Designing Hedda: Questioning the Canonical Play Hedda Gabler, as a Feminist Text Through Abstraction

Bethany Eddy
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DESIGNING HEDDA:
QUESTIONING THE CANONICAL PLAY HEDDA GABLER, A FEMINIST TEXT
THROUGH ABSTRACTION

A Thesis presented

by

BETHANY EDDY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
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DESIGNING HEDDA:
QUESTIONING THE CANONICAL PLAT HEDDA GABLER, A FEMINIST TEXT
THROUGH ABSTRACTION

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I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Megan Lewis, for her unlimited and fierce support of this process and our team. Thanks, are also due to Jessica Ford as a formative mentor, friend and inspiration to this process, and especially to Kristin Jensen for consistently reminding me, over these last three years, that I am in fact a capable and talented human being. Your friendships and selfless contributions to my personal and professional development will forever be appreciated.

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ABSTRACT

DESIGNING HEDDA: QUESTIONING THE CANONICAL PLAY HEDDA GABLER AS A FAMINIST TEXT THROUGH ABSTRACTION
MAY 2017
BETHANY EDDY B.A. WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY
M.F.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Megan Lewis


Ibsen is considered “The Father of Modern Drama”, with Hedda Gabler as one of his most widely performed plays. Hedda Gabler in the 1890’s was a disruptive reflection on society, and is considered by many to be a feminist work. I disagree with this assessment of the text. There are relevant gendered issues present within Hedda Gabler, however the play presents suicide as the only solution. Hedda Gabler could become a feminist work if presented to address the issues raised. I propose that the play is distanced from our contemporary moment by Ibsen’s realism, allowing audiences to observe it as less relevant to our current social structures. If presented through the abstraction rather than realism, we can reconnect dialogue between play and audience, allowing Hedda to become a timely and relevant feminist work.
A collaborative, devised process, was used to produce this play. This created an iterative process of design reacting to discoveries made throughout the process. Costume design, in concert with set design, functioned as a visual medium creating the abstracted world of *Hedda*. Tracking artistic and social influences on costume design for *Hedda*; I provide the evolution of the design from analysis to production while examining the design’s influence on show development, and role in the devising process.

Our show featured a seven women ensemble, each actress alternatively portraying Hedda and each of the other characters within the play. Set in a flat, surrealistic, paper covered library, the paper costume constructs blended with the background when each was not in use. This role switching resulted in the presentation of *Hedda* as a widely felt feminine experience rather than a singularity. Through the abstraction of Hedda Gabler we presented a production that challenged the canonical text while reviving its feminist dialogue with our contemporary moment.
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INTRODUCTION

_Hedda Gabler_ written by Henrik Ibsen in 1890, has been performed countless times all over the world, 19 times on Broadway alone. Ibsen, known for his achievements in realism and “the well-made play” is often heralded as “The father of modern drama”. His vision as a playwright was so specific that he even mentions, within the stage descriptions, the color that Hedda’s eyes should be. If a designer followed the letter of the script what would be on stage could be considered a believable historic piece that could open a window to the past, feeding information about “what it was like back then” to an audience. The play is considered a jewel in the overwhelming library of theatrical history. It is one of the sacred texts of the western theater canon. What does it mean to produce a historical realistic piece to a modern audience?

_Hedda Gabler_, a century ago, was considered explosive. The thought that a woman would kill herself rather than conform to an established societal norm was unthinkable. Suicide was an extremely taboo subject in the 1890’s, the added distress that Hedda was pregnant made it even worse. A Norwegian critic called her a "monster created by the author in the form of a woman who has no counterpart in the real world (Lyons, p130)." The mirror that Ibsen had set to reflect the society he lived in caused a great deal of cognitive dissonance. The 1890s were entrenched in social belief structures which were subverted by Ibsen’s realism. _Hedda Gabbler_ was considered offensive and unthinkable to the late Victorian era sensibilities. This intense reaction has died out over the years as _Hedda Gabler_ moved further and further from when it was written, a woman wanting to leave her husband is no longer so strange, and suicide, is a
bleak reality for a rather large number of women. When performed as written Hedda Gabler now meets with the most unenthusiastic reviews.

John Lahr, a reviewer for the *New Yorker*, in his review of a 2009 production of *Hedda Gabler* directed by Ian Rickson, states: “Hedda’s suicide is intended as a perverse transcendence, a form of negative creation. In Mary-Louise Parker’s cold-shoulder interpretation, however, it plays more like sulking for keeps”. Another review, by Lloyd Evans with *The Spectator*, on a 2016 production at the Lyttelton Theater said “really, it’s not worth discussing this production it isn’t even an anagram of a classic, it’s just a daft old muddle”. Ben Brantly from the *New York Times*, concerning a 2009 performance of *Hedda Gabler* at the American Airlines Theater states: “Hedda admits she possesses a talent for only one thing: “Feeling dead.” By that time no one is going to argue with her.

Instead of holding a mirror up to our society provoking introspection and outrage, as Ibsen was attempting to do in his time, *Hedda Gabler*, when seen out of its time, is not nearly close enough to provide a reflection. There is a distancing effect when watching a play that is historically reproduced. Not only is it being viewed through a lens of time but also a lens of previous productions, previous reviews, countless translations and interpretations. It comes with baggage. Watching *Hedda Gabler* as it was written has become not unlike watching a documentary about the fall of Rome. The viewer can passively gain information about a bygone era completely secure in the belief that yes, that happened, but it happened in the past, history that is so far away that it cannot be refuted or examined with anything other than a view of, that was then, not now.

The character of Hedda has been viewed as an enigma, a vixen, a man-eater, selfish and manipulative and any other name we could attach to a woman who is performing outside of society’s strict regulations. Her actions, that so offended the
Victorian sensibilities, are now viewed as a moment in history. The distance of time allows us distance from her situation, which flattens the character and her actions. She is difficult to relate to, and can then be brushed off as a product of that society. The question then becomes, has her situation really changed? How far away have we really traveled from the society that produced Hedda?

Even today, from my own experiences, women are regarded and valued by their relationship to men. I have needed to tell men that were being aggressive, that I already had a boyfriend/husband because they respected that fictional male’s position, more than mine. Women are still shamed for not wanting the full package of husband, house and baby, they are told they are selfish, and should consider what their boyfriend/husband would want, as if they could not possibly know themselves well enough to make their own decisions. Women still do not have full reproductive rights, the right to legal and safe abortion, the right to birth control or sterilization, or the right to be educated and informed about their options. A case in point, the global gag order which forces health providers to choose between receiving funding from the US and providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, risking women’s lives. Women are still taken to task for having traits that would be considered too masculine, a man is a boss while a woman is bossy, a man is persuasive but a woman is pushy. The pay discrepancies, in this country alone, state that white women make .78 cents for every dollar a white man earns, black women earn .63 cents, and Hispanic and Latina only make .54 cents. This in concert with the glass ceiling, that unseen barrier which prevents women and minorities from rising in the workforce regardless of their qualifications, is the economic enforcement of second class citizenship. I would argue that we have not come so far.
When *Hedda Gabler* was written the beginnings of first wave feminism were taking root, primarily concerned with women’s legal rights with a focus on women’s suffrage. In the last century, the fight for women’s rights has expanded and evolved, to include the intersectionality of class, race, gender and LGBTQIA communities. The contemporary definition of feminism that I refer to, was stated by bell hooks, from her book *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*: “Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. (…). Practically, it is a definition which implies that all sexist thinking and action is the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female or male, child or adult. It is also broad enough to include an understanding of systemic institutionalized sexism. As a definition, it is open-ended. To understand feminism, it implies one has to necessarily understand sexism.” bell hooks

hooks’ definition is broad, and feminism means different things to different people, while the dictionary definition: the advocacy of women’s rights based on the equality of the sexes, is over simplified. I believe in the equality of women’s rights, all women, despite ethnicity, race, sexual orientation or gender identification. I believe that equality cannot be achieved if women do not have full legal rights over their own bodies, and lives, and I believe that sexist practices need to be addressed, and abolished to truly start to move away from the world of *Hedda Gabler* that we still inhabit.

Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* features a multitude of issues concerning women, both in 1890 and today, but it is not feminist. Hedda is infantilized by the men around her, she is in a relationship and house she does not want, perused by a man she does not want and carrying a fetus she does not want. It is the sexist practices of her environment that have entrapped her. Hedda’s lack of options coupled with her inability to change direct her to suicide. The suicide, written by a white heterosexual male over a hundred years ago, which provides no true path forward, only a void. The repetition of this play being so
widely performed, while being proclaimed as a feminist work creates a cycle in which a woman kills herself over and over again, with the final line condemning her actions, delivered by a white heterosexual man. I feel that it is the presentation of those issues that prevent *Hedda Gabler* from becoming feminist text. I believe that in altering the presentation of *Hedda Gabler* we can readdress this play as feminist.

A realistic painting, monument, or play has a distinct narrative. The art object portrays a clear story, placing the viewer as the listener in that story. Abstraction requires interaction. The viewer becomes an active participant, not in the sense of getting up on the stage or touching the art object, but that it requires dialogue and introspection. Presenting an audience with something that they are not expecting to see requires them to examine it, to think about it, to think about what it means to them, and what it means in a larger scale. By presenting *Hedda Gabler*, abstracted, the play then invites the audience to participate.

As the costume designer of this production what can I provide, visually, that would help to reconnect and engage the audience and to bring out the contemporary similarities with *Hedda Gabler*? Ibsen wrote for realism, but I argue that the realism of the 1890s is an ineffective way to actively engage an audience in 2017. Through the abstraction of this canonical text can we reframe and examine this play as a feminist work while reconnecting the character and world of Hedda Gabler in our contemporary moment?
CHAPTER 1

FIRST THOUGHTS, SUMMARY AND OPINION

The story of Hedda Gabler follows the lead character, Hedda Tesman, daughter of General Gabler, recently married to George Tesman, through the first 36 hours in their new home after their honeymoon. We learn that she is already unhappy in her marriage. Many hints are dropped throughout the play that Hedda is already pregnant. It is also exposed that Tesman, and his Aunts Julia and Rina went heavily into debt with Judge Brack, an older friend of Hedda’s, to secure a loan for the house in which they now reside. Judge Brack and Hedda flirt but Hedda is not serious. Through gossip and coded conversations, the Tesman’s learn that Eliert Lovborg, an old flame of Hedda’s, and Thea Elvsted, an old flame of Tesman’s, are in town. Lovborg is a brilliant writer but has a history of alcohol abuse and debauchery. Mrs. Elvsted has left her unhappy marriage to be with Lovborg, who had been her step children’s tutor. Since being at the Elvsteds, Lovborg had reformed his ways, and given up drinking. Together Lovborg and Thea had published a book on the history of civilization, and now Lovborg has miraculously regained his previously ruined reputation. Together they plan to publish their second book, an exceptional manuscript based on the future, which poses a threat to Tesman’s promised appointment as a professor. Lovborg is invited to Judge Brack’s stag party and refuses on the grounds of avoiding temptation. Hedda’s jealousy of Thea is apparent. Hedda longs for the camaraderie that she and Lovborg had once shared, which was largely based on his wild past. Convincing him that it is in his best interest to have a drink and join the men, she believes that she has gained influence over him again.

The morning after the party it comes to light that Lovborg drank to excess, and had lost his manuscript. Tesman had recovered it but not revealed to Lovborg that it is in
his possession. Tesman is informed that his Aunt Rina is dying and he leaves to be with her. Judge Brack stops by to inform Hedda about Lovborg’s behavior and to let her know that Lovborg’s presence in her home would not be tolerated. Lovborg returns to the Tesman’s after his wild night to convince Thea that he had destroyed their manuscript and that she should try to forget him. He confesses to Hedda, after Thea has left, that he has lost not destroyed the manuscript and that he wishes “to make an end of it.” Hedda gifts Lovborg one of her father’s pistols, and asks him to “let it be beautiful.” Lovborg leaves presumably to kill himself. Hedda then takes the manuscript and burns it as if she were killing Thea and Lovborg’s child. Tesman returns after the passing of Aunt Rina and learns of Hedda’s burning of the manuscript. To deflect Tesman, Hedda reveals, indirectly, her pregnancy. Judge Brack returns to inform the gathered assembly of Lovborg’s passing, presenting a watered-down version for Tesman and Thea and the truth to Hedda. The Judge presents Hedda with a blackmail option knowing that she is unwilling to endure a scandal. With her husband’s attention turned towards Thea, and the Judge waiting for her to acquiesce, Hedda leaves stage and kills herself. Finally, the Judge ends the play with the line of “people don’t do such things.”

The women’s liberation movement in the 1960s and 70s reclaimed this play as a feminist piece. In truth that’s how it was taught to me in my undergraduate studies. I have always found this play to be problematic as a feminist work. Hedda’s suicide begs the question, if this is a feminist work, why is the annihilation of the powerful woman the only possible solution? Ibsen wanted to explore psychological conflicts that were not a simple rejection of current conventions. Ibsen was aggressive in his affirmation that he was his own man, he adamantly refused to be claimed by organizations or campaigns, which included the Women's Rights League. If the author himself rejected the affiliation
with women’s suffrage, first wave feminism, can we truly ascribe the heading of feminist to the work itself?

I do not believe that Hedda Gabler has ever truly been a feminist piece. We can see a woman bucking the constrictions of inequality that define her society. However, she is solitary figure with very little connection to the world outside of her sitting room, this distance’s her from a greater social commentary. We also see our main character as someone who is singularly difficult to root for, she is destructive to those around her, with very little dialogue within the text to explain why. I also have a great deal of personal difficulty with ascribing the word feminist to a play in which a white male author, had his female character kill herself. If this truly is a feminist piece, why does Hedda commit suicide? Why does the older white man of the play get the last line “people don’t do such things”? When in truth people do, “Do such things” all the time. Suicide is currently the 10th leading cause of death in the US. If Hedda has done such a courageous act in defying her society by removing herself from the equation, why does Judge Brack, the personification of the patriarchy, get to condemn her act?

The role of Hedda Gabler is considered by many to be a coveted role that women are expected to want to play. The role of Hedda carries the same weight as Medea and Lady Macbeth. There is no doubt that this trio women are complex, strong female characters, but if we look at these three roles together, what does that say about the Western theatrical cannon? If we continue to produce these plays through their original lens whether that be the Greeks, Shakespeare, or Ibsen, we are going to need to acknowledge that for a historic female role to be considered strong or exciting, they need to also be considered a villain. By continually presenting them within these historic contexts, we are no longer examining these characters as dimensional female roles, but rather as their historic place markers in western theatrical cannon.
There are three women in this play; Aunt Julia, Thea and Hedda. Each of them are dealing with “problem” of being female in the Victorian era in different ways. Ms. Tesman is abiding by the rules as best as she can, she is unmarried and has no children of her own, however she raised her brother’s son, and continues to support him to a fault. She has also taken the responsibility of caring for her sister through her illness. She greatly desires the equivalent of grandchildren, and she wants nothing more than for Hedda to be a good wife and mother “for George’s sake.” Aunt Julia is mired in the belief that her sole purpose in life is to care for others, but support George in all things. Aunt Julia in many ways represents the society as it is.

Thea is very feminine, and possess the traits that would have made her a model Victorian woman. She had married a man with a good if not remote job, he already had two children, but they do not have any children together. Their marriage is literally fruitless. She understands that her marriage was not right, and wanted something better for herself so she got up and left. This does mean that she will be subjected to the backlash from that Victorian society for doing what she felt was the right course of action. If Thea had not been picked up by George Tesman at the end of the play, her future would not be bright. Her connection and influence on Lovborg, and her desire to recreate his work with Tesman, indicate her representation of “the future”.

Hedda on the other hand does not fit the Victorian mold. She is somewhat aggressive with her many traits that have been considered too masculine for a woman, her favorite past times are horseback riding and pistols, she has a desire for power, independence and life, but no desire to be a parent. Despite these personality traits she married a man that was dull, obsessed with the past, but above reproach, rather than the man that excited her. They had a fashionable honeymoon, bought an expensive house,
and Hedda is pregnant. She has fulfilled all the qualifiers on the Victorian checklist for having a happy, standardized life. This is the very act that seems to be making her despondent. She has created her own trap, and cannot find a way out of it. It is through her own dysfunction, fear of scandal, that she cannot allow herself to take the same route that Thea did. Her inability to face the fall out of a scandal leaves her stuck where she is with suicide presenting her a way out.

I believe this play can become a feminist work, through the examination and presentation of Hedda’s world from her vantage point. Producing this play, in its original format, with its myriad of stage directions, as historic realism is ineffectual at connecting a contemporary comparison to this play. It is my opinion that if you are trying to tease out modern dialogue with this text, you need to reconnect the conversation with Hedda, the characters that surround her, and the world that she occupies, and present it to the audience in a way that poses new questions for their consideration. Simply putting Hedda in a modern setting isn’t enough, because we never see the outside world, she would simply become an over indulged socialite complaining “what about me?” To reconnect with this story, we need to abstract the presentation of her world and the people within it, to reflect her viewpoint.
CHAPTER 2

COLLABORATIVE VISION

In April 2016, I chose Hedda Gabler from the upcoming 2017 season for my thesis project as the culmination of my MFA in Costume Design at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I chose this show primarily due to the team I would be working with, rather than the show itself. As a designer, I do not always get to pick the show I will be working on but it is great boon to be able to pick the people I will be working with. I have an excellent working history with Christina Pellegrini, director, Finn Lefevre, dramaturg and Amy Altadonna, sound designer. I knew that working with this team I would not have to self-censor ideas or thoughts and that I would have a stronger voice because I was unconcerned with how it would be received. This allowed for a free-flowing conversation about the play with a complete understanding that was about the play and not about ego. There is a phase of getting to know your team that I was able bypass by already having worked with them. With the additions of Athena Parella, our set designer and Zach Molin, our lighting designer, our team for Hedda Gabler was set.

Throughout the summer Christina, Finn and I were in reliable communication regarding the play. This play was difficult to handle considering it is over a hundred years old with so much scholarship already attached to it. When looked at that way there is quite a lot of pressure to produce it the way it has always been done. When we ask ourselves why something is being done the way it is being done and the answer is because that is how it has always been done we need to question it, examine it and maybe we need to crack it open to look.

Christina wanted to examine what keeps drawing us back to this play. Why are we so fascinated by Hedda Gabler? Why does it keep being produced despite its rather
underwhelming reviews? Is *Hedda Gabler* still relevant in our contemporary moment? And if so what do we have to do to it, to show it? Rather than a clear concept vision trying to express a distinct message, we came to this play questioning its contemporary validity.

Over the summer, with Finn and Christina, I read several translations of the script. It became apparent that the number of female translators were few and far between, with some of the male translated works cutting out several of Hedda’s motivations, there were even a few where the pregnancy was cut. We were fortunate enough to find an excellent translation by Eva Le Gallienne. Le Gallienne had performed as Hedda Gabler several times, and written about her different experiences with the role. Her translation became our working script.

Our process, and I’m careful to use the word “Our,” was collaborative from the very beginning. This is an unusual situation for a designer to find herself in. It meant that I could be a part of the play from the ground up. In previous plays that I have worked on with Finn and Christina we have used Pinterest, as an early way to express our thoughts and feelings about our project through a visual medium. This allowed us, on our own, to share with each other thoughts and feelings regarding the play in an evocative visual way. Once we could see what each other had found we could go back and build more images in response to each other’s images, which resulted in a communal visual analysis of the play. It was apparent early on that our production could not be produced in its traditional form.
We were drawn to the works of four artists: Louise Bourgeois, “Femme Maison” (Fig 1.), Evard Munch, “Madonna” (Fig 2.), Francesca Woodman, “House #3” (Fig 3.) and Gregory Crewdson, “Beneath the Roses” (Fig 4). At first glance these four art pieces have very little in common. They use different materials, they were all made in very different times, by different artists. What they do have in common is a haunting look at the ideals of womanhood. Louise Bourgeois carved marble “Femme Maison” (Fig 1.), reflects an armless pregnant female body, it is unsure if her head has been crushed by, is inside or is the house. This female figure cannot get up, her body is on display and she lacks the hands to change her situation.

Figure 1 Louise Bourgeois, Femme Maison” 1994, White marble, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art NYC
Evard Munch's “Madonna” (Fig. 2.) is a contradiction to the millions of Madonna painted before his. She is surrounded not by blue but by red, a color associated with power, lust, seduction and blood. She is drawn in an unashamed sexual manner, with a shriveled baby in the corner. His work looks at the contradictions women are asked to provide for others; mothers that are somehow virginal and submissive while also being powerful and sexual.

Figure 2 Evard Munch, “Madonna”, 1895–1902, Medium: Lithograph and woodcut, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art NYC
Francesca Woodman took extended exposure photographs of herself, nude, in condemned houses. Her long exposure photography allows her to look as though she is being consumed by the house (Fig. 3.). Each of these artists presented a glimpse at the darker aspects of the demands on women. If this was presented as reasoning for Hedda’s actions rather than the surface level beautiful middle class home, we may have more empathy for her.

Figure 3 Francesca Woodman, “House #3” series, 1973-75, Black and white extended exposure Photography, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City
Gregory Crewdson’s “Beneath the Roses” (Fig. 4.) series combines real and surreal, with a focus on domestic spheres. There is a quality in his work which captures the tension of in-between moments. We see a woman in a strangely lit kitchen, but also in a field of flowers. She looks distressed, she is sweating and covered in dirt. Kitchens are considered traditionally female spaces, and flowers are often associated with femininity, but the thing that looks the most out of place in this photograph is the subject herself.
After I have met with a director I will create a mood board for the play. I prefer collage using printed or found images, colors and sometimes found objects or words that speak to me about the overall mood of the play. I find this to be the most helpful way to solidify my initial thoughts about the show. Mood boards are a useful tool for communicating with a director to find out where you are harmonizing or disagreeing so that you can hone in on what the show is. Since we had found our images as a team this was less necessary for the group, but I still needed to do it to understand how I was thinking about the play. Printing all the images from our Pinterest board, I set about trying to understand them. Pinterest is great for collecting images but not for organizing them. Viewing all our images together I could take the photographs and divide them into categories. This is unusual; I have made several dozen image boards and I have never been able to see an organization to them outside of their relationship to the play. The categories consisted of like items such as mirrors, flowers (alive and dead), pianos, household spaces as uncomfortable spaces, traditional female roles as disturbing or frightening, identity, constriction, construction etc…. It was very impressive that with the minds of several people we could find such different images with such similar moods and meanings. I then collaged with the pictures we had found to create a mood board, that would not only be representative of my thoughts and feelings about the show but the entire design teams.

In the handling of these photographs I began to see patterns and order to the images, which, again, is unusual. My collaging process is generally intuitive, I intentionally try to not think about it too hard, letting my subconscious and my hands do the bulk of the work. As the collage evolved there were figures trapped within structures and boxes that radiated from the middle of the board with mirror reflections both left to
right and top to bottom, mirrors became a very large component to this, revealing contradictions of inside verses outside, life and decay, and organic verses construction. Abandoned and decayed spaces created a wall between the central female figures and the rest of the board which was framed with burning paper, pianos and cut flowers. Scattered across the top was the repeating image of pieces of a woman’s face reflected in a broken mirror (see Fig. 5).
At UMASS there is a closely followed schedule that designates the timelines to produce a play. This assumes that the director will produce the play as written, possibly with some deviation, or perhaps a slight variant on the play. Christina proposed a devising process in which we would examine the play with the actors, making discoveries within the play throughout the six-week period. Graduate Program Director, Dr. Megan Lewis introduced our team to a concept of productive failure. What we were going to be doing was experimental and explorational we would be able to take greater risks with the possibility for great reward, with the knowledge that should it fail we would have had the benefit of having had the freedom to truly experiment with our work.

The process Christina requested was met, although not initially, with a great deal of resistance. In hindsight, I do not believe that the traditional way that UMASS produces a play is open to, or flexible enough to allow for the kind of process that Christina had requested. The power dynamics in the production meetings ending up having a paralyzing effect on the play, without a design faculty presence, it became painfully apparent that our set designer, an undergraduate working on her first design, was intimidated by the people she had to report to. There were several meetings where accommodations were asked for, met with assurances that they would happen, and then were left undone. If any accommodations were going to be made based on what was happening in the rehearsal room, costumes were going to have to do it. In many ways, the patriarchal themes we were investigating with Hedda were being performed for us in the production meetings.

At this point in what could be considered a more traditional UMASS process, I would have gone straight to the design work, however this process was intended to be more collaborative and devised. This meant that we continued to toss around ideas of how this show would be produced. We took the time to engage in a dialectical process
that allowed us to get deep into the text. The questioning of this show would continue throughout the production period. This process was not straightforward but more like a meandering stream. There were so many thoughts about what we could do and what the play meant that it was difficult to narrow it down to any one or even five focal points. The image board could provide us with a more pointed look at the concepts we had been discussing about Hedda up to this point.

Christina proposed that actors could switch roles within the play. Branching off this thought process we explored the possibility of puppetry with the actors literally trying out different personalities through the performance with puppets. The ending could resolve itself by whoever was playing the Hedda puppet refusing to participate. This was such an exciting idea that it made it through a full round of designs before we recognized the difficulties involved in adapting a play while creating and experimenting with puppets and training actors to use them. It would be prohibitive to the devising process we were hoping to achieve, and it would be nearly impossible given the time frames that we had to produce the show. Masks were proposed as an alternative to puppets, which also would have been beautiful but did not quite capture what we were trying to do with the show. I knew the idea of a construct to represent character was an avenue I wished to explore, this led me to one of my formative ideas for the design, the theory of Ghosting.

Ghosting, as theorized by Marvin Carlson, is the belief that performances of a play cannot be performed without retaining aspects of a previous performance.” Everything in the theatre, the bodies, the materials utilized, the language, the space itself, is now and has always been haunted, and that haunting has been an essential part of the theatre’s meaning to and reception by its audiences in all times and all places” (Carlson, 2001,15.)
Investigating the play Hedda Gabler involved quite a bit of ghosting. Previous performances aside there is so much presence on stage that is not physically present. General Gabler, Aunt Rina, Mademoiselle Diana, and Sheriff Elvsted, are all present on stage without being physically represented. These are, in many ways, named characters that don’t have a role, but still exert power seen on stage. Hedda has an overwhelming fear that someone will “overhear”. It gave me the impression that even in private moments the characters are still being watched. One of my proposals was a concept for a solid costume that the actors could have walked in and out of that would remain standing on stage even when not in use. I believe it would have provided a rather beautifully disturbing image of society on stage. Stepping from this idea was the concept of Hedda’s costume being on stage but that none of the women would be able to wear it. It could have provided a way to kill the construct at the end of the play rather than Hedda killing herself. This idea, although compelling, was not the correct one either. Elements of this idea did however make it to stage in the final design, which I will elaborate on in the final designs.

Sometimes form follows function. We cast the show early October 2016 the semester before it was planned to go up. Due to the devising process, and desiring the actors input for clarity, we did not yet have our final designs, but we were at a point in our discovery process that we needed the bodies that would be inhabiting this world we would create. We wanted a diverse ensemble to work through this play with. If Hedda Gabler was going to have more relevance to a contemporary college audience, the people on stage should be more of a reflection of them, than the people of Norway in the 1890’s. During callbacks Christina and Finn discovered some amazing dynamics between the women they were auditioning. They also discovered the women were far more likely to freely embrace rolls when the men at the auditions were not present.
When Christina first proposed that we cast all women in our ensemble it took me by surprise. It was not something I had previously considered. We talked through it as a group and it started to make more and more sense. All our thoughts leading up to this point worked better with all female cast then a traditional one. Christina cast seven women as our ensemble: Mallory Kassoy, Monica Henry, Christine Hicks, Ellen Keith, Emily Tanch and Sevan Dulgarian. We would produce Hedda Gabler as a female experience, rather than as a single figure who did not fit with her place in the world.

We had a cast even if it was undecided who would play each character when, and we had a direction but this new development left a multitude of questions to answer. I realigned my thought process with this new information and went back to both character analysis and the image board to try and recalibrate how we could better portray this show through an all-female cast rather than a traditional one.

The fall of 2016 was a painfully politically charged time. On November 8th, 2016 Donald Trump was elected president of the United States. It became acutely apparent that our play would need to become a response to the reality that a good portion of the American population would rather see a white male accused misogynistic, racist, xenophobic, sexual predator, with no political knowledge, as the president of the united states rather than a woman, no matter her qualifications. Trump’s now infamous quote “grab ‘em by the pussy” is only the beginning of this new government’s assault on women’s bodies. The threats of anti-abortion judges being appointed to the supreme court, punishment for women who have chosen abortion, and repealing the Affordable Healthcare Act, which would end free access to contraception for millions of women, have created a miasma of fear, anxiety and anger through the US. The stakes of creating this production as a feminist work were raised. Whether Hedda Gabler was a feminist piece before, we were certainly going to make it one now.
CHAPTER 3

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The essence of a costume designer's job is to show, rather than tell, the story. This is accomplished primarily through a deep understanding of the characters and their world. Character analysis from this direction needs to include many factors: personality traits, the character's goals and aspirations, their relationships with the other characters on the stage, current social status, past social status, socioeconomic issues, what the conflict on stage is doing to that character specifically and anything else that would make the script's character into a person on stage. This is layered on top of the more practical stage world concerns such as period, time of day, weather conditions, and how they combine with mood and the artistic style of the play. Hedda Gabler is a complex show. Considering that we were placing several other layers of complexity on this show by removing it from its traditional setting, dividing the role of Hedda between seven women, and placing women in the roles of men, there was a lot of work to be done.

Splitting the role of Hedda became more than trying to establish that Hedda’s experience as a widely felt feminine situation. It began to show itself as a metaphor for the many roles that women must play in their day to day lives. How women put different masks on, depending on who they are talking to, or what is expected of them at that moment. Establishing when those moments of change were in the play would be the groundwork for who would play what role when, which would in turn inform costume/character changes.

Knowing that we were not setting *Hedda Gabler* realistically, things like weather and time of day became less consequential. We would abstract the environment of the
play to the point where whatever constructs we used would represent an entire role. I did not want to cause unnecessary confusion through the excessive costume changes it would take to represent the passage of time within a society obsessed with clothes. I was going to need to provide a single construct representative of each role, that would be able to come on and off quickly depending who would play what character when.

The role of Hedda needed to be broader, split between seven distinct women. I would need to provide each of them a Hedda look that would reflect who they were and what they were bringing to the role, while relating Hedda to our contemporary audience. This would shift the attention from Hedda as a singularity to Hedda’s story as it relates to a broader female experience. To properly represent the 7 Heddas a thorough understanding of the alternate roles was also required.

Character analysis starts with the script, but involves a great deal of reading between the lines. Hedda is a character whose actions speak louder than her words. The same could be said for many of the characters in this script. I did a character analysis of each role within the show as it was written, with descriptors for each character, before our group came to the conclusions of abstraction. Those descriptors would no longer work with our new direction, it was more important to create a list of characteristics for each character based on Hedda’s point of view, rather than the character’s individual point of view. I reached out to Christina and Finn, so that the three of us might create a list of descriptors that would describe each of the characters from that standpoint. This is what we came up with (Fig. 6):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hedda</td>
<td>Faded, wilting, suffocated, extinguishing, aging, trapped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tesman</td>
<td>weak, sloppy, traditional, childish, mama’s (auntie’s boy) dull, inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovborg</td>
<td>exciting, brilliant, sexy, troublemaker, Dionysus, out of her reach, outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thea</td>
<td>brighter, younger, beautiful, Independent, a threat, outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge Brack</td>
<td>powerful, mastermind, informant, flirt, dangerous, outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Julia</td>
<td>subservient, clingy, forgettable, old, inside</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 Character descriptor table

Meanwhile, in the rehearsal room, as part of the devising process, cuts were being made to the show. This assisted in modernizing the language, removing excess exposition and the character of Berta the maid. Her role as messenger did not serve our purposes as each of the characters continually gain information from one another, so she seemed unnecessary. This left us with two sets of three. We had three male roles in this play and three female roles. Each set of three provided a scale by which to organize them and start to understand their characters.

The two sets of three was particularly interesting as the concept of triangular relationships is brought up several times in the play. The three women form one triangle, the men another, and the pairing different men with different women create still more triangles. Using this triangular shape of thinking, I was able categorize characters by hierarchies and connections. Each set of three, within their genders, represents a past,
present and future. Judge Brack and Aunt Julia, representing the past and as enforcers of the social norm. Hedda and Tesman, the present, what is happening right now. Lastly Thea and Lovborg, the future, what could happen.

This makes Hedda's choices to destroy Thea and Lovborg's relationship and manuscript even more telling. She has married to someone obsessed with the past and was longing for someone obsessed with the future but here she is stuck in the present. Watching a young woman who has been able to do all of the things that Hedda wishes she could do with a sort of blithe ignorance to the sort of social implications of which Hedda is acutely aware, and petrified of. All the while she is being harassed by an older man's lust for her and an older woman's desire for grandchildren, recognizing that neither of these roles is within the scope of her personality to provide.

Having a better grasp on how to think about Hedda and the characters that were occupying her abstracted world, I could look more closely at why we were drawn to several of the images we had selected and the connections we were making. I was ready to move on to the initial design work.
CHAPTER 4

INITIAL DESIGNS

We had a cast, we had a concept, now we needed designs. We would have to carefully consider how we would choose to abstract Hedda’s environment. I worked closely with our set designer Athena Parella to create the visual world of Hedda Gabler. When creating costumes and worlds it is so important that they are in dialog with each other, whether that is a unified vision where the costumes and set are creating one look, or if the costumes and set are opposing one another to provoke thought. The words, although reduced, would still be Ibsen’s, so it would be how we presented the play that would make the difference. The costumes would play a large part in this abstraction. The world had to be estranged from what an audience would expect to see in a performance of Hedda Gabler. By marrying the set and costumes we would be able to present a clear image of the encompassing nature of the situation that Hedda has found herself in. Our vision for abstracting Hedda needed to be unified, except in the case of Hedda herself, which would put her at odds with her surroundings, helping her look out of place in that world.

There were many possibilities for how we would achieve this before we came to our final design. Themes of false worlds, manipulation, inside vs outside, identity and roles, drove the design. We also wanted to acknowledge the questioning aspect of our process within the design as well. Going back to the mood board there one image everyone was drawn too, of an abandoned library with a tree growing up and out through the roof (Fig. 7.)
From the beginning of this process we have been examining the viability of this play in our contemporary moment. Hedda Gabler holds a such a prominent place in theatrical history. Why not put Hedda, this dimensional character that has become a historic place marker, in this old crumbling library? The Western theatrical cannon consists of an overwhelming number of male playwrights. The library provided a representation of the oppressive weight of the history, not only this play, of men’s words. The decay and clutter of the library gave it a sense of fragility, as if it might fall in on itself. Knowing that we wanted to place Hedda in a visually uncomfortable situation this image became a jumping point for a portion of each aspect of Hedda’s design.

There is a fragility to paper. Paper crumples, paper tears, paper burns, you can write on it to change its meaning, you can erase it if you don't like what you see, but you
can also be crushed by it in enough quantities. Our team wanted to make sure that the world in which Hedda Gabler resided was fragile and dangerous, while being oppressive, that she could burn it up at any minute, or that it could crush her. There was something poetic about using paper to represent the world as well as the people participating in it. It needed to be fake. Above all else the constructed nature of the set and the costumes could not look real, we needed to showcase the artificial construction of the world, in many ways it is these women’s complicit involvement in this world which gives it validity. It is only by breaking out that we would see it for the construct that it is.

The people that surrounded Hedda needed to be of that world, of that quality. Knowing that we were still on to something, using an artificial construct to represent an entire role, I came across the idea of paper dolls, understanding that paper dolls was not quite the correct terminology for our production, but that it was of the constructed nature
that we are trying to portray for the show. Paper dolls are a construct and a toy not unlike the puppet idea, they are fragile and 2 dimensional (Fig. 9.)

There is an abstracted quality to flattening a human form that you then change by simply placing another layer on top. How we play with dolls, giving them roles based in imaginative play, became a way to illustrate the artificiality of gender structures. It meshed with so many of the other thought processes we had already explored that I presented a design based on it. Looking at Victorian paper dolls, their illustrative styles and the color schemes of pastel colored photographs of the period, I designed a series of 2D costumes to be swapped from actress to actress (Fig. 12.) It needed fine tuning, but it was a place to start.
One of the largest questions I had to answer with this design was, if the paper costumes were the representations of the characters in the world surrounding Hedda, and if Hedda would in turn be played by each woman, what would I do with her? Her character needed to represent her inability to fit in with the world around her, as well as her participation in it. She needed a connection with contemporary women, and the Victorian society of the 1890s, to show the idea that we are not so far removed from them here in our contemporary moment. This in conjunction with more practical concerns such as budget, quick changes and character changes, posed a large challenge.
Going back to the image board once again I started looking at concepts that involved expectations on women, time and progress. One of the photographs that was central to my image board was of several Victorian ladies sitting on a staircase (Fig 13.) They are not looking at or interacting with one another. While there were many women within the photograph they appeared to be alone. These women were surrounded by each other, but they were each in a pocket of solitude.

Figure 13 Mood board detail
It reminded me strongly of contemporary fashion shoots that you might find in *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair*, magazines which specifically deliver unrealistic expectations to women, to maintain societal ideals (See Fig.14.) These images represented for me our societal lack of progress over time. Certainly, the women in these 2 photos (Fig. 14, Fig. 15.) were positioned, set, lined up, and told not to look at each other. In both photos, there is very little camaraderie or warmth, and no human interaction despite being able to reach out and literally touch each other.

![Vogue Cover](image1.png)

Figure 15. S. Meisel, Vogue cover May 2007

![Figure 14](image2.png)

Figure 14. Daniel Murray, “Nine women, seated on the steps of a building, Atlanta, Georgia, 1899”
When I had found these images previously we did not have a cast. I was just drawn to the images. As our presentation of Hedda moved with the direction of an all-female cast, these two photographs became even more relevant. These two images became the foundation of my design for our seven versions of Hedda.

It was during this time, January 2017, that we began discussing the title of the play. The title of the play *Hedda Gabler*, insinuates that Hedda is her father’s daughter, instead of Hedda Tesman, her husband’s wife. Hedda is only referred to by her relationship with the men in her life. If we were going to be exploring this work as a feminist piece we needed to refer to the women herself. The name of the production was changed to simply *Hedda*

![Figure 16 Promotional posters for Hedda](image)

Looking back at the previous series of designs that I had made for this show, I kept noticing that beginning with the puppets I had not moved the actors out of black. First it was because they would’ve been puppeteers. Even in that version I imagined the puppeteers would’ve been contemporary and the puppets from the 1890s. Looking at the paper dolls I had created for the 1890s it made sense to keep the character of Hedda, whoever she may be at that moment, in contemporary clothing. To keep the
connection between the 1890s and now, I was looking for elegant clothing that would have a flair of the 1890s. Hedda needed to be grounded and real looking on our stage of constructs.

I wanted to keep all our Heddas in a base costume of black. There are quite a few cultural associations with the color black. Black is the end of the color spectrum or the absence of color. Black is a color of fear, death and mourning, but black is also a fashion color, a color that women are told they should wear because it makes them look thinner, or more powerful. Despite being in absence of color, black catches the eye, and gives things weight. Anything placed on top of black pops out into the foreground. Black is also the last color in greyscale, which our set was proposed to be. This would keep Hedda involved with the world she was in, while the contemporary clothing would set her apart from it. The color black served my purposes in keeping the emotional connection through our contemporary cultural associations with the color, maintaining Hedda’s position in the world and creating the visual aesthetic of the fashion shoot.

Once in this paper abstracted world, there were three things that were important for the black costumes to provide onstage. First, each base black costume needed to represent the character of Hedda. Second, they each needed to be fit and flattering to each of the women, to retain the semblance of trying to fit in by looking their best. Finally, they needed to reflect the personalities each actress was bringing to the stage. Each woman playing Hedda brought a distinctly different take on this character, which meant each of their black outfits as Hedda, needed to also be unique. It would have been a disservice to the variety of our cast both in personality and in body type to put them all in the same outfit. If the goal was to present Hedda as a female experience I could not put seven copies of the same woman onstage. So in keeping with the
aesthetic of a fashion shoot, each woman was designed a unique, elegant, fitted outfit of contemporary clothing with an 1890s flair.

Each woman had a different personality, style and body type. Their individual thoughts and experiences created different Heddas, I decided to bring not only Hedda to the stage, but the actresses playing her. Looking at contemporary black clothing, I tried to match the personalities of the actresses with how they were portraying Hedda. I took many cues from the women’s personal wardrobes and combined several of the silhouettes they were already wearing with fashionable contemporary clothing. This would allow for the diversity of our cast to come through, and would aid in the visual representation of Hedda as a shared experience rather than a singularity. Applying a similar method of describing the characters with in the play I described the women who would be performing our seven Heddas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actresses</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sevan Dulgarian</td>
<td>poised, Introspective, quiet, elegant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Tanch</td>
<td>active, comedic, physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallory Kassoy</td>
<td>comedic, selfless, relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Kieth</td>
<td>quick witted, intelligent, expressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa Labrie</td>
<td>upbeat, energetic, driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monica Henry</td>
<td>classy, intelligent, powerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine Hicks</td>
<td>non-conforming, artistic, sassy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17 Actress descriptor table
I attempted to match each woman to an outfit that would bring out some of the characteristics that I saw in them. Assisting these women to look and feel their best would help them to become more empowered while in the role of Hedda. The initial designs were met with acceptance. I proceeded to work through them, knowing I was not quite there yet, and that the black costumes would need more finessing, but I knew that I was on the right track.

Figure 18 Initial designs for 7 Heddas
CHAPTER 5

FINAL DESIGNS

The overall process of designing and producing Hedda was a meandering one; there were many twists and turns and accommodations made for discoveries that were being made in the rehearsal room, as well as personal discoveries about my own design. I expected this, and I attempted to remain as accommodating as I could. My designs changed several times throughout this process but each change brought us closer to a more pointed version of what we hoped to put on stage.

The paper doll concept needed to be revisited. The colors were not working. The two-dimensional concept was problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the two-dimensionalities of the paper doll concept felt too close to a previous production I had worked on Collidescope 2.0, designed by Jessica Ford, where each actor played multiple roles by changing costume fronts made of muslin that had been drawn on. Secondly the prominent features of the 1890s women’s silhouettes were on the backside of the dress. I could not create the silhouette which would inform the audience of the period we were occupying by the fronts alone. The artistic style I had chosen was too nice, too illustrative and overall it felt too cute. The watercolor I had used on the paper dolls was subtle and washed out, it was illustrative rather than evocative, which undercut the power these characters held. I could not put Judge Brack, who is in many ways the personification of the patriarchy, in a light gray morning suit and then have him stand next to Hedda, who would be in black, and make him in the least bit intimidating. Trying to show the audience where Hedda might be coming from was not going to be successful if her world was cute. I had boxed myself in by only looking at Victorian illustrations focusing on research rather than concept. I wrestled with this for a long time.
It wasn't until winter break of 2016 that Jessica Ford, a mentor, professional designer and former professor, introduced me to the work of Kathe Kollwitz.

Kathe Kollwitz (1867-1945) was an artist working in Weimar Germany. She was a gifted woodblock carver whose subjects were often tormented. Her woodblock prints are a powerful and evocative testament to the horrors of post-World War One Germany. There were several qualities of her work that I found compelling in this application. There is a frightening and depressing quality in the stark black and white prints. Up to this point I had been looking at the Victorian etchings and line drawings. Line drawings possess a dreamlike sense, whereas etchings are cold and almost medically precise. Each art form possessed different qualities that I could have used but the danger and emotion associated with her woodblock cuts felt much closer to what we were trying to express with our production. The very act of creating a woodblock cut it is aggressive and dangerous. Lastly woodblocks are based on the concept of positive and negative space, Is the through the removal of material that the image is created. It was this connection that resonated strongest with me. Thinking specifically about the different parts of women's personalities that must be carve out to present themselves differently, based on the company they find themselves in. It is almost like, as women, we create our own two-dimensional stock characters based on what is expected of us at the time, the virgin, the mother, the wife, the lover are all personalities we take on by removing a part of ourselves from the equation.
Using this style, I played with color combinations that would result in more clearly defined power dynamics for the characters. Color became a more difficult option when I had to accommodate a dramatic and surprising shift in the color of the set, which would now be done in greyscale. If I used color on the costumes, I felt that they would pull focus from Hedda herself. I had already begun purchasing several of the black costume pieces by this point and felt that I could not change the concept for Hedda, so I removed color from my paper design. The concept had always been to unify set and costume.
designs so I made that accommodation. This raised questions and concerns from the production area about whether we would be able to discern our actors from the set when they were near the walls. I did not see this as a problem but rather a positive affirmation of the image we were trying to present. What better way to make the costume constructs look like they were part of this fake world than then to have them look like they could disappear into it? Of course, we did not want the actresses themselves to disappear, their hair skin tones and make up would create pops of color which would draw focus to their faces more than anything else. The idea however that our paper constructs could simply look like part of the set was exciting.

I set about redesigning the constructs/paper costumes through this new lens. Removing color from the equation made this simultaneously more difficult and clearer. Using only black and white, I needed to clearly convey each character as Hedda would see them, and I would need to exaggerate characteristics about each of them to create the abstract quality I was looking for. (See Fig. 6.)

The paper costumes were redesigned to be 3 dimensional, single piece jumpsuit like outfits that mimicked exaggerated forms of clothing from different parts of the 1890’s decade (See Fig. 20.) They would be made to look like paper and treated with paint to look as if they were wood block prints. This treatment would help the costumes look more abstracted and tie them to the paper world we had created with the set. Each paper outfit would represent the role of a single character within the play. When an actress put on the paper outfit, she would then embody the role that specific outfit represented. Closely examining each character within the new vocabulary of black, white and woodblock, I created distinct looks for each role.

In the reexamination of each role, it became clearer that it was important to see that we were watching women taking on gendered roles and that it was a choice, not
simply that we did not have enough male actors to fill these parts. The more we explored the idea of having a thing/construct represent the role, the more I felt I needed to show that it is through the embodiment of these constructs, occupying this space, that this false world was given validity and power. The dynamics of each character as they appear to Hedda would inform the final costume shape, fit and construction.

Figure 20  Final design for the paper constructs, Hedda, Bethany Eddy
Judge Brack is an older gentleman, a friend and informant to Hedda and Tesman, and most likely a friend of her late father’s as well. He is a man used to getting what he wants and getting other people to give it to him. He has few scruples and sees nothing wrong with attempting to blackmail Hedda into sleeping with him. He feels a sense of entitlement to this as he owns the loans on their house and the Aunts annuities. This character embodies male privilege and the patriarchy. Judge Brack’s Tyvek costume needed to be powerful. The paper costume would need to be primarily black with white only to emphasize the lines of the outfit. Judge Brack’s association with the past, and with maintaining the patriarchal order needed to display in the cut and color of the costume (Fig. 21.). The jacket gave a more angular squared shoulder line and a double-breasted closure, in the style of Victorian morning coats from the early 1890’s, the bottom of the jacket was a straight line, grounding the character with more sharp lines. It was also important to see the women within the costume so I altered the lines of traditional men’s wear to include double darts to allow for shaping in this jacket, accentuating the female form within the masculine garment (Fig. 22.)
Tesman, to Hedda, is safe and unexciting. He is a specialist obsessed with the past, specifically the domestic industries of Brabant in the middle ages. Tesman is oblivious to the present and lives in confidence that everything is going to plan. Tesman is childish, and a bit of a clown. He has always had others to care for him. Hedda views Tesman as a necessary burden. Tesman’s paper costume was slightly oversized and not fit to emphasize the childish nature, I chose a Victorian sack coat from 1894 to base this jacket on (Fig. 23.) The checked pattern served to add an element of clowning to the costume. The checked pattern also put Tesman in the closest proximity to grey in the show. His obsession with the past countered with his excitement and dedication to reconstructing Lovborg’s work placed him as the least aligned character in the play. It was my attempt for grey in my world of black and white (Fig. 24.)

Figure 23 Tesman Rendering

Figure 24 Tesman production still
Lovborg is brilliant, sexy and out of Hedda’s reach. Hedda has always been attracted to Lovborg but refused his advances due to his reputation and the scandal it would cause. Lovborg is who Hedda wants, but who she won’t let herself have. He is set apart from everyone else on stage except Thea. Lovborg’s coat was based on a single breasted 1898 Victorian morning coat with a cutaway dovetail back. He is more open and honest than the judge and more aware than Tesman. Lovborg’s association with the future through the manuscript he has written with Thea is a strong source of jealousy for Hedda. I needed Lovborg to be mostly in white with some black to accentuate the lines and shadows of the coat (Fig. 26.) Darting the coat allowed for a closer fit feminine take on the masculine garment (Fig. 25.)
Thea had to be the object of Hedda’s jealousy. Thea is younger than Hedda, prettier than Hedda and has the fortitude of character to walk out of a loveless marriage to pursue the man that she loves. Thea also seems to not care about the scandal this would cause, or how it would impact her life because she believed it the right thing to do. Thea’s dress was modeled after the of the late 1890s when the Victorian era was on the verge of becoming Edwardian, fluted skirts with tiers of ruffles and a pouter pigeon breast were the silhouette of this time. Her clothing style helped to show Thea as fresh, young and perhaps a bit naive or girlish (Fig. 27.) Putting her in white immediately aligned her with Lovborg and put her at odds with Hedda (Fig. 28.)

Figure 28 Thea rendering
Figure 27 Thea production still
Aunt Julia as written is a sweet selfless older woman who wants nothing for the best for Tesman and Hedda. However, from Hedda’s point of view Aunt Julia is what she is afraid of becoming. Aunt Julia’s age and subservience make her seem forgettable and powerless to Hedda. She has spent her life caring for others and has given no thought to what she may want or need from life. Aunt Julia is who society expects Hedda to be, despite their vast personality differences. From this point of view Aunt Julia needed to have elements of Hedda’s jailor, she needed to be corseted/constricted with long lines and hard edges which rooted her role in this world (Fig. 30.) Her alignment with the past and with Tesman put her in primarily black with a few white accents (Fig 29.)

Figure 29 Aunt Julia rendering

Figure 30 Aunt Julia production Still
Having come to a better place with a more pointed and cohesive message, I was able to present a new set of renderings for this round of thoughts, as my final designs. These concepts were approved I had my paperwork together and my budget of $3,000.00. I was ready to take the show into the shop.

Figure 31 Fitting with Alyssa Labrie

Figure 32 Fitting with Mallory Kassovy

Figure 33 Fitting with Sevan Dulgarian

Figure 34 fitting with Emily Tanch
CHAPTER 6

DESIGN REALIZATION

Once my final designs were approved, I could meet with my shop manager Kristin Jensen and assistant shop manager Felicia Malachite. This was an opportunity to talk through my designs and research, and gain their professional insights on how we might go about the technical creation of the pieces. They could provide me with a myriad of possibilities of how the garments could be constructed, and suggestions as to what materials might best serve to create the effects I was looking to achieve. I was still not completely sure of how to go about creating the constructed look, but it became apparent that we were at a point where I would not know unless there were samples. I had reached a limit of what I could imagine on my own and I needed to look at textiles and closures to realize what it was that I wanted done with my designs. I have a very tactile approach and often I will need to touch something before I can understand what I want to do with it. I sourced a variety of materials to sample for the paper aspect of costumes. The show moved into the shop and we began our realization process.

The material of choice, found through some experimentation, was Tyvek. Tyvek comes in many weights, textures and qualities. It is a white non-woven textile, it is durable, and tear resistant. Tyvek is most widely known as a sheeting for wrapping houses and other construction work, as well as envelopes at the post office. There are however fabric weight Tyveks used for coveralls and hazard wear. There was some trial and error with Tyvek that was more paper weight vs Tyvek that was more fabric like. The fabric Tyvek was more reasonable to work with and soft enough to be made into costuming that would not be too irritating for the actresses to wear or too noisy on stage,
but would still provide a rustle with movement. The sound of the Tyvek when it moved would enhance the paper feeling of the garment on stage. The fabric weight Tyvek looked and sounded and crumpled like paper. Knowing we would be treating the Tyvek to get an effect that would mimic woodblock cuts we would need more experimentation to find out how it took dyes or paint, but we were off to a good start.

The show, once in the shop, was divided up into two parts: things to be found/bought and things to be built. I ordered the Tyvek and various other materials that would be needed for mock up fittings with the actresses. I had already sourced modern black clothing that was either something that already had the flair I was looking for or that would be easily altered to fit the design.

The solution to who would be what character at what time was resolved. Of our seven actresses, five would take up the roles of Tesman, Aunt Julia, Judge Brack Lovborg, and Thea. The roles were distributed as follows; Mallory Kassoy as Aunt Julia, Emily Tanch as Tesman, Sevan Dulgarian as Judge Brack, Monica Henry as Lovborg and Alyssa Labrie as Thea. All seven would take turns playing Hedda with Ellen Keith and Christine Hicks having portions of Hedda as their only role.

Sourcing and shopping can be a large and time consuming part of design work. My contemporary designs needed to be realized through shopping and fittings. The clothing I found would need to fulfill my requirements, with the understanding that alterations would fill in any gap between shopped and finished product, but primarily exist already in the world. I was extremely fortunate to have been able to shop over winter break, which was winter clearance season. Anything that I found, once approved, would be fit to the actress, so I needed to keep in mind that what I purchased needed to be as close to the actress’ size as possible. If I foresaw a great deal of change to the garment I may need to go a size up to accommodate alterations. Fittings for the black
outfits went extremely well (Fig. 35.) Nearly each of my first-choice outfits was a close match for the renderings I had created for each woman and would require only minor alterations.

The Tyvek costumes were underway when I made my last large alteration to the design of the show. Christina and I met to discuss some of the discoveries that were happening in rehearsal. There was a major development in how we would be working
with our actresses. The show was becoming more movement based and all the women would become a chorus of Heddas, reflecting Hedda’s emotions and state of mind. They would be on stage at all times. I could no longer approach the Tyvek costumes as if they were a full costume change, to be assisted by wardrobe off stage. Each woman would be responsible for any costumes they would be putting on themselves. This needed to happen in a fast and elegant way, that would not distract from the action on stage.

There was a bit of a scramble to attempt to accommodate this, it was difficult to negotiate with the production team, and required a great deal of flexibility. It was going to result in a large reduction in the design. Less Tyvek would be required, we could no longer do something like a jumpsuit that would require a second pair of hands. We needed to find a way to have a single piece or two that the actresses could handle, that would immediately identify a character, trusting that our audience would go with us. It was unfortunate that we had already begun construction on the pieces that would need change. I needed to reassess how I would keep the core elements of my design with this new practical element involving the lack of assistance and the speed which would be required of the changes.

Up until this point we had been entertaining the possibility of having a Tyvek costume/construct that would not be worn on stage to represent the role that Hedda was supposed to fill. If all the actresses were going to become a chorus of Heddas that would be on stage, visible, at all times this was no longer needed. The costume/construct only would have confused the purpose of having all the women on stage. It did leave more of a question of how would we end the show, but we would get to that later.

Examining the Tyvek design character by character, I made cuts that seemed appropriate while still conveying character. For the male roles, it seemed easy enough to
retain their jackets and hats, as they were already varied enough from role to role, with specific cuts and styles. Taking away the Tyvek pants, undershirts and ties on the male roles, we began to expose the black clothing which defined them as Hedda. The idea by itself was very intriguing, but if I did not reduce the amount of Tyvek that the women were wearing by a similar proportion we would have lost a sense of balance throughout the design.

The women posed a much larger problem. Going back to the core of the Victorian silhouettes, I believed we could manage the communication of character I was looking for primarily through skirts. For Thea/Alyssa, that meant no longer including the bodice of her dress but retaining the yoke and collar that would have been on the bodice, and the waist cincher attached to the fluted, ruffled, skirt. This left the blouse portion of her blacks visible, which gave her a sense of equity with the male roles whose pants and glimpses of tops were all visible.

Aunt Julia/Mallory posed a much larger problem. If my goal for this character was have her feel more confined, reducing the amount of Tyvek she would be wearing would be counterintuitive. With her current black outfit, a mid length dress and leggings, I could not see a way to expose the black outfit under Aunt Julia’s in a way that did not push aunt Julia too far into Hedda. I needed Aunt Julia to remain corseted, not only did it provide us with the period shape but I believed it central to viewing at Aunt Julia as a representation and enforcer of the past. I needed to rethink Mallory’s blacks as well as Aunt Julia’s dress. I could secure a new set of black clothing. I found a Victorian inspired shirt that hid a great deal of the corset when Mallory was in the role of Hedda. I paired this shirt with wide legged trousers with a chiffon overlay which could look like a skirt when she was standing still. This allowed us to cut away the panel that would have been the under dress, so that we could see her pants, and we took away the sleeves of what
would have been her jacket so that we could see the sleeves of her top. This regained the proportional balance between characters.

![Figure 36 before and after Mallory Kassoy](image)

This change was the right one for the show. It served the story by keeping these women on stage with no visual relief of letting them leave and it enhanced the design bringing back the ideas of ghosting by acknowledging the other Heddas in the room. The actresses and their costumes always onstage created the lack of privacy and added to the visual clutter of the stage. The reduction of the design allowed us to see the blacks underneath the Tyvek, which forced a connection between the blacks and the paper world, showing the embodiment of these constructs. Finally, the practical requirements of the actresses being able to put on their own costumes quickly and seamlessly, allowed for the play to keep its pace and not lose momentum.

In hindsight, I believe this break from the three-dimensional full costume, that had been designed, resulted in a closer visual appearance to Collidescope 2.0 than I had intended. The costumes functioned differently within each play, and I still believe that the costumes used were the best storytelling aid to serve the show, but I would have liked for them to not have landed quite so close to a show I had recently worked on.
In the UMASS costume shop, in the division of labor, each designer is responsible for the craft aspect of their show. Crafting is quite possibly my favorite part of working on a show and I was fortunate enough to have two very bright undergraduate assistants with me, Elyssa Needle and Billy Luce. A large portion of the craft involved was going to be painting and millinery. The reduced design allowed me to take more time teaching both Elyssa and Billy how to perform a wide range of tasks from dyeing and painting to making buckram based hats. It also allowed me more time to experiment with and develop the painting technique I would use on the Tyvek to emulate the graphic nature of the woodblock cuts.

![Figure 37 Aunt Julia's hat, progress](image)

The painting of the Tyvek was a task that I did not feel comfortable delegating away. The shop had spent so much time making the perfect ‘paper’ costumes that I did not want to pass off a job that could have easily gone very wrong, very fast. I had gained experience and inspiration from working with painting/drawing on costuming from
working on *Collidescope 2.0*, designed by my professor Jessica Ford. Expanding on that experience I developed a technique to emulate a look that was close to Kathe Kollwitz’s woodblock cuts. I used Dharma pigment dye as a paint. The highly-pigmented dye is a fabric paint/dye which will not change the hand/drape of a garment or rub off. This allowed for a light weight solution, with fewer coats of paint. The painting of the Tyvek needed to be aggressive but specific, looking more like a cut than a stroke. Thinking in terms of what would be removed if this were a woodblock cut and how patterns, lines and textures would be achieved through that form. Positive and negative space needed to be accounted for. Seam lines on mostly black garments were left white, while seemliness on mostly white garments were black. I could treat these three-dimensional costumes in a two-dimensional way, which left us with an effective approximation of the work I was emulating (Fig. 38, and 39.)

The painting took me the last week of our construction time and into tech week. It was a tandem task, some pieces needed to be painted before they were put together, and some after. There were several pieces that needed finishing work after the bulk of the painting was done but before the finishing work of the painting as done. It became sort of revolving door of finishing work in the last week with the final push to be ready in time for tech.

*Figure 38 Tesman coat progress*  
*Figure 39 Judge Brack coat process*
CHAPTER 7

TECH AND PERFORMANCE

Tech week brings together all the technical elements of a show. It is a crucial time for designers. It is the first time we get to see all our designs in conversation with each other and the play. Tech week is a time to address unforeseen problems that arise before a show goes up. Hedda’s tech week was no exception. The costumes, off stage, were a good reflection of the design I created, however seeing them on stage in concert with the other technical elements would inform whether they were serving the play as intended. In addition to the normal discoveries and accommodations made during tech week, discoveries were still being made during tech week about the play itself. The finale of the play, Hedda’s suicide, still needed to be worked through.

The first problem that we needed to address was where the costumes would live on set. It was a question that had come up in several production meetings, and led to multiple conversations with our set designer Athena Parella. In both our designs the concept of keeping everything looking constructed and fake was very important towards showcasing the artificial nature in which we adhere to gender roles. Athena did not want to hang anything on the walls and I did not want the costumes on the floor. We established a sort of halfway meeting ground, by working the costume places into the existing elements of the set: Alyssa Labrie’s yoke and skirt were disguised by one of the paper piles; Judge Brack’s coat and hat were laid over a pile of books on an end table; Aunt Julia’s dress and bonnet were placed under one of the ladders; Tesman’s Jacket and coat were over a pile of books next to the stove; and Lovborg’s coat was hung off to the side of the other ladder.
This resulted in making the piles of clutter that already existed onstage a little larger, which was a favorable result because the Tyvek costumes were painted the same colors of the set, they were easily disguised. When the costumes appeared in the performance, they were somewhat surreal as they seemed to have been created from the clutter on stage (Fig 40.)

Once the costume placement was settled, I needed to examine several things: how I viewed details like hem length and fit that may be changed from the perspective of the audience, and how the actresses were wearing their costumes. I needed to look at how all seven women looked in their blacks as an ensemble, and how each of my constructed triangular relationships spoke to each other while the actresses were in them. There is a certain amount of finessing that happens during tech week when things get pushed and pulled just a bit to make it the best it can be.
Many minute changes took place during this period, and some of much larger changes. Some of the smaller changes involved: Aunt Julia’s hat closure changed from tying ribbons to a pre-made magnet rigged bow, Judge Brack’s hat brim was cut down because it had become comically large from stage, and Lovborg’s coat got its collar tacked down so that it would land in the right place every time it was put on. There were several larger problems that arose involving balancing the Hedda’s with each other and their other roles.

Several of the costuming problems that arose during tech were related the balancing of the women in their blacks. Each woman would need to portray Hedda Gabler in their own way but they needed to be equally represented. Each outfit was unique, and fit to its actress in a flattering way, but there was still something off. Mallory and Sevan’s blacks were dull compared to the other women, and were lacking from the original design in sleeve lengths and bottom variations.

I identified Mallory as looking too much like Aunt Julia, her alternative role, when she was supposed to be Hedda. Her blouse made her seem more closed off than the others and the plain cotton fabric it was made of made it seem less elegant. The shape was correct, but it needed dressing up. Our solution was to replace the gathered neckline with lace, which opened the neck drawing the eye to her face, and the lace also served to bring interest and texture to the top, which helped balance her with the other Heddas and to push Mallory further from Aunt Julia while Hedda (Fig. 41.)
The black outfit I had for Sevan (Brack) had been purchased and fit before the reduction of the design. The outfit was light rayon jumpsuit with a wrap front, short sleeves and wide legs. She wore a lace high necked shirt under the jumpsuit. This outfit was beautiful on her offstage. But on stage the lights were caught the wrap top in a very unflattering way that made her look messy and unkempt, and the floating quality of the fabric combined with the wide cut of the legs undercut the power of her alternate role of Judge Brack. Sevan needed a completely new black outfit. Thankfully I still had some of the options I had purchased at the beginning of this process. Putting Sevan in a tighter pair of long pants and a fit peplum, mesh top, with half-length sleeves and a belt made a world of difference. Sevan as Judge Brack came back to looking firm and grounded with long straight lines and Sevan as Hedda looked and felt more powerful (Fig. 42.) This balanced out the seven Heddas by varying the sleeve lengths and pant fit. The only thing left was to work out the ending of the play.
As this process was a devised one, carefully worked through step by step, the ending, Hedda’s suicide, is something that our entire team had fought with from the very beginning, but had not come up with a satisfactory solution too. Due to unforeseen complications of snow days and illness we lost nearly a week and a half of rehearsal time. We had this constructed world with these paper costume constructs, but we had done away with the idea of Hedda killing a construct that represented her, in addition everyone on stage was now Hedda. We had been batting around the idea of multiple endings, since we had added the choral aspect, and we wanted to show what Hedda’s choices could be in this situation.

Through some trial and error, Christina put together three endings to present our audience with. The first ending was the traditional one, Hedda’s final line, as she is playing the piano, is “from now on I promise I will be quiet,” she slams the piano takes her father’s gun while no one is looking and exits. The four women on stage who are acting as Hedda, at that time, all exit, we hear a gunshot, and Judge Brack gives the final line of “people don’t do such things!” The scene rewinds. The second time we see a different Hedda going through the same ending, and on the line “from now on I promise I will be quiet,” she quietly closes the piano, contemplates the gun, and then turns, quietly walking back to Judge Brack, submitting to his blackmail. The scene rewinds. The third and last Hedda reaches the line “from now on I promise I will be quiet,” the piano ceases to play, the characters in Tyvek freeze in place, and the Heddas begin to wake up. They slowly walk the stage, acknowledging each other for the first time. Those out of Tyvek undress and release the others who are frozen, bringing them back to life. The women then, as a unified group, recognize the world for what it is, a facade. Finally, they
approach the edge of the stage they have not been able to leave, and help each other as they jump off the edge, to then exit through the audience.

Presenting the traditional ending, acknowledged the canon and provided the context for the other two endings. The second ending provided a bleak look as what would happen if she did keep quiet. The third and final ending, offered to break the cycle. Our chorus of women on stage acknowledging each other, their situation and helping each other leave, provided a hopeful solution. This last ending was truly a culmination of our work. The women in this ending removed each other from the roles they had taken on and expose the construct for what it was, and break it. Our show left the audience with the image of seven women leaving the world of Hedda. Seven powerful women who didn’t need that world anymore (Fig 43.)

Our production went up February 22nd, and closed March 4th, 2017 in the Rand Theater. It was met with a wide range of reviews from faculty and audience members alike. Three of my favorites were: “I have never felt like I should root for Hedda before,” Jordan Reed, “I didn’t know when I should clap, I was too busy thinking about what I just
saw," John Eddy and "I have seen Hedda Gabler so many times, and it has never hit me like this before," Sara Demby. I don't know if our show would have been met with these responses if we were not in the political climate that we have found ourselves in, but then again, our show direction may have been very different if our country was not so divided.
CONCLUSION

Our approach to Hedda, design and production process, was somewhat new to UMASS, it did not follow the school’s traditional model for producing a play, which led to difficulties and hurdles to overcome, every step of the way. Having already worked professionally in the position of costume designer at several theaters, I was not used to the possibility of embracing something, to its end goal, with the complete understanding that it might fail. The concept of productive failure allowed us to take larger risks, and empowered us to fight for the process that allowed for an intense examination of this play. I believe that without Dr. Lewis’ affirmation that we could fail, we would have caved to the rather immense amount of pressure to produce this play as written. Instead we were able to dig into the show to truly find what it could mean to us, and to our audience, in our time. I don't believe that Hedda failed.

A costume design process is a collaborative one. A designer is in constant communication with the other people on the team and how a team collaborates can make or break a show. If I had been working with another team the pressure to present Hedda Gabler in its traditional, realistic and safe setting may have won out over the desire to experiment. The team that worked on Hedda did not cave. Our collaboration was open and supportive of each other’s voices and ideas. This allowed for the chance to explore this piece, fully, to its end goal. Our team set out to examine this canonical text’s validity as a feminist work and if it was still relevant to our contemporary moment. We questioned it through abstraction, maintaining Ibsen’s words while showing it to be a timely piece expressing a widely felt feminine experience rather than a singularity of the Victorian period.

Hedda was not the most ambitious design I have ever created for a show, but it was the most important one, as an artist, as an educator, as a mother and as a woman.
It is our job as artists and theater makers to question and challenge the knowledge and histories we have been given and their effects on the world around us. As an educator, I can encourage and empower the next generation of theater makers to also question challenge and resist; while modeling for them what a team of theater artists can accomplish together. I brought my children to this show. I showed my teenage daughter that women have a chance. We don't have to lie down and keep repeating the same tragedies over and over again. As a woman, the play became an affirmation that women can break the cycle. We will continue to challenge it, we will continue to resist it, and we will do it together. We can't keep quiet.


Ibsen, Henrik, translated by Gallienne E. Le, adapted by Finn Lefevre, directed by Christina Pellegrini *Hedda*. Performed February 22<sup>nd</sup>-March 4<sup>th</sup> 2017 at the Rand Theater University of Massachusetts, Amherst.


