

Machinal

Written by Sophie Treadwell
Concept by Mack Finklea



The World of Machinal



**“THE WOMAN IS ESSENTIALLY
SOFT, TENDER AND THE LIFE
AROUND HER IS ESSENTIALLY
HARD, MECHANIZED”.**

We see this story from the eyes of the young woman. Through the sheer amount of words and noise, the audience can begin to feel the claustrophobia that is suffocating the young woman. The play itself jumps from scene to scene with a fast paced, overwhelming motion which mirrors the pace at which the workforce frequently moves. It forces us to exist within the machine (an industrialized, conformist society).

The story itself is exciting for me because it allows the audience to empathize with someone who could easily be seen as the villain of this story. It tells a side of this story that was overlooked in its time due to the fact that this woman was sexually “deviant” and therefore deserved no empathy. Something I’m really interested in is exploring the way she broke societal rules through her affair and how that immediately changed the way society viewed her. She was no longer playing her role correctly so she earned the harshest possible punishment. What happens when we openly defy societal norms? How does the machine react?

In addition to that, it is a story which is told in two ways- through the actual words themselves and through the feeling that the sounds of the words evoke. Treadwell wrote, “ In the dialogue of these scenes there is an attempt to catch the rhythm of our common city speech, its brassy sound, its trick of repetition”. It is exciting to me to find the rhythms of each scene and attempt to utilize them through scenic transitions with the addition of movement through the ensemble so that the audience can enter each scene already in pace with the actors.

THEMES

Gender Expectations

“AND I SUPPOSE I GOT
TO MARRY SOMEBODY-
ALL GIRLS DO”

“YOU FLINCHED WHEN I
TOUCHED YOU ... I LIKED
IT. PURITY”



Gender roles are extraordinarily important to this story.

They are the reason why the Young Woman feels pressured into an unhappy marriage, the reason she felt she couldn't divorce her husband, and ultimately part of the reason the trial was so out of her favor. It is important to me that we highlight the extremes of each gender with this story. Husband should be the epitome of masculinity while Young Woman or Telephone Girl should exude femininity and softness. The harshness of the world stems directly from the hardened male influence because it is they who have the power and thus they who create the world. This is a man's world. The men should feel overwhelmingly dominate in costume and treatment. Casting will influence this greatly but so will the way we create the world around these characters.



“THESE MODERN
NEUROTIC WOMEN, EH
DOCTOR?” (29)

THEMES

Claustrophobia vs Freedom



ALL THOSE BODIES
PRESSING. I THOUGHT I
WOULD FAINT! I HAD TO GET
OUT IN THE AIR!

One of the main phenomenons that leads Young Woman through this journey is the feeling of being trapped, unable to breathe. She is suffocated by the world she is a part of and that is what inherently sets her apart from the other characters.

I want to explore this idea in several ways- the set should have a very closed off feeling which culminates in the jail cell. Young Woman is constantly seeking freedom but the only moment in which she is free from this suffocation is in her last moments, in the execution chair. First Man shows her a taste of secondhand freedom but it is not long before she is back to suffocation

This suffocation can also be found in the lack of silence at all times. I imagine that there is some sort of noise, environmental or musical throughout the majority of the show, expanding when she is feeling particularly overwhelmed. The audience should feel as though they are very rarely given a chance to breathe, the moment which I think is the exception is in the duet scenes between Young Woman and First Man.

I FEEL AS THOUGH I WERE
DROWNING. WITH STONES
AROUND MY NECK. STIFLING

I HAD TO GET FREE DIDN'T I?

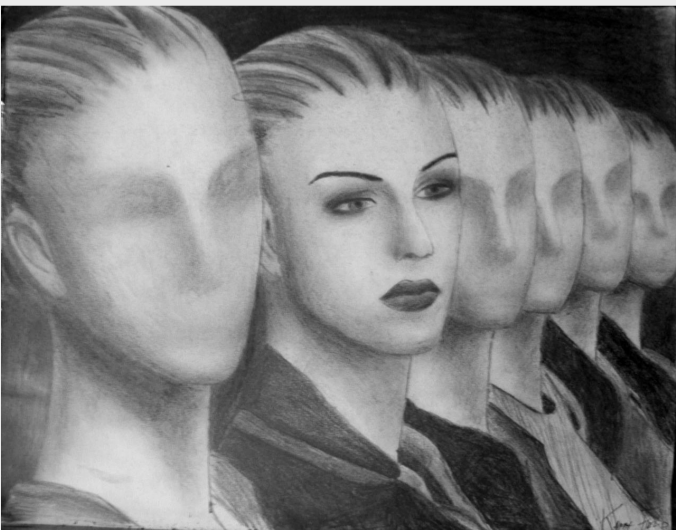


THEMES

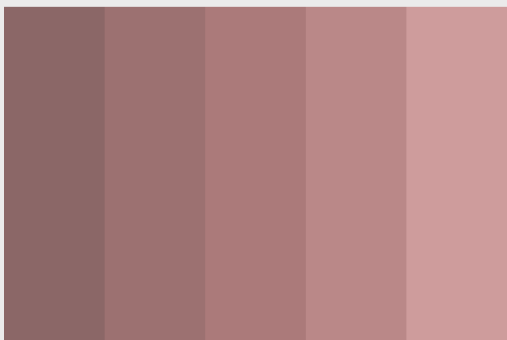
Self Expression

There is a clear lack of individuality and expression of self in the writing of this play. The most evident example of this is the lack of using names. They are referred to as Young Woman, First Man, Telephone Girl, etc which makes them anonymous anybodies. But this is underscored by the changing of these titles within the script (Young Woman becomes Woman after her affair, Jones becomes Husband). Essentially, Treadwell is arguing that the context of your identity, your relationship to those around you, is more important than your actual self.

This lack of identity is particularly important to me in the creation of the ensemble. The ensemble should blend into these identity-less pieces moving around this world, which is why it is especially helpful that most actors are portraying several characters. Young Woman partially struggles so much because she is not allowed to find what she wants and express it- love and freedom. It is not until she has her affair that she discovers what that feels like.



Color Palette



Casting Breakdown

CASTING BREAKDOWN AS OF YET:

3 F, 5 M, 1 EITHER / NB, 1 F / NB

M: ADDING CLERK, SECOND MAN, JUDGE, BARBER 1

M: FILING CLERK, MAN AT BAR 1, LAWYER FOR DEFENSE

M: BELLBOY, COURT REPORTER, BARBER 2, JAILER

M: DOCTOR, MAN AT BAR 2, BAILIFF, PRIEST

M OR F: STENOGRAPHER, NURSE, BOY AT BAR, GUARD

F: TELEPHONE GIRL, LAWYER FOR PROSECUTION, MATRON

F/NB: FIRST MAN

M: GEORGE H. JONES

F: MOTHER

F: YOUNG WOMAN



Set Design



SET LOCATIONS:
BUSINESS OFFICE
YOUNG WOMAN'S HOME
HOTEL ROOM
DOCTOR'S OFFICE
SPEAKEASY
MAN'S HOME
GEORGE'S HOME
COURT

JAIL CELL/ELECTRIC CHAIR

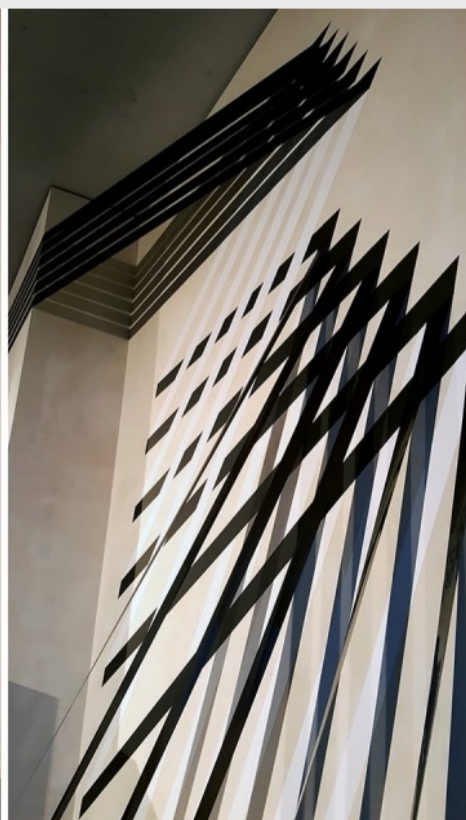
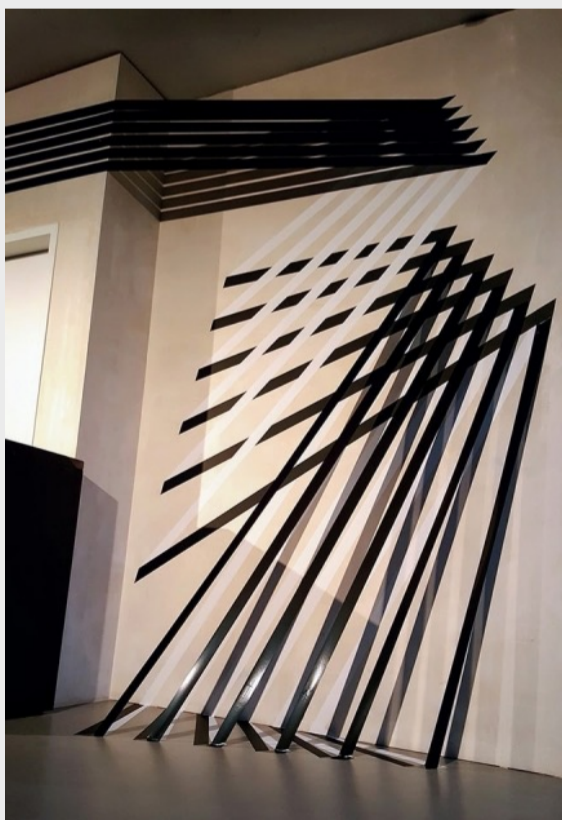
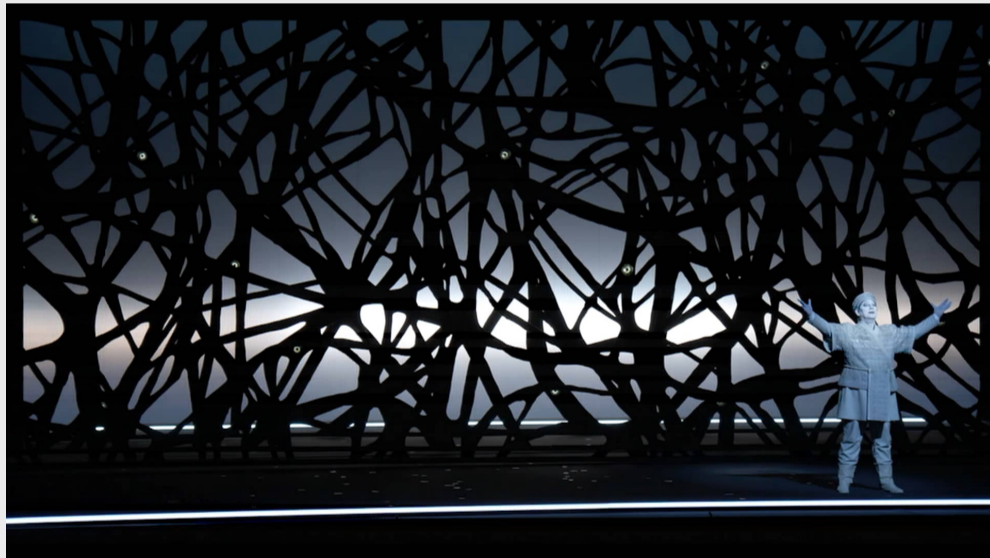
As you can see above, each scene in this production takes place in a completely different location. For that reason I think a minimalist, unit set is our best option.

The important pieces I will need is a single entryway and a way to silhouette actors from backstage for the moments when offstage voices and acting occur. It should almost feel like a window, although it doesn't need to be that literal. The images on the following page provide a direction I am imagining. Other than that, logistically we will utilize up to 6 chairs and one bed which can be dressed differently according to which room it is in. My hope is that we rely more on lighting and sound to create these rooms than any very specific set dressing. The only dressing that should be on the pieces is what is absolutely necessary to the scene (the lily in Richard's room for instance).

Because of the minimalist set design, the aesthetic of the set is very important to me. It should feel very cool and structured with severe lines. I'm interested in exploring how busy we can make the aesthetic to the point of making the audience feel slightly overwhelmed without putting them off the moment they enter the theater.

Images on next page.

Scenic Images



Lighting Design

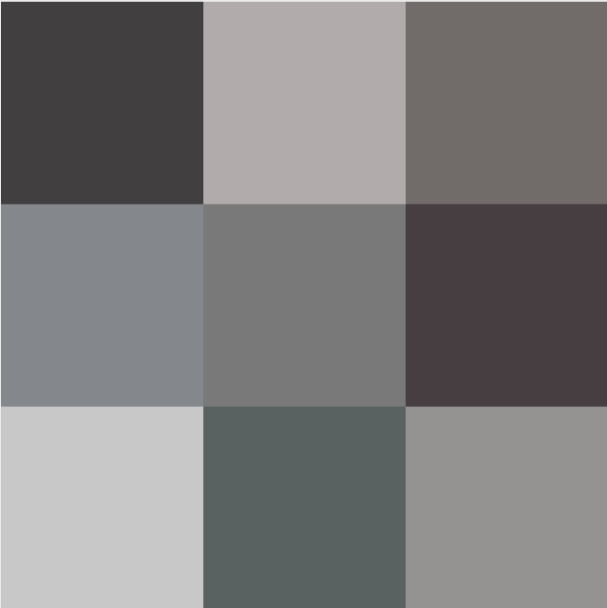
Harsh, stark light is very important to me with this production. The lights should feel very artificially made and cold, mechanical. I do want an area for silhouetting actors from backstage so that will be an interesting challenge for us to light and stage. We will also have to work to find a balance with utilizing shadow which I think work well with this show but also making sure it doesn't become too dark.



Costume Design

There will likely be a lot of blues and grays in the sets and lights so we have to find alternate cool tones to put the actors in so that they don't fade into the scenic elements. Greens, cool purples, and darker tones will be essential. I am looking to set this in the 1920's but through the lens of a hyper-collectivist society. There should be very little individuality and the only very clear distinction of groups should be gender which can be exaggerated (broad shouldered men, frilly dresses for the women, etc). Style is more important to me than strict historical accuracy.

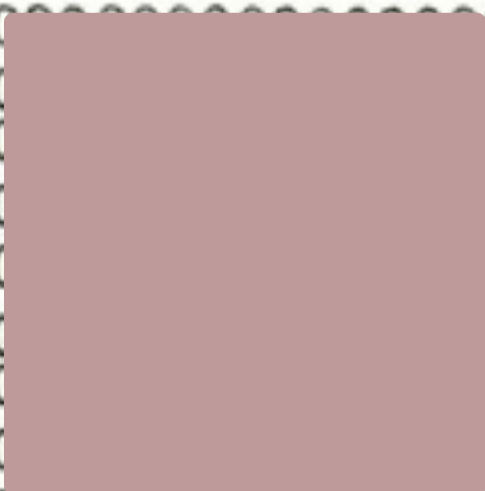
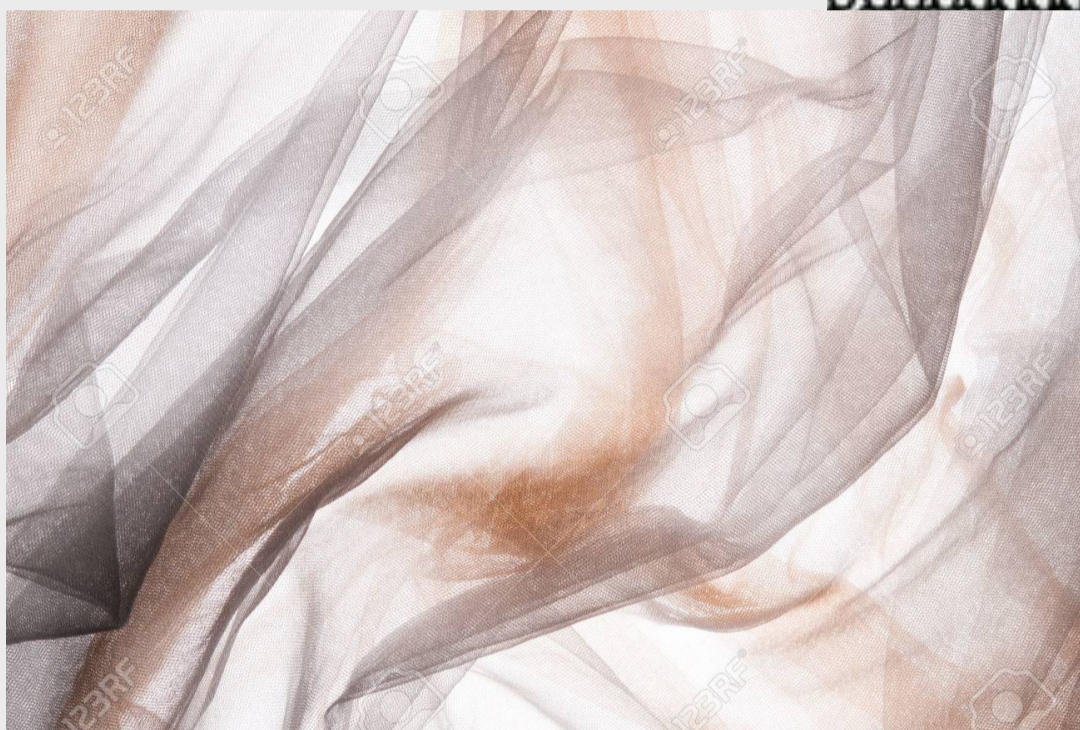
Other than Young Woman, Mother, George H. Jones (Husband), and First Man every actor will be portraying multiple characters. There can be some differentiation in small pieces to show this but my hope is that we can make the other characters generalized enough that we can minimize those differentiations. The characters that appear for one or two scenes are not meant to be individualized, but rather a part of a conformed society.



Costume Design

Young Woman:

She is a working class woman but everything about her should read soft, feminine. She should be very put together, her hair never out of place. I imagine the fabric to be very light, ethereal, perhaps in a more mauve color palette.



Costume Design

First Man:

She/they should be wearing a dress but with several masculine elements (a tie, a lapel, etc). This costume is the one that arguably doesn't truly fit the world because of their relative androgyny. It can sneak into some warmer tones, although it shouldn't go too far away so as not to become a distraction.



Costume Design

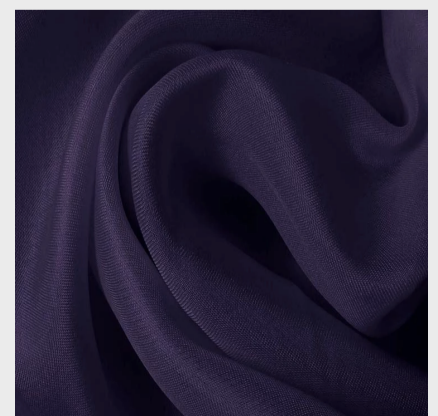
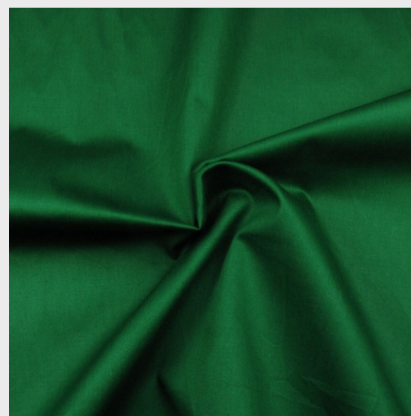
Male Ensemble:

All of the men should have a suit which will work for each of their characters, the two exceptions being the judge and the priest which will require separate costume pieces. The suits should be similar but not identical and should mimic the style of the late 1920s. Of these men, George H. Jones should be the darkest and most formal while Richard (First Man) should be the warmest and less formal.



Female Ensemble Member:

There is only one definite female ensemble member. She should have a fairly nondescript dress. There should be a level of femininity, but not quite as much softness as the Young Woman has.



Sound Design

Sound is a key element for the concept of this production. We will have a composer writing original pieces for the show which will be very static, staccato pieces that occasionally blend in machine sound effects such as typewriters and metronomes. In addition to this, I would like those machine sounds to be utilized in particular during the first scene and in transitions to the point of overwhelming the audience with noise. There are also several instances of off stage voices and pre-recorded voices particularly in the court room scene.

LIST OF SOUND EFFECTS:
TYPEWRITERS
ADDING MACHINE
MANIFOLD
TELEPHONE BELLS
BUZZER
DOORBELL
STREET NOISE
STEEL RIVETING
SOUNDS OF DANCING/MUSIC
THROUGH A WINDOW
SONG FROM STREET:
“CIELITO LINDO”

