and engage in some questioning or reflection. Engagement with this type of presentation might result in a deeper experience at the theater. I intended to create an aesthetically and aurally pleasing experience

that elegantly explores identity and creativity through theater. The plan of how to accomplish this task evolved as I worked on my own deep practice around applied creativity skills. Creative Problem Solving was my guide in uncovering my own questions as well as my compass as I continued my research and development of the piece. Theater, the medium that is closest to my heart and in which I have worked for many years proved to be a rich context for applied creativity practice. My passion for and trust in this art form fueled this “without a net” jump into the very essence of the creative self. I am excited to continue work on this project after the initial phase of performances and audience feedback is complete.

Section Two: Pertinent Literature and Resources:

Introduction

I turned to a variety of resources, text and other, in my research around creativity, identity and arts practice. Various articles and books about creativity, arts practice and theater criticism formed the basis for my exploration. Musical resources, video and interviews with art makers fleshed out my research as I synthesized the data into a performance piece fit for public consumption. The following are a list of resources that were instrumental in shaping the direction and final execution of the performance piece. What began as an inkling of an idea took shape through the information and guidance of the texts, music and individuals described below.

Literature

Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to the social psychology of creativity*.

Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

An update to the author's 1983 book: *The social psychology of creativity*, Amabile explored the meaning and measurement of creativity, including a chapter dealing with the consensual assessment of artistic creativity. This book was pertinent to my work with its deep exploration of creativity, psychology and society.

Banning, Y. (2005). Embodied selves: Ritual, relationships and identity in theatre production: An ethnographic case study of Dance in the shadow of pain. *South African Theatre Journal*, 19, 72-91.

This article, authored by a professor at the University of Cape Town, detailed her study of three students in the "theatre professions" at the University and their work with a prominent director and faculty member to create a theater piece around the subject of

HIV in their communities. This article opened my eyes to the power and universality of ritual in theater and shaped a strand of my research.

Buckley, P. (2005). Creativity and the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre. *Theatre Topics*, 15(1), 41-47. doi: 10.1353/tt.2005.0005

Buckley wrote about observing the group creative practice of students at the world-renowned Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, in Blue Lake, Humboldt County, California. He dissects the process of group-directed scene creation and rehearsal and draws out anecdotal data that was used in my attempt to better understand creativity in a theatrical context.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. New York, NY: BasicBooks.

Csikszentmihalyi deeply explored how people became so engaged in a process that they experienced a sense of timelessness within a feeling of being totally connected with the task at hand. He dissects the “in the zone” experience with psychological data and empirical evidence. This close look into a fleeting and hard to predict experience was valuable to my exploration into the creative impulse in the execution phase.

Dewey, A., Steinberg, H., & Coulson, M. (1998). Conditions in which British artists achieve their best work. *Creativity Research Journal*, 11(4), 275-282.

This study was a fascinating look into the environments that are most (or least) conducive to making art. The study looked at Visual Artists and their practice in Britain and provided an interesting perspective on modern art making that deepened my reflection on my own artistic process.

Fichlander, Z. (1998). Gender, creativity and power. *American Theater*, 15(7), 30-34.

The author wrote from a place of experience about gender, identity and power and was often included in books about influential female stage directors and feminist theater. Her exploration into these themes as a director, theater intellectual and woman was valuable as I explored these questions in my own work.

Fletcher, J. (2003). Women and oaths in Euripides. *Theatre Journal*, 55(1), 29-44. doi: 10.1353/tj.2003.0020

This fascinating article used the plots of three tragedies by Euripides: Medea, Hippolytus and Iphigenia at Aulis to explore the power of language and oath in elevating female characters into positions of great influence (for better or worse) over male characters. The Medea, specifically her monologue to all women, delivered close to the beginning of the play, figured prominently in the exploration of creativity and identity in my piece.

Garner, S. N., & Sprengnether, M. (1996). *Shakespearean tragedy and gender*. Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.

This book was a collection of essays of theater criticism that explored Shakespearean tragedy from a variety of perspectives, including feminist. The role of women in the action as well as their marginalization in the denouement of the tragic play figured prominently in the discussion. This exploration allowed me to make connections between theory and Constance's monologue railing against being called mad in Shakespeare's King John, which was featured in my project.

Huss, R. (1986). *The mindscapes of art: Dimensions of the psyche in fiction, drama, and film*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

This book used theater as a metaphor, describing the "aesthetic detachment" from daily life provided by theater and its role in revealing truth about our place in society and relationship to ourselves. The author's intended audience included theater practitioners, psychiatrists, sociologists and philosophers and the book provided a study of art making from a distinctly humanist perspective and contributed to my exploration of identity and art making.

Maslow, A. H. (1998). *Toward a psychology of being*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Maslow's writings on being-cognition and self-actualization must be included in any well-researched exploration into creativity and identity. His work was specifically helpful in my exploration of how an individual might further develop identity through creative practice.

Novy, M. (1990). *Women's re-visions of Shakespeare: On the responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H.D., George Eliot, and others*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Shakespeare's legacy as a creator of strong roles for women is thoroughly examined and tested in this collection of essays by female writers. This rumination on Shakespeare's work and the place of the female within it added depth to my discussion of gender and identity within theater.

Sawyer, R. K. (2003). *Group creativity: Music, theater, collaboration*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Sawyer's work looked at group creativity in practice in musical and theatrical collaborations. Although he limits his exploration in theater to improvisational group performance, his writing on the dynamics of live performance and the actor/spectator relationship deepened my own research on group creativity in theater.

Weissman, P. (1965). *Creativity in the theater; A psychoanalytic study*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

This book was selected because of its examination of creativity and theater making as well as the chapters on personality characteristics and motivating factors. Weissman viewed the theater practitioner through the complex lens of psychoanalytic study. His chapters on the actor, Jungian archetypes, and exhibitionistic tendencies proved fruitful in my research on identity.

Wilshire, B. W. (1982). *Role playing and identity: The limits of theatre as metaphor*. Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.

This book also looked at the creative individual in the theater from a psychoanalytic point of view. It examined the psychology of the actor, director and playwright as well as picked apart the inner mental workings of archetypal characters in classic plays. Wilshire's use of Greek tragedy and ritual as a lens through which to view the modern creative individual resonated with my own work.

Music (a representative selection)

Lotte Lenya sings Kurt Weill American theatre songs. Songs from The threepenny opera and Cabaret. [CD]. (1999). Sony Classical.

Massive Attack collected [CD]. (2006). EMI.

PJ Harvey - Let England Shake - YouTube. (n.d.). *YouTube - Broadcast Yourself*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2Q1b0qFLFE>

Vitamin String Quartet performs Radiohead's In rainbows [CD]. (2009). Vitamin Records.

Key People

- Catherine Eaton, actor and creator of a one-woman show using only lines spoken by female characters in Shakespeare plays. Catherine generously sent me the latest version of her show, under a strict confidentiality agreement as it is in soft pre-production for a film. We communicated by e-mail throughout the process of creating my piece.
- Amy Frasier, an actor and creator of a theater piece exploring creativity in time. Amy offered insight, encouragement, feedback and advice through phone and e-mail communication.
- Various actors, musicians, readers and technical crew had a hand in reviewing the script and offering feedback and ideas for collaboration.

Classic Works (a representative sample)

- *The Medea*, Euripides
- *King John*, Shakespeare
- *Mother Courage and her Children*, Brecht
- *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky
- *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekov

Section Three: Process Plan

“Is the chemical aftertaste the reason why people eat hot dogs, or is it some kind of bonus? “

-Neil Gaiman

I came upon this quote as I was researching a piece of text for performance, and it struck me as a comment on the condition of being human that was equally funny and poignant. The quote resonated in my head as I assembled the puzzle pieces of my final script, and embraced the ambiguity of an improvisational performance woven into the written words. It became my mantra as I struggled to remember that humor and playfulness were an important part of the creative process as I strained to re-infuse them into my practice. Finally, it became the title of my piece, as I realized that the probing, questioning play of my imagination had evolved into a deconstructed meditation on being human. The process plan of this exploration into creativity and identity was one of improvisation steeped in specific ideas developed from the initial research phase. Research was conducted around ritual, creativity and identity using current articles and books. Additional data was gathered from interviews with modern theater-makers, musicians and creativity professionals. A look back to classic plays that spoke to universal truths formed another strand of research, one that was instrumental in shaping the apex of each scene or section of the script. Scenes were centered on a single idea framed by a classic monologue. A third strand of research involved a deeper look into music and improvisational performance. Music formed a central theme in the piece and both improvised and written music played an integral part in performance. After the research phase, the performance team was assembled. The team consisted of one actor who also doubled as a musician, a composer and a bass guitarist.

Technical artists involved in the project included a videographer and lighting designer, and a director. Throughout the research, development and implementation stages of this project, I used Creative Problem Solving processes and tools to tackle challenges I encountered with options and direction. The CPS tools “hits” and “card sort” were both instrumental in crafting the initial idea and direction for this project. I also worked with divergent and convergent tools as the project continued.

To begin the process of writing the script for this performance piece about creativity and identity, I first explored definitions of creativity, of which there are many. Some evaluated creative merit through the lens of “product” such as Mumford’s definition “creativity involves the production of new and useful products”(2003, p. 5). Others looked to define creativity as an individual process and capacity. Inspired by the “person” definition of creativity, which seemed to me the closest to exploring elements of the actual creative process, I wanted to explore this individualistic lens with the piece. I began researching classic texts that spoke to an individual’s relationship to something larger than self. In many exemplary texts and poems, the primary way this relationship is expressed is through love. Romantic love is a powerful theme, and many aspects of human-ness are affected by its presence. One of the first pieces I selected was the last stanza of Euripides’ *Orpheus and Eurydice*. I felt it should go somewhere within the center of the piece and be a softly glowing tale that would be followed as a traditional narrative. Simultaneously, the text would be held up for examination from a different perspective as it would be spoken over original music that was partially improvised during live performance. After I put these two elements together, ideas began to flow. I read many groundbreaking plays, from Shakespeare to Genet to Brecht and was insatiably curious about poetry. When I had collected enough text to explore the themes of duty, romantic love, filial/maternal love, work and

death, I turned to an instrument I hadn't played in at least five years, my viola, and I began, hesitantly, to make music.

While the research on creativity, performance and identity as well as the text selection and writing were a processes I engaged in alone, the creation of the body and soul of the piece was to be a group effort. At this point, I re-read some of my earlier research on improvisational performance focusing on both the performance and social scientist perspectives. Keith Johnstone's *Impro* (1987) and R. Keith Sawyer's *Creativity in performance* (1997) each provided unique views of improvisational action and relationship. Moving forward, I assembled my performance team: a musician, a videographer/lightening designer, and a director. The composition process came next. This was, and continues to be, the aspect of this whole effort that terrifies me most. I had invested in an electronic viola at the start of the project and I began to experiment with sounds as my music partner created elaborate canvases out of rhythm and melody. After he brought each transition to a certain point, we would put the music on my phone and I would go about my day, listening to the tracks over and over until I felt sufficiently familiar with them. We would then get together for writing sessions where I would improvise with him, write and record viola parts and vocal elements for each piece. Since my partner musician was also my husband, writing sessions would sometimes happen spontaneously, usually occurring with our children in the same room. This provided a rich environment for idea generation, as we were always familiar with context if one were to randomly blurt out an idea for the piece without any prior conversation. In addition, this practice infused my home with constant creative energy, which I saw reflected in the children's behavior. The children would build, draw or just listen while we were writing music or sometimes grab toy instruments and join. The composition process was challenging as my confidence as a musician was extremely

low, and I had never written a musical part. I tended to avoid risk when composing, which was antithetical to creating an original piece, and sometimes I just avoided writing altogether. The constant collaboration of my partner musician, as well as the sense of fearlessness with which our children approached making music bolstered me in my lowest moments. In the end, we created three pieces of original music that are used throughout the piece. Simultaneously with the music composition, I began to explore the idea of group voices, text deconstruction and soundscape. This led me to the Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble (BPSE). Describing themselves as: “a cooperatively run ensemble of actors, singers and musicians dedicated to the exploration of non-linear and improvisational forms of narrative”, their artistic director is a colleague from the theater and was intrigued when I described the project in our dressing-room conversations. I had a wonderful “Aha!” moment here as I imagined an ensemble of four actors creating an improvised soundscape under certain sections and exploring others through their unique gestural language. It felt completely right to present the nuances of being human with performers who were extremely curious about the manipulation of words and sound and entirely fearless in performance. I had two meetings, one with the Artistic director, during which we discussed the concept and brainstormed ways of collaborating and, the other with the AD and the company, where I explained the underlying questions of the script and the ideas I wished to explore through live performance. Before the first rehearsal of the script with music, I revised several sections to add the Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble into the mix. A tolerance for ambiguity was very necessary at this point, as I turned entire scripted sections into the stage direction “BPSE improvises here” and added sections in which the BPSE improvised around a single word or phrase. With the revised script (**Appendix B**), the music, and an invitation to be part of the BPSE’s evening of experimental theater at the New Phoenix Theater (Buffalo, NY) later that

spring, it was time to bring the lighting designer/videographer into the production. The designer involved was Jackie Albarella, a multimedia artist, theater professional and friend. Jackie had been incubating on the ideas and execution of the piece and gave me the light plot (**Appendix C**) and tentative palette of video images that would be played on screens upstage during performance (**Appendix D**).

The final element that came into the creative process was the director. As the piece was imagined, written and “unwritten” by me, I felt the best directorial option would be consultancy. I wanted an experienced, objective eye to work with the cast and musician before the workshop performance, but in a limited fashion. Chris Kelly, a longtime collaborator and award-winning director offered to be that eye. The final ingredient I added to the soup was humor. As I approached the most involved and risky part of the process, rehearsal, I began to mentally compose bizarre reviews and to picture humorously puzzled audience reactions to the performance. To poke fun at myself, some of these sanity-saving efforts will appear in the promotional poster.

The final play, *Bonus chemical aftertaste: A word and sound cabaret* is an exploration of identity through both the everyday and sacred experiences of being human. The work is shaped into five movements, each dealing with a different aspect of the human experience. Exploration takes place through the utilization of classic text, poem, text deconstructions, improvised ensemble-based soundscapes and written and improvised music. It explores the rhythms and dissonance of being human and is a way into reflection on identity in many modes. When I set out to create a performance piece that would engage the audience in questioning of and reflection on their own relationship to creativity, I imagined I would subject others to a great deal of questioning. Instead, I feel that I have gone much deeper into my own creativity, mining it for

new passion and purpose and reflecting on, in some ways for the first time, theater, art and my own creating self.

Project Timeline:

January 30th- February 13th	Concept paper	10 hours
January 30th- February 28th	Research: including readings, videos of live performances, interviews with theater makers and other artists and musicians.	40 hours
Feb 28- March 9th	Assemble performance team and create schedule for improvisation rehearsals.	10 hours
March 9th- March 16th	<p>Improvisations conducted with performance team on music, original language and text excerpts from classic plays and literature. Improvisational rehearsal will be conducted with the following goals in mind:</p> <p>Create outline for final performance piece</p> <p>Assemble materials (instruments, visuals)</p> <p>Devise balance between improvised and scripted material</p>	20 hours (this includes rehearsal with team and individual reflection and revision)
March 17th- March 24th	Create first draft of final piece	10 hours
March 24th- April 9th	Rehearse performance piece with team.	20 hours (this includes rehearsal with team and individual reflection and revision)
April 9th- 13th	Revise script	10 hours
April 14th -	Rehearse piece in final form, add technical	20 hours (this includes

April 20th	elements	rehearsal with team and individual reflection and revision)
April 17-23rd	Assemble project in final form	20 hours
April 24th-May 6th	Create 15 minute presentation of project	8 hours
May 7th	Final approved project due	N/A
	Total hours: 168	

Section Four: Outcomes

The tangible outcomes of my engagement in the process of creating a performance piece were three-fold. Through my research, writing and creative collaboration with musicians and theater artists, I have produced a script that is developed to the point where it can be rehearsed, revised and rewritten in anticipation of performance. Second, my musical partner and I have developed three compositions that are ready to incorporate into the performance of the text. The third outcome of this process was the robust collaboration I enjoyed with various theater artists, including the Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble, Jackie Albarella, a talented lighting designer and Chris Kelly, an insightful and creative theater director. The fruits of this collaborative effort will be shared in a public performance of *Bonus Chemical Aftertaste* at the New Phoenix Theater in Buffalo NY.

The Script

The research and writing period of this project culminated in a script that examines the experience of being human through interpretations and deconstructions of classic text from theater, fiction and poetry. The words are performed in a variety of ways, including being spoken over music, performed in song, and rearranged through improvisation. The goal, in performance, is to offer audience members a way in to reflection on their own feelings and experience through a buffet of images and sound. An excerpt of the script appears below.

Bonus chemical aftertaste: A word and sound cabaret

Projection 1 Title:

“Bonus Chemical Aftertaste: Being Human in Sound and Word”

Projection 2:

“We walk even now in constant vulnerability, which is usually felt only peripherally and unacknowledgeably...” (Wilshire, 1982, p.119)

Projection 3:

“From the cradle to the coffin underwear comes first. “
(Bertolt Brecht)

(Enter Beth, Brian and Members of the *Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble*)

BETH:

To begin at the beginning:

It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobblestreets silent and the hunched courters-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeback, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat-bobbing sea. The houses are blind as moles (though moles see fine to-night in the snouting, velvet dingles) or blind as Captain Cat there in the muffled middle by the pump and the town clock, the shops in mourning, the Welfare Hall in widow's weeds. And all the people of the lulled and dumbfounded town are sleeping now.”

You can hear the dew falling and the hushed town breathing.

Only *your* eyes are unclosed to see the black and folded town fast, and slow, asleep.

Listen. It is night moving in the streets, the processional salt slow musical wind in Coronation Street and Cockle Row, it is the grass growing on Llareggub Hill, dewfall, starfall, the sleep of birds in Milk Wood.

Listen. It is night in the chill, squat chapel, hymning in bonnet and brooch and bombazine black, butterfly choker and bootlace bow, coughing like nannygoats, sucking mintoes, fortywinking hallelujah; night in the four-ale quiet as a domino; in Ocky Milkman's lofts like a mouse with gloves; in Dai Bread's bakery flying like black flour. It is to-night in Donkey Street, trotting silent, with seaweed on its hooves, along the cockeled cobbles, past curtained fernpot, text and trinket,harmonium, holy dresser, watercolours done by hand, china dog and rosy tin teacaddy. It is night nedding among the snuggeries of babies.

Look. It is night, dumbly, royally winding through the Coronation cherry trees; going through the graveyard of Bethesda with winds gloved and folded, and dew doffed; tumbling by the Sailors Arms.

Time passes. Listen. Time Passes.

Come closer now. (Thomas, *Under Milkwood*, pp.1-3)

BSPE: Riff on words from above passage to create the feeling of a bustling urban environment.

MUSIC A:

(After the music is established, weave in more syllables and words of the urban soundscape. Then slowly decrease volume until one voice can be heard.)

The Music

In addition to the script, my musical collaborator and I created three pieces of music exploring the themes of the piece through rhythm and sound. Finding a way to express concrete ideas through a non-theatrical medium proved to be one of the most challenging elements of this project and I am indebted to my musical partner for weathering the storm of my creative process. To begin communicating the themes of the piece in music, I first had to establish new tools for expression. Language and gesture are the most basic and powerful of tools for the actor. It was of paramount importance that I develop equally compelling tools for communication in the unfamiliar medium of music. We experimented with soundscapes and rhythmic palettes and built each piece from the ground up. Through experimentation, I found effective tools for expression in my viola and my voice. Alternating divergent improvisational sessions with sessions of convergent thinking, we created sections of musical landscape, then evaluated each element of the piece for effectiveness. We discarded anything that failed to meet our criteria of beauty, simplicity and elegance and we shaped and re-shaped each composition until we felt it was ready for performance. An excerpt of the music is below (fig. 1).



Orpheus and Euridyce.mp3

(Figure 1. Sound excerpt from *Bonus Chemical Aftertaste*, Music A.)

The Collaboration

The third and potentially most exciting outcome of this process was the vigorous and inspiring creative collaboration that arose from its development. In the process of building the performance piece, I sought out the help of theater professionals with skills in design and direction. I knew that the piece would need video and lighting design and asked a talented friend for advice. To my delight, she offered to collaborate and, through a series of conversations and designs, she has created a lighting design (**Appendix C**) and video palette (**Appendix D**) that further the theatrical experience and explore the central themes of the piece with insightful beauty. Our work will continue as we explore the piece in a new environment and stage it for public performance. As the piece continued to grow, my involvement with it became so deep that I was no longer able to look at the elements and form with an objective eye. At that point Chris Kelly, a director equally versed in style as well as sensitivity, stepped in to provide feedback on the piece and suggestions for the staging. Chris has offered to stay with the project through our mid-May performance dates where the piece will be premiered along with a new work by the Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble, with whom I have established another robust collaborative partnership. The BPSE worked with me to deconstruct certain blocks of text and isolate important elements upon which to improvise and brought the piece to a more refined and communicative place with their work. The Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble combines a unique performance style with a gestural language that resembles an orchestra of words and ideas. Their experiments with the themes and words in the piece are responsible for a clearer, more focused final product that expresses the ideas of the piece with a power that eluded me in solo performance. I will continue to perform the piece with their involvement and support. The piece, in its current stage of development, will be performed as a workshop at the New Phoenix Theatre

in Buffalo, New York. I am thrilled to be invited to experiment, play and perform within the context of theater artists developing new and experimental work and I also greatly look forward to feedback from audience members and professional peers as part of this collaborative event. Feedback received will be folded into the rehearsal process for future iterations of the piece and will fuel its continued development. This leads me to a fourth and unexpected outcome.

The Future

A fourth outcome was the process itself and the drive to continue. This has been an outcome as well as a precious gift to me as a person and I place high value on its lasting effects. Engaging in the development of a performance piece for theater has resulted in concrete products including a script, music, and creative collaboration, that stand as a testament to the work and public record of the process. The benefits, however, extended far inward and spread slowly but thoroughly as the weeks went on. Questioning became pervasive and both joys and fears seemed amplified the further I explored this path in to creativity. Discoveries gave me courage to dig deeper and reflect as much as inquire. What I have gained in non-tangible results is worth at least equal mention with the physical, but how best to quantify something so personal? I believe the less public outcomes are best expressed by describing my key learnings.

Section Five: Key Learnings

Bonus chemical aftertaste: A word and sound cabaret, was, and continues to be one of the most terrifying and deep experiences in the discovery of my own creativity. Embarking on a

path to engage the audience, I ended up engaging myself and my own creative process in a way I had not expected. The tangible outcome was a script and ensemble performance piece well on its way to a workshop production in an established professional theater, but the intangible outcomes are equally exciting. Through engaging in this creative process, I have approached a deeper understanding of my own relationship to creativity and art making. In addition, I have developed both vulnerability and confidence, which allows me to express the products of this dynamic process.

When I began this project, I discussed my goals in a general, philosophical way. I wanted to explore the relationship between art-making and creativity by engaging my own creative self. I wanted to tease out information about the creative process through examining my own practice and apply this information to a human context larger than myself. And, perhaps most importantly, I wanted to facilitate the audience members' uncovering of questions related to their own creativity. In many ways, this project has been a strong attempt to achieve these goals. However, as I dove deeper into the project, my goals seemed to morph and change with time, reflection and the integration of novel elements. I began to uncover more and more questions in myself, rather than pose them to others, and my key learnings reflect this unexpected turn inward. They include:

- 1. I am an artist, so I make art.** This may seem like an obvious statement, but it wasn't that clear to me when I began the project. As I faced full engagement with creating a piece of theater, I began to grasp at concepts I perceived as more "worthy" of an ICSC Masters Project. I wanted to overlay quotes from the latest creativity research into the piece, and I toed up to the line between creating a work of art and writing a lesson. Lacking confidence in the process, itself, I

attempted to mold it into a form I thought would be evaluated positively by the ICSC community and beyond. Just beyond the mid-point of the writing process, while still immersed in text selection, a well-timed Skype conversation with my advisor prompted me to let go of this need to explain and justify. In order to simplify as well as to identify and connect with the places that held true value for me in the project, I took an idea from the conversation and created a brief biography of myself as an artist. The bio revealed a clearer vision of what was really important to me in my own creative work and how I wished to proceed with the project. When I let go of the need to look at my project through the lens of creativity research and began to look at it in the wide-open space of creativity practice, I began to understand myself and my place in the world a bit better. Although I have many interests and curiosities, and although I have studied, practiced and learned many things, at my deepest level I am a theater artist. Making art is both my most effective means of communication and the area of life for which I have seemingly unending passion. Through engagement with this project, I now understand that that itself is enough.

- 2. Making theater is better together:** Reading and re-reading texts as I selected the “ribs” of the piece was a luxurious time of individual reflection and incubation. When I began to flesh out the transitions and interactions, being a high ideator, I found it very challenging at times to converge after long sessions of idea generation. Having the deadline of meetings with collaborators helped in this regard as, I had to make some decisions on a timeline. This, and the addition of other interpretations and different ideas spurred even more new thinking on my

part. Theater is a collaborative art, and, as I am a self-defined extrovert and friend-maker who gets energy from relating to others, theater always seems better to me when done together. In this instance, having been the originator of the piece and with far more attention on my behavior within the creative process, I began to experience what R. Keith Sawyer described in his book, *Group creativity*, as the “interactional synchrony” of fluid group collaboration. Interactional synchrony was first identified by Condon and Ogston (1971) after their careful analysis of video-tapes revealed the tendency for speakers and listeners to synchronize a large number of verbal and non-verbal behaviors while engaged in conversation. Sawyer regards this as a kind of “state of flow” for group creative activity and identifies it as one of the reasons group creativity can result in a whole that is much greater than the sum of its parts (Sawyer, 2003, pp. 35-37). After adding another musician and partnering with the Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble, the piece blossomed into a much different bloom than I expected. Additionally, as the soil had become so incredibly rich through collaboration, it bloomed brighter and more beautifully than expected.

- 3. Creativity is about questioning:** When I began my graduate work with the International Center for Studies in Creativity, I thought the study of creativity would be a study of naming, defining, quantifying, categorizing and explaining creativity through the study of people and behaviors. As I progressed through the program, I found the experience to be less about answers and more about questions. We researched those who have gone before and familiarized ourselves with current issues in creativity studies. We uncovered definitions and developed

an understanding of assessment, but the facts only generated more questions and the practice resulted in a deeper need to know. My experience with my own creative process, a personal journey played out in a very public forum, is both representative of my leaning this past year and the most authentic assessment of my engagement with the questions it uncovered. I have discovered that the impulse to create, on a basic and personal level, is about questioning, and that the act of discovering answers to these questions is, for me, creative practice.

- 4. Fear can be a real waste of time:** Not all of my key learnings were so positive and transformative. I did learn (for the umpteenth time) that fear can lead to a lot of wasted time. This Masters Project was woven into a very busy time in my life. Between other classes, my husband and children and a full theater season, I had to create a very tight timeline and stick to it. Observing a timeline was a familiar experience for me, as every actor operates under someone else's time constraints, but fully engaging the creative part of myself necessary for composing music did not always happen on demand. Because of my "stage fright" as a musician, I found ways to disengage that went beyond not showing up physically during writing sessions. Perhaps this was a lesson I needed to learn (again), but I look back now and would like to reclaim the time I wasted and funnel it into the compositions.

Section Six: Conclusion

I first entered the halls of the International Center for Studies in Creativity in the fall of 2010. Thinking back to that time, and a meeting with Dr. Puccio, I remember him describing the study of creativity as, in many ways, a deeper look into oneself. His words took on greater resonance in my mind with each day I spent engaged in my own creative process. When I began planning this Masters Project, I expected it would inspire questioning and reflection in others, and, that it would offer others a way in to discoveries of self. What happened, as I researched, reflected, confronted, and created was a deeper exploration of myself and a more specific idea of my own creative impulse. Perhaps the next steps in this process will evolve more publicly as I begin to prepare for performance. I am confident that discoveries will continue if I remain authentically engaged in the process.

Bonus chemical aftertaste: A word and sound cabaret is a labor of love, sweat, curiosity and faith that was born from an idea and grew up to be a question. Aspiring to learn about the creativity of others, I was given a powerful journey through my own creative self and an immersion into rich group creativity practice. The discoveries I have made about creative identity are personal discoveries of blocks and fears, mitigated with periods of fluid creative practice. I have learned that creativity, at the primary level, is a uniquely personal and domain-specific activity. I have learned that the creative impulse seems to originate in a question and seeking the answer to that question can be creative practice.

Looking ahead, I anticipate another block of rehearsals before the performances in May. These rehearsals will be where new ideas are introduced, and others cut away. The improvisational aspects of the piece seem to allow us to engage in a robust cycle of action,

feedback, reflection and refinement that I feel serve the development of the play. After the workshop performances, I look forward to further reflection and rewrites of the script as well as the addition of new musical compositions, percussion, and voices. Writing and performing the piece has only deepened my curiosity about the questions within, and a clearer examination of my own creative practice has strengthened my confidence as an artist. *Bonus chemical aftertaste:* *A word and sound cabaret* represents the achievement of a long standing idea, to create a solo performance. Its realization new doors of collaboration and engagement, as I continue to develop the piece with the Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble and others, and to joyfully explore all aspects of my own creative practice. The deepest and most lasting effect, however, is the one I hold as most true. I have discovered that the impulse to create and true elegance in execution manifests itself, internally, as a singular and unwavering truth. Some would call this passion. I call it “the thing one holds most true.” For me, this is the discovery and expression of connection, communication and questioning. The nod to the fact that we are all human and the embracing of the notion that we are not so separate. This process has created an intriguing seed, in the form of a workshop performance of a sound cabaret, while also enriching the soil in a robust and lasting way. The learnings that will sprout from this solid beginning hint at deeper discoveries and broader understanding of creativity, identity, art making, and self.

References

- Amabile, T. M., & Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to The social psychology of creativity*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Apostolos-Cappadona, D., & Ebersole, L. (1995). *Women, creativity, and the arts: Critical and autobiographical perspectives*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Banning, Y. (2005). Embodied selves: Ritual, relationships and identity in theatre production: An ethnographic case study of Dance in the shadow of pain. *South African Theatre Journal*, 19, 72-91.
- Barron, F. (1963). *Creativity and psychological health; Origins of personal vitality and creative freedom*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand.
- Coyle, D. (2009). *The talent code: Greatness isn't born : It's grown, here's how*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. New York, NY: BasicBooks.
- Davis, G. A. (1992). *Creativity is forever*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Pub.
- Dewey, A., Steinberg, H., & Coulson, M. (1998). Conditions in which British artists achieve their best work. *Creativity Research Journal*, 11(4), 275-282.
- Fichlander, Z. (1998). Gender, creativity and power. *American Theater*, 15(7), 30-34.
- Fletcher, J. (2003). Women and oaths in Euripides. *Theatre Journal*, 55(1), 29-44. doi: 10.1353/tj.2003.0020

- Garner, S. N., & Sprengnether, M. (1996). *Shakespearean tragedy and gender*. Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.
- Huss, R. (1986). *The mindscapes of art: Dimensions of the psyche in fiction, drama, and film*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Johnstone, K. (1992). *Impro: Improvisation and the theater*. New York, NY: Routledge, Chapman & Hall.
- Lotte Lenya sings Kurt Weill American theatre songs. Songs from The threepenny opera and Cabaret*. [CD]. (1999). Sony Classical.
- Maslow, A. H. (1998). *Toward a psychology of being*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Massive Attack collected* [CD]. (2006). EMI.
- Mathews, P. T. (1999). *Passionate discontent: Creativity, gender, and French symbolist art*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- McDermott, D. S. (1984). Creativity in the theatre: Robert Edmond and C.G. Jung. *Theatre Journal*, 36(2), 212-230.
- Nelson, B. (2007). Its own reward: A phenomenological study of artistic creativity. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 38(2), 217-223.
- Novy, M. (1990). *Women's re-visions of Shakespeare: On the responses of Dickinson, Woolf, Rich, H.D., George Eliot, and others*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Parnes, S. J. (Ed.). (1992). *Sourcebook for creative problem solving*. Amherst, MA: Creative Education Foundation Press.

PJ Harvey - Let England Shake - YouTube. (n.d.). *YouTube - Broadcast Yourself*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2Qlb0qFLFE>

Richards, R. (2007). Everyday creativity and the arts. *World Futures*, 63(7), 500-525. doi: 10.1080/02604020701572707

Sawyer, R. K. (1997). *Creativity in performance*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex.

Sawyer, R. K. (2003). *Group creativity: Music, theater, collaboration*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Sawyer, R. K. (2007). *Group genius: The creative power of collaboration*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Sternberg, R. J. (1999). *Handbook of creativity*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Vitamin String Quartet performs Radiohead's In rainbows [CD]. (2009). Vitamin Records.

Weissman, P. (1965). *Creativity in the theater; A psychoanalytic study*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Wilshire, B. W. (1982). *Role playing and identity: The limits of theatre as metaphor*. Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.

Appendix A: Concept Paper

Creating self: A Theatrical Exploration of Identity

Beth D. Templeton

Submitted February 5, 2012

Project Type: Use a skill/talent to improve the quality of life for others.

Section One

Purpose and Description of Project:

“Question,” “Cabaret,” “Communication,” “Language,” “Music,” “Other,” “Self.” These words emerged from my card sort as I was grappling with the qualities I wanted in my Master’s project. After a round of converging with hits, I decided to evaluate the measure of importance each word held in my mind. What emerged from the sort were qualities and intention. I wanted to create an environment of authentic questioning, but I did not want to impose the questions. The project would be composed of parable, ritual and music. I would trace out an exploration of identity within and of creativity. I would use creativity itself, whatever definition I synthesized out of the many definitions that form conjoined lenses each showing a slightly different view, to trace the development of identity. My stage would be...well...the stage and my context theatrical with a dark underpinning of cabaret and some Brechtian alienation so things wouldn’t get too sentimental. I didn’t have a desire to teach, I wanted to invoke. Instead of inform, I wanted to engage my audience and tease out their own need to know. But how to do this? And to what end?

I incubated on the simplest act of theater: ritual. I brainstormed the myriad rituals that exist in our modern lives and generated challenge statements: “How to best explore creativity through ritual?” In what ways might I create an interesting piece of theater about creative identity?” How might I use the theatrical medium to invoke a reflection on personal creativity?”

An idea emerged from this process that seemed a solid first step: madness. If Ritual/order was on one end of the spectrum, then Madness/chaos must be on the other end. I would explore the link between creativity and madness. I would research eminent “creatives” and their stereotyped reputations of madness and develop text around their relationship to their own creativity. I would explore depictions of this struggle in some classic works of theater and through music and sound and see what emerged from it. Could our own creative identity be subject to this scale? Is part of the process of developing our own creative identity, finding our place on this scale? And what about the individual human experience? Is there a relationship between classic plays that seem to touch an inner landscape so intimate it feels shocking, and the personal struggle to forge our sense of self through creativity? Words have been written that touch the emotions in such a way that the speaker seems to be channeling some universal knowledge and touching the essence of what it means to be human. I embarked upon a journey to find the intersection of some of these words with madness, ritual and the act of creating self.

Rationale for selection:

What contribution would this exercise make to the field of creativity? In many ways the project itself will be the answer to this question. Right now, the best determination I can make is that I “feel” it will be worthwhile; that it could uncover truths about creativity, identity and art making that might be useful to others beyond me. One can hope that the performance itself will provide a catharsis to the viewer. She or he might uncover their own questions and, through this challenge, emerge changed to some degree. Like Daniel Coyle’s concept of deep practice in his book: *The Talent Code* (2009), the difficult challenges presented to Brazilian soccer playing

youth as they trained in the inner-city, indoor, game of “futsal,” (Portuguese for “soccer in the room”) was a driving force in their development into a nation of soccer champions. Through the struggle of playing a similar game, with a smaller, heavier ball, smaller teams and in a cramped concrete space, they honed amazing physical dexterity and skill. When they transferred these skills to the wide expanse of a regulation field and larger teams, their ability to handle the ball and escape from impossible situations in play became incredibly difficult to beat (Coyle, 2009 p.25-27). Apply this theory to the audience, present them with a theatrical piece that does not offer to narrate their thoughts, but simply invites them to think and engages them in some questioning or reflection may result in a deeper experience at the theater. Lofty intention aside, I intend to create an aesthetically and aurally pleasing experience that elegantly explores identity and creativity through theater. How to do this will evolve as I work on my own deep practice around applied creativity skills. Creative Problem Solving will be my guide in uncovering my own questions and my compass as I continue my research and development of the piece. Theater, the medium that is closest to my heart and in which I have worked for over thirty years will be the context for applied creativity practice. My passion for and trust in this art form fuels this “without a net” jump into the very essence of the creative self. I am excited to see what this project will become.

Section Two: Pertinent Literature and Resources:

Literature:

Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to the social psychology of creativity*.

Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

An update to the author’s 1983 book: *The social psychology of creativity*, Amabile explores the meaning and measurement of creativity, including a chapter dealing with

the consensual assessment of artistic creativity. This book will be pertinent to my work with its deep exploration of creativity, psychology and society.

Banning, Y. (2005). Embodied selves: Ritual, relationships and identity in theatre production: An ethnographic case study of Dance in the shadow of pain. *South African Theatre Journal*, 19, 72-91.

This article authored by a professor at the University of Cape Town details her study of three students in the "theatre professions" at the University and their work with a prominent director and faculty member to create a theater piece around the subject of HIV in their communities. This article opened my eyes to the power and universality of ritual in theater and shaped a strand of my research.

Fichlander, Z. (1998). Gender, creativity and power. *American Theater*, 15(7), 30-34.

The author writes from a place of experience about gender, identity and power in theater. She is often included in books about influential female stage directors and feminist theater. Her exploration into these themes as a director, theater intellectual and woman will be valuable as I explore these questions in my own work.

Fletcher, J. (2003). Women and oaths in Euripides. *Theatre Journal*, 55(1), 29-44. doi:

10.1353/tj.2003.0020

This fascinating article uses the plots of three tragedies by Euripides: Medea, Hippolytus and Iphigenia at Aulis to explore the power of language and oath in elevating female characters into positions of great influence (for better or worse) over male characters. The Medea, specifically her monologue to all women, delivered close to the beginning of the play, will figure prominently in the exploration of creativity and identity in my piece.

Garner, S. N., & Sprengnether, M. (1996). *Shakespearean tragedy and gender*. Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.

This book is a collection of essays of theater criticism that explore Shakespearean tragedy from a variety of perspectives, including feminist. The role of women in the action as well as their marginalization in the denouement of the tragic play figures prominently in the discussion. Constance's monologue railing against being called mad in Shakespeare's King John will be featured and explored in my project.

Huss, R. (1986). *The mindscapes of art: Dimensions of the psyche in fiction, drama, and film*.

Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

This book uses theater as a metaphor, describing the "aesthetic detachment" from daily life provided by theater and its role in revealing truth about our place in society and relationship to ourselves. The author's intended audience includes theater practitioners,

psychiatrists, sociologists and philosophers and the book provides a study of art making from a distinctly humanist perspective.

Maslow, A. H. (1998). *Toward a psychology of being*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Maslow's writings on being-cognition and self-actualization must be included in any well-researched exploration into creativity and identity. I look forward to diving deeper into this book.

Novy, M. (1990). *Women's re-visions of Shakespeare: On the responses of Dickinson, Woolf,*

Rich, H.D., George Eliot, and others. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Shakespeare's legacy as a creator of strong roles for women is thoroughly examined and tested in this collection of essays by female writers. This rumination on Shakespeare's work and the place of the female within it should add depth to my discussion of gender and identity within theater.

Weissman, P. (1965). *Creativity in the theater; A psychoanalytic study*. New York, NY: Basic

Books.

This book was selected because of its examination of creativity and theater making as well as the chapters on personality characteristics and motivating factors. I am very interested in going deeper into this subject in an effort to inform my exploration into identity and theater.

Wilshire, B. W. (1982). *Role playing and identity: The limits of theatre as metaphor*.

Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.

This book looks at the creative individual in the theater from a psychoanalytic point of view. It examines the psychology of the actor, director and playwright as well as picks apart the inner mental workings of archetypal characters in classic plays. Weissman's use of Greek tragedy and ritual as a lens through which to view the modern creative individual resonates with my own work.

Music (a representative selection):

Lotte Lenya sings Kurt Weill American theatre songs. Songs from The threepenny opera and Cabaret. [CD]. (1999). Sony Classical.

Massive Attack collected [CD]. (2006). EMI.

PJ Harvey - Let England Shake - YouTube. (n.d.). *YouTube - Broadcast Yourself*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2Q1b0qFLFE>

Vitamin String Quartet performs Radiohead's In rainbows [CD]. (2009). Vitamin Records.

Key People:

- Catherine Eaton, actor and creator of a one-women show using only lines spoken by female characters in Shakespeare plays.
- Amy Frasier, an actor and creator of a theater piece exploring creativity in time
- Various actors, musicians and technical crew that will have a hand in this project.

Classic Works (a representative sample):

- *The Medea*, Euripedes
- *King John*, Shakespeare
- *Mother Courage and her Children*, Brecht
- *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky
- *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekov

Section Three Process Plan:

The process plan of this exploration into creativity and identity will be one of improvisation steeped in specific ideas developed from the initial research phase. Research will be conducted around ritual, creativity and identity using current articles and books while also drawing on interviews with modern theater-makers, musicians and creativity professionals. A look back to classic plays that speak to universal truths will form another strand of research, one that will be instrumental in shaping the apex of each scene or section of the script. Scenes will be centered on a single idea framed by a classic monologue. A third strand of research will involve

a deep look into music and improvisational performance. Music will form a central theme in the piece and both improvised and written music will play an integral part in performance. As far as style, the cabaret era of Weimar Germany (1920-1930) will be a primary area of focus and one interweaving the ideas of both creativity and madness. The era itself was one of the most intellectually productive, I would argue the most creative, in German history and it gave rise to the most repressive and evil regime the world had ever seen. I imagine questions regarding moral evaluation of creative intent and creative product will bubble up during this phase of research. Another German of questionable ethics, Bertolt Brecht will play a significant role in the creation of the piece with his theatrical “Objectivism” that allowed the audience to disengage from the action and sit in judgment of the players. He encouraged his audience to watch the play as if it were a boxing match. It is this kind of non-sentimentality that gives rise to deep engagement with the broader message or question of the piece that I hope to create in the final product. Other music will be added as the research takes shape and through improvisation in the rehearsal phase.

After the research phase, the performance team will be assembled. The team will consist of one actor who also doubles as a musician, a female singer and a bass guitarist. There may be other actors or dancers involved in rehearsal and/or performance phases. Technical artists involved in the project will include a videographer and lighting designer, a costumer and a director.

When the team is complete, we will quickly move into an improv/rehearsal phase where the script will be developed. This intense period of rehearsal will be followed by a week of writing and revision to develop the script for the final piece. The team will then rehearse the second iteration of the piece and add technical elements, revising as necessary. This second

rehearsal period will culminate in a staged reading in front of an invited audience. Feedback from this audience will be folded into the revisions for the completed project.

Throughout the research, development and implementation stages of this project, I will use Creative Problem Solving processes and tools to tackle problems I may encounter with options and direction. The CPS tools “hits” and “card sort” were both instrumental in crafting the initial idea and direction for this project and I look forward to working with more tools as the project continues.

Project Timeline:

January 30th- February 13th	Concept paper	10 hours
January 30th- February 28th	Research: including readings, videos of live performances, interviews with theater makers and other artists and musicians.	40 hours
February 28th-March 9th	Assemble performance team and create schedule for improvisation rehearsals. Book performance space for staged reading (April 21)	10 hours
March 9th- March 16th	Improvisations conducted with performance team on music, original language and text excerpts from classic plays and literature. Improvisational rehearsal will be conducted with the following goals in mind: Create outline for final performance piece Assemble materials (instruments, visuals) Devise balance between improvised and scripted material	20 hours (this includes rehearsal with team and individual reflection and revision)
March 17th- March 24th	Create first draft of final piece	10 hours
March 24th- April 9th	Rehearse performance piece with team.	20 hours (this includes rehearsal with team and individual reflection and

		revision)
April 9th-13th	Revise script	10 hours
April 14th - April 20th	Rehearse piece in final form, add technical elements	20 hours (this includes rehearsal with team and individual reflection and revision)
April 21st	Perform staged reading for invited audience	5 hours
April 22nd	Make additions to final project submission based on staged reading.	10 hours
April 23rd	Project due in final form	N/A
April 24th- May 6th	Create 15 minute presentation of project	8 hours
May 7th	Final approved project due	N/A
		Total hours: 163

Section Four:Outcomes

This Masters Project will result in a performance piece that engages the audience in deep questioning about their own creative identity. In the process of creating the project I will engage in inquiry that may lead to new thinking about creativity and identity. I plan to create the piece in such a way that this questioning is elegant and precise, observing standards of excellence in both skill and content. In this way, I hope to create a useful addition to the study of creativity, art-making and self.

Section Five

Personal Learning Goals:

- To look deeply and thoroughly at the relationship between art-making and creativity through creating a work of theater.
- To document this process in such a way that I can define patterns of relationship and be able to apply them to a context outside of myself.
- To explore applied creativity in a group setting, through theatrical collaboration and improvisation
- To create a finished piece of theater that is engaging, interesting and uncovers a need for inquiry in the audience.
- To measure the experience of the audience in such a way that I can use their feedback to refine the project for future performance

Criteria for Assessment:

The main criteria for assessment will be in the staged reading performance of the finished piece. The creation of this project will follow the typical production calendar, although abbreviated, of a professionally produced theater event. The staged reading performance will serve as a natural culminating point for the project. Major milestones in the project will be:

- Creation of the first draft of a script for performance
- Final rehearsals for the performance with full technical support.
- The performance of a staged reading of the finished piece

The final piece will communicate its intent through excellence in production values and execution. The performance must be of value to an audience and of special relevance to an

audience interested in creativity. The piece will form a solid foundation upon which to reflect, incubate and prepare for the next iteration of the project.

Evaluation:

The final project will be evaluated for effectiveness primarily through audience response. A questionnaire will be distributed to an invited audience immediately before the performance. The results of these surveys will be combined with anecdotal information compiled from talking to participants after the show and all information will be used to inform next steps in the process. Self-reflection will be an integral part of the research and development phase and is a natural part of an actor's work. This inner reflection will be partnered with one-on-one and group feedback as the project develops. All information will be folded into the final evaluation to create the most complete picture possible of the effect of my project on an audience. It is my intention to create a piece that deeply explores creativity and the making of self through theater.

References

Coyle, D. (2009). *The talent code: Greatness isn't born : It's grown, here's how*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Appendix B: Script

Bonus chemical aftertaste: A word and sound cabaret

Projection 1 Title:

“Bonus Chemical Aftertaste: Being Human in Sound and Word”

Projection 2:

“We walk even now in constant vulnerability, which is usually felt only peripherally and unacknowledgeably...” (Wilshire, 1982, p.119)

Projection 3:

“From the cradle to the coffin underwear comes first. “
(Bertolt Brecht)

(Enter Beth, Brian and Members of the Buffalo Soundpainting Ensemble)

BETH:

To begin at the beginning:

It is spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the cobblestreets silent and the hunched courters-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible down to the sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack, fishingboat-bobbing sea. The houses are blind as moles (though moles see fine to-night in the snouting, velvet dingles) or blind as Captain Cat there in the muffled middle by the pump and the town clock, the shops in mourning, the Welfare Hall in widow's weeds. And all the people of the lulled and dumbfounded town are sleeping now.”

You can hear the dew falling and the hushed town breathing.

Only *your* eyes are unclosed to see the black and folded town fast, and slow, asleep.

Listen. It is night moving in the streets, the processional salt slow musical wind in Coronation Street and Cockle Row, it is the grass growing on Llareggub Hill, dewfall, starfall, the sleep of birds in Milk Wood.

Listen. It is night in the chill, squat chapel, hymning in bonnet and brooch and bombazine black, butterfly choker and bootlace bow, coughing like nannygoats, sucking mintoes, fortywinking hallelujah; night in the four-ale quiet as a domino; in Ocky Milkman's lofts like a mouse with gloves; in Dai Bread's bakery flying like black flour. It is to-night in Donkey Street, trotting silent, with seaweed on its hooves, along the cockeled cobbles, past curtained fernpot, text and trinket,harmonium, holy dresser, watercolours done by hand, china dog and rosy tin teacaddy. It is night neddyding among the snuggeries of babies.

Look. It is night, dumbly, royally winding through the Coronation cherry trees; going through the graveyard of Bethesda with winds gloved and folded, and dew doffed; tumbling by the Sailors Arms.

Time passes. Listen. Time Passes.

Come closer now. (Thomas, *Under Milkwood*, pp.1-3)

BSPE: *Riff on words from above passage to create the feeling of a bustling urban environment.*

MUSIC A:

(After the music is established, weave in more syllables and words of the urban soundscape. Then slowly decrease volume until one voice can be heard.)

BETH:

Polly Garter:

Me, Polly Garter, under the washing line, giving the breast in the garden to my bonny new baby. Nothing grows in our garden, only washing. And babies. And where's their fathers live, my love? Over the hills and far away. You're looking up at me now. I know what you're thinking, you poor little milky creature. You're thinking, you're no better than you should be, Polly, and that's good enough for me. Oh, isn't life a terrible thing, thank God? (Thomas, *Under Milkwood*, p. 34)

BSPE:

(create whatever you like with this)

To begin at the beginning

BETH:

Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way (Tolstoy *Anna Karenina*, P. 1)

BETH:

(some kind of bass/stick underscore)

Men tell us we live safe and secure at home,
 while they must go to battle with their spears.
 How stupid they are! I'd rather stand there
 three times in battle holding up my shield
 than give birth once. But your story and mine
 are not the same. For you have a city,
 you have your father's house, enjoy your life
 with friends for company. But I'm alone.
 I have no city, and I'm being abused
 by my own husband. I was carried off,

290 [250]

a trophy from a barbarian country.
 I have no mother, brother, or relation,
 to shelter with in this extremity.
 And so I want to ask something from you.
 If I find some way to punish Jason
 for these injustices, and his bride, as well,
 and father, too, say nothing. In other things
 a woman may be timid—in watching battles
 or seeing steel, but when she's hurt in love,
 her marriage violated, there's no heart
 more desperate for blood than hers. (Euripides)

300

[260]

BSPE:

(Begin riffing on this speech, enter when Medea says: 'If I find some way to punish Jason...')

Me, Polly Garter, under the washing line, giving the breast in the garden to my bonny new baby. Nothing grows in our garden, only washing. And babies. And where's their fathers live, my love? Over the hills and far away. You're looking up at me now. I know what you're thinking, you poor little milky creature. You're thinking, you're no better than you should be, Polly, and that's good enough for me. Oh, isn't life a terrible thing, thank God? (Thomas, *Under Milkwood*, p. 34)

(End with)

and yes I said yes I will Yes. (Joyce, *Ulysses*)

(breath)

MUSIC B (LOUD)

(breath)

BETH:

Ivan Ilych's life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible (Tolstoy, P. 338)

BPSE:

(create whatever you like with this)

As soon as the official relations ended, so did everything else. Ivan Ilych possessed this capacity to separate his real life from the official side of affairs and not mix the two, in the highest degree, and by long practice and natural aptitude had brought it to such a pitch that sometimes, in the manner of a virtuoso, he would even allow himself to let the human and official relations mingle. He let himself do this just because he felt that he could at any time he chose resume the strictly official attitude again and drop the human relation. And he did it all easily, pleasantly, correctly, and even artistically. (Tolstoy, P. 349)

MUSIC C

(Song: Time passes. Listen. Time Passes)

BETH:

You can hear the dew falling and the hushed town breathing

BSPE:

(riffing)

Come closer now

BETH:

(simultaneously with BSPE)

Only *your* eyes are unclosed to see the black and the folded town fast, and slow, asleep

MUSIC D:

(with words)

Now thro' the noiseless throng their way they bend,
 And both with pain the rugged road ascend;
 Dark was the path, and difficult, and steep,
 And thick with vapours from the smoaky deep.
 They well-nigh now had pass'd the bounds of night,
 And just approach'd the margin of the light,
 When he, mistrusting lest her steps might stray,
 And gladsome of the glimpse of dawning day,
 His longing eyes, impatient, backward cast
 To catch a lover's look, but look'd his last;
 For, instant dying, she again descends,
 While he to empty air his arms extends.
 Again she dy'd, nor yet her lord reprov'd;
 What could she say, but that too well he lov'd?
 One last farewell she spoke, which scarce he heard;
 So soon she drop'd, so sudden disappear'd. (Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, Book 10)

BSPE:

(create what you like with this)

Me, Polly Garter, under the washing line, giving the breast in the garden to my bonny new baby.
 Nothing grows in our garden, only washing. And babies. And where's their fathers live, my love?
 Over the hills and far away. You're looking up at me now. I know what you're thinking, you poor

little milky creature. You're thinking, you're no better than you should be, Polly, and that's good enough for me. Oh, isn't life a terrible thing, thank God? (Thomas, *Under Milkwood*, p. 34)

BETH:

(Weaving into the BSPE improvisation)

Thou art not holy to belie me so;
 I am not mad: this hair I tear is mine;
 My name is Constance; I was Geoffrey's wife;
 Young Arthur is my son, and he is lost:
 I am not mad: I would to heaven I were!
 For then, 'tis like I should forget myself:
 O, if I could, what grief should I forget!
 Preach some philosophy to make me mad,
 And thou shalt be canonized, cardinal;
 For being not mad but sensible of grief,
 My reasonable part produces reason
 How I may be deliver'd of these woes,
 And teaches me to kill or hang myself:
 If I were mad, I should forget my son,
 Or madly think a babe of clouts were he:
 I am not mad; too well, too well I feel
 The different plague of each calamity.

Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
 Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
 Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
 Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
 Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
 Then, have I reason to be fond of grief?
 Fare you well: had you such a loss as I,
 I could give better comfort than you do.
 I will not keep this form upon my head,
 When there is such disorder in my wit.
 O Lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son!
 My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!
 My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure!

(BSPE creates an urban soundscape with words, add viola sounds)

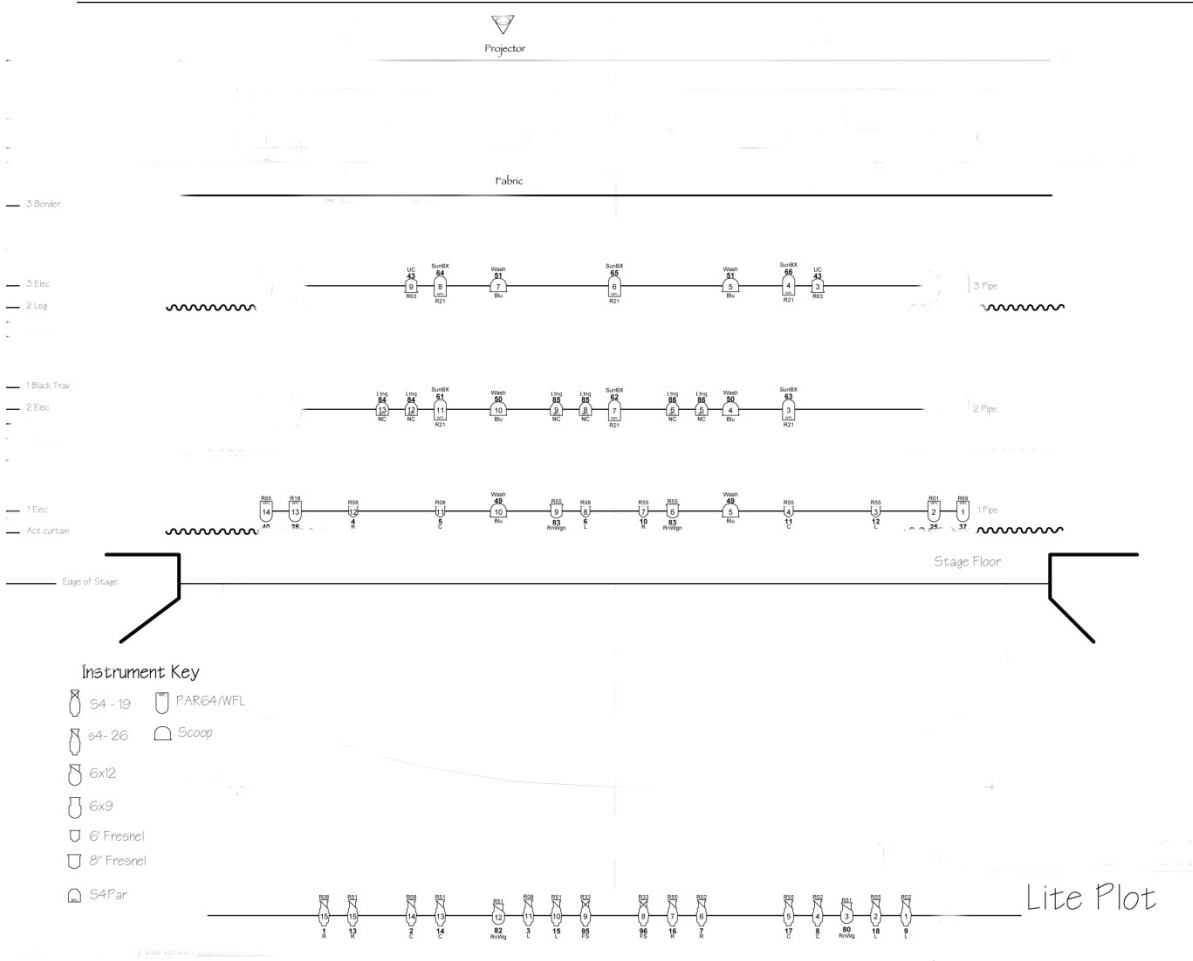
BETH:

There is a place behind our hill so real

It makes me turn my head, no matter. There

In the last thicket, lies the cornered cat
Saved by its claws, now ready to spend
All there is left of the wilderness. Embracing
Its blood. And that is the way that I will spit
Life, at the end of any trail where I smell any hunter.
Because I think our story should not end-
Or go on in the dark with nobody listening. (William Safford, from *Our City is Guarded with Automatic Rockets*)

Appendix C: Light plot



Appendix D: Video palette

Bonus Chemical Aftertaste: A Word and Sound Cabaret

Visuals

Projections shot onto silken material stretched across the back of the stage

The movement of the fabric takes the images and distorts them, makes them breathe, deconstructs them

The initial text will each have a different type treatment. Coming in from left or right. Vertical. Coming together letter by letter,

Opening: Stars and planets , floating in a sea of blue black. Twinkling, moving, glittering

Polly:

Urban landscape, hot sun, quick motion

As music and dialog changes, so does the image. Colors change, shapes morph to new shapes, strange shapes. Discordant colors and shapes.

The screen goes blue

The screen goes back to the stars and slowly fades to black

Final scene:

Cool colors wash the fabric. Greens of the forest and blue cerulean skies. Mighty trees wave their branches gradually morph to the underside of the forest canopy.