
Senior Projects Spring 2016

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2016

INFERNO: Lust, Gluttony, Greed

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Recommended Citation

Dewell-Amiranashvili, Salome Gwendolyn, "INFERNO: Lust, Gluttony, Greed" (2016). *Senior Projects Spring 2016*. 238.

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INFERNO: Lust, Gluttony, Greed

A reflection on the process of a collaborative senior project

and

An exploration of self-validation and pain

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of the Arts

Of Bard College

by

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May, 2016

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To my family in Tbilisi:

ყველა მიყვარხართ.

Acknowledgements

Jack Ferver, Miriam Felton-Dansky, Kritika Yegnashankaran, Lynn Hawley, Jonathan Rosenberg, Thomas Wild, David Shein, Kristin Lane, Amy Winecoff, Barbara Luka, JoAnne

Akalitis and Gideon Lester

Jean Churchill, Peggy Florin and Peter Kyle

Jim Brudvig, Bill Walker and Maika Pollack

Jennifer Lown, Bob Bangiola, Zia and Emily

Laura Ferri and Alban Dennis

Lily, Antonio, Audrey, Ayla, Muir, Lafe, Nina, Sam, Anya, Mikey, Cullan, Annarose, Zoe,

and Koko

Miss Alex Moni-Sauri

That guy from Red Hook

Jamie O'Neil

My deda, my aunties, my grandparents, my godmother, and my step-father, Martin

The family in Saint Leu-la-Fôret

The seniors of 2016

And to my ladies, Abby Eleanor and Leah: We made something.

My everlasting thanks to all of you.

Forward: Influences from Mind, Brain and Behavior

The whole reason I wanted to study theater and acting was because I was, and am, fascinated by people. The things humans do to protect themselves and one another, to validate their sense of self, to cope with trauma, to express their affection (and hatred) and to adapt to their surrounding environments have all been focal points of anything and everything I have ever been interested in. My own self-exploration and attempt to understand myself as best I can has been driven as much by my own soul-search as it has been by the things I have learned about those around me. I was concerned that theater would afford me only one school of thinking which, while highly enriching, was not enough for me. My studies in psychology offered an analytic view of behavior, but the conceptual aspects, which I loved so much, were only present in the first few years of my study. Once I became a junior the program demanded more in the way of research methods and conducting experiments which, though interesting, was not where I saw myself working after school. Philosophy had always interested and intimidated me, and it seemed to be rich in the conceptual frameworks of which psychology had first afforded me a taste. The Mind, Brain and Behavior program was first suggested to me by Professor Kristin Lane, and I never looked back after that. Throughout my time here I have found that my studies constantly overlap, regardless of division, and that the different methods of thinking between subjects have helped me to critically analyze and examine my theater work, and to find empathy and emotion in the classes I have taken within the MBB program.

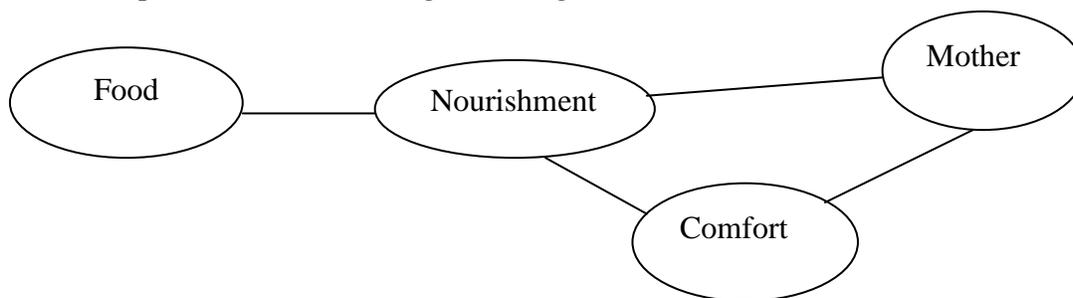
The first psychology class to influence my senior project was Professor Lane's course, *The Psychology of Good and Evil*. Through extensive study in tactics of dehumanization, groupthink, conformity and fear, I learned about the environmental elements which contributed

to events that, at first blush, appeared impossible. I did extensive studying on Jim Jones and the Jonestown Massacre which was my first major inspiration for what later became my senior project. Through reading analyses and case studies of the events leading up to the massacre at Jonestown, I learned about the structure and inner-workings of cult systems. Further research on Charles Manson and other cult structures allowed me to find common themes across events. Cult leaders were always charismatic; that was a must. Cult members often came from walks of life which afforded them very few opportunities. Many members had traumatic childhoods and were fresh out of rehabilitation clinics or prison. The element of substance addiction was first presented to me here as a significant psychological variable, and would become a thread throughout all my studies, MBB related and otherwise.

I took the class, *The Causes and Consequences of Eating Disorders*, with Professor Amy Winecoff, and was able to continue my exploration of addictions, not just to substances, but to physical patterns and the releases afforded by them. Learning about the roles that dopamine and norepinephrine played in the binge-purge cycle, as well as the emotional stifling that happened in all eating disorders, binge-related or otherwise, prompted a further exploration of coping mechanisms and what exactly was being avoided by these patterns of addiction. Over and over again I was met with the formula of an all-too familiar pattern of resistance: rebellion, a brief high, then an emotional and physical crash which left the subject even more unhappy than before. What I did not then realize was that this cycle would become the model of my senior project's story arc; my character followed a rigid set of rules and structures, similar to those of a person struggling with disordered eating. Eventually these rules become too much to bear, and give way to a breaking down of will; an inevitable response to this pre-set inflexibility. The rebellion offers her (my character) a brief high as she takes on a new way of life but, ultimately,

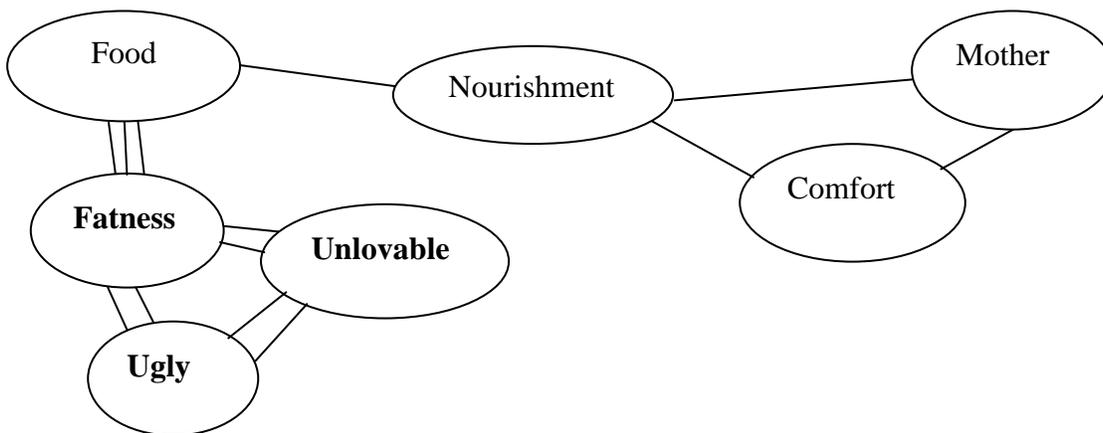
whether or not this new life will afford her happiness is subject to doubt. It was a unanimous decision on the part of my group members and myself that the cult which the nuns joined would not be better than the Church; just different. A different way to channel emotions which were a basic, human response to an unforgiving environment.

Professor Barbara Luka's cognitive psychology class was also a major influence on my work, and an exercise in accepting the limitations of my own brain. Though the mind has the capacity to understand and learn languages and to interpret the significance of symbols and images before we are even fully-conscious of them, the one thing which all the research kept coming back to was exactly how little we know about ourselves. Even our ability to make executive decisions or change our minds are processes so complicated that they can only be explained so far without the aid of complex neuroscience. In learning about conceptual schemas, the diagrams used to illustrate mental associations between different ideas, I found a way to further explore the inner workings of eating disorders.



For example, as a child, the concept of “food” becomes linked by association with the concept of “nourishment” which subsequently connects to the concepts of “comfort” and “mother.” These concepts become linked in a subject’s mind through education, media, and life experiences. Interestingly, as I learned in Professor Luka’s psychology course, certain experiences can form connections between concepts which are stronger than others. These connections form independently of will. Interestingly, experiences with negative valence (things

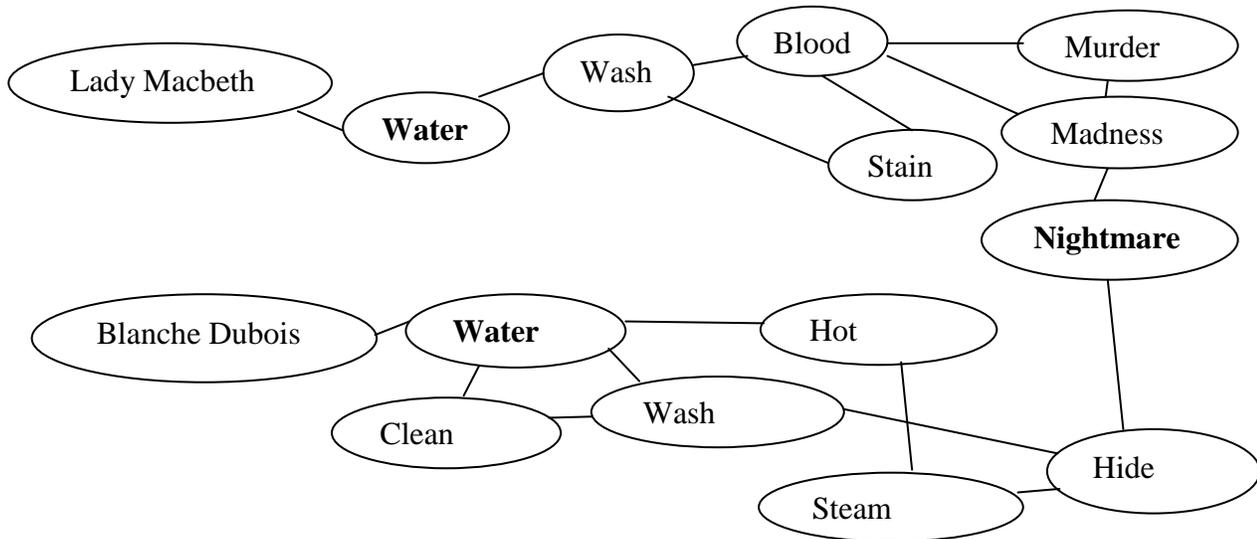
which bring up emotions such as shame, anger and fear) are ones which, evolutionarily, we are conditioned to pay more attention to and which will bear more weight in shaping our future experiences. For example, a child who is told that “if you eat this, you will become fat”, will forge new connections between concepts of “food” and “fatness.” The concept of “fatness,” something which, from a societal standpoint, is inextricably linked with ugliness, shame, and undesirability is now also linked with the concept of “food.” And, of course, because these concepts bear more negative valence than the original ones, it is these concepts which now are more readily accessible in the mind when the concept of “food” arises in the child’s experience.



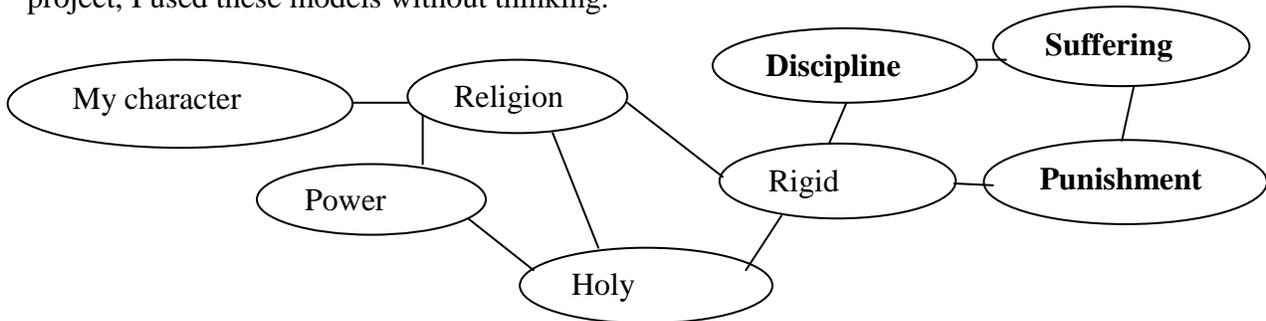
The concept of “food” is still associated with “nourishment” but, on a conceptual scale, the associations that it has with other, negative concepts are now more readily accessible. When a child thinks of food, they will be far quicker to think of “fatness” than of “nourishment” or “comfort.” Thus begins a pattern of disordered eating.

On a slightly less dire note, these same conceptual models helped me to create idea schemes for character analyses and acting work. Understanding the inner workings of a character’s mind becomes much more dynamic if you are able to place them in the context of other characters you have worked on and compare different associations which different

characters might have with the same concepts. An example of this would be the characters of Blanche Dubois from Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. So much for lack of direness, I guess.



I have neither the time nor the space to give a full, in-depth analysis of how Lady Macbeth and Blanche come to view the concept of “water” in their respective ways. However, by charting two characters’ associations with the same concept it becomes easier to see how these women both relate to, and diverge from, one another. And, when I eventually came to create my senior project, I used these models without thinking.



Religion as our characters understood it was holy and righteous. However, as with the negative connections forged around the concept of food, it was the negative associations surrounding religion which took precedence in my artistic process and, ultimately, created the foundation for

my senior project. Overall, my cognitive psychology class was an exercise in learning about what we actually have control over in our minds, and what we do not. I was left with the question of how to reconcile with, and accept, this inevitable lack of control.

My class with Professor Kritika Yegnashankaran, on the philosophy of mind, opened many doors for how to view both myself, and any character, I approached in a vastly different way. Philosophy is rife with drastically different ways to examine someone's inner state-of-being, and, as a result, I found new ways to approach character development.

Charles Taylor's paper, *Self-Interpreting Animals*, introduced a first glimpse into something which, as an actor, I had already been trying to come to grips with: the linguistic inability of a person to describe their constantly evolving inner experience. This made total sense to me, as any rehearsal process is, essentially, trying to tell a story with the same words, over and over, to understand not just what those words mean, but how to let their meaning evolve and change. The need for constant discovery is essential for any good performance, and yet, as Taylor points out, our ability to articulate our constantly changing inner-experience is both an incomplete and constantly evolving process. This, of course, does not make the process of working from a script any easier, as it is merely explaining why it is so difficult to do correctly. However it was this information which brought me to a question I had been unconsciously grappling with since I took on the MBB minor: How do we cope with uncertainty? Taylor's assertion that the linguistic explanation of experience is limited is followed up with the claim that, consequently, these experiences are irreducible to anything "sub-personal" (i.e. a mechanical cause-and-effect relationship within the brain). So then, I concluded, it is our attempt to explain the inexplicable which saves us from a sub-personal means of explanation. Our idiosyncrasies are, essentially, what keep us human. At least that is how I justified it.

These levels of “personal” and “sub-personal” explanation are addressed by Daniel Dennett in his article *Personal and Sub-personal Levels of Explanation* (surprise!), and they served as over-arching concepts for the entirety of the class. For me, these concepts did not hit home until after I had grappled with Taylor’s analysis of linguistic explanations. Dennett explores the concept of the “pain-state,” which he attributes only to living persons or organisms. Because we feel pain, but there is not (Dennett argues) a “mental phenomenon” of pain which can be pinned down, our descriptions of pain are personal, and non-mechanical (they cannot be described by neuro-cognitive events). This, for me, was essential, because it painted the concept of “pain” as something which was necessary for an explanation of the self, and which could not be explained away by simple mental phenomenon. According to Dennett, pain could only be described by the person experiencing it. Pain was key to character. Using this information, I found a way to express what I had previously found inexpressible. How do you explain to an audience why someone would willingly cause themselves pain? By Dennett’s logic, pain could be used as a way to reinforce personal experience. If I can cause myself pain, then I know that I am alive. I know that I am still here. It was key, in my mind, that a pain state was the example as opposed to joy or contentment. It is harder to pin down the feeling of happiness. Pain will be felt in one way or another.

I had spent three years, at this point, researching and studying different ways the mind could be known. And, over and over again, I was met with the same level of uncertainty which had been present, for me, on stage, in rehearsal, and sitting alone on the floor of my bedroom. How do I know I am here? How do I know whether I even make a difference in the real, grand scheme of the universe? The answer seemed to be “You do not. So?” And the “so” was what made the question important. How do tell yourself that you exist and that, on some level, you

matter, even if it is only to yourself? One method is to cause yourself pain. The pain afforded to a person by addictions, eating disorders or self-harm were undoubtedly examples of this. And, in theater, the only objective I knew I could play if I had no other was, "I want to exist. Somehow." Here was the bridge between the uncertainty of existing at all, and existing on a stage in front of people. Here was how I could make the question real for myself. I had to talk about pain.

INFERNO: Lust, Gluttony, Greed

As much as I shied away from the soul-searching aspects of this project and this journey, I am finally coming to terms with the fact that the driving force of my entire artistic journey here has been a search for the self. That is why I came here. I am no longer even certain that theater, acting, or any involvement in film or television is what I want to do anymore. It might be. But, for now, I am using the past four years as fodder for an intensely reflective process, which has culminated in one, final project. I am so afraid. I am so afraid of writing this paper, and I am so afraid of finishing it. I know that once I do, I will have drawn up the last anchor which holds me here. I know that once I turn this in, it will be time for me to move on. And I am scared to do that.

I am grateful for the fact that, ultimately, I was never burdened with the intense need for this project to be perfect, change lives, or even impress anyone. For the first time ever, I created something from a place of zero expectations. I had no idea what this project would turn into. I had no idea whether or not it would suck. I thought for a long time that it would. And, perhaps, the most valuable thing I have learned from all of this is that it is possible, in fact necessary, to make blind leaps into the unknown. More often than not, you will survive. The feedback which my group members and I received was overwhelmingly positive. I think we were all at least somewhat shocked. And I think that what I now feel is pride. But, mostly, I am overwhelmed with a series of feelings and emotions, very few of which I can label.

I wanted to make art about me. I still am not sure whether this makes me arrogant, self-centered, or just an aspiring artist in her twenties. If there is one thing I have learned from any of my education here, it is that I can only make art about what I know. And, considering the past five years of my life (gap-year included) have been dedicated to trying to make sense of who I

am as a person, it seemed like the only option was to make art about myself. Of course, I had not banked on having to work with anyone else, let alone three other seniors that were all as confused, terrified and self-absorbed as I was. And I say this without any criticism. I do not consider self-absorbedness to be inherently negative. As I have said, it seems to be requisite for my age group to be focused on themselves. Generally speaking, we are all tasting a vast amount of very new independence for the first time in our lives. Of course we are trying to figure ourselves out. But collaboration with three other people who had just as much stock in the project as I did, and who were all overwhelmed with the looming sense of finality this piece represented was very, very hard. It was very fucking hard. Ultimately I learned how to take the things I wanted to make art about, and boil them down, over and over, in order to find some common ground which we all could agree upon. I will discuss that common ground later. For now, I need to explain how I approached senior project.

I find vulnerability difficult. No surprise there. From the first moment I became involved with the theater department here, everyone seemed to be talking about this one word, “vulnerability.” I learned that, unfortunately for me, vulnerability meant exposing yourself. And, for all my self-absorbed introspection, I was, and am, deathly terrified of exposure. I fear that I am showing my arrogance for the whole world to see, or boring people with my life and petty problems. I refuse to be victimized. I want no one’s pity. I fear people hearing what I have to say, and feeling obligated to give me sympathy. However, I have limited control over the things that happen to me, and if I want to be vulnerable I must, in some way, talk about them.

During my four years here at Bard I have recovered from an eating disorder, experienced severe emotional abuse, survived two separate instances of sexual assault, and grieved over the

death of a person I was in love with. All of these things inevitably found their way into my final project.

The first major artistic inspiration I explored in considering my senior project was the underlying principle behind abnormal and destructive patterns of eating behavior. I was fascinated by the work of Geneen Roth, an author and psychotherapist who has written extensively about the links between food, sexuality, and self-love. I found self-love to be boring (a fact indicative in and of itself), so I instead fixated on the scary, exciting issues of addictions to food and sex. I was fascinated by the strange connections between stuffing oneself full of chocolate, vomiting to be thin, and craving sexual connection with others in order to feel wanted and beautiful. For me, these things were inextricably linked. In all cases, the resulting manifestations of the behavior were both violent and obscene. Watching someone eat until they cannot stand is like watching a car crash you are unable to look away from. Watching two people kiss can be tender and moving, until you watch those two people slowly struggle to lose themselves in the other. Mouths open, tongues collide, kisses become consumption. These things frightened and fascinated me. I wanted to play with the line between sensuous and vile, between sexy and disgusting. For me it was a continuum. Studying *The Bacchae* and the figure of Dionysus intensified my fixation. I wanted to explore indulgence that came from a place of self-hatred. I wanted to watch someone destroy themselves on stage.

The work I did in Jack Ferver's performance composition class was the first time these ideas manifested themselves on stage. I performed text and movement based on body hatred and dysmorphia. I wanted to explore how someone who hated themselves and their body still managed to carry on with, albeit damaging, sexual relationships, when these placed them in such a position of literal and emotional nakedness (see appendix A). I wanted to explore the desire to

feel pain in order to validate one's own existence. Depression is often marked by a numbness and inability to feel anything at all. Pain tends to be the only thing that is powerful enough to break through.

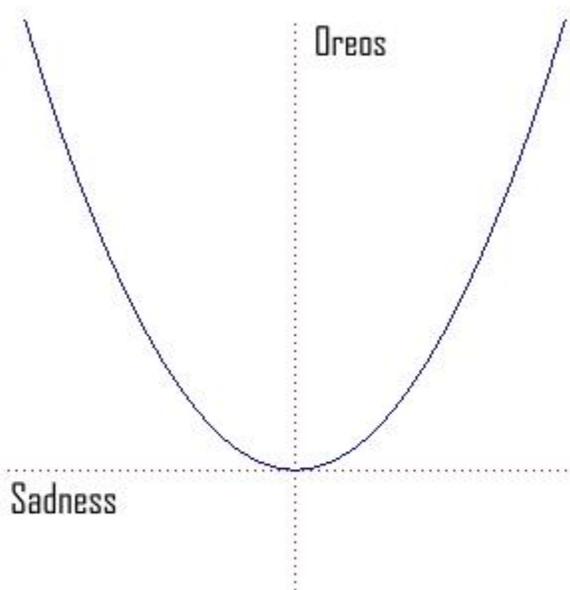
This masochism inspired my moderation project (see appendix B). I had an actress seated on a large sheet of plastic, and dressed all in white. Before her was a pitcher of water, a plastic yogurt container, and a jar of Nutella. She ate the Nutella, spit it up into the yogurt container and then rinsed her mouth with water and spit that out, too. Then she did it again. At the end of the project she drank the water and spit-up, while a voiceover played of someone expressing the need for meaningless sex and contact. I knew the piece was difficult to watch, and would inspire some to stop paying attention. This was okay, for the time being, as I was interested in looking at disgust and self-hatred in its rawest state, before scaling back to something which would not disengage my audience completely. Ultimately, in my final project, this self-hatred and need for meaning was present, but it manifested in a totally different way. I had to come to terms with the fact that I needed to be content with those feelings and ideas being present at all, even if they were not there in ways which, had I been working alone, I would have chosen to utilize.

I am so grateful that I am a part of this graduating class. My fellow students are all artists whom I intensely admire and respect. I have always felt more than slightly outside of the theater and performance department, though this has never inspired resentment or a feeling of exclusion. Rather, I came to Bard with a background in acting, form and technique, and had no idea how to make theater from scratch or what on earth the ever-ethereal "devising" was. I pride myself in being nothing if not adaptive and so, when it became clear to me that my class was focused largely on this very new, very alien form of theater, I decided to rise to the occasion. I find

devising to be difficult, very difficult; certainly more challenging than any role or class I had taken on previously. However, the art I saw my classmates make over the course of four years was absurd, cynical, witty and intensely interesting. So, when the idea was posed to do one, enormous, collective senior project on Dante's *Inferno*, I was onboard immediately. I was thrilled to take on the sins of lust, gluttony and greed, as they fed in perfectly to the ideas I had been toying with thus far. I, like everyone, was still reeling from the bomb of collaboration which had been dropped on us just before we were to declare the subjects of our senior projects (see appendix C). Nevertheless, I was determined to make the best of it, and to graduate with a senior project under my belt which represented at least some of what I and my fellow group members were capable of. What I did not expect was that the process would be so, very, difficult.

One of the first things we all did was get together and meet with our adviser/Resident Witch, Jack Ferver, via Skype call, to discuss what we wanted going forward. Themes such as campiness, degradation, discomfort and spectatorship all came up. Ultimately, however, I spoke little and did my best to just listen. At this point I was still so shell-shocked at the very idea that we were all in our last year at Bard, that most of the beginning processes went by the wayside. I only recently looked back at the notes I took during those first few weeks of the process. It was mostly images and quotes. "What do animals in heat look like, why that way?" "What's on the other end of the scale?" "I normally would eat till I explode, but I can't explode here. I'm always on the edge" "the edge like the orgasm," "stick your stomach out" And other fucked-up epithets like that. During the Skype call I came up with a ton of writing prompts images, and storylines, but had to reign most of them in order to allow everyone time to talk. Also, a lot of them were uncomfortably morbid. Or just mostly uncomfortable. During this call the idea of all of us

embodying different sins was also addressed, as the topic of *The Inferno* was a case in point. It was during this time we spent an obligatory amount of hours discussing the necessity of Pina Bausch and her influence on art in general. She is incredible, there is no denying that. Müller's *Hamlet-Machine* was also a frequented source, and helped us call to mind different physical materials we might want to work with, such as hay, the REPRESENTATION of feces (let that distinction be noted, also let it be noted that that was ONLY ever brought up in jest, I promise), and water. Jack, in his enviable wisdom, let us throw ideas into the air, and ended with reminding us of the necessity of “leaning into open-ness” and the importance of “unfettered material.” *Gender of Sound*, by Anne Carson, was mentioned. At some point during the skype conversation I drew the following diagram:



The Skype call concluded with the question of whether or not we would make the character of Satan also be Dante, or whether Dante, the ever present narrator in *The Inferno*, was to be an underlying figure in all the senior projects at all. My personal thoughts at this point in

the call were represented by benign little jots in my journal such as “a house made of bodies,” “Start screeching start coughing,” and “shoving someone’s face into my stomach.” One of the ideas for a possible storyline, which Abby and I brought up together, was “Some sort of painful celebration.” I ended the day of our Skype call with the following entry in my journal: “Have you ever picked scar tissue out of a healed wound? It’s got a different texture. It’s stringier. And it leaves a hole behind.”

The next part of the process was figuring out whether or not we wanted to use the text of *Inferno* at all. Being tech-savvy millennials, our first step was to create a Google Drive where we could all upload pictures, text, videos, music, etc, that we found inspiring. At the time we assumed we would be overflowing with need to post dozens of pictures of Brecht plays. Instead, Leah posted pictures of past senior projects which had inspired her, and images of *Nuns Having Fun*, a delightful online anthology of pictures of nuns playing games and going on outings. It was this collection of pictures which first brought the idea of nuns to the forefront. Eleanor created a folder where we put names of movies which we thought the group should see (incidentally, none of us ever saw them), and, most importantly, we upload transcriptions of the notes from our meetings. I wrote many sample scenes for us to try, which we spoke about, but never put on their feet (see appendices D through F). We all wanted different things, it seemed. We considered having a huge, industrial fan on stage, and using it to generate the winds for the lovers trapped in the circle of lust. I did research on Minos, ex-king of Crete and overseer of the sinners in *Inferno* and Cerberus the three-headed dog who oversaw the sinners in the circle of gluttony. I played with how to make them characters, or just voices in the space. At one point I wrote a scene that had Cerberus in a French maid’s outfit, wandering through hell and tidying things up, an idea which was bizarrely similar to Dana and Audrey’s rendition of Cerberus in an

evening gown and false eyelashes (see appendix G). I wanted the three circles to be combined into one sleazy nightclub, with strippers in cages eating food instead of dancing, and chocolate syrup dripping from white, industrial walls. These ideas were rejected by the group fairly quickly, as it became clear that, collectively, there was no general interest in anything overtly disgusting or sexual. This aspect of the process was something which I resisted for a long time. My main point of focus until then had been exploring how obscene I could make something, while still keeping my audience engaged and interested. None of us, myself included, were interested in nudity; it was too easy, and took attention away from the piece itself. But I wanted to look at the sins for what they were to me; ways to fill a void of uncertainty and sadness that so many people had no idea how to cope with. In my mind, lust, gluttony and greed were the three main ways to fill this void; food, sex, and material objects all acted as ways to distract the self from feelings of inadequacy, and uncertainty about what was missing from one's life. The concept void was something we all agreed on, and it propelled us into the first main idea for the project; a sense of emptiness.

Back when we were trying to figure out how to swing the whole "girl power" act which we inevitably explored ("Three-Lady-Inferno-Triumvirate was too solid an aesthetic choice to back away from), we came up with a bunch of ideas. Because of a communal love for campiness, we decided to explore Charlie's Angels and TV tropes, of which I did EXTENSIVE research. Among finding style blogs dedicated to the Angels, encyclopedias of television tropes from the last eight decades, and all number of shitty, shitty TV shows ("Emergency!" anyone? Terrible. Utter garbage to watch on Netflix exactly never.) I also found the definition of the 80s term "Carpet of Triumph," which is apparently a particularly virile patch of chest hair and is accompanied by images I will never be able to un-see. It was during this time we were toying

with the idea of hell as a dance club and us as some sort of crime-fighting nun trio with rosaries and handguns. Leah's character was supposed to die, and then we would go down to hell to find her. I still believe that idea can go places.

Eleanor, Abby, Leah and I did not always agree. In fact, we often did not. One instance in particular which serves as a place-marker for our group conflict, was actually referenced in our final piece. In the beginning of the play, Leah makes a comment about how the reason we are in the basement at all is because I accidentally forwarded an email to people who were not supposed to read it. The story behind it is funny to us now, but was a pain in the ass when it happened.

Ah, the email. It really is a testament to its insignificance to me, now, that I actually forgot to put it in the original draft of my paper. Ultimately it served as a representation of the inevitable tensions that arise when four seniors are forced to create one, unified project which they each need to be a culmination of their *own* artistic work at Bard. Luckily, I think we all eventually realized that senior project was simply one of many things we would do with our lives. It was not a finalized death sentence, or a declaration of who we were as artists. It was just another project.

The whole thing happened way back in the beginning of the year when tensions were running high in regards to what we were going to make a piece about. I wanted fire and brimstone, sex and pulp and screaming and ectoplasm. I wanted murder. Abby seemed on board with this, but Eleanor and Leah did not. My description of the events leading up to the email is in NO way an exhaustive recollection of the objective truth. All I can give are my own impressions of it which I know, now more than ever, are completely subjective and limited. I was acting from a place of intense stress and anxiety, which manifested in an "us/them" complex that Abby and I

thought we saw but was, in fact, a projection of our own insecurities in making this piece. I wanted to take massive risks, and the only way I saw that as possible was to create intense amounts of pain; things that were in your face, anything but subtle, and images which would haunt the audience for months after. I wanted aggression. From my perspective at the time (and later, I found out, Abby's as well) Leah and Eleanor were interested in subject matter which was less abrasive. The idea of nuns was, at this point, something I had thought of as mostly a joke. Nuns in the context of lust, gluttony and greed, for me, seemed only to serve as a gag. I saw no aggression in nuns. After one rehearsal, where we were all particularly exhausted, Leah and Eleanor left, leaving Abby and I alone to stew in our own anxiety. We each allowed ourselves to vent: we did not feel like the group was taking enough risks, we wanted something aggressive, we both hated the idea of nuns. I expressed how I felt trapped and snubbed by Eleanor in particular; I had brought several pages of different styles of text that I wanted to see manifest in the piece in some way. They had all been shot down because Eleanor felt they were too aggressive and offensive. I knew they were aggressive, but I was insulted at the idea of their offensiveness, as I had written them from a very personal take on pain and violence and I knew I was not doing anything other than expressing my own experience. Abby had similar feelings about the whole thing (though she, I am sure, has distinct memories and reflections about the event which I do not remember) and we decided, together, that we needed to be proactive. We decided to draft an email to Jack, describing to how we felt trapped in the idea of nuns, and how our ideas seemed to be rejected right and left. I had distinct memories from early rehearsals where I had tried to give movement prompts and exercises, only to be given no effort on the part of Leah or Eleanor. At one point I remember asking us to try and "transform into bulls." Leah and Eleanor would not participate. Eleanor later remarked that, "sometimes my director will be

like 'be a leaf' and I'll just be like 'I'm not a leaf.' I felt slighted, pissed, and like none of my ideas were being listened to. Abby felt the same. So we drafted the email.

Dear Jack,

Salome and I are experiencing some anxiety with how the project and its content are progressing. The group seems to be divided up into two separate camps with us on one side, and Leah and Eleanor on the other. Salome and I got together and talked [tonight](#) and articulated the concerns and ideas that we have for the piece. We do not feel comfortable sharing this with Leah and Eleanor though we realize that it is necessary to communicate for the piece to move forward.

Is there any way that Salome and I can meet with you [this Sunday](#) to discuss our ideas and figure out how we can present them to the rest of the group?

We would appreciate if you did not discuss this meeting with Eleanor or Leah as we don't want to create further tension before we even have a plan.

Thank you so much,

Abby and Salome

We were respectful, I think, in our writing, and we did our best to be anything but inflammatory. Jack responded, suggesting a group meeting, and had everything followed as planned, the whole thing could have blown over. However, yours truly has a penchant for putting

her foot in her mouth at the least convenient time. For all my studies on the human condition, and my attempts to be sensitive and compassionate, I am capable of doing things that are really, fucking stupid.

Jack replied to Abby and my email with a response on which he cc'd Leah and Eleanor, suggesting we meet. This happened over winter break, and none of us were on campus at the time. I was probably high (weed is legal in Seattle, by the way, so I was not breaking any laws, and I was on vacation, so I refuse to apologize for that), and I hit "reply all" upon sending a confirmation saying that I was available for the meeting. This meant that the email, which Abby and I had written, got forwarded to Leah and Eleanor. I remember Abby calling me shortly after I had sent it, telling me what had happened. I kicked myself, cursed, and then we all scheduled a Skype meeting to talk about it. In retrospect, I really am grateful that it happened when it did. When we met over Skype I felt as though I was able to talk, candidly, about my feelings during the process, as well as hearing what Leah and Eleanor had to say. Surprisingly, both of them felt taken aback and caught off-guard by the whole thing; they had had no idea that either Abby or I had felt this way. They expressed being hurt that neither of us had come forward sooner, and I expressed my own feelings about the feedback Eleanor had been giving about my writing. We talked about her discomforts in vocalizing some of the text I wrote about rape and hatred, which, when she addressed it, did make sense to me, and significantly reduced (if not erased) any feelings of resentment I had. Abby and I apologized for not coming forward sooner, and we all agreed we would try to be more open with one another.

Once we had reconciled, there was so much for us to do that I completely forgot about the email until we were actually writing our script. Jack had encouraged us to put our struggles into the piece (and he really, really wanted the email to be in there), so it became the reason we

were all in the basement in the first place. One throwaway line about how “if someone knew how the reply all function worked on email, none of us would be here” was all the email ended up being. It became a sly joke for us, and something that, ultimately, I forgot all about.

If lust, gluttony and greed were all based on a sense of excess, then the worst kind of hell for those sinners would be a place void of everything. We struggled with whether rape and violence were things we wanted to address in regards to lust, but decided against it as those concepts we felt deserved pieces of their own. Images of sterile rooms, fluorescent lights, and intense cleanliness became our ground plan. We looked for characters that represented these images, as well as a sense of asceticism. Nuns in a convent, as much as I had resisted it, now seemed like the inescapable choice.

The fact that we were four women and were personifying women who were a part of a system controlled by men was something we knew we could not ignore, nor did we wish to. We were unsure for a long time what, exactly, we wanted the story to be about. For a while we entertained the idea that all of us embodied a different sin, with the exception of one nun, Leah, who was an incoming novice and would in some way create conflict in the world of the other three. We examined how the different sins could manifest in all of us; I was, for a while, a woman who had come to the convent as an escape from a life of prostitution. Eleanor’s character was a woman who came from an intensely religious family, people who “glutted” themselves on spirituality, so to speak. We never figured out how to manifest greed within Abby’s character, an issue which eventually led us to make a major decision in the world of our play. Greed seemed to be the sin which encompassed everything else. Greed seemed to us the most political of all the sins; a need for power, wealth, resources, and being corrupted as a result of it. Greed was a byproduct of systemic power, power which was unquestionably gendered (see: patriarchy) and

we found that by placing ourselves in a convent, we were already prey to the consequences of greed. It was very important that the piece not become a critique on spirituality, or even the Church. We were not looking to bash God or religion in any way. Rather, we were trying to look at power.

We soon pared down our theme to a specific topic: women in systems. The next part was trying to come up with the question we were attempting to answer. This was a huge struggle. We all knew that systemic oppression was “bad.” We knew we were all victim to it, especially as women. Abby brought up the image of the Panopticon more than once; the philosophical concept of a prison where all inmates had to operate as though they were always under observation. This led us to further explore the idea of the male gaze; how could we show that, in the convent, we were always being watched. We played with ideas of projection; specifically, the projection of one huge eye, which watched us throughout the entirety of the piece. We wanted to have a film of it; so that the eye was always moving and blinking. At the end, where we wanted some big event to take place, we thought that perhaps the eye would close. Maybe this was a sign we were free, or maybe it was a sign that the owner of this eye was coming for us; maybe we had overstepped our bounds. Maybe we would be punished.

We wanted the status quo to be challenged, and we wanted Leah, the newcomer character, to be the one to challenge it. We wrote several drafts of a script where, in the midst of a series of chores, Leah coaxes us into expressing our frustrations and, somehow, leads us to rebel. The fact that Leah’s character later became (arguably) the Devil, was merely a byproduct of this. She entered, tempted us, and we succumbed to her temptation. What we could not figure out what was we were being tempted to do.

Jack was there for our questions and provided feedback every step of the way. He pushed us toward choreographed movement, getting up and doing things as opposed to being in our heads and highly theoretical (an issue for all of us, I think) but, most importantly, he urged us to remember the pleasure. We wanted people to enjoy the piece; without enjoyment, there was no play. We all wanted humor, but we were struggling to find it. The Sound of Music became a recurring theme, finding songs and silliness were crucial, but we were not sure how to do it. Eleanor's taste in music is exquisite, and she provided us with countless songs from all different genres and decades (we tried to find a place for the Beach Boys' *God Only Knows* for a long time before, tragically, admitting it was too on the nose for a play with God as the constant unspoken figure). We had many a dance routine before realizing that, somehow, there had to be a song. We needed to up the stakes and find pleasure. As the process continued and it became crucial to figure out what we were trying to say, having a good time was getting more and more difficult.

Finally we called Jack in for a rehearsal where we hoped we would make some kind of breakthrough. Out of sheer desperation and lack of ideas we brought back the text of *Inferno* and used it as a means for us to, hopefully, generate material. Poor Jack. He came to that rehearsal to and saw a choreographed montage we had done of us as three nuns, sewing a sheet in perfect synchronicity. Or, rather, we wanted it to be that way. It was not quite in sync. It was probably sloppier than I remember it. We also did an exercise called *Viewpoints*, where we walked around the space, attempting to be aware of one another and the images that our bodies were forming together. In addition to this, we each had a copy of *Inferno* and did an improvised read-thru of some of the cantos; taking turns reading lines, occasionally saying things together or overlapping phrases with sound and repetition of words. It was not a great rehearsal. At the end Jack told us

this, in so many words. It was our attempt, in the midst of feeling lost, to go back to a structure which we recognized. Every theater student at Bard has done viewpointing at least twice. While we generated no material that day which we ever used, it did spark ideas for devised movement, which manifested themselves when we choreographed the final moments of our piece. It also finalized an important aspect of our rehearsal process: our collective disinterest in using any of the text from *Inferno*.

One particular night we were sitting in Olin tired, cranky, and blocked. We had come up, once again, against the issue of what we were trying to say with the project. Through much deliberation and lots of Abby writing on the chalkboard, we came to what we seemed to all agree on: systems are a part of life and we are unable to escape them. Once this was established, the next step came almost immediately: the nuns would decide they did not want to be a part of the convent. Leah's character, ever the outsider, would offer us a new system. We would adapt it. We would think we were free but we would not be. The end.

We were all very good at being present for rehearsals, but we each occasionally, had circumstances which prevented us from being at all of them. The day the specifics of Leah's rebellion were created I was not present, as I had a doctor's appointment about an hour away. I returned the next day to find the fifth (or so) draft of our script in front of me (see appendix H). All of our drafts had been largely similar up to a certain point. We went through an establishment of circumstances and characters, as well as Leah's pointed questions which led us to realize how unhappy we were with our lives. My character had, at this point, developed into the one who devoutly resisted; the one who was the last to fall. Using this mechanism, we tried to voice the struggles of a life in systemic oppression; why had the nuns joined the convent? Why did any one choose to live within a given system? What did we all want to have in order to be happy?

The uncovering of this new question was a crucial point for me, personally, as it allowed me to tap back into the sources of inspiration which I had cast aside as the piece developed. What drove addictions? In this case, what drove an addiction to the strict rules and system of the convent? I proposed feelings of perfectionism, of needing to impress and be the best one could be. This fit with the themes of redemption and guilt which were already present. But it also opened the door to another realization: my character would never find the perfection she sought. Besides the obvious impossibility of perfection, there was the crux of her obsession with religion: she could always do more. The amorphous “Him,” whom my character references more than once in the script, will never be satisfied with her. She posed these statements as opportunities for self-growth, but under all of it was a sense of constant inadequacy. Freedom from that was what Leah was able to offer. Later we decided Leah had to work some spell on me and the others, otherwise my giving in felt too quick and disingenuous to the story’s arc. This was not explored fully until opening night, where I made the choice to appear “trance-like” when Leah finally converted me.

What the new draft did differently was that it did not, like the others, end after my character had fallen. We knew that, eventually, all of us succumbed to Leah’s power, but we had no idea what happened after that. This is where the draft changed. Eleanor’s interest in the project had always been based in a need to bring in the political, and here was its manifestation. Leah’s character creates a clan of supreme beings; she makes it possible to achieve perfection. Through joining her sisterhood (called *IOS Infinity* in the script, as an homage to the unending cycle of “better” and “more” as represented by *Apple’s* constant improvements to their operating system), we could become the best versions of ourselves. We would no longer be striving for

perfection, because we would have it. We would be beautiful, all-powerful, and divine. We would be updated.

The second movement of our piece was thus labeled *The Update*. We were given new names, each name a letter in the Greek alphabet (at first this appeared to me to be further reference to technology, with Beta test versions of new software and the usage of Greek letters in technology marketing, but I later learned it was actually a reference to sororities). For a while the Update was movement-based; we devised transformative gestures and considered having scanning lights that ran up and down our bodies. We had *Positive, Life-Affirming Messages to Live By*, our new manifesto which outlined what the Update entailed. We eventually chose to illustrate these recitations with movement, and Abby composed a scrolling video with text to give the idea that we were reading the mantras aloud (though once we started our recitation, we magically knew them by heart). Leah conducted us, and, finally, we were transformed. We wanted to make sure the audience did not forget our confinement in the basement and, what had originally been portrayed by a giant eye, turned into the sound of footsteps above us. But those footsteps did not matter to us, because our new sisterhood would never enter the real world. We would forever exist in the world of the basement, “being godly together.”

From a dramaturgical standpoint, however, the Update was not enough. We established a question and proposed an answer, but we still felt that, as artists, we were not able to fully comment on the work we had made. We were proud of our piece, but we also felt cheated out of being able to do solo projects, exhausted by the process of collaboration, and frustrated at how much we had lost sight of pleasure during all of it. The decision for a Karaoke number was virtually unspoken; it became a necessity. The question of what we were saying with the song was also easy: “This was just supposed to be fun. We just wanted this to be a positive

experience. Fuck all of this. We are done.” Eleanor (naturally) proposed *Just Wanna Have Fun*, by Cyndi Lauper. We were all game. What we learned later was that the song was just old enough to speak to audience members of all ages. Everyone loves the 80s. Whether or not singing the song was the Update itself, or just us, singing our hearts out, was never fully answered. Ultimately, the liminal space at the end was the whole point of the piece. The characters, in attempting to escape a system of penance and sterility were tempted by promises of excess and perfection. We, as theater makers, just wanted to enjoy ourselves. Our characters, ultimately, did not escape systemic oppression, they just moved from one system to another. We were just trying to have fun.

Laura Ferri, my theater director from high school, once referred to the process of creating a play as “dessert before the meat and veggies.” She meant, of course, that the real fun in putting on a play was in the rehearsal. It was a sweet sentiment. Laura Ferri is a smart, smart lady and one hell of a director. But her sentiment did not apply here. The rehearsal process, in this case, if we are to extend the metaphor, was like trying to chew a particularly unforgiving rock, which keeps insisting it is supposed to be a nun. The performance process, on the other hand, was as smooth and sweet as the Welch’s grape juice we drank in lieu of wine during the play. Finally, I was back in an element with which I was familiar. I found, thankfully, that I was not overly-attached to the text (so that I might have been afraid to take artistic liberties as an actor), and instead found myself having fun with the different ways I could play my character. I explored, giggled, hammed things up and attempted to see what worked and what did not. Finally, my ladies and I were able to function within a rigid structure to see how we could express ourselves individually as artists and actors, and just see what happened. What happened was a remarkably smooth technical rehearsal, which afforded us several runs of the piece in the theater before we

even did our dress or opening-night performance. I found myself comforted in a suddenly familiar structure of waiting on light cues, and the freedom to experiment with line delivery however I wanted (even if it was cheeky and unsuccessful). I also found space to explore the physicality of my character, something which, in my conceptual headspace, I had been very far removed from. My group and I collectively found the arc of the piece as a whole, as well as the beat changes and key moments where the world changed irreversibly. We all found places for the camp and humor, which had once seemed so impossible to grasp. The adrenaline afforded to all of us, in the presence of lighting, costumes and a set, helped us to cruise through our opening, and toward our closing night on a sweet kind of high. The hardest stuff was over. All that was left now was to play.

I will never forget our collective Karaoke performance on closing night. I belted to high heaven, and basked in our collective moment of over-the top revelry. We were finally having fun.

If we were to continue working on the piece, I am honestly unsure as to what more I would wish to say. I am not, by any means, implying that our final project was perfect. We all would have loved to have done more character work and development, and perhaps have taken on another person who could act as full-time director (Abby and Eleanor did lots of directorial work, Leah and I did some, but we all could only be outside eyes for minutes at a time). Having the moment of my character's conversion by Leah last longer would have been helpful too, I think, though I am not sure what more there was for either her, or me, to say. We tried hard to be clear in the dialogue without being expository; and that is something I think could have been even better if the piece had been longer. We did struggle with the narrative arc; because the piece could only be 25 minutes, the establishment of the story, as well as the build, had to be

compressed, dramatically. From a theatrical standpoint, I would have loved for my character to interact more with Abby's and Eleanor's. But it was necessary to rapidly establish and "us/them" dynamic and, as a result, I remained separate from the group. It would have been wonderful to have the cabinet, our Pandora's Box, brimming with even more symbols of excess, makeup, costume jewelry, new shoes and mirrors, but our piece was too short to spend time fiddling with time-consuming props so, ultimately, we had to leave them out.

Surprisingly, my need for my own, individual senior project dissipated with the completion of our collaborative one. Working with Leah, Abby and Eleanor helped me to expand the ideas I was working with so that they were more universal. It is true that many, many people struggle with addictions to food, sex and substances. But what is even more important, it seems, is what is underlying all of it. The insecurities and struggles of being human, of being a woman and living in society, manifest in many different ways. I started out with the intention to express a fraction of those ways but I think that, ultimately, working with my fellow collaborators, and friends, we managed to express the idea that drove them all.

Appendices

Appendix A

Jack Ferver's Performance Composition Class, Performance Text, Tuesday, October 14, 2014

If I sucked in back to my spine, inhaling so hard I pulled my intestines up through my trachea, tumbling over my tongue, could I use the symmetry of my flat stomach for the formula that would make the food burn the fat burn the meat from the sensuous bones trapped inside it.

I wasn't supposed to dream of slicing it off and letting it bleed, at least the number would change

I wasn't supposed to dream of pinching it until it was no longer there disintegrated under my fingertips melting off of my skeleton thin.

Tell me about Nutella

No thank you

but I shoved it down my throat sensuously slipping through my veins the way sex didn't but Nutella does.

Is it semen or syrup in the corner of my mouth.

If I don't get the feel of your flesh under my fingernails If I don't have the slick sweat of your chest slipping against my back than I will take the sensation of teeth sinking into good bread and the feel of bloody grease from a tenderloin dripping down my chin.

I want you to smear Betty Crocker Creamy Deluxe Milk Chocolate Frosting on the inside of your thigh so that I can feel the brown, sugary slick under my tongue mix with the blood from the bite I left for you to remember me by.

Because picking hair out of my teeth is better than popcorn husks.

Because you tearing into the lips on my face makes them swollen like the lips between my thighs when I see the pile of Rolo Snicker Reese's under my eyelids when I slide between the covers.

Because you give starving orgasms and I want mine stumbling along the line of obesity.

And after I lie on my back for one or two or seven hours my stomach looks flat even though the rope swells my wrists, making them look puffier than they really are.

And after everything is exhumed, expelled, ejaculated, after my vomit spatters across the wall in Neapolitan streaks of red number 40, expelled cocoa extract and enriched wheat flower, I'll let you finger my hostess fruit pie.

Yielding under sweaty palms like flesh pressed between the ribs in the early hours of the morning.

I will revel in a feast, the day your body leaves.

One way or another, I get what I need.

Appendix B

Text for Theater Moderation, Tuesday, April 14, 2015

I found it impossible to go for a jog without hearing disarmingly detailed descriptions of a variety of salacious actions passersby would enjoy engaging in with me-

-Or having all manner of charming gestures cast my way in the subway, most involving a "v" made with the fingers and strategic placement of the tongue. I was baffled, at first.

Then I started to enjoy it.

I got a pleasure out of the catcalls, the proclamations, the winks. They were affirmations.

The comments soothed me. I was still desirable.

When kissing, the tongue should provide equal attention to the tongue of the recipient as well as the general vicinity around the mouth. Chin included.

Aim for one inch or more of saliva around the recipients lips.

I sucked him off last night. It was messy. And awkward.

It is said that the human stomach can hold about 1.5 liters of fluid. The stomach is about the size of our fist.

I am addicted to contact.

You'd never know it though.

I crave stroking, brushing, squeezing, holding. Touching. The feeling of strange skin makes me drunk.

Fuels me.

Sex is awesome. Give me meaningless hookups any day. I'll have my panties back on and be out your door before you have the time to awkwardly light that first cigarette and search for something to say. One-night stands are my shit. But will someone please explain why there is no such thing as a casual caress.

Having your face, your cheek, your lower lip and forehead attended to by the sensitivity of another's fingers is electrifying. Intoxicating.

And it doesn't make me fall in love with you any more than I would had you taken me from behind in a dark motel room where I never learned your name.

I don't discriminate between sensations.

Appendix C

Theater & Performance Program Senior Project Proposal, Wednesday, March 11, 2015

1) Which Senior Project format are you proposing?

Senior Project Festival

2) Names and contact information for proposed collaborators:

Salome Dewell

Eleanor Robb

Leah Rabinowitz

Abigail Adler

3) Describe the proposed project:

As a part of the larger Senior Project centering on Dante's Inferno, we are exploring the sins of Lust, Gluttony, and Greed. These are the sins of the body, and we are interested in how these sins are attributed to the concept of the feminine in modern society.

I will be exploring the line between Lust and Gluttony, and how it can be blurred. Eating in excess, and sexual insatiability are indicative of the way humans fall prey to addiction, as in the case of drugs or alcohol. In all cases, the behavior is attempting to fill some sort of void. It is not the substance which renders the addiction disturbing, but the excess in which it is used. Sex and food are not disgusting in and of themselves. But they can be. And I want to look at how.

4) Provide a rationale for the proposed project. Why is this project important to you? Why is this project important now?

The decision to use Dante's Inferno derives from the wish of the entire junior class to make one cohesive body of work. As an all-female collaboration we view this project as a necessity. It will allow for us to explore our own femininity within the society we live in. The question of women's bodies has been and continues to be on the table: how do you control them, how do you keep them in check, what do you do with them, and to whom do they belong?

5) Describe the individual role(s) that each collaborator will play in creating the project:

Salome and Abby: Directors/ Devisers

Eleanor and Leah: Performers/ Devisers

Appendix D

Journal entry/brainstorm, Monday, July 13, 2015

I am a glutton for love. I want the whole world to love me.

I am a glutton for need. Need me like you have never needed anything else, let my breath be your reason for breathing.

I am a glutton for your lust. Let the urge to fuck me raw overpower all five senses and then some. Need my body so bad you think the universe may implode if you don't get to touch my godlike skin.

Feed me your praise and let me drink long from the goblet of your drool from when you saw me naked.

Hunger for my cunt the way I watched you hunger for those baby back ribs from Chili's.

I will never get enough. Greed is not my sin, my sin is emptiness.

Can you blame me for always wanting when no matter in the world would clog me up into silence?

It's not my fault I'm empty.

The void chose me.

Is this funny are you laughing?

Love me please my god love me please my god.

I could never have enough bodies until the one I thought was my anchor let me drift away.

I used to be fluent in the language of tracing a tongue along an inner thigh.

Now the words just stick in my throat.

It's not so much that the endless hunger—or I guess you call it greed. Which is really not fair by the way.

Greed is just trying to be full. Trying not to be empty.

It's not so much that I'm full. I'm just not hungry, because every time I see skin all I can think about is the time when skin poisoned me.

I have all this skin under my nails from raking my fingers down endless backs.

Good. A snack for later.

I'll tell you a secret. My worst fear is drowning. Not in water, but inside myself. I fear becoming so massive my own fat buries me, I cannot move, I am too heavy. I can only sink deeper inside my own flesh.

Sex scares me now.

No, I wasn't raped. That's too simple. No I don't think I was raped, I don't think.

No, sex just scares me now.

I eat so I can make my fear a reality because once I become so fat I cannot speak, cannot move, it will be comforting to know I am powerful enough to scare myself to death. Anyway, it can't get any worse than this.

I became my worst fear today. What have you done with your life?

If I became my worst fear than nothing else can scare me. I become all powerful. All-consuming. Because I've consumed everything.

When you go to eat me out I'll crush you to death between the thighs that consumed the world.

My cellulite will be the last thing you taste.

Greed is god. All hail.

If you want your chicken lean, all you need to do is cut off the fatty bits. Then you can fry it.

Get your sausage fingers off my frightened throat.

I'm not hungry, thank you.

Let's make a house of bodies. Please come inside. Here's the chimney. Would you stoke the fire?

"excuse me but the chimney is screaming"

"that's alright it will still taste good"

My jaw clicks when I'm horny.

Hell is a place where my clothes are too tight and it feels like my bra is too tight even when I'm not wearing one. It always feels like I'm just about to take it off but I never do.

It's so funny because once you're fat it's not even that bad. Life still goes on.

What does it mean to be entrapped in hell, anyway. Why am I here. Because I tried to fix what was broken. Greed does not seek to hurt. The hurt is a by-product. Collateral damage isn't spiteful, it's just a necessary evil. I'm sorry that I hurt you with my greed. But the alternative was me, starving inside all this flesh.

It's a dog eat dog world. Dogs eating dogs eating you eating me, me making sweet love to little Debbie.

The circle of life rotates even here. Thanks, Dante.

Appendix E

Journal entry/brainstorm Thursday, April 28, 2016

Man sometimes I just don't feel that pretty.

No stop that just stop please cut your well-meaning body-positive zero fat-shaming feminist tongue out of your white-boy dread-head for just a second and let me feel ugly.

Feeling ugly is my blister only when I pop it you feel the need to rub against my rawness with stop-it and you're beautiful. I know you hate that you feel like you have to

But please don't.

Today I need you to let me feel ugly

Today I need you to receive my red, wet, blister-juice and just say "okay."

Okay?

"Okay" is all I need because knowing you're sitting on the other side of the wall on your smartphone while I watch the oscillating ellipses let me know you're "typing" is enough for me to know you're there, and to know you'll be there as I stew in the ugly.

Okay?

Let me feel ugly so I can know there is a life outside thin webs of maybe I'm pretty and maybe I'm not.

Because maybe someday I will be a horrendously ugly fuck but it won't matter because I'll know that the world won't freeze because I'm ugly.

But let me be monstrous just for a second so I can feel the power of being outside of beauty

Let me smear my cheeks with basic society shit and Justin Beiber bum-sweat and let me scream to the sewers because I have inhaled unfiltered trash and there is no going back now.

Okay?

But today I need you to think I'm beautiful.

I need you to cream yourself because you saw the contour of my shoulder blade

Worship me as your celestial war goddess of infinity or some shit and whip your back because you love me that much.

But today I need to be beautiful I need you to worship my breath, want my thighs and want my skin.

I need you to be awed by me.

After you see me close your eyes forever, so that the last thing you see before you die will be the blissful image of my face, looking at yours.

Today I need you to be in ecstasy because one of my hairs fell onto your carpet.

Today I need you to want my body the way you have never wanted any other, and I want to feel your need to fuck me before your fingers touch my sleeve.

Mostly I need you to need to let me be beautiful except when I need you to need to let me be hideous.

Except when I need you to need to let me be your codependent leech of self-fulfilling prophecies and awkward nights of being the only two people at the party who don't talk to anyone but each other and I weld my breasts to your ribcage so I can look up at you always.

Mostly I need you to need to let me be beautiful

Except when I'm ugly.

Appendix F

Possible scene, written Thursday, September 03, 2015

The mirror wall covered with white paper. The scissor lift is raised above the top of the curtain, the platform is out of sight.

They enter, they wear bulky canvas clothes.

A: Well, this is it.

B: Where is Minos.

A: I don't know. Minos is supposed to be here.

B: Did you call him

A: No because I thought you did

B: Well neither of us called him so he is not here.

A: So then what are we supposed to do without him

B picks up the whip.

B: Here. You go first

A: This is stupid

B: Come on you go first

A: Fine one time I had sex

B: One time you had sex

A: Yes one time I had sex and I liked it okay

B: this is serious

A: I am being entirely serious. There was sex. I had it.

B: Fine I'll go

A: fine

B: I fried the fat on my girlfriend's thighs. It was delicious.

A whips herself 3 times

B: So I stay in the third circle then

A: What?

B: The third circle. you whipped yourself three times so I stay where we are. in the third circle.

A: is that what it means

B: That's what he does

A: who

B: Minos

A: how do you know?

B: common knowledge.

Enter Cerberus

C: I am Cerberus

A: you are Cerberus

C: yes I am Cerberus I just said that

B: Cerberus has three heads

C: I left the other two at home so I only have one. I can pretend to have three heads if that makes you feel better

A: no one head is fine look we're looking for Minos we're not sure where to go

C: did you call him?

B: no she was supposed to

A: You were supposed to

C: okay well he'll come in a little anyway, it's just a little quicker if you make an appointment in advance.

B: That's what I said

C: Do you have any dirt

B: what

C: dirt do you have any

A: why

C: I love dirt

Black paint slides down white paper, one stream. Cerberus goes into a frenzy, lunging at the paint (syrup?) smothering it in the general vicinity of his mouth. He rips the paper off the mirror to suck off more of the syrup. He gnaws at it. He exits.

They notice the mirror behind the paper. They decide to tear the rest of it off. There is a sound cue, sound as they remove the rest of the paper. They look at themselves in the mirror.

B: I want to be Cleopatra

A: no you can be Helen of Troy I want to be Cleopatra

B: you look beautiful, Cleopatra.

A: I have nothing to prove. You're a sad bitch. And I have nothing to prove.

So I fucked my brother. That wasn't my choice, that wasn't my fault. And I have nothing to prove.

You know I watched them burn? All of them. I watched them burn and I watched them writhe and then I saved them. I was a goddess on earth but Minos decided the only thing that mattered was a couple of flings with a couple of Cesars. I have nothing to prove.

Fly my pretties, you'll make the pharaoh angry!

I loved both of them. So you know. Not that it makes much of a difference. Everyone just cared about the fucking. About who fucked who and who put what where. Whether I was a screamer. Whether I bared my breasts on a daily basis. My jewelry. My hair. No one wondered anything else of the actually African, apparently Aryan princess. The historian's wet dream. Jack your scepter and think of my juicy pyramids, but no one cared that I changed history.

Do you know what I've done? The people I've burned, the violent, bloody sacrifices I've made? At least give me credit for the important things I've done. The things that mattered.

But no. at the end of the day all they cared about is how many Roman staffs penetrated this playboy queen.

Girls dance. Minos lowers down on scissor lift. There are two buckets next to him. Looks at the girls. Minos tells the girls to stop. They stop

M: I am Minos. I'm sorry you were waiting. Did you call?

B: No, but it's okay we were just looking around anyway.

M: there is too much of you, please.

A and B rip pieces of canvas off of their bodies. They wear white underclothes.

M: there is too much of you please

They do it again

M: too much

Again

M: lightness we need lightness please be less thank you

They stand, with rags of their clothes hanging off.

M: there we go yes no more excess. I always loathed excess.

A: I am Cleopatra

B: I am Helen of troy

M: You are both sluts so it makes no difference to me. Kindly come forward and tell me your sins.

A: I needed to rule the world

B: I'm just really hot

A: my body was my weapon

B: it's not my fault they think with their dicks

A: I loved Cesar. I did.

B: Achilles never loved me. And no matter how much he wanted me he never knew I loved him. I did. I loved him.

M: Yes yes very nice thank you. Now then, (he hands them buckets)

A and B cover themselves with the black syrup. They lie down, with paper over their faces.

Dante and Virgil enter

M: excuse you you were not invited

V and D do not answer him, they walk past M on scissor lift. They look at A and B

V: we have permission

D: and I want to look

They marvel, poke, prod A and B. They pull the paper off of A. A sits up.

V: SPEAK TO US O WOEFUL SPIRIT AND TELL US YOUR SINS.

A: I once ruled a great empire-

V: YES YES THAT'S VERY NICE YOU MAY LIE DOWN NOW

V places paper over her face. A falls back down. D has already lost interest and moved on to B

D: (takes off paper from B's face) wow she's really hot.

Appendix G

Sample Scene, written Tuesday, September 29, 2015

A: Where are we

B: Stand still please

A: Where am I

B: If you could just put the icing there

A: The what?

B: The icing.

A: The what

B: The icing.

A: The icing.

B: Yes if you could just put the icing there

A: Put the icing where?

B: There, on the side of your right cheek, please

A: I...here?

B: Yes, that's lovely, that's just fine.

Lights up

People lying on their side or their back. Chocolate icing is spread on the side of their body facing the ceiling. Chocolate syrup drips from above.

Cerberus (B), artfully arranges the bodies on the ground. He wears a French maid uniform and holds an umbrella, to protect himself, and his outfit, from the rain. He arranges A on the ground in relation to the others.

Appendix H

Final script edited April 26th 2016

LUST GLUTTONY GREED

A senior project submitted to the Division of the Arts at Bard College
Presented as a part of the INFERNO Festival

Created in collaboration by

Abigail Adler '16
Salome Dewell '16
Leah Rabinowitz '16
Eleanor Robb '16

Jack Ferver, Advisor

Characters

ABBY/ GAMMA.....Abigail Adler
 ELEANOR/ BETA..... Eleanor Robb
 LEAH /ALPHA.....Leah Rabinowitz
 SALOME/ THETA..... Salome Dewell

Fluorescent lights come up. Three nuns (SALOME, ELEANOR, ABBY) are sitting in metal chairs on stage. They begin their work. SALOME goes to back to polish silver, ELEANOR goes to sew/mend, ABBY peels potatoes. The fourth chair is empty. LEAH enters, holding her habit in her hand. She is unseen by the others. She sits, dons the habit, surveys the nuns. LEAH pushes her whole stack of BIBLES over. She pulls out a star magazine, begins reading. The sound of the bibles tipping over alerts the others, and they treat her as if she's been there the whole time.

SALOME

It would be soooo nice if we could all devote our minds and bodies to the tasks at hand.
LEAH takes no notice. ABBY and ELEANOR look over, interested.

The tasks at hand.

LEAH still does nothing. ABBY and ELEANOR look at each other, trying to figure out what to do.

SALOME

Put that thing down and sort, Sister. Or do you want extra time in the basement.
Beat. SALOME/ELEANOR/ABBY resume work. L picks up magazine again. ELEANOR and ABBY notice and are astonished and impressed by her brazenness. They look over at SALOME, who is hard at work. ELEANOR/ABBY sneak over to LEAH.

ABBY

Where did you find that?

LEAH

Around.

ELEANOR

Around where?

LEAH

I have my ways.

LEAH/ELEANOR/ABBY crowd around the magazine. ELEANOR gasps at something in the magazine, followed by giggles from LEAH/ABBY. SALOME looks up.

SALOME

What did I just say?

LEAH

Relax, I'm just taking a break.

SALOME

I swear to God in Heaven. When you are punished, you will do the work you are assigned, *without* breaks.

LEAH

Do you think you have that much authority to tell me what to do? Please. You don't even know how to send a confidential email.

SALOME

What?

LEAH

If someone just knew how the "reply all" function worked, and I hadn't read it, none of us would be here.

SALOME

All I ask is that we just do what we've been told so we can finish and continue our worship, which I'm sure, is in everyone's best interest.

ELEANOR

It was a little unfair of you to send that email from the library computer; after all we were working just as hard as you...

SALOME

Really? I can't believe you're still talking about that it happened, it was a mistake, get over-

ABBY

Stop! Stop it. Please.

There is a beat.

LEAH

You ladies can finish this magazine, I've got plenty more. I'm thirsty.

ABBY

There's a water pitcher in the corner....

LEAH

Like it's obvious- I'm thirsty. I'm getting something to drink.

ELEANOR

What is there to even drink down here?

LEAH

Let's play a game. Ladies, what do we drink on Sundays?

ABBY

Water.

ELEANOR

Ooh! Another glass of milk at dinner?

LEAH

NO. *(It's so obvious)...* At communion....

ABBY

Oh, the blood of the Lord!

ELEANOR

Oh right, yeah! Wine!

LEAH

Exactly.

ELEANOR

So what? We literally drink that every Sunday.

LEAH

Yeah, one mouthful. You gotta drink a little more for the real fun.

ELEANOR

But, like, *how*?

LEAH

(Story telling esque) Have you ever wondered where all the sacraments were kept when they weren't being used for church?

ABBY

I've never really thought about it.

LEAH

What if I told you that there was more than working—more fulfillments, more gratitude, and better sisterhood some other way?

ABBY

What does that have to do with communion?

ELEANOR

What do you mean?

LEAH

Open the cabinet.

ABBY

How? We can't do that-- we don't have the key.

LEAH

Don't worry sisters; I'll make sure you can do anything you want.
LEAH pulls a bobby pin from under her habit and gives it to ELEANOR and ABBY. They are mesmerized. They move in, ABBY takes the bobby pin with great care and brings it UPSTAGE CENTER with ELEANOR. ABBY begins to pick the lock.

ABBY

Are you sure this is supposed to work?

LEAH

Turn clockwise.

ELEANOR

How do you know that?

LEAH

I've had experience
ABBY fails. ELEANOR takes the pin. She succeeds. They pause. And turn to look at LEAH.

LEAH

Satisfaction awaits.

SALOME

What are you talking about? Who do you think you are?!

LEAH

You'll see.
ABBY and ELEANOR open the CABINET. Pandora's box moment. It's filled with some sort of mash up between a sorority closet and a dusty church cabinet. LEAH has decked it out with stolen tea lights, lots of wine and crackers, and outfits, pulled together from the church-run consignment shop/her own ingenuity. She has prepped for this moment for years. LEAH sidles up and pulls out two bottles, and four glasses.
ABBY gasps with delight as LEAH pours her and ELEANOR two huge glasses. She crosses to SALOME and leaves a glass at her feet. Moves CENTER.

LEAH

A toast. To a new sisterhood.

ELEANOR and ABBY move to flank LEAH. They cheers. SALOME looks on in horror. She starts to pray. SALOME has her eyes closed and prays more fervently throughout this. LEAH, ELEANOR, ABBY finish their wine.

LEAH

I'm hungry.

ABBY

Is there something to eat in the cabinet?

LEAH

Come sit with me. I'd love to share.

They move their chairs to form gossip corner diagonal from SALOME. LEAH goes back UPSTAGE CENTER to CABINET. ABBY and ELEANOR sit, excitedly waiting to see what comes next. SALOME is consumed with pious action- perhaps picking up discarded work, reading the bible, etc. LEAH brings a box of communion crackers.

LEAH

Here, eat some of these

ELEANOR

I can't believe we're eating these.

ABBY

I've never had more than one at a time! *Whispers* They're not that good when you eat more than one I think...

ELEANOR

Yeah, they're a little dry...

LEAH

Oh, do you want something else?

ABBY

Do you have something else?

ELEANOR

We wouldn't want to impose...

LEAH

No, not at all! Please, I want you to have satisfaction.

She gets up, goes to the CABINET. LEAH opens a drawer in the CABINET and pulls out a serving tray of assorted chocolate candies and grapes. She carries it to the cluster of chairs

LEAH

Abby.... how do you feel about peeling potatoes all day?

ABBY

Well, I guess this isn't the worst punishment I ever received here. *Lowers voice so that Sister SALOME cannot hear* One time, I once filled my bed with spare robes so I could sneak out of my room to smoke, but one day I forgot, and that's how she found me, smoking Marlboros in the bathroom at 3 in the morning. I was on toilet duty for months after that.

LEAH

Oh no!

ABBY

It's better than when we had to shovel the sidewalk after that huge snowstorm because we talked during Monday night services, and we didn't have anything covering our faces

LEAH

That seems like overreacting.... Eleanor, this isn't your first time being punished right?

ELEANOR

No! Remember that time when I slept through the trip to the shrine and had to wake up for the next week two hours before everyone else and scrub the floors? My fingers were so dry and red, and so painful!

They all laugh, raucously.

LEAH

How excessive.

ABBY

Right?

ELEANOR

That's what we're saying! One time, we tried to argue a punishment for being late to dinner and then we got doubly punished.

ABBY

Or that time....

She stops- Upset.

LEAH

Abby, you can tell me anything. I'm here for you.

ABBY

That time when I got my knuckles struck with a ruler for...

It's quiet for a second. ABBY shakes her head, not going to continue. ELEANOR picks up.

ELEANOR

I guess we always seem to be getting in trouble...

ELEANOR

This is probably the best punishment we've ever had.

LEAH

You both deserve it.

ABBY

Thanks for listening to us... no one here really does.

LEAH

It was my pleasure.

ELEANOR

Hey what else was in that cabinet? Do you really mean when you say.... fulfillment?

LEAH

Oh, has being a novice not provided contentment for you?

ELEANOR

Well, not exactly... Joining the convent I thought I was getting the best of both worlds- sisterhood and serenity. But with all this work and all these punishments, I feel like I've lost sight of who I am... And I'm scared that... this isn't my true path.

LEAH

Her plan might work

Our lives can seem as if there is no direction or -

SALOME

Addressing Eleanor

You don't mean that, you cannot mean that.

ELEANOR

I think I do, I've never really been able to say it in words before, especially surrounded by all these sisters all the time. I feel like I'm trapped, that someone tipped an empty glass over me, so even if I screamed... no one would hear me.

ABBY

Anytime we expressed ourselves, it seemed like we were punished. We're constantly hidden. We sit and read in the parlor and the public views us from behind a gate. Literally.

ELEANOR

We are the amorphous voices filling the church every Sunday. And for what?

ABBY

Forgive me for thinking this can't be it.

SALOME

Think of the beauty. You are good and virtuous and pure.

ABBY

Our routines repeat an endless cycle-

SALOME

Your entire life is an endless cycle; it's all endless cycles- that is how life is. Heaven will free you from that. Just listen, just open your mind, He is speaking so clearly-

LEAH

Have you ever heard Him?

SALOME

How can you ask me that? Every night I pray, every waking moment I hear His voice ringing in my ears-

LEAH

What does He say to you?

SALOME

Everything. He reminds me of everything that I can be for Him, of all of the ways that I can do more, be more.

LEAH

So you're never enough.

SALOME

Of course not. If any of us were ever enough there would be no reason to live. I have always known I was meant for this. I have known ever since I was a child that when I became a nun, I would be the most devout, the most beautiful. I would strive for perfection. I can always improve, always do better. There is always more for me to reach for and to find.

LEAH

You'll always be empty. You will always be starving for more. Always hungry.

SALOME

This is the life I chose. This is the only life. This is the life I chose. I can always be better, I can always do more-

LEAH

You have no control, you have no meaning, you will never have satisfaction when you give away your power.

SALOME

I....

LEAH

You are powerless, why do you do this to yourself? Why do you think this is ok? This hierarchy that you subscribed to is holding you back, keeping you from the perfection you seek. It makes you dependent. It makes you pathetic.

SALOME

I am doing my duties, I work so hard, and I'm doing this for the greater good, I'm doing this for me.

LEAH

No you're not, you're just a cog in the large machine and you will never benefit from that.

Why don't you believe me?

SALOME

Because I'm terrified! I just want to mean something

LEAH

I was once like you. I thought those same things. I thought I was worthless, this place made me feel worthless. But I have found the way to make all of those feelings evaporate. You can be someone. You can be complete. You can be so much better. You mean something to me.

(LEAH claps again. ELEANOR and ABBY sit up. SALOME stands up from her chair. LEAH takes SALOME's chair, pulls it upstage, and stands on it to deliver her sermon)

You're being asked to constantly produce. Create for the greater good placed well above your station. In this damp basement you toil, and for what? Some salvation that will be given to you once you die? But I've figured something out. I've heard it in the buzz of these lights, the undeniable current of energy that runs throughout our world. Who says we can't be in charge of our own production? I say we produce ourselves. Make us the most fulfilled, curious, most innovative, happiest people in the world. We can indulge in our pleasure, eschewing these stifling robes and confines for a higher calling. Our basement becomes our kingdom, and we will thrive. Trust me.

SALOME

I trust you.

ELEANOR looks around, raises her hand awkwardly, puts it down, fiddles with her robes

ELEANOR

How will we "thrive" in this musty basement?

LEAH

I have prepared everything to give you the tools you need to emerge, a beautiful, rewarded, devout BETA.

ELEANOR

A BETA?

LEAH

YES, part of this emergence is through creating a new self. Your new self is the best version- the prime model, the most up to date. I have that power.

ABBY

What would I be??

LEAH

You would become the supreme version of you- free of guilt and punishment, a GAMMA.

ABBY

Wow... A GAMMA

SALOME

Softly... And what would I be?

LEAH

With some consideration... A THETA.

SALOME

What does that mean?

LEAH

You'll be the best you. No more doubt. No more fears. A THETA. Confident and strong.

ELEANOR

And what will you be?

LEAH

I *am* the ALPHA

LEAH goes to the closet and brings out a small bag

LEAH

Now, do you pledge to follow my teachings and view me as your ALPHA?

SALOME/ELEANOR/LEAH

Yes.

From now on, they speak into the microphones.

ALPHA

Good. Let's begin.

She Claps again. BETA/GAMMA/THETA take their places for affirmation

Each of you please read one of your new life-affirming positive messages to live by.

BETA

Make updating a habit. Any moment you doubt yourself, you are a lesser version. Don't hesitate- innovate.

GAMMA

Your five senses are the only things that are real. Thrive in the beauty of truth, excellence, and tech.

THETA

ALPHA is the ultimate update. Strive to be like her, but remember that ALPHA created you.

ALL

WE'VE BEEN BEGUILED BY THE IDEA THAT ANYONE ELSE IS IN CHARGE OF OUR PRODUCTION. WE'VE BEEN SUBMERGED BY FRUITLESS PIETY. WE RENOUNCE OUR PAST SELVES TO BECOME OUR BEST SELVES. WE WERE POWERLESS AND THE ONLY WAY TO REGAIN CONTROL IS TO LISTEN TO OUR ALPHA.

BETA

"There is a pain that hurts and a pain that changes you" Expel the pain that hurts.

GAMMA

There is an update that controls and an update that changes you. Expel the update that controls.

THETA

There is a god outside and a god inside of you. Expel the god outside of you.

ALL

WE ARE REPROGRAMING OUR SYSTEMS. WE HAVE BEEN LIVING OUR BEST SELVES FOR OTHERS. WE ARE RECLAIMING SELFISHNESS. WE ARE REINVENTING SISTERHOOD. WE ARE REDUCING OUR DEPENDENCY ON OTHERS AND NATURAL GAS. WE WILL BE HYBRIDS OF NEW TECHNOLOGY.

BETA GAMMA THETA move towards each other, they are together at last.

BETA

I thought I would be saved by the church, but now I've found salvation.

GAMMA

I thought I would be fulfilled by the church, but now I've been fulfilled.

THETA

I thought I would be nothing without the church, but now I'm somebody.

ALL

I DON'T WANT TO BE THE OLD ME, I WANT TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF ME. I AM MYSELF 2.0. I AM INVINCIBLE IN MY NEW DESIGN. I AM SUPREME. TOGETHER WE ARE BEAUTIFUL. TOGETHER WE ARE CELESTIAL. TOGETHER WE ARE INFINITY

They scream as Alpha raises her arms, reveling in the chaos.

ALPHA

Now sign that you agree to the terms and conditions.

GAMMA

But it's so long!

BETA

Just sign it!!!!

They sign on the dotted line. All three turn and walk upstage to ALPHA, anxiously awaiting her blessings.

ALPHA

Bless you, my LETTERS.

ALPHA blows glitter on her new followers. They turn to face the audience, reveling in their new sisterhood.

ALPHA

Let's begin the first update.

BETA/GAMMA/THETA hold hands and march upstage, giggling. This is their Miss America moment. They have earned it.

Before the update can begin, there are three loud footsteps that emanate from above.

BETA/GAMMA/THETA freeze, and look up.

THETA

How would we ever go back up there?

BETA

Why would we ever go back up there?

ALPHA

We will never go back up there. They aren't ALPHAS, BETAS, GAMMAS or THETAS. They are not as shiny as us. Our glows will not be diminished. We will pray to ourselves, rejoicing in my creation of you. The communion is now our body and our blood. This basement is our heaven, real and here. We are saved. We can be godly together.

ALPHA prepares for the first update. They freeze.

A blue screen with karaoke countdown bars appears. It counts down from eight to one. Nothing happens. It counts down again. Nothing happens.

ELEANOR

I don't think I can generate anymore.

LEAH

Well, you have to.

LEAH claps. The four of them strike a pose, smiles wide and empty eyes.

The karaoke screen finally works. They sing.

Blackout.

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