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## VOX MACHINAL : The Voice in the Machine

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# VOX MACHINAL

## *The Voice in the Machine*

A Senior Project in Theatre and Performance

Submitted to The Division of the Arts

Bard College

by

Phoebe Hiltermann

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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## VOX MACHINAL

A play about a woman, unable to sleep or to breathe,  
About the rustle of hospital sheets and the numb beat of a heart machine,  
About light that cuts and sounds that vex,  
About a soul that haunts, that follows in footsteps.

### The Voice in the Machine

*“Sadly repetitive, painstaking, or infinitely fragmenting things, rambling on with pauses only for explosions. Pleasure (?) full of histories but no possible historiography.”*

Luce Irigaray

*Machinal*, a play written by journalist and playwright Sophie Treadwell in 1928, follows the life of a woman and the choices she makes from her agreement to marry her boss to her decision to kill him and face the consequences in the court of law. While the story itself was radical for its time, the play shattered conventions through its use of the fragmented quality of its dialogue, repetitive in rhythm and cacophonous in sound, expressing the inner world of the protagonist as well as the anxieties and mechanized mode of being that defined the capitalist culture and post-war tension of the early twentieth century. In a period of great social upheaval, people found themselves caught up in a social and industrial machine that ordered their lives by their means of production and their role in the nuclear family. Treadwell reproduces this world in her play in order to focus on the life of an individual who finds her fixed existence in this environment unsustainable, and thus chooses an act of self-destruction to free her body and mind from its cultural constraints.

The title *Machinal* is a word of Treadwell's own invention, drawn from the Latin *machina*, meaning machine. She evokes this world of order through the language of the play, which takes on staccato beats and cycles of repetitions, as though she has taken her manuscript and run it through a broken machine to produce a work reinvented by pattern and mechanism, dictated by its own logic. She creates the world of a Woman who has been consumed by the Machine and equally constructed by it. The Woman has no history, but of the machine; it is her and it will destroy her. While she is constructed by the Machine, it is also ruled by her subjectivity, in that she manifests her internal reality externally: this is the guiding principle behind expressionist art, which seeks to refigure the world not as we see it, but as we experience it.

In the early half of the twentieth century, women who displayed such symptoms of unrest and disquiet without any physical mark of illness were diagnosed as neurotic. The Woman is plagued by workplace anxieties, insomnia, and intrusive thoughts of violence which manifest in manic spiraling dialogue that unravels amidst the churning words and mechanical sounds of the machine-like environments she inhabits. In our adaptation, titled *VOX MACHINAL*, my co-director, Payton Smith, and I chose to reinvent the world of the play through both the Machine and the psychosis of the Woman, which we explored through interludes of inner thought which interrupt everyday life in the different environments of the Machine, such as the Workplace, the Home, and the Hospital. In these institutional settings, we investigate how the Woman acts and is acted upon, how she is given form and made formless, and how the boundaries of her reality collapse and transform. We explore the manifestations of this neuroses in the way human figures take shape, time is dissolved, and the material world mutates,

following the distorted logic of the Woman over the ordered logic of capitalist society. In order to capture this, we chose to recenter the world around sound, puppetry, and dance: theatricalizations of time and place that allowed us to build a world of sensory feeling, sculpting environments based on how we experience them rather than their appearance.

## Part I : The Surreality of Psychosis

### A Radio Show

The use of the radio stands as a symbolic element and critical narrative device to build the world of the play through sound and tell its story through recorded voice overs, invoking the on-air quality of a radio show playing out through abstraction on stage. The overwhelming rhythms of voice and of movement reflect a machine-like pattern of being and behaving. All around the Woman people are ordered by this machine, or act as extensions of it. The narrative is spoken through the radio, an image of the Machine that constructs and orders the world. Language, as we know it, is transmitted through the radio, distorted and disembodied from the people on stage. It builds a soundscape that tells a story of auditory experience over language itself. The dehumanizing effect of voicelessness is something I've explored in past work as a means to alienate the body on stage as a vessel of truth, acting an expression of its experience without the muddiness of language. In telling our story, we were guided by other-than-human languages that speak in opposition to the Machine: the language of puppets, of poetry, and of dance, and the points where they intersect. In this way, our adaptation builds a world and

simultaneously interrupts it through interludes which offer a glimpse into the inner world of the protagonist, free from the rigorous order of the Machine.

The play begins with the Woman alone on stage at a typewriter. While we do not see her type, we hear the tapping of keys, and then the spinning of a dial, the ringing of a phone, and voices, all elements of the mechanized workplace. Workers of the office enter stage with these machines and get to work, their movements large and abstract, their typewriters and telephones acting as musical instruments and body extensions: simultaneously objectifying people and personifying object. The frantic repetitive movements and staccato dialogue engineer a growing sense of anxiety that builds in the soundscape as the audience catches snippets of the narrative to follow. When the Woman is asked if she'll marry her boss, she cries out “*No*” and the scene transforms into the first interlude. The title of our show *VOX MACHINAL* translates as either the voice *in* or the voice *of* the machine. We use this ambiguity of meaning in our transitions between the outer manifestation of the Woman's reality and the episodes of her psychosis that interrupt it, by exploring this relationship between the voice of the Machine, and the Woman's voice trapped within.



*Fig 1. The Office*



## Worlds that Bleed

In the play of *VOX MACHINAL*, we create worlds that bleed into one another, dreamlike in their sensory qualities and intrusion of the surreal into everyday life. The surrealist movement inspired much of the world we built in our adaptation, as we attempted to evoke large expanses of psychic space, the way time dissolves in an arc, making familiar instruments and figures uncanny and strange. While the environments of the Machine come from an early expressionist tradition of subjective experience through sensory lighting and sound, the interludes introduce us to the surreal inner-workings of our protagonist's mind, and lead us to venture into the uncanny. As the Woman slips into psychosis, the words she is speaking break down and multiply and reverberate in waves and she dances in a diagonal across the stage. The language of the Machine is insufficient to her need to communicate. The noises die down and are replaced by the organic sounds of dripping and scraping that come from a live foley hidden in the wings of the theater. A monstrous being enters the scene, a creature made up of twisted driftwood and winter branches making a slow procession across the stage. This is the first appearance of the Soul, which asserts itself in various forms throughout the narrative. The abrupt divergence from the reality of the Machine takes us to a setting out of time and space, where language and sound break down to allow for something strange and new to take its place. The Woman's monologue begins with sense, and slowly unravels into a rhapsody of rhythms and repetitions. This fragmentation of language mirrors the dissolution of her identity through the play, as she shifts from one reality into another. In her psychosis, the Woman is drawn to the giant skeletal form that crosses behind her, and pursues it until the world slips back into the world of the Machine as a song begins to play on the radio.

## The Body in Pieces

The idea of fragmentation entered early into our creative process. It began with the original script, which we read line by line delineating which were important for narrative and for building the world of the play. I then made it my objective to destroy the script - to break it down to its essential pieces in order to refigure it into something new. Due to the nature of soundscape, I did not find the linear structure of a play conducive to our new work, and so attempted to collage the script scene by scene. This gave us more of a sense of how the dialogue and the sound would interact in the soundscape, weaving a narrative into the atmosphere of each of the environments we created. In the Home, for example, the Woman attempts to speak with her Mother about her marriage proposal as the Mother nags and busies herself about the kitchen. In order to heighten the tension of the scene through sound, we cut the dialogue with clattering dishes and slamming drawers that were evocative of the Woman's stress and anxiety. Sounds like the crescendo shriek of a kettle and the shattering of glassware conjure a heightening sense of violence in the objects and in the Home. These objects are also fragmented, as the sounds they elicit are alienated from their objecthood. We deliberately constructed a visual reality in which objects and sounds were dissociated, body alienated from a disembodied voice, to create a gulf between what is seen and what is sensed.

Thus, what we hear through the radio is also not in accord with what we see on stage. The fragmented quality of language and sound is reproduced in the materiality of the scene, in which figures build and break apart and stretch beyond their boundaries. For example, the Mother first makes an appearance as three separate entities: an eye peaks out behind a curtain on stage right,

a nose makes an appearance on stage left, a banner of fabric reminiscent of a hand sweeps across the stage. When these fragmented features come together they compose the image of a face, flat and framed by wire with a skin of mesh stretched over its surface. As we see this puppet take shape on stage, the Woman strips from her work attire, peeling off her nylon stockings only to find another pair underneath. She continues to shed layer after layer of nude stockings as the argument with her Mother builds and the cacophony of sound amplifies until the Woman begins to tear apart the stocking with shears and tooth and nail, turning them into a pile of scraps on the floor. In the same moment the Mother breaks apart: flaps of fabric fall from her frame as she appears to age on stage. We did this in order to create an association between the material of the stockings and that of the Mother, one which constricts the skin, which pinches and itches, the other which suffocates with overbearing control and emotional neglect, an entity that both fusses and nags. In this scene, the associations between unfamiliar things - like stockings and Mother - do as much work as the dissociations between familiar objects in order to build a world of fragmentations that follows only its own logic.

## A Spectacle of Terror

The elements that construct the world of the Machine are the most basic means of perception: light and sound. Light plays a critical role in the development of the image, giving crude form to what is obscured by darkness. In the Machine, we were interested in the role of light as the oppressor in its ability to direct focus, to expose, and to assault. We wanted to fully realize this effect in the Honeymoon scene, when the newly wed Woman consummates her marriage with her husband. The scene takes place in near total darkness, save for the beam of

flashlights as they trace the Woman's body and movement across the stage. The flashlights act as aggressors, exposing the Woman's form as she attempts to hide in the darkness that conceals her. The vulnerability of the Woman is stark as she faces the audience, the lights contouring and casting shadows across her face. As she begins to run, she is petrified by the light which catches her in its beam. For the choreography of this sequence, we were directly influenced by the 1927 German expressionist film, *Metropolis*, where the protagonist woman is stalked by a mad scientist in the catacombs that exist beneath the technological city. In his article "The Vamp in the Machine", Andreas Huyssen refers to the terrifying scene as a "symbolic rape,"<sup>1</sup> as the beam of the flashlight penetrates the darkness and forces the woman into the male gaze. The focus in our adaptation does not, however, lie in the male gaze but on the negative image that is formed out of the oppressive beam. Behind the Woman, on the scrim, the shadows of her frantic gestures are projected: a spectacle of her abject terror. The Woman's fear as spectacle is reinforced by the context of the soundscape, which is cut with laughs and applause that situate the intimate scene in a radio sitcom. The Woman's only escape lies beyond two windows, which hang suspended on the stage. The scene slips between the reality of the wedding night and the dissociation from the reality as a puppet show plays out beyond the suspended window frame. The shadow is the negative, the void of form that exists beyond the boundaries of material constraint. Outside the window, the shadow of a creature, a recreation in miniature of the Soul, slowly walks from one window to another, echoing the first psychotic interlude. In the next two shadow interludes, the creature reaches the woman and branches grow out of the frames of the window, surrounding the Woman in a skeletal forest. This sequence prefigures the climax and conclusion to the show, and

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<sup>1</sup> Huyssen, "The Vamp in the Machine," 230.

so the shadow play becomes prophesy of events to pass, suggesting the self-destructive end to the Woman as fateful.



*Fig. 2 Honeymoon*

## Poetic Images

As we did for the choreography for the Honeymoon, we relied on another artistic work to construct the visual environment of the Hospital, drawing imagery from the poem “Tulips” by Sylvia Plath. The poem chronicles Plath’s experience in the hospital: her apathy towards the actions that happen to and around her, her dissociation from her body, and the violent life she

projects onto a bouquet of tulips, whose vibrant color sucks the oxygen from the room. She writes:

*The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.  
Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe  
Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.  
Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.*

In this poem, there is a sharp numbness to hospitalization that we wanted to evoke through the material world the Woman inhabits. We used stage-length swaths of white butcher paper that hold the Woman in their embrace, as though she is lying in a giant bed or packaged in tissue paper. Besides the voices of the nurses coming from the radio and the hollow beep of a heart monitor, all sound is cancelled out by the rustling of the sheets. The nurses enter one by one handing swaddles of brightly colored tulips to the Woman, suffocating her. The act of passing the bouquets is reminiscent of when the swaddle of the baby is handed to the woman, drawing a parallel between the oxygen-sucking tulips and the unwanted infant of the Woman who is suffering from postpartum depression. In the scene, the nurses manipulate her body like a lifeless doll as they conduct medical exams on her. The doctor ignores her symptoms of nausea and fatigue, diagnosing her as neurotic and ordering the nurses to bring her baby. This moment speaks to a pattern of misdiagnosis of women in the medical institution, and particularly a history of women diagnosed as neurotic or hysterical who underwent electrotherapy to fix their perceived illness of mind.<sup>2</sup> In the machine system of the nuclear family where women are expected to marry, love their husband, and have his children, any refusal to conform to this narrative was seen as an aberration in a woman's psyche, something to be treated in order to

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<sup>2</sup> Weiss, "Sophie Treadwell's "Machinal", 8-9.

return to a state of normalcy. Sophie Treadwell was no stranger to this truth, and the history of electrocution is repeated in the arc of her play through the death sentence of her protagonist; another self fulfilling prophecy. The Hospital scene marks a critical point of departure in the world of the Machine. The rules of the world that are structured by the radio dictate that no voice comes from a body, but is transmitted and warped by the Machine. In the Hospital, this rule is broken when the Woman screams and the world slips into psychosis once more.



*Fig. 2 Hospital*

## Killing the Angel

When rewriting the narrative of the play for our adaptation, it was essential for us to discover a new motive for the murder, and to reconsider the murder itself. We sought a way for the Woman to find liberation not through another man or through the birth of a child, but somehow deep within herself. In the moment she refuses to see her newborn, the world of the Machine begins to break down every so slightly as she activates her voice to speak her will. The noise of the Machine dies down and we hear only the voice of the Woman and the organic sounds that signify a transition into her psyche. A nurse enters, carrying a swaddle of white fabric that imply a baby, until the Woman slowly unwraps the bundle and sticks clatter to the floor. In this moment, a wave of cacophony crashes over the woman, as the boundary between reality and psychosis collapse. These worlds she inhabits have converged, disordering all rule and reason to become something unsettlingly *other*. The sticks that haunt the fringes of her psyche are revealed to be a part of her through their expulsion from her body. She recognizes these uncanny forms as a composite of her own being, these fragments which compose a grotesque image of herself.

The final scene of the play collapses time and place into a solitary walk of the Woman across the stage, the image of the grotesque following in her wake. The channels of the radio flip through the dialogue of the courtroom, the Woman's final words with her mother, and the doctor's treatment plan of electrotherapy in a simultaneous bracket of time as she makes her way toward the object that structures her reality and seals her fate. For the Woman, death and freedom are the same as both represent a means of escape from the boundaries of her reality. As she pulls the cords from the radio, electrifying her body, the act of destruction is also one of



creation. Her annihilation of the Machine world from her psychic space allows for something creative and new to take shape. This is defined in our final image of the Woman, who sits in a metal chair with her arms outstretched, branches rising out from her arms and the crown of her head. She appears as a grotesque angel of dead and broken things.

## Part II : Radio Silence

### Making Nonsense

Jacques Lacan defines metaphor as “the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense.”<sup>3</sup> Metaphor, images, and symbols are the language of the unconscious, and poetry is a means of communicating that language. The language of the unconscious is expressed in metaphors, images, and symbols. By contrast, one could reverse this reasoning to have non-sense emerges from sense in what has been termed a “radical metaphor.” In his book “Staging the Savage God”: *The Grotesque in Performance*, Ralf Remshardt discusses the grotesque in art as “metaphor taken literally.” He writes:

*Only the "radicalization" of metaphor turns it from rhetoric into spectacle: radical metaphor is the mise-en-scene of metaphor, but it is also the putting on trial, or putting to the test, of metaphorical thinking.*<sup>4</sup>

When looking at the language of the *other* in our play, that is, the language not transmitted through the radio, we turned to puppets as the communicators of radical metaphor, speaking through silence. Puppets are a community of Images through which one is able to act out human

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<sup>3</sup> Botting, *Sex, Machines and Navels: Fiction, Fantasy and History in the Future Present*, 67.

<sup>4</sup> Remshardt, *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance*, 107.

life in all the ways that language is unable to express. The silence of the puppet is critical for this reason.

The Mother puppet embodies this silence in its disembodiment from the voice in the Machine. The voice of the puppet tells a different tale from that of human language, articulating instead through symbolic gesture. She weeps. She falls apart and rebuilds. She embraces. She widens and closes her mouth. She stretches and she contracts. She rips and sags. The material for the mother was inspired by the sculptures of Senga Nengudi, who creates abstract forms out of pantyhose. In her collection *R.S.V.P.*, she writes about her interest in the “psyche (which) can stretch, stretch, stretch and come back into shape.”<sup>5</sup> We similarly use this fabric for its association with the female body, and the elasticity of its form. The skin of the mother is akin to the fabric the Woman wears on her cultured body. The Mother refers to the Woman as “flesh of my flesh.” The body of the Woman is intrinsically tied to the body of the Mother through the symbolism of the stocking, which is able to replicate the body’s ability to stretch and grow, to tear and to age. Through the use of the puppet, we were able to show the Mother physically age on stage, evoking the stress of the scene and the body’s ability to transform. As the Woman begins to yell at her Mother “*I’ll kill you! I’ll kill you!*” the frame of the Mother begins to shake and from her empty eyes spill waves of fabric like tears or weary bags. In this way the puppet is able to communicate the Mother’s fear of aging and the transformations her body will endure, and so she projects these fears onto her daughter by pressuring her to find a husband so as to

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<sup>5</sup> Nengudi, quoted in “Senga Nengudi. *R.S.V.P. I. 1977/2003.*,” audio file, 01:34.

ensure security in her old age. The body language of the puppet speaks volumes over spoken word.



*Fig 4. Mother*

## The Grotesque Innate

The giant creature which is the sum of sticks and branches and bits of wood that inhabits the psyche of the Woman is an image of herself. If the Woman were a mirror, the creature would be her reflection, a projection of her psyche made formal. For this reason, I have nominated this puppet the Soul. The Soul exists on the periphery of the Woman's consciousness, occasionally stepping into her field of vision as an outsider, signifying a world beyond the Machine. The Soul

represents the *other*, all that is outside of the ordered way of the Machine. It is chaotic in its composition, an ambulating sculpture of twisted wood and gnarled branches that defies classification. It is not unlike the rough beast of The Second Coming, “moving its slow thighs, (...) its gaze as blank and pitiless as the sun.”<sup>6</sup> It carries with it a foreboding sense of apocalypse, a dissolving of boundaries and transcendence of form.

In her ecofeminist article, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?,” Sherry B. Ortner evaluates the anthropological secondary status of women in society in the way the subordination of women equals the domination of nature at the hands of male culture, and how the female body is socially identified with nature by its functions, its social role, and its psychic structure.<sup>7</sup> Nature is disordered and grotesque, outside the margins of society, an *other* to which the sign of woman is intrinsically linked. The Woman’s rejection of her role as mother and wife places her outside of culture as she exercises her autonomy. The liberation of the monstrous and grotesque which is innate in the female form comes from her choice to destroy her own image, so that only the Soul remains, free from the cultural trappings of the body.

In “The Female Grotesque: *Risk, excess and modernity*,” Mary Russo asserts: “The grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change. The grotesque body is opposed to the Classical body which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world.”<sup>8</sup> The choice to build the puppet out of foraged branches and washed up driftwood echo this sentiment of excess, of transgressing the boundaries

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<sup>6</sup> Yeats, "The Second Coming," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*

<sup>7</sup> Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? Woman, Culture, and Society”, 68-87.

<sup>8</sup> Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess, and Modernity*, 63.

of the cultured body by claiming nature as material. The process of becoming is defined in the narrative arc of the play which sees the Woman seek transcendence from her body which is merely a mechanism inside the Machine. This transcendence unfolds in the breakage of the Woman's body by its electrocution and the subsequent growth of branched wings that rise from her limbs like burnt nerves. In his book "Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life," Kenneth Gross defines puppets as a world of destroyed things, "remnants that would ordinarily, by themselves, be dead, can come alive and threaten the living, supplanting or disordering the rules of the world."<sup>9</sup> The recurrence of the Soul who haunts the borders of the narrative, taking form as a shadow, as an assemblage of remnants, and as a monstrous being that stalks the protagonist, foreshadowing her inevitable fate.

The Puppet implies the notion of fate by its very existence: that we have no choice over our actions, that we own our bodies though they are not in our grasp: representing the disorder of the body, our thoughts and actions, our world. In this way the Puppet represents a microcosm for the body, and metaphor for society; the margins of our existence defined by its seams, between freedom and control, our bodies and their extensions, our Images and our Selves.

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<sup>9</sup> Gross, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*, 69.



*Fig. 5 Machine*

## Appendix

Fig 1. "Office." VOX MACHINAL. Photo by Christopher Kayden.

Fig 2. "Honeymoon." VOX MACHINAL. Photo by Christopher Kayden.

Fig 3. "Hospital." VOX MACHINAL. Photo by Christopher Kayden.

Fig 4. "Mother." VOX MACHINAL. Photo by Christopher Kayden.

Fig 5. "Machine." VOX MACHINAL. Photo by Christopher Kayden.

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VOX MACHINAL

Adapted from *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell  
By Phoebe Hiltermann and Payton Smith  
Spring 2019

SCENE 1: OFFICE

*(Typewriter sound, telephone ringing)*

REPORTERS

Mrs. Snyder found guilty in the first degree in swift verdict to get death sentence/First ballot dooms her/Mrs. Snyder victim of hysteria/Says she watched in dark/Murder, Madness, and Mayhem.

OFFICE WORKERS

Hello?/Hello?/Hello?/ George H Jones Company, hello?/Good morning/ Hello?/What number do you want?/Hello?/Hello?/ George H Jones Company, hello?/

*(Loud ring)*

OFFICE WORKERS

Shh!/ Yes, Mr. J? No, Ms. A ain't in yet. I'll tell her Mr.J the minute she gets in./She's late again huh?/ She doesn't belong here/She's inefficient/She's got J going/going/Going and coming/Out with her sweetie last night/Hot dog!/She ain't got a sweetie/How do you know?/I know/Hot dog!/She lives alone with her mother.

HUSBAND

Good morning, everybody.

OFFICE WORKERS

Good morning!/Good morning!/Good morning!/Morning, Mr.J!

HUSBAND

Ms.A isn't in yet?

OFFICE WORKERS

Not yet/not yet/not yet/She's late

HUSBAND

When Ms.A gets in, tell her I want her to take a letter. Tell her it's important.

OFFICE WORKER

Ms.A, important.

HUSBAND

And I don't wanna be disturbed.

OFFICE WORKERS

You're late/You're late/you're late/and yesterday/the day before/and the day before/you'll lose your job.

WOMAN

No, I can't

OFFICE WORKERS

(indistinct chatter)

WOMAN

Why? The Subway.. No! I had to get out! In the air. All those bodies pressing. I thought I would faint. I had to get out in the air. Like I'm dying. What am I going to do?

OFFICE WORKERS

Take a taxi/call a cop/Mr.J wants you.

WOMAN

Me?

OFFICE WORKER

You/ Do you think she'll marry him?/If she'll have him/If she'll have him/If she'll have him/Why don't you get to work?

WOMAN

Work? Can't. My machine's out of order

OFFICE WORKERS

Ain't it all set?/You and Mr.J/You and the boss/You and the big cheese/Did he tell you?

WOMAN

No. It isn't so. No.

OFFICE WORKER

Not yet/But soon/Why did you flinch?/Did he pinch?

WOMAN

Flinch? No, nothing. Just his hand.

OFFICE WORKERS

No, tell him no/If she does, she'll lose her job/Fired/The sack/And if she doesn't?/She'll come to work in a taxi/work/no work

*(Phone rings)*

OFFICE WORKER

Yes, Mr.J? J wants you.

WOMAN

I can't. I'm not ready.

*(radio static)*

SCENE 2: INTERLUDE 1

WOMAN

Marry me. Wants to marry me. George H Jones. Do you take this man to be your wedded husband. I do. No. I can't. How would you like to marry me. Let me look at your little hands. Let me look at your pretty little hands/ (begins to loop, become indistinct) Bodies pressing/bodies/trembling/hair/stop/no/please don't touch me/job/no job/fired/late/alarm clock/alarm clock/alarm clock/earn/all girls/nagma/ma/installments due/all women/most women/I can't/must/maybe/must/somebody/something/Ma/breathe/Ma/rest/can't I, Ma?/sleep, Ma/something/somebody

(echos out)

SCENE 3: MOTHER

*(Mother's song plays)*

WOMAN

Ma, I want to talk to you.

MOTHER

Aren't you eating a potato?

WOMAN

I don't want one

MOTHER

Why not?

WOMAN

I don't want it. Ma, I wanna ask you something. Something important/ Ma tell me/Because I don't want it/I want to ask you something/something important/Ma, tell me/No/Because I don't want it/Ma, let me alone/Ma, don't nag/

MOTHER

What would become of you, I'd like to know if I didn't nag.

WOMAN

I'm grown up, Ma.

MOTHER

Grown up, what do you mean by that?

WOMAN

Ma, listen! There's a man wants to marry me.

MOTHER

What man?

WOMAN

He says he fell in love with my hands.

MOTHER

In love, is that beginning again? I thought you were over that? Who is he? Where did you come to know him?

WOMAN

In the office

MOTHER

In the office?

WOMAN

Mr.J

MOTHER

Mr.J?

WOMAN

The vice president.

MOTHER

Vice president? His income must be. Does he know you've got a mother to support?

WOMAN

Yes

MOTHER

What does he say?

WOMAN

Alright?

MOTHER

How soon you going to marry him?

I'm not going to. WOMAN

Not going to? MOTHER

No! I'm not going to. I'm not going to. WOMAN

Are you crazy? MOTHER

I can't, Ma. I can't WOMAN

Why can't you? MOTHER

I don't love him, Ma. WOMAN

Oh love, will it pay the bills? MOTHER

WOMAN  
No, but it's real just the same. If it isn't, what can you count on in life?

MOTHER  
You can count that you've got to eat and sleep and get up and put clothes on your back and take them off again and that you've got to get old and you've got to die. That's what you've got to count on.

WOMAN  
But, Ma.

MOTHER  
All the rest is in your head.

WOMAN  
Didn't you love Pa?

MOTHER  
What difference does it make now? He's a decent man.

WOMAN

I don't care whether he's decent or not, I'm not marrying him.

MOTHER

But you just said you wanted to marry/

WOMAN

Not him, I don't know, I haven't found him yet.

MOTHER

You talk like you're crazy.

WOMAN

Oh ma, tell me. Your skin oughtn't to curl just when he comes near you, ought it. That's wrong, ain't it? You don't get over that, do you? How is it, Ma, do you? Do you get used to it, so after a while it doesn't matter or don't you? You ought to be in love oughtn't you, Ma. That change everything doesn't it? When he puts a hand on me, his blood turns cold. His hands are fat, Ma, don't you see? His hands are fat. He's the only man that's ever asked me and I suppose i gotta marry somebody. All girls do. I can't go on like this such longer. Going to work, coming home, going to work, coming home, I can't. Sometimes in the subway I think I'm going to die. Sometimes even in the office/

MOTHER

You're crazy

WOMAN

Ma! If you ever say that to me again, I'll kill you! I'll kill you!

MOTHER

If that ain't crazy!

WOMAN

Maybe I am crazy! Sometimes I think I am. The thoughts that go on in my mind. I can't help it if I am. I do the best that I can and I'm nearly crazy. Go away! Go away! You don't know anything about anything. You haven't got any pity. No pity! You just take it for granted that I go to work everyday, and come home every night, and bring my money every week, you just take it for granted. You'd let me go on forever, and never feel any pity! (burner sparks) Oh Ma, forgive me. Forgive me.

MOTHER

I brought you into the world. You're flesh of my flesh.

WOMAN

I know. I know, Ma. You rest now, Ma. You rest.

MOTHER



Now I got to do the dishes.

WOMAN

I'll do the dishes. You listen to the music, Ma. I'll do the dishes.

MOTHER

I've been washing dishes for 40 years and I've never worn gloves. But my lady's hands! My lady's hands!

WOMAN

Sometimes you talk to me like you're jealous, Ma.

MOTHER

Jealous?

WOMAN

It's my hands got me a husband

MOTHER

A husband? So you're going to marry him now?

WOMAN

I suppose so.

MOTHER

If you ain't the craziest.

*(Mother's song)*

SCENE 4: HONEYMOON

*(radio show applause, music box melody)*

HUSBAND

Well here we are

WOMAN

Yes, here we are.

HUSBAND

Aren't you going to take your hat off, stay a while? This is all right, isn't it? Huh?

WOMAN

It's very nice.

HUSBAND

Twelve bucks a day! They know how to soak you in there pleasure resorts. Twelve bucks! Well, we'll get our money's worth out of it all right. *(music box stops)* Say, pull that blind down! They can see in!

WOMAN

I thought you said there'd be a view of the ocean.

HUSBAND

Sure there is.

WOMAN

I just see people dancing.

HUSBAND

The ocean's beyond.

WOMAN

I was counting on seeings it.

*(music box slowly comes back)*

HUSBAND

You'll see it tomorrow. What's eating you? We'll take in the boardwalk. Don't you want to wash up?

WOMAN

No.

HUSBAND

It was a long trip, sure you don't? Better make yourself at home, I'm going to. Say, pull down that blind! *(music box stops)*

WOMAN

It's close don't you think it's close?

HUSBAND

Well, you don't want people looking in, do you? *(laugh track)* Huh?

WOMAN

No.

HUSBAND

I guess not, huh? Say, you look a little white around the gills, what's the matter?

WOMAN

Nothing

HUSBAND

You look like you're scared. Nothing to be scared of. You're with your husband, you know.

WOMAN

I know.

HUSBAND

You happy?

WOMAN

Yes.

HUSBAND

Then come here and give us a kiss. That's the girlie. Like that? Say, stay there! What you moving for? You know, you got to learn to relax, little girl. *(music box begins)* Say, what you got under there?

WOMAN

Nothing *(laugh track)*

HUSBAND

Nothing? That's a good one, nothing. That reminds me of the story of the pullman and the porter and the, what's the matter, did I tell you that one?

WOMAN

I don't know

HUSBAND

The pullman porter and the tart

WOMAN

No

HUSBAND

It's a good one, well, the train was pulling out and the tart

WOMAN

You did tell me that one *(laugh track)*

HUSBAND

About the/

WOMAN

Yes, yes, I remember now

HUSBAND

About the/

WOMAN

Yes.

HUSBAND

Alright, if i did. You're sure it was the one about the/

WOMAN

I'm sure. *(laugh track)*

HUSBAND

When he asked her what she had underneath her seat and she said/

WOMAN

Yes, yes, that one.

HUSBAND

Alright, but I don't believe i did. *(music box stops)* You know you have got something under there, what is it?

WOMAN

Nothing, just my garter.

HUSBAND

Your garter! Your garter! Say did I tell you the one about/ *(laugh track)*

WOMAN

Yes, yes!

HUSBAND

How do you know which one I meant?

WOMAN

You told me them all! *(laugh track)*

HUSBAND

No, I didn't! Not be a jugful! I got a lot of them up my sleeve. That's a part of what i owe my success to, my ability to spring a good story. You know, you got to learn to relax little girl, haven't you.

WOMAN

Yes.

HUSBAND

You haven't got much on, have you? But you'll feel better with em off. (*cheer track*) Want me to help you?

No.

WOMAN

HUSBAND

I'm your husband, you know.

WOMAN

I know.

HUSBAND

You aren't afraid of your husband, are you? (*laugh track*)

WOMAN

No, of course not.

HUSBAND

We can talk here. I'll tell you all about myself. Go along now. Where are you going?

WOMAN

In here.

HUSBAND

I thought you'd want to wash up.

WOMAN

I just want to get ready.

HUSBAND

You don't have to go in there to take your clothes off! (*laugh track*)

WOMAN

I want to.

HUSBAND

What for?

WOMAN

I always do.

HUSBAND

What?

WOMAN

Undress by myself.

HUSBAND

You've never been married til now, have you? (*laugh track*) Or have you been putting something over on me?

WOMAN

No.

HUSBAND

I understand, kinda modest, huh? Huh?

WOMAN

Yes.

HUSBAND

I understand women. Go along. Don't close the door, I thought you wanted to talk. (*music box starts*) You're awful quiet, what are you doing in there?

WOMAN

Just getting ready.

HUSBAND

Well hurry up then! I thought you women didn't wear much of anything these days, huh? I'm coming in.

WOMAN

No, no, just a minute!

HUSBAND

Alright, just a minute. 13, 14, (*laugh track*) I'm counting the seconds on you, that what you said, didn't you, just a minute! 49, 50, 51, 52, 53/

WOMAN

Here I am. (*music box stops*)

HUSBAND

Are you crying? What you crying for?

WOMAN

Ma! Ma! I want my mother!

HUSBAND

I thought you were glad to get away from her.

WOMAN

I want her now. I want somebody.

HUSBAND

You got me, haven't you?

WOMAN

Somebody, somebody/

HUSBAND

There's nothing to cry about. There, there. There's nothing to cry about.  
*(Music begins, applause track)*

SCENE 5: HOSPITAL

*(heart monitor beep begins)*

HUSBAND

Well how are we?

NURSE

She's getting strong.

HUSBAND

Of course she is.

NURSE

See what your husband brought you!

HUSBAND

Better put them in water right away. Everything okay? Now see here, my dear, you've to brace up, you know! And face things! Everybody's got to brace up and face things! That's what makes the world go round. I know all you've been though but. Oh, yes I do! I know all about it! I was right outside all the time! Oh ye! But you've got to brace up now! Make an effort! Pull yourself together! Start the up-hill climb! Oh I've been down, but I haven't stayed down. I've been licked, but I haven't stayed locked! I've pulled myself up by my own bootstraps, and that's what you've got to do! Will power! That's what conquers! Look at me! Now you've got to brace up! Face the music! Stand the gaff! Take life by the horns! Look it in the face! Having a baby's natural! Perfectly natural thing, why should/

NURSE

What's the matter?

HUSBAND

She's get that gagging again, like she had the last time I was here.

NURSE

Better go sir.

HUSBAND

I'll be back

NURSE

She needs rest

HUSBAND

Tomorrow then. I'll be back tomorrow, tomorrow and everyday. Goodbye.

NURSE

How are you feeling today? Better? No pain? You're getting along fine, such a sweet baby you have, too. Aren't you glad it's a girl? You're not! Oh my, that's not way to talk! Men want boys, women ought to want girls. Maybe you didn't want either, eh? You'll feel different when it begins to nurse. You'll just love it. Your milk hasn't come yet, has it? It will! Oh, you don't know Doctor! Anything else you want? Draft? The noise? Oh that can't be helped, hospital's got to have a new wing. We're the biggest Maternity Hospital in the world! I'll close the window though. No?

WOMAN

I smell everything then.

DOCTOR

How's the little lady today?

NURSE

She's better, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Of course she's better, she's alright, aren't you? What's the matter? Can't you talk?

NURSE

She's a little weak yet, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Milk hasn't come yet?

NURSE



No, doctor.

DOCTOR

Put the child to breast. No? Don't you want to nurse your baby? Why not? These modern neurotic women, eh? What are we going to do with them? Bring the baby!

NURSE

Yes, Doctor. She's behaved very badly every time, Doctor, very upset. Maybe we better not?

DOCTOR

I'll decide what we better and better not here, Nurse.

NURSE

Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Bring the baby!

NURSE

Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Gagging, you mean nausea?

NURSE

Yes, Doctor, but/

DOCTOR

No but's, Nurse.

NURSE

Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Nausea, change the diet! What is her diet?

NURSE

Liquids.

DOCTOR

Giver her solids.

NURSE

Yes, Doctor. She says she can't swallow solids.

DOCTOR

Give her solids.

NURSE

Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR

Wait, I'll change her medicine. After meals, bring her baby.

WOMAN (VERBAL)

NO!

*(beeping stops, faint ringing starts, static follows)*

SCENE 6: INTERLUDE 2

WOMAN (VERBAL) (cont'd)

LET ME ALONE/LET ME ALONE/ I'VE SUBMITTED TO ENOUGH/I WON'T SUBMIT  
TO ANY MORE/CRAWL OFF/CRAWL OFF IN THE DARK/VIXEN CRAWLED UNDER  
THE BED/WAY BACK IN THE CORNER UNDER THE BED/THEY WERE ALL  
DROWNED/PUPPIES DON'T GO TO HEAVEN/HEAVEN/GOLDEN STAIRS/LONG  
STAIRS/LONG/TOO LONG/LONG GOLDEN STAIRS/CLIMB THOSE GOLDEN  
STAIRS/STAIRS/STAIRS/STAIRS/CLIMB/TIRED/TOO TIRED/DEAD/NO  
MATTER/NOTHING MATTERS/DEAD/STAIRS/LONG STAIRS/ALL THE DEAD GOING  
UP/GOING UP TO BE IN HEAVEN/HEAVEN/GOLDEN STAIRS/ALL THE CHILDREN  
COMING DOWN/COMING DOWN TO BE BORN/DEAD GOING UP/CHILDREN COMING  
DOWN/GOING UP/COMING DOWN/GOING UP/COMING DOWN/GOING UP/COMING  
DOWN/GOING UP/STOP/STOP/NO/NO TRAFFIC COP/TRAFFIC COP/CAN'T YOU GIVE  
US A SMILE/TIRED/TOO TIRED/NO MATTER/IT DOESN'T MATTER/NO MATTER/IT  
DOESN'T MATTER/I'LL REST/I'LL LIE DOWN/DOWN/ALL WRITTEN DOWN/DOWN  
IN A BIG BOOK/NO MATTER/IT DOESN'T MATTER/I'LL LIE DOWN/IT WEIGHS  
ME/IT'S OVER ME/IT WEIGHS/WEIGHS/IT'S HEAVY/IT'S A HEAVY BOOK/NO  
MATTER/LIE STILL/DON'T MOVE/CAN'T MOVE/REST/FORGET/THEY SAY YOU  
FORGET

WOMAN (VOICE OVER)

Let me alone/let me alone/(indistinct)/little girl/curls all over his head/little bald girl/going  
up/coming down/stop/stop/no traffic cop/doesn't matter/nobody loves God/please don't/let me  
rest (indistinct)/even if he's got fat hands/outside/all around/wait/I'm under it/Vixen crawled off  
under the bed/I'll not submit anymore/I'll not submit/I'll not submit

SCENE 7: MACHINE

HUSBAND

Record production

WOMAN

Girl turns on gas

Sale hits a million HUSBAND

Woman leaves all for love WOMAN

Market trend steady HUSBAND

Young wife disappears WOMAN

Owens a life interest HUSBAND

Prisoner escapes, lifer breaks jail, shoots way to freedom. Woman finds husband dead.  
*(channel change, gavel hit)*

Order!/Order! JUDGE

Then there was a light in the room? PROSECUTOR

A sort of light. WOMAN

What do you mean a sort of light? A bed light? PROSECUTOR

No, no there was no light on. WOMAN

Then where did it come from, this sort of light? PROSECUTOR

I don't know. WOMAN

Perhaps from the window. PROSECUTOR

WOMAN

Yes, from the window.

PROSECUTOR

Oh, the shade was up!

WOMAN

No, no the shade was down.

PROSECUTOR

You're sure of that?

WOMAN

Yes, Mr. Jones always wanted the shade down.

PROSECUTOR

The shade was down, there was no light in the room, but the room was light, how do you explain this?

WOMAN

I don't know.

PROSECUTOR

You don't know?

WOMAN

From the moon!

PROSECUTOR

The moon!

WOMAN

Yes! It was a bright moon!

PROSECUTOR

It was a bright moon, you are sure of that?

WOMAN

Yes!

*(channel change)*

HUSBAND

What's the matter?

WOMAN

Nothing, what?

HUSBAND

You flinched when I touched you

WOMAN

No.

HUSBAND

You haven't done that in a long time.

WOMAN

Haven't I?

HUSBAND

You used to do that everytime I touched you.

WOMAN

Did I?

HUSBAND

My, you're nervous tonight.

WOMAN

I try not to be.

HUSBAND

You inherit that from your mother.

WOMAN

Poor Ma.

HUSBAND

What would she do without me?

*(channel change)*

WOMAN

Who is that woman?

JAILER/MATRON

Your mother/your mother

WOMAN

She's a stranger, take her away, she's a stranger.

JAILER/MATRON

She's come to say goodbye/To say goodbye.

*(Mother's song starts)*

WOMAN

But she's never known me, never known me ever. Go away! You're a stranger! Stranger!  
Stranger! *(Mother's song stops)* Mother?

JUDGE

Order!/Order!

*(channel change, gavel hit)*

WOMAN

I try to be a good mother

HUSBAND

Of course you do!

WOMAN

I try! I try!

HUSBAND

A mother's a very precious thing. And a child's a very precious thing. Precious jewels. What's  
the matter?

WOMAN

I feel as though I were drowning.

HUSBAND

Drowning?

WOMAN

With stones around my neck.

HUSBAND

You just imagine that.

WOMAN

Stifling.

HUSBAND

You don't breathe deep enough. Breathe now, look at me. Breath is life, life is breath.

WOMAN

And what is death?

*(channel change, gavel hit)*

JUDGE

Order!/Order!

*(heart monitor beeping)*

JAILER/MATRON

Very neat/very neat

BARBER/DOCTOR

How is she?

JAILER/MATRON

Calm/Quiet/The rule/Regulations/Routine

BARBER/DOCTOR

No, we ain't the death guard, we're the doctors.

JAILER/MATRON

Your hair must be cut/must be shaved

BARBER/DOCTOR

Just a patch/Fix ya right up

REPORTERS

Suppose the machine shouldn't work!/It'll work, it always works!

*(channel change)*

HUSBAND

Close the window, will you?

WOMAN

It isn't open.

HUSBAND

Don't you feel cold air?

WOMAN

No, you just imagine it.

HUSBAND

I never imagine anything.

I can't sleep. I haven't slept.	WOMAN
That's nothing.	HUSBAND
And the moon, when it's a full moon.	WOMAN
That's nothing.	HUSBAND
I can't sleep	WOMAN
It's the light.	HUSBAND
I don't see it. I feel it. I'm afraid.	WOMAN
Nonsense, come here.	HUSBAND
I want to go away.	WOMAN
But I can't get away now.	HUSBAND
Alone.	WOMAN
You've never been away alone.	HUSBAND
I know.	WOMAN
What would you do?	HUSBAND
Maybe I'd sleep.	WOMAN
	<i>(electrocution sound)</i>



SCENE 8: INTERLUDE 3

*(live folley of wind chimes)*

END OF PLAY