Machinal: A Sourcebook For The Actress Playing "young Women"

2009

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MACHINAL: A SOURCEBOOK FOR THE ACTRESS PLAYING “YOUNG WOMAN”

By

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B.A. University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2006

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
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in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

This thesis will document four phases of my rehearsal process/performance while portraying the role of Helen in Sophie Treadwell’s *Machinal*.

The first phase of the project will be researching and analyzing historical material on: Sophie Treadwell (the playwright) Ruth Snyder (the murderess upon whom the character of Helen is based), and the actual murder that occurred in the 1920’s.

The second phase that will be documented is a character analysis. I will take each episode and divide it into the following sections: given circumstances, what is said about the character by the playwright, by others, or by herself, objectives, tactics, vocal traits, and physical traits.

The third phase will include a written journal of my experiences as an actor as they occurred during the rehearsals and performances.

The fourth and final phase will include a self-analysis of the performance. I will reflect on my abilities in synthesizing the research and character analysis found in phase one and two into the actual performance. In addition, Committee Chair, Mark Brotherton, and my thesis Committee Members, Kate Ingram and Vanduyn Wood will also give written responses.

The performances will be held February 14-17, and 21-24, 2007 in the University of Central Florida’s Black Box Theatre. Dr. Julia Listengarten will direct the performance.
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“It is in the shelter of each other that the people live…” –Irish Proverb

There are so many people I have been lucky enough to share this journey with.

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My own personal Richard Roe: who loves life and tastes joy. Thank you for the new eyes.

For all my fellow artists and friends, thank you for inspiring me daily…”We are the music makers, we are the dreamers of the dreams”-Arthur O’Shaughnessy (Brainymedia).
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Treadwell strove to represent feminine vacillation and desperation in the search for selfhood in an altering and amorphous society” (Heck-Rabi 1976: 217)

“I do not wish women to have power over men, but over themselves! ... The helpless- the degraded position of women is the presumption of my mind...” (Dickey 115)
-Sophie Treadwell, 1921

Sophie Treadwell’s Machinal, based on the murder committed by Ruth Snyder, was written and produced in 1928. In her introduction to the play, Ms. Treadwell asks the reader to explore society as a “machine”, the literal English translation of the French title. We meet a young woman caught in a world, or “machine”, where she cannot operate, and Ms. Treadwell is careful to mention that this is “an ordinary young woman, any woman” (Treadwell xii). Ms Treadwell describes the plan of the play as:

To tell this story by showing the different phases of life that the woman comes in contact with, and in none of which she finds any place, any peace. The woman is essentially soft, tender, and the life around her is essentially hard, mechanized. Business, home, marriage, having a child, seeking pleasure- all are difficult for her- mechanical, nerve nagging. Only in illicit love does she find anything with life in it for her, and when she loses this, the desperate effort to win free to it again is her undoing (Treadwell xii).

In 1928, Sophie Treadwell was a journalist and wrote Machinal based on her inspiration from work. Covering the trial of Ruth Snyder, an actual woman who killed her husband in 1927, Ms. Treadwell felt inspired to question what the driving force could be behind this and numerous other spousal murders in the 1920’s.

My attention was drawn to a show that currently airs on network television entitled, “Snapped”. The program investigates women who “snap” mentally and kill their husbands,
families, or boyfriends. In addition, I began hearing more about the missing child Caylee Anthony, who is believed killed by her young mother. *Machinal* is a story about a murder, written in the hotbed of women’s political activism in the 1920’s. Yet the play presents issues that I feel are currently relevant. This is because it represents women’s challenges in business, marriage, and home life, concerns that are still being struggled with today. This feeling of relevance is why I was attracted to using the role of Helen and this script as my thesis project. The opportunity to explore an ordinary woman’s great effort to operate in an industrial and patriarchal society became the ultimate intrigue.

As an actor, I had the opportunity to explore a complex and historically based role in a play that has extreme modern day relevance. With fellow actors, designers, and our directing team I had the opportunity to participate in creating a conceptual world of a machine: and the representation of what happens, as our director Julia would often say, “when a flower is caught in a meat grinder.”

My goal is to construct an actor’s source book of my historical research and character analysis. Also included are my trials and errors for any other young woman to explore if she is cast in this role.
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH

Researching the background of the playwright can often yield insight into their work. Knowing where Sophie Treadwell came from and what her life experience was like is an important part of understanding the inspiration and creation of the play *Machinal*. Likewise, researching Ruth Snyder’s life, the murder she committed, and the trial in which she was convicted can aide in illuminating choices for the character of the Helen/Young Woman. The information I found gave me a greater understanding of the historical climate of the play and deepened my observations of the character of Helen/Young Woman.

Sophie Treadwell

Sophie Anita Treadwell was born on October 3rd, 1885 to Alfred B. and Nettie Fairchild Treadwell (Rodriguez, “Sophie Treadwell”). As a child, Sophie had two very opposing female models in her life: her mother Nettie, and her grandmother, Anna Gray Fairchild. Anna was a Scottish immigrant and a widow, who maintained a 150-acre ranch in Stockton, California on her own. She was a very strong and independent woman, and the memory of early life on the farm stayed with her into adulthood. Nettie, her mother, was a very different kind of woman. Sophie’s father, Alfred, left Nettie when Sophie was six years old. Nettie continued to have brief affairs with Alfred whenever he decided to come back to her, and never followed through on officially divorcing him. Nettie’s co-dependence was the exact opposite of Ms. Treadwell’s grandmother. Sophie often said that she felt like both women were mingled inside of her, and the part that might weaken her spirit with codependence became a personal fear (Dickey, “Sophie Treadwell” 97).
Despite his absence in the family home, Sophie spent several summers visiting with her father while he worked as a City Prosecutor and a Police Court Judge (Dickey, “Illustrated Biography”). This exposure, as well as her future career in journalism, certainly must have aided her portrayal of a working courtroom in Episode 8 of *Machinal*. Also, Alfred fathered Sophie into a background of mixed heritage. Alfred’s father and grandfather both traveled to Mexico and married women of Spanish descent. Even Sophie’s middle name, Anita, means “little Anna” in Spanish (Dickey, “Sophie Treadwell” 99). Sophie struggled with the idea of Spanish women being deemed as unreliable and wild, and she would often pose for pictures in Mexican dress (Dickey, “Sophie Treadwell” 98). Her fascination with the culture can be seen in many of her plays, including *Machinal*. One of the characters in *Machinal*, Richard, goes to Mexico often to work. The country is romanticized in the scene between Helen and Richard, and he even sings her a verse of a popular traditional Mexican song by the title of “Ceilito Lindo” (which he translates to her as ‘little heaven’). The “little heaven” of a wild and free Mexico is ideal to Helen, in juxtaposition with the restricted world of her marriage.

Like her fascination with her mixed heritage, Sophie also developed an activism for Women’s Rights at an early age. She attended the University of California at Berkeley, which had a large center for women’s rights due to the State of California granting women the right to vote in 1902 (9 years before the National Government gave women the right to vote with the 19th Amendment in 1911.) At Berkeley she was able to see Sarah Bernhardt perform at the Greek Theatre in Phedre in 1906, and kept her self very busy with drama clubs, women’s crew, editing a school magazine, and majoring in foreign languages (Dickey, “Sophie Treadwell” 99). In addition to school activities, Treadwell studied shorthand and worked in the circulation department of the *San Francisco Call* (Rodriguez, “Sophie Treadwell”). Her involvement in so
many activities made Treadwell very nervous and sleepless, habits that would follow her for the rest of her life. It seems likely that Helen’s nervous habits in Machinal, such as adjusting her hair, were actually nervous habits of Treadwell. This nervousness even led to a breakdown her senior year that led to her inability to walk for two months (Dickey “Sophie Treadwell” 100). College seemed to expose Sophie to stress, culture, women’s rights, but most important of all, it was where she began to write.

In the year 1906 Sophie graduated from Berkley with a Bachelor of Letters in French, and wrote her first play: a one act entitled A Man’s Own. She then began freelancing articles for the San Francisco Examiner, while also performing in Vaudeville as an actress (Rodriguez, “Sophie Treadwell”). In 1909 the San Francisco Bulletin hired on Sophie as a reporter, and then in 1910 she married the sports columnist William O. McGeehan (Rodriguez, “Sophie Treadwell”). Six months into her marriage Sophie ended up in the St. Helena Sanitarium in California, where she was diagnosed with “nervous prostration” (Dickey, “Illustrated Biography”). Treadwell recovered after six months and remained married to McGeehan her entire life, and seemed to have a great deal of respect for him based on what little is known (Dickey, “Illustrated Biography”). Her hesitation about the institution of marriage seemed to come from her parents situation, rather than her own.

Sophie participated in a 150 mile march to Albany from New York City with women’s suffrage advocates to petition for the right to vote, clearly illustrating her feelings of women’s rights (Dickey, “Sophie Treadwell” 101). She also joined the Lucy Stone League, and helped to support the group that eventually succeeded in forcing the government to allow a woman to copyright under her own name rather than her husband’s (as this was previously the law). Further
declaration of independence in her marriage was the fact that she and her husband held different residencies. Also, Sophie maintained the kind of relationship with her husband that allowed her to have an open affair with the artist Maynard Dixon for four years (Rodriguez “Sophie Treadwell”).

Indeed, Sophie was not one to follow all the rules. Despite her nervous habits, she was a woman of great independence and strength. She stayed in France to cover the First World War when other female and male reporters left, and she covered the Mexican Revolution for the New York Tribune. While in Mexico, she also was allowed an exclusive interview with Pancho Villa in 1921 (Wainscott 316).

Prior to the wars, the Armory Show opened in New York (1913) with the motto of, “The New Spirit”. It is now famous for hosting the art forms that came to be known as Dada, cubism, expressionism, and symbolism. (Dickey, “Sophie Treadwell” 104). The large amount of expressionism in Machinal exhibits the affect that this, “The New Spirit” and visitation of similar artistic salons, had on Sophie’s artistic taste (Wainscott 317). These Salons continued for the next few years, and the group of artists and intellectuals that Sophie belonged to were united in their views on social injustice and the dangers of growing consumerism. However, Sophie felt the need to drive to the Broadway stage in spite of its commercial tendencies. She felt she could reach a wider audience by having her plays produced on the larger stages of the “great white way” (Dickey, “Sophie Treadwell” 106). Her first play on Broadway, Gringo, opened in 1922. She also studied acting, and ended up producing and performing in her play O. Nightingale on Broadway in 1925 (Greenwald 214). It was in 1927 that she attended the Snyder-Gray trial that
inspired *Machinal*, and the show opened on Broadway as early as September 7, 1928 at the Plymouth Theatre (Dickey, “Real Lives” 99).

Sophie spent the rest of her life traveling, writing, publishing, producing, and seeing two revivals of *Machinal* before her death in 1970. There have been two more since, one in 1990 at The New York Shakespeare Festival and one in 1993 at The Royal National Theatre (Rodriguez, “Sophie Treadwell”). While she did see two revivals happen, she did not live to see her play inducted into the canon of American Literature for the Twentieth Century. *Machinal* is widely accepted and acclaimed for its feminist message and expressionistic qualities (Wainscott 317). Too often the playwright does not live to see the work find its place in history, but *Machinal* has proved its relevance by maintaining a place for itself among American dramas.

**Ruth Snyder: Background**

Mamie Ruth Brown was born to Harry and Josephine in 1891, but she later called herself Ruth May (MacKeller 23). The Browns had a hard life according to Ruth; her father Harry had epilepsy problems and her mother tried to pull in extra income by performing practical nursing duties (24). Ruth was herself a child who suffered multiple health problems. From the ages of six to eighteen she underwent intestinal surgery, had serious sunstroke, problems with fainting, and was not able to be very athletic (Noe, “All About”).

Ruth dropped out of school after eighth grade and took a job working the graveyard shift at the New York Telephone Company (Noe, “All About”). This earned her fifteen dollars a week, which she handed over directly to her family. After two years, she began to learn stenography at a business college in order to find a better job. This worked out well for Ruth, as
she ended up in several office jobs with normal daytime hours and earned a salary that allowed her to keep a little bit of the money for herself (MacKeller 24). Ruth had grown into a beautiful blonde, tall, and slim woman. She began to be known for stimulating interest from the boys. However, Ruth never seriously dated anyone until she met Albert Schneider (25).

Albert Schneider found Ruth a job at Hearst Publications where he worked, after hearing her voice on the other end of an accidental phone call. When she took the job, she began to be pursued by Mr. Schneider. It was said that he flirted with her endlessly at work, playing with her hair and asking her out (Noe, “All About”). She was advised by colleagues not to go out at night with Mr. Schneider, because he had a reputation for being a womanizer. Ruth listened, and accepted a lunch date instead (MacKeller 25). He made many failed sexual advances, but seemed to be encouraged by her respectability. When Ruth moved to another job, he continued to call on her and began to take her out to dinner, movies, and the theatre. Ruth turned down one marriage proposal before finally accepting another in March 1915; the second proposal included an engagement ring with a diamond solitaire (25).

Ruth and Albert Schneider were married on July 24th, 1915. Foreshadowing their future, the marriage got off to a rocky start right after the ceremony. Albert found out that Ruth was feeling quite miserable because she was menstruating. He lost his temper and left her to stay with his parent’s for the night (26). As they settled into married life, Albert stopped taking Ruth to dinner, or movies, or the theatre. The courtship was truly over. Albert was an avid outdoorsmen, and Ruth hardly saw her husband because of all his activities. She did manage to make a few changes, however. Albert’s boat was named after an old girlfriend, Jessie G., and she had him rename it Ruth (Noe, “All About). She also convinced him to change their last name from
Schneider to Snyder, because she thought the former sounded too foreign (MacKeller 26).

Albert was not keen on having children, though Ruth desperately wanted them. She had a secret, minor operation to help her chances and was soon pregnant. Albert was outraged, even more so when they had a daughter, Lorraine, instead of a son (27).

Although Ruth usually got what she wanted, the marriage still had many struggles. Albert was compulsive about cleanliness, and obsessed with expenses. He did do well for them monetarily and the Snyder’s enjoyed a new house, new boat, and summer rentals on Long Island. However, his temper was becoming uncontrollable. He was known in the neighborhood for chasing a boy into his home and beating him unconscious just for sending a baseball through the Snyder’s kitchen window (MacKellen 29). He was enraged when his daughter would not eat her breakfast and he would run upstairs, grab a pistol, and threaten to shoot himself. He complained loudly at restaurants, and on one occasion swept his arm across the table breaking all of the plates, glasses, and knocking the silverware to the floor (29). He also insisted on keeping a photograph of his ex-girlfriend, Jessie Guisnard, hanging in the bedroom in every house they lived in (Now, “All About”). As time passed, Ms. Snyder’s photograph disappeared from Mr. Snyder’s desk at work (MacKeller 30). He was rumored to be taking out girls from the office, and Ruth even found ticket stubs in his jacket for shows that they had not seen together. In addition to cheating, Albert began making his own wine and beer in the cellar, regularly drinking bootleg whiskey, and physically abusing Ruth (31).

The neighborhood knew Mrs. Snyder as a lighthearted tomboy. It was said that she could make her budget stretch, and cut ruthless deals with all of the merchants up and down her street
(28). While appearing as a cheerful mother and homemaker to the neighbors, Ruth was not truly enjoying being a wife. Her health continued to decline after being married to Albert. She experienced fainting spells, heart palpitations, headaches, hot flashes, and abdominal pains (MacKeller 31). Ruth wanted to get a divorce from Albert, but she wanted alimony and custody of Lorraine. The only way to accomplish this was to prove his brutality or adultery. In the 1920’s Albert’s hitting Ruth occasionally was not enough to be considered brutality, and Ruth could not seem to catch Albert in the act of cheating (31). She was stuck in the marriage.

Later on, Ruth ended up finding some reprieve. She met a man by the name of Judd Gray, a corset salesman, at a dinner with some mutual friends (Noe, “All About”). It turned out that the other couple had to leave early, and Ruth and Judd were left alone. Judd asked Ruth up to his office, which was deserted. Ruth mentioned that she had terrible sunburn, and Judd mentioned that he had some camphor ice. She removed her dress from her shoulders for him to administer the medicine, and the affair moved on from there (MacKeller 39).

The two became inseparable from that night on. Judd had a conservative wife and also wanted to escape a mundane family life. Ruth had an abusive husband and loveless marriage (Noe, All About). They found abandon and excitement in each other. While the reporters later labeled the affair as boring, to the two in it, it seemed the whole world. They wrote letters back and forth, and saw each other as often as possible (Taylor, “Dead Men”). Ruth’s mother, Granny Brown, lived with the Snyder’s and even approved of the affair: as long as Ruth was home before Albert. Lorraine called Judd “Uncle Judd” and was quoted as saying he was nicer than her mean old daddy (MacKeller 41).
September 1925 was a turning point for Ruth. She wanted to get her daughter out of the house, away from her abusive father, and into a convent school. She even started working selling stock in a dental company to try and save up tuition (41). When Ruth proposed the idea, Alfred hit the roof and refused to let his daughter leave the house (42). Directly after that, Ruth became extremely interested in life insurance. It appears that Alfred’s behavior and her affair began to stir up thoughts of how good life could be without her husband. She questioned Gray about his life insurance, and found out that as opposed to Gray’s respectable thirty thousand to be left behind for his family, Albert only had one thousand dollars worth. He had already had two near death experiences working on their car in the garage, and Ruth decided to make a case that he needed more. Knowing that Albert would never agree to pay more, Ruth shrewdly made a deal with their insurance agent. If the insurance agent would stop by and help her to convince Albert to sign a blank form, she would call the next day and let the agent know how much they had decided on (42). That is exactly what happened, and Albert Snyder suddenly, and without his knowledge, had life insurance to the tune of a $45,000 with double indemnity and a $5,000 dollar policy without it. He was now worth more dead than alive (44).

**The Murder**

On Sunday, March 20th, 1927, nine-year-old Lorraine Snyder found her mother passed out, and telephoned for the neighbors to come over. When they got there, Mr. and Mrs. Mulhauser saw Ruth Snyder lying across the top landing of her stairs in her nightgown. Her hands were not tied, but her feet were loosely tied with some clothesline (Noe, All About). Lying nearby was a gag and another set of rope. Mr. Mulhauser began to look around, and he found Albert Snyder dead in his bed. He was lying on his stomach, his face
smothered in the pillow. A piece of picture wire was stuck in his neck, like it had been wrapped around and pulled in order to strangle him. He was in his pajamas. (MacKeller 3). Mr. Mulhuasur informed his wife, and they put Mrs. Snyder to bed in Lorraine’s room. She did not ask about her husband, nor was she told about the discovery of his dead body. Regular patrolmen in the neighborhood stopped by and assumed the case to a regular burglary with violence since someone had been seen in the preceding weeks prowling around. She was questioned for about five minutes and then left to rest. She still had not asked about her husband (4).

Mrs. Snyder claimed to have been knocked unconscious, but two doctors examined her and could find no evidence of a wound that would have led to such a state. Ruth Snyder was reported to be calm and collected, and still not asking about her husband (4). A third doctor examined her, and again no signs of a blow to the head were found. She did not have marks on her wrists from “attempting to break free of her hand ties”. The doctor’s also dismissed Mrs. Snyder’s claim to have been unconscious for five hours (6). When the New York City Commissioner arrived, he informed Mrs. Snyder about her husband’s death. It was said that she shed a few tears, and that was it. Then, she told her story.

Ruth claimed that her family had come home from a party at two o’clock in the morning (Taylor, “Dumb bell”). Albert let Lorraine and Ruth out of the car at the front door and went to park in the garage. Ruth said that there was a window of about five minutes when someone could have come in the front door while Albert was in the garage and she and Lorraine were upstairs. Albert quickly fell asleep, and Mrs. Snyder thought she heard Lorraine in the hallway. She went
out to check, and was then attacked by a large man. She claimed to have been hit on the head with a large object, which she said resulted in being unconscious for five hours (MacKeller 7).

Upon inspection, the house had been turned upside down. But it did not fit with regular burglaries. Everything was strewn about, including couch cushions and kitchen’s pots and pans. Mr. Snyder’s gold watch with a platinum chain was on the floor in the bedroom, although his wallet was emptied (7). None of the information provided made logical sense to the investigators. The Snyder household was modest, and not worth the large risk of burglarizing. Also, time is of the essence in burglary, and the house was very well turned inside out.

Considering that only the money out of Albert’s wallet and a small amount of Ruth’s jewelry was reported, the burglar seemed to have taken a lot of time to search the house. When the detectives continued investigating, they found some of the “missing jewelry” wrapped in cloth and stashed under Mrs. Snyder’s mattress, several canceled checks made out to H. Judd Gray and a tiepin with the initials J.G. When Mrs. Snyder’s address book was found, she blushed as the name Judd Gray was mentioned. (Noe, “All About”) Also found where checks for the Prudential Life Company for the new, large policy Mrs. And Mr. Snyder had taken out. When Lorraine was questioned, she mentioned her mother and father fought a lot because Ruth stayed out all night. Neighbors claimed that they had heard Mr. and Mrs. Snyder loudly fighting on the sidewalk late at night, when Ruth would be returning home (MacKellen 9).

All of this information contributed to Mrs. Snyder being escorted to the Jamaica Precinct House, where she would be questioned further (10). While she was being held at the Precinct, new information that there was no sign of forced entry came to light (11). This continued to
show holes in Ruth’s report. The commissioner was determined to get the real story. He told Ruth that the burglary story was not adding up, and he wanted the truth. The commissioner got news that when a neighborhood patrolman was questioned about the Snyder’s friends, Judd Gray was mentioned again. He wrote the name down on a slip of paper and went back into the questioning room. He told Ruth he knew there was a man in her house that night, and that she had been lying (12). Ruth responded with a question: how much trouble would she be in if she told them the whole story? She was promised nothing, but encouraged to tell the truth. Ruth Snyder then accused Judd Gray of killing her husband (13).

Gray was taken into custody, and he eventually came clean. (Taylor, “Dumb bell”) Both Ruth and Judd gave their statements about how the murder was done. Gray had entered the household through the kitchen door, and waited in the grandmother’s room. In the room, Ruth had left him a sash weight, whiskey, and pliers. Judd had with him some cotton rags, two pieces of picture wire, a handkerchief, and some gauze. He sat in the room and claimed to get drunk off the whiskey, which he said was the ultimate undoing of him (MacKeller 53). He also claimed to have tried to leave, but he heard the Snyder’s car pull up, and then he was stuck. Ruth met him in hallway after her husband was asleep to make sure he was going to go through with the murder. He went into the room and hit Albert with the sash weight. This only stunned the victim, and a struggle followed. Mrs. Snyder grabbed the chloroform and handkerchief, and then tied her husband’s hands with a towel. Gray tied his feet with a necktie (54). Mrs. Snyder collected their bloodstained clothes and burned them in the furnace. They both readied the house to look like it had been searched in a burglary. Gray then tied Mrs. Snyder up, and left her at the top of the stairs as planned (55). He took the items away with him, place them in a briefcase, and heaved it
into the Hudson River. Ruth told a similar story. The only difference between the two claims lay in where the ultimate blame for the death of Albert was placed. Each said it was the other that had made the final blows. It really did not matter in the end, however, because both of them would get the electric chair.

Both parties were taken into custody and arraigned. Having a lawyer now, Ruth retracted most of her statement and claimed to have been pushed to speak under duress (65). In comparison, Judd Gray stuck by his original statement for the entire trial. Gray was from a highly respectable and wealthy family, and his dutiful wife supported him throughout the entire experience (63). News of the murder created a media circus, and the story sold papers in record numbers (61). The Grand Jury issued a first-degree murder indictment, and the trial commenced. After a long blame game, both parties were sentenced to death. On January 12th, 1928 Judd Gray was executed first, followed by Mrs. Snyder (Taylor, “Dumb bell). Tom Howard, a Chicago Tribune reporter working for the New York Daily News, strapped a camera to his leg and caught the famous picture of Ruth Snyder strapped into the electric chair (MacKeller 333). This picture sold a record number of papers, but that was the end of the public’s interest in the case (334). The Snyder-Gray case was now just a footnote in history, but it was enough to start the wheels of one reporter’s mind turning. The reporter inspired was Sophie Treadwell. In 1928, the same year of the executions, Machinal was written and produced on the Broadway stage (Dickey, “Real Lives” 99).
CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Character Analysis

The following is an analysis that I created for “Helen” using the given circumstances of the script to shape the role and my personal aesthetic choices to further flesh out the character. The play is divided into nine “episodes”, or scenes, and each episode is labeled with a title that explains what part of Helen’s life we are entering. I will examine each episode and explore the time, place, plot, objectives/obstacles/tactics, character, and generator/moment before.

Episode One: To Business

*Time:* 1920’s. A specific date is never mentioned in the script by the author. I have worked out a timeline for myself based on research. Knowing that Sophie Treadwell wrote *Machinal* in 1928, I have decided to adopt her time period for the setting in my mind. The language of the play lends itself to the 1920’s, and all of the designed costumes have a 1920’s feel to them. When I begin my journey, I have set the age at 19. This is the age Ruth Snyder claimed to have been when she met Albert Snyder. In the trial scene, I state that I was married to George Jones for six years. As I think George would insist on an immediate marriage, I have placed the office scene to be six years prior to the execution, which was in 1928. This means the office scene would be placed in 1922. It is in the morning, at the beginning of the workday. I set this to be 9 am.

*Place:* Business District, Manhattan. The play is set in New York City and my immediate surroundings are the office where I work, in the business district. Our designed unit set could be described as urban. It is far enough away from my home that I have to take the subway.
Plot: I am late for work. When I arrive, I am immediately harassed by my co-workers. I have a hard time jumping into work and keeping up with everyone else. My boss calls me to his office and proposes marriage. I do not answer, and the scene ends with me contemplating the decision I have to make.

Objectives, Obstacles, Tactics:

Main objective: My main objective is to blend in. I want to keep my job and please my boss and co-workers, but with as little notice as possible. I look for acceptance occasionally, but I am most often lost in my own world of thought.

Obstacles: Nervous demeanor causes me to stand out, I get lost in my world of thoughts and cannot keep the pace of the office, and my boss has a crush on me and others in the office know it. All of these things cause me to be noticed.

Tactics: to withdraw, to shield, to dash, to permit, to assimilate, to juggle, to dream, to weigh.

Character: Helen

Playwright describes Helen: “a young woman, going any day to any business. Ordinary. The confusion of her own inner thoughts, emotions desires, dreams cuts her off from any actual adjustment to the routine of work. She gets through this routine with very small
surface of her consciousness. She is not homely and she is not pretty. She is preoccupied with her herself- with her person. She has well kept hands, and a trick of constantly arranging her hair over her ears” (Treadwell 1). At one point she is caught dreaming, with her hands in her lap at her machine, hurries, retreats, thinks her thoughts out loud at the end of the scene.

*Other Characters describe Helen:* always late, in danger of losing her job, making the same excuses, artistic, inefficient, always messing with her hair, attracting their boss as a potential wife.

*Helen describes herself as:* needing air, feeling faint, not ready, late, trembling, needing to rest, having to earn.

*I mportant Influences/ Observations:* My name is Helen. I work in an office in order to support my mother. I am a stenographer. My present state of being is nervous and lost in thought, as I am late for work and concerned for my job. I perceive myself as inferior mentally and socially in the office. I only feel myself economically inferior in relation to my boss, George H. Jones. I am curious about the telephone girl; she is beautiful and has an active social life. The Adding Clerk I work with disgusts me; he is always staring at me and has asked me out several times. The Stenographer, my superior, intimidates me; she is older, stern, and always yelling at me. I look for sympathy from the Adding Clerk, as he is younger and newer to the office than me. I feel like he might not be hardened yet. I am intimidated and afraid of my boss, George H. Jones. He has power over me, and that
is frightening. He also never looks me in the eye when he talks to me. He always finds excuses to touch my hands. I am wearing a simple skirt, feminine sweater, and belt. I am plain, but attractive. In 1920’s New York the telephone girl in my office represents a modern working girl. She takes many dates, goes to speakeasies, and has affairs with married men. She is the symbol of the jazz age. The stenographer is an old maid. She is irritable, meticulous, and represents to me the idea of the woman who remains unmarried in her society. It is a male dominated world, and I know this. My boss is male, and powerful.

**Physicality:** I live in a very angular society. Our set is angular, with harsh lines. I want to move in circles, I like to be able to curve. In this scene in particular, I am working to try and fit in. I attempt to follow the stenographer’s angular grid as I walk. I misstep often, by the fault of a curve. I also disrupt the “machine” when I stop full on, lost in thought. I imagine a machine working, plugging away in straight, precise motions. I try to keep up, but keep stopping and curving. I am also very preoccupied with my hair and my hands. This is a characteristic, like the circular patterns, that will remain throughout the show. Also, my preoccupation with my hands will remain constant. I like to hold them, and rub them at uncertain moments. It gives me a small sense of peace. I centrally lead with my head. I am a thinker, and a dreamer. Especially in this scene, where I am trying to process the pattern of the work machine, I lead with my head. When I am dealing with George H. Jones, I sink into my hips and chest, in an attempt to try and disappear. In my monologue at the end of the episode, I use my body to enact the different scenes I mention. I revisit some of them, reliving previous physicality, and imagine others, creating new
physicality. Each place and idea I speak of has a different level or pattern in space. For example, when I speak of my job and the office I am on a high level and pacing in straight lines and angles. When I am discussing getting married, I take the low level of kneeling at an imaginary altar down stage right. This is illuminated more specifically in the rehearsal journal portion.

*Vocal Quality:* I live in my mid range. This is because I am to be, as stated by Mrs. Treadwell, an ordinary woman. I want to live in a comfortable middle place that could be accented by lower or upper range as needed for emotional effect. In the first episode, I have been rushing. I am breathing heavily, and I want to focus on lots of h’s and sh’s to help me to come across as out of breath. I also have language that is written heavily with dashes. I try to focus on hard consonants to deliver the idea of interjection. In my long monologue, it is helpful to divide up the sections in relation to vocal characteristics. When I am reliving my situation with George H. Jones, I use my lower range to imitate a man’s voice. Using mid range to distinguish when I am back in the present, I also use an upper range for the idea of my mother and my alarm clock. This shrill tone helps to establish the emotional effect that work and my mother have on me. Also, I am trying to decide between marrying and living a life without it. As I go back and forth, I put my marital images in an open, buoyant place. I am dreaming up a happy marital life, it is what my fantasy marriage would be. For this, I focus on the open vowels. When I interject with sharp, more fearful words that pull me out of my dream, I focus on using the percussive consonants.
Generator/ Moment Before: Right before the scene opens, I have been trapped on the subway. I was overwhelmed and anxious, and had to get off the subway to get fresh air. I felt that the bodies pressing against me would crush me. I was short of breath and sweating. I walk the rest of the way to work, making me late. I am still short of breath and anxious when I reach the office. I am nervous about being late for the third day in a row, due to the same reason, and am afraid that I will lose my job. My attitude is separated from everyone else. They don’t have the fear I have, or the nervousness. It makes me lost in thought and unable to keep up with the pace of the office. I feel like an alien here. The weather outside was muggy and warm, adding to my physical and emotional state. I took the subway to work, where I became claustrophobic.

Episode Two: To Business

Time: It is the same day in 1922 as Episode One, after work is over. It is 6:30 p.m and already getting dark outside.

Place: A small apartment in Morningside Heights, where I live. This is the place where Ruth Snyder was born. I commute to work everyday and return to my cramped, angular home. There are few windows, and they are very small as well. It feels me feel like I am boxed in. It is a crowded neighborhood of apartment buildings. The weather is still muggy, and the small window in the kitchen is open. Through the open window and the thin walls I can hear sounds drifting in: people’s voices in conversation and the general noises of the city (car horns, doors slamming, wheels squealing, etc.)

Plot: I am returning home from work. I am having dinner with my mother, and I let her know that my boss has proposed. I question my mother to try and get information that might help me
make a decision. My mother and I fight, and by the end of the scene I have decided to marry him to escape living with her.

**Objectives, Obstacles, Tactics:**

*Main Objective:* To gain information and emotional connection with my mother about love and relationships so that I can make a decision about whether or not to marry my boss.

*Obstacles:* My mother is cold and emotionless, she is unwilling to share information, she is manipulative and patronizes me, my patience over the years has worn thin.

*Tactics:* to brave, to evade, to pursue, to appease, to overwhelm, to consult, to deny, to reveal, to entreat, to beg, to excite, to develop, to shame, to absolve, to compose.

*Character: Helen*

*The Playwright describes Helen:* words suddenly pour out, rushes on in speech, walking up and down, protects her hands from the dishes with a set of rubber gloves, she goes to her mother several times and takes her hands.

*Other Characters describe Helen:* jumpy, not grateful for garbage service or dinner, that love is in her head, that she is crazy, must have her gloves.
Helen describes herself: glad and grateful, not hungry for dinner, needs to talk with her mother, has to get married like all women, not going to marry, doesn’t love her boss, won’t marry her boss because she doesn’t love him, skin curls when her boss comes near her, blood turns cold when he touches her, always thought she would find somebody young and attractive that she would love- with wavy hair, have babies with wavy hair, has never dated anybody because her mother wouldn’t let her, nobody has ever asked her out, she supposes she has to marry someone because “all girls do”, feels all tight inside and feels she can’t go on going to work and coming home everyday, sometimes in the subway she thinks she is going to die with all the bodies pressing against her, thinks maybe she is crazy- but can’t help it, feels taken for granted by her mother, thinks her hands got her boss’s affection, supposes she is going to marry him.

Important Influences/Observations: I am Helen, and a daughter. I am in a state of confusion and physical unrest because I do not know how I want to answer the proposal from my boss. I perceive myself as more intelligent than my mother mentally, but not emotionally. I seek her advice due to her experience in life. I feel economically superior to her only because I am the one who earns the money for the household. I also feel socially superior because I do get out of the house and experience different kinds of people in the modern society. I am emotionally needy. I want my mother’s attention and affection, I always have. However, our relationship has never been good. She cannot see past conventions and social constraints. She understands black and white, and lines or arrows. She does not understand my emotional needs. I am wearing the same outfit that I went to work in.
**Physicality:** I am at home now; I have more ability to move. I imagine a rectangular box around me, starting from my head and moving out, just encompassing my body. I rarely move outside of this box, and when I do, I break the lines with circular motion. I travel a little more outside the box in this scene, especially when I become very frustrated with my mother. There is a lot of advancing and retreating in this episode. When I want to open myself up to ask my mother something, my arms are open and my chest is more expansive. When my mother shuts me down, my chest collapses and my arms become drawn to my side, often becoming crossed. It is a literal sense of opening and closing, like a clamshell. When I am in a line of pursuing questioning with my mother, I follow my mother’s grid, much like following the stenographer in the previous scene. The difference here is that it is not done out of fear or pressure for the need of imitation, it is done in need of maternal connection. I have a rant at the end of the scene that is similar to my monologue that closes the first episode because I go back and forth between ideas of marriage and ideas of my work life. I apply the same pacing and angular walk, with a closed in chest and arms, to the discussion of work life. I apply a circular spinning to my pattern of walking when I am discussing marriage or love, giving me free use of flailing my arms. It represents an idea, or an attempt, of living outside of the grid, or the box. Again, my head is leading in this entire line of questioning and ranting, as I try to intellectually process my situation and the consequences of my decision-making.

**Vocal Quality:** There is a switching back and forth in this scene, as discussed in the physicality, which happens for me. I reach out to my mother, and pull myself back. This
goes back and forth, until my decision is made. I want to focus on using sustainable consonants when I am trying to reach my mother. I say “Ma” many times, and the word “women”. Those are nice examples of when I can play the m’s and n’s, and this playing allows for the questioning to be vocally leaned into as I press emotionally and physically to connect with my mother. When my outward reach is not reciprocated by my mother, I focus on any sharp, percussive sounds to illustrate my frustrations. A sentence like, “don’t talk like that!” exhibits the opportunities to harshly play the t’s and k’s. Going between these two focusing points really illuminates my struggle in this relationship.

*Generator/Moment Before:* Prior to this scene, I have been to work. My boss, George H. Jones, has proposed. I did not give him an answer, but I know I will have to give one soon. I am weighing whether or not I want to say yes, and if I will lose my job if I say no. I have come home to the apartment that I share with my mother to discuss my situation. I am nervous and lost in thought about the proposal and the idea of love. I have a sense of curiosity that I haven’t felt before. I want to know what my mother’s marriage was like, and if she can tell me about love. I want to ask questions and get answers. We have just sat down for dinner.

**Episode Three: Honeymoon**

*Time:* This is 1922, the same year as the play began. We married immediately after I said yes to his proposal, which was only a few weeks ago. It is nighttime; we traveled here the day of the wedding.

*Place:* We are honeymooning in the Hamptons, as George knows this would impress his bosses. We are staying at a middle rate hotel, in a room that is very standard. During the day it has a
view of the ocean, but at night it cannot be seen because there are no outside lights. The room is moderately sized and generic. It has peach wallpaper, seashell decor, and a semi-soft bedspread. There is only one door to enter and exit. There is only one bathroom, attached to the room. I am drawn to the large bay window like a moth to a flame. The weather is mild.

Plot: George H. Jones and I have been married and are on the first night of our honeymoon. We have just arrived at the hotel and been shown to our room. The scene takes place as he tries to have sex with me for the first time.

Objectives, Obstacles, Tactics:

*Main Objective*: To put off having sex with George H. Jones for as long as possible.

*Obstacles*: George H. Jones’s authority as a husband, his physical movements, the small confines of the hotel room and lack of escape route.

*Tactics*: to abandon, to compose, to identify, to coordinate, to distract, to humor, to overcome, to depart, to reduce, to allow.

Character: Mrs. George H. Jones

*The Playwright describes Helen*: She looks around the room to try and find a way out, pulls her hair around her ears, speaks desperately, tries to get away from him multiple times when he kisses her or pulls her into his lap, becomes silent and still when she has to
undress, eyes are wide with a “curious, helpless, animal terror, is crying at the end of the scene.

*Other characters describe Helen:* looks a little white around the gills, looks like she is scared, needs to learn how to relax, hasn’t got much on, modest, glad to get away from my mother, that she has him so there isn’t anything to cry about.

*Helen describes herself:* counting on seeing the ocean, doesn’t want to wash up, her clothes are not heavy, would like to go out for a little while, wants to get ready, likes to undress by herself, modest, wants her mother, wants somebody.

*Important Influences/Observations:* I am now Helen Jones, having married G. H. Jones. I am a daughter, a wife, and no longer an employee. My present state of being is nervous and anxious. I do not know if I can fulfill the marital obligations I have gotten myself into. I know my husband is interested in sex, and is very excited to get me into bed. I am terrified. I am a virgin and have had little experience with men. I feel mentally exhausted and frantic, trying to find ways to get out of the eventual ending of getting into the bed. Socially, I feel inferior. I am a woman, and he is the man. I do not have as much power. More than that, I have given up any power I had to resist him when I made the decision to marry him. I have no options. I am now economically better off than I have ever been before. I am wearing my traveling clothes, a jacket, and a hat. I do not, under any circumstances, want to take off any article of clothing.
Physicality: I am as physically shut down as I can be in this scene. My movement is very restricted. In fact, I do not move unless I have to. I am using the idea of a trapped animal. If I can freeze, maybe I can escape. Then, if there is any sign of escape, I am frantic. I scored the outburst into five different places, each time getting increasing frantic. This is in contrast to the times in between, when I am frozen. In the outburst I lead with my arms and hands, as if in defense. When I am frozen, my eyes darting are the only movement I allow myself. In a last effort of defense, I sit on the bed and ball up as much of my body as possible, as a kind of retraction into myself. This is a more extreme version of the caving in of the chest and arms from previous episodes.

Vocal Quality: I am very urgent in this scene. My sense of urgency, the desire to escape, does not stop when I am frozen. A good way to indicate this is with the voice. I focus on urgent sounds with the use of cognates. For example, switching from the “s” sound to the “z” sound, or a “b” sound to a “p” sound. If I could work the time in between the sounds switching, anticipating when it would change, it kept the energy very focused and streamlined. I also focus on my “o” sounds. I have a lot of “no’s”, or “I don’t knows”. I really enjoy using this open sound in my sinus resonance to imitate the sound of crying, or sighing out in fear.

Generator/Moment Before: We have just been married that day. There was a moderate sized reception at a hotel in Manhattan, all paid for by George Jones. I met lots of the people that are higher up in the business that I used to work for. My co-workers were not invited. I have never been to the beach before and I want to see the ocean. I am unsure of the world I have just
entered. I do not know what is expected of me and I am terrified. I feel like a deer caught in the headlights, or a trapped animal. I was near silent the entire car ride over, only answering my new husband in mono-syllabic words. We have just climbed the stairs to the room, and are being shown in by the bell boy.

**Episode Four: Maternal**

*Time:* The year is 1923, ten months after the marriage. It is early evening, which makes George available to visit the hospital.

*Place:* I am in New York City, Manhattan proper. I am in the maternity ward of a hospital where every nurse is female and every doctor is male. My immediate surroundings are a small hospital room with a single bed and a small table. I have a private bathroom. There is one small window, and I can hear the loud construction of the new hospital wing. The colors are dull and the atmosphere is sterile.

*Plot:* I have just had a baby and I am in a state that could be modernly compared to post partum depression. My husband comes to visit me, upsets me, and is asked to leave. I am tended to by the doctors and nurses, and then left to contemplate my situation.

**Objectives, Obstacles, Tactics:**

*Main Objective:* To get everyone to leave me alone.

*Obstacles:* Nurse doing her check-up and questioning, husband visiting, doctor doing rounds, drugs.
Tactics: to ignore, to permit, to shake, to gag, to dupe, to illustrate, to implore, to trick, to bargain, to rise, to demand, to accuse, to deny, to resolve.

Character: Mrs. George H. Jones

Playwright describes Helen: mostly unresponsive to nurses and doctor, whispers, chokes, gasps, occasional violent gestures to husband and doctor.

Other Characters describe Helen: getting along fine, gagging problem, needs to brace up, face things, and pull herself together, face the music, stand the gaff, take life by the horns, look it in the face, make an effort, start the up hill climb, needs rest, has behaved badly every time the baby has been presented to her, very upset.

Helen describes herself: isn’t glad it’s a girl, didn’t want a child at all, wants the window to be left open, doesn’t think her husband knows what she has been through, doesn’t want her baby, doesn’t want to nurse her baby, wants to be left alone, can’t swallow solids, has submitted to enough, will rest, will lie down, there is a heaviness weighing her down, too tired, the weight inside of her is gone and now it is on the outside pressing on her, she is underneath a great weight, she will not submit anymore.

Important Influences/Observations: I am unresponsive, withdrawn and lost due to the drugs and the depression. This also leaves me physically weak and mentally clouded. I have more social stature than before, as I am now the wife of George H. Jones and have
just had his child. George’s career continues to move upward and we are more economically well off than before. I am unattached to my husband and often still frightened of him. However, through ten months of marriage, I have grown more accustomed to his behavior patterns.

**Physicality:** There are many physical limitations within this episode. Not only am I groggy from the drugs administered, but I also have costume restrictions. My jacket buckles in the back and is very suggestive of a mental patient’s straight jacket. This indicates previous outbursts, which are not observed in the scene. My movements are laborious and kept within the rectangle physicality discussed previously. As in episode one, in the monologue I have designated a physical space for each topic breeched. The largest movement made is a step onto a platform as I discuss a spiritual question, but this is guided by a rail and careful placement to keep up the continuity of a weakened physical state. My arms are often drawn to my mid-section as an indication of childbirth and pregnancy. In fact, my core is the leading energy throughout this scene. My head and my legs are all being drawn toward my center. This was acceptable for sight lines because I was on such a high platform. I could afford to be able to look down.

**Vocal Quality:** Due to my drugged state, as discussed in the physicality section, I found that consonant linking became very helpful in this episode. The ability to lean on sounds and have them blend into each other kept the energy moving through the line while still allowing a lethargic quality. Also, blending sustainable consonants and holding out
buoyant energies of vowels helped me to articulate the words while maintaining the illusion of being sedated.

*Generator/ Moment Before:* It has been two days since I have given birth and the baby is being kept in the nursery. The labor was long and I have not physically or psychologically recovered. I am heavily drugged, therefore leaving my mental state even cloudier. I am in a state of emotional upheaval, although it is dampened by the pharmaceuticals. I am in a maternal, physical, and spiritual quandary that leads to the exploration of my last monologue of the episode, which fully represents a state of seeking. I have just been given another IV by the nurse and am lying in the bed.

**Episode Five: Prohibited**

*Time:* The spring of 1927, and during the day while my husband is at work. The weather outside is chilly and damp: the transition between winter and spring.

*Place:* A speakeasy in the west 40’s of Manhattan. The speakeasy is small and cramped. It is filled with cigarette smoke and the smell of liquor. Voices are not quiet and the energy is boisterous. I am on the opposite side of town from my husband’s office and my home. The speakeasy is filled with everything that is socially unacceptable.

*Plot:* I have come out with my old co-worker, the telephone girl. We have come to a speakeasy during the day to meet one of her boyfriends, and his friend. There is a flirtation between the man and myself, and I end up leaving the bar with him to go back to his apartment.
Objectives, Obstacles, Tactics:

Main Objective: I want to find something that is outside of the world I know of marriage and motherhood. I am seeking attention and experience. I want to be more like the telephone girl.

Obstacles: I am shy and uncomfortable in new places, and with new people. I do not consider myself to be very attractive; I have a lack of confidence.

Tactics: to question, to audit, to disclose, to request, to cover, to offer, to play, to campaign, to doubt, to construct, to correspond, to excite, to permit, to impress, to retract, to bid, to hope, to deny, to risk.

Character: Mrs. George H. Jones

Playwright describes Helen: takes a cigarette from the First Man and lets him light it for her, interrupts restlessly, nods, gets embarrassed, drinks, doesn’t answer, suddenly understanding and very elaborate, picks up a bottle, handles a bottle, puts bottle down, holds the man’s hand from across the table, gets up, stays at the table with her hand outstretched, she rises and leaves the bar with the man.

Other Characters Describe Helen as: late, wants to dance, wants to keep moving, one of those restless babies, doesn’t run with a crowd, fastidious, married, not dumb, haven’t been around much, all right, haven’t met the right guy, different, an angel, she likes the first man.
Helen describes herself as: she’s heard them all (jokes), wanting to keep moving on some days, it’s all right with her, knows what business is like, she used to be a business girl, quit her job, she’s married, doesn’t like knives, doesn’t mind a hammer, when he puts his hand over hers-when he just touches her- she exclaims, she hasn’t been around much, runs around with the telephone girl because the girl seems to have a good time, she herself hasn’t ever had a “good time”- it’s just her she guesses (why she hasn’t ever had a “good time”), knows she needs to meet the right guy, thought the telephone girl and the second man wanted to be alone, couldn’t leave the bar with the man, they can’t go to her place, she won’t need anything to drink.

Important Influences/Observations: I have been married since 1922 and I have a daughter. My present state of being is nervous and restless. I perceive myself to be physically inferior and mentally superior to the telephone girl, who has taken me to this speakeasy. I do not feel socially superior to her and my marriage still gives me an increasing economic placement in society. I have grown numb to my husband and am no longer frightened by him but feel more disconnected than ever before. I have on a fashionable jacket, which I never take off during the scene. While I am feeling adventurous, I am still very reserved.

Physicality: My center of energy for this episode is my chest. By leaning forward or backward against a table I am able to express my degree of interest or level of
timidity when encountering a gentleman suitor. I am, as before, preoccupied with my hands and my hair but touch them in a more gentle and feminine way than before. Instead of these habits exhibiting a frenzied state, they now exhibit a level of intrigue and sensuality. My ankles remained crossed as a semi barrier and slight indication of lady like behavior, but my upper body remains open and receptive. The dancing that occurs with the man in the speakeasy is circular and open, indicating the first time that my preferred pattern is compatible with another character’s. Since the hands are a constant preoccupation and point of importance, it becomes the ultimate indication of trust when I offer my hand to the man at the end of the scene.

_Vocal Quality:_ This scene is one of seduction and flirtation. I focus on sustainable consonants, especially m’s, n’s and v’s. Part of the seduction is leaning in to Richard, and I found that leaning into the sounds married with the physicality. In fact, it aided it. I used the ‘o’ vowel to carry many lines of subtext. As before Treadwell gave the young woman lots of scripted “Oh’s” in this scene and it seemed appropriate to take advantage of that.

_Generator/Moment Before:_ I called the telephone girl yesterday and told her I wanted to take her up on her previous offers to take me out. She informed me that she had a date that had a friend, and I would be perfect. I met her at her apartment where she approved my outfit and brought me to the speakeasy. I am intrigued by her life and by the place I am about to enter. I feel humbled
in the presence of a world that I know nothing about. Outside of the bar the telephone girl straightened my hair, and we have just walked inside the door to meet the men.

**Episode Six: Intimate**

*Time:* 1927, later in the afternoon and into the evening from Episode Five.

*Place:* Richard’s apartment is also in the West 40’s of Manhattan, not far from the speakeasy. Richard’s apartment is spacious, but not large. It feels airy and comfortable. There is large window where the night sky can be seen. The streets are noisy, but the all city sounds seem to fade away for me. The neighborhood is a progressive one. The weather outside is chilly, and the sky is crystal clear.

*Plot:* The scene takes place after Richard and I have made love. We find out more about each other, and bask in the afterglow of romance. I realize it is getting late, and I have to get home before my husband gets home from work. Richard lets me take a water lily of his home with me.

*Objectives, Obstacles, Tactics:*

*Main Objective:* I want to learn more about this man I feel like I am falling in love with, and I want to know what the future holds for us.

*Obstacles:* He doesn’t know what the future holds and is non-committal, and I cannot stay very long because my husband will be getting home. I am also still a little nervous, because I have never had an affair before. I don’t know what the usual behavior is following a tryst.
Tactics: to offer, to pressure, to invite, to promise, to plead, to partake, to bask, to divulge, to celebrate, to expand, to seduce, to level, to stimulate, to verify, to conclude, to discover, to support, to liberate.

Character: Mrs. George H. Jones

Playwright describes Helen: the sound of her voice is beautiful, glad, relieved, laughs, sings, tickles the man, laughs with the man, laughs and sings, pauses, changes mood, rises, “She comes into the light. She wears a white chemise that might be the tunic of a dancer, and as she comes into the light she fastens about her waist a little skirt. She really wears almost exactly the clothes that women wear now, but the finesse of their cut, the grace and ease with which she puts them on, must turn this episode of dressing her into a personification, an idealization of a woman clothing herself. All her gestures must be unconscious, innocent, relaxed, sure and full of natural grace” (Treadwell 50), stands before the mirror and stretches, looks towards the man- then throw her head slowly back-lifts her right arm- a gesture that recalls many statues of women- Volupte, when he kisses her her head and arm go further back- then she circles her arm widely over to close her hand on his head, with her fingers spread, protective, clutching, her eyes are shining with tears, her eyes fasten on a lily, she takes the lily, opens the door.
Other Characters describe Helen: awful still, mighty pretty hands, a nice voice, a fine voice, has him beat, a little spoon, maybe right, no woman was sweeter than her, needs to learn “quien sabe” if she plans on running with him, bets she would like Frisco, in good shape, a couple of months riding in the mountains with the man and she’d be great, pretty sweet.

Helen describes herself: thinking about seashells, used to take good care of her hands, she will take better care of them now, she knows what it means (Cielito Lindo), couldn’t sing, understands the “hey diddle diddle” nursery rhyme now, she’s the spoon, believes in guardian angels, belongs with him, hasn’t thought of singing since she was a little girl, used to sing a song that confused her when she was in first grade, came home with him because he said she looked like an angel, likes to hear him call her sweet, never forget what “quien sabe” means, must go, late, knew a woman who went out to Frisco, has never known anything like this or that she could feel so purified.

Important Influences/Observations: My present state of being is sanguine. I am full-bodied, and full of life. I am mentally aware of my situation, and feel that I am on an equal level with my partner. Socially, I feel that I am superior as far as society is concerned, but inferior as far as life experience in concerned. I am economically better off that my partner, due to my husband’s status. My emotional relationship with my husband is indifferent and distant. My new relationship is tentative and exciting. This man has really seen me and taken me
in, and we made love. It awakens a courage and excitement in me that I have never had. For the first time, the word mutual enters the picture.

**Physicality:** This is the most circular that I will ever be in the show. Every movement, every line of my body is fluid and circular. I am the most feminine here, with an s-shaped curve in my body, and softness in my stature. In this scene, the hips lead. I move comfortably outside the rectangle around my body. My hair is abandoned, and attention is only paid to my hands when my lover massages and compliments them. All nervous habits have gone to the wayside. This is the only scene where we ever see me smile, or hear me laugh.

**Vocal Quality:** I am so happy and free in this scene, and that is reflected in my range. I sing in this scene, and use my upper range. I also have a strong hold on my lower range. When the script is examined, I have more y-buzz sound than in any other scene. Y-buzz indicates a strength and vibration of life that I have not experienced previous to this episode. It is those moments of strength that I put my vocal focus on. I felt it gave me a sense of grounding that I had not shown before.

**Generator/Moment Before:** I met Richard in the speakeasy. He asked me to come home, with him and I agreed to go. We made love, and the scene begins in the after glow. We are lying in his bed, and I have never felt more comfortable. He is tracing my body with his fingertips, and gazing up lazily at me.
Episode Seven: Domestic

*Time:* The year is 1927, at ten o clock in the evening.

*Place:* At my Manhattan home in the Upper East Side. This is an affluent neighborhood where certain behavior is expected. The house is wealthy but sterile. Everything is black and white and angular. There is a view of the full moon from the living room window. The weather is chilly and crisp, and the sky is clear.

*Plot:* The scene takes place as we are both reading our own copies of the newspaper. George attempts to carry on with our regular evening routine: mentioning articles from the paper, answering the phone for a business call, and going to bed at eleven. As the scene goes on, my mental state of unrest causes me to break routine with agitated physicality and language. The agitation grows, and by the end of the episode I have lost the ability to reason and am completely lost to the voices in my head.

*Objectives, Obstacles, and Tactics:*

*Main Objective:* to hide my longing for Richard, and participate in the routine of the household to please my husband.

*Obstacles:* My husband keeps mentioning article headlines in the paper that prove as catalysts to my feelings of a miserable home life and my love for Richard, I discover articles in my own paper that incite strong emotional reactions about my husband, my mother, and my lover, my anxiety drives my physical problems of dizziness and claustrophobia to their extremes.
Tactics: to appease, to fool, to pursue, to expose, to comply, to resist, to restore, to disprove, to trigger, to empower, to escape, to illustrate, to increase, to implore, to panic.

Character: Mrs. George Jones

Playwright describes Helen: Reading paper to herself, opposite side of the divan from her husband, first responds to husband in rote, pulls away from husband swiftly, unexpectedly, stops, pauses, gets up and goes to the window, leaves window restlessly, picks up paper, reads, gets up, puts hand to her throat, suddenly, to herself, takes up paper, stares at paper, looks up after a pause, steps towards husband and then recoils, desperately, sits, starting ahead of her, flies from her chair and cries out in terror.

Other Characters describe Helen: she is his, flinched when he touched her, hasn’t flinched when he touched her in a long time, used to flinch every time he touched her, one of the purest women that ever lived, must be looking at something, she is nervous tonight, inherited nervousness from her mother, is a good mother, imagines things, doesn’t breathe deeply enough, must be going someplace, never been away alone.

Helen describes herself as: happy, nothing’s the matter, didn’t flinch, knows she used to flinch every time he touched her, is not pure, is just like everybody else, is looking at the moon, is reading, listening, tries not to be nervous, tries to be a good mother, feels as if she is drowning with stones around her neck, stifling, is all right, going to bed, wants to
go away anywhere, scared, can’t sleep, hasn’t slept, can’t sleep when it is a full moon, feels the moon, is afraid, wants to go away alone, maybe she could sleep then.

**Important Influences/Observations:** I have been married for five years. I am tense. The lover I have been seeing has left the country. I am lonely and the things that I had become numb to in my marriage are now very loud. I am mentally depressed and unstable. My social and economic statuses are the highest they have ever been. I try to engage in old patterns with my husband to appease him but throughout the scene I have more and more outbursts. I feel as though I live in an assembly line of husbands, wives and children.

**Physicality:** In this scene, my energy center is in my head as I am trying to process my frenzied thoughts. I have scored five outbursts, or breaks from the routine for myself. Each outburst has a growing physical urgency. It starts with a flail of the hand, then the arms, then the arms and legs (all while sitting) until the fourth outbursts brings me to my feet and I begin to pace. The pacing is reminiscent of episodes one and two when I talk about work and the subway suffocating me. The pacing is strict and angular broken only when I make a circular sweep to look to the moon through the window, a relationship with the lover. The idea is a pacing tiger in a cage, lacking in grace and agility.

**Vocal Quality:** In the times where I am attempting to exercise the patterns that please my husband, I have a mid range monotone. This is especially used for reading the newspaper.
titles. Between outbursts one and five I go from middle range to a panicked higher range. I also begin to utilize lots of p’s, f’s, h’s, w’s and wh’s to help with the sound of being out of breath as I start to feel more and more suffocated. Also, when I am lost in thought and then snapped back by my husband, there is almost always a final t sound to hit. I use this percussive sound to throw her attention back to him.

*Generator/Moment Before:* I saw Richard Roe for the last time yesterday. He left for Mexico. This is the first full day I have gone without seeing him in months. I am trying to keep my composure but my thoughts are lost and my mind restless. I am finding it more and more difficult to hide my anxiety from my husband. His regular routine and lack of empathy builds on this unrest. I have just sat down after being in the kitchen, and opened the paper when he begins the scene by speaking to me.

**Episode Eight: The Law**

*Time:* It is spring 1928, and early morning.

*Place:* A large courtroom in Manhattan. It has high ceilings and two stories. The room is spacious, but not comfortable. It is harshly angular and intimidating. The stand is in the middle of the room, and a light shines directly on it. The weather outside is chilly and rainy.

*Plot:* I have been accused of killing my husband. The scene begins as the court gets ready to hear my case. I am brought in and the trial commences. My defense lawyer questions me, and then the prosecuting attorney questions me. After the prosecuting attorney introduces a letter from Richard as evidence, I confess to the murder of George.
Objectives, Obstacles, and Tactics:

Main Objective: To follow the steps that my defense attorney reviewed with me and become acquitted of the murder charges.

Obstacles: I am weary from being in jail and from the media circus involving the case. It is hard for my fatigued mind to remember exactly how my lawyer wanted me to answer questions. As the memory of Richard and the exposure of our affair are introduced to the trial makes it becomes almost impossible to function.

Tactics: to dissolve, to maintain, to manage, to recall, to replace, to exonerate, to honor, to revise, to lessen, to yield, to verify, to assess, to audit, to chance, to complete, to deny, to defend, to reveal.

Character: Mrs. George Jones

Playwright describes Helen: all people in the courtroom except Helen are routine and mechanical, all except Helen are going through the motions of their own game, Helen sits in witness chair, hesitates, desperately, whispers, shakes her head, moans, stares at the court, moans suddenly as if the realization of “the enormity of her isolation had just come upon her. It is a sound of desolation, of agony, of human woe. It continues until the end of the scene” (Treadwell 76), cannot speak, continues in the witness box when all are dismissed, unseeing, unheeding.
Other Characters describe Helen: scarcely able to stand and needing to be almost carried to the witness stand by my lawyer, accused murderess, widow of the late George H. Jones, married for six years without a quarrel, devoted daughter, devoted wife, has been accused of murdering her own husband while he slept by brutally hitting him over the head with a bottle filled with small stones, the accused woman told a straightforward story, the accused woman told a rambling story, saw Mr. Jones was hurt, under the cross-questioning her defense was badly riddled and she is left pale and trembling, she maintained her innocence under the pressure from the cross questioning that threatened but did not menace her defense, flushed but calm, Richard has known Helen for one year, met her in a speak-easy in the West 40’s of New York, had intimate relations with her, have her a blue bowl filled with pebbles that contained a flowering lily, had intimate relations almost every day until he left the country, murderess confesses, paramour brings confession, “I did it!” woman cries.

Helen describes herself: Helen Jones, twenty nine, lives in prison, widow of George H. Jones, married for six years, it was a happy marriage, they never quarreled, has one little girl at age “past five”, she is the only parent living, as a girl she worked to support herself and her mother, she was a stenographer, she has continued to be her mother’s sole supporter, did not kill her husband, tells the story of the night of the murder in detail, she did it, she put him out of the way to be free (her husband), being free was the only reason, couldn’t divorce him because she didn’t want to hurt him.
Important Influences/Observations: I am a widow and a prisoner. My present state of being is trapped. I am mentally shut down. I have been prepared to regurgitate what my lawyer has instructed me to but I am not processing my surroundings normally. My state could be compared to a woman who is on Valium and very unaware. Socially, I am now a criminal. The media is publishing true and untrue stories about my life. Economically I am only wealthy if I don’t go to jail. I am emotionally attached to no one in the room as my husband is dead and my lover is gone. The prosecuting attorney intimidates me and I am indifferent towards the defense attorney.

Physicality: Using the idea of a trapped animal, I am most often physically frozen. I have an S shaped curve on the stand, as it is traditionally feminine. The concept of the show is “a flower caught in a meat grinder”, and in this methodical courtroom it seemed like a good place to exhibit her frailty. I stay in this S shaped curve the entire time, and alike my body to a deer caught in the headlights. My eyes, however, are extremely active and follow the person interrogating me. All of my fear and unrest is placed in the face. Hands are also extremely important to me, and there were choice moments where I became unfrozen and placed attention on rearranging them or touching my hair. The touching of the hair was reserved for the times when Richard Roe was discussed. This was because my link to my femininity is through my hair and hands.

Vocal Quality: For this scene I focused on buoyant energy. I am very lost, and by using this energy I found it easier to convey my detachment from the world around me. I looked for assonance, and found those moments to be extremely helpful in maintaining
an on going energy of fragility. It is only when I am pushed to confession that I focused on the y-buzz words to give me strength. I use the word “free” many times in my confession, and the potent energy of the y buzz helps to achieve the urgency that I want.

*Generator/Moment Before:* Prior to this scene I was dressed by my matron in a nice suit and hat and taken to the courtroom. I have been in jail for a month and the trial has been going on for eight days. Today is the day when I take the stand. I am about to be taken into the courtroom and questioned by both lawyers. I am presently in the state of a trapped animal. I am no longer pacing like a tiger in the cage, but am now like the animal that has been captured and held long enough to be rendered frozen when his captor comes around. My picture was snapped in the courtroom lobby, and I have just been ushered through the court room door when the scene begins.

**Episode Nine: A Machine**

*Time:* The year is 1928, 9 A.M.

*Place:* I am in the state of New York at its highest security prison. I am in my cell, which is tiny, cold, damp and dim. There is a tiny, dirty window in the cell.

*Plot:* In my cell, the Priest prepares me for my execution. I can hear another prisoner singing in the next cell, and I beg for the Matron to let him keep singing. The barbers come in to shave a patch of my hair, and I get a chance to ask the Priest more questions. I see an airplane for the
first time through the window, and then the guards come to take me. My mother comes to visit me one last time, and I see her as the guards lead me to the electric chair. I am executed before the guards, matron, priest, and reporters.

**Objectives, Obstacles, Tactics:**

*Main Objective:* To find peace before my execution.

*Obstacles:* The Priest does not speak to me in a way that I can understand him, his answers to my questions are vague, the barbers have to shave a piece of my hair, my mother stirs up old memories and regrets, there is no time left for any more discussion.

*Tactics:* to collect, to beg, to defend, to implore, to battle, to induce, to importune, to liberate, to connect, to deny, to reconcile, to impart, to resign, to possess, to yearn.

**Character:** Mrs. George Jones

*Playwright describes Helen:* folded hands, rises, steady voice, crying out, taken by the arms and a patch is cut from her hair, calm is shattered, weeping, recoils, reaches out hand to mother, they embrace through bars, taken by the arms by the guards to the execution site, calls out, her voice is cut off.

*Other characters describe Helen:* can’t hear the Father praying, calm, quiet, ready, knows she is ready, will submit right to the end, life has been hell to her because she never knew God, she didn’t seek Him, her sins are forgiven, will pray for her the prayer
of desire, how little she looks, has gotten smaller, lips are moving, fixed her hair under the cap, pulled her hair out from under the cap.

_Helen describes herself:_ understands the singing prisoner because he is condemned, the singing helps her, ready, not ready for her hair to be cut, will not be submitted to indignity, is she never to be let alone, always to have to submit, she won’t submit, no more, not now, she’s going to die, wants to know why nothing is hers not even the hair on her head, will she ever be left alone, will she have peace when she is dead, will she have peace tomorrow, will she be in hell, life has been hell to her, how could she know God when he was never around her, was always seeking something, seeking rest and peace, has been free for one moment on earth, when she did what she did she was free and not afraid, a great and mortal sin which will send her to hell made her free, the sin of love is all she ever knew of heaven, needs a prayer she can understand, her mother has never known her and is a stranger, she never knew her daughter, her daughter will never know her, there is so much she wants to tell her daughter.

**Important Influences/Observations:** I am a widow, criminal, and have been sentenced to death. I am presently being dressed for execution. I am mentally alert. It is the most alert I have been except for episode six. I have no social or economic status, but the media is still covering my story. I attempt to engage in a relationship with the priest because I am longing for spiritual answers. Prior to my mother’s entrance he is the only person physically present in the scene that I have any attachment to, and the only person in the scene that looks me in the eyes when speaking to me. I am shaken when the guards
have to shave my hair. They take from me something that represents the only part of my identity I feel is still mine. After my mother’s visit, I began to think of my daughter, which further breaks my sense of calm. There is a feeling of reconciliation with her, but also a new sense of fearful urgency to ensure that my daughter will be cared for. By the time I am walked to the electric chair I am in turmoil over this act of execution, which is the most extreme form of submission.

*Physicality:* The center of my energy in this scene lies in my core. It is reminiscent of episode four, where I am drawn into myself. I have been in prison, so I have learned to try and take up as little space as possible. I keep my arms and my legs very near to my body and my head down when spoken to, unless I am addressing the priest or seeing my mother. This is consistent throughout the scene. I allow my chest energy to open up when I hear the sound of the prisoner singing and see the sight of the airplane. Even when I am flailing against the barbers, I keep my arms and energy very close to my body. In my last moment in the electric chair, I allow my arms and my shoulders to be open and expanded as I turn.

*Vocal Quality:* In the beginning of the scene when I am calm, I use my lower resonance. This gives me a sense of power and steadiness. It is after the barbers cut my hair that I lose my grounding and begin to weep. This, in combination with the spiritual questions I ask the priest (which feels reminiscent of a father and a daughter relationship) led me to focus on sinus resonance. Believe this helped to convey my state of childlike wonder and mania. When I am talking about my sin of love, I focus on sustainable energy consonants
because it is related to Richard. I felt the sustainable energy gave the words a rich quality, and as the consonants are leaned on I felt like it illustrated my emotional clinging to Richard. When speaking to my mother, the need to instruct her about my child became extremely urgent. I use percussive consonant endings to express this need, especially with repeated words like “wait” and “don’t”. In my struggle, I ultimately lose against the guards, so my last “wait” focused on the buoyancy of the A sound, rather than the consonant energy, in order to allow more of a wail to emerge.

*Generator/Moment Before:* Prior to this scene I was woken up by the matron and told to eat breakfast. I knew she would be back in one hour to dress me and that the priest would be visiting me for final confession. I am fully aware that I am about to be put to death. I think I am ready to die and escape from the world that I never fit into. The scene starts right after I have been dressed, and the Priest has asked me to kneel so he can pray over me. I have knelt and the prayer begins.
CHAPTER FOUR: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE JOURNAL

January 6th 2007

Tonight I finished highlighting my lines in the script. I would like to have used the same color for the entire script, but my purple highlighter started to fade and eventually die towards the end of the trial scene…interesting correlation? Helen is definitely getting worn down at that point in the scene. I also notice when highlighting that in the whole show she is “Young Woman”, except in the episode “Intimate”. Then she is just Woman, and her lover is just Man (he was previously “first man”). I wonder what Sophie was indicating. It can’t be that she finally becomes a woman, because she goes back to being young woman again. It may be that Helen is truly only a full woman when with this man, or that Sophie is making a statement about these people being reduced down to only what they are in an intimate relationship: man and woman. It could be the only time they escape all of the other labels. I can’t wait to explore the different possibilities of the name change when in rehearsal. I need to get in touch with the publishers so that I can find out if I can put a copy of my script within the thesis. I really hope I can because I feel like the most important part of my process will occur within those pages. The work of the actress…taking down my blocking, noting my actions, tactics, and objectives and the words that pop out at me during the rehearsal process…these are the things that mean the most to me. They are the meat. I spent today deciding on what paperwork I wanted to do, and I think I have settle on a Stanislavski approach. I want to take the time to score every scene with my beat breakdowns, subtext, objectives, and tactics. Often we only do this for scene studies in class, but if it is so helpful there it has to be just as helpful here. I am also thinking tonight about the style
of the piece. In the preface for the play, it is mentioned that the show’s style was compared to the precision of The Adding Machine. I have seen this show, and I know how mechanical the movements are. I know that this show means mechanical in French, but I have to say that as an actress that kind of style is difficult for me to swallow. Often times I see that the emphasis on the style and movement in the show ends up taking the focus away from telling the story. I really want the humanity of this piece, especially of Helen, to be seen. I noticed that this show has previously had a choreographer. It is hard to imagine a choreographer in a play, not a musical. This further brings up thoughts of how the movement is going to be used in this production. Luckily, it is mentioned that Helen is the only really living thing in this mechanical world. This means I won’t have to focus as much on behaving in a mechanical style, and it also means that I get to interpret how it really feels to be the only one who is behaving in a different way. As an actress, in the rehearsal process I may be left out of some cast activities or tasks. As a person, Helen definitely doesn’t fit in. I am cast in a show with many of my friends, and I know that sometimes actresses decide to behave with their cast members very closely to how their character behaves with their characters. Perhaps those kinds of relationships come into play without a conscious recognition. Now that I am journaling my acting process, I am interested to see just how the relationships will develop because it will be brought to my conscious attention at the end of every rehearsal, when I reflect. I also came to the decision today that I want to get started on my background work for Helen. I want to do a physical character sketch: how does she stand, sit, move, etc.? I want to do her emotional sketch too: where did she grow up?, what is her relationship with her mother?, etc. I will start first with going through the script and writing down the given circumstances. I can’t possibly do all the work I have thought of today in one night! I will have to set daily and weekly goals for myself to make the work realistic. I think this
is best anyway because as I move farther with the character in rehearsals my ideas and understandings will grow, as will my answers to these questions and decisions on objectives. Better to keep the work growing too then, not having it finished before the first day of rehearsal. We are lucky to have such a lengthy time, although I know that is something that usually only educational theatre has the luxury of. However, there is a lot to learn and I am worried about being off book one week after we start. And we start in two days! Speaking of which, reading the first scene again tonight I have made progress in decision-making even since the read through. At the first read through I had her very broken already, but as I read it tonight the word that came to mind was more like dreamy, or like a lost sheep. Which I think is much more appropriate because she has so far to go. She can’t start out broken or there is not a journey. I want characteristics that make her fragile, but more youthful and dreamy. She can be nervous, and I think she is, but more out of place than anything else. It will be important to show that from the start. At the first read through I was in tears reading her first big monologue when she mentions marrying George H Jones: about his fat hands and all her wonderings about getting married. But as I look back I realized it was me, the actress, crying because I knew the end of the story and I felt so much for this woman. But that won’t be appropriate for performance! Finding the right place to start will be a good thing to keep in mind going in to rehearsal two nights from now, when we focus on this scene.

January 8th, 2008

Whew! Episode One is a doozy. I spent the first hour or so just waiting to make my entrance! The other workers have a tough job. The lines all interject each other, and they have to be perfectly timed. They are creating the “machine” image with their voices and bodies, and the
rhythm has to be just right. When I am added to the mix, it becomes even more confusing because I am a kink in the wheels, so to speak. The machine has to try and keep working around me, even though I am “inefficient”. Just whirling around to try and respond to the characters tonight gave me my inclination towards Helen’s physicality. Everyone else has a grid, an angular set patter. Helen likes to move in circles. Julia liked it, and I am thrilled. It feel’s just right for Helen. We didn’t even get to the monologue at the end of the scene; the rest of it took so much time.

January 9th, 2008

We came back to Episode 1 tonight rather than moving on. Getting a more solid floor pattern and flow really helped move things along. I am curious to see how long it will actually take me to get up to George H. Jones’ office and back down again. Doing my background work, I am already becoming very attached to my hands. Having Kyle touch them once, in our first rehearsal of this, made my stomach turn. It became so personal when he did that. I want to hang on to that feeling of violation. I need to work on being able to shrink back with the rest of my body and my energy without blatantly pulling away from him. We started to work on episode 2. What a mess. We have little to no set. We are so used to dealing with physical reality in our acting classes. We are so focused on task oriented acting that Amanda and I were just stuck. We just had the words, and nothing to carry them. I am going to have to really think about this. I need to be able to stand still and speak to her without feeling like I need to be doing something.
January 10th

Continuing on with Episode Two: breakthrough. Julia and Patrick decided to come up with a system of dividing the scene into “red flags”. We start out by sitting down together and choosing four or five moments that we feel are most important. We then develop a picture for each moment with our bodies, somewhere on the set. Then we begin at the start of the scene and try to hit those marks for those moments. Everything else is free form; just see how you can get there. It was helpful to have a goal to be reaching for; it felt less like we were “lost in space”. I think we are going to approach a lot of the other scenes this way too. Finding out why Helen arrives at this last moment of deciding to marry George is so important, since the scene ends and the next thing you see is “Honeymoon”. There has to be such a careful dynamic between Amanda and I…a real pushing and pulling that illuminates how difficult life is at the house.

January 11th

We briefly started on Episode Three, just walking through it. I had the same feeling of confusion I had before with episode two. At the start of this rehearsal, we found our “red flags”. There was a little bit of disagreement, but we finally settled on the same moments. Creating the stage pictures for this is a lot of fun. Julia is a very visual person, and I share this with her. Thinking about where the bodies can be at the moment to best tell the story is exciting...like if you took a snapshot of that moment it could tell an entire story itself. Also, Helen really likes the moon. She is drawn to natural elements too, like her desire to see the ocean in this scene. It makes me feel the connection to her being a “flower”, the only living, breathing thing inside of this machine. She identifies with natural elements because they are not of the cold, steely world she is living in. For the hospital scene: we just touched on it. We seem to be running behind as far as schedule
is concerned, but I don’t care. I enjoy taking the time to really feel out the blocking, and create it, rather than hammering it out and coming back to the details later. This feels much more collaborative as far as it being a process.

January 13th
Rachael informed us that grad students will be leading warm ups every week. At the beginning of each rehearsal, we warm up together as a cast. Some shows I hate this! But for this show, it seems so beneficial to really connect with each other. This machine does move together, and when we get our voices and bodies in synch it helps build the ensemble. I can really feel the cohesion in this cast already, which elevates my mood and drive. I love building a strong family in the cast. We worked hard for the afternoon today and got caught up through episode five. The bar scene is very confusing due to the different scenes that are going on simultaneously, but each needs its own moment to be featured. Then everyone must freeze. I am concerned about Helen in this scene. I know she wants to be there, but how badly? How far is she willing to go, and does she really want to have an affair? What is happening at home that finally drove her out? Has she kept in touch with the telephone girl all this time? Things to think about. My level of interest will affect my physicality, as will my level of familiarity. We came back briefly for a voice rehearsal, but it lasted about twenty minutes. We just went through any times that voices are in the background.

January 14, 2008
Today Chris came in to work on the Prologue. I am interested in this concept, and I think it will go over well. It is set to very interesting music, and it shows the rise of man from monkey. The
grid pattern that the other characters have to walk foreshadows the show: many people walking specific patterns. It is organized chaos. I am curious to see what happens. I wasn’t actually used in the rehearsal tonight, but I enjoyed watching. The idea of the development of man as a society really relates to the research I am doing on Sophie Treadwell and her concepts.

January 15th, 2008
We worked with Chris today, reviewing the first, fourth, and second episodes. Again, a majority of the time was spent on getting the opening of scene one right. I was grateful to Chris because he helped me to think about where my energy is coming from. I have decided that it comes from Helen’s head. I think she is working so hard to process this entire world, and when the head leads, the body follows. I was really thinking about the precision in this scene, and I find that the swirling motions help to disorient me. The fourth scene and first scene have one thing in common: HUGE MONOLOGUES! I haven’t found a way to dissect them yet. I think I am going to try to use Julia’s idea of “red flags” to try and cut it into more manageable pieces. Also, we were supposed to be off book tomorrow, but the deadline has been pushed back to Sunday. Thank goodness. Between schoolwork and rehearsal I am struggling to keep my head above water. Episode two is coming along….but I very concerned with the mother and daughter relationship. Amanda is being directed to be cold and mechanical. But I feel like there is some give and take here. It feels more heartbreaking for Helen to keep trying to get something from her mother, and then when she gets a moment of connection, her mother shuts off again. This is frustrating.

January 16th
Tonight we blocked episode six and seven. I LOVE the idea of a moon shaped bed that acts as a swing. It is a little difficult to rehearse on hard wooden blocks, especially when Ryan and I are such tall people! Finding the fluidity that the bed will eventually have while working on the blocks we have at present is a challenge, but Ryan and I flow together very well. Our energy fields just seem to mesh. We are getting notes about being too familiar with each other, as a matter of fact. We forget that this is the 20’s, and women and men don’t touch each other quite the same way we do now. We have to be able to show the attraction and flirtation with more distance…but that is more in scene 5. Scene 6 allows us more flexibility. I want Helen to move in circular motions the entire time. This is only space where she begins to pull back the layers that lead to her real self. I do think of it in terms of a flower, she blossoms here. She is nervous still, but in a different way than in any other scene. The nervousness comes from a place of wanting to be right with Richard, not from a sense of displacement. This small apartment room feels more like home to her than any other place she has been. Scene Seven, on the other hand, is the complete opposite. I used the flag system here and divided Helen’s journey here into separate outbursts. I came up with five, and each one will grow with intensity. This is especially important because it leads up to the killing of George. We have decided to cut her last, “oh!” in this scene, and there is no bottle to be raised. I like this concept because the voiceover in her head becomes more powerful and it relies more on the audience’s imaginations.

January 17th, 2008

Tonight we blocked episode 8 and 9. 8 is simple in that I walk out, take the stand, and never move. It is difficult in the range of emotions required to navigate being interrogated and hearing evidence. The first thing I have done is gone through and decided which parts of the story were given to me by the lawyer previously, making them “rehearsed”. Second, of these rehearsed
parts, which do I get right and which do I mess up? Third, which items are totally new to my ears? This adds a lot of layering to the multitude of my “yes” and “no” answers. Episode 9 is hard to rehearse. Right now we are just blocking, but it is still in the back of my mind not to be “marking”. Which is difficult considering the level of emotion this scene calls for. The woman is about to die. I have settled in myself that while I cannot reach the performance level of Helen’s pathos right now, as long as I commit to the words I will be achieving honesty. It just doesn’t have to be quite to the height that I know I will reach. Which brings up the lesson that I should be focusing on being in the moment of the process, not living in expectation of the results.

January 18th, 2008

BREAKTHROUGH in scene 2! There was a bit of a communication breakdown, and it turns out that Mother is NOT a robot. Patrick helped bridge the gap with the understanding that the mother, like the other characters, is a cog in the machine. She is proud of her machine; she wants it to run correctly. It is not that she is inhuman; it is that she, like the others, does not appreciate when someone messes up the machine with their ideas or behavior. This is a black and white world, and there are codes of behavior. Now that we have that solved, it doesn’t become about a lack of humanity, it comes from a sense of approval or disapproval. This gives the scene much more availability for layering. While the world is black and white, the struggle in the relationship is multi faceted for Helen.

January 20th

Today I started leading warm ups. Getting to focus the cast together before we work is a wonderful experience. I like to start with stretching, and partner massage. That goes over well! Once the body is woken up, I move on to the voice. After vocal warm ups, I pick a focusing activity for us to do…like counting in the circle. This is a time where I get to be part of the
ensemble, as opposed to the entire show, where I am distanced from it. I use that feeling to remember what Helen is longing for, inclusion. We did our first full run: off book. Four words, in a succession that can strike fear in the heart of any actor! I was mainly concerned about the long monologues. I devised a way to further break them up to help me memorize them. I treated them like a song, with verses, a chorus, and a bridge. Sophie Treadwell’s writing is so much about rhythm; it made sense that she would use words in a pattern, like a song. It worked. That, as well as plotting specific, physical moves for different beats of the monologues, has helped me to remember the flow of words in my body and my mind. The run through went well…but we need some serious help as far as transitions are concerned. There are lots of things to be done in-between scenes, and we haven’t pieced that together. I think we will be dedicating some time to that later.

January 21st

We started back at the beginning. A lot of time was spent on the Prologue. There is a lot of choreography, and a grid for each character. I used to time to look at my lines. In my monologue before, I had made some specific places for different sections. I have added a few more, due to the encouragement of Chris. I actually face upstage and head towards George H Jones’s office. I like this because when the next thought pattern throws me out of his world, I can us a large circular motion. This indicates for me that she is going from something she does not enjoy into something that she does. I also noticed tonight that the language disintegrates the closer it comes to the end. She has complete thoughts and sentences until the last fifth of the piece. Then she goes into simple, monosyllabic words. Sophie is cluing me in here that all of this processing really breaks Helen down.
January 22\textsuperscript{nd}

I didn’t have to be at rehearsal until 8:30 tonight, they made more time at the beginning for the Prologue. I got there in time to rehearse episode 9. I am having a hard time because Andrew, as the Priest, is not making eye contact with me at all. I feel like we are having a repeat of the barriers we approached in Episode two. I know Helen is struggling, and that should be difficult, but there is a time when I would love if he would look at me for just a moment. Halfway through the rehearsal Julia must have felt the same thing, because she have him a specific line to look at me on. It made all the difference in the world. I finally get him look at me, and hope for answers, and then he looks away. The loss of the possibility is crushing. I am also struggling with the Mother coming in at the end. She has no emotion at all; it is very robotic. I am wondering if this is just an exploration, or if it is the way it is going to be played. I will have to find a way to make that work for me. Chris came to take publicity shots today. I didn’t know this was happening, and I looked like crap. Luckily, it was posed from Scene 9 when the guards are after me, and in Episode 8 when the lawyer is interrogating me. Helen wouldn’t look too hot then either.

January 23\textsuperscript{rd}

We recorded the voices today, it was fun! I like that the voices of the cast reflect the people they parallel: for instance Amanda is playing a woman in a fighting couple, and she had a bad relationship with my father. Desiree is the abortion girl in the bar for episode 5, and she is the young lover being coaxed to sneak out by her boyfriend in episode two. Clever. We worked episodes one, two, and six tonight. During one tonight it occurred to me that I should be taking my gesture with my hair further. It is stated in the script that it is a nervous habit, and I have been
doing the gesture. However, I have been doing the same one. I need to find out how she touches it differently: when she is scared, nervous, excited, or happy. It needs to reflect where she is. I need to look at this in the other scenes too. In Episode Two tonight we had more props, and a chair. It helped! I loved dragging the chair over to the window. I know that Helen is frustrated, and I want her to appear young here. But I don’t want her to appear bratty. I am avoiding sinus resonance for that reason. I need to really play up appeasing my mother in the end of the scene, when I know the fight has gone too far. I have added in a caress when she is sitting in the chair to really put in some tenderness. It is important that she does not come across as ungrateful. Episode Six is coming along so well. Ryan is very easy to work with, and he will try anything. We have been playing around with different ways to wrap our bodies around each other when we are lying on the bed for so long. We need to be able to shift to create different levels and positions since we are staying in one place on the set. There are actors this would be uncomfortable with, but Ryan is so open. It makes my job easier. We are finding moments of genuine laughter in this scene; it is refreshing. It really is the only time I am finding myself smiling or laughing.

January 24th

I had my first fitting today. Harmony is wonderful! She wanted me in a navy skirt, and she picked out several that she liked. Then, she let me try on all of them and pick the one I was most comfortable in. That does not happen often! I picked one that is simple, but very feminine. She paired it with a cream, fluffy sweater that I just adore. It makes me feel so delicate. Knowing what I will be wearing contributed to my performance tonight in Scene One. I was reading today that Ruth Snyder was a telephone girl. Ruth was brassy and bold. She had career ambition and dated many men. Going through episode one and two tonight really hit home to me how little
experience Helen has. She does not date; she cannot even operate at an entry-level position. Ruth seems to be more like the telephone girl in Episode one than like Helen. Helen is delicate, and has many health problems…more similar to Sophie.

January 25th

We ran the honeymoon and maternal scene tonight. I love the transition between the two scenes. The last part of the honeymoon episode when I am on the bed, I am frozen in fear. To have Desiree come on and dress me for the transition into the hospital scene really establishes how comatose Helen is in Episode Four. It also exhibits to me how unwilling she is to participate. She doesn’t fight, but she doesn’t help. I make my body a ragdoll; Desiree has to lift and place me in every instance. My eyes are vacant and unfocused. I need to remember to keep my head up for sightlines. I need to get braver with the outbursts I do have. Being in the trailer makes me forget the larger space we will have to eventually fill. I need to rehearse the vocals more in this scene and find different levels, physically, for the monologue at the end. I find myself becoming more and more nervous with these monologues. I have this fear that the audience is not going to follow me. I can’t let the fear keep shutting me down.

January 27th

We started out with warm-ups, and it is not my week anymore. I am happy to be able to just follow instructions, and not have to lead. My mind is becoming more crowded with possibilities for this character, it is nice to relax. I think having to put myself in this character’s shoes for three to four hours a day, six days a week, is rubbing off on me. I am so conscious of my own hands now. I have become obsessed with keeping them manicured, and how they look compared to others. My hair has also become something that is very important to me. It is as if Helen’s characteristics are manifesting themselves in my everyday habits. The rest of the cast reviewed
the prologue today, and then we spent the last three and half hours of rehearsal on episode 8. That is a good chunk, but this scene has to be so precise. The tracks that the lawyers walk are very specific, and the questioning has to be just right. I don’t do much but react in this scene, so it allowed me the time to really discover: when I was reciting a rehearsed line from the lawyer, how I feel when I get the lines right … which often led to me messing up the next question. I read many historians believe that Ruth Snyder "did herself in" by taking the stand. I think that is the case with Helen. She cracks into confession because the memory of Richard. The thought of the only man she ever loved betraying her destroys her barriers. I wonder how Judd and Ruth felt when they found out that they both gave each other up. The difference for our story being that in contrast, Richard did not aide in the killing of Helen’s husband and the murder was not premeditated by anyone. Helen is plagued by a controlling husband and overwhelmed by a lack of belonging to the world in which she lives. Ruth Snyder planned every moment. She may have felt out of place in her world, and I know she had an abusive husband, but I think the two women are only similar in that they felt trapped. I am discovering more and more that Ruth and Helen are not as related as I thought at the beginning of this process.

January 28th, 2008

Tonight we worked my monologues, and then we sped lines through episodes 7, 8, and 9. My monologues were a disaster. Chris was there to work with me, at my request, but I still got so frustrated. He kept pushing me for more physicality, to be bigger. I think my frustration was a combination of my mind in this character (she is so nervous with authority) and myself feeling very vulnerable. These monologues are so long, and I am constantly second guessing myself in them. I need to work at home with larger movements and bring something better back into the
rehearsal space. Much to my dismay, I just couldn’t shift into larger choices on the spot. I could feel my body shutting down with tension. I knew Chris and Julia were disappointed. The line through, however, went really well: especially in Episode 8, where lines have to be so tight. I have noticed more correlation between the Snyder case and Helen’s. On the crime scene, Mr. Snyder’s gold watch on a platinum chain was found. Mr. Jones brings up several times that they will go travel, and that he really wants a Swiss watch. Mrs. Snyder concocted a story that a strong man broke into her house and hit her husband, and Mrs. Jones did the same. Mrs. Jones, however, said that there were two men in her house. Mr. Snyder was known to hit Mrs. Snyder, treating her like his property. Mr. Jones never hits Helen, but he has a series of lines in episode 8 when he is celebrating the acquisition of some property, after which he turns to Helen and says, “That’s not all that’s mine. (He pinches her cheek) I got a first mortgage on her, I’ll got a second mortgage on her, and she’s mine!” It is very clear that Helen in an object in this house, in George’s life. He sees her as property. He doesn’t listen to her, or understand her. More importantly, he doesn’t take the time to. Not that this warrants murder…but it got me to thinking that just because a man isn’t hitting a woman doesn’t mean she isn’t suffering from abuse.

January 29th

We had a full designer run tonight. It felt good! They seemed to really enjoy the work. I am still apprehensive about transferring into the other space, but since we are moving tomorrow, I will soon be finding out what it will feel like there. Little progress today in the monologues. I focused on using my voice more, really stressing the vocal patterns I had scored, but it still felt…dry. Kate came into rehearsals a week ago and watched the Honeymoon scene, and reminded me to lift my gaze. She said when she could catch my eyes; she was heartbroken. I have carried that
with me, and it is helping so much. I was missing a lot by having my gaze down, and I think the habit is related to when I freeze up in my monologues: self consciousness. With my gaze down, my energy is down, and I am less vulnerable. I want to be a braver actress.

January 30th
Our first day in the space! We did a walk through with Heidi and Mike, and I am LOVING it. The set is amazing. All of the details they have added…the bed popping up, the pressurized mail shoot…these things really add to the artistic vision of the show. I am a little nervous about the Genie making it up every night…if not I have to walk up the ladder. After the initial walk through, we worked the blocking and transitions for every scene. And we needed all the time we had. There are a lot of things to be maneuvered around, and lots of buttons to be pressed, etc. The space here is larger than the trailer. I have a lot more room to play with…I intend to make my circles bigger and my pacing more expansive. I also have more room in the hospital monologue than I thought. There is a platform box next to the window on stage left, and I decided I wanted to use it. During my monologue in episode four, I just stood on it. Climbed up on it when I am talking about St. Peter and heaven, and then when I am questioning God. It broke me of my physical containment. I am feeling much more brave. I am giving the physical movement of my hands praying and my laying on the belly more time and space. This is also helping my energy become more expansive. I cannot be afraid to take up space as an actress. Helen might be afraid to, but I need to be able to in order to tell her story.

February 1st
We have been working the scenes in the space, and I am finding my bearing. It has given me encouragement to be vocally and physically larger. As we work the scenes I am more aware of the strange mother and daughter relationship. Sophie was clearly working on her experience with her mother, and the general breakdown of the matriarchal connections that happen when you live in a patriarchal society. Helen has a complicated relationship with her own mother, and she has terrible confusion about being a mother herself- to the point of rejecting her child at first- because the child represents what happens to a woman from a man. Then in episode 7 she is so frantic to tell her husband she really tries to be a good mother. One of her last lines in Episode 9 is to her mother, telling her to tell her “strange little child” to “live!” It’s as if these women have all missed each other due to the masculine society around them: Helen’s mother is bitter and shut down from her failed marriage, and Helen is stuck and confused in her own. Helen’s daughter suffers from the lack of a present mother, just as Helen did. I wonder if this particular story thread came from Sophie’s observance of Lorraine, Ruth’s child.

February 2nd

We reviewed episodes 6, 4, and 3. I love working on episode six in this space. No longer wooden blocks, but an amazing moon shaped, swinging bed! It was a little precarious at first, but Ryan and I have worked to learn how to distribute our weight for each other when we move around so that we don’t tip over! With the swinging motion and the shape of the bed, it is truly Helen’s circular dream. The boldness is still coming through for Episode 4. Julia is much happier. Episode three is terrifying. Even the thought of having to take off my clothes for George H. Jones brings me to tears every night. This woman is so timid and vulnerable… and she is
oblivious to what she has really gotten herself into. She is trapped and forced to strip herself in a way that she doesn’t understand.

February 3rd

We didn’t have rehearsal today, but I met Harmony and a hairdresser at the costume shop and we cut my hair. They had wanted to wig me, but it just felt so wrong. It just seemed strange to me that the only person who had humanity, who is real, (other than the lover) would be wigged. The black box is such a small space too, and you can tell when someone is wigged. I just wanted Helen to be as natural and organic as possible, so I told Harmony I would rather cut my hair. I wept as the lady cut it. My hair has also become so personal to me. Working on Helen’s psychology has certainly taken root in my own. It was so hard to let someone else handle a part of my identity. This is the feeling that I will bring to the stage in episode 9 when the barber’s are there to shave a patch of Helen’s hair. She is calm before that, and the shaving is what makes her hysterical: the last untouched part of herself is violated. She must “submit to the very end”. As hard as it was to see my very long hair in chunks on the floor, I looked up into the mirror, and through my tears, I swear I saw Helen reflecting back at me. The style is perfect for her. I felt in that moment that I was truly lending my skin to her story.

February 4, 2008

I forgot to mention that our intermission idea worked! We mentioned to Julia that we would love an intermission between episodes five and six. After the crew view, Julia and Patrick made the executive decision to place one in. It will keep everyone (including myself!) from being
exhausted, and the placement is perfect- it works with the concept. Richard represents freedom to Helen, and at the end of Episode 5, he now leads her out of the bar, through the vom, and into the free world that he occupies. Intermission. When the lights come up, they are in the swinging moon bed, having just made love. It makes sense that we wouldn’t see that part, and we enter after they have done what we knew they left to do…and the show moves on from there. Tonight Episode Nine went really well. I adopted my physical ideas from Episode 4, and it felt right. I decided to actually go down to the floor, on my knees, to pray. Just adding this level helped with the layering of the scene. When the guards drag me to Genie, I am supposed to go limp and drag my feet. I am having a hard time giving over my weight to them. I am going to have to stop being self-conscious about my weight and trust Ryan and Kyle.

February 6
We did a crew view today. It was so nice to have a larger audience. The idea of the “long stairs” (the phrase in my monologue) really affected me tonight in Episode Four. I had this vision of a huge well of souls, and this staircase that they were all blindly walking on…it was terrifying. I am also finding that the more I give a section a specific voice- as if the words were something the nurse said, or George said, or my mother said- and I give that part the voice of the person it originally came from-the more clear the reason for the words to be coming out of Helen’s mouth. I titled the monologue at the end of this episode as: SEEKING. It seems more and more appropriate. Helen wants to many answers. She asks so many questions in the play, and no one answers her: except the lover. I was feeling so silly asking him so many questions, “What does that mean? Where is that?”, etc. but then I realized why she keeps doing it in such a joyful and
playful way. It is because he is the only person that pays attention to her long enough to really answer honestly to what she is asking.

February 7

We had a full run last night that went well. A lot of our starts and stops will be fixed once we have our tech rehearsal. This show is a machine, as is the set. There are lots of technical items that need lots of attention. I love the order of the men and women in episode four. The way the doctor orders the nurse, and the two young, male doctors have a rapport separate from the nurses. It is the nurses that help me, however mechanical they may be. Hearing that in the scene really made my line “God didn’t have one, Mary had one” (in reference to bearing and birthing a child) stand out to me. It’s the concept of a male face for God that is confusing to Helen. Yet she still seeks him amongst her confusion. The Father of the church in Episode Nine also doesn’t give Helen any real answers, and he represents another male face of God. It is interesting to find the places where Helen struggles with her spirituality, and specifically, the Catholic Church. She has a section where she worries about her puppy that died when she recalls that puppies don’t get to go to heaven. What is most interesting is that I found that Sophie Treadwell had a large struggle with her Catholic Faith. The script seems to aim a few questions at the Catholic religion, in a negative light. However, she left the rights and money of this show to a Catholic Church when she died. Knowing this adds some complexities to Helen’s pondering. She doesn’t know what she believes.

February 10th
Yesterday we went through transitions, and much improvement was made. Today was cue to cue. Whew! A very technical show requires lots of time and detail. Several of us forgot close-toed shoes for the cue to cue, and we got in trouble. Don’t forget to bring rehearsal clothes, always! We have been working lots of costume things today as well. I don’t have to do very much; it is mostly other people dressing me on stage and off. It is a surreal experience that I am using for my character. Helen is often just standing there, letting the world dress her to what she ought to be. Since this is a dramatic convention, we see the times she fights back…and is then smote down…with pregnancy, with drugs, with a controlling husband. She is meant to submit. She can’t, and she doesn’t, and she dies for it. The execution scene was tedious. I know they want to get it just right, it is just that fog blows right up into my face every time. I have learned now when to breathe in where it won’t choke me, and then to hold my breath until I get down the ladder. The effect will be worth the pains!

February 11th, 2008

I can’t believe we open this week. Submitting has been in my mind even more: when Helen decides not to submit anymore after the childbirth…the next scene is at the speakeasy. I have been trying to figure out why she decided to go there, and how she arranged it. What is most interesting to me is that she makes the decision not to submit at the end of episode four, but then we don’t see her decide to step out to the speakeasy until five years later. I think this continues to show her struggle in finding herself and making decisions for herself. I also have begun to see her relationship with George H. Jones like her relationship with God: it is a power issue. They are both males that demand submission. This makes the Holy Ghost, or a spiritual or marital life,
one that carries a burden of responsibility to something other than one’s own truth. And even in
the last scene she questions why she is guilty of the sin of love: the only thing that made her feel
free while she was here on earth? How can that be a sin that would condemn her? Amanda has
added some music to the execution scene and it is powerful. I love it because I feel that when
Helen dies, it is her ultimate freedom. It is supposed to be a punishment, but what it means is that
she has finally escaped this machine. The music gives the audience the feeling of her ascension.
It really feels like a missing piece to the story has been found.

February 12th, 2008

My gown got ripped yesterday because I stepped on it. A lot of people have been tripping and
such, so they made an effort to glow tape the stage even more (something that was heavily
requested by the actor’s during tech). My quick changes have not been going so well, so today
they decided that we would run them everyday before the show. Yikes. But if I had a fight, I
would have fight call everyday. I should just look at it as being safe. My choker got the note that
it wasn’t bold enough, so we will see what Harmony will do with that. Something fantastic, I am
sure. We sped through episode one and five tonight before the run, which was a good idea. It is
so damn hard to get those patterns right. It is so rhythmic. When it is right, it sounds like music.
When it is off, it sounds like something clanging a wrench on a drainpipe. Tightening the lines
helped in the run. I tried something new tonight in Scene 5. Earlier I wrote about why Helen was
at the speakeasy, and it has always occurred to me that she was nervous in this new place- so she
looks to the telephone girl for guidance. What if she actually tried to imitate the telephone girl?
Doing this would make her fit in more, and it would be what the gentleman there wanted to see
…so I made her more sassy. Patrick and Julia didn’t like it and asked me to cut it. And upon reflection, they are right. The reason Richard likes her is because she is different from the other girls. I have been fighting this stereotype of her being a bad person because she ends up murdering her husband, and if she is sassy and provocative in this scene it could compromise any chance of sympathy she could get from the audience. You have to fall in love with her softness and timidity.

Wednesday 13th

Last dress. The new choker tonight was awesome! It is so heavily decorated, it makes the line about feeling like I have “stones around my neck” so perfect. My husband has decorated me with stones, they are choking me, and I end up killing him with stones. Nice, Sophie. Tonight, at the end of episode six when I ask for the lily, I realized that Helen makes her first fully present decision on stage. She isn’t timid or nervous, or weighing different options. She point blank asks for the lily. And he gives it to her. It is one of her small moments of personal strength. I do wonder that she finds herself with the help of a man…but Sophie’s own relationship with her husband was so respectful and loving that I think she was hoping to show that it could be done differently. Even though the lover leaves Helen, it is not out of spite. It is out of life calling. Sophie and her husband were often long distance or in separate residences. I believe feeling that they both had freedom is what kept their relationship alive. I also think we are ready to open.

February 14, 2008
Opening night. I left one of my costume pieces up on the platform in a transition because I couldn’t see. Bad luck! But it was rescued later on. Thank goodness that was the only thing that really went wrong, other than the platform not quite coming out all the way. But that was easily fixed. I got applause after my first monologue in episode one. That was encouraging! I think the audience really enjoyed it. Our energy was up, and marks where hit. It felt electric.

February 15, 2008

Last night a skirt, tonight a hat. Something of mine getting left behind every night! Luckily, it has been easily fixed by attentive cast mates. It is just so dark; it is hard to see if you have grabbed everything. I think I will just have to be more conscious of placing all the items RIGHT on top of each other, so that I won’t be searching around. I can fix that by taking the clothes off more carefully in the honeymoon scene. When I hear Richard’s name in Episode 8, I have stopped flinching and started to freeze, and then do a slow burn look to the lawyer. It feels much better and I think it has a better effect. That is a major lesson I am learning in this process- don’t be afraid to take up more time or space. I affect no one when I am keeping my energy to myself. The flinch reached in to me, and the slow look reaches out to the audience.

February 16th, 2008

I feel like Act One of the show is really getting tighter as we move on. Hooray! I have gotten used to what triggers me in Episode Nine, but tonight something totally new happened. I started to break down when I talk about my daughter, when I say, “I never knew her”. The tremendous amount of sadness and guilt that went along with that line just choked me up. I have a line that says, “tell her-tell her…” But I never get to say what I want to tell her because the guards drag
me away. I never got past imagining that I wanted to tell her to live her life to the fullest. But looking over more research on the execution scene, I found that they have published Ruth’s last letters to her daughter and mother. So I decided to write a letter to my daughter. I told her all of the things I wanted to tell her, about the mistakes I had made and what I hoped for her future. I wish I would have thought to do it earlier. It also prompted me to write a letter to Richard, letting him know what he did for me and how he changed my life. I also wrote a letter to my mother, revealing regrets and asking for forgiveness. These letters have really helped me create even more depth within these relationships. I also think it was a bit cathartic. Leaving this show every night is very hard. I am so emotionally and mentally stirred up. Being with my cast mates after the show is helpful, and I often do yoga or read before bed. But there is still a lingering tension most nights.

February 17th

Photo call! Today was a day of technical upheaval. The mail tube didn’t work, my hat was left again, and the hospital bed and IV did not pop up right. Oh well. I often don’t notice these things because I don’t have any technical tasks except striking clothes. But I sure can feel it when it starts to go wrong, in the energy of my cast mates. I just try and use their sense of frustration as one more means to my anxiety. Speaking of anxiety, I am ready to have a few days off. It requires technique to get all of this nervous energy into my body and out for the character, and I need to make sure I am taking just as much time and technique in letting it go. Some basic yoga and breath work is helping a lot with the release.

February 20th
We tried to convince Julia to do our brush up rehearsal at Bennigan’s….but to no avail! It wasn’t long though, and it really was needed. We ran through the prologue, episode one, and the transition between four and five. This is where the clothes have been left when that has been a problem. Also, we sped through the lines for scene 5. That was an especially good idea because the cue lines there are so tight as we move from scene to scene. I am going to come in early tomorrow so that we can review the execution with the board ops. I certainly don’t mind. That moment needs to be spot on, and I will do whatever we need to be sure that it is.

February 21
Back to the show. Tonight was really great. The energy was up, and I think we escaped the “first night back” curse with our brush up rehearsal. I have had a few days to think about how to wind myself down after these performances. It terms of overall objective, Helen wants peace. She wants peace within, and peace in this world. She never finds it. I was rereading what I wrote about the ascension music and it occurred to me: she gets peace. She finally does because she escapes the world that gave her so much confusion and pain. It is helping me to remember that at the end of the show. Also, when the show is over I try to place moments in my mind from Episode 6, when Helen is happy and feels safe. On that note, people have asked me how I can hold on to this idea of the lover being so wonderful when we find out he betrays Helen by giving up their story to the prosecutors. But there is one line that catches me in that scene. The defense attorney mentions that the prosecuting attorney most likely got the deposition from Richard by threatening extradition charges. Richard loved Mexico, and he loved the freedom that it gave him. Richard represented freedom to Helen. Helen would have known that without freedom, Richard would die. It came down to giving up the story, or losing his freedom. I don’t think she
ever resented him for that. This is another pointed difference between the Jones case and the Snyder case. Snyder and Gray turned on each other and ripped each other apart. There was more of a sense of love and understanding in the Jones case, which makes it more heartbreaking.

February 22nd

My family is in town! They are coming to see the show tomorrow night. Good thing, tonight was a wonky one. The Genie didn’t work for Kyle, Luigi dropped his calculator and the whole tape unrolled, my dress in episode nine popped open…that was kind of the energy for the whole show. Perhaps it is a good thing, since adjudication is tomorrow night. I am a firm believer in the bad dress, good opening rule. So maybe that can apply for adjudication too!

February 23rd

We had adjudication tonight. I am exhausted. It lasted so long and I didn’t get home until past midnight. The show went well tonight, it was really moving along. The platform had to be moved manually, but everything else worked. The adjudicator really loved the piece. That was encouraging. Although it wasn’t very helpful. He was young and excited, and it was his first time to be a respondent. He told us many of the things he loved…the flower caught in the meat grinder concept, the poignancy of the lover scene, and the powerful execution scene. Everything we wanted to portray he got. Which was wonderful. But I was hoping for more constructive criticism. I was proud that he commented on our ensemble work. This cast has been such a joy to work with, and I am glad it came across that we really are there for each other out on the stage.

February 24th.
I can’t believe this is the last show. It has affected me greatly. I see the moon differently, I think of flowers differently. I am still obsessed with my hands and my hair. But most of all, I am still so disturbed by this woman’s story. The fact that so many women who have seen the show approached me and related that they felt so heavily close to its concept is frightening. 80 years later, the main themes of this play are still battles being fought in humanity. I question the male face of God. I question the constraints of society. I hope that people are walking away from this show with questions. Helen was filled with questions that never got answered. It is a privilege that we do live in a place were we are least allowed to ask. I hope they leave asking, and seeking. I hope the idea that the world is not so black and white resonates. A woman murders, and is killed for it…but it isn’t that simple. There are so many shades of grey, and in order to understand them, or even approach them, it requires us to really tap into our sense of humanity and empathy. I leave this show wanting. I feel that I could continue to uncover more layers of relationship, spirituality, and human instinct. I dearly hope that I left the audience with a story that haunts them and causes them to question. My goal was to have married together the script in a way that conveys this woman’s life, episode by episode. I hope I did that. They say theatre is the art form of memory; the only canvas is the mind. Now that the performances are over, that is all that is left.
CHAPTER FIVE: COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mark Brotherton: Committee Chair Report

As chair of Ms. Rentschler’s thesis committee, I had three primary responsibilities: to observe a working rehearsal, observe an actual performance, and assist and guide Ms. Rentshler’s through the written component of the thesis.

The rehearsal I observed was an early work-thru of one of Helen’s monologues in the beginning of the show. I instantly recognized Ms. Rentschler as an attentive/active listener, and a willing-to-try-anything performer. She immediately applied any notes given by the director desiring to see if the suggested actions/tactics would work. The director often said, “yes…but,” alluding to the fact that it was not exactly what was right. Ms. Rentschler never grew impatient. The director and actress continued to discuss and reexamine the monologue until both seemed satisfied with the progress. My advice to Ms. Rentschler (who has a very strong actor’s vocabulary in regards to tactics) is to help the director by offering multiple choices rather than waiting for clarification.

On February 21, 2008, I attended a performance of Machinal. Overall, I very much enjoyed my experience watching this complex piece. The visuals, movement, and musical underscoring were very strong. The acting, for the whole, showed a very strong ensemble cast who had a clear understanding of the material. Ms. Rentschler’s performance contained many touching, honest, and true moments. My only negative comments were that some of her acting
choices may have been too passive. Helen often ended up being a victim rather than trying to survive. Although the world around the character does try to weigh her down, I feel the actress might have searched for more struggle and more reasons to escape.

As for the written component of the thesis, I feel Ms. Rentschler has done an outstanding job. I believe this thesis could easily be used by any actress approaching the role of Helen and would offer them a comprehensible and concise reference tool in creating a successful character. Ms. Rentschler’s acting choices in the written component seem stronger and in many ways more aggressive. If Ms. Rentschler ever approaches this role again, I feel that with this material, she would be even more successful than she was in her original performance.

**Kate Ingram: Committee Member Report**

As Helen, the main character in Sophie Treadwell’s play MACHINAL, Brittney faced a difficult actor-challenge in that Helen is troubled and introverted. Author Treadwell’s script provided her with focus, but also a strong measure of passive energy. “Helen” as written is a protagonist who watches the world evolve around her and basically, allows events to happen to her.

Brittney’s movements and overall body language had an appropriate almost floating/gliding sense which led to a “not-quite-all-there” quality, languid, and never stiff. Her portrayal of Helen came across as classy and elegant without putting on airs, but the distant quality was tricky to connect with; as a character, she does not feel part of the world, and thus, as an actress, connection to her cast-mates must have been difficult due to the necessarily confused
and uncertain way she looked at her life. At times, it may have also inhibited the audience’s connection to her.

Brittney’s Helen without a doubt was enacted sympathetically, despite the remote and somewhat isolated role. She came across as especially warm in her scenes with The Lover; those were the most fully realized as the character (as, I suppose, they should be.) The final trial scenes evoked audience sympathy, but again, Brittney had a difficult task in playing the victim, being acted upon, and lacking opportunity to stand her ground and exhibit more “spine” and personal stakes. Brittney was able to use her lovely open face to express her internal thoughts and emotions as they passed through her, but there were times when her passivity and acceptance of events served to neutralize key moments which might have flickered or flared had they been able to be played with higher stakes and deeper investment. Her vocal work was clear and fine, though sometimes her low volume was not a fair match for the highly mechanized noise of the stage environment. Some of these observations are no doubt reflective of certain scripted “givens” as well as directorial decisions.

In conclusion, Brittney’s performance was a very fine, successful enactment of a very difficult character. She was beautifully cast in a role which was perfectly suited to her physically and vocally, and she embodied the spirit of Helen in a manner that I am confident Sophie Treadwell would have applauded whole-heartedly.
Vandy Wood: Committee Member Report

Britney Rentschler did a beautiful job of exploring and performing the role of Helen in Sophie Treadwell’s *Machinal*. She thoughtfully examined the character during the rehearsal process and appeared to have clear understanding of the character, script and the relevant historical events. Britney actively explored the scenic environment on the first night of rehearsals on stage and discovered an exciting relationship to the space in performance.

Britney’s performance of this complex role was very effective in the creation of an empathetic response from the audience. Her delicate portrayal of Helen brought some complex and often conflicting layers to a character that presents challenging emotional and physical landscapes.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

“As well your part, there all the honor lies”
–Alexander Pope (BrainyMedia).

As storytellers, it is our job to lend the characters we play our flesh, blood, bones, and voice to bring them off the page and in to life. By examining the given circumstances Mrs. Treadwell wrote into her play, _Machinal_, and by synthesizing the research I did about her life and the life of Ruth Snyder, I put together my interpretation of the character Helen. This sourcebook contains the part of my acting process that can be shown on paper. After processing all of the information you can read here, I did my best to lend my skin to another woman. I told her story, out loud, on stage, for an audience in the UCF Black Box theatre a total of nine times.

I can conclude from this that art is not an exact science. I cannot share tables or diagrams to illustrate the level of my success; I can only make an educated guess as to the outcome of my performance in this role. I feel that I did act well my part, and I am content with the information I am leaving behind for any other actress who will make an attempt to tell Helen’s story. I learned more about myself in this process: that I want to be braver as an actress, and that I want to make larger choices in my work earlier in the rehearsal period. Mrs. Treadwell wrote a bold script, and I would challenge any actress to start off matching that boldness as early as possible. Along that line, I want to warn the actress about falling into playing “the victim”. If Helen does not struggle, or use active tactics to move in her world, she can end up being static and unsympathetic. In my own performance, I feel that I could have incorporated more moments of actively resisting, rather than passively contemplating. The term that our director used, “flower in a meat grinder”, is a beautiful image. However, it is a passive one. It should color the actresses choices, but not dictate them. A flower caught in a meat grinder is a fragile, submissive
fatality. Helen’s life has to matter enough to be fought for, and she has to be the one doing the fighting. The actress must capture the heart and delicateness of Helen’s nature, but she must not ignore the strength and understanding that she is seeking. I feel that if I had done all of the paperwork found here before my performance, to this amount of detail, I would have had a more dynamic Helen. For the actress reading this, I cannot stress the importance of being specific and active with your tactics, especially in this role.

I found the reaction to this play to be very interesting. There was an outpouring, positive response from the female audience members that I encountered. I received several letters and emails thanking me for helping to tell this story, because the senders felt that women today are still suffering from a lack of voice in their own lives. I also had a very personal experience with this role, as it illuminated places in my own life where I was facing the same relationship issues as Helen. Additionally, I found it interesting when I received verbal comments that alluded to the fact that she was a bad wife, a bad mother, and that she deserved to die for committing murder. In fact, they were happy to see her executed. It did not escape me that most of these comments were coming from males. I was bothered by this at first, and then excited about it. The art itself was causing discussion, and that is its purpose. It is not my job to dictate how an audience feels. My job is to show up, present the most fully alive character that I can, and then to let go of the results. I can neither judge my character, or the audience.

What is left of my performance is as intangible as a memory, but what can be left behind is in this sourcebook of my research, trials, errors, and successes. Now I pass on the torch to any other storyteller who is ready to take on the delicious challenge that we have as artists and storytellers: to act well our part.
APPENDIX A: COSTUME RENDERINGS
Machinal

Episode 9
Helen
Machinal

Episode 1/2
Helen
Episode 4
Helen
APPENDIX B: SET PICTURE
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