THE ACTOR-CREATOR AT WORK:
IPHLOA, AN ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
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ABSTRACT

The following document records my process as an actor-creator in the development of my thesis project, iphelOa. The first chapter includes my research for this project. In the second chapter, I discuss the production circumstances. I include a final draft of the script for iphelOa in Chapter Three, and explain the various approaches I took in the writing process. Chapter Four includes my rehearsal and performance process, and Chapter Five is an evaluation of some conclusions I have drawn.
Dedicated to my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PERFORMANCES

Professional/Stock Theatre

The Last Night of Ballyhoo Lala Weathervane Playhouse, OH
Dead Guilty Julia Darrow CATCO, OH
Candy & Shelley . . Desert Candy Furies Theatre Group, OR
The Actor's Nightmare Sarah Siddons Furies Theatre Group, OR
Community Theatre and Dance

Beckett Festival
The Duchess of Malfi
The Dig
Victims of Amnesia
Dark of the Moon

Educational Theatre and Dance

King Lear
_ipheïOa
_Fen
The Misanthrope (Bartlett)
The Bacchae (Soyinka)
The Memorandum
Romeo & Juliet (adaptation)
Miller’s Point
The Eumenides
Tartuffe
Drums in the Night
Don’t Fence Me In
On The Verge
Control
As Women Do
An Evening of Shakespeare
Shadows of Immortality
Ordinary People
Guys and Dolls

Film and Voiceover

The Hitchiker’s Game
Introspect
Barnum’s American Museum
Wu Is One
You Are There
DMV Audio/Visual Exam

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Acting
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Research</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Brokers and Baser Matter: The Obstacles of Hamlet and Ophelia’s Relationship</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 To Obey or Not to Obey and Other Non-choices: Parent-Child Relationships in Shakespeare’s <em>Hamlet</em>.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Adolescent Behavior</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1 Teen Population and Financial Status</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2 Family Relationships</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.3 Adult Development</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.4 Social Pressures on Female Adolescents</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.5 Teen Consumerism</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.6 Ophelia’s Fan Club</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Production Circumstances</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The Production Team</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 Edna Berkey, Stage Manager</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 Quinn Carlson, Performer</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.1.3 Julie Graham, House Manager ........................................ 23
2.1.4 Matt Kari, Floor Treatment ........................................ 24
2.1.5 Michael Karp, Sound Designer ...................................... 24
2.1.6 John Leahy, Run Crew ............................................. 25
2.1.7 Mark Shanda and Julia Weiss, Fabric Rigging Specialists .... 26
2.1.8 Jason Swank, Light Board Operator ................................ 26
2.1.9 Michael John Washer, Technical Director ......................... 27
2.1.10 Nan Zhang, Lighting Designer .................................... 27

2.2 The Pre-Production Meeting ........................................... 28

2.3 Director’s Concept Statement .......................................... 31

3. The Writing Process .......................................................... 36

3.1 Project: Jenny 2000, A Character Sketch Collection ............. 36
3.1.1 Sketch I: “About Me” ............................................... 37
3.1.2 Sketch II: “I am in charge of myself” ................................ 37
3.1.3 Sketch III: “About My Brother” .................................. 39
3.1.4 Sketch IV: “About My Boyfriend” ................................ 39
3.1.5 Sketch V: “About Other Things, Like Being a Girl” ............ 41
3.1.6 Sketch VI: “Ophelia and the Psychologist, Part I” ............... 42
3.1.7 Sketch VII: “Ophelia and the Psychologist, Part II” .............. 47
3.1.8 Sketch VIII: “Ophelia’s Side of the Conversation” ............... 48

3.2 Research and Writing Journal ........................................... 49

3.3 The Final Draft of iphel0a ............................................... 63

4. Rehearsal and Performance .................................................. 81

4.1 The Working Rehearsals ................................................... 81
4.1.1 Moving into the Performance Space ................................ 82
4.1.2 Working with the Stage Manager .................................. 82
4.1.3 Trust and Ownership ............................................... 83
4.1.4 Vulnerable Vocality ............................................... 84
4.1.5 Effortlessness ...................................................... 86
4.1.6 The Fabric Rehearsals ............................................. 88
4.1.7 Signs of Life Behind the Curtain .................................. 90
4.1.8 Warm-up and Cool-down .......................................... 91
4.1.9 Working with Robert Post ........................................ 93

4.2 Technical Rehearsals ....................................................... 94

4.3 Rehearsal and Performance Journal .................................... 95
5. Evaluation and Conclusion ........................................... 110

5.1 MFA New Works Post-Production Meeting ......................... 111
  5.1.1 Brief Introduction to the Project ................................ 112
  5.1.2 Solo Work is Never Solo ....................................... 112
  5.1.3 Working With Robert Post .................................... 113
  5.1.4 The Cool-Down Process ....................................... 114

5.2 The Universal Collective Strikes Again: Similar Productions
  in 1999 and 2000 .................................................. 115

Bibliography ................................................................ 119

Appendices .................................................................. 123
  A. Pre-show Check List for iphelOa .............................. 123
  B. Sound List for iphelOa ........................................... 124
  C. The Program ...................................................... 125
PREFACE

As a member of the second class to complete an MFA in Acting on the Independent Track at The Ohio State University, I feel compelled to briefly explain the focus of this new program. Under the direction of Jeanine Thompson, the MFA candidate develops and performs in an original theatrical work during the third year of study. The piece, not more than an hour in length, must be written for a small cast if not as a solo work. It is performed as part of the Department of Theatre’s season during Winter Quarter in Mount Hall Studio, a black box theatre on West Campus. This differs from the traditional Ensemble Track, in which actors select and perform a thesis role in a Mainstage production.

While the Independent Track also maintains a focus on performance, the actor is additionally responsible for writing an original script. Just as the ensemble actor can arrive at the role by whatever methodology best serves the production and the actor, the independent artist, or actor-creator, can develop a new work using compositional tools and methods that will serve the production and herself as performer.
INTRODUCTION

iphelOa, pronounced "I fell away," is an original play about a teenage girl struggling with the events and circumstances of her life in today's world. The character, Jenny, is a construct of my own observations of teenagers and their relationships with parents and peers; psychological case studies; and images, icons, and literary figures from the late sixteenth century (particularly Shakespeare's Ophelia), the nineteenth century, and the late twentieth century.

I created iphelOa in response to the changing image and role of teenagers in our society. Teens today make up the largest population in America, larger than the post-World War II "baby boomers." They also have more disposable income than other generations of teens, introducing them earlier to consumerism. Aware of this lucrative potential, the music, entertainment, and clothing industries, among others, target these teenage consumers. Lacking consumer wisdom and self-confidence, teens accept their role in the supply-demand cycle in the hopes of fulfilling advertisers' prophecies of social acceptance with each purchase.

On a personal level, teens grapple with their relationships to family, friends, lovers, and authority figures. They wrestle with difficult situations, such as messy divorces, sexual harassment, and pregnancy. They experience rejection, fear, anger,
loss, hope. They are human beings, adults-in-progress. As they continue to develop, they struggle with their own physical, mental, and emotional responses to various events and situations, especially less-than-ideal ones.

In *ipheLOa*, Jenny is brought to the breaking point when her boyfriend dumps her and her father forgets their special dinner plans, all on her sixteenth birthday. Rejected by the two men in her life and taunted by a third, her younger brother Jason, Jenny leaves home. In a dark moment, Jenny seeks comfort in her haven, a glorious waterfall. She drowns her sorrows (literally) and emerges in the afterworld, where she is met by the friendly voice of a familiar peer, Ophelia. When she finds herself at odds with Ophelia's views of life, death, and dating, Jenny discovers that she wants to live. Her return home is difficult but victorious, and in reconciling with her own world, Jenny gains a greater sense of self.

My goal in this project was to create an original work about teens that could tour to high schools. Since the work would be exposed to teenagers, it was necessary that the teenage character was believable and the content was interesting and valuable to an audience of adolescents, parents, and teachers. Since the production would tour, a minimal set and small cast would also be necessary.

In this document, I discuss the process of creating and developing *ipheLOa*, and performing the role of Jenny. The first chapter includes research on parent-child relationships in *Hamlet* and obstacles in Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship. Research on adolescent behavior and images of Ophelia is also included. Chapter Two details the circumstances of this production, including the production team, notes from a
production meeting, and the director’s concept statement. My writing process is laid out in Chapter Three with character sketches of Jenny, my research and writing journal, and the final draft of *iphelOa* that was used in performance. Chapter Four investigates the rehearsal and performance process of this production. The final chapter is an evaluation of the conclusions I have drawn thus far in the process.
CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH

In order to develop a contemporary teenager based on Shakespeare's Ophelia, struggling with both contemporary and universal issues, my research began with Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* and psychology books on adolescent behavior. My specific interest, with the play and the case studies, was familial relationships. In this chapter, I explore the obstacles that Hamlet and Ophelia encounter in their relationship with each other, as well as parent-child relationships in the play. I also investigate various adolescent issues arising from risk-taking behavior in response to social and peer pressures. Finally, I discuss some images of Ophelia by pre-Raphaelite artists that continue to attract and fascinate viewers today.

1.1 Brokers and Baser Matter: The Obstacles in Hamlet and Ophelia's Relationship

If *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* was a play about two cursed young lovers, it would have been titled *Hamlet and Ophelia*, as in *Romeo and Juliet* or *Pyramus and Thisbe*. However, as is inferred from the title, Hamlet is first and foremost a prince, with duties to the state of Denmark. His first priority as son and heir to the rightful
King of Denmark is to remove the poison from the fountainhead by killing his father's murderer, and then to reveal to a "Rankly abus'd" Denmark the truth of King Hamlet's murder.

After learning from his father's ghost that Claudius committed the murder, Prince Hamlet pledges to remove all distractions from his mind and serve the rightful king:

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment, all alone, shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain
Unmix'd with baser matter yes, by heaven! (1.5.98-104)

This includes the fair Ophelia, to whom he has already pledged his love. The priority of the state over Hamlet's personal life is the first of many obstacles standing between the young lovers and the altar. Ophelia's older brother, Laertes, tries to explain this problem to Ophelia as he cautions her to reserve her pledge of love to the prince

Perhaps he loves you now,
And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
The virtue of his will; but you must fear,
His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth;
He may not, as unvalu'd persons do,
Carve for himself; for on his choice depends
The safety and the health of the whole state,
And therefore must his choice be circumscribed
Unto the voice and yielding of that body
Whereof he is the head. (1.3.14-24)

Laertes is not necessarily slurring Hamlet; rather, he recognizes the prince's obligations to the state to be far greater than any contract he would make with Ophelia.
At the very least, the state would need to be in a peaceful position before marriage becomes a possibility for Hamlet and Ophelia, and currently it is in open conflict with Norway.

In addition, Ophelia's father, Polonius, advises her to spend less time with Hamlet and to be more cautious of his declarations of love: "Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence... Do not believe his vows for they are brokers" (1.4.121-7). From the advice she receives from her brother and her father, we can presume that Ophelia is of marrying age and rank; "... at least twelve... and of a rank above the labouring classes; well-dressed without affection; and beautiful both physically and mentally" (Meader 79). There is a small question whether she truly is beautiful. Hamlet remarks in a letter and in the nunnery scene that she paints herself beautiful with makeup. However, we know her to be virtuous, fair, honest, angelic, and sweet. Being the daughter to the king's councillor, she can expect to take the hand of a well-ranked gentleman.

Polonius presents another obstacle to Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship: "Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star; this must not be" (2.2.141). Polonius is the only character to directly bring attention to rank. Does he truly believe that his family's status is so beneath the king's that the prince and Ophelia could not marry? Polonius holds a prominent place on the king's council. Perhaps he is concerned that the marriage of his daughter and the king's son would make him a family member and could result in his being asked to retire his position.
To further convince his daughter to avoid Hamlet, Polonius calls the prince’s vows of love “mere implorators of unholy suits” (1.3.127-129), insinuating that Hamlet’s promises stem from lust rather than love. If Polonius is correct in his assumption, then he has good reason to separate them. When Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, pre-marital sex was common, as was childbirth out of wedlock: “Late in the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth, the proportion of bastard births could reach 9 per cent to 10 per cent over whole decades in certain parishes in Lancashire and Cheshire” (qtd. in Singh 54). If Ophelia got pregnant, her reputation would be permanently soiled, and her chances of marrying any suitable man would be out of the question.

Considering that Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s parents know that Hamlet writes Ophelia love letters and that neither Claudius nor Gertrude forbids their companionship, there seems to be no real concern over rank or virtue. This is partly because Hamlet and Ophelia’s love takes a secondary role to politics, but also because the two appear to suit each other well, as expressed too late by Queen Gertrude over Ophelia’s grave: “I hop’d thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife” (5.1.248).

It is Gertrude’s abuse of the sacrament of holy matrimony, however, that spurs Hamlet to declare, “I say we will have no moe marriage” (3.1.147). Not only does his mother marry again, and so quickly, but she remarries into the same family, and Hamlet considers the union to be incestuous. The pinnacle of this tragic action, however, is that she marries her former husband’s murderer and so embraces a traitor to Denmark.
A question of love arises with Queen Gertrude’s marriage to brother-in-law Claudius. Hamlet, in forcing his mother to reckon with her choices, accuses her of desecrating the sacrament of marriage:

Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty!
Calls virtue hypocrite! takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister there! makes marriage vows
As false as dicers’ oaths! (3.4.40)

He argues of this new marriage that “you cannot call it love; for at your age the hey-day in the blood is tame, it’s humble, and waits upon the judgment” (3.4.68). Hamlet’s rage toward his mother increases to the point that he condemns her behavior completely: “Rebellious hell, if thou canst mutine in a matron’s bones, to flaming youth let virtue be as wax and melt in her own fire!” (3.4.82-85).

At best, Hamlet may recognize the political advantage of Gertrude’s marriage. This does not excuse her poor choice, nor does it set her in any favorable light. It does, however, feed Hamlet’s earlier thesis: “Frailty, thy name is woman” (1.2.146). Her need to belong to a man, or perhaps to the state, suggests that she considers herself nothing alone.

In the nunnery scene, Hamlet and Ophelia create their own obstacles. Each has at least two different agendas, one public and one personal, that prevent them from adequately expressing their love. Ophelia is sent by Claudius and Polonius to reveal whether Hamlet’s behavior is a response to being in love or something more dangerous. On a personal level, Ophelia has this one opportunity to clarify their relationship, whether it be for all observers or for her own peace of mind. Hamlet expresses his
love, or lack thereof, to Ophelia poorly. Perhaps he is inept in the art of wooing; though a scholar, Hamlet admits his poor courting skills in a love letter to Ophelia: “I have not art to reckon my groans” (2.2.182). On the other hand, his suspicions of espionage may incense him to lash out at Ophelia and anyone else who may be eavesdropping on their conversation. Whatever his reasons or intentions may be, Hamlet’s thoughts twist and contort, creating an incoherent path to the logical ear. The prince is either incredibly smart to mislead his adversaries, or he is so completely wrought with guilt, love, hate, and duty that he cannot properly express himself. It is difficult to know which path he takes in this scene, but the impact on his love life is not positive. As a result, Ophelia assesses, “O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown” (3.1.150). She regards herself to be “of ladies, most deject and wretched” for falling in love with him (3.1.155).

The final obstacle coming between Ophelia and Hamlet is the accidental death of Polonius. As Hamlet forces his mother to see the repercussions of her hasty marriage, one large “rat” behind an arras (Polonius) squeals too loudly and meets his maker at Hamlet’s hands. The level of paranoia and self-defense at which Hamlet is operating leaves him with no kind words for his girlfriend’s dead father. Polonius dies, a spy. After this action, there is no opportunity for explanations, apologies, or future promises for the young lovers. The loss of control over their situation sends each of these emotionally- and spiritually-sensitive characters into a storm, from which neither emerges.
1.2 To Obey Or Not To Obey and Other Non-choices: Parent-Child

Relationships in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*

Children learn from their parents and then choose to accept or reject what has been taught. That is, they will choose if they have a choice. In Elizabethan society, children entered adulthood around the age of twelve. Occupations were passed from father to son, marriages were arranged, daughters (considered to be in their prime at the age of fifteen) were expected to become wives and mothers. By social convention, young adults were not offered the choices they have in our society today.

In Shakespeare’s plays, young lovers are often faced with the challenge of being kept from the ones they truly love. Less-than-ideal situations at home, such as arranged marriages or a father’s disapproval, become tremendous obstacles to these passionate young adults. In the comedies, they often choose to reject society’s conventions. Running away, they find themselves in unfamiliar territory, relying on courtly tools, including wit, charm, and negotiation, to improve their situation. Essentially, once they get what they want, they are then willing to reconcile with society. The conventions of tragedy, however, assume strict obedience to social customs and laws; almost assuredly, the consequence of not complying is death. Young lovers in Shakespeare’s tragedies, such as *Romeo & Juliet*, are often faced with the dilemma of obeying or defying family in order to find happiness.

What is the parent’s role in Shakespeare’s plays? A relative, often a father figure (Prospero, Lear), establishes the stasis of the play’s world. The conflict of the play often begins with a child’s reaction to the state of things (a parent’s beliefs, social
conventions), or to actions that stem from old traditions. In the end, the father figure must either stand his ground or give way to a new way of doing things. In the comedies, youth emerges victorious; in the tragedies, no one wins the present battle. There is only the hope that future generations will learn from old mistakes.

In Shakespeare's tragedies, the core of the play's conflict lies in the parent-child relationships. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, a Capulet and a Montague fall in love. Because of an old feud between their families, however, the children cannot be together. In choosing to pursue a relationship, Juliet and Romeo not only disobey their parents, but also cross "enemy lines". In *Hamlet*, parent-child relationships are equally at odds. A young prince (Hamlet) must obey his political commitment to Denmark and honor his murdered father's demand for revenge. Only then can he tend to his own needs and desires. The young woman who loves the prince (Ophelia) must obey the king's and her father's commands before she can fulfill her own needs and desires.

In Act I of *Hamlet*, Polonius commands his daughter Ophelia to avoid Hamlet, insisting that his vows of love are empty. He speaks to her in sharp, abbreviated exclamations: "Look to't, I charge you!" and "Give me up the truth!" (1.3.88, 98). This follows Laertes's send-off, in which Polonius offers his son a volume of advice. He gives no orders, only joyous blessings for a long, full life. Yet to his daughter he says, "Be somewhat scantier of your maiden presence . . . for Lord Hamlet, believe so much in him, that he is young, and with a larger tether may he walk than may be given you" (1.4.121-126). In the next act, Ophelia obediently reports Hamlet's strange and disheveled appearance to her father. Polonius immediately takes this private confidence
to the king, reporting that he has prescribed his daughter to lock herself "from his
resort, admit no messengers, receive no tokens" (2.2.143-144). Ophelia sacrifices her
own desires for her father’s, not because she is less passionate than her father, but
because to obey him is the right thing to do.

Hamlet’s relationship to his father is similar to Ophelia’s relationship to
Polonius. The prince’s obedience to the late king of Denmark is virtually unflinching.
He is willing to challenge his uncle/step-father, Claudius, and his mother, Gertrude. In
addition to mourning for his father, Hamlet sees his mother’s second marriage as an
abuse of the sacrament of holy matrimony. When he begins to show signs of defiance,
Claudius and Gertrude become concerned and look for the cause of his resistance.

Claudius and Gertrude remind Hamlet of proper social and courtly manners.
Gertrude bids Hamlet: “Cast thy nighted colour off, and let thine eye look like a friend
on Denmark” (1.2.68-69). Hamlet explains that he is still mourning over his father’s
recent death. Claudius, still treating Hamlet’s behavior as merely a show of defiance,
warns that “to persever in obstinate condolement is a course of impious stubbornness.
’Tis unmanly grief” (1.2.92-94). Once Claudius suspects that Hamlet is a threat to his
power, however, all attempts at parental guidance disappear. But the damage is done.
Claudius has wronged King Hamlet and taken advantage of Queen Gertrude. The
obedient prince will carry out his father’s orders.

Hamlet’s declaration, "I say we will have no moe marriage,” stems from his
disapproval of the union between his mother and uncle (3.1.147). With this
exclamation, the young prince seals the end of a kingdom: there will be no more
political growth through wedlock, nor will Elsinore seed a new prince in a young queen’s womb. Their futures overshadowed by present disaster, Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s passions die with them.

1.3 Adolescent Behavior

My research on adolescent behavior took off in a number of directions: teen consumerism, expressions of teen angst, the effect of the music and entertainment industries on teens and social pressures affecting teens. Rather than rushing to the computer to type up my research results, I jumped into the role of actor-creator and began the process of writing and developing the play.

1.3.1 Teen Population and Financial Status

Today in America, the population of adolescents surpasses that of the “baby boomers” of post-World War II. This generation of teenagers cannot be ignored. Their needs and demands are becoming as much a priority as those of full-grown adults. In addition, our country’s strong economy and abundance of entry level positions has invited younger people to experience the power of the dollar for themselves. For some teenagers, job earnings are purely disposable income. Since they are still living at home, their financial responsibilities are low. For others, the earnings are necessary to keep the household financially afloat.

Money is a problem. We have become an increasingly stratified society with some children living in a luxurious world of designer clothes, computer games, private schools and camps, while other children walk dangerous streets to inadequate schools (Pipher 80).
1.3.2 Family Relationships

In *Reviving Ophelia*, Mary Pipher explores the relationships between mothers and daughters and fathers and daughters. Lynn Ponton includes relationships between sons and each parent in *The Romance of Risk*. Strangely, neither author focuses on sibling relationships, which seem to shape a child's development to some degree (probably quite a bit in single parent households with more than one child). However, both authors agree that "like mother, like daughter" still elicits a negative response from young women, and that the mother-daughter relationship is usually most tense when the daughter is in her adolescent years. They also observe that father-daughter relationships tend to be very distant, whether the father lives at home or is away, due to separation or divorce. While teens need their parents as much as they ever did, they distance themselves in an effort to find their individuality. This distance is a significant part of adult development, in which they explore their relationships to the outside world.

1.3.3 Adult Development

As teens swim through adolescence, they experience feelings they have not encountered before, which can make them feel distanced from the rest of the world. No longer feeling connected to younger children and sensing rejection from the older ones isolates adolescents in unfamiliar physical, emotional, psychological, and social territory. They are often afraid to talk to adults about problems and seek comfort in peers' similar thoughts and feelings. Teens become distrustful of authority figures,
including parents. They may begin to challenge anything that they recognize as their parents’ rules: curfews, dress codes, telephone or television restrictions. They are even willing to challenge greater authorities by drinking and smoking, destroying public property with graffiti, and skipping school. They are testing the power of authority figures and deciding who deserves their trust.

Teenagers take risks not only to see who will respond and how, but also to find out who they are and what they are capable of doing. Sometimes the risks they take are healthy, such as trying a new sport or participating in a difficult class. Unfortunately, these risks can be less glamorous than certain others, such as experimenting with sex and drugs.

Often, teens take risks in order to cope with the lack of control in their lives. If they choose a healthy way to overcome feelings of shyness, low self-esteem, or fear of rejection, they may continue to take healthy risks in the future. If, however, they find comfort in risk-taking behavior such as self-mutilation, starvation, and drugs, they may develop a pattern of unhealthy behavior that will follow them into adulthood. In The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do the Things They Do, Lynn Ponton argues that risk-taking is necessary, and many factors determine how a teen will take action:

. . . including genetic makeup and temperament; their social environment, including friends and family; their perception of their immediate environment; personality factors, including self-esteem; how they visualize their future; their innate propensity for risk-taking; their values related to health and achievement; and lastly, other behavior related to risk such as patterns of drinking or school attendance. (28)
Ponton notes that teens who take healthy risks gain a sense of ownership over the rules and regulations of adulthood, share respect and trust with adults, and better understand the relationship between responsibility and independence:

A teen’s ability to believe that he or she can determine in some measure what happens to him or her is an important coping skill that promotes active attempts to overcome stressful situations. (267)

1.3.4 Social Pressures on Female Adolescents

One common problem for teenage girls, lack of self-esteem, is fed by social pressures to be beautiful. Beauty is defined largely by advertisers and the fashion industry. Photos in both teen and women’s magazines regularly display rail-thin women well under thirty with breast augmentations, collagen lips, and fancy makeup. For teenage girls trying to find out what the world expects of them, these images are the first they see, beyond their own mothers. Young women who accept these images as the definition of beauty will judge themselves against these images. If they do not see the same image when they look in the mirror, then they have failed to be beautiful. Another element that adds the pressure to be beautiful is that females in our society are not expected to be as smart or financially successful as men. It is still acceptable for a woman in our society to survive by intentionally seeking out, seducing, and marrying a wealthy man. Even since the women’s liberation movement in the 1970’s, many women still consider this option over financially supporting themselves.

When adolescent males begin to recognize authority, they see older, wiser men who can serve as positive role models: presidents, senators, ambassadors, doctors, law enforcement agents. Adolescent females often see women working in subservient roles:
secretaries, assistants, nurses. Recognizing this gender imbalance in the work force can be frustrating for a young woman with big dreams. Her self-esteem is in danger of wilting when she sees limitations at the same time as her male counterpart sees endless options.

1.3.5 Teen Consumerism

Teens are now regular targets of consumer trends from all kinds of industries: toys, clothing, foods, music, and movies. Advertisers interest them in becoming good consumers and trend-followers at an early age. In return, these adolescents are told they will be rewarded with compliments and cool friends.

As I was walking through the downtown shopping mall this past Christmas, I saw more teenagers than adults making purchases in music stores, toy shops, and clothing boutiques. It was apparent that much of the merchandise in these stores had been designed for young adults. In fact, a number of labels indicated that the article was official merchandise of a particular television show, video game, or movie. I drew a number of conclusions from this observation; my mind immediately connected the word “official” with “authentic” and “trustworthy.” I sensed the advertisers saying that when young people decide they like a game, a rock band, a TV show, or a movie, then they should trust that the official paraphernalia will be just as exciting or popular. Having spent my adolescent years in the eighties, when teen materialism skyrocketed, I could understand why the teenagers I saw in the mall were so eager to spend their money (or their parents’ money) on this official merchandise. By wearing an “official”
shirt or eating an "official" cereal, adolescents can feel like they belong to something larger, such as a fan club or even a cult. At the same time, they are able to exhibit free will and individuality by showing the rest of the world who or what they choose to endorse.

1.3.6 Ophelia’s Fan Club

Searching for web sites with dialogue about Shakespeare’s character, Ophelia, I came across a number of sites for teen angst bands and teen poetry. It seems that this four hundred year-old character still has a fan club. This fan club consists primarily of unhappy adolescents, which makes sense; there are few young girls in Western literature with a life more dismal than Ophelia’s. She obeyed authority and neither made choices nor took risks. For being such a passionate young girl, Ophelia led an incredibly boring and stifling life. In addition, she had no mother, and her only peers (Hamlet and her brother, Laertes) abandoned her. To Ophelia’s like-minded fans, suicide probably looks like the only solution to their problems as well.

This generation’s fascination with Ophelia is not unique. In the mid- to late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century, several artists were obsessed with the image of Shakespeare’s dejected daughter. Sir John Everett Millais (1829-96), original member of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and student of the Royal Academy in England, painted one of the more recognizable images of her. In Ophelia (1851), a young woman floats on her back in a river or pond. She is surrounded by lush green algae and foliage, and flowers float on the surface of the water around her. Her dress
billows lightly in the dark water. The painting does not depict a realistic dead body, but rather a romantic notion of death: pale skin, eyes and mouth open, arms and palms slightly open to the sky, giving a sense of surrendering to natural forces. The viewer can presume the woman is dead if he or she knows Ophelia’s fate.

John William Waterhouse (1849-1917), like Millais, painted at the Royal Academy during the Victorian period, but his style was more classical than Millais’s. Waterhouse is often grouped with the pre-Raphaelites because he was similarly interested in depicting images of beautiful young women. His body of work includes at least three images of Ophelia. *Ophelia* (1894) sits on a log over a body of water and prepares herself for death. Her environment is similar to Millais’s Ophelia, but lily pads replace algae, and the more open space surrounding her is a foggy blue. A ring of red and white flowers crown her head. Her long brown hair drapes her back. She wears a blue dress in which the viewer can see the curve of her belly, raising the question of whether she conceived Hamlet’s child. Her skin is almost as pale as the white daisies that sit in her lap. Waterhouse’s most famous pre-Raphaelite painting, *The Lady of Shallot* (1888), depicts a figure like that of the 1894 image of Ophelia crossing dark and murky water in a gondola. She wears a white dress and her expression is one of desperation.

Waterhouse’s *Ophelia* (1910) wears a rich blue dress accented with gold embroidery along the collar, sleeves, and hem, with deep red undergarments. Her fiery red hair and full red lips are striking features against her alabaster skin. She carries a bouquet of red and white flowers in her dress; the same flowers are strewn in her hair,
as in Waterhouse’s 1894 image. Her eyes show fear and desperation, as though she is suffering from hysteria, and she appears to be running away from something. The biggest difference between this composition of Ophelia and most others is that this Ophelia is not alone. Two children, one in blue and one in red, witness Ophelia from a bridge in the background. In both paintings of Ophelia by Waterhouse mentioned above, the young woman is captured in action. In the former, she is preparing for death. In the latter, she is running away from something unsettling.

These actions, which mirror those of Shakespeare’s Ophelia, influenced the journey that Jenny took in iphelOa. Jenny ran away from home and sought solace in the arms of a waterfall, where she drowned. The colors in the paintings also found their way into the production. The predominant color scheme was a pale blue similar to Waterhouse’s 1894 painting. While other research fed my creative process, it was the visual depictions of Ophelia by pre-Raphaelite painters that directly influenced Jenny’s primary costume and the lighting effects in the production.
CHAPTER 2

PRODUCTION CIRCUMSTANCES

The following chapter includes a summary of what each member of the production team did to make the production run successfully. I also discuss an important meeting that the stage managers and actor-creators held in preparation for our first production meeting. Finally, I include my initial director’s concept statement for iphelQa.

2.1 The Production Team

Even though iphelQa is essentially a solo performance, the rehearsal process was never a solo endeavor. The production team to which I belonged was experienced and dedicated to high quality work. In addition, most of us had worked together in some capacity prior to the New Works production. Our level of comfort with each other and the studio space made our jobs easier.

2.1.1 Edna Berkey, Stage Manager

I spent a lot of solitary time during the initial research and writing process. When it was time to expose the work to outside eyes, I did not feel ready. I wanted
more time. Jeanine had to coax me onto my feet during our Autumn Quarter New Works Lab. I am so thankful that she did, because I could easily have continued sketching new pieces at that point. By transitioning from writing new material into crafting the existing text, I was able to set limits, goals, and deadlines for my writing and rehearsal process over Christmas break. By the time Winter Quarter began, I was tired of working alone. I felt ready for outside eyes and suggestions for improvement. Thankfully, my stage manager and I had already discussed her unique role in this process.

Edna Berkey, a senior theatre major, had stage-managed one of the MFA New Works projects last winter. Soon after that production closed, Edna told me that she was interested in stage managing my project the following year. We knew each other from Introduction to Theatre (she was in my recitation section in Winter 1998), OSU’s production of The Memorandum (she was an assistant stage manager and I was in the cast), and Voice and Speech Studio I (she was a student while I was regularly observing). Having already begun to develop a working relationship, I was pleased that she wanted to be my stage manager. Edna’s previous experience was a relief to me. I knew that her duties in last year’s project extended beyond those of a traditional stage manager, and she was prepared to accept those duties again, particularly being an outside eye for me throughout the rehearsal process.

It was not until I returned from Winter break and began rehearsing in Mount Hall that Edna joined the process. When we began, her basic duties were simply to keep an eye on the clock, to make me schedule my rehearsal time more specifically,
and to tell me when something did not make sense. Once the fabric was rigged, Edna’s
duties included taking down blocking on a draft-in-progress, being prepared to call an
ambulance if I hurt myself, and telling me if something looked too dangerous—her
verbal response, “Oh no,” usually sufficed. Looking back, the most important element
in our relationship was that I could unquestioningly trust her to give me her honest
opinion, to manage the process, and to ensure my safety. It was great not having to
control everything.

2.1.2 Quinn Carlson, Performer

The MFA New Works was Quinn’s first production in the OSU Theatre
Department. Michael Karp cast the talented freshman in the role of Mr. Bones in
Barnum’s American Museum with the understanding that he would be involved in
iphelOa as well. At the time Quinn was cast, Jenny was the only on-stage character in
iphelOa. Soon after he joined the production team I decided to write in Jenny’s little
brother, Jason. This was an easy decision. Quinn’s audition and callback were strong,
and Michael and I felt lucky to have him on our team. I knew that Quinn could handle
two performances in one evening. More than anything, Quinn was a perfect little
brother type with a very contemporary look.

2.1.3 Julie Graham, House Manager

Julie Graham, senior Theatre major, was our box office manager. Her role was
important to both pieces. Julie and I had direct contact each night. She watched me set
myself in the fabric and listened for my “okay” before opening the house. During intermission, Julie instructed the audience to exit the space so that ipheLOa could strike and Barnum's American Museum could load in their set. Because Julie maintained a strong line of communication with the performers as well as the stage managers during this process, we never had a problem transitioning from one piece to the next.

2.1.4 Matt Kari, Floor Treatment

Matt Kari and his paint crew gave us a special floor treatment. Because Michael and I both had set and costume pieces with shiny surfaces, we asked Nan Zhang, the lighting designer, if some silver paint on the floor would be possible. With her approval, Michael and I approached Matt, who got permission from his advisor to add silver to the standard black floor. As an added bonus, Matt spattered blue paint over the silver. This small detail gave more dimension to the space and made us feel like our production was important. The studio productions are meant to be extremely low-maintenance. Considering that fall quarter's high school touring show, Roasted Shoes, Toasted Tootsies, performed on the floor from a previous production of Caryl Churchill's Fen, we greatly appreciated that the studio floor was specifically ours. It added to our sense of ownership and pride in the space.

2.1.5 Michael Karp, Sound Designer

My classmate and husband, Michael, spent almost as much time designing sound for productions these past three years as he did performing in them. His sound
design credits include an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* to be performed by two actors; *The Field*, a ten-minute play that I directed for a class project in 1999; Giles Davies’s thesis project, *Whu Is One*, and Michael’s thesis project, *Barnum’s American Museum*.

Michael, or Karpo (as he prefers to be called in the work place), creates sound designs on his computer. For this project he spent a lot of time in our office recording and warping my voice and listening to at least 24 various sounds of water. This process was grueling, but the level of collaboration was high, and sharing our ideas made the process fun, even at four in the morning on a technical rehearsal day. Karpo walked me through the process. He explained to me the number of ways he could manipulate the sound of my voice, then created examples on the spot. I learned his vocabulary this way, which expedited the process. His sound effects far exceeded my expectations. I felt fortunate to have him on my design team.

Karpo burned a rehearsal CD for me prior to technical rehearsals. It included pre-show selections and the sound cues that I was certain I needed. After my initial technical rehearsal, he burned me a second and final CD, with the pre-show selections and all of the sound cues to be used in this production. I appreciated his hard work, expertise, and support in this endeavor.

### 2.1.6 John Leahy, Run Crew

John, a senior Theatre major and tremendous asset to this department, stage managed *Barnum’s American Museum*. Because he aspires to be a technical director like his mentor, Mark Shanda, he could not have picked a better production. Michael’s
piece was technically heavy for a studio show, while mine was minimal in technical needs. As we approached technical rehearsals, however, I did miss a detail in iphe\textit{Oa}: I needed to strike a few set props but did not have a run crew. John agreed to help me; in return, Michael borrowed Edna for video crew. I am grateful that our team was willing to do whatever it took to execute the evening’s performances as efficiently as possible.

2.1.7 Mark Shanda and Julia Weiss: Fabric Rigging Specialists

Mark Shanda and Julia Weiss were rarely seen, but they had a great deal to do with the set for iphe\textit{Oa}. Because the fabric was the only permanent set prop in the piece, and because I climbed it, swung on it, and hung from it night after night, it was absolutely necessary that the fabric be sturdy and safe for rehearsal and performance. Julia fortified the fabric for rigging and Mark rigged the fabric in the space.

2.1.8 Jason Swank, Light Board Operator

Another member of our production team was senior Theatre major, Jason Swank, who not only ran the light board for both pieces, but also coordinated a video production team to tape our performances as part of professor Dan Boord’s Video Production course. Jason joined the production team on the evening of crew watch. Even though he was with us for a short time, he was an integral part of the process.
2.1.9 Michael Jon Washer, Technical Director

Michael Jon Washer, our technical director, was rarely seen at the studio. His responsibilities were limited for two reasons: first, the studio shows tend to be technically low-maintenance; secondly, John Leahy was able to solve most of the problems a technical director would encounter. Michael Jon did, however, create a contraption to strike the iphelOa fabric for Barnum’s American Museum. It became our entertainment during the change-over at intermission to watch the fabric disappear into a long tube in the cat walks.

2.1.10 Nan Zhang, Lighting Designer

First year MFA lighting designer, Nan Zhang, was assigned to the MFA New Works production. After lighting Russian guest director Anatoly Morozov’s production of The Marriage during Autumn 1999, Nan expressed her excitement in designing our new works. Both Karpo and I were happy to give her a lot of freedom.

When I gave Nan an early draft of the script, I explained to her that the play shifts from a realistic world to an underwater world and returns to a different realistic world. I kept my wish list small: I told her that I was interested in using a particular lighting instrument that gave the effect of water in motion. It was used in OSU’s production of The Misanthrope to create the illusion of a swimming pool. I also mentioned that I had fallen in love with a saturated color effect that was used in OSU’s production of Angels in America: Part Two. Having worked in Mount Hall Studio
twice already, I knew that Nan would be limited in number and types of instruments. Moreover, because she was designing two absolutely different productions on one plot, she would be more limited than usual.

Before technical rehearsals began, Nan brought me to the lighting studio to examine some different instruments and gels to find out what I really wanted. I have not directed many productions, so I am not sure whether this kind of collaboration is customary, but I thoroughly appreciated it. Her lighting crew was also very helpful and dedicated to the project. During technical rehearsals, I stopped several times to thank Nan for her beautiful work. She found a way to bring in two rotating lights for the waterfall scene. She also helped me find a super-saturated color for a heightened moment at Jenny's bedroom window. The scene in which Jenny finds herself in a new place (underwater) amazed me. I had an image in my mind of dim green, an idea so inarticulate that I had never expressed it to Nan, yet that is exactly what she designed. This part of the process was exciting to me as a performer because the world I had imagined for the character was truly coming to life.

2.2 The Pre-Production Meeting

Before our first MFA New Works production meeting, Michael, John, Edna, and I met to review some of last year’s challenges and prepare a game plan for the upcoming meeting. The first problem addressed was the seating arrangement in Mount Hall studio. Apparently, last year’s artists wanted to adjust the seats during
intermission, and the faculty opposed. Michael and I decided on a thrust seating arrangement early in the process to avoid re-writes, re-staging, and any other problems we might have encountered.

Last year, the New Works production received only one crew member. In the post-production meeting, both artists strongly suggested bringing in a second crew person to be used as needed. In the case of solo artist, Giles Davies, who had multiple costume changes off-stage, an additional crew member could have been employed as a wardrobe assistant. We could not be certain of receiving an additional person this year, so we had to consider the limitations of having only one crew member. Since my piece had minimal off-stage time and a minimal set, we skipped directly to Michael’s spectacular ten-in-one vaudeville show. Edna and I offered our services, should Michael need assistance back stage. Michael decided that he would cast an assistant, who, in addition to performing, could also serve the show as a run crew person. We all decided Michael was brilliant. John reminded Michael to post an audition notice and to participate in the unified auditions and casting meeting. Michael recommended that I attend auditions and call-backs with him, since the person cast would be involved in both pieces, and I agreed.

John, Edna, Michael, and I unanimously decided that one set of keys should be with the performers, at least over Christmas break. This way, John and Edna could enjoy their vacation time. For safety reasons, Michael and I assured them that we would accompany each other to the space. Edna asked us to repeat our promise to the faculty in the production meeting. We were told to devise a preliminary rehearsal
schedule that would not conflict with each other’s time in the studio. Michael and I found a simple solution to scheduling the space. I had daytime hours available in my schedule, so I suggested that I rehearse in the space from 3:00-6:15 p.m., and Michael rehearse from 6:45-10:00 p.m. This way, we could rehearse in the performance space every day instead of using a different rehearsal room every other night. The half-hour between our rehearsal times would be used for striking and setting props and checking in with the other half of the team to exchange any important information.

Edna told us to bring a props and costume list to the meeting. She advised us to put anything we might need onto these lists. The technical director and producer could then tell us what was and was not possible. The most important topic that arose was how we defined the production. Michael and I had witnessed the numerous conflicts that last year’s New Works artists encountered. We identified their core problem to be a misunderstanding of the production itself. The production is called MFA New Works. It is not two productions; it is an evening of new works performances. John and Edna agreed that we must treat each other as one production team.

With this sense of team work, we entered the first production meeting (a few days later), confident and prepared. We emerged successful, our basic needs agreed upon and supported by the faculty. Now that we had permission, Michael and I were eager to begin the next steps of the process: moving into the studio, building the sets, and staging the work.
2.3 Director's Concept Statement

_iphelOa_ explores choices that today's teenagers face in their homes, societies, and America at large. Loosely based on William Shakespeare's character Ophelia, a present day millennium "grrl" shares her thoughts and experiences on being a teen.

Thinking she has successfully staged her own death, this "sweet sixteen" attempts to delight in her triumph, but she is interrupted by a voice of reason, which probes her to reflect on her actions and explain her reasons. When her selective memory is challenged by what is or what might be, she must plunge deeper to solve her own riddles.

The structure of _iphelOa_ resembles Joseph Campbell's dissection of the hero's journey, especially as it applies to Dante's _Divine Comedy_. The main character is tempted or invited into a new adventure. Finding herself in new surroundings, she is met with personal trials or challenges. Upon successful completion, she must reckon with her changed self and her homeland. The voice of reason is her own personal Virgil on this journey, at times coaching, challenging, probing, and assisting her voyage.

While the topic of _iphelOa_ is essentially "Teen Angst and What You Can Do About It," this is not necessarily a dismal experience. References to contemporary American celebrities and events (e.g. Tommy Lee, Brad Pitt, the Trenchcoat Mafia, _Felicity_) will help clarify that this is happening today. Costume design and music will do the same.
The costume will have at least three distinct layers, which will be shed throughout the performance. The first layer should have a very feminine silhouette to it, a corset and skirt, perhaps slightly resembling 16th Century dress. The second layer would be a recognizable teenage “phase” costume, yet to be determined, but most likely of the “grrl” genre (e.g. Tank Girl, Riot Girl). The final layer will be a simple outfit seen on most mainstream teens right now (e.g. Abercrombie and Fitch, Old Navy, American Eagle, Gap; white shirt, gray fleece vest, boot leg jeans), with a personal twist. Both Aimee Greer and Tatjana Longerot have expressed interest in helping Michael and me find and/or build costume pieces outside of their scheduled commitments. I also plan to make an appointment with Julia Weiss, costumer for the Department of Theatre, to see if anything I need can be pulled. I understand that this would be a favor to me, not a privilege.

The sound designer for iphelOa is Michael Karp. All music and sound will be on compact disc. In general, the design will include several contemporary alternative rock songs. It will also offer environmental sounds. I know that various sounds of moving water will be used ocean waves, drops of water, running water, and splashing water. I also need a live microphone in the space. A headset or body microphone would be best. I will also be using recorded voice. I plan to ask Dan Boord about availability of the Haskett Hall recording studio.

The space will be arranged in thrust, seating eighty audience members. The set will consist of large lengths of fabric twisting from the grid to the floor. One length will hang from the grid (or something secured to the grid), which can hold my body
weight. I have briefly discussed possibilities with Mark Shanda, and I plan to seek Dennis Parker’s advice in the very near future. I will also need a transparent inflatable chair and an assorted stack of teenager magazines. I will provide my CD player for any music that might come from on stage. SPECIFIC NEEDS: I will be smoking about half of a cigarette in each performance. Also, I will be entering the space soaked in water from head to toe.

I want the lights to transform the space from what appears to be normal nighttime to underwater. In general, the color scheme is blues and greens. I would like to find subtle motion in the underwater lighting; I am interested in using the wave machine that created the swimming pool effect in The Misanthrope last season. I have also briefly discussed the possibility of creating a shaft of light inside one of the lengths of fabric. I also need a black light.

Michael and I want to build temporary environmental displays for the second floor lobby and studio hallway that would be quickly assembled each night before each performance. When the audience initially enters, we want the space to suggest the first piece they see. During the first performance, this display will be taken down and the second piece’s display raised so that when the audience exits the space at intermission, they walk into an entirely different environment. This friendly mayhem is suggested in both ipheLOa and Barnum’s American Museum: the familiar has been altered by time or perspective. As an example, the environmental display for ipheLOa might be posters of
popular contemporary musicians and film actors, and several popular teen bedroom items, like a tinsel covered desk lamp, beaded frames and mirrors, and (particular to this teen) a large sign reading, "Ophelia's Pond: Sink or Swim."

Michael and I are currently trying to coordinate our schedules for showings. We plan to show our work to our committees during the first week of November, again in early December, and a third time in mid-January.

Michael and I have split rehearsal time into two basic slots: 3:00-6:15 p.m. and 6:45-10:00 p.m. The half-hour between slots allows for clearing and resetting the space and checking in with the other stage manager and performer regarding any shared business. Michael and I both plan to rehearse in the space over Christmas vacation. For everyone's safety and peace of mind, we will accompany each other in the space at all times over the vacation. Michael and I have decided that iphelOa will tech the first day, and Barnum's American Museum the second day.

iphelOa and Barnum's American Museum will open Tuesday, February 1, 2000, at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday (February 2, 2000) through Saturday (February 5, 2000) evening performances will begin at 8:00 p.m., with a Saturday matinee at 2:00 p.m. Michael and I have decided that the order of every evening will be iphelOa followed by Barnum's American Museum. We based this decision on expected running time of each show as well as on style and content.
BUDGET

I understand that the department is providing me with $150.00. I have budgeted it as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compact Discs ($1 ea.)</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
<td>(to be used/destroyed on stage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makeup (street)</td>
<td>$10.00</td>
<td>(to be used/destroyed on stage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen Magazines (10 x$3)</td>
<td>$30.00</td>
<td>(to be used/destroyed on stage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-sized journal</td>
<td>$18.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflatable Chair</td>
<td>$28.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Display materials</td>
<td>$24.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabric dye (est. $3/lb.)</td>
<td>$30.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL COST</strong></td>
<td><strong>$150.00</strong></td>
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I will provide additional needs, such as fabric, costume purchases, on-stage boom box, and any additional items already mentioned above.
When I began writing ipheLOa, I anticipated using text from a number of sources, including women's magazine articles, Shakespeare's Hamlet, female case studies published by Freud, and dream interpretations about falling and flying. I also planned to write my own text, influenced by my research on adolescent behavior. As the writing process continued, my thesis committee suggested that I eliminate found text and use more of my own text. This chapter includes character sketches, my research and writing journal, and the final draft of ipheLOa that was used in performance. Because the sketches and journal were treated as creative writing exercises, the writing style is informal.

3.1 Jenny 2000: A Character Sketch Collection

Below are some sketches I wrote while developing the character, Jenny, in ipheLOa. Some of these pieces became a part of the final script, others fell away. In all, the exercise in writing character sketches brought me closer to Jenny and helped me understand her inner life. I numbered the sketches in the order they were written.
3.1.1 Sketch I: “About Me”

My greatest fear? I think I have two: failure and rejection. They usually go hand in hand in my world. I think the worst is when I do everything I’m supposed to, follow all the rules, by the book, and I lose anyway. That’s probably why I force myself to break rules, do drugs, have sex, break curfew, drive without a license, date the wrong guys, sneak out, surround myself with totally unreliable peers I don’t even respect, and risk everything that I hold dear, admire, or respect. Shit on myself, basically, is what it seems like. Funny, I think we consider it freeing ourselves. I still feel that way, too. The fact is, it just can’t all be justified or even explained. It just happens. It’s white water rapids. It’s currents, undertows, waves that we only feel once they’ve got us.

It’s hard to feel a sense of direction underwater. You just figure you’ll wash up somewhere and hope for the best. Or you hope that Tommy Lee or Brad Pitt or some other hottie will come along and save you.

You look to anything that resembles order or civilization or structure. You look for anchors, buoys, and little thing that can guide you back to the surface.

3.1.2 Sketch II: “I am in charge of myself”

I AM IN CHARGE OF MYSELF! But I’m so not. I don’t have a car. My curfew is eleven. I cook dinner for dad and me. I have to clean my room and do chores before I can go to a friend’s. No TV ‘til homework’s done. It’s so - - old-fashioned! NO ONE’s like that anymore! It’s so embarrassing.
Everybody else pushes their 'rents around. They get whatever they want. My friend Allison? Got an Abercrombie & Fitch credit card when she was twelve. My brother got his own car when he turned sixteen.

When I turned sixteen? Dad had a meeting with his boss. He took me along to this really nice restaurant, and proceeded to discuss mergers and corporate spy stuff with Mr. C (short for CEO) while I just sat there.

At least there was this really cute waiter working. He kept smiling at me.

I guess Mr. C ordered champagne. Probably to celebrate some business deal, I doubt it had anything to do with my birthday. But Dad wasn’t even gonna let me have any! So Mr. C cut in and told dad, “Oh, Come on Paul! She’s sixteen, for God’s sake. She’s the woman of the house now. She’ll be bossing you around in no time.” Then he proceeds to tell Dad all about Allison’s sixteenth birthday--Allison? Abercrombie & Fitch-Witch? (Sometimes I hate her.) Anyway, about how on her sixteenth birthday, she got a limo with a stocked bar and got to take six of her friends to the Blink 182/Silverchair concert. She invited me, but dad wouldn’t let me go cuz we weren’t gonna get back ‘til 1:30 in the morning. It was a Friday night! I had no school, I didn’t have dance classes. I swear sometimes he is so unreasonable!

So we toasted my birthday and then--and this is sooo embarrassing-- the cute waiter comes by the table and wishes me a happy birthday and winks. Then walks away. My face turned so red. Of course Dad and his boss couldn’t let it slide; I’m like sinking in my chair, and they won’t STOP! (Everything stops, sounds, music, and the lights change to something more solitary.) I just want to savor this one little
moment in my life and they won’t let me. It’s like I’m not allowed to enjoy anything until I’m completely independent. No wonder my brother’s studying abroad. I’m sure it was never this bad for him. *(Sound, music, lights resume.)*

3.1.3 Sketch III: “About My Brother”

What’s there to say that you couldn’t guess. Mom’s dead. Dad rules. Son wins. It’s always been this way. It will always be this way.

3.1.4 Sketch IV: “About My Boyfriend”

I’m in love:

a. with the Prince of Denmark

b. with the most miserable young man in history

c. with a man who can’t love me back

Which makes me:

a. stupid for falling for him

b. crazy for still loving him

c. suicidal

This is my heart.

This is my heart in love. (?!)

Any questions?
What does he expect me to do? Just sit around here, waiting, 'til he has the
time and the courage to tell me he likes me? Of course I will, which I hate, but what
else is there is to do?

I’m depressed because I can’t make him love me. I’m angry because he won’t
come around on his own. The whole thing makes me anxious, and anxiety is a bad
trip.

The day that Hamlet went away to college, I started my period. I was so
freaked out, I hid up in the study, half hoping that he’d forgotten a book and had to
retrieve it, or better still, that he’d make the boat wait ‘til he’d found me and said good­
bye one more time.

My Dad and Claudius just see me as an agent. I’m their lackey. I live for
them. And it doesn’t help that the only other woman around here is Claudius’s wife. I
mean, that’s her job, to be an agent. (A TOOL!) One king dies, just marry the next
one. No loyalty there. I guess there’s something to be said for keeping it in the
family. Right.

Thank God Hamlet was away during all that. People were saying some pretty
sick stuff about his mom. When he came home for his dad’s funeral, I just wanted to
grab him and run away somewhere, hide him from all the funny looks everyone would
be giving him. And they so were. They weren’t even trying to hide it. They all knew
something he didn’t and they were just going to show it.
Anyway, Dad wouldn’t let me meet Hamlet at the boat. He gave me a bunch of reasons why not, but I know he just doesn’t want me around him. I swear, he thinks I’ll get pregnant just by being looked at by a guy. By Hamlet.

So I watched from my room upstairs. It was really late when he got in. I saw him get off the boat. It was hard to see him. It was really dark and the water was black and the boat was black. I only knew it was him when he walked past one of the sails. His hair. He has a cowlick right at the top of his head, same place his dad did. That’s all I saw of him ‘til the next afternoon.

3.1.5 Sketch V: “About Other Things, Like Being a Girl”

THE TEEN COMMANDMENTS: Teen Magazine as Cultural Bible

1. Thou shalt not use the time of the month excuse in vain.

2. Thou shalt worship the flavor of the month, and there shall be no other idols before him.

3. Thou shalt honor Saturday afternoon at the mall and keep it wholly important.

4. Honor thy mother and thy father, especially when you want something you know they’ll never go for.

5. Thou shalt not borrow thy friend’s favorite three-quarter sleeve boatneck fitted shirt that she’s only worn once and forget to return it before a really important occasion!

6. Thou shalt NOT cheat on thy boyfriend, unless he cheats on you first.
7. Thou shalt not embarrass thy friends in front of really cute guys. That includes not showing them notes that say how fine they are or how someone's picture made it on the wall or ANYTHING.

8. Thou shalt not spread rumors about people in thy own circle. Gossip's fine, no rumors, though.

9. Thou shalt not covet thy friends' boyfriends.

10. Thou shalt not covet thy friends' stuff (they should be sharing it with you anyway).

Private All Girls School is so boring. All I'm learning is how to answer Cosmo quizzes correctly, apply lipstick like Miss America contestants, and how to attract the right man.

Why couldn't I have been a boy? As a girl, I have to acknowledge men and women and what each expects of me (which is the same thing whatever the man says). But if I was a boy, I could drown out all women, write them off entirely, and just listen to myself. What good is a woman anyway, unless she's breeding? And how long can women hold that over men's heads?

When I watch talk shows, it is so rare to see a guy talking about why he's so distraught that the woman he loves is leaving him or ignoring him or spends too much time and energy at work and not enough at home with him.
3.1.6 Sketch VI: “Ophelia and the Psychologist, Part I”

Psychologist: So, tell me a little bit about yourself.

Ophelia: What is this, an interview?

Psychologist: Seriously.

Ophelia: There’s not much to tell.

Psychologist: Good, I only want to hear a little bit.

Ophelia: In that case, there’s nothing to tell.

Psychologist: Nothing?

Ophelia: Nothing you’d want to hear.

Psychologist: Why not? Are you boring?

Ophelia: I guess.

Psychologist: Why do you guess?

Ophelia: Everyone else seems to think so.

Psychologist: Do your friends think so?

Ophelia: Sometimes.

Psychologist: Why?

Ophelia: Because I don’t do the things they do?

Psychologist: What do they do?


Psychologist: I can’t imagine you’re more boring than that.

Ophelia: Try harder.

Psychologist: What do you do?
Ophelia: Nothing.

Psychologist: Nothing, as in . . .


Psychologist: Are you afraid to tell me?

Ophelia: No.

Psychologist: Why don’t you want me to know?

Ophelia: What if I’m telling the truth? What if I don’t do anything? What if I truly don’t have a life? What if all I do all day long is sit on my bed and stare at the wallpaper and wish I was dead?

Psychologist: That’s not nothing.

Ophelia: That’s not what I do.

Psychologist: So you were lying?

Ophelia: I was speaking hypothetically.

Psychologist: Then hypothetically speaking, what would you do if you had a day to yourself?

Ophelia: To myself?

Psychologist: All to yourself.

Ophelia: No family?

Psychologist: No friends, no teachers, no classmates, no body.

Ophelia: (pause) I’m thinking.

Psychologist: I’m patient.

Ophelia: I know. (pause) I guess I’d go for a walk.
Psychologist: Where?

Ophelia: By the waterfall downtown.

Psychologist: What would you do there? *(interrupts her)* No “I d’no’s”.

Ophelia: I’d look for fish.

Psychologist: What else?

Ophelia: If it was warm, I’d sit on the rocks and dangle my feet in the pool.

Psychologist: If it was cold?

Ophelia: *(smarting off at the psychologist)* I’d be inside. *(not winning the power struggle, she quietly responds)* I’d sing.

Psychologist: I’m sorry?

Ophelia: *(now over-articulating)* I’d sing.

Psychologist: You like to sing?

Ophelia: No.

Psychologist: I see.

Ophelia: It’s just something I do when no one’s around.

Psychologist: Why? *(interrupts her)* No “I d’no’s”.

Ophelia: This is frustrating.

Psychologist: *(as though also frustrated)* I know.

Ophelia: Shut up.

Psychologist: Why do you sing?

Ophelia: It makes me feel better.

Psychologist: Better than what?
Ophelia: Better than dead.

Psychologist: What do you sing?

Ophelia: Whatever comes to mind.

Psychologist: Do you have a favorite?

Ophelia: You're not gonna make me sing, are you?

Psychologist: I d'no.

Ophelia: No "I d'no's".

Psychologist: Maybe.

Ophelia: Maybe what?

Psychologist: Maybe you'll sing for me?

Ophelia: Maybe not.

Psychologist: Why not?

Ophelia: Because I do it for me, you big schlem.

Psychologist: Then why did you ask me if I was going to make you sing? (big pause) What are you thinking?

Ophelia: (lightening her own mood) That I can't say "I d'no".

Psychologist: What else? (Ophelia shrugs, too upset to talk) Was it something I said?

(Ophelia shakes her head) What is it?

Ophelia: I can't do anything for myself.

Psychologist: Can't?

Ophelia: Don't. That's just as bad.

Psychologist: You sing for yourself.
Ophelia: That's nothing.

Psychologist: I thought nothing was sitting on your bed staring at the wallpaper wishing you were dead.

Ophelia: You listen too much.

Psychologist: So I've been told.

3.1.7 Sketch VII: "Ophelia and the Psychologist, Part II"

Ophelia: Is this for real? Where is this coming from? God, I think I'm gonna be sick. I'm a pawn, a tool, an agent, a gopher. I'm a child, a daughter, a girlfriend, a sister. I'm the invisible girl, an empty vessel, a nobody of my own. I'm a memory of nothing of note. I'm already dead.

Psychologist: So suicide is the answer to public humiliation, and death of a loved one, and rejection from a boyfriend? Is there no chance for recovery?

Ophelia: You make it sound so well-thought out. It's not like I say, God, I feel terrible today, but not enough to commit suicide. For this to be a suicide day I need to see my boyfriend kissing my best friend in front of my locker at school just as the TV in the cafeteria declares that we're heading into a nuclear war with Iraq while, simultaneously, our local branch of the trenchcoat mafia plows through the commons area with more weapons than most third world countries, announcing that their target for the day is environmentally aware brunette virgin honor students with at least four years of ballet whose interests include astrology, poetry, rock collecting, and dream
analysis. Oh, and the lucky candidate must be five foot seven inches tall, allergic to penicillin, and fluent in a foreign language. And then I’d be thinking, “Oh cool, I’m off the hook ‘cause I’m not fluent in a foreign language.” But just then the principal comes out of his stuffy office with an incoming fax from the state superintendent confirming that American Sign Language has just been approved as a foreign language in accredited private schools, including our very own Sweet Valley High, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much.

Okay, I did not just give you the big fat scoop on me. But you know what? If I had a day like that, the last thing I’d be thinking about is suicide. And now that I am in such a stellar mood, I think I’ll go pick some daisies. Why don’t you stay here so you can fill someone else’s day with sunshine.

3.1.8 Sketch VIII: “Ophelia’s Side of the Conversation”

I am not a child. And I’m not an adult, and I’m not a kid. I’m a person who understands that she is going to be an adult soon and must try to start acting like one. Everything you see in me is a reflection of everything I see older people doing. The way I dress, the relationships I seek, the independence from my family that I want, the risks I take. I see, I do. (Pause.) Are my actions really so wrong? And if the consequences are truly that bad, then why does everyone keep doing it? (Silence.) But they really do feel like they’re gaining something; I don’t. (Silence.) This is my point. You wouldn’t seek a cure unless the problem was so incredibly bad. (Silence.) Do you know how many times I’ve heard that our pain is our identity? I cannot tell
you how many times a day I have to listen to people out-identify each other. It’s so stupid. But what’s even more stupid is that they don’t even talk about themselves; they brag about knowing other people who have really bad problems. It’s identity abuse.

3.2 Research and Writing Journal

The following excerpts are from my thesis journal, which housed my research, writing, rehearsal, and performance notes. I separated my original journal into two sections: “research and writing,” and “rehearsal and performance.” Even though research and writing are divided into two different chapters in this thesis, I was actually engaged in both processes at the same time. It was important for me to preserve the organic development of this project as much as possible, so I have left the journal in its original arrangement.

My first committee showing, November 1, 1999, marks the official beginning of my rehearsal process (see 4.4: Rehearsal and Performance Journal). There is still some crossover between the sections, but I found that point to be the best dividing line. I left some smaller character sketches intact and have identified them with italics. More sketches can be found earlier in this chapter (see 3.1: Jenny 2000, A Collection of Character Sketches).

July 9, 1999

I finally started reading Reviving Ophelia yesterday. I wouldn’t have put it down except that I was going to rehearsal. I got a little depressed, concerned,
discouraged, and disheartened reading about young, young women with very adult problems. The thing is, I know that I was in the same position as a lot of these young girls. I don’t know exactly what I was thinking, what I wanted, what I expected to get out of my actions.

Undated

In developing the character for iphe{l}Oa, I want to examine the components of teens that Pipher describes in Reviving Ophelia (page 35), specifically regarding the contradictions they hear from authority figures.

I recently co-taught a seven day communication skills course to minority teens. We engaged in theatre games, exercises, and activities for the purposes of developing and recognizing interpersonal communication methods. These kids know how they communicate, and they often know when and why they communicate the way they do.

They really know about eyes: eye contact.

August 27, 1999

What’s happened to me? I used to have so much fun. Now I just stare in the mirror for hours and nothing stares back at me. I can talk on the phone all night, but in the morning I don’t feel like I’ve really said anything. It’s like I’m already dead.

I think there’s a male presence, a voice that talks down to Ophelia: sometimes as her father, sometimes as the social patriarch, sometimes as a psychiatrist. And since
that patriarch never seems to falter, change, or break, that voice really could be recorded. In the best of all possible worlds, I could travel with a CD or tape.

_You never break, do you? I could be laughing, crying, or screaming my head off, and you just won’t let me effect you, will you? You think you know everything about everything and everybody. Just because you made the rules doesn’t mean I can’t break them. Asshole._

August 31, 1999

I’m interested in materialism/consumerism of the eighties to the present, especially as it has effected teens. The need to have or to own has created teen monsters like never before. Where are kids getting the money to buy all this stuff?

Hamlet, Laertes, and Polonius all supposedly love Ophelia, in different ways. Somehow the result is that Ophelia must split up her love and her self for these three men. She doesn’t have enough left for herself. She doesn’t know that she can or should keep some for herself. Why not? Because she’s been raised by men—the very men who desire her love. Self-love was not part of a woman’s training in this patriarchal society. Polonius tells Laertes, “. . . to thine own self be true” (1. 3. 78). He doesn’t give Ophelia the same advice (well, he commands, as opposed to advising).

Undated

“Tammy,” age seventeen, is a good reference for reactions to a severe rejection-acceptance yo-yo (Pipher, 159).
October 4, 1999

This girl is an angel. Michael brought up a good image: the fabric becomes wings. What else is angelic in image? Halo, wings, rays of light, sitting on clouds. Alas, no more pole. I’m thinking of fabric now; it suits the environment and elements better: water, air. I’m also considering sounds of bells, chimes, and water (waves, drops, running, rivers). I may also need voiceovers of a father, boyfriend, brother, God, and a psychologist.

The idea of hanging fabric in three areas sparks strong religious associations to me. There’s an image of a painting in this journal; I wonder if I can achieve lighting effects on the fabric like the painting. Do I want a smoke machine to make the space more unfamiliar and otherworldly? Do I need a fan to keep everything in motion? I’ve been describing the central fabric as the rabbit hole, which I see as the main entrance and exit to another world. It transports Ophelia through space. Can it send her through time or back to her own moment of action (choosing death)?

Does Fortinbras have a place in this? If Ophelia wakes up on earth, whether reborn, given another chance, or for some other reason, should there be signs of life other than her? How do I do that if this is solo? Is it not solo?

A long time ago, I was certain that this script would be a compilation of found text. While I’m still planning on using text from Shakespeare’s Hamlet (most likely from the Riverside edition), I’m not sure about using any other previously written material, especially contemporary adolescent stuff. As I read all these books, the issues and personal statements are no different from what I’ve been writing on my own. I
pulled the following quotes from Lynn Ponton’s *The Romance of Risk*, as a kind of reference point for my own work. When someone’s words resonated with Jenny’s behavior or how she sees the world, I jotted it down. Strangely, I didn’t find Sara Shandler’s compilation of personal accounts by teens (*Ophelia Speaks*) to be useful in the same way. Most of the young ladies wrote about problems that they had already resolved, while Ponton’s clients were often in the throes of identifying their problems.

“Jill” from Chapter 1, pp. 19-36:

“You can’t imagine it. Now I don’t even believe that it happened to me. It was the most amazing experience. Finally, I felt like I really belonged. Then it all had to end when the police came.” (20)

“I don’t even understand why I run. My parents are wonderful. It’s not them. It’s something inside of me.” (21)

“No adult can understand what it’s like . . . ” (21)

“It is so boring. The life, you, my parents, I feel like I could scream. When I’m with them . . . I feel alive. I feel like I’m part of something special then.” (22)

“I think on both sides now. It wasn’t like that before. I might think about what I wanted at the moment but never look at the complete picture.” (36)

“Ariel” from Chapter 2, pp. 37-55:

“I don’t seem to be very good at figuring things out.” (38)

“I’ve never had sex. . . . I would really like to be a virgin when I get married.” (38)
"I want you to have a really good impression of me. I mean, I have taken risks. You know about the acid, but I also smoke cigarettes, and I do stuff with guys at school . . . I seem to get in trouble all the time." (38)

"You're smart. You knew that if you said something, I would get real obsessed about it, but then if you acted like a shrink and didn't say anything at all, I'd also be obsessed about that." (39)

"How much do you want to know?" (40)

"I'm not going to kill myself, if that's what you mean. I think I'm depressed about what I'm doing, but, you know, I don't even know that for sure." (40)

"I don't remember. I know I loved my mom, but I don't really remember anything . . . If you can get a picture of her, I'd like it. I think I might look like her." (46)

"I want to make them feel like I feel. They deserve it. They are the lowest of the low. I feel like I want to hit them; sometimes I do." (47)

Ponton: "In the next session Ariel began to talk about feeling that she didn't amount to very much . . . calling herself 'a piece of shit.'" (50)

"Hannah" from Chapter 3, pp. 56-76:

"I basically think I do it to get attention from my mother and to feel like I'm special in some way." (64-5)

"I feel like I have no options." (65)

"It's amazing how many choices there have turned out to be." (76)
Ponton: "... Hannah freely admitted that she saw herself as painfully ugly—a frog in a family filled with princesses." (75)

"Maya" from Chapter 4, pp. 77-98:

"Whenever I thought about what I was going to say today, I’d start feeling sad. You’ve been telling me that I’m real good at figuring out what everyone else wants and not so good at figuring out what I want, and I think that you’re right. I kind of go with the flow. My mother’s like that. She’s a real strong lady, takes good care of my brothers and me, but I think that she caters to them too much. ... I don’t know if she thinks they’re so special just because they’re boys." (81)

"Jessica and Zoe" from Chapter 5, pp. 101-121:

Zoe: "You still call me sweetling, but you don’t mean it, that’s just to make me feel guilty." (102)

Zoe: "... she wants to dominate and control me, and I’m just not going to let her do that." (104)

Jessica: "I don’t want to stay here, and I won’t." (111)

"Maura" from Chapter 8, pp. 156-176:

"I was mad at Dad, but I was even angrier at myself." (161)

"In lots of ways, you’ve been a great father to me, but I still need you to be able to listen to me. You have so many ideas for me that I can’t focus on my own. I need to be able to have my own ideas. You’re always trying to confuse me." (169)
Ponton: "Did you think you were the only one?" (160)

Ponton: "... the outspokenness of young girls and awareness of their authority in the world changes in adolescence so that by the age of fifteen or sixteen they become less able to speak out, less sure of themselves, and less willing to discuss honestly their feelings and observations." (171)

Undated

I read some poetry and looked at a lot of Ophelias, mostly by pre-Raphaelites, but others, too. Millais and Waterhouse use a lot of bright green in one painting each. Often Ophelia is in blue. There is a different one by Paul Strenk that shows Ophelia in motion underwater. It's very mermaid-like. I'm still blown away by how many artists were and are fascinated by a young female character whom many theatre practitioners cast aside. And yet isn't that the draw? Who doesn't pity this young woman who does everything by the book and loses?

Undated

I was talking to Edna last night after our official meeting about girl stuff, and we both remarked how fun but sometimes awkward it is to try to be a girl. We were both tomboys growing up. I had a Tonka dump truck; she had a Voltron. Not much has changed. Edna is way into Silverchair. Could I have a better SM for this show?
She’s all about teen angst music. I’m going to pick up some magazines this week to see what I’m supposed to look like, and to read what I’m supposed to think, want, say, and do.

Undated

What is the rabbit hole? Is it Jenny’s choice to take a healthy or unhealthy risk? Is the punishment for teen suicide to have to relive teen years? Are the voices she hears underwater the same as those that exist above water, too? Is her confusion in how she hears things, or is it in what is really being said?

October 9, 1999

The Role of the Voice/Psychologist

Her conscience? The left lobe of her brain? Dialogue and debate over any socio-political or serious social/emotional issues will keep this character from sinking herself, from wallowing in self-pity, or blaming one side (self or society) too much. If this piece is going to high schools and colleges, then some cool-headed debate is truly necessary. Plus, it’s a keen device for bringing up more questions than can be answered.

And for me, personally, I come from a family that is repelled by the thought of sharing intimate details with a stranger. They believe we should be able to solve personal problems ourselves. I believe that part of this anti-shrink mentality has to do with being afraid of what you’ll find out about yourself. To be analyzed, picked apart,
discovered, or demystified can be a very scary proposition. Some people can deal with it, some can't. And maybe for some, it simply has to do with whether a person is curious about him/herself that way.

October 10, 1999

I noticed Friday that there were two fairly distinct categories of pre-Raphaelite (and contemporaries) images of Ophelia: in water, and on land. I haven't drawn a stronger distinction, but there's a sense of pre- and post-decision. One striking image of Ophelia on land (Waterhouse?) is Ophelia walking somewhere, her hand on a tree, carrying a bouquet of flowers in a blue dress with red and gold trim. Two children stand on a bridge over water in the background. One seems to be looking at her. Ophelia is pale, she has flowers in her hair, and her eyes are frightening wide open. Does she know where she's going? Does she know what she's going to do? Does she understand the consequences? What has just happened? In addition, she's not just looking off in some unknown direction. She is looking at the viewer. Was she caught in the middle of something? Is she trying to tell the viewer something? It's truly intriguing. This painting would be just another pretty face image of Ophelia if not for what the artist captured in her eyes.

My Personal History of Stage Space Theory

In directing and composition classes, the student learns that there are strong and weak areas to stage a particular event or action. For instance, powerful staging for a
king's initial entrance and cross would be entering upstage right and crossing
diagonally to downstage left. I believe that powerful staging devices can exceed the
horizontal plane. Consider the space above the actors' heads. This is usually wasted
space, in my opinion. It is left empty, negative. Sometimes designers get to fill it with
light, sound, and set dressing, but rarely does the director or actor think to fill it with
action. Why? Well, maybe because American theatre is so buried in realism. It, of
course, makes sense to walk on the stage floor at all times if the play is a microcosm of
the real world, a representation of life on earth, or if the play is about the limitations of
human beings.

In my adaptation of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1994),
it was important to me that the woman in the attic have access to as much of the
designated performance space as possible. Why? Because this woman is locked in a
room where she spends most of every day by herself. She knows it better than the back
of her hand, which she has probably ceased contemplating since her artistic privileges
were revoked. Alone in an old nursery with dingy yellow wallpaper and nothing to do,
this woman's imagination unlocks a scene that becomes much more interesting, real,
and finally more important than her true surroundings. When the other characters can
no longer understand her, they figure that she has lost touch with (their) reality, and
they are correct. The woman's only mission in life, to release a woman like herself
from the hideous yellow wallpaper, lies in her imagined world, not theirs.

I felt that both the woman's and the family's perspectives could best be
expressed if the woman could physically transcend the familiar world. This made sense
because this woman was experiencing something that the others weren’t. They called it hysteria, which is defined as uncontrollable heightened emotion. A child sensing the greatness of the world may climb up on something very tall and look out over all that wonder. And of course, if it’s a potentially dangerous object such as a tree, a house, or a very large jungle gym, then the parents who understand laws of gravity will most likely insist that little Susie return to the ground. This woman revisits the curiosity and fascination of living. Wishing to overcome the banal nothingness that her life has become, she invests wholly in freeing the imaginary woman behind the wallpaper, who is clearly a reflection of her restrained self.

If time allows, I want to read Dante’s *Inferno* again to examine the value of its structure (Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey) and its principal characters, Dante and Virgil.

To consider for the psychologist’s voice: perhaps it begins as a man’s, but it’s warped anyway because it’s underwater. Maybe as it clears, it is the young girl’s voice, or the man’s voice fades into her’s.

**October 11, 1999**

I like this method of discovery from a MASH episode: Hawkeye’s psychosomatic response to mildewed clothing—memories of cousin Billy saving him. He eventually remembers, with Sidney’s help, that Billy pushed him in.

[I toyed around with this idea, developed some text, but it wasn’t used.]
I keep feeling like I ought to be researching angels, but I think I'm really only interested in the images and associations. I don't think I want to create a particular angel character.

October 25, 1999

We had our first Production Meeting last Thursday, October 21, 5:00 p.m. Everybody seemed to think it went well. Lesley complimented us (especially Michael) on our organization. Dan Gray complimented Michael, too.

Nothing was cut, so all systems go. I think Lesley wanted a complete script then and there. That was slightly unnerving. I know she expects that because last year's New Works artists had them at their first meeting. They also had a writing class Spring quarter of their second year, which we did not have. Also, they were not as prepared on the technical end as we are.

Everyone was, of course, intrigued with Michael's concept and spectacle. He sells it well, and he knows what will capture an audience. Unfortunately, I don't care enough about that aspect. I got the feeling that everyone was just waiting to get through mine so we could talk about his. Story of my life. But I can't blame them.

I want this piece to have the build of The Sixth Sense: it begins with someone dying and leads to that person discovering that he is dead. And I want to have the zoom-in style of discovery ("Look closer.") like in American Beauty.
Jenny should be sickly-looking all the way through the piece. Maybe she won’t really look sickly under all that blue light. But I think white light has to shine at the end, revealing this still pale, dead-looking body.

October 26, 1999

Jeanine and I discussed some ways in which I can transcend time, or make time/space barriers fit my needs. I feel confident that I can incorporate Shakespeare’s text in at least two ways: I can cut and paste the text into particularly heightened or impassioned moments; I might also adapt Shakespeare with a nineties sensibility. I can insert monologues, and fade in dialogue. I already know of a few places where text from Hamlet belongs. The place of which I am most certain is the moment when Jenny decides to leave her familiar world. Since I’m not certain how the play ends yet, I can’t insist that Jenny’s final words will be Hamlet’s or Ophelia’s. In fact, if the play has a happy ending, then the words she speaks really ought to be her own. After all, this piece is gaining momentum as a feminist play about self-discovery.

As I was walking through the lobby (of Drake Union) today, I heard “Why Must I Be a Teenager in Love?” on the radio. It made me think that the unclear voices could also carry other sounds, music, etc. It could carry the weight of time/space changes. If Bobby Darin and Pearl Jam are playing over each other at once, then we have a wormhole of sorts, one in which time and space have little division, if any.

Straddling eras.
3.3 The Final Draft of iphelQa

Fed up and exhausted with the world around her, a young teenage girl seeks refuge in another world. When she discovers that the new world has even less to offer, she must figure out how to return home.

Frame #1 “The Incredible Shrinking Girl”

(Jenny is hiding in her curtains; only her toes can be seen; when the piece begins, we hear Jenny’s Mom calling her name; as it gets louder, Jenny finally responds)

Jenny: I’m not here.

Mom: Honey, he’s on the phone right now.

Jenny: I don’t want to talk to him.

Mom: I’m sure he wants to apologize to you.

Jenny: Hang up the phone.

Mom: Jennifer, don’t be unreasonable.

Jenny: (opening curtains) UNREASONABLE? YOU’RE CALLING ME UNREASONABLE? (beat) Okay. (crosses to door) Maybe you’re right. Maybe I am. Give me the phone. (speaking to phone) “You there? No listen, before you say anything, I just need you to know that you are the most selfish, uncaring, subhuman prick on this earth, and I don’t ever want to talk to you again!” Here’s the phone back, Mom.

Mom: Young lady, you will stay in that room until you can behave like a human being again.
Jenny: (snickering “young lady” under her breath) Fine. (crosses to chair and remote)

But the contradiction’s killing me. (grabs remote, turns on stereo; music is loud to
drown out Mom; Jenny collapses in her chair)

Mom: And as soon as I get him back on the phone, you will apologize to your father
for speaking to him like that.

Jenny: Dad?!

Mom: After that you’re grounded from any phone use for a week.

Jenny: Ground me now, ground me now.

Mom: That includes e-mail.

Jenny: Most pernicious woman.

Frame #2 Medium Teen

(Jenny grabs chalk, begins drawing on the floor, stage left)

Jenny: It’s my dad who tells me to stand up for myself. It figures he’d fall victim to
my tirade. It’s also my dad who stood me up for dinner last night, so he can suffer as
long as I do. (Looking at her work) These stupid contradictions really do get to me
after a while. I don’t know who I’m supposed to be anymore. For example, Matt likes
me because I’m smart and outspoken, and he apparently also doesn’t like me because
I’m smart and outspoken. And then he has all day to tell me he’s mad at me but waits
til he’s supposed to pick me up to call and tell me he doesn’t want to see me anymore.
But I digress. Example #2 when I’m a heinous bitch, Mom calls me “Young Lady,”
and when I’m at my most mature state of sociability, she calls me “Muffin.” (Standing
and crossing to center) Is she telling me who she wants me to be? 'Cause if so, then
why not just hang me on a gallery wall with all the other installations. (Here, Jenny
demonstrates that she is the art work in the gallery. Beginning with "Do What You're
Told," Jenny gestures the ingrained physical features of each command as though they
are each a piece of work, like a sculpture.)

JENNY 2000

flesh & blood on bone

by Mom and Dad

programmed to loop "The Best Of":

"Do what you're told"

"Be modest"

"Look people in the eye"

"Honor thy father and thy mother"

"Be seen . . ."

" . . . Not heard"

"Turn the other cheek"

"Look the other way"

"You're so much prettier when you smile"

(Jenny stops speaking but continues this gesture sequence to Beck's "Loser." The
intensity and speed builds as she continues to execute each gesture perfectly. As she
wears herself out, Jenny begins speaking again, and continues one more round of the
gesture sequence, which slows down with her discovery.)
Jenny: What’s happened to me? I used to have so much fun. Now I just stare in the mirror for hours, and nothing stares back at me. I can talk on the phone all night, but in the morning I feel like I haven’t really said anything. It’s like I’m already dead.

Frame #3 “Interrupted”

(Jenny discovers her little brother, Jason, has been in her room, watching her.)

Jenny: (horrified) What are you doing in here?

Jason: (approaching Jenny, feigning honesty and concern) You know, we hardly ever see each other anymore. I thought we could spend some quality time getting to know each other a little better.

Jenny: (retreating to the curtains) Get out of my room.

Jason: (laughing at her response to him) Are you sure? I’d love to hear your poetry.

Jenny: Thou wretched rash intruding fool farewell.

Jason: (rifling through her things, making himself at home) Did you really call Dad a prick?

Jenny: (making him retreat) Do you really have one?

Jason: (yelling toward the entrance) Mom, haven’t you told Jen she’s adopted yet?

Jenny: (gesturing with her pinky finger) Yeah, good one.

Jason: Oooh, what’s that supposed to be? The size of my prick?

Jenny: No, I just don’t care enough to send the very best.

Jason: I do.
Jenny: *(backing Jason toward the exit)* Did you know that 9 in 10 violent fratricides happen when the sister is menstruating? You gotta ask yourself: do you feel lucky?

Jason: No wonder Matt dumped you, Freak. *(at the exit)* Mom, Jen’s ethical standard seems significantly lower than usual. *(Exits)*

Jenny: Seems? Nay it is, I know not seems!

*(Jenny stands there for a moment, watching after Jason, then breaks into a tantrum and throws herself into her inflatable chair. She manages to take a few deep breaths to control her rage)*

Frame #4 “Confession”

Jenny: *(To audience, from the chair)* I just want to get a few things straight: One, I’m not usually like this. Two, I probably am adopted; I’m the only one who doesn’t seem to know her place around here. And Three, I really didn’t know that was my Dad on the phone. I thought it was Matt. You know, my EX-boyfriend, as of half an hour ago? He says I intentionally out-witted him in Lit class during his Hamlet presentation. It wasn’t hard, he was totally unprepared. I mean, at least know what a “bare bodkin” really is! He knows that’s like my favorite play ever: a self-proclaimed coward of a prince throws away a really good shot at love because he has to be that fardel-bearing guy and make the world right again. If you ask me, the only smart one in that whole play is Ophelia. She sees the world; it doesn’t look good; she gets out. Anyway, Matt didn’t ask. But he should’ve seen it coming. Still, if I had kept my mouth shut, I’d have a date tonight.
**Frame #5a “To Be or Not To Be”**

(Lights change; Jenny looks out her window and begins to sound)

Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,

Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew;

Or that the Everlasting had not fix’d

His canon against self-slaughter. Oh God.

Oh God. How weary, stale, flat, and barren

Seem all the uses of this world to me!

‘Tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed

Possessed by all the darkness in the world.

(That it should come to this!)

**Frame #5b “I Hate You All! Love, Jenny”**

(Jenny decides to leave; during the following, she sheds her “girlish” exterior to reveal camouflage pants and an olive green tank; she packs her things, writes “GOOD-BYE” in chalk on the floor stage right, and exits out the window) Why, look you now how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my
lowest note to the top of my compass and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak. S'blood! Do you think that I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me. (Exit)

Frame #6 “Waterfall”

(Jenny enters from upstage right entrance, sees the fabric, which now represents a waterfall, drops her backpack, and plays in the water [this movement sequence was developed using mime, Suzuki, and modern dance] first splashing her feet, then gathering water from the waterfall in her palms and splashing it on her face and drinking it, then wading into the body of water.)

Jenny: (seeing her own reflection in the water around her) How did you do it, Ophelia?

(Jenny continues playing with the water. She runs through the waterfall, then catches her breath from the shock of the cold water; she playfully shakes it off like a dog. The moment she stands up straight again, the sound of the waterfall ends and Shawn Colvin’s “84,000 Different Delusions” plays. Jenny, in slow motion, turns upstage, crosses to the waterfall, and slides into the water until it appears that she is floating on her back just downstage of the waterfall. She rolls back up and rises in the waterfall, where she wraps herself into and around it. She knots it, dives into it and lets it swing her; she dives under it and fights her way back to the surface; she climbs into the
knotted fabric and curls up in it. As she disappears into it, she gasps for air one last time; her exposed arm struggles, her body convulses slightly, then her arm swings to a halt. Sound dissolves into water lapping as lights change.

Frame #7 “Other World”

(A dim light now exposes Jenny concealed in the cocoon of water; as she recalls her dream, she blossoms out of the cocoon like a hatching chick, eyes closed.)

Jenny: I have the same dream over and over: I’m flying in pure darkness. Nothing exists around me. And I’m flying and flying and then I hit a wall that’s not really there. It’s like a force field, like I’ve run out of void. Then I fall and fall like Alice through the rabbit hole and I’m falling and falling and falling . . .

Ophelia: And then what?

Jenny: Then I fall out of frame.

Ophelia: Is that what happened this time?

Jenny: (dangling upside down in the hatched cocoon, eyes popping open) I don’t know. (Shifting immediately to sitting upright) Is this a dream? (No response; Jenny climbs out of it completely and explores the new world around her.) Yeah, so I just disappear. (beat) From my own dream. (beat) How sad is that? It’s like I’m not even the subject of my own life.

Ophelia: What do you think that means?

Jenny: I guess I see myself like everyone else sees me.

Ophelia: How’s that?
Jenny: They don't.

Ophelia: Why not?

Jenny: I don't know. Maybe they don't want to.

Ophelia: Maybe you're good at hiding.

Jenny: I try not to be.

Ophelia: Maybe you're better than you think.

Jenny: Maybe.

Ophelia: I'll bet no one knows where you are right now.

Jenny: I'm not sure I know where I am right now.

Ophelia: You sound/

Jenny: confused. Yes, I am. (under her breath) This had better be a dream or Mom is totally gonna kill me. (to voice) Could you please tell me where I am?

Ophelia: You're where you choose to be.

Jenny: No, you don't understand, I'm like, lacking so much general direction as it is. (no answer) Okay. I'm just gonna sit here, then, until you tell me what to do. (sits patiently for all of twenty seconds, then begins to unpack) I'm where I choose to be, right?

(Jenny pulls her Cosmo magazine out of her backpack and glosses through it, checking in every now and then for a response from the voice)

Jenny: Hey, you wanna take a quiz? (Jenny mumbles, "Here, let me get a pen," as she reaches into her backpack, but her hand emerges with several toy soldiers.)
Frame #8 "Wasted Youth"

Jenny: I didn’t pack these. (plays with soldiers for a bit, then lights change as Jenny sinks deeper into drowning) Is this where I choose to be?

Ophelia: Where?

Jenny: (during this, she gathers her army, climbs the knotted fabric, and drops the soldiers from above) I’m in an apartment building. Up high. Tenth floor or something. I’m with a man and a woman and they’re in business suits. We’re supposed to be celebrating something. They don’t pay much attention to me. We step out on the balcony, and I see that the place is familiar to me. It’s my favorite park in the middle of downtown. There’s a big rock with a waterfall that pours into a pond. It’s way below me now. When I look around me again, the man and woman aren’t on this balcony anymore; they’re on the one over there. They’re toasting champagne without me. Then I look up, and right above them is a helicopter flying dangerously close to the building. And there’s a young guy, eighteen, leaning out of it. I look at the business people again and they’re cheering him on. When I look up again, he’s dangling by one arm from the helicopter and he drops himself onto the balcony.

When I look up again, there are more helicopters, with more guys doing the same thing. The first three are celebrating now and a fourth is coming down. And he misses. He misses the balcony, bounces off the rail, and falls all the way to the ground. Flat out. I look up again and the sky is littered with helicopters, and no one’s even trying to land on the balcony anymore. They’re just jumping out for no reason: no mission, no parachutes. They just fall like rocks to their death. (lowering herself
I run inside and down the ten flights of stairs to help them. (seeing the audience) By now a crowd has gathered. They just stand there and look on like it’s not really happening, and I shove through to get to the soldiers. But they’re all dead; the entire field is covered in dead bodies. They just curl up from the ends, like paper fish, and the wind rocks them, like cradles. To fly; to fall; to fall, perchance to die.

Frame #9 Reckoning With Ophelia

Ophelia: Creepy.

Jenny: Yeah.

Ophelia: What does it mean?

Jenny: I’m not sure, but it can’t be good.

Ophelia: Maybe it just means life is feeble and useless, and we fight for nothing.

Jenny: Wow, that’s a pretty existential take on it.

Ophelia: (quoting Jenny) “To fly; to fall.

To fall, perchance to die.” See, there’s the thing:

‘Cause in that death, God knows what thoughts will pop

Into our heads and make us want to live.

Again. Which totally sucks ‘cause, think about it:

What would we be going back to? Tell me!

A boyfriend who loves war games over you?

A dad who totally has no time for you . . .
Jenny: (continuing the thought)

But runs your life according to his whims.

Teachers who hate their jobs and fear their students;

Kids who worship heroin addict rock stars;

All of which amounts to wasted youth!


Jenny: Where is "here"? Am I dead?

Ophelia: Did you see a white light? (Jenny attempts to answer; Ophelia cuts her off.)

Just kidding.

Jenny: So there's no white light?

Ophelia: Everybody sees something different.

Jenny: What did you see?

Ophelia: The look on Hamlet's face when he found out.

Jenny: Ophelia, I knew it was you! Does it always take this long?

Ophelia: It varies. Hey, pull out one of those magazines. I want to take a quiz.

(Jenny picks up her Cosmo magazine, and they begin to take the quiz. Jenny crosses the space a few times, for emphasis and because she doesn't exactly know where Ophelia's voice is coming from.)

Jenny: (hesitates) Okay. (stalls while she looks for it: "Just give me second, I think it's right about . . .") Got it. Ready? (reading) "Do You Handle Problems or Hide Them? Are you the type who banishes bad times to a do-not-open mental vault?
Find out if how you cope makes you out of touch or out of control. One: on the day your friend is getting hitched, your new boyfriend decides you're getting ditched. You:

a. Let the tears rip at random moments, even during the Macarena.

b. Feel sad but manage to have fun out on the dance floor. You can cry later.

c. Block out your ex's memory as soon as you lay eyes on a tux-clad cutie.

Ophelia: Oh, “A.” I'd be a total wreck.

Jenny: (shocked) “A”? “Let the tears rip at random moments, even during the Macarena”? (no response) Whatever. Okay, how about this one: a reliable source reports that she saw your man tying tonsils with another woman. How do you spend the rest of the night?

a. Lookin' for love with your party pals. Since he's history, you need to scope out his even-hotter replacement.

b. Confirming the rumor, then discussing why you're too good for your ex-can't-wait-to-mate man.

c. Stockpiling essential crying gear: pints of Ben & Jerry's and boxes of Puffs Plus--you're calling in sick for the next few days.

Ophelia: That's an easy one: “C.”

Jenny: (mortified) “C”?! You've got to be kidding me. (tossing the magazine to the floor, disappointed) What's the point of taking this now? It's not like we can go back and change anything.

Ophelia: There is no point; it's just fun.

Jenny: No point now or no point ever?
Ophelia: Why are you even thinking about it?

Jenny: What if you had to do it all over again?

Ophelia: I don’t, thank God.

Jenny: But if you did?

Ophelia: It’d be the same stupid mess.

Jenny: You wouldn’t do anything differently?

Ophelia: Like what? Avoid water? Why?!

Jenny: I don’t know. Aren’t you curious?

Ophelia: God no. I’m so done up there. It’s like you said, nobody wants to be there.

Oh, no. Do NOT tell me you want to go back!

Jenny: (convincing herself) No! This is obviously what I need, right? (Beat) Eternal downtime. Or I wouldn’t have come here. Right?

Ophelia: Sure.

Jenny: (moment) But you’re saying I could still go back.

Ophelia: I knew it! Don’t even. Why?! Why would you want to go back there?

Jenny: If I forgot something.

Ophelia: You don’t need anything.

Jenny: I didn’t say good-bye.

Ophelia: Yes you did!

Jenny: I didn’t mean it!

Ophelia: What are you saying?
Jenny: I’m saying there’s so obviously nothing here, but maybe there’s something back there that I totally overlooked.

Ophelia: Yeah, it’s called reality, and it’s totally going to suck, and you’re going to wish you had stayed here, but you won’t have the guts to come back, and you’ll be miserable the rest of your life!

Jenny: *(this stops her for a moment, then she starts packing)* Why am I even listening to you! You’re:

a. In love with the most miserable guy in history.

b. Some fabricated, over-glorified nymph from like four centuries ago.

c. Happy here.

Which makes you:

a. Lonely as hell for any company you can get.

b. The most passive-aggressive manipulator I’ve probably ever met.

c. The absolute opposite of me.

Ophelia: You bitch.

Jenny: I’m out of here.

Frame #10 “Courtroom”

*(Lights suddenly change to stark white light and sound of ambulance siren roars.)*

Jenny: Oooh, the white light! Nooo. Not good. *(recovering quickly)* Okay, you’re right, that was pretty harsh, and I’m sorry. I just know this is not where I’m supposed
to be. *(no response)* Are you there? Listen, this was a big mistake. I'm not supposed to be here. I need to go home. *(Loud sound of gavel; the deep monotone voice of a judge is heard.)*

Judge: You are charged with trespassing with the unintent to stay compounded with breaking curfew and leaving home without permission. What is your plea?


Before you punish me, please recognize that this is a dual reality, and since the latter two charges happened at home, I ask that you grant me extradition to stand trial there. Regarding the trespassing thing: since it was my own self-punishment that brought me here in the first place, it's only fitting that you let me punish myself again. *(no response)* In the case of . . . Jenny Versus . . . This Place: Jenny, having pleaded guilty to the charges heretofore stated, will serve *(moment)* a Life Sentence Without Parole. *(silence)*

*(A countdown begins from “10,” and in slow motion Jenny begins fighting her way through and up the water; lights slowly fade as the sound of the waterfall fades up over the continuing countdown. Half way up the waterfall, Jenny looks down and sees one last soldier; she makes the decision to go back down and get it, then fights her way to the surface again. In very dim light, the countdown reaches “1,” Jenny pauses a brief moment, then slowly slides down the fabric all the way to the floor, and lies still.)*
Frame #11 Ascent to the Homeland

(Lights fade up as a paramedic drags Jenny away from the fabric, then tilts her head and places his finger in Jenny's mouth to drain her lungs. Water runs out onto floor. As he is about to administer CPR, she gasps and struggles to breathe on her own. The paramedic holds her over to help her.)

Medic: Whoa, she's back. Do you know who you are?

Jenny: (still coughing) That's a loaded question!

Medic: (laughing) Welcome back, Jenny; you're a very lucky girl.

Jenny: Did you bring me back?

Medic: You brought yourself back.

Jenny: How?

Medic: I guess this is where you wanted to be.

Jenny: Was I dead?

Medic: Did you see a white light? (Jenny attempts to say something; paramedic cuts her off.) Just kidding. We're taking you to the hospital. You were under for a while and we just want to make sure you're okay. Do you understand? (Jenny nods) Now, I have to get something from the van. I'll only be gone a second. Are you okay? (she nods) Are you sure?

Jenny: Yeah.

Medic: I'll be right over here.

Jenny: (watching him exit) Thanks. (Jenny pulls herself to sitting, still hazy. When she looks around her, she becomes confused for a moment, shaken. She spots the
fabric, pulls herself to it for comfort, and leans back on it. She becomes aware of the audience.) What can I say? Other than, don’t try this at home. I don’t know why I did what I did. I know I was sad and angry. The fact is, it can’t all be justified or even explained. It’s white water rapids, currents, waves, undertows that we only feel once they’ve got us. It’s hard to feel a sense of direction under water. You just figure you’ll wash up somewhere and hope for the best. Or you hope that Tommy Lee or Brad Pitt or some other hottie will come along and save you. You look to anything that resembles structure or civilization. You cling to anchors, buoys, any little thing that can guide you back to the surface. And that’s just on the inside.

My mom always tells me that even though the people who piss me off or depress me may seem like real jerks at the time, they are in fact misplaced angels. (discovering the soldier in her hand; examining it) They’re the people or things that make you feel lucky to be you.

I’m still the same old Jenny. I’ve not miraculously changed into somebody new-- which some will find unfortunate--(placing the soldier on her knee) but I choose to be here. And if that makes me a misplaced angel, then I guess you’re in luck. (Fade out on Jenny saluting the soldier.)
CHAPTER 4

REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

The following chapter details the process beginning the week that I permanently moved my rehearsals into Mount Hall studio and started working with the stage manager, Edna Berkey. I will discuss specific challenges I encountered in letting go of my role as playwright and stepping into the role of Jenny. Working with the fabric was a particularly exciting part of the process. In this chapter, I have described my exploration of this scenic element, as well as my work with Robert Post, and my rehearsal and performance journal.

4.1 The Working Rehearsals

The process of putting a new work on its feet differs from staging a previously produced play in numerous ways. During the working rehearsals, I noticed that we did not make assumptions about how to approach any particular task. I did not assume that the stage manager would conduct her duties according to a predetermined method. I could not expect my knowledge of the script as playwright to automatically carry over
into my performance. In addition, I had never performed on fabric: I did not know what to expect. No one did. The state of not knowing certainly kept us on our toes, and definitely brought a lot of life to the process.

4.1.1 Moving into the Performance Space

The day we moved our rehearsals into Mount Hall Studio felt like the true beginning of the rehearsal process. I could now see the possibilities. I could imagine the fabric giving a vertical life to the space. I could envision physical compositions cutting through the space and Jenny’s soft blue costume against a studio black backdrop. We were no longer vagrants, seeking rehearsal space between classes at Drake Union. We now had our own space, and the project seemed official.

4.1.2 Working with the Stage Manager

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, I was sick of working alone by the end of Christmas break and was ready to swear off solo performance for the rest of my life. Edna became involved at a point in the process when I needed help from an outside eye, a time/space manager, and an honest critic. Edna was very confident in her abilities as a new works stage manager. This was a relief because I, on the other hand, having never performed solo, was terrified. I relied on her catch phrase, “It’s all good,” to get me through some heightened moments of the process, such as Robert Post’s visits and technical rehearsals. Edna’s versatility also came in handy in the
most unexpected ways. She crossed over into the performance world for me one night, when the script was virtually complete, with the exception of one important scene: Jenny’s trial.

I knew that Jenny’s decision to leave Ophelia’s world would need a sharp transition. This is the moment of judgment in which she begins fighting for her life. I envisioned blinding white lights flooding the space, blinding Jenny, exposing her completely. A man’s deep, monotonous voice played over in my head as the judge.

Toward the end of rehearsal one night, as we were approaching that frame, Edna stood up in the audience, assumed the role of the judge, and improvised a scene with me in which Jenny stood trial for her actions: leaving home without permission, breaking curfew, and trespassing. I wrote the scene that night. Though it changed considerably from our impromptu sketch, I did retain the charges against Jenny. I also kept Jenny’s unprepared, in-the-moment response to the charges.

4.1.3 Trust and Ownership

As the actor-creator, I still had to gain trust in the playwright’s choices and develop a sense of ownership of her words, even though they came from me in the first place. A similar obstacle was trusting my skills, abilities, and awareness as an actor. I had to take a story I had written and develop the character, gain ownership, and then share the story with an audience in a crafted, theatrical way.

Watching Sean Sullivan’s technical rehearsals for his undergraduate thesis project, “Bookmarks and Blessings,” gave me an opportunity to see someone else
grapple with this same challenge of gaining ownership of one’s own work as a performer. At the beginning of tech week, Sean told his story as though he was in his living room, talking to an intimate group of friends. Jeanine and I gave him notes to adjust his storytelling performance to the stage. The result within that short time was phenomenal. Sean, though probably more vulnerable, was able to project his performance to the audience, allowing them to watch his actions and hear his story.

4.1.4 Vulnerable Vocality

For the role of Jenny, I needed to create a believable teenager. This was an enormous challenge as I am undeniably a fully developed woman. Vocally, I decided to venture into a higher pitch range, using head and mouth resonators to produce the voice of an excitable young teen. Even though I spent many years speaking from this place, I found it to be absolutely jarring to my senses. I think I had some baggage attached to the sounds of a female adolescent overwhelmed by hormones, who is certain that the world is against her. I found I had buried some tears and confusion in the muscles and cavities that produce the sharp, anarchic cries of teendom. I had spent months tapping into Jenny’s voice qualities. Now that I was in the performance space, I could feel both safe and terrified that this is where it would all happen: this room would be full of classmates, students, and faculty members who would hear this awkward and perhaps unpleasant voice flying out of my mouth.

In addition to playing with challenging qualities, I decided to play with another vulnerable vocality: sounding. Sounding, as someone once told me, is the action of
sending sound waves through water in order to calculate the distance from one underwater object to another. I understand that whales also send sounds through the water, possibly to find and communicate with other whales.

Sounding served several aims in this production. It helped me to avoid my trap as an actor to internalize emotional moments. By sounding, I was able to continue to project heightened moments at an appropriate level. It also helped clarify Jenny's need to be heard by anyone when she stood at her window and cried out to the world. In this scene, sounding was used as whales may use it. Jenny was sending out a call (for help, advice, love) and hoping for a response.

For this production, sounding was primarily the exploration of projecting sound in non-realistic or heightened moments, much like singing is used in musicals. Because IphelOa is not a musical, nor is Jenny a trained singer, I wanted to find a less stylized way to approach a heightened moment in the piece, right before Jenny decides to run away from home. As an additional challenge, the text to be sounded was from Hamlet. Two influences that helped me develop this moment were my vocal work with Saratoga International Theatre Institute (SITI) four summers ago and Tori Amos's style of singing.

One of our assignments in a text class with SITI was to find a piece of heightened text and play with the sounds in it. The next day, we would present our homework to the class. The exercise freed my attachments to the words' meanings by focusing on the sounds. I found I could create strong imagery with sound and I discovered a new richness to the text. I have continued this exercise with my students.
in voice and speech class. In fact, Winter quarter we ended up spending extra time on sound imagery, which complemented their work in movement lab with Laban effort qualities. This also provided me with some time to play with text other than my own.

During the SITI summer program, one of my classmates listened to Tori Amos on our down time. I liked the way Amos would linger on one sound longer than most singers. She was, herself, a musical instrument.

I also explored non-verbal communication, playing with movement sequences and expressive breath. It was the foundation for my sounding work. It also fed the transition from frame three, “Interrupted,” to frame four, “Confession.” After Jason leaves Jenny’s room, she throws a tantrum and tosses herself onto her inflatable chair. Here, the audience just watches the storm brewing inside her via her rapid, high-pressure breath pattern. Jenny looks and sounds like a bull ready to charge a matador. In frame six, “Waterfall,” I used expressive breath patterns to strengthen the illusion of cold water shocking Jenny’s system when she runs through the waterfall.

4.1.5 Effortlessness

One of my major goals as an actor-in-training has been to find the ease of performing. I did not even believe it existed for performers until I started taking Alexander Technique classes with Dr. William Conable in the OSU Music Department. In ipheLOa, I knew I had to explore the entire journey of a teenager in a desperate situation. Physically and vocally, this meant finding extreme effort qualities. I am naturally drawn to a bound energy flow, so my challenge was to find free flow.
Having worked in Mount Hall studio twice before rehearsing and performing iphelOa (Miller’s Point in 1997 and Fen in 1999), I knew that my tendency in this small performance space was to become even smaller. My performances would become too natural, and I would lose a sense of projecting my performance. Both Miller’s Point and Fen were directed to be naturalistic, so I fell deeper into my own trap. Since iphelOa was less realistic much of the time, I could not afford to shrink in the already intimate space.

Finding size, projection, and effortlessness in a studio space was an incredibly difficult process for me. I had to approach the problem technically. By choosing the vocal qualities I mentioned earlier, I avoided falling into comfortable breathing and vocal patterns most of the time. Heavy use of stylized movement also helped me to project outward, instead of becoming too internal with my thoughts and actions. The most helpful element, and the scariest, which brought me out of myself in that space was my necessary connection with the audience. Jenny needs the audience to be her confidants, best friends, and peers. I had to accommodate the character by projecting myself, very directly at times, to individual members of the audience, and to the audience as a whole.

Until this production, I do not think I noticed how significant the performance process has been to my training. By relying on the audience so much in this piece, I have developed a greater awareness of their role in the performance. As individuals, they come to see the performance for different reasons. Once they arrive, they become a community by attending the same performance. When the curtain rises, everyone
under one roof shares one experience. I have always recognized that the audience has needs which they expect me to fulfill, but in this project I learned that I can need them, too. It was my developing balance of give-and-take that fed my ability to give an effortless performance.

4.1.6 The Fabric Rehearsals

Mark Shanda rigged the fabric in Mount Hall on January 19. This gave me two weeks to set my work on the fabric. During this time, I had to become familiar with the qualities of the fabric and find out what I could do safely on it. The fabric was a 50 percent cotton/50 percent acetate blend. It was light blue, with a wood grain pattern and a light sheen. I purchased it because it fulfilled my primary concerns: it was strong enough to carry my body weight; its sheen would reflect light, and its color and pattern looked watery. I was lucky that one of the dozen fabric stores I visited carried a full bolt of this fabric; it is apparently uncommon for someone to purchase fourteen continuous yards of drape or upholstery fabric.

I was happy to find that my upper body training during rehearsal warm-ups adequately prepared me for climbing the fabric. By the end of my first week with the fabric, I could pull myself to the top quite efficiently without using my legs. When playing with the fabric, I had to bear in mind that I gave up stretch and lightness for strength in the material. I let this work to my advantage. I quickly found that I could knot the fabric once and it would hold me while I stood on the knot. I could also loosely double knot it, use it as a swing, and unknot it with unexpected ease.
The greatest advantage and disadvantage of this choice of fabric was its sheen. While it worked well with the lighting and allowed me to loosen knots quickly, its slipperiness limited my actions. As I became familiar with the fabric's qualities, however, I found consistency in my actions and its reactions, and I began to choreograph and set my work on it. In the choreographing phase, I tapped into the transformational aspect of fabric. I knew from the beginning that the fabric would represent water. However, Jenny did not enter the water world until halfway through the play. Since she was in her room at home for the first five frames, it made sense to let the fabric represent curtains at her window.

Once the fabric represented more than one object, I felt freer to explore how it could specifically be used in each frame. Jenny's curtains became her hiding place at the beginning of the play. They cradled her as she leaned into them while sounding her feelings out the window, then acted as her entrance to the outside world when she climbed out of her window and ran away from home. As the waterfall, the fabric ran through her fingers, poured over her face, showered her body, soothed her, and finally engulfed her. Underwater, Jenny was suspended by the fabric, as though she was slowly sinking. When she sank further underwater and into deeper images of her fear and pain, the fabric supported her dream of soldiers falling to their death. It became a ladder that she climbed, and a balcony that she stood on to see the catastrophe she dreamed. In returning to her world, the way home was straight up the fabric. In the final frame of the play, a paramedic pulls Jenny's soaked body away from the fabric to revive her. She recovers on her own, and as the paramedic is off getting a stretcher,
Jenny suspiciously takes in the world around her. As she does so, she backs up to the fabric and leans into it to prop up her exhausted body. This is the only time the fabric’s role is ambiguous, because Jenny is unsure of her surroundings. As Jenny redefines her choices in life around her self-discoveries, the fabric will be redefined.

4.1.7 Signs of Life Behind the Curtain

Once I had finally put away my writer’s cap and could strictly analyze the script as the actor, I found a few lines that told me a lot about my character, Jenny:

Ophelia: Maybe you’re good at hiding.
Jenny: I try not to be.
Ophelia: Maybe you’re better than you think. (IphelQa, Frame #7)

Jenny wanted to be seen but felt invisible to the world. Not only did this dialogue make sense of the title’s homophonic statement, “I fell away,” it also led me into a new investigation: When does Jenny try to be seen, and how? Until this discovery, I had, ironically, listened to Ophelia’s lines more than Jenny’s in this exchange. I accepted that Jenny willingly hid herself from the world and staged the beginning of the play accordingly.

In order to tell the story correctly, I kept Jenny hidden inside the curtains, with one small adjustment: her feet poked out beneath the fabric. If she really wanted to be seen, then she would have to move from time to time, in the hopes that someone would notice her. To bring this to life, I had to adjust my acting approach from activating
Jenny internally, as I had been doing, to externally. That is, I had to transfer Jenny's inner life to her physicality so that, as a performer, I would be sharing Jenny's previous action or moment before with the audience.

Prior to this adjustment, I would immerse myself in the fabric and lean my body weight into the back side of it so that I could relax while the house opened and the audience entered. Now I had to find a way to control Jenny's physical actions in a part of her body that I could not even see. My first attempt at this adjustment was to lean against the fabric as before, but to engage the muscles in my stomach and legs to make precise gestures with my knees, ankles, feet, and toes. This resembled an exercise called "sitting statues," developed by Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki's theatre company. While I found the precision and control I desired, the approach exhausted me before I had even begun the expected performance. My second approach was inspired by F. M. Alexander's studies in human anatomy and freedom and ease of movement. I pulled myself away from the fabric and established a connection between my sit bones and the floor. Next, I found free and efficient breath support, with my knees bent. From this available place, I could then lengthen my legs to expose my feet, and I could control my movements from my joints, which were much freer now that I was not over-flexing my muscles.

4.1.8 Warm-up and Cool-down

My performance background prior to my theatre training was highly athletic. In high school, I was a dancer, a cheerleader, and a member of the track and field team. I
also studied Tai Chi and rode my bicycle at least thirty miles per week. Before any practice or performance, I engaged in a physical warm-up which would appropriately prepare me to endure a high level of physical exertion. I included warm-ups to help me focus mentally as well. After exercising, I repeated a routine similar to my warm-up. It consisted of breathing exercises to replenish my system with oxygen, calm me down, and gradually slow my pulse. I incorporated a number of stretches and gentler exercises to prevent muscle cramps and blood pooling. This process also acted as a mental cool-down because it was an opportunity for me to reflect on my performance.

For every theatrical production, I engage in a mental and physical warm-up before each performance, as do a number of performers. It is customary, so it is usually accommodated in the professional world with an available space, such as the stage or a rehearsal room. However, when a performance ends, the goal of the stage manager and house manager is to evacuate the building so that performers and crew can be released on time. This system does not afford the actor a cool-down period following the performance. My unproven theory as to why so many actors can be found in bars and pubs after a performance stems from this lack of attention to a physical and mental cool-down. It becomes their way of releasing the character, the dramatic conflict, and any tension that might linger from an intense performance.

IphelOa preceded Barnum’s American Museum (BAM) in rehearsal and performance order, so I used part of BAM’s stage time to my cool down. When the fabric for IphelOa was struck and BAM set up, I got out of costume and systematically hung up each article of clothing. Then I found a small space backstage, out of
everyone’s way, to conduct a cool-down. Because of the challenging vocal choices I made, I felt it was necessary to add vocal exercises to my cool-down process. Since BAM was dragging set pieces and getting into costume during this time, I would not disturb anyone with a few sighs of relief, some resonating ladders, and a couple of pitch rolls. By the time intermission ended, I could gather my belongings, bid “broken legs” to all, and continue my physical cool-down in the lobby. This process, like my warm-up for iphelOa, consisted mostly of yoga exercises intended for releasing tension by breathing and stretching. It was effective in helping me release my character’s conflicts and tensions.

4.1.9 Working with Robert Post

Jeanine Thompson invited solo artist, Robert Post, to be a creative consultant for our projects. She joined him on his two visits to see our work in the final phase. I appreciated Post’s objectivity and directness; his notes were specific and thorough. That is, he would tell me when the story had a weak point. Then we would attack it from all sides: the writing, my performance choices, and how I was using the set. My favorite moment working with Post was when he shared his experiences of playing with toy soldiers as a child. He showed me, very efficiently, how specific I would need to be with my toy soldiers in frame eight, “Wasted Youth.”

Post’s detailed advice complemented Jeanine’s more open suggestions for enhancing compositions or incorporating certain elements of my training into various movement sequences. During the technical rehearsals, both of them offered incredibly
specific blocking advice to help me achieve the sharp transitions they could see I wanted. These notes often included adjustments to sound and light cues, which the production team was happy to take. Their guidance was incredibly valuable; it was a gift getting to work with both of them.

4.2 Technical Rehearsals

Our technical rehearsals were fast and furious, with one evening for iphelOa, one evening for BAM, and three final technical runs before opening. I felt fortunate during this time that iphelOa was technically low-maintenance, as opposed to BAM, which had extensive sound, video, and costume components. Until this process, I had never performed in a show and conducted technical rehearsals at the same time. Edna volunteered to walk through the cue-to-cue for me, which helped me see Nan's vision of the play. Then I walked through the cues to find my light and develop a sense of the play as the performer. Mary Tarantino, resident lighting designer and Nan's advisor, had to remind me that I could make adjustments to sound and light cues and levels, if needed. I was so accustomed to my duties as an actor in technical rehearsals that I forgot I was also the director. As I mentioned earlier, Jeanine Thompson and Robert Post attended a technical rehearsal and suggested some small adjustments to sound and light cues which improved the flow in transitions from frame to frame.
4.3 Rehearsal and Performance Journal

The second section of my thesis journal begins with feedback from my thesis committee in response to the first showing of my work. It concludes with a post-production entry, reflecting particularly on the performance process.

November 1, 1999

Today was my first showing before my committee. I provided found and written text in the loose form of a script for iphelOa. Their notes were very useful:

1. When writing my own voice, I need to keep the character’s objective in mind, so that I’m always writing with purpose.

2. I should consider in-the-moment delivery. For example: The Teen Commandments might be Jenny’s impromptu thoughts on how the world is.

3. Sue Ott Rowlands suggested that any objects (props) be portable, easy to set and strike quickly, like a smock with all objects built on it. I’m trying to be open to that, but it’s not an image I had in mind. It’s chunky, and it requires adding layers, whereas I want Jenny to shed layers.

4. Maybe after her first conversation with the voice, Jenny decides to change.

When she meets up with the voice again, she explains the differences between the old her and the new her.

What celebrities are teens familiar with today who survive risk, who even create risks for themselves (as though there aren’t enough obstacles in the world already)?
Courtney Love (drugs), Chris Gaines (sex), Tracy Gold (anorexia). Who do they know who did not survive? Kurt Cobain, River Phoenix. Which celebrities, dead or living, are glorified more? Who glorifies which ones, and why?

November 8, 1999

I came across some notes from the Hamlet/Ophelia scene that Michael and I performed in last year’s acting class. He and I staged it as though we were in a courtyard, with walls and doors on all sides and corridors upstairs surrounding the open space. In this scene, it seems as though Hamlet and Ophelia are each speaking in code to say what they want to say to each other without getting caught. We staged it so when one of them wanted the King and Polonius to hear and see them, they went to the middle. When they wanted privacy, they moved to the perimeters, so they could be hidden under the walkways.

I got another strong image of a tether. Ophelia, having no privacy, is meant to be an example in some ways, just a tool in other ways.

November 23, 1999

What is the discovery of being dead about for Jenny? How does she find out? How does she recover? What does she do?
November 26, 1999

I thought this character would be more of a brat than Ophelia, but I'm realizing that Ophelia did the same things a teen does now: she challenged her brother's and father's advice; she looked for Hamlet to seal his promises publicly; she obeyed her father, for her safety and his approval and love. Then, when she lost her father and believed that she has lost her beau's love, her world fell apart. She was just a young girl in the world without love, safety, and protection; she might as well be dead. I don't think it would have happened any differently today.

November 27, 1999

Maybe the story unfolds like a series of dreams. There could be the initial dream, then the soldier's dream, then the courtroom dream. It would be in the courtroom dream that Jenny discovers she has to take responsibility for her actions. Her way back to the real world is to sentence herself to death.

December 9, 1999

What does Jenny want? What would any teenager want? An apology from the whole world; a promise that it'll get better. I'm beginning to think that the parallel universe idea is going to be necessary. I think I'm dealing with two separate teens who have a lot in common. Jenny sees the reflection of someone else in the water. She likes the reflection more than she likes herself. She falls into the other reflection. (Jenny: How can everybody expect me to be perfect when nobody else is?)
December 15, 1999

Maybe she catches on to her unexpected journey earlier. Maybe the three dreams are a perfect linking tool for the piece I'm trying to create in my head. She comes home, mad; something bad happened (11 on a scale of 1-10). She makes a choice; next thing we see, she's in a new place. The voices that fade in and out are her parents in the real world. She's gone to the other side. She encounters her parallel, Ophelia.

1. Explains first dream now if not sooner; makes the discovery of where she is, what it is to be dead

2. Next dream is the soldier dream; maybe she realizes that she needs to make a difference; maybe because she has knowledge no one else does

3. The courtroom dream is her way back; she sentences herself to life

Maybe she discovers she's different from Ophelia when she has the soldier dream and Ophelia reacts differently to it than Jenny does. Maybe Ophelia figures it's meant to be and Jenny realizes that NO, it doesn't have to be that way, that it isn't supposed to be that way. If everybody makes the same decision she did, there'll be no more next generation. They'll stop history. As powerful as that may sound, it's a surrender of all that power. She decides to go back. Ophelia maybe disappears or chooses to stop helping.
I was watching a movie called *Next Stop, Greenwich Village*, starring my favorite actor, Christopher Walken, and one of the characters said, "You all think I’m crazy. You all think I just want attention. . . . I’m not happy. I’m not sad. I just want to die." It made me think of Jenny.

Undated

I’m building a new outline for the piece. The basic structure for the beginning is currently as follows:

1. Jenny comes running into her room from a big event, something devastating to a teen like a pageant, a formal dance, or a party. She is yelling at her parents to go away and leave her alone. ("Leave me alone. I don’t want to talk to you. I hate you.") Voices of parents, or just Mom, respond. ("Honey, let me in. . .")

2. Jenny wishes she was dead. She is consoling herself with the fabric (hugging, stroking); she envelops herself in it which is the decision to leave her world, and the journey begins.

3. The journey has to bring to light what is truly important to her: life, responsibility, independence, options. I can imagine hearing her parents in the background (soundscape element) banging on her door, calling to her, then entering her room and finding her ensnared or tangled in the fabric. Screaming and panicking, they call an ambulance and finally EMTs arrive. I imagine all of this timed so that Jenny’s decision to live seems to spark her rescue rather than the other way around. So, what we’ll witness is her will to live.
4. Jenny decides to return to her world. It will be a more difficult passage than her initial departure. She will have to fight for her life, to win it back. It will be her greatest challenge.

Undated

I spoke with Edna, threw the above outline at her, so she’d know what we would likely be returning to. I shrank it down to this: Jenny comes running into her room from a traumatic “teen” situation (one that could later be broken down, examined, and heard from a human being as opposed to a category). Or maybe she’s really busted. Anyway, she finds her way out of that world through the fabric, which may just begin as the curtains in her bedroom and later become water. It (the fabric) takes her to a new place. Is she dead or is she dreaming? (I don’t feel like we need to know that yet.)

I imagine sounds from the real world coming in waves of water. We hear her parents banging on her bedroom door calling to her, the sound of the door knob wiggling, the gasps, screams, and cries of her parents finding her body, calling the ambulance, followed by sounds of the paramedics arriving, calling in the victim, reviving her. This physical revival should coincide with Jenny’s choice to return to the living world. The sounds check in from time to time (they ebb and flow like the waves they ride), washing over the audience to remind them of the world she left.
Undated

Now that Quinn Carlson has been cast in Michael’s thesis production, I have an additional person to work with as well (we made it clear that the person cast would serve both shows as needed). I think he’d make a great younger brother to Jenny. Most likely, he’d have some part in breaking the camel’s back, so to speak. I envision him sneaking into his sister’s room and interrupting her already bad time:

Jason: What are you doing?
Jenny: Get out of my room!
Jason: No wonder (so-and-so) dumped you, Freak.
Jenny: Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell.
Jason: Whatever. (yelling down hallway) Mom, tell Jenny she’s adopted!
Jenny: (doing the same) Mom, tell Gay-son to get out of my room!
Jason: I don’t think I heard you, could you turn it up? (flipping her off)

Yeah, she definitely got dumped. I think Jenny was too witty for her boyfriend.

January 16, 2000

I think throughout this process it has become important to differentiate Ophelia’s circumstances and behavior from those of a girl of today. I want a girl named Jenny to really think through her actions, and to be challenged to discover the real problems before going over the edge, never to see life again. Maybe what she’ll discover is the universal truth that we can’t always meet the expectations of ourselves or others, but that we don’t necessarily have to.
January 19, 2000

Today, Michael brought me toy soldiers from Yankee Trader. What a difference these little creatures make. They have a different weight, smell, and feel from the hard plastic, medieval ogres that I borrowed from Michael’s board game. I have a feeling that the soldier dream is going to become a lot more specific now.

Frame #6: The Waterfall. Is it here, in the water, discovering her reflection, that Jenny removes her pretty layer? Or does it happen when she decides to leave home? What motivates her to shed? What is she shedding? What is that layer about?

January 20, 2000

I chose my army tonight. Five soldiers, all different duties. I feel closest to the scout. Is it because he doesn’t carry a weapon? That discovery really terrified me last night. How could anyone send a soldier into battle without a weapon? I can see Jenny empathizing with this one, willingly throwing everything aside to save the scout. After all, she probably feels that she is in a similar position. High school probably feels like a battleground most of the time. Unfortunately, even her sharp wit cannot slice certain growing pains. In fact, it may at times do her disservice (e.g. making her boyfriend feel inferior, pushing away her family).

January 24, 2000

Joy Reilly watched a run-through with Quinn as Jason and the paramedic in the run. I’m glad she was here tonight; she gave me valuable notes that I can incorporate before tomorrow when Robert and Jeanine return.
First, I want to address Jenny’s costume change. We briefly discussed where and when it happens (which is while she’s playing in the water) and why. I chose this because I imagined that she left home with what she had (to run away being an immediate decision). Discovering a new place (one she thinks is better) allows or prompts her to shed the blue, revealing army camouflage. The strange thing is that the blue is perfect camouflage in the fabric; the two coordinate. However, since the fabric transforms into several things, I feel I can justify Jenny’s costume transformation into something that doesn’t coordinate with the fabric. Edna thinks the contrast of camouflage on the blue fabric is strong. I’ll have to ask her why she thinks so.

The earlier choice was to have Jenny shed her “pretty girl” layer at home and reveal a young girl going into combat, waging war on the world (though really herself). When she comes upon all that blue water, it’s then the real thing, not a “pretty girl” mask. As ugly and plain as she thinks she is, mingling with the water makes her feel beautiful, special. She surrounds herself in it much in the same way she comforted herself in the drapes at home. But she gets caught up in the waves and washes up somewhere else, a place where she has to fight her way out to get back. I’ll have to try this way (the old way) tomorrow to see which is the better choice.

Joy also suggested that if I really want audience reaction, or interaction, that I then need to engage specific audience members with my questions, concerns, pleas, etc. I’m excited about exploring my relationship with the audience. I’ll play tomorrow with Jeanine and Robert, and any crew members at Crew Watch.
January 30, 2000

Tonight was my first dress rehearsal. Michael is currently running his show. Since I saw it Friday night, I decided to take advantage of this time and reflect on the piece. Before the house opens, I’ll be set in the fabric. I’ll stay there for twenty minutes before Nirvana fades out and the knocks begin. Hopefully that pause will be shorter that it was tonight.

Jeanine said I need to bring up my volume at “It’s my dad who tells me to stand up for myself. It figures he’d fall victim to my tirade.” She likes the playwright’s additions of Ophelia (mentioning her name, retelling her story) to set up the attraction to water, the later meeting of minds, etc. I told Jeanine I decided not to use an actual mirror for Frame #2, so she suggested that I create the mirror with a pantomime. I offered the possibility of staging the end of the movement sequence as a private moment. She agreed that could work. I’ll try both tomorrow.

Maybe I should write “Goodbye” on the floor instead of “I hate you.” Then I can treat the “I hate you” as subtext for what I’m writing, like Robert suggested. “Goodbye” will probably help the audience better realize that I’m leaving than “I hate you” would.

I feel like I need to venture out into the space more when I land in the water world after “flying and falling.” I didn’t trust myself tonight. Also, I have to put my backpack on before I go completely into “drowning.” Maybe I can fit it in right after seeing my reflection. I want to skip to the transition between frames ten and eleven.
Jeanine said I should just climb the fabric, then slide all the way down it onto the floor. Quinn should then immediately run out to save me by pulling me away from the fabric.

Jeanine suggested a few technical adjustments. For instance, she thought it might be more effective for the lights to stay up a little longer during the transition between frames five and six. This way, the lights would begin to fade once the curtains have already closed. Also, during the waterfall scene, the sound level needs to drop when I speak.

January 31, 2000

Tonight was the final dress rehearsal. I still need to bring up my volume and articulate better, in general. However, I slowed my pace to compensate. Now that I have an audience, I have a reason to tell this story. My choice to speak with a higher pitch range in head resonation was a challenge from the very beginning in a number of ways. I’m glad I made those choices, and even happier that they have been effective (when I project and articulate). I don’t want to over-think anything at this point, but I do want spot rehearsal time to specify and clarify several moments in the piece.

February 3, 2000

We had a decent house for opening night. They were very attentive. These past two nights (including tonight) have been very small, but the energy tonight was fabulous, ours and theirs. Greg and Eleni were in the front row, and they gave us every ounce of energy they had. God love ’em.
I continue to make adjustments on the cocoon and the ladder, to make them as efficient as possible. I'd love to finish this run as a work-in-progress production and bring it back next quarter as a final work. There are so many changes I would like to make. I look forward to having time away from this project to reflect. The prospect of touring *iphelOa* and *Barnum's American Museum* is exciting. Because they are so different, they may actually continue to bill well together.

Most exciting is that third year MFA dancer and next door neighbor, Christine Chen, saw the show last night and agreed that her project and mine are incredibly similar. She actually told Michael that she and I ought to combine our pieces. We've talked about it since, but she'll be moving to San Francisco before I have any time to work with her on staging the works together. It's just satisfying to know that we can do it.

**February 5, 2000**

This afternoon I was told to expect an audience of five. Remembering Wednesday night's small audience and what I learned, I prepared myself to pick up the pace considerably. When I opened the curtain, I was happy to see more than five people in the audience. I still lifted the pace a bit, which turned out to be a good choice; they didn't even respond to Karpo's Schlitzy on a bed of nails!

The fabric did not hold me this afternoon. As I climbed the ladder in the soldier's dream sequence, the fabric just slid under me, bringing me back down to the floor. I had to continue the scene from there; it didn't seem worth it to climb again.
I’m sure the scene wasn’t as effective on the ground as I’d like to think it is in the air, but I sensed that the audience followed me anyway. I’m going to run through that part several times before tonight’s final performance. I look forward to performing for my classmates and students!

**February 10, 2000**

Abbott Handerson Thayer’s *Angel* (1889) sits opposite this entry in my written journal. Here is the innocence and the tragedy of youth all at once. A young girl with sad brown eyes, tousled hair, and slightly pursed lips is portrayed with wings that, in reality, she would never sustain. This particular painting makes me aware of the possible burden this child model endured for the artist. It also reminds me of the enormous expectations passed down to each new generation: to be smarter, wiser, richer, happier, and more successful than the others.

The show closed on Saturday, February 5. Michael and I feel that each of these pieces can have a life outside of here. However, his piece, in my opinion, could tour tomorrow whereas I feel that mine needs some restructuring. As I think back on the piece as a performer, the moments I want to keep playing with are the cocoon in the waterfall and “Why look you now how unworthy a thing you make of me.” I want to find consistency working with the fabric.

The things I enjoyed learning about the most in this project were the actor-audience connection and the presence of the actor on stage. I’m sure every actor is in some way aware of what it is to “feed off the audience.” I don’t think that this
exchange is as carnal as it sounds, but there really is no way to hide from the theatre experience as an actor: not behind our costumes and makeup, sets, lights, or sound.

During this process, I had to continually surrender to the entire experience of performing. I had to rely on the audience in so many ways. They were as immediate to me as I was to them in that intimate space. To hold back (energy, voice, breath, action) was to fool myself, not my audience. To resist the people in the room is as bad as saying, “I don’t trust you.” They became my scene partner when no one else (no other character) was around. Deciding who the audience was to me at each moment was a good challenge which I’ll continue to explore in rehearsal and performance.

I became very aware of my relationship to the audience beginning Sunday night before opening when we had a few audience members. The moment I heard these people in the space, I realized I had to silently build a bridge to them. The eeriest feeling is that they didn’t know I was there in the room with them, inside the fabric. I felt like a spirit. The only proof of my existence lay in the toes of my exposed slippers. My need to communicate with them was intense. All I had were my toes, and my heart. This non-verbal communication that I had practiced during the technical rehearsals was brought to life by that final addition in the process: the audience.

Monday night, Final Dress, I was a wreck at times under the fabric, but it dawned on me how specific my motions would need to be every night. I think it was over the final rehearsals Sunday and Monday that I established my “prologue.” It wasn’t a true prologue, but I was very aware that I was establishing an incredibly long and somewhat volcanic “moment before.” My inner tempo was a storm of locusts
shredding everything in sight. My outer tempo had to be that of a snake on ice. Jenny is an organism with an amazing kinetic life, but for this moment, for these twenty minutes, a storm is suspended. A child’s eyes are welling up with tears as a sting of pain works its way through her nervous system.
CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, I feel that my endeavors in this thesis project were successful. The feedback that I received regarding my writing and performance was positive. While few teenagers came to see iphelOa, several women in their early twenties suggested that I take the production to high schools. Not a single one of them questioned my age or my ability to portray a believable teenager. My mother-in-law’s cousin brought her teenage daughter whose own personal story is published in Sara Shandler’s Ophelia Speaks. It meant a lot to me that they enjoyed and appreciated the piece, not only for its content, but also for its creativity.

I still consider iphelOa to be a work-in-progress. I knew before opening that the show would undergo changes before I would put it to the test of future performances. Because Jenny is a modern-day girl, her speech characteristics and her fashionable costume will necessarily have to adjust to the trends. Another change would be to add the pronunciation of the show’s title (“I fell away”) to the program, or to change the title. A number of audience members still tell me how much they liked “that Ophelia show.”
Beyond these slight adjustments, I plan to examine the soldier dream section. While it has great value to me, it did not flow with the rest of the piece. If I want to keep it, I will have to find a way for it to truly belong in this journey. One way to do this may be to clarify that Jenny's journey of self-discovery begins underwater. Perhaps this journey takes her to the deepest, darkest reaches of her mind, conscious and unconscious. When she surfaces at the end, maybe the audience will question whether the physical journey of drowning ever really happened.

I am not certain that I will perform this piece more than two or three years from now. Because it is so important to me that the character, Jenny, be a believable product of society, I will want to hand the performance of this piece over to younger people in the near future.

5.1 MFA New Works Post-Production Meeting

I prepared an agenda for the New Works post-production meeting to give an overview of the project. I began with an introduction to the project, then discussed my challenge with solo work. I followed that with a brief comment on how wonderful it was to work with Robert Post. Jeanine Thompson added a personal concern at that point regarding whether the committee chair's duty is to advise, coach, or direct. Other faculty members gave their opinions, but no one resolved the issue. I ended the overview with my personal interest in the cool-down process for actors. The following sections detail my comments in the meeting. As a note, all of the topics addressed here are discussed earlier in this thesis.
5.1.1 Brief Introduction to the Project

I wanted to write a piece about Ophelia staging her own death and returning home to find the remains of a bloody massacre. When Dr. Tom Postlewait's Research Methods students received an assignment to develop a thesis proposal last Autumn, I used this opportunity to draw up a preliminary proposal for the Ophelia project as my thesis. Much of that proposal was used in the final draft received by my committee.

Over the summer, I co-taught an acting class for the Young Scholars Program. In class, these high school students, whenever challenged to use their imaginations beyond a basic reality, would fall out of the exercise. Too many times, I heard them mumble or even exclaim, "I might as well be dead." This pained me. Why was death the alternative option to trying something new? I had already decided that my character would be something of a modern-day character, with modern speech characteristics and a slight flare for contemporary fashion. After teaching these teens, I knew that I needed to more deeply research adolescent behavior so that the character was not only modern but true.

5.1.2 Solo Work Is Never Solo

I spent extensive time in solitude during the initial research and writing process. When it was time to expose the work to outside eyes, I felt unprepared and wanted more time. My advisor, Jeanine Thompson, had to coax me onto my feet during the Autumn Quarter New Works Lab. I am thankful that she did, because I could easily have continued sketching new pieces without committing to the completed ones.
Once I was on my feet, I received technical assistance and support from Nan Zhang (lighting design), Michael Karp (sound design), Mark Shanda and Julia Weiss (fabric rigging), Matt Kari (floor treatment), Michael John Washer (technical director), John Leahy (run crew), and Jason Swank (light board operation). The space was managed by Edna Berkey (stage manager) and Julie Graham (house manager). The OSU Department of Theatre, under producer Lesley Ferris, partially funded the production, and local professional theatre, CATCO (The Contemporary American Theatre Company), offered to help advertise for us. Jeanine continued to offer her artistic support, along with Robert Post, Quinn Carlson, Michael Karp, and my thesis committee members, Sue Ott Rowlands and Dr. Joy Reilly. As each member of the production team joined the process, we gained momentum and quickly found ourselves at the culminating point, Opening Night. With everyone's hard work, focus, and commitment, I was able to step onto the stage without worrying about anything other than my performance. This endeavor was far from solo.

5.1.3 Working With Robert Post

Jeanine invited solo artist Robert Post to see our works in-progress. Post visited two rehearsals, in which he viewed our progress and shared his suggestions and advice. He was less concerned about seeing our training at work and more interested in crafting two great shows. His objective, practical view of the work and direct feedback are what I needed and valued the most from him.
Post’s strength lies in storytelling, as is evidenced in one of his solo creations, *Here in America*. When giving notes from a run-through, I could see that he was looking for the story to continue to develop, unfold, and finally blossom at the right points. As a performer, Post understands that revelation of information is a deliberate and necessarily well-timed action. He helped me clarify some moments of revelation throughout my own script. Working with Post was an unexpected gift and a tremendous learning experience.

### 5.1.4 The Cool-Down Process

As an actor, a dancer, and an athlete, I have been dealing with the training and performance process for years. In all three disciplines, it is necessary for me to achieve focus on the task at hand; build physical strength and endurance to complete the task; find balance, alignment, and relaxation to do the task efficiently, and develop the will to commit to the task until it is completed.

As an actor, I have to do this night after night. One thing most actors understand, whether they commit to it or not, is the value of a warm-up before rehearsal and performance. Warm-ups have become a necessary part of my process. I continually develop and alter my warm-up to meet my needs for a particular production or role. Recently, I have discovered that I also need time to wind down after a performance. I have begun to establish certain rituals as a performer that help me cleanse my palette of the character at the end of the performance. For example, I deliberately reset my costume pieces to the way I found them when I walked into the
dressing room. I do the same with my makeup. While this may appear to be obsessive-compulsive, I find value in purposely creating ritual out of the simplest tasks. I also conduct a physical and vocal cool-down to release the tension, alignment, and placement of my character.

5.2 The Universal Collective Strikes Again: Similar Productions in 1999 and 2000

When researching for my undergraduate thesis project, an adaptation of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s The Yellow Wallpaper, I found a recent production history of the same short story produced at Yale University and adapted by a female graduate student. I was surprised and excited to know that someone else found Perkins Gilman’s work valuable and worthy of being staged. I also felt the sting of now knowing that I was unoriginal. I pressed on, however, and the piece managed to hold the attention of sold-out crowds of eggheads on my undergraduate campus. That was my first known artistic adventure through the universal collective. It was about time for another.

This past November, Christine Chen, a third year MFA candidate in OSU’s Dance Department, in partial fulfillment of her degree performed in an evening of new dance works integrating two programs into one. In A Memoir: Past, Future, Present, Chen told a story of self-discovery in four parts: “Mirror, Mirror,” “Oh God ... I Do,” “A Room Of/My Own/Private Idaho,” and “Throne.”

In “Mirror, Mirror,” the stage, littered around the edges by brand-name products (props for MFA Mikey Thomas’ project, Activities in Abundance and Excess), presented a neat diagonal of magazines and makeup, down and center. Chen
entered downstage right in a white sport bra and white briefs, the image of a clean slate. She walked directly to the row of magazines and developed a pattern of perusing them. Her interest in the content manifested itself physically: she casually contorted herself into various poses that were clearly images of women in the magazine ads. Interest grew into the desire to be instructed, and her pace sped to one of a crazed addict as she attempted to reconstruct each image as precisely as possible. By the end of this frenetic exposition, we were left with the image of a sweaty, burned out, dissatisfied, and confused young woman, panting heavily, a lipstick line from cheek to cheek. An intensely focused look in her eyes let us know that a journey had just begun.

After watching this section, I realized that once again, I was on the collective journey. I was already rehearsing a section of my project in which Jenny shares her disdain for authority in a physical and verbal sequence of their aggravating commands.

Returning after an entertaining interlude by “Tang Drinker” Thomas’s flashy dancers, Chen recaptured the audience with a memorable image: the largest piece of fabric I have seen on a stage the size of Sullivant Hall Auditorium. This enormous white sail became the train for Chen’s wedding dress in “Oh God . . . I Do.”

Chen’s final performance of the evening, “Throne” by Jo Kreiter, suspended the audience’s breath, step by ascending step. An avid risk-taker, Chen (who is also my next door neighbor, and can be found sunning in a chair on her rooftop when the weather is nice) amazed us with her new favorite dance escapade: wall dancing. She and her classmates explored architecture in new ways when Kreiter visited Ohio State’s dance department earlier in the year. This investigation included the entire wall, which
meant coming off the floor on occasion. Chen eventually climbed her way out of this last piece, with the adeptness of a gecko on stucco. My strongest memory of her entire performance was watching her head, then torso, and finally her legs disappear. Her determination and confidence gave me permission to forget there was a roof on the ceiling, that anything could contain this woman. And her unexpected return, in the middle of Thomas’s final number, deserved the breaths of surprise, and the whistles, claps, and laughter of pure amazement that, equally unexpectedly, poured from the audience that night.

Chen’s production, though less flashy than Thomas’s, carried a weight that could not be blown over by all the purely entertaining, Barnum-esque spectacle of the abundant and excessive (and yes, truly eye-popping) “stuff” show. It gave me hope that my minimalist, feminist  

Barnum’s American Museum.

Chen’s was not the only production of similar value, interest, and imagery. Washington, D.C. playwright Christi Stewart-Brown wrote a stage adaptation of Mary Pipher’s  

Reviving Ophelia for Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which premiered February 2, 2000. Pipher’s book uses modern-day case studies to examine problems faced by teenage girls today. In Stewart-Brown’s play, “Ophelia becomes the main focus . . . taking on the identity of a modern-day psychologist who treats teenage girls” (Smith 6). This truly floored me. I referred to the same book for guidance in crafting my contemporary teen, Jenny, and I had considered the same incorporation of Ophelia, as a psychologist who interviews and interrogates Jenny. There were other
similarities in the works and some differences. Ophelia drowns and is revived by “her newly empowered patients” in Stewart-Brown’s adaptation. In my production, Jenny drowned and revived herself by sheer will. Ophelia’s role in _ipheLOa_ was quite different from her role in Stewart-Brown’s play and more true to Shakespeare. She was still led by her heart and stood by her choice to commit suicide.

A contemporary adaptation of _Hamlet_, by Miramax films, starring Julia Stiles as Ophelia and Ethan Hawke as Hamlet, will open in cinemas this summer. An article in the May 2000 issue of _In Style_ fashion magazine begins: “Let’s say Shakespeare’s Ophelia was taken out of the past and plunked down in modern-day New York City. What would she wear?” (Arbetter 137). Need I say more?

Sometimes, a strong current runs among us. Sometimes we respond. I am grateful that I can hear it. I am fortunate to be a part of it. I am hopeful that it will happen again.
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APPENDIX A

Pre-show Check List for iphelo

The following are to be completed and checked every night before house opens:

Sound
    CD is in player                            Volume levels are checked

Lighting
    Wave machines are in place and working properly

Set
    Stage is swept and mopped            Inflatable Chair is on spike
    Fabric is hung and splayed            Glow tape is charged

Props
    Blue bucket of chalk is stage right of chair  Remote is on magazines
    Magazines are splayed on stage left side   Cordless phone/magazines
    Abercrombie shirt is placed on head of chair

Costume
    Olive green tank top                    Blue ball gown-style skirt
    Camouflage pants, bottoms rolled up     Ballet slippers
    Blue v-neck fitted three-quarter sleeve top Butterfly clips for hair
APPENDIX B

Sound List for iphelOa

Sound Designer: Karpo
Sound Operator: Edna Berkey

Pre-show
Track 1. “Angel” Sarah McLachlan Fumbling . . . #7
Track 2. “Shelf in the Room” Days of the New Days . . . #1
Track 3. “I Will Survive” Cake Fashion Nugget #7
Track 4. “Just a Girl” No Doubt Tragic Kingdom #3
Track 5. “Semi-Charmed Life” Third Eye Blind 3eb #3
Track 6. “Teen Spirit” Nirvana Nevermind

Frame #1
a. Door knocks and Mom
b. “Young Lady” and “Push” (by Smash Mouth)

Frame #2
“Loser” by Beck

Frame #5
Wind (200)

Transition
Wind into Waterfall

Frame #6
“84,000 Different Delusions”

Frame #7
Water Lapping
Ophelia 1: “And then what?”
“Where?”
Ophelia 2: “Creepy”
Quiz Answer #1
Quiz Answer #2
Ophelia 3: “There is no point”
Ophelia 4: “You Bitch”

Frame #10
a. Ambulance
b. Gavel and Judge
c. Countdown into Waterfall

Frame #11
“Good Riddance” by Green Day
APPENDIX C

PROGRAM

*iphelOa*

a new work
created and performed by
robin amy gordon

production team

artistic consultants .................. robert post
jeanine thompson
stage manager/consultant ............ edna mae berkey
technical director ..................... michael jon washer
lighting designer ..................... nan zhang
sound designer ......................... karpo
performer ................................ quinn carlson
light board operator .................. jason swank
running crew .......................... john leahy
fabric rigger .......................... mark shanda

special thanks to
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matt kari, TH205 paint crew and lighting crew students,
jeanine thompson, sue oth rowlands, and dr. joy reilly,
and to my family and friends for your support

*youth to itself rebels, though none else near."*
--Laertes, Act I, Scene 3 in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*