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Woman vs. Machine: Directing Machinal, Sophie Tredwell's Expressionistic Outcry Against the Male Establishment

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Machinal, French for mechanical or automatic, is Sophie Treadwell's groundbreaking expressionist play, written in 1928. It chronicles the journey of a young woman, oppressed by her society into pursuing a loveless but secure marriage and other traditional feminine roles. The Young Woman gets a glimpse of a better life and begins to rebel against the system, and her resistance results in tragedy. Treadwell not only captured the struggles of women in a male-dominated society, she also captured the spirit of expressionism. "The expressionistic form – flat characters, repetitive dialogue and action, numerous short scenes, harsh audio effects, confusion of inner and outer reality – is the perfect medium for presenting the life of a young woman who asks an impersonal society 'Is nothing mine?'" (Barlow viii). *Machinal* is about an individual's struggle to find their identity in a fast-moving, unfriendly world, a theme familiar to most modern audiences.

While society has changed significantly since the 1920s, many of the gender role stereotypes and financial expectations of the "American Dream" are still prevalent. Americans are taught to strive for career success, financial stability, marriage and children. People that do not conform to these acceptable lifestyle choices are perceived as unusual and often treated with pity or disdain. Also, technology is evolving rapidly and there is a widespread societal obsession with constant connectivity to the web, causing one to feel as if the world is more machine than human. In *Machinal*, the machine of society takes the form of the most common devices of the 1920s, capturing the spirit of efficiency of an assembly line. Today, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the access to communication and information provided by tablets,

smartphones and the World Wide Web. A 1990 production at the Public Theater proved *Machinal's* relevance, even sixty years after it was written. Critic Frank Rich wrote, "Like an archeological treasure preserved in a subterranean air pocket, 'Machinal' . . . is both an authentic artifact of a distant civilization and a piece of living art that seems timeless." Clive Barnes also wrote "here is a wonderful play so perfectly of its time that it transcends any such boundaries, and stands as a drama about a woman in a land of machines, a woman in a sea of men," (Shafer 262). While this production will be set in the 1920s, the production will also endeavor to connect to modern themes and ideas, asking the audience to consider if and how American society has changed and whether further change is still needed.

Machinal is widely considered a successful example of expressionist theater, a style that has been debated and defined in a variety of ways for more than a century. In order to embrace this technique in production, it will be important to identify and understand the key elements of expressionism in the play in order to effectively tell the story. Early 20th century American director Philip Moeller provides a straightforward explanation, saying: "Expressionism . . . is *subjective* projection; that is, all the half-understood 'hinterland' thoughts, all the yearnings and unknown suppressions of the mind, are exposed, so to speak, in spite of the character, just as an X-ray exposes the inner structure of a thing as against its outer, more obvious and seeming form" (viii-ix). In essence, the thoughts and emotions of the protagonist are represented in all aspects of the production, creating an environment that allows the audience to see through the eyes of the Young Woman and therefore empathize with her struggle. Everything in the production depends on the perception and feelings of the Young Woman, who is also called Helen in the dialogue, though Treadwell lists her character only as Young Woman.

In order to project these ideas to the audience, it is important to address the heightened circumstances and abstracted or exaggerated elements that enhance the Young Woman's struggle to find her place and therefore happiness. Drawing from expressionist art of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as German expressionist film and even some modern sources, we can create a world that is both strange and frightening. The goal was to juxtapose the Young Woman with her environment. She is the one person that doesn't necessarily conform to the machine of society, while the other characters represent cogs in the machine. If the audience connects with the Young Woman and empathizes with her struggle, then hopefully they will relate to the challenge of finding a place in society and understanding one's identity within the social constructs that dictate who we are supposed to be and how we are supposed to act.

The audience for this production will be primarily college students. *Machinal* is a play to which students should be exposed, since it explores a variety of social concerns that they will face throughout their lives. Young women, in particular, face a number of challenges as they begin their adult lives; American society expects them to behave a certain way, look a certain way and conform to arbitrary rules about relationships, careers and lifestyle. *Machinal* represents an important message about being true to oneself, making thoughtful life choices and learning from one's mistakes. In American society, it is easy to succumb to others' expectations, but it is important, in order to live a fulfilling life, to make choices that may not always be popular or accepted in order to follow one's heart.

I've loved this play since I first read it over 12 years ago in a wonderful undergraduate class called "Women in Theater." We live in a male-dominated world and theater is still, surprisingly, a male-dominated industry. Women's voices are not heard or valued as they

should be and I connect strongly with Sophie Treadwell's feminist message in *Machinal*. I've lived my life differently than many women in my family, as a free-thinking, single and assertive woman. Not only do I want to spread the message of female empowerment to as many young women as possible, I also want to pay homage to a woman who made extraordinarily brave choices at a time when women were limited and even persecuted for voicing their opinions, demonstrating their intelligence and asserting their independence. I'm also thrilled to immerse myself in a style of performance that is fairly new to me. A thesis production provides a unique opportunity to experiment, learn and define my voice as an artist. It will be a challenge, one which I will relish. *Machinal* tells a story that is important to me as a woman and captures the spirit of a courageous and unique group of artists that wanted the world to hear them and to be made better for listening.

Chapter 2

Research

Historical Context – American Women in the 1920s

The 1920s were a pivotal decade for American women and Sophie Treadwell was a major player in the huge societal shift of the time. With suffrage granted to women in 1920, the feminist movement achieved a milestone that would drastically alter the role of women in politics, art and home life. A new consciousness was emerging among women, questioning the traditional wife and mother roles of the past and seeking new possibilities in their personal lives and careers. But with this advancement also came a degree of backlash, as conservative Americans resisted women's participation in traditionally male activities and wished to demonize flappers as promiscuous and irresponsible.

At the time, the primary expectations imposed upon young women included remaining pure until marriage, seeking a proper husband and being a good wife and mother. Historian Frederick Lewis Allen chronicled social codes of the 1920s in his book *Only Yesterday*, stating that “women were the guardians of morality; they were made of finer stuff than men and were expected to act accordingly. Young girls must look forward in innocence . . . to a romantic love match which would lead them to the altar and to living happily-ever-after; and until the ‘right man’ came along they must allow no male to kiss them” (Gourley 6). Women from respectable families were expected to represent themselves to men as innocent and even helpless, they were told that men wanted a wife who needs to be cared for or rescued. This standard was communicated to women through popular films, magazines and etiquette books, which described the ideal woman as “tender, weak, and childlike. A woman's goal . . . is to make

yourself somebody's pet" (Gourley 74). Pursuit of a "happily-ever-after" romance was meant to be the top priority for every young woman, and they were to remain entirely modest and chaste until they wed.

Once a woman secured a husband, she would be required to keep house, entertain, and basically strive to be the perfect wife. To gain the necessary skills and to prevent inappropriate romantic attachments, women were discouraged from pursuing work outside of the home. A 1924 article in *Good Housekeeping* titled "Your Daughter and Her Job" stated that young ladies who remained in their fathers' homes and engaged in domestic pursuits, such as baking and sewing, were well prepared for the future, and that such women were "following normal biological and social instincts which end in mating and mothering." In contrast, girls that sought employment "risked losing their 'domestic instincts' and their 'feminine interests.' They would fail at becoming good wives and mothers" (Gourley 35). Women that worked weren't entirely shunned, but assumptions were made about them, including the notion that they were just biding their time, staying busy until Mr. Right swept them off their feet. Others asserted that women with jobs were earning "pin money," bits of extra cash to supplement the allowance given them by their husband or father. The traditional belief was that men worked to support their families, while women didn't need to earn money, a false belief that contributed to the severe discrepancy between men's and women's wages for similar jobs. Needless to say, a woman in the workplace was not taken seriously because it was generally assumed that she was working only to find a husband or to earn a bit of spending money. These assumptions served as justification for women's presence in the workplace, allowing industry to continue without disrupting social hierarchies.

Many women ignored the stereotypes and worked out of necessity, making up between twenty and twenty-five percent of the working population in the 1920s, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. However, more controversial behavior that broke the rules of modesty was also prevalent in the early twentieth century as a new group emerged known as flappers and “New Women.” “The flapper cut her hair, slipped into a shapeless, short dress, and danced all night. The new American woman might not have dressed in such a shocking style, but her behavior was just as startling. She appeared on the athletic field and in the workplace and made headlines for achievements that would have been unheard of in the years before the Great War” (Gourley 11). Women like Coco Chanel, Josephine Baker, Zelda Sayre and Amelia Earhart inspired scores of young women to reject the traditional roles of wife and mother in order to explore fashion and sexuality, to pursue higher education, and assume roles in politics and business.

As the feminist movement became more prevalent in American culture, so too did anti-feminist rhetoric and fear about the crumbling moral values of the nation. Advances in technology and changing attitudes about fashion and beauty made the American woman a target demographic for many new products and services. Advertising to women became a core element in America’s capitalist boom and with this economic change came a social change that was, for some, quite frightening.

The desire for novelty encouraged by consumerism also reinforced fears of flightiness and frivolity in women’s behavior and spending habits. New leisure opportunities increased this anxiety, as young women sought out the pleasure of dance halls, theaters, and other public unchaperoned venues for their social activities. Moreover, encouraging novelty in fashion made it more difficult to reject the value of novelty in other areas of female behavior – dance partners, petting partners, husbands – where

would it end? In the realm of gender ideology, the demands of consumerism interacted with the increased freedom of movement and loosening of strictures on female sexual behavior to create a sense of crisis among more conservative commentators. Jazz, bobbed hair, short skirts, petting in automobiles – the world of the flapper symbolized not only the freedom and energy that technological advances combined with disposable income might generate but also their perceived danger to social and familial stability (Koritz 9).

Despite significant resistance, the “New Woman” had emerged to challenge the conventional roles for women and this character was often represented in popular entertainment, including theater. The “New Woman” championed the right for women to vote, pursued positions of power in politics and business, chose not to marry or sometimes to live apart from her husband and expressed herself as an individual with her own ideas and opinions. For a time, American drama reflected the successes of the feminist movement in the 1920s by representing the rise of the independent woman. But an initial surge of these characters was decreasing by the time *Machinal* was first produced, “partly because of the conservative backlash prompted by the economic and social turmoil of the late 1920s and early 1930s. A decline in women’s enrollment in colleges and in their participation in the work force and professional fields all contributed to an increasing return to traditional domestic roles for women after 1920” (Bywaters 99). While suffrage and the feminist movement had accomplished much for women’s independence, the next few decades brought about a resurgence of the opinion that women were best suited to be wives and mothers. An analysis of prize-winning American plays of the 1920s and 30s promotes marriage for all women:

Marriage, to any man and under any conditions, is better than none. Especially during the twenties and thirties, a period when many women were questioning whether a life exclusively preoccupied with home and

family was necessary or desirable, the important plays seemed to assume that salvation for women could be found only in marriage, even an unhappy one (Bonin 6-7).

This subjugation of women was of major concern to Treadwell, who was a member of a number of feminist organizations, and became a prominent theme in her writing, most notably in *Machinal*.

The modernist theater and literature of the time explored women's changing roles in a variety of ways. Male modernist writers tended to express "both a fascination and misogynist 'fear of women's new power,' resulting in an 'irresolvable ambivalence toward powerful femininity'" (Gainor 46). This is evidenced in works like George Kelly's 1925 play *Craig's Wife*, where the strong female character is treated as domineering and obnoxious, a wife that wants to control her husband. In Martin Flavin's 1924 drama *Tapestry in Gray*, the wife of a successful male surgeon is blamed for his suicide, despite his post-traumatic stress disorder after serving in World War I. The other lead male character is also undone by the end of the play and both men's downfall is "attributed to the unconscious will and actions of the play's female character. Both men are destroyed by her sexuality and her envy of their male talents and careers" (Cotsell 281).

While female modernists treated women characters with more compassion than their male counterparts, a fear of punishment for desiring social change is a common characteristic of their heroines. Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* features two women coming to the aid of a woman who has murdered her husband, deceiving the men investigating the homicide. While the women relate to the killer's feeling of imprisonment by her husband and domestic duties and

their actions ultimately make a feminist statement, there is a pervasive fear of the power wielded by their male counterparts.

This fear of punishment for desiring change for women is also true of *Machinal*. The Young Woman struggles with the consequences of not marrying her employer, not being able to support her mother, not wanting a child and desiring to escape the prison of her marriage. “Augmenting a female tradition of literature that dissects the restrictive institution of marriage and its effects on women, *Machinal* stands as an early twentieth-century piece of subversive drama, conveying the message that female insurrection can lead to ‘one moment of freedom’ before the patriarchal ‘machinery’ crushes the revolt” (Bywaters 97). Glaspell’s misogynistic world in *Trifles*, as well as the Young Woman’s dilemma in *Machinal*, both demonstrate the desperation for change felt by so many women at the time, as well as their hesitation to stand up for their rights for fear of punishment. Additionally, Treadwell’s representation of society as an oppressive machine explores a resistance to the rapid advancements in technology in the early twentieth century, another common theme in modernist drama.

Technological Advancement

Following the Industrial Revolution, urbanization and technological growth shaped American society in the early twentieth century. Manufacturing was the centerpiece of American commerce and efforts to streamline production lead to major innovations, in particular the assembly line of Henry Ford’s automobile factories. A by-product of Ford’s obsession with efficiency was the dehumanization of workers as they found themselves at the mercy of machines in the workplace. “Although the assembly line materialized as a logical solution to

practical problems, it subordinated human beings to the demands of the production process” (Cobley 39).

While this unintended result of mechanization impacted the workplace, there was a movement to apply techniques of efficiency to manage human beings, mostly spearheaded by F.W Taylor. In his book *The Principles of Scientific Management*, he outlines a plan for an utopian ideal reducing workers to mere cogs in an indifferent social machine. “Whereas Ford’s assembly line conjures up images of workers oppressed by external forces, Taylor’s principles of management compel human beings to reify their consciousness by internalizing the ideology of efficiency” (Cobley 39). Both the creation of factory machinery, as well as the desire to increase human productivity, resulted in new anxieties among workers. The characters in *Machinal*, particularly in the office, reflect the expectation that workers function as emotionless producers, and the tone Treadwell achieves is one of fear and stress. The workers strive for an almost inhuman level of productivity and snap to fearful attention when the boss enters spouting clichés about efficiency.

This effort to increase efficiency extended to the American home, with new gadgets saturating the market, all claiming to save time, particularly for the housewife. Electric appliances for every room in the house were available and Americans embraced these devices, with approximately eighty percent of all upper- and middle-class homes containing a vacuum cleaner and washing machine by 1926 (Gourley 37). Most of these innovations were marketed toward women, claiming to allow for more time spent with children and doting on one’s husband. Since men were the primary earners, this led to a cultural identity for women as consumers, whereas men were associated with “efficiency, method, and control” (Koritz 8). The

development of new household appliances, like washing machines, toasters and vacuum cleaners, contributed to the marginalization of women by reducing their primary contribution to the household. Appreciation for this manual labor was now bestowed upon machinery, and advertising aimed to minimize women's role to shoppers and supervisors, rather than important contributors to family happiness and household orderliness.

In addition to technology's impact on gender roles, American society was changing dramatically due to modern conveniences, a development that modernist writers often found disturbing. "The contemporary urbanite was surrounded by technology, from the subway rumbling under the streets and the elevator clattering through the apartment buildings, to the radios in the living rooms and the reading lights in the bedrooms. This casual intimacy with technology was a new social factor" (Jerz 33-34). Modernist writers responded to the impersonal nature and intrusion of devices like the telephone and the chaotic environment caused by humming electric lights, clacking telegraph machines and clunking elevator doors. In *Technology in American Drama 1920-1950*, Dennis Jerz compares the approach to new technology in *Machinal*, Elmer Rice's *The Subway* and Eugene O'Neill's *Dynamo*, all expressionistic dramas that premiered in 1928-29. Through thematic devices and the use of experimental design elements, these three plays capture the anti-technological message common in modernist drama. The main departure from previous representations of modern technology is their use of technology "as an internalized and even fundamental dramatic tool, not merely an externalized and destructive thematic force" (34). In *Machinal*, every character, every locale, every lighting effect and every sound cue makes up a part of a larger machine that becomes the primary opposition for the Young Woman, Treadwell's symbol of humanity. In this way, *Machinal* captures the spirit of modernist drama:

In modernist drama, women struggle to speak or speak in voices not their own. They live in terror. Plays end with their screams or madness. . . The slaving industrial worker; the banal and overwhelmed clerk . . . are broken by the faceless machine. Men and women . . . stare into the abyss of their hearts and the horror of their deeds. At the crisis there is frequently a hysteric fit, often accompanied by violence. . . Trauma – the overwhelming and shattering of the self by an overpoweringly adverse environment – proves to be at the psychological heart of American modernist drama (Cotsell 10).

Sophie Treadwell and her modernist peers were calling attention to new social problems that arose as technology became a more pervasive part of American lives. They created environments in their plays that became technological foes for the humans at the heart of their stories, giving voice to under-represented minorities including women and the working poor, and *Machinal* is a shining example of the goals of the modernist movement.

Treadwell's Background and Views

Experiences from Sophie Treadwell's childhood are evident in much of her writing. Labeled at an early age by her father as "neurasthenic," Treadwell was considered fragile and needy by many in her family. Her father, who later abandoned Sophie and her mother, considered himself an expert in the neurasthenia, "a nervous disorder which might have a variety of symptoms, including digestive woes, insomnia, headaches, hypochondria, and nervous prostration. It was believed to have been caused by stress due to the rapid changes in modern civilization and it afflicted those with either extreme moral laxity or sensitivity" (Dickey 8). This condition was frequently used in literature during the early 1900s and became a way to explain away strong emotions, particularly those of young women, and was ultimately an effective technique for repressing feminist attitudes by reducing the desire for social change to a medical disorder. In much of Treadwell's work, including *Machinal*, male characters justify women's

emotions or rebellious behavior as a nervous condition or as sexual immaturity. In the honeymoon scene, the Husband is unable to recognize or accept his wife's disgust, playing it off as an inability to relax. "You know – you got to learn to relax, little girl – haven't you?" (Treadwell 24). Sophie Treadwell overcame the false assumptions about her emotional and intellectual limitations and calls attention to a pervasive problem in American society. She gives us a heroine with legitimate reasons for emotional instability and demonstrates the importance of looking beyond stereotypes to address the unique concerns of the individual.

Treadwell's early career successes were as a journalist, covering everything from European wars to sensational murder trials and interviewing international political figures. A pivotal moment in her life and career was a trip to Mexico to interview both Mexican President Carranza and the legendary Pancho Villa. Treadwell was entranced by Villa and glamorized him in her article for the *New York Tribune*. Not only was she impressed by Pancho Villa, but she found Mexico to be a magical place and set many of her stories and plays there. "Mexico, as is true for other modernists, became for her the image of the un-lived American life" (Cotsell 276). In *Machinal*, it is Dick Roe's stories of intrigue and freedom south of the border that initially attract the Young Woman and becomes the ultimate escape fantasy for her. Her lover describes Mexico, saying "I can't live anywhere else – for long," and "You're free down there! You're free!" (Treadwell 49). Treadwell also romanticizes the San Francisco area, describing it as a place of refuge for the character Dick. "I bet you'd like Frisco. The bay and the hills! Jeez, that's the life" (50). San Francisco was one of the places Treadwell called home as a child, and also during her early career in journalism.

Although Sophie Treadwell had dabbled in theater, both as a writer and actor, prior to her move to New York in 1915 to join her husband, sports writer William “Mac” McGeehan, it was in the Big Apple where she developed her most influential plays. Treadwell was invited to join an elite group of artists that held salons at the Park Avenue home of Walter and Louise Arensberg. Other artists involved in these salons included dancer Isadora Duncan and surrealist artist Marcel Duchamp. “At the core of the beliefs held by Treadwell and the artists at the Arensbergs’ salon was a shared demand for ‘the new in life and art: new forms, new sexual values, new freedoms unhindered by old rules’” (Gainor 45). Treadwell’s plays were undoubtedly influenced by her affiliation with these groundbreaking thinkers and artists. From her experimentation with form to her progressive, feminist ideals and rejection of America’s conservative views on sexuality, the Arensberg salons allowed her to develop a voice that would, like her peers, change the course of modernist art.

Another influential affiliation for Treadwell was The Lucy Stone League, which was instrumental in the fight for women’s suffrage and promoted women’s education and public engagement:

The League encouraged married women to retain their maiden names and take up separate residences from their husbands in order to maintain an autonomous identity, both practices which Treadwell adopted on her move to New York. Such activism led to newfound sexual freedoms, especially those originating in openly discussed pre- and extra-marital relations (Gainor 45).

The sexual affair Treadwell’s *Young Woman* enters into in *Machinal* certainly reflects the new attitudes toward sexuality explored by feminist organizations like The Lucy Stone League, but may have also been inspired by Treadwell’s own experience. “In addition to her support of women’s suffrage, Treadwell advocated increased sexual freedom for women” (Ozieblo 102).

The writer was linked to painter Maynard Dixon for over four years while still married to William McGeehan (102).

While her associations helped strengthen Treadwell's personal values, which come across clearly in her work, she was also influenced by psychological theories. Treadwell immersed herself in Freudian theory for a time, a study that helped her identify the cause of many of her emotional troubles. Uncovering her suppressed experiences of abandonment by her father and domination by her mother influenced many of Treadwell's later writings. She was "drawn to the psychoanalytic theory that sexual fulfillment and openness led to an emergence of the authentic self" (Dickey 76). The experience of the Young Woman in *Machinal* clearly exemplifies Treadwell's belief in the importance of a satisfying sexual life in order find freedom and happiness. The Young Woman's sexual experience with her husband is frightening and cringe-inducing, whereas she is elated after she spends the night with her lover for the first time. "I never knew anything like this way! I never knew that I could feel like this!" (Treadwell 51). Her husband, George H. Jones treats sex as a business transaction and there is virtually no affection or longing between him and his wife, whereas Dick woos the Young Woman, making her feel desired and special. He dances with her, sings to her, holds her and compliments her, leading to a sexual awakening and confidence in her body. During her honeymoon, when she enters the room in her nightgown to consummate her marriage, Treadwell says, "She is very still, but her eyes are wide with a curious, helpless, animal terror" (26), whereas her actions after making love to Dick are distinctly different.

She really wears almost exactly the clothes that women wear now, but the finesse of their cut, and the grace and ease with which she puts them on, must turn this episode of her dressing into a personification, an idealization of a woman clothing herself.

All her gestures must be unconscious, innocent, relaxed, sure and full of natural grace (50).

The Young Woman is miserable until she experiences romantic and sexual liberation through an affair, discovering a satisfaction she didn't even think was possible.

Sophie Treadwell's life experience is reflected in a variety of ways in *Machinal*, serving as excellent inspiration, as well as an opportunity for self-discovery. The magic of her accomplishment with *Machinal* is the many women whose stories are also mirrored in the play. *Machinal* is a recollection of Treadwell's troubled life, but it also speaks to the American woman of both the 1920s and today. It tells a woman's story in an eloquent and special way; it captures expressionistic style beautifully, and it represents Sophie Treadwell's manifesto for change.

Source Material - Ruth Snyder Murder Case

In addition to some very personal experiences and opinions, Treadwell looked to the news for inspiration when writing *Machinal*. In fact, the story is based very closely on a widely publicized murder case that Treadwell observed. In 1927, Long Island housewife Ruth Snyder and her lover Judd Gray were tried for murdering Snyder's husband, a story that, due to the extensive newspaper coverage, became a source of entertainment for the American public. "Americans were fascinated by the quiet, neighborly woman who helped murder her husband one night. . . The element which lifted this story above the ordinary love triangle murder was that the lovers who planned and executed the murder were such ordinary people" (Shafer 259). Drawing from a well-known real-life occurrence, Treadwell made crucial adjustments in order to make her protagonist sympathetic, allowing *Machinal* to examine a major societal problem and ultimately advocate for change.

Ruth Snyder enlisted the help of her lover, Judd Gray, to kill her husband in order to receive a \$48,000 life insurance award. According to Gray, the two made seven unsuccessful attempts before killing Albert Snyder by bashing him over the head with a heavy window sash weight, then strangling him with a picture wire (Schneider). The two staged a burglary to cover the murder, but their undoing was hiding the supposedly stolen items in the home, which the police discovered during their investigation. Snyder and Gray were both convicted during a highly publicized trial and were sentenced to death by electric chair. Ruth Snyder was the first woman executed in Sing Sing Prison since 1899.

While Ruth Snyder may have been seeking escape from an oppressive marriage, the public perception of her was as a cold-hearted killer. Treadwell, however, recognized a common struggle for many married women in Snyder's experience, a marginalization that she and her feminist cohorts sought to expose. "Snyder defended the act as 'a step toward the larger freedom, a fuller enjoyment of life'" (Cotsell 278). In order to shed light on the aspects of Snyder's experience that were overshadowed in the trial, and to make her feminist statement, Treadwell needed to carefully craft a protagonist in *Machinal* who is relatable and sympathetic. "The cold-blooded murderer from the front pages is transformed into a poignant figure who draws in the audience because it sees everything through her eyes – she is the victim of a machine-like, indifferent society"(Shafer 259). As a journalist, Treadwell had covered many murder trials and was expert at "deciphering meaning from small behavioral details of witnesses and defendants" (Dickey 11). While the Young Woman's journey in *Machinal* is distinctly her own, Treadwell did find inspiration in Ruth Snyder's experience, even using actual language from the trial. Journalist Walter Winchell covered the trial and execution and reported that "much of the testimony [in the courtroom scene] was taken verbatim from the trial,' and

that even the protagonist's 'cries of despair in the cell scene were copied almost word for word from those uttered in the execution chamber'" (Jerz 44). This blending of actual thoughts expressed in the heat of the moment and Treadwell's own dialogue gives these scenes a truthful quality and allows the audience to view the situation through the eyes of the protagonist.

Expressionism

The birth of the expressionist theater movement is most often associated with Germany. Before the first World War, expressionism was the major form developing in all genres of art, from architecture and painting to film, literature and theater. Since theater is often considered the culmination of all art forms, this section will focus on expressionism as it applied to live performance. While the artists involved in expressionism articulated differing opinions on the aesthetics and goals of the movement, there was one unifying element. Expressionism was "decisively about cultural transformation. In social consciousness and ethical commitment, as well as artistic form and aesthetic philosophy, expressionism sought to revolutionize German society and renew its faith in humanity" (Kuhns 1). Several associated artists responded negatively to the new emphasis on work as identity and incorporated warning messages into their work. "Many criticized the standardized, inexpensive products made available through mass production and distribution, fearing that the production processes that made them would turn workers into mindless slaves of machine," (Koritz 7). Social change was at the heart of all expressionist productions, and the style of performance was critical in communicating the artists' messages. This method required the actor to embody the cultural transformation

designated by the playwright. The distinguishing characteristic of expressionist theater became the extent to which it “textualized” actors (Kuhns 2):

Radically suppressing their traditional mimetic function, expressionist productions foregrounded actors’ bodies and voices as complex thematic stage signs. In this way, audiences were virtually impelled to “read” the performance as an expressionist text about, rather than a mimetic imitation of, the contemporary state of German culture (2).

This performance style moved away from both the melodramatic and naturalistic acting styles prominent at the time, and required actors to embody objects and ideas. This meant a vocal and physical style that was unfamiliar to most audiences and forced them to participate in theater in a different way. Rather than enjoying a piece of entertainment, expressionistic productions asked audiences to confront social problems, to see the world from a viewpoint different than their own and to begin to ask themselves difficult questions. This performance style was achieved in a variety of different ways (some of which will be explored in Chapter 4), but each production strove to better German society — a notion that carried over to the United States as expressionism grew in popularity following World War I.

In the 1920s, American expressionism was defined by some as a method of “presenting theatrical event, character, language and location that objectified and externalized theatrically either what is subjective and internal for the characters in the play or the point of view of the theatrical artists presenting the work” (Waincott 91). This resulted in a number of plays that explored intensely personal conflicts, or dealt with major societal problems from the perspective of an individual, presenting the impact on that person’s psyche. It allowed for exaggeration and abstraction and frequently incorporated taboo subjects such as sex and

violence. “Further, during the rise of popular science fiction . . . expressionistic plays were notable for the extent to which they recognized – even indulged in – the seductive power of technology . . . playwrights objectify the anxieties of an isolated individual, projected against the background of a modern society that is not only mechanized but also eroticized, and even sanctified” (Jerz 34). This connection between technology and eroticism is commonly explored in American plays like *The Adding Machine*, *Dynamo*, *Subway* and *Machinal*, as well as European expressionist films such as *Metropolis* and Fernand Leger’s *Le Ballet Mecanique*.

In Leger’s film, gears and wheels (i.e. components of machines) alternate with shots of a woman’s eyes, lips, hats and shoes (i.e. components of a sexualized woman). Mannequin legs appear to dance via stop-motion photography, and a wire loop suggests the outline of a uterus. . . The montage juxtaposes the primal force of sexuality with the modern force of technology, positing the female worker as essentially interchangeable with the eroticized machine (Jerz 37).

The imagery of Leger’s film, as well as the score, written in 1925 by American composer George Antheil, capture the struggle to retain humanity in the rapidly changing world of technology and industry, ideas also at the crux of Treadwell’s play. These two works will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.

Playwrights like Elmer Rice and Eugene O’Neill were recognized in the early twentieth century for their contributions to American expressionist drama, but by the time *Machinal* was first produced, many felt that the form was “a dead dodo in the American theatrical pit” (Shafer 261). With *Machinal*, however, Treadwell was credited with galvanizing the form. It has also been said that the expressionistic form is the most vital component to *Machinal*’s success.

By giving the story an Expressive form, Miss Treadwell transfigured the commonplaces of adultery and murder we encounter in newspapers and popular fiction into something

considerably more humanly meaningful and socially suggestive . . .
If the author had poured the same story into the mold of the
ordinary three-act realistic play, it would have been quite
unremarkable (Jerz 43).

While Treadwell's expressionistic devices are often compared favorably with Rice and O'Neill, she is also credited with advancing the form using her own unique style.

Some staples of expressionism found in *Machinal* include several short scenes, mechanical sound effects, off-stage voices and "inferential images reflecting the interior mind state of the protagonist" (Jerz 42). She also effectively captures the urban cityscape, giving the piece an anti-technological bent. Treadwell captures, perhaps better than any of her contemporaries, the sounds of an environment as experienced by the protagonist and with the emotional flavor that they induce. These sounds represent an "assaulting environment, but they are also the voices of [the Young Woman's] fragmented, dissociative state. She is as mentally crowded as she is physically in the subway . . . The voices of the other office workers dramatize a confused stream of self-hostility, internalized judgment and panic" (Cotsell 278). Not only does Treadwell seamlessly connect all the elements of the Young Woman's environment to create an atmosphere that thoroughly represents the protagonist's view, but in doing so, she created a uniquely feminist aesthetic, something no other female playwright had accomplished. "Treadwell employed expressionistic devices in an attempt to appeal to the subconscious minds of her audience, especially those of women" (Dickey 11). This idea will be further explored in Chapter 3. While the overall style of the play is expressionistic, there are more naturalistic moments in the play. The tone and style reflects the emotional state of the Young Woman, therefore when she is most happy or at peace, the scenes become more naturalistic. Each episode is more or less expressionistic, depending on the Young Woman's

state of mind. Though Treadwell's catalog of plays is smaller and less celebrated than Eugene O'Neill's, it could be argued that *Machinal* more effectively represents the structure, style and spirit of expressionism.

Chapter 3

Analysis

In analyzing the script, I endeavored to learn as much as possible about Sophie Treadwell's inspiration and intentions for the play. Understanding all of the information provided was an important starting point, but perhaps even more important was understanding what is left out and why. Treadwell leaves several major events out of the script, skipping ahead in time and alluding to things that have occurred in the interim, a device I needed to fully understand and information that needed to be clearly conveyed to the audience. Additionally, I sought to connect my research to the text, gaining a stronger understanding of the circumstances, both societal and personal, that lead to her writing the play. The two most important parts of this process were to thoughtfully represent the playwright and to make my voice as director clear, creating a harmony between the text and what I hoped to convey to the audience. In his essay "On the Essence of Directing," Gustav Hartung, German director of expressionist plays said: "For this is [the director's] task: to find the performance and scenic expression for the linguistic form which the poet has given to his experience: and the simpler the means by which this expression is achieved, the greater is the art of the director" (101). In order to represent Sophie Treadwell's story, I must first know as much as possible about the script, which begins with a thorough analysis.

The play is written in nine episodes: To Work, At Home, Honeymoon, Maternal, Prohibited, Intimate, Domestic, The Law, and A Machine. Each episode's title represents both action and thematic elements and understanding this episodic structure was crucial. In Episode One, the Young Woman goes to work in a high-stress office where her boss, George H. Jones,

proposes to marry her. Episode Two takes place in the home of the Young Woman and her mother where they discuss the proposal and her future over dinner. By Episode Three, the Young Woman has married Jones and the two arrive at a hotel for a very uncomfortable honeymoon. A hospital is the location for Episode Four, where the Young Woman gives birth and experiences a mental breakdown due to the course her life is taking. In Episode Five, the Young Woman joins a friend for a double date in a bar, where she meets and flirts with Dick Roe, the man she goes home with in Episode Six. Episode Seven shows the married couple at home and the Young Woman's dissatisfaction with life comes to a climax. In Episode Eight, the Young Woman is on trial for murdering her husband, an act Treadwell deliberately leaves offstage. Episode Nine shows the Young Woman in the final moments of her life before she is executed by electric chair.

Given Circumstances

Treadwell created a unique world in *Machinal*, a world of moving components that requires its inhabitants to fill a particular role and embody the characteristics of the cogs in the machine of society. *Introduction to Play Analysis* by Cal Pritner and Scott E. Walters emphasizes the thorough exploration of the given circumstances provided by the playwright, which becomes extremely important when the world of the play is a heightened or abstracted version of reality. According to Pritner and Walters, "politics, economics, and religion interact to create much of what is thought of as a society or a social system" (24). In *Machinal*, much emphasis is placed on financial stability, creating a society whose major concern revolves around money. Also important are rules or guidelines about appropriate roles for men and women: "we can't assume that the play's characters share our personal attitudes about marriage and family, or

love and sex” (25). The social norms of 1920s America dictated that young women should find a husband and have children, men should earn a good living to support their families and single women that had affairs with men were “tramps.” This is certainly the case in *Machinal*. In the second scene, the main character, Helen, says to her mother, “All women get married, don’t they?” (Treadwell 16). The idea of security outweighing love in a relationship is also prevalent in the play. Helen’s mother urges her to marry her boss, despite the fact that her skin crawls whenever he touches her: “Love! – what does that amount to! Will it clothe you? Will it feed you? Will it pay the bills?” (17). These societal norms are the most important given circumstances to note in order to create a production concept. The world of *Machinal* is an urban machine, the components of which must adhere to the goals of financial stability and conformity to the roles appropriate for men and women.

Theatrical Contract

Another important element of a production concept is the theatrical contract, or the guidelines for how the play will involve or ignore the audience. Pritner and Walters state, “the representational contract calls for the characters to refrain from overtly recognizing the audience’s presence” (36). In *Machinal*, there are no asides and no characters directly address the audience. Treadwell’s world is one that the audience observes from outside and it is not a realistic, recognizable environment. The characters speak and move in a repetitive, mechanical way and the situations explored in the story are exaggerations of familiar scenes, such as an office where the adding clerk reads every number aloud, the receptionist answers the phone in the same sing-song tone of voice each time and the filing clerk repeats his catch-phrase, “hot dog,” throughout the workday. In order to determine whether the audience will experience a

non-realistic production, Pritner and Walters ask, “are any of the production elements abstracted, that is, heightened or distorted in any way?” (39). Since there are heightened circumstances, abstracted behavior and settings, *Machinal* requires a nonrealistic production approach.

Conflict

If the Young Woman is the protagonist, then the conflict of the play, which is essential to telling a compelling story, centers around her needs and desires. “To understand a play’s conflict, we explore characters in terms of what they are seeking that puts them in opposition to others” (Pritner and Walters 53). Helen wants peace, love and freedom, the ability to pursue passion and happiness outside the parameters set by the rigid machine of society. The opposition, then, becomes the values of wifehood and motherhood imposed upon her, as well as her need to support herself and her mother. However, there are a number of internal emotional obstacles within Helen that drive her to make choices that lead to some of the most compelling conflict. “Internal obstacles are deeply involved in the character’s sense of right and wrong, good and bad, pleasure and pain” (59). This is particular true for this young woman who wants to escape her unhappy marriage and find peace in her life. However, she is conflicted because she anticipates the backlash of pursuing her desires, whether they subscribe to society’s rules or not.

The conflict is best summed up by identifying the major dramatic question, then aligning each part of the play to the eventual answer to this question. This idea is encapsulated with the following question: “What question that has been pursued throughout the play is answered in

the moment of climax?" (Pritner and Walters 62). In the case of *Machinal*, the dramatic structure is as follows (parenthetical definitions from Pritner and Walters 60-61):

- *Major Dramatic Question*: Will the Young Woman find peace?

The Young Woman seeks peace, but until she meets her lover, she doesn't know what form that peace might take, where she might find it or how it might change her. She just knows there is something or somebody else. "In a mechanical, ordered environment, the protagonist's contrasting naturalness becomes almost lyrical. The Young Woman is not driven by an intellectual search for identity or cosmic meaning, but, so far as she manages to articulate, she desires simply 'Peace. Rest and peace.' To achieve it will assuage her personal unhappiness in the face of a vague feeling that there must be something more to life" (Jerz 49). She is tired and overwhelmed by the noise and movement of her environment and the responsibility of caring for her mother. The bigger dilemma, however, is a lack of identity, not knowing how she fits into the world. During a conversation with her mother about George H. Jones' marriage proposal, she vacillates between the idea that "all women get married, don't they?" and the importance of loving the person she marries (Treadwell 16). "You must be in love, mustn't you, Ma? . . . Maybe if you just like a person it's all right" (18). Compounding this question is the dream she has of her perfect mate, the need to make money to survive and the fact that she hates her job. There are a variety of options and for her, the conflict stems from whether conforming to societies oppressive expectations or defying them will result in the peace she desires.

- *Introductory Incident* ("the moment when the subject of the conflict is introduced"): In the middle of Episode One, it is revealed that the boss plans to ask her to marry him and

she is dismayed by the prospect, but feels she must at least consider the offer. At this point, she sees marriage as a potential solution to her personal dilemma. Marriage could offer her an escape from the rat race, long-term care and income for herself and her mother, and the opportunity to rest. The introduction of this option sets the conflict of the play in motion.

- *Moment of Engagement* (“the point when the protagonist commits to achieving her goals”): This could be either the moment she enters the bar, deciding to try a new experience that will lead to her discovery, or when she agrees to go home with Dick. The latter seems most clear to me, as she is taking a bigger risk that leads directly to her discovery of passion and begins to build within her a desire to be free, ultimately driving her to murder her husband in his sleep, for which she is arrested.
- *Climax* (“the moment when the conflict is resolved, when the protagonist achieves or fails to achieve her goals”): During her trial, Helen succumbs to the pressure of the prosecutor and admits to killing her husband, sealing her fate to be executed. She breaks down screaming, “I did it! I did it! I did it!” and when asked why, she states: “To be free” (75).
- *Denouement* (“the moments after the climax . . . misunderstandings are clarified, lovers are joined, or dead bodies are dragged offstage”): Helen says goodbye to her mother and is executed.

The answer to whether Helen will find peace is complicated. Though she tries to escape her suffocating marriage in order to run away with her lover, she is subject to society’s law and is doomed. Only in death does she truly become free. But there are moments before her

execution that suggest that she is leaving the world having at least tasted happiness. Her conversation with the priest is filled with both fear of eternal damnation and hope of finding peace in the afterlife. She also confesses that she felt free after killing her husband. "I've been free, Father! For one moment – down here on earth – I have been free! When I did what I did I was free! Free and not afraid!" (Treadwell 80). But it is the final words of the play that make me sure she does not find the peace she desires. She calls out for "Somebody! Somebody –," a final cry for the thing she has sought all along, the somebody or something that will give her peace (83).

Genre

The definition of tragedy has evolved throughout theater history, but most scholars agree that it involves severe, often life-altering circumstances. One scholar provides the following definition: "A work of the highest seriousness, with a serious protagonist in a serious action with serious consequences. Usually, as well, human decision is important to the idea of tragic action" (Cameron 55). If a tragedy results in serious consequences as the result of a person's choice, then *Machinal* can be defined as a tragedy. The choices made by the Young Woman lead to her execution and death is arguably the most serious consequence for humans.

Characters

According to *Introduction to Play Analysis*, "the basic structure of tragedy has historically involved a central character who commits an act that has profoundly disruptive consequences," (Pritner and Walters 17). In *Machinal*, the protagonist is the Young Woman, and her choices, starting with marrying her boss despite the fact that she loathes him, having a child although she doesn't want one, and then pursuing an extramarital affair, all lead to her ultimate

downfall. She goes against society's norms and pays the ultimate price for it. An important component of *Machinal's* style is the contrast between the Young Woman, described as having "an abundance of soul," and the other characters in the play, who represent cogs in the oppressive machine of society (Jerz 42). These cogs move about with the appropriate efficiency and fulfill the duties expected of them, and they do so with Treadwell's distinctive rhythm. Much like other expressionist plays of the time, rhythm is a tool used to capture the mechanical feel of a society determined to squelch individualism. "The 'bad' rhythms of the machine age force individuals into patterns and activities that homogenize them and destroy those who resist, that alienate them from the rhythms of nature and their own sexuality, and that erode their ability to feel fulfilled in their lives or even to seek fulfillment"(Koritz 27). The Young Woman is the exception to the rule, resisting the tempo of her environment and moving through life in her own way. She disrupts the normalcy of her world by ending the life of her husband, removing a daughter and a support system from her mother and depriving her daughter of a mother, altering the destinies of her entire family. It is not, perhaps, a society-wide disruption, but it does result in major change for the Young Woman and the people closest to her, as well as causing a media sensation, the results of which cannot be predicted. Since the core of expressionism involves pushing for social change, Treadwell's message about equality for women and personal freedom cannot be ignored. These are certainly disruptive ideas given the landscape of American social conventions in the 1920s.

Young Woman

While *Machinal* presents a rebellion against the stifling world of unhappy marriage and unwanted motherhood, Treadwell steers away from a heroine that represents the ambitious

and politically motivated feminist or the wild and sensual flapper, a woman with a strong desire to be herself and resist society's oppression. Rather her Young Woman is naïve and confused about what she wants, a kind of "Everywoman." "Emphasizing the average rather than the special woman, Treadwell implies that it is not the extraordinary 'New Woman' of the suffrage movement that the patriarchal system has to fear but rather the outwardly docile, ordinary woman who can be transformed by the social pressures of the patriarchy to act" (Bywaters, 100). Treadwell's protagonist becomes a symbol for women's independence, but only after she suffers the hardship of being forced into roles that, while traditionally acceptable, stifle her into undertaking an unthinkable act of rebellion.

In a 1993 review, critic Peter Vaughn stated that "Helen becomes an Everywoman who leads a life of submission and powerlessness and is continually forced to make choices that only lead her from one form of subjugation to another . . . Treadwell doesn't offer Helen's solution as either viable or logical, but she does make it understandable" (Shafer 263). This ordinary woman in her mid-twenties provides the lens through which the audience views the world of the play, whose internal experience is represented externally in this expressionistic drama.

In 1955, Treadwell wrote a letter explaining her impetus for writing *Machinal*, in which she describes the protagonist as "a young woman – ready – eager – for life – for love - . . . I wanted to unfold her story in vital situations – teeming with life – but deadened – squeezed – crushed - . . . she is a woman innately unsuited to this mechanization of life" (Shafer 259). Treadwell created a real, deeply feeling woman, one whose emotional responses to her surroundings are much more complex than those of her fellow citizens. At the heart of these emotions is an intense dissatisfaction with her circumstances and relationships, as well as a

feeling of confinement and oppression. Treadwell describes her as “essentially soft, tender,” qualities that set her apart from her environment that is “essentially hard, mechanized,” as well as “nerve nagging” (xi).

Nearly everyone, but especially the Young Woman’s husband, mother, doctor, and lawyer, dominates her conversationally, and each constantly interrupts, forcing his or her own views. No one recognizes her pain or understands her confusion. . . . Often the stage directions indicate that the Young Woman is looking for a way out of the room. . . Her marriage functions like a jail, which she exchanges for a real prison cell after killing her husband. Yet Treadwell fittingly, if surprisingly, calls her “an ordinary young woman, any woman,” thus stressing the plight of women in 1920s society and the anxiety and danger of destruction or self-destruction under the patina of domestic normality (Waincott 139-140)

Through the journey of the Young Woman, Treadwell warns the audience against the dangers of an impersonal, woman-subjugating society. The Young Woman’s downfall represents the potential outcome for women, a tragedy that could affect any woman who feels trapped by her life and anyone close to her, if major change is not embraced and women are continually forced into roles determined by men. Knowing what the Young Woman represents in the play, the next step will be to develop a believable character whose journey will be relatable to the audience and thereby convey the symbolic meaning of the character.

The overall objective for the Young Woman is to find peace, whatever form that may take. In every episode, she is searching for the thing, the “something” or “somebody” that will set her free from her disappointing life. She never articulates what this freedom means, as she doesn’t know until it happens, but she does repeatedly reference the idea of submission. After birthing her child, she says, “I’ve submitted to enough – I won’t submit to any more,” meaning she has obeyed society’s rules and gotten married and having a child (Treadwell 30). But it is

clear that these things are not fulfilling to her, or she wouldn't refer to these as acts of submission. Leading up to the first episode, the Young Woman has been living in a cramped apartment with her selfish and nagging mother, her father having died leaving her to support them both. She has taken a job in the office of George H. Jones as a secretary/stenographer and has been judged a sub-par worker by her officemates. When she first appears in the play, she has just experienced a stressful subway ride that left her feeling claustrophobic and out of breath. Her goal in the opening episode is to get through the day and keep her job, because despite feeling overwhelmed and unhappy at her job, she has to support her mother. As the day progresses her boss, George H. Jones, a man she finds unattractive and overbearing, proposes marriage to her. This proposal and the Young Woman's subsequent dilemma over whether or not to marry him initiate the Young Woman's journey in the play. In the second episode, she looks to her Mother for advice, but ultimately this scene is about coming to terms with marrying a man she finds repulsive. It also provides the audience with a closer look at the causes of the Young Woman's stress, including her nagging Mother, her unhappy home life and her dilemma of duty versus happiness.

She ultimately decides to marry her employer and in the third episode, she has to come to terms with another aspect of this choice: sex. The honeymoon gives a clearer picture of just how unbearable George H. Jones is to live with. Plus, the Young Woman grapples with her lack of sexual experience, a man that repels her and the expectation that a wife will submit to her husband. This is a terrifying scene in which the Young Woman must sacrifice more of herself, both body and spirit, than she is prepared for. This submission then leads to pregnancy and in the fourth episode the Young Woman is broken and more desperate to escape her life than ever. Having given birth to a baby girl, she can't even bring herself to hold the child, let alone

nurse her, and finds herself choking and gagging whenever her husband comes into the room. “As the weight of her role as wife and mother intensifies, Helen feels ‘stifled’ and ‘drowned,’ painfully conscious of her confinement” (Bywaters 107). After a complete unraveling, a change happens that Treadwell doesn’t include in the play; this gap represents the Young Woman regaining her desire for freedom and her hope that there is something or someone that can take her away from her misery. It is unclear why Treadwell left this transition out of the script, but it is consistent with other emotional transitions that happen between scenes. Between episodes two and three, she comes to terms with marrying a man she loathes. Between three and four she endures a pregnancy she never wanted. Later, between episodes seven and eight, she breaks down completely and murders her husband. Though these are significant occurrences in the story, Treadwell chose not to show these things happening, rather finding ways to reference those events in the episodes on either side. It is a structural choice that provides a challenge in production, but I think the nine episodes she wrote tell a clear and comprehensive story.

In Episode Five, the Young Woman bravely joins her former co-worker for a night on the town, with one goal: to dance. For her, dancing represents a rebellion from her prison-like marriage and a chance to try something new and be someone different. The Young Woman visits a bar with her friend and is introduced to Dick Roe, an attractive and adventurous man who seduces the Young Woman with his stories of killing bandits in Mexico. Drawn to his mysterious and carefree attitude, as well as his obvious attraction to her, the Young Woman surrenders to his charms. In Episode Six, the two have just made love and are relaxing in Dick’s apartment, singing along to music they hear in the street and playfully sharing stories. Helen has finally found something, somebody she thinks can set her free. She has tasted happiness for

the first time, had her first orgasm, found a reason to laugh and to sing. She wants the moment to last forever, but she knows that it can't. More than anything, this scene provides her with the motivation to escape her life, and the idea of using violence to achieve that escape is planted in her mind.

After reluctantly leaving her lover's apartment, Helen returns home and in the next episode she is seated in the living room with her husband. The two read newspaper headlines aloud and he takes several phone calls, during which he brags repetitively about his recent business triumph. Helen now knows that she has to get away and the headlines she reads demonstrate her desperation: "Young wife disappears," and "Prisoner escapes" (Treadwell 53 and 55). After enduring her husband's perpetual braggadocio, his faux concern for her raw emotional state and his repellant touch, she retreats into her mind where she hears voices that seemingly urge her to kill him. The voice of her lover repeats the story of his escape in Mexico, other unidentified voices speak of stones, bottles and freedom. Helen is driven mad by these voices and though we don't see it happen, the murder of her husband is the inevitable outcome, which leads to the courtroom in Episode Eight.

Helen Jones attempts to prove her innocence to a jury of men, with the somewhat lackluster assistance of her Defense Attorney. Initially, she seems confident that nobody can prove that she had a strong motive and that the story she has concocted is believable. Then the Prosecutor begins questioning her and is able to weaken her resolve somewhat. But the truly devastating evidence is the affidavit from Dick Roe proving that she had an affair with him and also borrowed the murder weapon from him. When his letter is read aloud, Helen realizes that she has nothing left to live for. Dick has rejected her, destroying her hopes of freedom and

happiness. When she realizes that he has betrayed her, she loses all hope, confesses and resigns herself to whatever fate the jury determines.

In the final episode, Helen is visited in her death row jail cell by a priest. She is minutes from being executed by electric chair and experiences an array of emotions as her demise draws near. She expresses confusion about what will happen to her in the afterlife, whether she will finally find the peace she has sought in death, and whether she feels justified in cheating and murdering her husband. While the primary emotion expressed is fear, there is also a bit of catharsis. Commenting on a plane that passes overhead, she says “Look, Father! A man flying! He has wings! But he is not an angel! He has wings – but he isn’t free! I’ve been free, Father! For one moment – down here on earth – I have been free! When I did what I did I was free! Free and not afraid!” (Treadwell 80). Ultimately, although she is fearful of what will come and regretful that her daughter will not know her, she goes to her death knowing that she found peace and freedom, at least momentarily, when she took matters into her own hands. In the one moment when she did not submit to what society expected of her, she found what she was seeking, and there is hope in that knowledge.

Mother

One of the major causes of stress for the Young Woman is her mother, as evidenced by their interaction in Episode Two. “Her mother is a selfish nag whose chief interest is in being supported by the Young Woman. Her character symbolizes the crass materialism and false moral standards of society” (Shafer 260). Throughout Episode Two, the mother’s focus is on herself, from her need to control the way her daughter eats, to her dismissal of romantic love and focus on how Helen’s potential marriage will benefit her. Even when her daughter begs for

understanding and help in making a crucial decision, she plays the martyr and shows no concern for her daughter's emotional breakdown. Helen's mother is given no name, she is probably in her late forties and, although it is never stated outright, it seems most likely that her husband died many years before the story begins. She is motivated entirely by her need to be provided for and is very focused on routine and propriety.

George H. Jones

Also insensitive and blind to Helen's emotional needs is husband George H. Jones. A successful businessman, he has a very narrow view of how things should be and considers himself to be living life exactly the way it should be lived. He is arrogant, self-centered, a braggart and fancies himself quite the comedian. He thinks that life is very simple: you work hard, you find success, you get married and start a family. If you achieve those things, you've got life "by the horns" (Treadwell 28). He is full of clichés and gets very confused and frustrated when things don't fit with his life plan. For example, a woman should be happy on her honeymoon and look forward to consummating her marriage. So when Helen is fearful of being intimate with him, his behavior ranges from simple confusion to aggression in order to right the situation. This also occurs in the hospital, when Helen's desperation after giving birth confuses him so severely that all he can do is spout clichés with growing frustration in the hopes that she will learn to accept motherhood as a natural part of life. Jones is older than Helen, probably in his late thirties, with no other family connections.

Dick Roe

Dick Roe, while not an entirely sincere man, is the closest thing Helen can find to a kindred spirit. Treadwell describes him as "pleasing, common, vigorous. He has coarse wavy hair" (32).

Helen has always pictured her ideal husband having wavy hair and his rejection of society's rules creates an intense attraction for Helen. He is mysterious and doesn't fit the mold of society's expectations. He is "a masculine hipster, a California-born, free-spirited proto-Beat who's been bumming around Mexico, loving the ladies, dark-skinned as well as white, 'moving on' whenever the open road beckons, and casually killing some 'bandits' to get 'free'" (Douglas 252). Dick embodies the romantic view Treadwell held of Mexico and symbolizes the promise of escape and freedom, and not just a periodic escape from Helen's day-to-day grind, but the potential to escape permanently from society's oppressive expectations and discover a life of travel, try new things and become a different person. While Helen idealizes Dick, he is ultimately aloof, never confirming or denying that he shares Helen's feelings. He can't be tied down, and that includes committing to Helen.

Ensemble

The rest of the cast make up the components of society's machine. Treadwell intentionally makes them simple, stereotypical characters, each with a very specific role, all of whom grate on the Young Woman's psyche. Treadwell's descriptions of the office workers exemplify the basic characteristics of the full supporting cast: "faded, efficient"; "Drying, dried"; "callow adolescence"; "young, cheap and amorous" (Treadwell 1). Other characters in later scenes are described as "an ordinary man and woman" and "an ordinary salesman type" (Treadwell 32). It is clear that the playwright sees these characters as parts of the environment, not as deep feeling individuals. Their purpose is to keep the machine of society moving and to provide resistance and contrast for the Young Woman.

However, there are scenes that are less expressionistic in style than others. When the Young Woman is closest to finding what she seeks, the action and therefore other characters are more naturalistic, such as Episode Five in the bar. Treadwell wrote two scenarios to complement the Young Woman's initial encounter with and subsequent seduction by Dick, both of which feature naturalistic dialogue, believable characters and serious circumstances. Other episodes are more or less heightened, but in general the characters are human components of the machine.

The characters in Episode One include a flirtatious telephone operator in her early twenties, a stodgy, middle-aged accounting clerk who kisses up to the boss, an energetic and naïve filing clerk in his early twenties, and a snotty and condescending middle-aged secretary. Episodes Two and Three feature only Helen, her Mother and George H. Jones. The hospital workers in Episode Four include a fortyish doctor with a big ego and unsympathetic bedside manner, two eager young nurses that basically share a brain, and a young doctor attempting to emulate his superior. Episode Five introduces a number of new characters, including a young couple dealing with an unplanned pregnancy and a cultured, flamboyant middle-aged gay man courting a non-worldly teenage boy. Episode Eight includes a broader spectrum of society, with two lawyers, a judge and bailiff, reporters and jurors. While each character has a unique attitude, they all represent stock characters you would see in a courtroom. The defense attorney is younger and less confident than his counterpart, a manipulative and snakelike prosecutor who is full of surprises and relishes the idea of getting a conviction. Each character has a specific function in the machine of society and their function outweighs every other personality trait.

Theme – Female Identity in a Male-Dominated, Mechanized Society

Sophie Treadwell's feminist ideology clearly shaped the theme of *Machinal*: the struggle for female identity in a male-dominated society. The Young Woman's journey allows the audience to examine the oppression many women felt in a society that dictated what their lives should be. "Treadwell used [Ruth] Snyder as a point of departure for dramatic indictment of a society whose masculine laws and orientations stifled the emotional needs of women" (Dickey 11). Treadwell is making a clear statement about the lack of fairness in a society where men were encouraged to pursue careers and be the decision-makers in every aspect of life, from the home to running the world. Through the Young Woman's story, Treadwell asks the audience to question the rightness and fairness of gender inequality in the American 1920s, an inequality that is still worth examining today.

One of the more fascinating ways Treadwell introduces the struggle for female identity is by withholding the Young Woman's proper name for a majority of the story. Treadwell was a member of the Lucy Stone League, a women's rights organization with the motto, "My name is the symbol for my identity and must not be lost" (Dickey 72). As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, Treadwell created a protagonist that is a kind of "Everywoman," a Young Woman with no name and no clear identity, a representation of all women subject to the rules and roles dictated for them by a controlling class of men. The name Helen Jones is not revealed until the trial when the defense lawyer calls her to the stand. "She achieves her true identity only through personal rebellion against society's constraints on gendered behavior" (Gainor 48). Only after she has severed the bond between herself and her husband, taking a stand against the life forced upon her, does her name and therefore her identity become clear. However, she is never referred to

as simply Helen, but rather Helen Jones or Mrs. Jones, for the rest of the play. In this way, the sliver of identity she has eked out for herself is stained by her husband's last name and her inability to escape him entirely, even after his death.

Early in the play Treadwell establishes the rules and expectations for women using the Young Woman in her "Everywoman" capacity. Based on several examples from the dialogue, it is clear that Helen is expected to marry someone, whether she loves him or not, build a family, quit her job and continue caring for her mother. In the opening scene, her officemates speculate about her marriage to Jones, saying she won't have to worry about money, she'll have breakfast in bed and won't have to work. After his proposal, Helen's monologue explores the dilemma of marrying someone she finds repulsive and having the financial freedom to rest. She references her mother's nagging to find a husband, the stress of "installments due" and her commute to work each day, her trepidation about a sexual relationship with Jones and the potential to escape a number of problems by accepting his proposal (Treadwell 11). "Mrs. George H. Jones – money – no work – no worry – free! – rest – sleep till nine – sleep till ten – sleep till noon – now you take a good rest now – don't get up until you want to" (12). The Young Woman's stream of consciousness shows the variety of emotions she feels as she weighs the pros and cons of this major life decision.

In the second episode, her mother makes it very clear what she expects from her daughter. When Helen shares the news of Jones' proposal, her mother immediately asks when the wedding will happen, showing no sympathy for her plight of a loveless marriage: "Love! – what does that amount to! Will it clothe you? Will it feed you? Will it pay the bills?" (Treadwell 17). After their discussion, Helen reluctantly agrees to marry Jones, and shortly after this, Helen

gives birth to her first child. Jones and the hospital staff represent the societal expectation that women should be mothers. The nurse says, "Men want boys – women ought to want girls," and Jones chastises Helen for her melancholy behavior saying, "Having a baby's natural! Perfectly natural thing" (27-28). Everyone minimizes her nausea and panic, treating her as if her strong emotional response is just a byproduct of giving birth and that she'll learn to treasure her role as mother.

Helen submits. She follows the path assigned to her by society, her mother, her finances and her co-workers, and finds nothing but misery. This is made most clear in the monologue at the end of Episode Four, during which Helen expresses a desire to be left alone and the feeling that she has been abandoned by God. Additionally, she compares her experience to that of her childhood dog, saying: "Vixen crawled off under bed – eight – there were eight – a woman crawled off under the bed – a woman has one – two three four" (Treadwell 31). This comparison reduces women's value to that of an animal, linking "the woman to dog as breeding animals in an inescapable bond of biological determinism" (Bywaters 105). Helen's experience as a wife and mother has left her unfulfilled, lonely and with the feeling that she has compromised herself in order to conform to society's expectations.

Conversely, the only joy and peace Helen experiences is a direct result of rejecting the role that's been thrust upon her. When she breaks the rules and begins an affair with Dick Roe, she discovers feelings she didn't know were possible.

Treadwell emphasizes the Young Woman's empowerment through sexual liberation in the affair with Roe. After making love for the first time in Roe's basement apartment, Treadwell provides a stage direction that shows the Young Woman at peace for the first time in the play: 'She looks toward him, then throws

her head slowly back, lifts her right arm – this gesture that is in so many statues of women – Volupte’. This moment of sexual liberation proves emblematic of the Young Woman’s desire for the same sort of unencumbered freedom enjoyed by her male lover, as it was his stories of adventures in Mexico, including his murderous and unpunished escape from bandits, that first stimulated her attractions (Gainor 47-48).

Everything about Dick Roe and her relationship with him is immensely more satisfying than anything Helen has experienced previously. His travels allow Helen to travel vicariously, escaping the limits of her small life. Their sexual encounters make her feel loved and attractive, feelings she thought would come with marriage. “You must be in love, mustn’t you Ma? That changes everything, doesn’t it – or does it? Maybe if you just like a person it’s all right – is it? When he puts a hand on me, my blood turns cold. But your blood oughtn’t to run cold, ought it?” (Treadwell 18). Despite knowing her actions are unacceptable, or perhaps because of that knowledge, Helen discovers beauty in the world for the first time.

Ultimately, she takes a huge risk by killing her husband in order to hang on to these new feelings and escape her marriage. Sitting at home with her husband, we see clearly the dysfunction in their relationship.

Helen “reads” a woman’s story of anguish and escape while her husband sees only economic prosperity. As the scene progresses, Helen interprets a more radical version of the female story . . . The possibility of freedom through revolution in these lines indicates the presence of an emerging subversive female consciousness that undermines the male version of what is ‘real’ and which, if acted upon, would threaten the male-dominated social structure (Bywaters 107).

While Jones reads meaningless headlines about the economy and healthy eating in between phone calls from work colleagues congratulating him on some deal he’s just made, Helen is reading about women escaping their lives by killing themselves and their husbands. “Girl turns

on gas . . . Woman leaves all for love . . . Young wife disappears” (Treadwell 55). Treadwell uses a fascinating convention to foreshadow the choice Helen must make, outlining both the danger and freedom that could result from that choice.

The ultimate statement about female conformity to rules set by men comes in the courtroom scene. Though Treadwell doesn’t specify that the jury is all male, it was almost unheard of for women to serve on a jury at the time. According to *Ms. Magazine*, “For decades after women won the right to vote, states retained the power to discourage women from jury service” (Batt). Despite the lack of any law prohibiting women from jury service, it wasn’t until 1975 that a Supreme Court ruling outlawed the practice of states preventing women from jury participation. Also, the Defense Attorney refers to the “gentlemen of the jury,” reinforcing the assumption that Helen’s fate was determined by an all-male jury (Treadwell 62). In the courtroom, Helen is alone in a sea of men, and while it is ultimately her own confession that leads to her conviction, the jury sentences her to death by electric chair. In this world, a woman that revolts against the rules established by a male-dominated society is punished in the most severe manner. She no longer submits and is therefore condemned.

Conclusion

While not a simple play, my analysis of *Machinal* can be summed up simply: In the expressionistic play *Machinal*, Sophie Treadwell condemns the oppression of American women through the journey of an “Everywoman” who seeks escape from the patriarchal machine of society with tragic results.

Chapter 4

Production Approach

*Note: As this chapter includes pre-production ideas, it is written in the present tense.

The primary goal of this production will be to clearly communicate the theme of female subjugation in a male-dominated society through a sympathetic portrayal of the Young Woman's journey as she navigates an unfriendly, even frightening and harsh environment. My approach will utilize expressionistic elements to create the world of the heroine's emotions as she is subjected to the "machine" of society, a machine attempting to churn out the ideal wife and mother. According to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, expressionism "depicts not objective reality but rather the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse within a person. The artist accomplishes this aim through distortion, exaggeration, primitivism, and fantasy and through the vivid, jarring, violent, or dynamic application of formal elements." Treadwell has provided dialogue, sound and stage directions that embody this style, so my focus will be on honoring her ideas and creating a distinct world of mechanized oppression.

Staying true to both German and American expressionist theater from the early twentieth century, I would like all production elements to create a cohesive environment, where the players, the sounds and the visual elements represented society's machine. "expressionism's distinctive way of integrating acting, costuming, make-up, set design, lighting, and music rendered all of these elements 'active' on stage. It was the expressionist production's overall style, not just its human actors, that was expected to 'perform' the desired rhetorical effect upon an audience" (Kuhns 3). Drawing inspiration from expressionistic acting techniques, visual art, film and music, I want this production to capture the spirit of this unique

form, while asking the audience to empathize with the Young Woman and identify the larger societal issues at the heart of the play.

Two main sources of inspiration will be George Antheil's symphony "Ballet Mecanique," as well as Fernand Leger's expressionistic film of the same name. I discuss Antheil's music later in this chapter, but the major themes in Leger's film overlap significantly with those in *Machinal*, and will impact the approach as a whole. Imagery from the film will serve as inspiration for all areas of design and will be useful in establishing the performance style for the actors.

Scenery

In the 1920s, expressionism was growing in popularity in the visual art world, as well as in theater and literature. In this production, we have the unique opportunity to visually represent the expressionist movement in a variety of different ways. In expressionism, "distorted line, exaggerated shape, abnormal coloring, mechanical movement, and telegraphic speech were devices commonly used to lead audiences beyond surface appearances. Often everything was shown through the eyes of the protagonist, whose view might alter emphases and impose drastic interpretations upon the events" (Brockett 416). Creating a world that reflects the emotions and point of view of the Young Woman will be the primary scenic goal. For that reason, I drew inspiration from the particularly evocative expressionist painting shown in Figure 1, titled *Lower Manhattan*, by John Marin.



Figure 1: *Lower Manhattan*, by John Marin, 1922, watercolor

This 1922 work captures the harshness and hardness of a city, the perfect backdrop to Helen's tumultuous journey. The sharp angles and thick black lines of the city seem to be rotating, with the circular gear at the center controlling the city's constant movement. I want to explore a three-dimensional interpretation of the world Marin created, possibly including a turntable that would actually shift as the scenes do. This really captures the idea that Helen is not controlling her own fate and that she is subjected to the constant churning of a giant machine. "Machine technology was progressively more pervasive in daily life, and advances in building materials made taller buildings feasible. As a result, the skyscraper began to define the skylines and living conditions of American cities. This skyline acquired aesthetic and symbolic power as Americans learned to embrace verticality in the 1920s" (Koritz 12). For this reason, I would like there to be

a reflection of the skyline and this tendency toward verticality, with the buildings looming over the Young Woman and making her small. Ideally, I want a unit set that resembled Marin's painting to curve around the back of the stage, with three dimensional buildings protruding out in a few places. The turntable would not move any of the background, but would rotate at strategic times, moving actors or furniture to different parts of the stage. I also like the suggestion of sky the artist has included, which could serve as the tiny glimmer of hope Helen discovers through her affair, the possibility that she can achieve a happier existence if she can see beyond her grim, urban circumstances.

Ideally, functional set pieces (furniture) and hand props will also reflect the colors and shapes in *Lower Manhattan*, but they could also be relatively neutral, either solid black or brown. I envision a set of furniture pieces being built, which could be used for multiple purposes, possibly in the style of Figure 2. I want these practical items to be easy to move, so they can quickly be rolled off or on between sections of the unit set.



Figure 2: German expressionist film

The exaggerated angles and vertical emphasis in Figure 3 is similar to the silhouette I imagine for the scenery. I also like the dark, gritty feel and the abstracted smokestacks and windows.



Figure 3: Still from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*

The scenery in Figure 4 provides some interesting ideas in terms of levels, shapes and color palette. There is a kinetic energy to this design reflective of the machine we want to create scenically.



Figure 4: Scenic Design for Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, by Carey Wong, Wildwood Park for the Performing Arts, 1989

Props

I would like to keep props as simple as possible and to even explore the possibility of miming some props. The script calls for some specific items, including a blue glass bowl with pebbles and a water lily. Other practical items include brief cases and papers for the courtroom, a judge's gavel, glasses, cigarettes and ash trays, newspapers and office machines. Additionally, pots and dishes will be needed for the mother's home, as well as telephones for the office and Jones' home. I want everything to be simple, accurate for the period and to blend seamlessly with the scenery and costumes.

Lighting

I imagine the lighting highlighting the sharp angles of the set, casting ominous shadows. I hope that the shadows could move at certain points, for example having them close in on Helen during the courtroom scene. I also think the lighting could help define the different settings, highlighting a particular part of the stage to represent the office and another to represent the home. Additionally, I would like to use lighting to help establish mood. The most important place for this will be in the scene with the lovers, when Helen discovers her passion and happiness. I want something bright and more cheerful about the lighting in that scene to contrast the menace of the courtroom and execution and the fast-moving mayhem of the machine world.

Costumes

Women's clothing of the 1920s had a very specific and recognizable silhouette. Fashion had a lot to do with the role of women in American society and how it was evolving as women

became more independent. There were strict rules of etiquette and the more traditional, conservative woman would have taken care to obey these conventions, while the more rebellious “New Woman” embraced the liberating style made famous by the flappers. “Good girls wore corsets instead of that newfangled invention, the brassiere. They did not wear silk stockings, satiny lingerie called teddies, bathing suits that revealed their legs, or high-heeled shoes. Rouge, lipstick, mascara, and perfume – none of these artificial paints and fragrances had a place on her dresser top” (Gourley 59). I would like to embrace the iconic style of the 1920s and find ways of displaying each character’s independence or conformity based on their fashion choices. Most of the female characters are fairly conservative, but the telephone operator and some of the women in the bar scene could explore some of the more fashion-forward styles. “In the 1920s the S and hourglass shapes were no longer in style. Instead, the ideal silhouette was straight and slim. Because skirts were shorter, the visual interest was not the breasts, the hips, or the waist but rather a woman’s legs” (Gourley 87). Keeping these things in mind, I plan to work with my costume designer to create a base costume for each actor, with specific accessories and outer garments to create different looks for each character the actors play.

Because I feel that most of the characters are part of society’s machine, my original concept called for the costumes to be entirely black and white business attire, appropriate to the era. While I don’t want to copy another designer’s concept, I was inspired by the clothing and robotic posture of the characters displayed in Figure 5. They all look like the same buttoned-up automaton workers, scurrying about in their black suits, white shirts and black hats. I want them to all have similar, conservative hair styles and have no obvious characteristics that distinguish them from one another and represent any kind of unique

personality. While black and white was my original instinct, I am open to other color options, as long as the palette remains relatively neutral. Helen's costumes, however, should set her apart from the other characters and her environment. Once she begins to discover her passion and resist society's conformity, bits of color should be incorporated into her costume and it should become more free, flowing and sensual.



Figure 5: *Machinal*, Insurgo Theater Company, Las Vegas, photo by Ryan Reason



Figure 6: Example of more matronly women's fashion of the 1920s, possibly for Helen's mother

Sound

I would like the sound design to reflect Helen's emotional state, as well as add to the mechanical and oppressive atmosphere of the world of the play. Treadwell has suggested hard, urban sounds, such as steel riveting, typewriter clacking, mechanical whirring, metallic clanging — all sounds that get inside Helen's head and add to her desperation to escape. In her introduction she calls for "the use of many different sounds chosen primarily for their inherent emotional effect, but contributing also to the creation of a background, an atmosphere" (Treadwell xi). I like the idea of most of the sound being violent, harsh noise, with soft jazz music underscoring the intimate scene between the lovers. A piece of music I want to either incorporate or use as inspiration is George Antheil's symphony *Ballet Mecanique*. First performed during the mid-1920s, this piece captures much of the harshness of the urban environment that Treadwell expresses in her play. It "explores the distinction between primal urges and technological invention by intermingling them. Antheil insists that we acknowledge the unyielding, hypnotic, sensual presence of the machine, even as we probe the soul it obscures" (Jerz 39). Antheil blends primarily percussive instruments, such as the xylophone and bass drum, with sirens, propellers and the roar of machinery. The resulting effect gives the feeling of experiencing a fast-paced, somewhat frightening environment from the perspective of an overwhelmed individual. This is the ideal soundscape for the Young Woman's internal struggle and I would like to explore ways to incorporate this piece or something similar. The execution scene is the culmination of the Young Woman's journey, where she is simultaneously destroyed by society, but also finally achieves freedom. Sound will be critical in this moment. During the execution, I want some sort of humming or buzzing to represent the electrical current, a noise that will start low and gradually become louder as the end approaches,

reaching its loudest and most piercing volume right before the lights go to black, then abruptly stopping as the lights cut to black.

Acting Style

As I touched upon when discussing costume design, I plan to ask the actors themselves to represent cogs in society's machine. I want them to be focused, rigid, precise and to always move with purpose. Each of them has a specific duty and they must perform their roles as specifically and efficiently as possible. I would like their movement to reflect the sharp angles in Marin's painting and their speech should be very staccato, direct and unemotional. In contrast, Helen's movement and speech should be more uncertain, fluid, choppy and realistic, and she should respond with genuine emotion to her circumstances and to the people around her.

A concept I plan to explore in rehearsal is the expressionist acting technique known as "Schrei":

The term "Schrei" has a rather narrow semantic range including: "cry, shout, yell, wail, scream, shriek." . . . More than any other performance feature, consequently, the Schrei became the hallmark of that breadth of vocal and physical performance capability – and endurance – which was the first standard of excellence in expressionist acting. However, it seems to have assumed its most comprehensive meaning in certain of the earliest expressionist dramas, where emotional expression itself was both the subject, and the chief agency, of dramatic action (Kuhns 94).

In *Machinal*, there are a few moments that require this type of emotional expression, including the Young Woman's monologues at the end of the office and hospital scenes, as well as the execution scene. In these moments, the character is grappling with astonishing circumstances, fearing death, considering monumental life choices and there is a thoroughly expressionistic

tone to the language. I plan to share my research about Schrei and explore whether or not it could help my actress in these moments which call for “extraordinarily intense and protracted vocal outbursts of emotion” (Kuhns 101). For the expressionists, the Schrei embodied a primitive, animalistic and spiritual element of human existence, the moment of emotional breaking or breakthrough that is both release and insight. The idea centers around a simplification of emotion, getting at the common denominator of emotion for all humans.

We know that such simplification for the expressionist actor involved the reduction of physical movement to a minimum. The idea was that when a gesture did occur it would be symbolically comprehensive, not psychologically illustrative. The reduction of speech in Telegrammstil [telegram style] dialogue aimed at a similar essentialization of expression. At the same time, the physical and verbal restraint in this strategy of reduction, as applied to Schrei acting, was intended to create an enormous emotional pressure which would eventually explode in expansive gestures and long passionate monologues. Words and gestures were fired like bullets or came rushing forth in resounding aural and visual avalanches. This pattern of compressive reduction and explosive expansion, in fact, was the essential rhythm of Schrei ecstatic acting. Hence, the “Schrei” was much more than a literal scream; rather, it was an enormous release of emotional pressure which fused movement and speech into “ecstatic gestures” (Kuhns 105).

Particularly in the stream-of-consciousness monologues of the Young Woman, these ideas are worth exploring. Treadwell’s dialogue is pared down to become a series of clipped phrases and individual words that represent the core of her emotions and state of mind. The Schrei could serve as a source of inspiration as I guide my actor in reaching the raw, vulnerable and truthful emotional places called for in the script.

Another important component of the acting style for this production will be an awareness of rhythm. In creating a machine, inspiration can come from a variety of mechanical and

technological resources, all of which have a distinctive rhythm that can be seen, heard and even felt.

Rhythm, in these plays [*Adding Machine*, *Hairy Ape* and *Machinal*], is profoundly integrated into the depiction of characters, particularly that of the subjective experience of their social identities. These social identities are in turn most fully formed around the work that characters do and their place in a bureaucratic hierarchy . . . rhythm often serves to demonstrate and emphasize qualities of character that motivate crucial actions in the plays (Koritz 21).

The idea of rhythm will be vital in differentiating the Young Woman from her environment.

While the machine of society chugs along, spitting smoke and filling her mind with an overwhelming and unstopping beat, her movement is not confined in the same way. “The Young Woman’s ability to release herself from the constraints of convention in order to act on her desire is represented theatrically by her body’s rhythmic grace” (Koritz 27). The expressionists believed that the most authentic identity is communicated through the rhythmic response of the body, an idea that will form the foundation for my work with the actors. I even plan to choreograph a prologue to establish the expressionistic style of movement, introduce the idea of the machine and start the show with a strong sense of rhythm.

Special Problems

Machinal poses a few rather unique challenges, including an electric chair execution onstage, how to approach the transitions between episodes and whether or not to add an intermission to a script that doesn’t include one. Other problems stem from casting limitations in a university environment, such as how to approach multiple roles for most actors and how to create an all-male jury with only female actors.

I know the execution will be challenging and since Treadwell just calls for a blackout, there are a variety of ways to interpret this ending moment of the play. Rather than staging the execution on stage, I want the Young Woman to cower on the floor in the center of the turntable with the reporters, jailers and priests in a half circle around the turntable's edge. Lighting can be used to create the sense that the machine of society is closing in and smothering her. In terms of the transitions, I want to keep the flow of the production moving smoothly by keeping the transitions as short as possible and potentially incorporating some of the pantomime I plan to choreograph to maintain the idea that the machine is always moving.

Casting this show will be very tricky, as the thirty-eight roles in the play are vastly different and finding student actors that can create three, four or even five unique characters in one show is a frightening prospect. I created a casting breakdown that at least allows for the minimum number of actors to fill each role and allow for costume changes, but I will need to spend time working with the actors on each character and am open to making casting adjustments throughout the process to accommodate the varying abilities of the cast I end up with and any technical concerns that might arise. In terms of the jury, I have an idea to resolve this, which will be examined more closely in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

In this production of *Machinal*, I want the audience to empathize with Helen's plight and reflect on the larger issues of inequality and struggling to find an identity in an oppressive, impersonal society. I would like all the elements to combine to create a harsh, fast-moving, streamlined mechanism that Helen feels compelled to resist, but that ultimately eats her alive. There is an element of unfairness that I want the audience to realize and consider. Man or woman, ditch

digger or CEO, housewife or sex symbol, everyone is part of a greater whole and it often feels out of our control to determine how we fit into that bigger picture.

Chapter 5

Auditions, Casting and Rehearsals

My primary preparation for auditions involved creating a brief description for and visualizing each character in my mind. The descriptions were provided for all those auditioning and can be found in Appendix A. In addition to thinking about my vision for each character's attributes, I did research to establish some ideas about the movement and vocal style I wanted to attempt. I prepared a series of activities to evaluate the vocal and physical abilities of each actor and planned to either ask for adjustments during callback readings or work with them in a group if they were not called to read for a specific character. Most important would be finding a strong, mature and hardworking leading lady, as well as a handful of men that could handle the larger male roles.

Auditions

Open auditions went fairly smoothly, but a major concern about the lack of men arose early in the evening. I chose the play knowing that I would need at least three relatively strong male actors, but was surprised and disheartened when eleven men auditioned for a total of ten roles being cast that semester (including the three other shows casting simultaneously). I was, however, impressed with the female talent and felt good about my options for casting women.

Callbacks also went smoothly, although I felt bad asking the few men to read the same scenes over and over because I had so many women to see. I had chosen primarily two-person scenes, in order to streamline the process, but also to give my full attention to each actor. There was one four-person scene from the office scene, which really captured the rhythm and style of the play and allowed me to get a sense of the range of each actor and how well they

take direction. Since I was casting thirty-eight roles, I knew I wouldn't be able to read for each character, so I chose the office scene and had them read it a couple times after giving them notes to explore their range. That worked very well and I felt confident that I'd be able to cast all the smaller roles easily. I also did an exercise with about fifteen actors, mostly the less experienced students, to see what they could do physically. We did some simple walking activities, just to see how they move, then we played a game where they built a machine together, each of them creating a movement and sound that made up a piece of an abstract machine. We did this a couple of times, then I asked them to expand on their choices to humanize the machine components and create characters, moving around the space and interacting with each other. I was pleasantly surprised by how eager most of them were, their creativity and ability to follow direction. I felt confident that I would have a strong supporting chorus to complement the larger roles.

Casting

My choices for the major roles also became clear relatively quickly during callbacks, but I didn't have strong back-up options for the Young Woman, Jones, Dick and the Prosecutor, which made me nervous going into the casting meeting with three other directors. Luckily, I didn't have to compromise on those key roles. I ended up casting more actors than I had planned, as I had combined roles to cast the smallest number of actors in case I had limited options.

Fortunately, I was able to cast two more actors than I had planned. Overall, I was pleased with my casting choices. I had to compromise on a couple of smaller roles, but I felt confident that I could work with the actors I got. I was frustrated to have one of my male actors drop out almost immediately, because it left me scrambling to fill a position. Thankfully, I was blessed

with the opportunity to work with a dedicated and experienced actor who stepped in and ended up taking over some additional roles.

I made one significant casting error, which I was able to resolve early in the rehearsal process. I miscast the actors playing the attorneys, which became apparent at the first reading. The actor cast as the Defense Attorney would have played the role well, but the actor cast as the Prosecutor was not up to the challenge. After early rehearsals I became concerned about the Prosecutor being able to push the actress cast as the Young Woman to her breaking point in the courtroom scene. I discussed the problem with my dramaturg who echoed my concern and suggested I swap the two actors, which seemed like the easiest solution. Accepting that college actors are still learning and that it would not be a significant detriment to the production, I spoke to both actors and they agreed to swap roles. This was a decision that saved the production, in my opinion.

I was thrilled to get my first choice for the Young Woman. Having worked with her twice before, I knew we had a strong connection and had been successful collaborators in the past. But most importantly, I knew she was the only actress with the talent, drive and maturity to take on such a challenging role. The actress has the ability to lose herself in a role, to draw the audience in and make them care about her character, which is vital in a play about a young woman's tragic journey. If the audience didn't relate to her character and sympathize with her plight, the production would fail. She is also one of the hardest working actors I've met and proved her dedication by being off book before anyone else in the cast, despite having over half the dialogue in the play and two extraordinarily challenging monologues. She also had great chemistry with the actor cast as Dick, as well as being a great listener to all of her castmates.

The other crucial roles included Dick Roe and George H. Jones. The actor I cast as Dick was the only actor that embodied the relaxed, confident and sensual qualities required for the role. The actor cast as Jones was the only person that captured the character's ridiculousness and arrogance. I also thought that two senior men would bring the appropriate work ethic, though I discovered this was not entirely true. I was concerned about the lack of experience among many of the supporting actors I cast, but with a strong group of six or seven leading actors, I felt confident that we could overcome their lack of experience.

Character meetings

For the Young Woman, Dick, Jones, Mother and both attorneys, I had one-on-one meetings with the actors to discuss their characters. For the rest of the cast, we used the beginning of our table work rehearsals for these discussions, which worked fine, as the characters are mostly one-dimensional and I wanted to exaggerate one or two specific qualities, rather than create characters with depth and complexity.

Every character conversation began with a series of questions to help the actors articulate their initial impressions and understand their objectives. The core questions were:

1. What are your initial impressions of your character?
2. What is your character's objective for the play?
3. What is your character's objective in this episode? (We went through each episode the character appears in.)
4. How does your character achieve their objective? What is their tactical style and does it change?
5. Does your character change throughout the play? In what ways?
6. What is your relationship to the other characters in your scene?
7. What is your role in the machine of society? How do you contribute to the motion of the machine?
8. How does your character move (fluid, choppy, fast, slow, etc.)? How does your character speak?

My primary goal was to help them shape their ideas, never to impose my ideas on theirs — a process that can be difficult with young and inexperienced actors. I've found that student actors need encouragement to own their choices, push beyond the surface and take risks. Each character conversation provided the opportunity for me to establish trust between myself and my actors, to answer whatever questions they had and to ensure that we had similar understanding of what their characters want. Some actors required more prodding and questioning than others, but I found each conversation enlightening and was thrilled to learn things about characters that I hadn't previously considered. I love being surprised and inspired by my cast and this situation was ripe with discovery and fruitful collaboration.

I had extensive pre-rehearsal conversations with the actor playing Young Woman, a process that helped immensely. We gradually worked through the script, establishing a specific objective for the play and each episode. We dissected the monologues and actually mapped them out, connecting the dots between ideas and finding an emotional arc for each one. I asked her to spend a fair amount of time doing visualization exercises, finding imagery to help her reach the emotional levels required for the role, a technique I find useful for most of the actors I work with, particularly students.

First Rehearsal

The first part of rehearsal was spent introducing production concept, including presentations from the designers that were in attendance, the dramaturg and establishing guidelines for the rehearsal process with the stage manager. I shared some basic ideas about expressionism and the performance style, but wanted to hear how they would approach the text without too much style guidance, something we'd explore in depth through table work and some acting

exercises early in the process. We also spent time talking about process and clarifying some script questions, then we read the play and for the most part, I was pleased with the level of engagement and preparation.

Table Work

A play as complicated as *Machinal* requires a deep level of understanding from everyone involved, which is what table work should accomplish. I was lucky to attend a workshop with the brilliant Amy Feinberg at the Region VII Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival in 2011. She recommends spending at least 25% of the rehearsal process doing this in-depth work before staging. Her technique asks the actors to make strong eye contact with one another as they read, to really listen to each other and respond truthfully to their fellow actors. As they read, the director asks questions to help them gain a deeper understanding of the subtext, their relationships and the emotional journey of their character. The actors are asked to respond as their character and give their answers to their scene partner. In this way, the director serves as a kind of conductor, guiding them toward discoveries but ensuring that the actors feel ownership of their choices. It is a powerful technique that I've had success with recently, and I was pleased with the results on *Machinal*.

Style Work

Working with so many inexperienced actors, as well as actors with solid experience with naturalistic acting but limited knowledge of any other performance style, I felt the need to spend some time teaching them about expressionism and helping them develop a vocal and physical style that fit the production. Within the first week of rehearsals, I dedicated a rehearsal to exploring an expressionistic performance style. Throughout the rest of the process, we revisited the ideas introduced in this initial workshop, fine-tuning the approach for individual

characters and applying our discoveries to a prologue I decided to add, some specific moments within the episodes and the transitions. To begin, I had asked the cast to watch the Coen Brothers film *The Hudsucker Proxy*, a movie that captures the expressionistic acting I hoped to achieve in *Machinal*. When the cast arrived for our first style session, I introduced the ideas of our performance style, describing a need to go beyond naturalism. I asked everyone except the Young Woman to think of their characters in terms of the Young Woman's experience and perception. The supporting cast represents the stress, oppression, and fears of the Young Woman, so these core characteristics would need to be developed and exaggerated in their faces, bodies and voices. The primary goal was to embody the components (or cogs) of society's machine, working as an ensemble to create a functioning and efficient machine that overwhelms and demoralizes the Young Woman. I encouraged them to listen to each other, watch each other and find ways to complement the work of their fellow actors. I imparted the importance of rhythm and asked them to think about how a variety of machines work.

We discussed *The Hudsucker Proxy*. The actors had many insightful observations, which lead to ideas they felt they could apply to their character work. We discussed the snappy, succinct dialogue, the clear purpose and limited range of each character, the chaos and constant movement, and the underlying feeling that there is a greater force driving them. In the film, the characters are all parts of a machine and if any one component doesn't function properly, the whole machine fails. I asked them to consider the rules that their characters follow and based on their work, I helped establish clear rules for their world, including a constant urgency, an emphasis on efficiency, moving to the rhythm of the sound design, upright posture and arm swinging, among many others.

We watched a number of other videos online, including Charlie Chaplin working on an assembly line and adopting the repetitive movement of his job, even after stepping away from his task. We observed Japanese synchronized walking, an incredibly precise activity featuring groups of men or women moving in unison and creating interesting patterns and shapes, as well as a posture that captured the robotic or mechanized physicality I wanted my actors to emulate.

I drew inspiration from René Migliaccio, the Artistic Director of Blackmoon Theater Company in New York and techniques he developed as a guest artist at UCLA entitled “Expressionistic Realism: Developing and Teaching a Performance Technique.” I shared his thoughts and developed exercises to explore his concepts, as follows:

1. The Face is the Mask: Migliaccio emphasizes articulation and separation of the facial muscles and features in three areas — eyes, eyebrows and mouth. The emphasis is on the eyes as the energy projection point, and to rediscover on the face the silent film type of expression. To demonstrate this, we did some very simple exercises to explore exaggeration in gesture, facial expression and body. I asked the actors to show a variety of emotions in a naturalistic way, then to demonstrate the same emotions in an expressionistic manner, exaggerating their responses so there is no mistaking their feeling and that an audience member in the back row could read their emotions even if they weren’t speaking. We also looked at some imagery from silent films and I asked them to identify the emotion of the actors in an art form that relied on exaggeration.

2. **The Body:** According to Migliaccio, no gesture is accidental. He emphasizes giving life and expression to each element of the body and finding the center for each character (i.e., the part of the body that leads their movement and most accurately represents their personality). I asked them to consider whether their character leads with their head, their pelvis, chest, or other body part; if their gestures are hard or smooth, fast or slow; and if there is a shape to their movement. We did some walking, body part isolation and gesture activities to help them explore their characters, then I asked them to demonstrate how their character would apologize, threaten, seduce, celebrate and several other actions, and we discussed what they were observing about themselves and their cast mates.
3. **Rhythm and Movement:** This concept is about learning the inner rhythm of the character and if/how it relates to the outer surrounding rhythm. “Each character has its own set of harmonies and rhythm which sustain its dramatic experience,” (Migliaccio). For this element, I called out a variety of different objects, like a stapler, a clock or a slinky, and asked them to find a movement and rhythm that captured the spirit of the object, encouraging them to not feel limited by being literal.

The next exercise was the standard “Machine” game that is commonly played in acting and improvisation classes, the same game I used during callbacks. In this exercise, one person begins a simple, repetitive movement and others join in, one at a time, expanding on this idea to build a human machine, finding a rhythm, a shape and a sound for each component that works in harmony with the rest. Then I asked them to choose one of their characters, find a mechanical movement that represents their personality or their role in the machine of society,

repeat the movement and add a sound. The next step was to refine it into a simple gesture, then find a way to move around the room without losing that gesture. Next I asked them to choose a few words of their character's dialogue and incorporate them into the movement, adapting the sound they had developed to work with the dialogue. We repeated the exercise a number of times, allowing the actors to find different ways of representing the many characters they would play and sometimes working with music to incorporate an external rhythm and energy. I encouraged them to explore different levels and planes and find ways of interacting with each other and their environment. Then we adapted the exercise to create an assembly line, passing a variety of objects down the line.

Throughout the rehearsal process, we revisited these exercises and I worked with the actors individually to develop specific ideas for their characters. I encouraged them to explore the activities outside of rehearsal and to create rules for their characters based on the ideas we explored as a group. The group activities, particularly the machine and assembly line exercises were the most effective for establishing the style. Also, working with music, particularly the sound created for the prologue, really helped the actors embody the rhythm and choppiness of movement I wanted. Working independently proved less effective, as some actors were more motivated than others and I found that they often didn't make significant improvements on their own. I would have liked to have more time to reinforce the mechanical movement by expanding on the machine exercise and doing it at every rehearsal, but time did not allow for that.

The Jury

One of the biggest challenges of the rehearsal process revolved around creating an all-male jury using women actors. Conversations with my dramaturg and costume designer helped me shape a convention that would disguise the jury members, but could also be incorporated throughout the play for a sense of continuity. I didn't want the audience to have to suddenly accept a cross-dressing convention in the court room, so we created a group of characters that would serve as representatives of the machine. These "watchers" would have a presence throughout the play, primarily during transitions, but also during other key moments. They would observe the other cogs in the machine and ensure that the machine is operating efficiently. Costume Designer Professor Pulver came up with the idea of putting them in jumpsuits and goggles, giving them both an intimidating appearance, but also establishing their connection to the world.

The idea was for them to create a "big brother is watching you" kind of presence, keeping the rest of the cogs in line. Then, they would become the jurors that condemn the Young Woman in the court room.

Prologue

In order to introduce the expressionist performance style and the idea of the world as machine, I added a substantial movement scene to take place before the first episode. For this scene, the supporting cast performed a synchronized, rhythmic scene that represents the morning commute to work. I created very simple choreography for the workers to arrive at the subway station, queue for tickets, form an assembly line to distribute the morning paper, ride the subway to work and exit to begin the work day. The movement was inspired by the Japanese synchronized walking videos we viewed during style work. The Young Woman was a

part of the scene, but her natural movement and anxiety created a nice juxtaposition, setting her apart from the machine and identifying her as the central character. Thanks to a brilliant sound design by Professor Hal Logan, the choreography was accompanied by a driving soundscape of urban, mechanical music and noise, adding to the environment in a crucial way.

Transitions

The overall goal with the transitions between episodes was to keep the momentum of the show moving, introduce the tone of the upcoming episode and, originally, to carry the expressionistic pantomime to unify the style for the production. Due to the complicated scene shifts and the lack of bodies to carry furniture, I chose to abandon the pantomime, which was unfortunate. As we incorporated the production elements, it became clear that finding ways to efficiently move the furniture to keep the length of each transition down was important for maintaining the flow of the production. Movement choreography that I had created was scrapped and I encouraged the actors to maintain the physicality established in the prologue, with the hopes that that would be enough to remind the audience of the machine.

Conclusion

I was mostly pleased with my casting choices and I feel that the rehearsal process achieved my primary goals for the production. We thoroughly explored the expressionistic, mechanical style, developed clear characters, told a compelling story and found a rhythm and momentum for the play. The only things that could have improved the process would have been more experienced actors in some of the smaller roles and more time to further explore the style. But I think I planned well and we achieved a great deal during the rehearsal period.

Chapter 6

Design Process

Like any design collaboration, the goal of this process was to compile ideas from everyone on the design team and find a way to synthesize the ideas that best suited my vision. I wanted to draw from the expressionistic art, music and films discussed in chapter four to create an urban machine that oppressed the Young Woman and added to her internal turmoil. Since the overall concept was to represent her internal struggles internally, her state of mind in each episode became the focal point for all design elements. It was fairly easy to communicate my production concept and I felt that all the designers embraced my ideas and brought great ideas to the table. Overall, the design collaborations were successful. Each designer took the imagery and language from my proposed approach and used that as a springboard, layering on ideas that inspired me and led to a cohesive production that represented me as a director and my vision for the production.

Costume Designer Professor Gregory Pulver encouraged me to consider color and tone for each episode, which became the palette for costume, lighting and sound. That palette is as follows:

Episode 1 – I was inspired by the dismal office in the film *Joe Versus the Volcano*, a bluish grey like a room with fluorescent lighting. This felt appropriate for an office where the Young Woman feels trapped and alone.

Episode 2 – For the Mother’s apartment, I chose a grungy yellow. Her home environment is another area the Young Woman wants to escape. I imagined this being kind of a tenement — very lived-in, but sparse.

Episode 3 – I chose rust for the honeymoon scene, because I think there is something disturbing about rust. It corrodes pristine surfaces and if left alone, will completely destroy an object. This is a scene where innocence is lost and it is scary and uncomfortable.

Episode 4 – I chose a sickly green for the hospital, a place where the Young Woman is pushed to the brink of sanity. She is nauseated and overwhelmed by this environment.

Episode 5 – The bar is dangerous, but enticing. It's sexy, but a little grungy and dark as well. I chose a cool purple; it seemed like a mixture of naughty and nice to me, which is what this scene is about.

Episode 6 – I chose magenta because it is feminine and rich and there is a power to this color. This is the moment of blossoming for the Young Woman, where she starts to feel and express her own identity. I wanted this scene to be vibrant, sexy, hopeful, sweet and dreamlike.

Episode 7 – This is the pre-murder scene and I couldn't get the image of the black stones in the bottle out of my mind. I liked the color for its morbidity and weight. The Young Woman is driven to a desperate choice and the color and tone should reflect that emotional turmoil and thoughts of violence.

Episode 8 – This scene takes us back into the world that stifles and controls the Young Woman, so I like the idea of going back to a darker, more stifling brown, reminiscent of the gavel or shackles.

Episode 9 – I decided to bring all the colors together to create the effect of the whole world closing in on the Young Woman when she is executed. I wanted to play with mixing colors and moving shadows to capture the danger and heaviness of the final moment of the play.

Scenic

Professor Larry Larson and I enjoyed a successful collaboration, ending up with a set that captured the gritty urban environment with the vertical skyline elements inspired by the Marin painting, as well as abstracted factory elements. The color scheme was inspired by a few different expressionist paintings, including Marin, as well as some photographs of art installations that Professor Larson found online. Due to budget constraints and rethinking blocking and stage layout, we abandoned the turntable idea early in the process. Instead, the stage had three separate levels, moving towers that started upstage and gradually moved forward, a functioning smokestack that was used in the execution scene and a set of uniform tables, chairs and benches reconfigured for each scene. The minimalism of furniture, the

abstracted shapes of the walls and towers and the grey, blue and brown color scheme all fit my vision for the production and worked well with the other production elements. Photographs of the set can be found in Appendix B.

Costumes

Once we agreed to create a base costume for all the actors, settled on a simple, period-appropriate silhouette and the color scheme for each episode, the costume design flowed beautifully. Professor Pulver was a great communicator and I enjoyed seeing his designs come to life and elegantly capture the spirit of each character, as well as the tone of each episode. I was particularly impressed by the inspirational presentation he created, using the colors I'd suggested as a starting point and giving several examples of clothing from the period. His fabric choices of neutral colored cottons created the perfect palette for the base costumes and the accessories he chose accurately represented each character and helped differentiate them. He also took my idea for the "watchers" and created costumes that completely captured my vision for those characters.

Sound

The collaboration I enjoyed most was with Professor Hal Logan on the sound design. Our ideas meshed from our first conversation and there was a consistent sharing of ideas, making adjustments and fine-tuning that resulted in a sound design more perfect than I could have anticipated. George Antheil's *Ballet Mecanique* and Treadwell's sound descriptions served as a great starting point and Professor Logan found a variety of other sources of inspiration, all of which resulted in a truly successful collaboration that enhanced the production beyond my expectations.

Preshow – Starting with the inspiration of the radio song from Episode 2, Professor Logan found a variety of simple 1920s songs that helped establish the period and had a fairly neutral tone.

Prologue – Professor Logan composed a perfectly suited piece of music, mixing mechanical and urban noises with instruments to create a fast-paced, almost panicked piece of music to underscore the prologue. This music perfectly captured the tone I wanted for this scene, introduced the idea of the machine and provided the actors with the inspiration they needed to capture the hurried, efficient style of movement for the opening.

Episode 1 – Typewriter clacking and incessant phone ringing were the inspiration for this scene, combining some recorded sound with the clacking of the prop machines to create a stifling office environment.

Episode 2 – Treadwell calls for a song about a mother, playing up the martyrdom of the Young Woman’s mother. Professor Logan found the perfect sappy song to underscore the mother’s meltdown and tug at the Young Woman’s heartstrings.

Episode 3 – An abstracted version of the wedding march created an eerie and uncomfortable feeling for the honeymoon scene.

Episode 4 – The scene began with a strange version of a lullaby, introducing the maternity ward, but also the Young Woman’s fractured state of mind. As the Young Woman breaks down at the end of the scene, sounds from previous scenes were gradually added, representing the variety of emotions she is experiencing and the sources for her pain and stress. The lullaby, wedding march, telephone ring and office sounds all built to a climax as the monologue reached its peak.

Episode 5 – There is a significant shift in tone between four and five, representing the Young Woman’s change in attitude. A jaunty piano tune was the perfect underscoring for a fun and romantic encounter at the bar.

Episode 6 – Since Helen and Dick bond over the song “Cielito Lindo,” we used a recording of the well-known Mexican folk song for this scene.

Episode 7 – We chose to make this scene silent — the only one in the play — since this is the moment where Helen is pushed beyond tolerable unhappiness, leading to her decision to kill her husband.

Episode 8 – Professor Logan created another original piece of music, layering sounds of clanking chains to create a terrifying and rhythmic piece of expressionistic music, ideal for the courtroom scene.

Episode 9 – A similar layering of the sounds from the full show was used during the execution scene. As Helen is led to the electric chair and surrounded by the people that make up the machine, all the stress-inducing sound and music from the previous episodes was layered together, the volume was increased and the ultimate effect was

quite chilling when the sound cut off abruptly as the Young Woman was killed, leaving only the sound of the Priests prayers.

Lighting

The lighting collaboration started on a very positive note. We exchanged a lot of good ideas and seemed to have a similar vision for the lights. In the end, I felt rushed during tech and didn't feel I had time to work closely enough with the designer to solve some of the problems. There were a lot of dark spots, colors that washed out the costumes and cues that didn't happen at the speed I had anticipated. Overall, the lighting was the most disappointing production element. I should have been more insistent on seeing the cues before we ran the show and in the future would be sure to communicate my concern with the Technical Director.

Conclusion

Apart from the disappointing lighting results, I found the design process relatively smooth and was pleased with the collaborations with each of my designers. They were all respectful of my vision and created elements to complement and enhance the work I did with my actors. I feel like I got what I needed from each designer, except in terms of lighting, without much difficulty and I enjoyed the process. The most fulfilling design partnership was with my Sound Designer Professor Logan. Together we created original music, wove sounds together and created a powerful soundscape for the production, which enhanced every other aspect of the show. In the future, I will be more proactive about lighting, making sure I have the opportunity to see and scrutinize every moment. Otherwise, I couldn't have asked for better collaborators and more successful process.

Chapter 7

Post-production Response

My thesis production of Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* was an excellent learning experience and I feel that I've grown as a director as a result. I enjoyed the many challenges the process presented and feel that the show was fairly successful and most of the problems I encountered will contribute to my ability to direct future productions with greater success. Based on the feedback I received from visiting respondents and University of Portland faculty, I'm happy with the overall result and agreed with a majority of the criticisms. I achieved most of my goals for the production, including conveying the theme of female oppression in a male-dominated society. While the play itself captures that theme, we successfully enhanced this idea by creating a world where men dominated the Young Woman, limiting her options and ultimately driving her to an outrageous act. One particularly important choice to maintain this idea was having an all-male jury, although some aspects of that choice weren't entirely successful. The major challenge for me was the expressionistic style of the production: how to teach that to inexperienced actors, effectively incorporate the style in every design element, and adjust and adapt to a script that varies in degree of style from episode to episode. In addition, I faced a variety of challenges with my student actors and had greater success with some cast members than others, particularly when actors were cast in multiple roles.

The primary style goal was to create a machine-like environment where the emotional journey of the Young Woman was expressed externally. I wanted the audience to see the world through her eyes, perceiving her fears and discomfort in the space around her and the behavior of her scene partners. The goal was to take a more natural approach for the Young Woman's

more positive and truthful experiences and to represent her moments of stress and alienation with a more exaggerated, heightened production style. The general tone of the show needed harshness, as well as an urban and mechanical feel, which I feel fairly confident we were able to achieve. The scenery definitely fit the expressionistic style in terms of shape and the color palette captured both the vertical elements of a cityscape, as well as colors and shapes you would see in a factory. The costumes helped establish the period, and having a neutral base costume for most of the cast helped define the actors as cogs in the machine. The sound was probably the most successful design element in terms of capturing tone and style, and while some commented that the sound could have been louder and harsher, the majority of comments were overwhelmingly positive.

Perhaps the most important way to capture the expressionistic style was the acting, which was the most difficult aspect of the whole process. The lack of familiarity and experience with anything besides naturalistic performance made it challenging for many of the actors to embrace the exaggerated movement and speech, but there were a few moments that worked well. I think the opening and closing sequences in the production were most effective, setting the tone for the show and then tying things together at the end.

I am quite proud of the prologue, both in terms of the choreography and the sound. While this took a lot more time and attention than I anticipated, it came together nicely and started the show on the right foot. I showed the actors a variety of videos that exemplified the movement style I wanted to achieve, including clips of Charlie Chaplin and Japanese synchronized walking. We also did numerous exercises to help the actors embody the qualities of a machine or its components, and they found the music created for that moment really

helpful to get into the rhythm and energy needed to jumpstart the show. I also think the final moment of the show brought back the style nicely, but there were a lot of ups and downs in between.

In terms of consistency of style, I had really hoped that the transitions between episodes could reflect the style established in the prologue. Initially, I had movement sequences planned that were similar to the prologue, but had to abandon those ideas for a variety of reasons. In order to keep the show flowing, I needed the transitions to be relatively quick, which proved challenging with the number of furniture items that needed to be moved, the costume changes happening offstage, the weight of the benches and tables, the difficulty of moving the wagons and the number of bodies available to shift the scenes. Because the scene shifts monopolized the transitions, my solution was to have the actors move the items while maintaining a rhythm and physicality similar to that of the opening sequence. That strategy wasn't completely effective, since the benches were heavy and required two people to move each one, making it difficult to move in unison. In addition, the most efficient way of moving furniture made it impossible to maintain the linear movement established in the prologue, causing a less uniform, mechanical appearance. I also think the robotic, swaying arm movement of the actors in the prologue added to the robotic, mechanical feel, which was impossible when actors were carrying chairs and tables. Ultimately I sacrificed style for speed and even though I pushed the actors to walk to the rhythm and maintain a rigid posture, it still didn't capture the style effectively. I also noticed that when the sound playing was more percussive and rhythmic, the actors picked up on that energy and moved more mechanically, but the sound was often more lyrical or irregular, depending on the mood of the upcoming episode.

If I had to do it over again, I would start working with the transitions much earlier, using the actual furniture or an approximation. Bringing music into the rehearsal process earlier might also have been helpful, even if it wasn't from the sound design but captured the tone and rhythm of the transition music.

The other style element that was not terribly successful were the "watchers," the actors meant to represent the machine, who appeared during transitions to ensure things were functioning properly, observed a few other episodes and served as the jury. The original idea came from the need to have an all-male jury (which supported the theme of a male-dominated society oppressing the Young Woman), and the fact that I didn't have enough male actors. Discussions with my dramaturg and costume designer about clothing women in male garb during that scene, and the desire to carry that convention through the rest of the production, led me to the idea of the "watchers." I attempted to establish the convention during the prologue, but that wasn't entirely clear to everyone in the audience. After feedback during technical rehearsals, I added flashlights to make the watchers more visible and help clarify their actions during the transitions, which may have helped a little, but it was an idea that just never came across fully.

In retrospect, I think I should have eliminated the watchers and just dressed the jury women as men, possibly doing some additional cross-gender casting earlier in the play to establish the convention. Though I still like the idea of the faceless, emotionless representatives of the machine's authority, I think the play is complex enough that adding an element like that was unnecessary. But I stand by the idea as a creative solution to the problem of creating an all-

male jury using actresses and establishing a convention that could be carried throughout the show.

Incorporating the expressionistic style into the actual scenes proved challenging. I wanted the audience to see the world the way the Young Woman did, meaning the style should be most exaggerated when she is least comfortable and more naturalistic when she finds moments of joy and comfort. This decision came primarily from the style of writing, which varies quite a bit. The most expressionistic dialogue happens when the other characters are clearly not listening or aware of the Young Woman's emotions. This dialogue tends to be more staccato, repetitive and flamboyant. The monologues are also expressionistic, but in a very different way. In those moments, the audience is privy to the frantic, emotional train-of-thought as the Young Woman considers the path she is following in life. The monologues are the most obvious moments of expressionism, while other episodes are written in a very naturalistic manner, in particular the episodes when the Young Woman is with her lover. But even within a single episode, there are both expressionistic and naturalistic moments in the writing, like the trial scene and the bar. Because the writing provided only loose guidance relating to performance style, I chose to base style decisions primarily on the Young Woman's state of mind.

While I think that my approach was a choice that worked, the machine could have been more present throughout. I relied too heavily on the presence of the watchers and the design elements to hint at the existence of the machine and there are ways this could have been enhanced by acting choices. A lot of the work we did early in the process to mimic components

of the machine in body and voice dissipated with the result that the characters became more realistic.

This also led to problems with differentiating multiple characters portrayed by a single actor. The early work was meant to create clear differences in voice and movement, but throughout the process I became less concerned with those distinctions and more focused on things like memorization, volume and many other basic acting issues. I attribute some of this to lack of experience among the actors, but I also wonder about things I could have done to ensure our early work carried over. The only thing I think might have worked is more repetition. Perhaps if I had called the ensemble and had them work with my stage manager while I worked on other scenes, that might have drilled the style into them more effectively.

Despite some disappointment in some actors' performances, there are a number of successes. In general, I think each actor had a pretty clear idea of what their characters wanted, the dynamics of their relationships and how they functioned within the world of the play. I attribute this success to the extensive table work, following the Amy Feinberg techniques of question-asking, eye contact and responding as the character. I've only attempted this a few times, but I feel strongly that this technique helps actors, especially students, comprehend the text and subtext and allows them to be better prepared to make physical and vocal choices once we begin staging. I received positive feedback from my cast about this and I found that the actors offered a number of insights that enhanced the production. I'm also proud of the intensive work I did with my lead actors, particularly the Young Woman, Dick, the Prosecutor and Mother. My lead actress and I worked collaboratively to understand the Young Woman's journey and to make sense of the challenging monologues. We worked slowly and

methodically, talking at length before we even tabled the monologues, then found ways to physically approach each moment and find the appropriate arc for each monologue. I was also proud of the progress made by the actors playing Helen and Dick during the romantic and sexually charged scenes. Again, a patient approach, helping the actors feel comfortable trying and failing and keeping my feedback as positive as possible, helped the actors achieve some really special moments. The actress portraying the mother made perhaps the most progress, and while she required a lot of pushing, positive reinforcement and examples, she improved tenfold and played the role with almost as much grotesque martyrdom as I envisioned.

A similar trajectory occurred with the actor portraying the Priest, Prosecutor, Bellboy and Man in Bar. Although he didn't find as much variety in his multiple characters as I would have liked, I was impressed with the dedication and effort he brought to the process. Once he was off-book, I was able to push him to make some significant changes and find an arc for his cross-examination that was non-existent when we began. He also made some risky choices, which ended up working very well. He came up with a way of sing/chanting the Priests' dialogue and requested specific props that helped him find his character. He also bravely took on the role of a homosexual man courting a young man in the bar, a role that some young actors might have found intimidating, especially at a Catholic university. I made it a point to let him play and make discoveries, then directed him to fine-tune his actions.

The two things I would likely do differently in terms of acting involve teaching the style and off-book deadlines. I think I underestimated how long it would take to teach and workshop the expressionistic acting style. If I had the opportunity, I would likely have divided the cast into smaller groups and spent more time with each actor individually. I would also probably give

them more specific homework assignments and have them showcase their work and give critiques, so they had a clearer idea of what I was expecting. The other main problem stemmed from actors not knowing their lines strongly until much later than expected, making it difficult to do as much detail and relationship work as I would have liked. I think I would move off-book deadlines closer to the start of the process and impose harsher penalties on those actors that don't come prepared. I would never consider disciplining a professional actor, but this experience made the difference between students and professionals incredibly clear and in the future, I will be better prepared to be more of a teacher and authority figure when I work with students.

One of the most successful aspects of the production was the collaboration between myself and my designers. I felt like my scenic, costume and sound designers quickly understood my vision for the production and brought a lot of great ideas to the process. The process of sharing ideas, giving feedback, adapting and compromising was positive for me and resulted in design elements that fit my vision, incorporated the creativity of each artist and created a world for the production that fit and enhanced the story of the play.

The only collaborations that proved disappointing were with my lighting designer and props person. The lighting collaboration started very positively and I felt, up until tech, that we were very much on the same page. The main failure was a result of the designer not delivering what we had discussed and my lack of assertiveness in asking for adjustments. Part of my failing was due to feeling rushed when all the technical elements were added at once, as opposed to a schedule where sound, lighting and costumes can each get the director's undivided attention.

Having cue-to-cue on Monday and opening on Friday with a show as complex as *Machinal* was frustrating. I didn't feel I was able to digest what wasn't working about the lighting as thoroughly as I would like, because I was watching and listening for all other elements, while receiving notes from faculty and fellow students. The process of designing and gathering props was also frustrating, as it became clear almost immediately that the props person was far from invested in the success of the show. She seemed to want to do the absolute minimum and was unable to find some simple objects called for in the script, which I was very easily able to secure on a quick trip to Goodwill. Props aren't glamorous, but they're important and gathering or building my own props took time away from other directing responsibilities.

Overall I'm pleased with the results of everyone's efforts in this process and I learned some important lessons, particularly in regard to working with students. I learned that I need to be better prepared to teach as I direct, making time to instruct them on skills they may not have developed in their acting curriculum or haven't yet experienced as young actors. I would also prepare a little bit more, particularly when tackling a style that I haven't worked with previously. Intellectually I understood expressionism and had a clear idea in my mind of what I wanted, but it would have probably benefited me to work more with my actors in callbacks and possibly do a sample lesson/coaching session before rehearsals began. I also would be more assertive about ensuring my designers were on the same page. I expected to see light cues the day before we did cue-to-cue with sound and costumes, but after building the cues, the designer left. At that point, I should have expressed my concern to Professor Larson as Production Manager. Despite all the challenges, I'm proud of the production and I think there

were more positives than negatives. I feel more prepared to take on future directing jobs, particularly those involving students.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The experience of directing *Machinal* at University of Portland has fortified my notions about the importance of preparation. The extensive research and analysis I completed well before rehearsals began proved invaluable to the success of the production. I learned an immeasurable amount about expressionism, the feminist movement, American society in the early twentieth century and women in theater. Most importantly, though, I learned how to apply this new knowledge to my vision for the production. While there are fewer opportunities to do such exhaustive research in the professional world, this experience has inspired me to pursue as in-depth research as possible. I felt very prepared to begin the rehearsal and design processes and to address challenges as they arose.

Also reinforced for me through this process is the importance of collaboration. In the past I've had varying experiences — some excellent partnerships and some not as successful — due to a lack of resources or difficulty communicating. In this case, for the most part, I felt like my designers were on the same page with me and working toward a common goal. I felt energized by their contributions to the planning process and was ultimately thrilled with the results. I also enjoyed collaborating with the actors and discovered, to my surprise, that I appreciated the teaching aspect of working with student actors. Having worked for many years with professional actors, it was a dramatic change to work with students that are in the early stages of learning their craft. Through this process, I realized how much I have to offer as a teacher and acting coach, as well as a director. I relished the balance of detail work while

keeping my eye on the bigger picture and I feel like I was able to successfully mentor some of my actors, and that is a very good feeling.

Another form of collaboration that I valued during this process was receiving input from my peers and professors. I've always appreciated feedback from others, as I acknowledge that I'm imperfect and won't catch every problem or be able to anticipate how others will perceive all aspects of the production. I was grateful to the faculty and graduate students that shared their thoughts throughout the process and integrating their ideas enhanced the final result.

The biggest discovery for me is that I've been on the right track in my directing work. I don't feel like any obstacle was too big or that I was stymied by any of the production's challenges. I had to adapt the way I operate at times, but I was able to draw from my previous experience, as well as my training at University of Portland to achieve my vision. While there were moments of doubt along the way, I'm pleased to know that directing theater is what I'm meant to do.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Auditions Notice

CASTING INFORMATION

The Play

Machinal is Sophie Treadwell's groundbreaking expressionist play, written in 1928. It chronicles the journey of a young woman, oppressed by a machine-like society into pursuing a loveless, but secure, marriage and other traditional feminine roles. The Young Woman gets a glimpse of a better life and begins to rebel against the system, and her resistance results in tragedy. The Young Woman's journey happens in nine scenes, where she interacts with office workers, is pressured to marry her boss by her mother, goes on a very unpleasant honeymoon, births a child she does not want, has an illicit affair, murders her husband, is put on trial and ultimately sentenced to death.

Characters

Please note that most actors will play several roles and may be asked to perform off-stage voices as well. In some cases, there is one particular role that is more significant than others an actor will play, those roles have been underlined. In those cases, the descriptions apply only to the underlined character. Also note that some roles may be reassigned, depending on the availability of additional actors.

**Denotes substantial role*

***Young Woman (F)** – early 20s, must be able to carry a tune, innocent, ready and eager for life and love, essentially soft and tender, unsuited for the mechanized world she lives in

Stenographer/Nurse/Girl in Bar/Reporter 2 (F) – multiple ages, professional, efficient, stiff

Filing Clerk/Young Doctor/Second Man in Bar/Reporter 1 (M) – multiple ages, gregarious, flirtatious, high-energy

Adding Clerk/Doctor/Man in Bar/Prosecutor/Guard (M) – multiple ages, serious, confident, efficient, hard, quick witted

Telephone Operator/Court Reporter/Reporter 3 (F) – early 20s, “young, cheap and amorous,” a total flirt, comfortable with her sexuality

***Jones/Man in Bar/Bailif/Barber (M)** – late 30s, larger than life, the boss, arrogant, fancies himself a comedian, expects everything to be in order and go as planned, condescending, impatient

Mother/Pregnant Woman in Bar/Spectator (F) – ages 25-50, a selfish nag

Bellboy/Boy in Bar/Defense Attorney/Priest (M) – multiple ages, confident, organized, plays for sympathy to the jury

***First Man in Bar (Dick Roe)/Judge/Jailor/Guard (M)** – early 30s, must be able to carry a tune and accurately pronounce Spanish, seductive, mysterious, aloof, comfortable in his skin, comfortable with his sexuality, a bit of a rebel and a dreamer

Bartender/Spectator/Barber (F) – mid 20s, a cog in the machine

Girl in Bar/Spectator/Matron (F) – multiple ages, a cog in the machine

Appendix B: Production Photos



Full Cast – Prologue



Episode 1: To Business



Mother and Young Woman – Episode 2: At Home



Young Woman and George H. Jones – Episode 3: Honeymoon



Episode 4: Maternal



Young Woman - Episode 4: Maternal



Episode 5: Prohibited



Dick Roe and Young Woman – Episode 6: Intimate



Young Woman and George H. Jones – Episode 7: Domestic



Episode 8: The Law



Episode 9: A Machine

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