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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

SANTA CRUZ

The Monster in The Machine

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Wendy Burr

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ABSTRACT

The Monster in The Machine

Wendy Burr

The following thesis maps the evolution of my dramaturgy for the UCSC production of *Machinal*, written by Sophie Treadwell and directed by Kirsten Brandt, in three sections. It serves to detail my process through evidence, analysis, interpretation and reflection. The first section I refer to as my “monster essay,” which places Treadwell’s work beneath the microscope, to be viewed through the lens of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s *Seven Theses of Monster Theory*. My essay exposes the fears and desires of 1920’s America through objective analysis and informed interpretation. This essay served to inform my work as a dramaturg, using Monster Theory as an empirical method of cultural and historical investigation. The second section is a direct reflection of my dramaturgy for the 2014 production of *Machinal*. It begins with an assessment of how Monster Theory influenced my process, followed by a linear evaluation of my role as a dramaturg. It functions to provide an account of the objective successes of this production’s dramaturgy in addition to exposing moments where further dramaturgy could have enriched the depth of the performance. Each of these documents is then supported by the evidence present within the third section, my dramaturgical casebook, which is separate to this file.

The casebook’s contents reflect a portion of my research, providing a glimpse at the socio-political and cultural elements of history that were relevant to both the historical moment of Treadwell’s writing in addition to how it has been interpreted since its debut in 1928 to the present. Furthermore, it documents historical evidence of the Snyder-Gray trial which was heavily influential to Treadwell’s work as being exemplary of the fears and desires present not only within the individual, but within the larger social sphere of the late 1920’s in America. Newspaper articles, essays, and other resources retrieved both online as well as from physical

documents provide concrete evidence that exposes the world of *Machinal*, both in its written form and as it was set in Brandt's production. In addition, this casebook reveals evidence of my dramaturgy that directly influenced the production. In particular, this is seen through the actor's packet, program notes, production journal and the external lobby display. Finally, it documents the designer and artist research, renderings and statements as well as production stills in order to historicize our production.

III. Monster Essay

A. Abstract

The following essay takes into account Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Seven Theses of Monster Culture while analyzing Sophie Treadwell's play *Machinal*, written and first performed in 1928. Using Cohen's theory, this essay exposes Society as a demonic monster that afflicts the world of the play, manifesting through the behaviors and interactions of Treadwell's characters. In conjunction with socio-political and historical contexts of The Roaring Twenties, this paper analyzes the time, feeling and place that Treadwell writes in response to and thereby paints the abstract body of the monster that is Society. In turn, it is asserted that each of Treadwell's characters are possessed by Society, adhering to its structures through various gender and social roles perceived not only as normal, but as natural forces of life. In conflict with such possession, the lead character, Young Woman, resists Society, breaking with social expectations imposed upon women of the time, and is subsequently eliminated for her transgressions. As a result, the outside observer must reconcile with the abrupt execution of an allegorical woman that has just cause to challenge an imperfect and oppressive system, but is not allotted the opportunity to do so in a humanistic and therefore progressive way. The conflict left unresolved, the observer must reflect upon their own relationship with social demons in order to exorcise the structures that promote inequalities and injustices that enable The Individual's demise within The Group that is Society.

B. Essay

In light of Monster Theory, as proposed by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Sophie Treadwell's play *Machinal*, written and first performed in 1928, exposes the monster of Society, which behaves demonically. Society's monster possesses the masses and ultimately corrupts the protagonist, Young Woman, which leads to her public trial and execution via the electric chair at the close of the play. Inspired by the real-life story of Ruth Snyder, a woman convicted and executed in 1928 for the premeditated murder of her husband, Treadwell puts to question what would lead a person – more specifically, a woman – in the socio-political context of her time to turn to such violent extremes. Exposing Society itself as the evil-doer, she illustrates the dangers of a supposedly safe social system via the downfall of an allegorical woman in 1920s America.

In the text of the play, we witness the arc of a 'young woman' that comes into her adult life, struggling to conform to the structure of the social order that she was born into. Namely, this structure is one of strict gender rules and expectations that are man-made constructs and not based upon absolute truths of biological difference. These written structures are a reflection of Treadwell's own perception of the world around her, struggling as a young, independent woman in 'a man's world' in the 1920's. Intended to be seen allegorically, the majority of the characters in *Machinal* serve to open a dialogue between the individual on the stage/page and any young woman, for example, within the world of the spectator. This use of allegories is a tool used to distance the audience from the illusion of the play as living or real in order to actively and critically analyze Treadwell's work in relationship to what one knows to be real in life. The importance of this "tool" is heightened when looking to Monster Theory as the Young Woman exemplifies the possibility of any if not all women in the context of the time suffering from social demons. It becomes clear in Treadwell's play that this suffering comes about if and when they are unable to conform to the unnatural structures and subsequent pressures of what it is to be "a woman" in such a time and place.

As a written work, *Machinal* is inherently cultural, for it arises out of a specific moment – out of “a time, a feeling and a place” (Cohen, 4). Therefore, any and all aspects of the text are part of the larger cultural body that is being addressed in Treadwell’s struggle to understand the functions of Society. Contextually, her work is specific to a period in America when women were coming into a greater sense of independence in the world for the very first time. The Roaring Twenties were marked by great change after the end of World War I in 1918 when modernity through industrialization, consumerism and urbanization began to flourish. In the year 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, giving women the right to vote. As a result, women also placed a foot in the door for future political activism that would continue to enrich their status among the larger social order, despite the standing notion that they were not fit to vote, let alone be of the same mental capacity as men.

Furthermore, women were increasingly interested in gaining a higher education and in becoming a lasting and vital part of the American culture and economy. They accomplished this by joining the workforce and moving beyond traditional roles of the passive and submissive housewife/mother that proved to be otherwise stifling over time. This struggle to transition becomes immediately obvious in Episode One of *Machinal*, as Young Woman is struck with misery at the social demands of fitting a role she does not feel is ultimately healthy or productive. In further parallels with the play, unmarried women were openly storming the urban lifestyle via fashion, sex and other vices publically available to them for the first time, such as smoking and drinking, without being met by the same stigmas as previous generations. The idea of the “New Woman,” exemplified through Treadwell’s character Telephone Girl, was one that wrought a brand new image which shocked many and enticed more to reject traditional roles and expectations through the pursuit of education, employment and independence both socially and within the home.

Despite this, many women seemed only to appreciate a small window of independence: going to school, working and partying until they found a suitable husband with whom to build a nest. We witness this directly in *Machinal*, as the Young Woman, in Episode Two, chooses to marry out of financial security despite her disgust for her husband and her fear of motherhood. At the time, it was a given that women were of lesser standing than men socially and even biologically; they received lower pay rates and experienced sexual discrimination in the workplace, at home and out on the town. It was a well known “fact” that men were superior and meant to dominate all aspects of the social order, and such dominance did not include cooking, cleaning and caring for the children. It is through this problematic notion in addition to many others that Treadwell’s protagonist is at odds with herself and Society. She wishes at once to be accepted within The Group but does not agree with its prerequisites in order to maintain status.

When approaching *Machinal* through the lens of Cohen’s theory in order to understand Society itself as a monster, there seems to be a lack of a body to poke and prod. We do not find ourselves as Dr. Frankenstein, hovering over a monstrous creation, attempting to understand it beneath the microscope, for there is no physical body present beyond the text of the play. However, when investigating further, we come to find that Society inhabits all bodies and products in culture. Society indeed gives way to culture, while culture has no significance without the established Group to perpetuate it. Society is the literal actions and lifestyles amongst grouped individuals that fall under an established sense of order and normalcy. In a less mystical way of coming to understand the body, or rather bodies, of Treadwell’s monster, we look to patterns of behavior and interactions between individual characters that function within an established group or social order which is Society. By determining the lifestyles and values of The Group, we are able to conceptualize the abstract body of the monster. The ways in which the individuals of The Group move, breathe and enact change is a response to their being seized by

Society in *Machinal*. Operating within a particular structure, those controlled by Society are responsible for both perpetuating and combating its monstrosity.

While Treadwell's work is written in response to her experiences with the world, "Society," in the case of the play as well as within our contemporary sense of the term encompasses a wide range of cultural implications. One published definition of the term describes society as:

A highly structured system of human organization for large-scale community living that normally furnishes protection, continuity, security, and a national identity for its members.

Under this definition, the desires, or fantasies, that are embedded in the manifestation and continual formation of Society are blatantly revealed. Namely, this is the desire for protection, security and national identity of The Group. Simultaneously, it reveals subsequent fears and anxieties of The Other – one who is not a member of The Group, or society. The Other threatens to dismantle the structures and continuity of social or cultural identity and way of life within the privileged circle. The Other, while equally human, rejects the established system and therefore cannot live symbiotically within The Group. We experience this sense of Otherness throughout *Machinal* as we witness the struggle of Young Woman to both conform to and reject Society.

In labeling Society as monster, instead of the particular individual within The Group, we must address what it is specifically that Treadwell reveals or warns against through the writing of *Machinal*. Following the arc of the Young Woman's tale, we are keyed in to a narrow, troubling scope of the struggles of the woman in 1920s America. This is a woman that cannot function within, and therefore cannot be fully possessed by, Society. More pointedly, Treadwell exposes the monstrosity of social roles and expectations of the Woman in the workplace, in the home – through love, marriage and motherhood – and in the justice system – as a deviant and a criminal. This is supported contextually when looking to the particular moment in which the text arose in 1928, as "the place" of a woman was far more constricting than the present day in America. This

“place,” as it were, is mapped out on the cultural body of both Woman and Man as they behave in accordance with the social order in *Machinal*.

Through the human body, Society possesses individuals as a demon might in order to do its bidding within the material world. Without the human medium, Society has no power or function in the world and is thereby unknowable. In *Machinal*, its presence is evident in the continual references to how a woman should live and behave as a worker, a wife and a mother, among other social roles. These “rules” are embodied within the culture and thereby the characters surrounding our protagonist who often chastise her for not conforming. Possessed, they are blind to the fact that their lifestyle is a construct, imposed upon them by Society. Indeed, they do not know themselves as subjects of Society, but rather as objects to be manipulated. The contrast of behavioral patterns between the Young Woman and all other bodies on the stage/page clue us in to the abstract body of the monster whose embrace she wishes desperately to reject in order live independently of the demons that surround her.

In a larger scope, it is important to recognize the historical functionality of “society” as a frantic attempt on behalf of humans to live together symbiotically in a chaotic world that may otherwise be driven by the selfishness of the individual. The desire to live in unity with one and other is a response to the fear that our wild or animalistic nature, if left to our own devices, threatens to disrupt the domestically tame and peaceful nature of communal living. This threat is ever apparent in *Machinal*, highlighting the ways in which we bring about our own fears through the very act of trying to pacify them. Young Woman behaves in a way that is a response to Society itself. She is not an obscure outside force, wishing to disrupt the flow of The Group. She is indeed born into The Group and must reconcile with the disagreeable expectations imposed upon her. Treadwell seems to imply that the contemporary role of Woman is intended to bring about a reliable structure that allows the demons of Society to do their will within the world without experiencing resistance. Even so, after centuries of these patriarchal structures, this cultural

monster is not only shaken but fundamentally threatened by the woman that challenges the integrity of the order. The monster itself lives in fear. Thus, in *Machinal*, we witness a battle between The Individual and The Group that cannot contain her nor she it.

It seems then that whether or not someone is born into The Group is irrelevant to these fears. While the individuals of The Group often promote the notion that a threat must always come from "The Outside," the Monster Theory supporting our new image of Society allows for corruption to emerge from the heart of the cultural body itself, evoking new dangers of communal living on large scales. As a result, Society must label The Other as Monster, all the while denying its own potential to be destructive and dangerous to the individuals both in and outside of The Group. In doing so, Society masquerades as ultimately "good," moving forward with the intention to excavate that which is "bad," in order to promote the overall well being of The Group over time. This denial on behalf of Society rejects the notion that It is ultimately responsible for breeding such individuals. It does so in order for the people to ignore the obvious constructs and subsequent malfunctions of an imperfect system and instead focus their anxieties on the imperfect subject.

By removing those who cannot or will not conform to the larger social order, Society rejects parts of an immediate, host-body from The Group. However, that which is monstrous is only an expression of Society that arises through an individual. This expression, as a result, is not intrinsically a part of the Young Woman in *Machinal*. Therefore, that which is seen as monstrous is not inherent to the human body; rather it is reactionary to Society and therefore behavioral. Thus, those monstrous "parts" will be reattached elsewhere, manifesting at any given time/place as a result of social structures that impose upon an individual. In the case of the Young Woman, we witness the social out-casting and execution, by right of law, of the human medium that refuses to be possessed. Throughout the play, she tries desperately to reject a life in which she must trudge mindlessly forward without questioning the integrity of the system, let alone be

crushed beneath its confining structures. Despite this, she continually falls into her prescribed social roles. Ultimately, she is driven mad by the contradictions surrounding her and turns to murder as a result. Her subsequent trial and execution is a response to the fear that Society gives way to such monstrosity. She is a woman that cannot play the part of a Woman and therefore she cannot be allowed to live. For, if she does, she may inspire others to resist their given roles, adding to the chaos already present in Society. Therefore, ending her life serves as a threat to all Others that consider challenging Society. In this, fear begets fear.

In an act of self denial, removing those who malfunction, the monsters or demons of Society always escape the present moment. Executing the Young Woman serves to silence her inability to function in accordance with the broken social order. In doing so, Society refuses to question the reasons why this is. Treadwell uses this as a tool for the observer to troubleshoot the issues of Society, leaving the conflict unresolved in her play. True to Monster Theory, the monsters of Society, as she paints them, are indeed “immaterial and [vanish], to reappear someplace else” (Cohen, 4). Throughout *Machinal*, we see the manifestation of several social demons corrupting the world around Young Woman. She struggles with sexual objectification at work and home along with the toils of financial responsibility, marital partnership and motherhood. As a result, she is claustrophobic, manic and depressive within the social order, for she feels she must abide by the rules but cannot do so in a way that is true to her Self. Eventually crushed by expectation and unnatural structures, she is unable to reconcile with her possessors and attempts to eliminate them rather than to submit. This task is impossible however as we know this monster is indivisible from the human medium. In order for the subject, Young Woman, to fully break away from the anxieties brought about by Society, she must die and no longer be in direct conflict with them. Through her death, “the monster” paves its escape from The Individual, only to be reborn at another time and place to threaten the unity, security and/or identity of The Group through a different body once again.

In *Machinal*, no singular evil afflicts humankind, rather these demons enter the body of the individual, and therefore The Group to which they subscribe, in order to enact various agendas of social/cultural change. Implied through biblical texts is the notion that only a divine, or good, spirit can cast out these possessors. In *Machinal*, we are to believe that The Law itself is such a divine power, enacting justice upon the evils of the world. Via politics, the American society has a historical record of both eradicating and introducing various demons to The Group. This eradication is done through means of campaigning, propagating, advocating and voting for or against certain laws, ordinances, etc. Politicians themselves serve as the priests and exorcists of the social order – charged with the quest to protect, defend and promote the good of The Group. Through politics, Society is at battle with The Self and The Other and is wholly responsible for not only the emergence but the escape of the monster over time/space.

An arguably sane woman in an insane universe, Young Woman's actions are monstrous in nature to those that judge her. The Young Woman rids the world of her direct connection to oppression as a woman through killing her husband, among other less offensive actions throughout the play. In response, Society rids itself of a violent body that is deemed unstable within The Group. This is an ironic disposition as she, too views the world/Society as a monster that cannot be reconciled with. Too weak to overcome the conflicts she faces without being met by further opposition, the Young Woman must be eliminated from The Group in order for Society to maintain its face-value of "goodness." In this elimination, the monster of Society escapes the grasp of the individual that questions its integrity by riding the world of her altogether. Her execution is indeed a necessary course of action in order for Society to endure.

Though the oppressed, Young Woman, and the possessed, her husband, lose their lives in *Machinal*, neither death truly solves the issues at hand. A poor reading might suggest that we have a need for the exorcism of all evil-doing Society and therein global salvation from demonic possessions. This suggestion is null, however, because, as a monster, once exorcised, the demons

will only ever rise again, for they are not bound by mortality and thus cannot be killed. Rather, they arise from the life force of human behavior and interaction, as seen in *Machinal*, suggesting that the only “way out” is an end to humanity itself. On the contrary, Treadwell is hinting at something much greater. Through her writing, she seems to suggest that we must continue to confront our very own disagreeable demons until they are no more. This is so in every aspect of Society. The process is a cyclical one that calls for a continual reevaluation of societal structures and standards of living that bring about inequality, injustice, immorality and ideas of Otherness.

Treadwell’s call is one that suggests we must continually work to rid ourselves of the behaviors and lifestyle patterns that contradict the utilitarian or utopian ideals we wish to promote. In *Machinal*, this means equality on all social/cultural fronts between both men and women. While we cannot eliminate society itself, we must strive to be possessed by demons that promote the overall well being of all individuals within The Group and continually sift out those which are contrary to this. As notions of Society change, each reemergence of these monsters becomes inseparable from the context of its rebirth. Thus, Treadwell warns that each generation must take on the task of evaluating and exorcising the structures under which they live in order to avoid the evil demons wrought by Society at any given moment.

IV. Reflection

The revelation of “the monster” in *Machinal* was not the crux of my dramaturgical work on this production. While the investigation of society, or “the machine,” served to enhance our perspective of understanding Treadwell’s work, it was not the be all, end all of our journey in telling such a story. The true success of my dramaturgy has been through the lens of Monster Theory as an objective approach to research, analysis and interpretation of history and culture in relation to *Machinal*. Thus, my contributions to our production of *Machinal* were founded on a critical analysis of Treadwell’s play, using Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s *Seven Theses of Monster Theory*. Briefly, Cohen’s theory can be applied as a method of interpreting cultural products in order to expose the desires, fears, fantasies and anxieties of any particular group of people at a given time and place. It is inherently dramaturgical in its process to understand factual elements of culture through history in order to make sense of how and why a product, like *Machinal*, came to be. Through Monster Theory, we are able to infer sociological implications of a specific time and place, allowing us to develop well informed interpretations through objective analysis.

In *Machinal*, the monster, as described by Cohen, is not at first as apparent perhaps as those present in *Dracula* or *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. However, using this theoretical lens quite clearly reveals deep-rooted struggles of individuals, particularly women, of the 1920’s in America. In addition, it exposes certain desires expressed by the playwright through her female characters that ring true to progressive politics and shifting cultural values of the time. The exposure of such points proved critical to acknowledge as we worked to produce this play, nearly 100 years after its Broadway premiere in 1928. As a result of this dramaturgical analysis, we were able to connect the struggles of the past with those of today in order to highlight the lasting relevance of this play and its rallying cry to reevaluate our social system and its increasingly insidious potential for monstrosity.

Monster Theory served to enhance my work by providing a framework in which to explore the dramaturgical concerns of the production. My investigation of *Machinal* was not simply to reveal the monster beneath the bed, but rather to point in every direction and exclaim, “There!” The undeniable truth of this analytical tool is that it works to expose the seams of history and culture, and then tears at them to reveal the stuffing inside. Monster Theory is concerned with the substance of the thing, the parts that make up the whole. Thus, we found it useful, as any and all of the dramaturgical research and findings of this production exposed just that. The anecdotes of culture and history that I provided to the cast and crew of this production through the working casebook, actor’s packet, on-site research and more served to educate and inform them of the context of Treadwell’s work. The application of that knowledge was subjective to the individual artists and their personal process. Even so, it is clear that an understanding of “the moment” in which *Machinal* arose built a foundation upon which to safely and justifiably expand our creative work as a team.

Beginning early in the Fall Quarter of 2013, my research for *Machinal* spread far and wide in its attempts to grasp at any and all relevant material. While the “Monster Essay” was the genesis of my work, my investigation did not end there. As the Monster Theory lens is inherently dramaturgical in its approach, it informed my process by guiding my focus and intentions toward exposing the facets of culture/society in contextual accuracy rather than loosely asserting opinions. Taking historical research and using fact-based information to understand the implications of Treadwell’s work served to justify my findings overall. Working primarily with the director, Kirsten Brandt, as well as my adviser, Dr. Michael Chemers, I was able to steer my investigation in such a way that my research would remain applicable to the production. Through their guidance, and more specifically through the director’s requests, I was able to first develop the actor’s packet, synthesizing much of my findings present within both the digital and the physical casebooks that were available to the cast and crew throughout the process.

The packet itself was intended to give a brief overview of the socio-political context of the time in which *Machinal* was written and our production was set. Initially, I had difficulty in narrowing down which information was most pertinent to include, but felt confident in retrospect that the subject matter was indeed relevant and on par with the director's requests. Such topics as American Life, Consumerism and Urbanization, Women's Rights and "The New Woman," in addition to other social and economic factors of the time were covered and provided a well rounded yet brief glimpse at the time and place of our production's setting. The packet proved to be an important contribution to our overall work on *Machinal* as it allowed members of the production to access succinct, conceptual information about the world of our play culturally and historically. In addition, I was present throughout the process in order to serve as a continual resource for any and all relevant dramaturgy to assist the artists in making informed, creative choices.

That being said, I had ambitiously hoped to provide a second packet that would explain other relevant concepts present in the play. These topics included but were not limited to homosexuality, abortion and birth control, Capitalism and The Alienation of the Worker, and the socio-political context of the Mexican Revolution and events along the Rio Grande. However, I did not have the opportunity to do so in such a formal manner as the first actor's packet due to scheduling and time management conflicts. As a result, other topics and inquiries that I encountered during the rehearsal process were primarily addressed verbally, conversing with the director or actors in person. Thus, there is little documentation of this on-site research and the totality of such findings. However, in conversation, I have come to find retrospectively that my presence in the rehearsal room allowed for more immediate work to occur, assisting the director and performers in a more personal and timely fashion.

My hands-on experience occurred most directly in the rehearsal space, conversing with the cast and crew about the socio-political and cultural contexts of our play. This contact began

during the first rehearsal when, following the director's presentation, I gave a brief but informative synopsis of my research. In addition to receiving the actor's packets, I provided those present at the rehearsal with an understanding of my dramaturgical perspective through the lens of Monster Theory. Following my presentation, we engaged in our first Q & A as they inquired about my findings in addition to other curiosities they had about *Machinal*. Overall, my first encounter with and presentation to the group was successful, as it opened the door to have a continual dialogue throughout the production process.

In the following weeks, my presence in the rehearsal room was accounted for nearly every night. It was pertinent, in the early stages of the production, to remain available primarily to the director and actors as they searched for a way to collectively understand the play from a dramaturgical viewpoint. This point was evident through the simplest of inquiries, such as how to pronounce a particular word, or the implications of certain slang to more controversial or not so easily answered questions, such as the historical processes of birth control and abortion in the 1920s. In addition to exploring particular topics or subject matter present within the play, I also assisted in coming to understand what in particular Treadwell was attempting to communicate through her writing. This meant breaking down aspects of her play, for example, both structurally, in her expressionistic style, and thematically, as she tackled larger social and political issues of the time. As a result, I actively assisted in shaping our collective perspective of our work and its meaning.

As time passed and the focus of the production shifted to specific staging and the finesse of performance, my physical presence was not needed on a day-to-day basis. In turn, we decided to communicate via email, having the stage manager send any dramaturgy-specific questions or notes within the nightly rehearsal reports. During my own time, I worked to the best of my ability to answer these questions, typically addressing them on nights that I would return to the space and observe the progress of our production. When the opportunity arose, I spoke directly

with the performers, designers or director as appropriate within the rehearsal room. In addition, I continually took notes of our process as well as particular points in our production that had the potential to benefit from further dramaturgical research and understanding. Two examples of this are present within Episodes 4 and 5, which will be expanded upon later. This experience in addition to my continual research provided the necessary wealth of information to effectively write the program notes and craft the lobby display, followed by the facilitation of the post-show discussions.

Both the program notes and lobby display were developed through further synthesis of my research, stretching as far back as the Fall Quarter to the moment in which they were printed and posted. As my adviser, Dr. Chemers, would refer to this process, it is “the Ghost Light way” to reduce, reuse and recycle ones work in order to reach the purest and most refined form of its being. With this notion, I moved forward, pulling the throughlines of information and dramaturgical gold out of my work and place it into the hands of the audience. As a result, I was able to prepare our viewers to be in their most ideal state of experiencing this production of *Machinal*, having a sense of the time and place from which it arose and the implications of the work as we encounter it today. The results of such efforts became a rewarding experience as I watched audience members before the show, during intermission and following the performance reading the notes and even going so far as to take pictures of the lobby display outside of the Main Stage.

People expressed both their intrigue and appreciation for the dramaturgical grounding that was available to them. This was the case for Professor Patty Gallagher, who approached me in congratulations for my work, commenting that she is typically one to toss the program notes after the first two sentences. However, in this case, she was drawn in to the writing and felt well-informed and confident about her understanding of what our production was about. Another example of my works success, as told from the point-of-view of one performer’s, Ken Chang’s,

family member was not felt until intermission. This was when he was struck with confusion about the play, having no prior knowledge or grounding in the material addressed. However, as Chang relayed to me, he chose to read the program notes and lobby display, in search for some form of solace. As a result, he experienced a revelation about the play and was more readily able to take in the many facets of our production. With this knowledge, it seems clear that the available resources served to inform the viewer of the world of our play as a part of the overall experience. I worked to provide a lens through which to see our production culturally and historically, as a form of developing a dialogue with both the present and the past as our audience encountered their marriage through the performance.

In one of my final steps as a dramaturg for this production, I lead two post-show discussions that engaged both the audience and performers in conversation about our performance as well as the larger discourses present in Treadwell's play. As guided by the director as well as my adviser, I developed a series of questions (noted in the appended casebook) in advance to navigate through the discussion. During each talk-back these proved to be extraordinarily helpful in maintaining my own grounding and confidence in both asking and answering questions. It goes without too much extrapolation that my research and analysis up until that point served to assist me as well in crafting responses to audience questions for which I may otherwise be at a loss.

For the most part, people were interested in the acting and performance process more so than the socio-political and cultural analysis that I had up my sleeve. However, at times in the conversation, I was allotted the opportunity to address both the audience and the cast in provoking thought and response to my inquiries. One question that was of the utmost importance to me as well as the director was whether or not the subject matter of *Machinal* was still relevant to a contemporary audience and if we are still living "in the machine." Something truly amazing occurred in this moment. In each instance that I posed the question, the audiences

stirred in their seats; talking over one and other, some even gestured outward in their resounding “Yes, of course.” A truly rewarding moment, groups of people from various backgrounds and ages were so moved by our work that they had a visceral response when connecting our performance to their own lives.

Following this, at each talk-back, there was one individual that made a point to ask whether or not the audience was meant to sympathize with the character Young Woman and forgive her for her actions. They expressed a sense of inner-conflict, being at odds with “who is to blame” for the atrocities that unfolded. In this moment, I saw myself in an opportune position to utilize my own analysis of Treadwell’s work and the collective perspective of this production. I chose to respond not with a simple answer, but rather a series of questions that would direct each audience member to go out in to the world and consider Treadwell’s intentions of leaving the conflict unresolved in her play. It is my understanding that her hope was to provoke audiences in to considering their own positions in society, regardless of their demographics or social status and question how “the machine” affects their lives and their choices. It is not for me or any other member of this production to prescribe a simple answer about how one should walk away from *Machinal*, believing one thing or another to be the direct problem or solution. It seems clear that Treadwell’s intentions were to provoke complex thought about social structures, and not to provide simple solutions to the obstacles in her writing. Thus, those doors were left open and I, as a dramaturg, ushered our audiences through them, to see the world in a new light, with the support of our incredible production team for shaping that vision.

Overall, my dramaturgical work on *Machinal* was founded on an investigation that spread far and wide, becoming more refined over time in order to support our production effectively. During the process, I often confronted questions of cultural and social contexts within the play, particular logistics, as well as historical relevance and accuracy of topics. Further along in the process, however, the work that I did outside of the rehearsal room was less immediate.

Due to over scheduling, as a result of being a full-time student, my contributions over time were less frequent than I would have ideally liked to provide. In turn, some questions went unanswered or only briefly scratched the surface of their depth and potential importance in informing our production. However, the fact that my research began early in the Fall Quarter served to benefit that which I was able to provide during the rehearsal process in addition to my work shaping the actor's packets, program notes and lobby display. Even so, in an ideal context, there are particular aspects of the play that I would have further expanded on dramaturgically, if I had time. For, it seems to me, that an informed decision is far more powerful than one based on speculation.

This seems to be the case, for example, in Episode 4, "Maternity." Contextually, our lead character Young Woman has just given birth to a baby girl that she wants nothing to do with. As a result, she is called a "modern, neurotic [woman]" by her doctor as a result and forced to be with her infant, despite her resistance. In the scene, she is so repulsed by the thought of being near her husband and child that she is on the brink of vomiting. She wishes nothing more than to be "let alone" in hopes that she may finally find peace and rest. The monologue that ensues while she is in solitude is one of apparent madness that is ultimately quite dark,

YOUNG WOMAN [alone]: Let me alone – let me alone – let me alone – I've submitted to enough – I won't submit to anymore... tired – too tired – dead – no matter – nothing matters – dead... no matter – it doesn't matter – I'll rest – I'll lie down – it weighs me – it's over me – it weighs – weighs – it's heavy – it's a heavy book – no matter – it doesn't matter – lie still – don't move – can't move – rest – forget – they say you forget – a girl – aren't you glad it's a girl – a little girl – with no hair – none... no matter- it doesn't matter... George H. Jones – oh don't – please don't! Let me rest – now I can rest – the weight is gone – inside the weight is gone – it's only outside – outside – all around – weight... I'll not submit anymore – I'll not submit – I'll not submit –

From this, we see in Treadwell's writing quite clearly that Young Woman is suffering, likely from postpartum depression. This is inferred through her written behavior and dialogue, which was further enhanced on stage. While notions of reading this monologue in such a light were briefly discussed by the director, the actors and me in the rehearsal process, it ultimately did not define

the art of staging and performing this section. In this case, a dramaturgical grounding of the medical implications was not absolutely necessary in order for the performance to be effective, though it would have been beneficial.

On the contrary, the execution of this scene was still profoundly unsettling. Furthermore, it successfully landed with the audiences its communicated distress and displacement of the Young Woman, in parallel with other women over time, suffering from similar contexts. In fact, the secondarily staged action portrayed several women in multiple circumstances of both pain and joy within the maternity ward that Treadwell had not allotted for in her script. Even without an in-depth dramaturgical analysis of the relevant action, the performance was moving in its ability to communicate a vast range of human (particularly female) experience in connection to childbirth. As a dramaturg, however, I wish I had time in my process to bring an understanding of both a scientifically and sociologically based account of postpartum depression in addition to birthing practices and maternity wards of the 1920s. In retrospect, I ideally would have provided an opportunity to increase the depth of how our story was expressed through further dramaturgy.

The same struggle was true in Episode 5, "Prohibited," in my opinion, when coming to understand the context of both male and female homosexuality in the late 1920s. While the script itself implies homoeroticism and even defines one character as "a middle-aged fairy," there is little provided by Treadwell to interpret how this character and his presumable date/male counterpart, "the BOY" who is "young, untouched" are perceived together in a public space, flirting. In addition, there is no mention of a homosexual female couple within the script. However, as a choice by the director, two female ensemble members were given the action of courting one and other while also providing a musical soundscape to the scene.

Having two well trained singers on stage was a practical choice in developing the environment and mood of the speakeasy in this episode. However, there is something far more

interesting about the director's choice to imply that the two women have a romantic – and perhaps sexual – connection. Not noted by Treadwell, their interactions were secondary to the script and could only be interpreted via their behavior. In this, my urge as a dramaturg was to provide both the male and female couples with the socio-political and historical contexts of their station as homosexuals in the 1920s.

During the performance, I observed the reactions of the audience members as the ensemble enacted Episode Five. As I watched, it seemed clear the performance had little risk involved while expressing homosexuality on stage. Both the performers and the audience members seemed comfortable and within a safe environment to perform homosexuality at a time and place that contextually may have been more dangerous due to social stigmas. I am inclined to believe this comfort is so because we are in a community that practices social equality and acceptance, particularly of “non-traditional” sexuality and gender identities. Dramaturgically, however, it was unclear to me whether or not the actions and interactions of these so-called “non-traditional” couples were accurately portrayed in a public, social setting. Because the potential “risks” were not explored, I believe that further research on my behalf would have provided a solid foundation from which to build. Having a precise understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of homosexuality would have allowed for more directly informed choices to be made.

While it is true that I did not have the time to provide my highest ideal of dramaturgy for the production, my work still proved to inform the production of *Machinal* in a fundamental way. Having a head start on understanding certain concepts and various socio-political and cultural circumstances of Treadwell's play enabled me to have several months to filter through my research. In this, I was able to consolidate that which seemed most relevant to my understanding of the director's approach to *Machinal* in an attempt to inform and thereby benefit our production. Over time, I continued to fine-tune my written work with the assistance and

feedback I received from both my adviser and the director along the way. Therefore, I was able to effectively structure my dramaturgical contributions and remain an integral part of our production. In retrospect, it became clear that having done research and analysis far in advance to the production was truly beneficial in serving as a dramaturg for *Machinal*. Thus, I now understand that it is of the utmost importance to not only prepare but to continually refine one's dramaturgical findings in order to remain efficient and effective throughout the process.

Furthermore, the support I received from all of the members of our production – both cast and crew – as well as the Theater Arts Department and its faculty has proven a great asset to my work. If not for the continual encouragement of these individuals, I would have felt at a loss in this endeavor. I am incredibly thankful to my adviser, Dr. Chemers, and my director, Kirsten Brandt, for the opportunity to take on the challenge of being the first full-fledged student dramaturg for a production at UCSC. Their guidance throughout the process has made a world of difference in shaping my approach to dramaturgy and analysis of *Machinal* in a way that remained culturally and historically grounded within its context.

Working beside them as well as the cast and crew has been a fruitful experience that has taught me an incredible amount about what it is to be a vital part of a team while taking on an objective perspective to our art and its dramaturgical foundation. As a result, I feel prepared to move into the larger world of theater and performance art as an emerging dramaturg. The many months spent researching, analyzing and interpreting my findings for *Machinal* while working alongside a group of such talented individuals has given me the experience and confidence necessary to move forward in this art.

V. APPENDIX

I. Casebook – not appended to this document: archived at UCSC Theater Arts

1. Part One

- a. Master's Thesis
- b. Actor's Packet
 - i. Production History (1928)
 - ii. Research (Synthesized)
 - iii. Monster Essay
- c. Historical and Contemporary Research
 - i. *Machinal*
 - ii. Snyder-Gray Trial

2. Part Two – Research (continued)

- a. The Roaring Twenties
- b. Women

3. Part Three – Research (continued)

- a. German Expressionism
- b. Miscellaneous

4. Part Four

- a. Visual Research
- b. Designer Statements, Renderings & Production Stills

5. Part Five

- a. Methodology/Theory
- b. Program Notes
- c. Notes on Lobby Display
- d. Evidence of Outreach
- e. Questions & Notes on Post-show Talkbacks
- f. Production Journal
- g. Reviews of Production (2014)
- h. *Machinal* Script

II, Lobby Display – not appended to this document: archived at UCSC Theater Arts

VI. Bibliography

A. Monster Essay

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