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On the Contrary: Subverting the Canon with Ibsen's Hedda Gabler

Christina Pellegrini

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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ON THE CONTRARY: SUBVERTING THE CANON WITH HENRIK IBSEN’S
HEDDA GABLER

A Thesis Presented
by
CHRISTINA PELLEGRINI

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

May 2017

Department of Theater
ON THE CONTRARY: SUBVERTING THE CANON WITH HENRIK IBSEN’S
HEDDA GABLER

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I won't play at moving chessmen.
Knock over the board; then I'm with you.
You furnish the deluge for the world.
I'll gladly torpedo the Ark.

-To my friend, the Revolutionary Orator
Henrik Ibsen, 1869
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the remarkable and inspiring cast and team of Hedda: thank you for your unending creativity, humor, and persistence throughout this process. I couldn’t have asked for better collaborators in this process.

A very special thanks to my stellar committee: Gil McCauley, Megan Lewis, Harley Erdman, and Priscilla Page. The generosity of your mentorship, spirit, knowledge, and support has been truly invaluable. Thank you for helping me to grow as an artist - and as an individual.

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Finally, thank you to my phenomenal fellow graduate students for sharing creativity, camaraderie, collaboration, and an office these last three years.
ABSTRACT

ON THE CONTRARY:
SUBVERTING THE CANON WITH HENRIK IBSEN’S HEDDA GABLER

MAY 2017

CHRISTINA PELLEGRINI, B.A., THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

M.F.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS - AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Gilbert McCauley

This written portion of my thesis is aimed at documenting and synthesizing how I, as director, staged an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler through ongoing collaboration with a creative team comprised of dramaturges, designers, and actors.

I walk the reader through my exploration of Ibsen’s life and work through travel to the International Ibsen Festival in Oslo, Norway, and describe how I endeavored to lead the production’s creative team by applying feminist theories in directing and embracing the possibility of failure as a means of discovery. I discuss the casting process and establishment of an all-women ensemble, explore the major themes I identified in the play, and reflect on how the creative team strove to subvert the societal expectation of a historical production rooted in realism through designs and artistic choices inspired by the western canon’s ongoing grasp on contemporary theater programming.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

There is a famous legend told amongst enthusiasts and scholars of Henrik Ibsen’s work that his final word on his deathbed in 1906 was “Tvertimod!” (Norwegian for, “On the contrary!”) As I began developing a production of Hedda Gabler in 2016, I was on the cusp of discovering my own contrarian spirit. I do not recall the first time I encountered *Hedda Gabler*, as the play has always been on my radar as one of the classics to be read and studied, and while I appreciated the boldness of Ibsen’s style and story at the time of its publication, as well as its place in the Western theater canon, I questioned the theater’s ongoing attraction to the play and, particularly, its designation as a feminist play. When I learned that the University of Massachusetts Department of Theater wanted to program *Hedda Gabler* for our 2016-2017 season, I deeply questioned the choice. During my time at the university, and in my work prior to attending the graduate program, I had primarily explored newer plays and worked in new play development, and was beginning to make discoveries about the that work I, as well as other students in the department, wanted to explore. Yet, I found myself being shoehorned into directing a canonical text that I already felt was overdone and with which I had fundamental issues. I determined that if this was the play that I was to direct, my directorial challenge would not be simply to stage the play, but to interrogate and respond to the fact that we, like so many theaters, had felt the urge or responsibility to program it in the first place. To find my way into the text, I needed to understand how, as theater makers, we could approach a once-controversial play that has evolved to feel like a safe choice, one whose popularity and assurance as a classic had become its danger.
How could I check myself, my practices, and my approach throughout the process to avoid (re)producing the exact type of production that I wanted to challenge and discover ways to interrogate this canonical text and find new meaning and resonance for the modern audience and theater artist?

When *Hedda Gabler* was first produced in the late-19th century, the response from critics and audiences was tepid. “To conceive of the Ibsen drama gaining an extensive or permanent foothold on the stage is hardly possible,” stated *The Times London* in a review of the Vaudeville Theatre’s 1891 production. And yet, in 2016, when I was assigned to direct a production, the Western theater was still revisiting the dusty Tesman villa with, most frequently, recursive productions featuring strong, “star” actors, period sets and costumes, and refined translations and adaptations of Ibsen’s script by prominent (and primarily white, male) playwrights. *Hedda Gabler* has been produced nineteen times on Broadway alone, with countless productions staged across the United States and around the world every year. Both onstage interpretations and critical analyses frequently place the character of Hedda on a pedestal, trumpeting her as the *Hamlet* role for actresses, a representation of both a proto-feminist and a feminist, and a woman behaving delightfully and dangerously badly. But why do theaters continue to program this play, when recent reviews from high-budget, star-studded productions range from “respectable” to “disappointing” to “so awful, you wished Hedda had shot herself at the end of the first act instead of waiting for the end of the play”? It seemed to me that something was missing from productions of *Hedda Gabler* today, something that was

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keeping critics and audiences at arms-length from the action unfolding onstage in front of them. If the play simply does not work for or inspire audiences today, why has it lasted and why do we continue programming it?

In *Theatre of the Unimpressed*, his manifesto on the history and current state of modern theater, Jordan Tannahill describes how many modern theatrical productions “squeeze a playwright’s vital and exciting ideas into a corset of dramatic structure until they can no longer breathe, until all of the lifeblood has been drained out of them. We go to the theatre to be surprised, but so often the Well-Made Play shoves the recognizable and familiar down our throats” (39). Tannahill defines risk-taking as the making of “bold choices that challenge the status quo, that subvert the expected, that attempt to reveal new layers of meaning, that provoke questions, that disorient and reorient us” (18). The Western theater has been engaged in a long-term romance with Ibsen’s work, yet the impact of his repertoire, which was socially revolutionary in challenging the hypocrisies and inequities in private and public life in the late-19th century, does not strike the same rousing chord with 21st-century audiences. It was my goal to explore and interrogate Ibsen’s work, and to embrace the risk-taking elements of the theater that could lead to new discoveries. Three ways that the creative team of our production endeavored to interrogate this canonical text included rejecting realism, testing feminist theories in directing, and embracing the possibility of failure as a means of discovery.
CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND TRAVEL

The majority of productions of Ibsen’s works that I have attended were staged in a traditional manner, adhering to a translation of the script and utilizing design concepts based on the original setting in late-19th century Christiania\(^3\). However, while studying abroad during graduate school, I was fortunate to witness two productions of Ibsen’s work that inspired me to resist the norm in my own production. Interestingly, the plays were staged at festival occurring at the southernmost and northernmost locations that I have travelled to in the world: the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa (2015), and the International Ibsen Festival is Oslo, Norway (2016).

During the summer of 2015, I traveled to South Africa to attend the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa as part of Professor Megan Lewis’ Arts and Culture in South Africa course. Christiaan Olwagen’s modern and witty adaptation of *A Doll’s House* (1879) mined the debate and controversy evoked by staging the play in modern South Africa, and I found myself particularly struck by the ensemble’s interrogation of space. The play was performed on a proscenium stage, and a slight, blonde Nora, played by Jennifer Steyn, was first presented to audiences constricted by a tightly tailored skirt and jacket and wearing impossibly high heels. Upon finding herself alone at the top in Act I, Nora peeled off her achingly tall shoes, providing herself with more stable footing and easier access to the space, albeit in private. She maintained this posture when the other female character, Christine entered, but when her husband Torvald made his first appearance, she quickly replaced the stilettos. This feigned height

\(^3\) Modern-day Oslo, Norway.
and upward mobility once again limited her comfort and ability to move, causing her to lose lateral space in response to the new, dominant presence in the room and suggesting a group mentality in terms of the acceptance of social codes. Many scene breaks involved Nora alone onstage, dancing in violent and explosive movements to techno music before being jolted into stillness and silence by the entrance of another character. The famous tarantella scene in the original work has Torvald playing the music for Nora and teaching her how to dance. In Olwagen’s production, Nora choreographed the piece and used the dance for her own means—to distract Torvald from checking his e-mail. The provocative dance could be seen as a means by which she serves and entices Torvald, yet it could also be read as a moment of physical and sexual liberation necessary for her eventual physical, spiritual and social emancipation. Similarly, Krogstad, in a moment of weakness, threw an enormous temper tantrum, hurling himself onto the floor. His failures made him feel weak, and in this moment, he claimed space in attempt to regain a sense of control. In the final scene, Nora returned onstage in tennis shoes, ran across stage, leapt over the coffee table, and easily hurled her body into the house, where she dashed up the stairs and out of the theater. While other productions of *A Doll’s House* frequently place this final scene, and Nora’s future, in an uneasy and doomed light, this production’s impactful ending concluded with the doors on set bursting open, providing her with access to limitless space and a world of options. Nora broke the forth wall in the final moment, implicating the audience and their role in creating a literal and figurative wall. I found myself asking, “How are we, the spectators, also contributing to the definition of roles and spaces in life and theatrical representations of life?” When I learned that the department was programming *Hedda Gabler*, I knew I wanted to bring this question into
play in our production.

Figure 2.1: Jennifer Steyn in Christiaan Olwagen’s adaptation of *A Doll’s House*. Steyn played Nora Helmer in the 2015 production at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa. (Photo: CuePix/Mia van der Merwe)
Upon receiving the assignment to direct *Hedda Gabler* in the late spring of 2016, I began to heavily immerse myself in dramaturgical research, focusing on learning about the life of Henrik Ibsen and the origins of this specific play, as well as developing an understanding the socio-cultural elements that played into the development of this script. I conducted an extensive amount of research using the Five Colleges library systems and internet resources and databases, but while the academic texts detailed the play’s historical context and biographical facts about Ibsen, I still did not fully understand the ongoing attraction of Ibsen’s work to modern theater practitioners. There was not only a draw to read and study this play, but a desire to fully produce it, and I was still struggling to understand why this was the case. I chose to travel to Oslo after receiving this assignment in pursuit of a better understanding of the passion and intrigue that continues to surround this play. In both academic institutions and within the Broadway and regional models of theater, Ibsen’s work is frequently viewed with reverence as a fundamental staple, when what he was doing was attempting to subvert the norm and illuminate the truths of society. Despite my impulse to push the boundaries of how his work can be staged and performed, I still felt pressure to not change a play viewed as not only venerable, but untouchable. As I spoke with the guide who toured me around Ibsen’s home in the heart of Oslo, I revealed my fears about finding a way into his glossy, well-preserved body of work.

“What play are you doing?” she asked.

“Hedda Gabler.”

“That’s the one you choose to start with?” she laughed. I admitted to her that I was aware of the challenges of the piece and that I felt the need to do something different with it.
“Well, you have to,” she agreed matter-of-factly. “Otherwise, it’s just facsimile.”

I felt relieved receiving this confirmation while sitting in Ibsen’s living room, although I didn’t go there for permission, but understanding. However, despite this illuminating conversation, of all the plays that I saw at the festival, I felt the productions of Hedda Gabler were actually the safest and least subversive. The plays, staged at a constellation of theaters and spaces throughout the city, didn’t stray too far from the original text. I noted that each production had cut out the roles of Julia and Berta, modernized the production in some way, and cast more mature actors. The production that I saw that was the most inspiring was a conglomeration of The Wild Duck (1884) and The Enemy of the People (1882) — Enemy of the Duck — a full-scale production staged at the National Theater. The production was performed in multiple languages, and while I was familiar with the source texts, at times I couldn’t do more than witness the performances onstage without a full understanding of the language. However, despite my ability to understand parts of the dialogue, I was drawn in by the mischievous, highly physical work of the actors. Perhaps the most inspiring moment took place when actor Mads Ousdal broke from the text, halted the play, and began to converse with the audience, asking us to consider how we have let Ibsen’s plays become too polite. Other actors lounged onstage and interjected at times with comments or anecdotes. Beneath their genteel facades, Ibsen’s characters are screaming truths, they told us, but we have been conditioned to applaud politely. This moment concluded with Ousdal sprinting into the back wall of the set, which collapsed around him, revealing the mechanics of the theater space.

4 Directed and adapted by Thorleifur Ór Arnarsson and Mikael Torfason for the Nationalteatret, 2016.
Interestingly, despite this call-to-arms moment, the audience remained well-behaved and attentive. However, I was glad to hear several attendees conversing excitedly about the work on the bus as we travelled to the next performance. Whether it had struck them in the way that the artists had intended, it had, at the least, stirred something in them that they wanted to discuss further.

With each of these performances, realism and the constructs that audiences and theatermakers alike have come to accept as a given was broken, once literally with the (false) back wall of the Norway’s National Theater, and once figuratively with the fourth wall at Grahamstown’s Rhodes Theater, and I would later apply this same concept to my own work on Hedda Gabler.
Image 2.2: Mads Ousdal addresses the audience in *Enemy of the Duck*. The production was directed and adapted by Thorleifur Örn Arnarsson and Mikael Torfason for the Nationalteatret at the 2016 International Ibsen Festival, Oslo. (Photo: National Teatret/Øyvind Eide)
CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Henrik Ibsen is often bestowed with the distinguished title of “the founder of modern drama.” Although he began his work in the 1850s with verse dramas depicting Scandinavian legends, by the 1870s he had turned his focus toward contemporary subjects. Plays including *A Doll’s House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881) drew fears that his work was an attack on marriage and family—indeed, the very foundations of nineteenth century Norwegian society. The later years of the century were witness to a number of intellectual, scientific, technological, and artistic advancements, provoking conversation and, oftentimes, heated controversy. Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) challenged the traditional views of creation, while Sigmund Freud posed new ideas about human conscience. Meanwhile, theatrical realism was first recognized during the 1850s, and naturalism, the 1870s. (While two different terms are listed, *realism* and *naturalism* were used interchangeably to describe theatrical productions that aspired to produce the appearance of real life on stage without sentimentality.) The view of realists and naturalists were grounded in a scientific outlook: Illustrate the dangers of trying to make everyone conform to an idealized conception of truth and understand human behavior in terms of natural cause and effect. They suggested that the theater, which had grown into a large, commercial industry that catered to the tastes of the bourgeois, could speak about the society around them and should do so as objectively as possible. Playwrights wrote primarily about contemporary subjects, rather than historical or mythical subjects, and in doing so, introduced behavior not previously seen on stage. Ibsen’s recurrent themes are the elusiveness of self-actualization, the moral
bankruptcy of materialistic society, and the restrictive nature of traditional, Western moral values. His plays attacked society’s values and dealt with unconventional subjects within the form of the well-made play.

_**Hedda Gabler**_ tells the story of Hedda, identified as the daughter of the late General Gabler, and new wife of the uninspired scholar George Tesman. At twenty-nine years old, social Hedda had “danced her last dance” and accepted Tesman’s proposal in spite of a lack of attraction toward him, romantically or otherwise. At the opening of the play Hedda and Tesman have just returned from a six-month-long honeymoon, which doubled as a research trip for Tesman and caused Hedda feelings of boredom and isolation. It is heavily implied that she has become pregnant, a fact that Tesman’s Aunt Julia is eager to confirm. Judge Brack, a man about town and confidante of many, arrives to the Tesman’s new home bearing the bad news that Tesman is going to have to compete for a coveted university position with his former academic competitor and one of Hedda's former admirers, Eilert Løvborg. Løvborg, a gifted writer prone to heavy drinking, was run out of town years ago and has spent his time as the tutor to the children of the local commissioner, who married the young and beautiful Thea Elvsted after his first wife’s death. Løvborg has recently returned to the city following the successful publication of a new book and toting the manuscripts for a sequel. Thea, who is deeply in love with him, has left her husband and followed him, and seeks the help of Tesman, her former admirer, and Hedda, her former schoolmate. Løvborg eventually arrives at the household, where Hedda manipulates him into attending Judge Brack’s stag party with the men, where he predictably gets drunk and ultimately loses his brilliant manuscript. Tesman uncovers the lost manuscript and gives it to Hedda for safe keeping until it can be returned to
Løovborg, but in a fit of jealous rage over Løvborg and Thea’s relationship, she burns the manuscript. Løvborg, believing his manuscript to be lost forever, drives Thea away. Hedda, meanwhile, encourages Løvborg to end his life, giving him one of her father’s pistols. However, rather than the “beautiful” suicide that Hedda envisions, Løvborg perishes following the accidental discharge of the pistol while at a brothel. Brack recognizes the pistol and, knowing Hedda’s fear of scandal, uses this information as blackmail to coerce Hedda into an unsavory relationship. Meanwhile, Thea reveals that she had taken detailed notes for Løvborg, and she and Tesman begin to develop a close companionship while attempting to reconstruct the book. Hedda, realizing that she is in Brack’s power and has no purpose other than duties as a wife and mother, states, “I’ll be quiet” before shooting herself with the second of General Gabler’s pistols. The play concludes with Brack uttering one of Ibsen’s most famous lines of dialogue: “But good God! People don’t do such things!”

The play was neither understood nor well-received at the time of its initial publication and production, and Ibsen’s titular figure was met with impassioned criticism. In Norway and across Europe, critics found Hedda to be an incomprehensible — even inhuman — model of a woman. Hans Heiberg noted that the play “was published simultaneously in English, German, French, Dutch and Russian and was received with almost total confusion all over the world” (Rustin 257). Bredo Morgenstierne remarked, “We do not understand Hedda Gabler, nor believe in her. She is not related to anyone we know… a monster created by the author in the form of a woman who has no counterpart in the real world” (Nilsen 8). Alfred Sinding-Larsen agreed, complaining, “Ibsen’s modern drama is the drama of abnormality. His main characters have nothing human
about them save the flesh in which they are clothed” (Meyer 671). However, the monstrous, inhuman qualities of Hedda intersect directly with psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud’s concepts of human instincts:

Freud’s view of human psychology implies that not only can we never fully understand others but also that we can never be certain of our own motives. To assess people and situations, in addition to noting what is consciously said and done, we must also be aware of the subtext—what is not openly stated or done. According to this view, then, not only are moral values relative, language and behavior are only partially reliable indicators of a person’s state of mind and motives (Brocket and Ball 177).

Charles R. Lyons notes that, “Part of the power of Ibsen’s drama derives from the phenomenon of suppressing the emotionality of extreme psychic crises to fit within the acceptable limits of middle-class public behavior. Today, of course, that restraint marks the difference between the sensibility of Ibsen’s moment and our own and reads, to us, as typical either of the artificiality of late-nineteenth-century dramatic language or the behavior it attempted to represent” (Lyons 7). The incendiary reception that Ibsen’s works provoked when they were first published and performed is hard to imagine today.

Upon receiving my assignment in the spring of 2016, I first returned to notes from early exercises that I had completed when staging Act II of *Hedda Gabler* in Actor/Director studio in the fall of 2014. I had noted that I considered the central conflict of the play to be “the power of the social self and social conformity verses the power of the authentic self and self-expression.” Nearly a year and a half later, this analysis still rang true. The play, for me, questions how individuals construct their own personal narratives as they move through their lives, a concept not unfamiliar to any generation, let alone one awash in social media and camera filters. The play also suggests impending change, a burning down of social conventions, and a move toward the future. This is
particularly evident in Løvborg’s manuscript outlining his perceptions on “the future”. These notes reinforced my belief that the play, with careful consideration and approach, could inspire discussion in a forward-moving way while still remaining truthful to the themes presented in Ibsen’s original text. With a cast and audience comprised primarily of students in a campus setting, I wanted to create a production that interrogated the ideas and concepts laid down by Ibsen, one that did not underestimate a young audience’s capacity for complex argument and confronted the context of the piece, both socio-politically and in relation to our broader contemporary culture.
CHAPTER 4
DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Production dramaturg Finn Lefevre and I began our work together by exploring possible translations of the text. Funding for an adaptation or translation of the play that was not in public domain was not included in the season budget, so the possibility of using any of the newer adaptations with less archaic terminology that had emerged in recent years, such as those by Jon Robin Baitz or Christopher Shinn, was eliminated. However, that particular challenge pushed me to delve even further into the discovering the translations that existed. When I discovered that actress and theater-maker Eva Le Gallienne had translated the text, I was eager to read her take on Ibsen’s text, and we ultimately decided to use this version. Due to the fact that I had to dig further to find an appropriate translation, I found a version by a female theater maker that excited me more than any of the more recent translations. Not only did we feel it was appropriate for this cast to have a female theatemaker’s take on the script, but her translation embraced and highlighted notes of humor, sarcasm, and absurdity that existed in the text. With the assistance of the Scandinavian Studies Department, I was able to retranslate passages or words that sounded dated or unfamiliar in anticipation of auditions and rehearsals.

The next phase of our process was based on research and development, when themes and the technical possibilities were explored with the creative team. Finn and I began folding the designers in the conversations and working process as they received

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5 William Archer and Edmond Gosse (1890); Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (2005); Una Ellis-Fermor (1951); James McFarlane (2008); Doug Hughes (2000); Richard Eyre (2005).

6 A British-born American stage actress, producer, director, translator, and author. (January 11, 1899 – June 3, 1991.)
their assignments — Bethany Eddy (graduate candidate in costume design), Athena Parella (a visual artist and double-major designing her first theatrical set), Zach Molin (an undergraduate focused on lighting), and faculty member Amy Altadonna (sound). While the concept of vision can mean myriad things to different directors, my process as a director in pursuit of a vision has been consistently characterized by boiling down my interests and curiosities about the material into a single, major question or concept that I can use as a touchstone in production meetings, design conversations, and rehearsals. As Anne Bogart wrote, “Inside every good play lives a question. A great play asks big questions that endure through time. We enact plays in order to remember relevant questions; we remember these questions in our bodies and the perceptions take place in real time and space” (21). Similarly, there is a quote on the wall of the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis from former artistic direct Liviu Ciulei that reads: “A community can be measured by the questions its theater asks.” I try to incorporate these sentiments into the plays I direct. Some live theater performances allow audiences to lean back and forget everything, while other plays provide an opportunity for audiences to lean in, remember everything, and ask questions of themselves and the world around them. In my work at the University of Massachusetts (and at large), I wanted to focus on the latter. For the department’s production of David Admji’s Marie Antoinette, which Bethany, Finn, and I had previously collaborated on in the fall of 2015, we considered the concept of function. During initial production and design meetings, we asked, “Historically, what was the function of Marie Antoinette, and did she fulfill her purpose?” and “How do we, as a society, create and drive a purpose onto people, especially those in the public eye (and, furthermore, derive entertainment from this)?” Hedda Gabler proved to be slightly more
complicated. In pursuit of interrogating the well-made play and its purpose in this season, Finn and I kept circling back to two interrelated questions: when are we Hedda and when is Hedda us? For the latter, when do our contemporary experiences of womanhood, gender, and gender roles say or bring something new to the story of Hedda Gabler, and when do we derive something about ourselves — how much we have changed, how much society is still the same — from the story? That question, we decided, would become the focus that the frames and tools we used to tell this story — casting, use of space, design — would telescope in and out of and serve.

As a director, I have always felt drawn to images when developing the visual aesthetic for a production, but Professor Christopher Baker presented a particular method called “imaging” in his course, Play Analysis, that I have found consistently effective and have adopted in my own process. Images are chosen from a magazine or other image source by intuition alone as the play is read, then studied to look for patterns and similarities. Considering that theater is, in fact, an imagistic medium, I also derive much inspiration from museums, particularly art museums, and visited several with the production in mind. Early in the process, one particular artist who stood out to me when I visited the Broad Museum in Los Angeles was Jenny Holzer, whose primary inspiration is the awareness of text and voice as tools of patrimonial control. Her Inflammatory Essays, a series of (at least) fifteen 100-word images created between 1979 and 1982, stirred something in me, and led me to further investigate her work, including Laments: I was sick of acting normal... (1989)7. The Broad Museum describes: “In the Laments

7 http://projects.jennyholzer.com/
series, vertical LED strips contain scrolling poetic stanzas that form sinister manifestos. The strips are paired with stone sarcophagi engraved with the same verses. The granite coffin implies the death and decay of the physical body, while the text serves to illuminate dark aspects of mental and emotional existence, ranging from feelings of apathy and boredom to compassionless sentiments and sadistic instincts. Here, corporeal decay is matched with psychological degradation, creating an uncomfortable and confrontational space to contemplate the more atrocious potentials of consciousness.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) “Jenny Holzer emerged in the late 1970s and early 80s with the intention of taking art out of the museum and gallery context and making it more accessible to the general public. Her strategy was to use text printed on billboards, park benches (as in It takes a while before you, 1989, from the Living Series), and commercially printed items like T-shirts and posters to disseminate her work throughout New York City.” <http://www.thebroad.org/art/jenny-holzer>
Image 4.1: Jenny Holzer’s *Laments: I Was Sick of Acting Normal*…(Photo: Broad Museum)

FEAR IS THE MOST ELEGANT WEAPON, YOUR HANDS ARE NEVER MESSY, THREATENING BODILY HARM IS CRUDE, WORK INSTEAD ON MINDS AND BELIEFS, PLAY INSECURITIES LIKE A PIANO, BE CREATIVE IN APPROACH, FORCE ANXIETY TO EXCRUCIATING LEVELS OR GENTLY UNDERMINE THE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE, PANIC DRIVES HUMAN HERDS OVER CLIFFS: AN ALTERNATIVE IS TERROR-INDUCED IMMOBILIZATION, FEAR FEEDS ON FEAR. PUT THIS EFFICIENT PROCESS IN MOTION, MANIPULATION IS NOT LIMITED TO PEOPLE, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS CAN BE SHAKEN, IT WILL BE DEMONSTRATED THAT NOTHING IS SAFE, SACRED OR SANE. THERE IS NO RESpite FROM HORIZON ABSOLUTES ARE QUICKSILVER. RESULTS ARE SPECTACULAR.

Image 4.2: A piece from Jenny Holzer’s *Inflammatory Essays*. (Photo: Tate Images)
A visual approach was also inevitable given the visual arts backgrounds of both set
designer Athena Parella and costume designer Bethany Eddy. In all theatrical processes,
I refuse to place boundaries on the imaginations and allow one idea to engender another.
No idea was ruled out at this early stage, no matter how outlandish, elaborate, or
expensive. For *Marie Antoinette*, one method that Bethany, Finn, and I found to be
particularly effective when communicating our aesthetic with the cast and designers was
creating a mood board of any image that caught our eye and arranging them together to
seek out themes and patterns. Over the summer, the team (primarily Bethany, Finn,
Athena, and myself) added photos. These images could be selected by a team member
for any reason ranging from historical research to life experiences to personal instinct to
artistic taste. The purpose of the image board was to begin to develop an overall sense of
place and mood and to track patterns in shape, color, and textures that could serve as
inspiration for play’s design and aesthetic.

![Production Image Board](Photo: Bethany Eddy)

**Figure 4.3: The production image board. (Photo: Bethany Eddy)**
We also discussed the images that we responded to most strongly in this text. Finn and I discovered three images that we were both very drawn to in the play. First, the piano—I felt that it represented Hedda’s self-expression. In the play, the piano doesn’t fit in with the rest of the room, she is constantly told to push the piano in the corner, and when she plays the piano raucously, she is sternly told to stop. Considering Holzer’s *Laments*, I also drew a connection between the piano and a coffin. The items that she claims in the room (even if they were inherited from someone else) are the pistols and the piano, and the piano is the item that we receive the least amount of information about. Both the pistols and the piano are loud and they take up space, directly juxtaposing the quiet and discreet behaviors and mannerisms that are suggested to Hedda by characters in the play. Next, the decay—she is surrounded by wilting, cut flowers inside the house, an autumnal dying landscape outside the house, and the experience of her own body aging and changing. Finally, fire—for us, Hedda felt like a fire that is being smothered. She is cloistered into an antiseptic environment and constantly talks about feeling cold. When she burns the manuscript, it is in a white-hot fit of rage, expressive of her inner fire erupting before it is finally snuffed out.

Initially, I was unsure of what theater space would be best for the production, but figured that the Curtain Theater, with its flexible, blackbox space could provide the most opportunities for exploration with the actors and could be exploited to create a more claustrophobic space. However, the department ultimately chose the 575-seat Rand Theater. Historically, this would be the more “accurate” space. The typical late-nineteenth-century stage was designed to create the illusion of realistic life on the stage, with a proscenium configuration establishing a fourth wall that masked the theatrical
mechanics from the audience. However, we were once again faced with a convention of western theater that would effectively separate the performer from the audience member and I was concerned that its non-flexible parameters would reinforce a canonical sense of control and manipulation by distancing the performers from the audience. It was apparent that we would have to find a more creative way to approach the space. Early in the process, a concept that I considered, with the space in mind, attempted to embrace the original context of *Hedda Gabler* and the conventions of Western theater by presenting a stage *within* the Rand Theater stage. I journaled one concept in July of 2016:

*Actors try on a different identities by exchanging puppets. Perhaps the puppets are even set aside as actors attempt to work through a scene. Hedda plays Tesman, Tesman tries out Brack, etc. Does it still work? Do we focus on the actor or the performance? Are new truths illuminated about the characters and about the society in which the play is set? What do we discover about societal roles today? Each character in the play displays a desire for autonomy and significance and are driven to progress — is the actors’ experience the same? The puppet stage would allow actors who might not be cast in a particular role to take on any identity. Would actors and audience members to better understand the motivation behind each character? Will they see themselves in a role they have unconsciously associated with a different gender, for example? There are great possibilities in viewing the characters as marionettes, pulled by the strings of social convention. In doing so, will audiences begin to ask questions about representation onstage? The ensemble may dress the same, and we may consider them puppeteers, but when they set down the puppets can we actually separate the person from the performance? Should we? By having the actors manipulate different characters, they can choose their destiny, but does anyone really get what they want at the end of this play? In this adaptation, one or more of the actors could cut the strings of the puppet at the moment of her death, separating themselves from convention and taking control of how, and if, the play will go on. The actor, and by extension, the character/puppet, is choosing to leave a situation where s/he is constricted and manipulated by the strings of power (Western theater conventions). How does this ending contradict the ending Ibsen wrote? How does it reinforce it? Hedda doesn’t want to be trapped in a role that society wrote for her, and in Ibsen’s text, she considers death her only way out. Do we cut ties with Ibsen’s work entirely, killing his child? Or can we literally cut ties with tired convention while still finding new purpose and meaning? Lighting can isolate a moment between two actors reading the roles. We can hop between pairs, for example, reading the top of I.2 between Hedda and Brack. “This trip never ends,” Hedda says in this scene. What is it like to hear three different voices*
say this line simultaneously? Or separately, with three different interpretations? What is it like to see two men read the full scene? A man and a woman? Two women? An actor as themselves and an actor playing a character? The actual script can double as Løvborg’s manuscript. If we burn it, can it ever be reconstructed? Probably not. In Ibsen’s case, the original text will always exist, but consider the impact of other adaptations. Once a new adaptation exists, we carry it over to our study and interpretation of the source text.

Initially, we explored making this puppetry, stage-within-a-stage concept a reality, but the logistics proved to be exceptionally tricky. Marionette puppets are difficult to manipulate and would require advanced training, so rod puppets were brought up as a possible solution. For our first-time set designer, creating a meta theatrical “stage-within-a-stage” that could hold both actors and puppets would be difficult to execute, so we abandoned that particular concept with the objective of continuing to pursue the questions that had prompted the idea through different means.
CHAPTER 5

METHODS OF APPROACH

5.1 Feminist Directing

I feel Ibsen succeeded in creating a character that attempted to relate to the diverse, complex and ambiguous lives of real women, rather than a caricature. The Department of Theater’s season selection committee — comprised of several members of the Department of Theater, including the Production Manager, the Public Relations Director, and Assistant Professors in Performance and Dramaturgy — agreed that it would be permissible for the adaptation and/or interpretation of the play to be flexible, and that the focus could be placed on the gender roles Ibsen outlined in his original text, based on the interest of both myself and production dramaturge Finn Lefevre. The season selection packet submitted to the committee for approval included text to that effect:

Christy is interested in taking a literal translation and adapting it, while remaining close to the original text. The language of the text would be modernized, a la the John Robin Baitz adaptation, but in a version that specifically draws attention to gender roles within the original text and their contemporary resonance. She is interested in exploring this through the use of a female Lövborg for example. This may involve the juxtaposition scenes played in the period style with contemporary counterparts.

The creative team believed that we could develop a production of the play that could exist as a feminist production through an ongoing devising process, and I felt that directing this play with a conventional approach would risk reconstructing the type of process and production that we resolutely wanted to resist. Regarding a feminist approach to the Western canon, Gay Gibson Cima writes:

Any consideration of feminist directing must begin with a reassessment of classical drama. The canon as it now stands was not written for women, and clearly it was not written by them. If a director doesn’t think through where she stands politically, she is likely to wind up serving the interests of a dominant
ideology, whether she intends to or not... The obvious solution, if she has the latitude, is to choose a play by a playwright who is also operating consciously around issues of race and gender... Not everyone, however, has the latitude to direct a script in which gender and racial issues are foregrounded and interrogated. The requirements of an academic curriculum or of a regional repertory season often compel directors to choose play from the existing canon, that body of literature which we have argued is so deeply and subtly oppressive to “difference” (7).

Following the November 2017 presidential election, after we had cast the play with an all-female ensemble and started preliminary workshops, the entire creative team felt more aware than ever of how the sociological issues of *Hedda Gabler* still remain with us more than a century after the play's debut. Demonstrations, including the Women’s March on Washington, were occurring worldwide and concurrently with our rehearsals. Women are still constrained in terms of gender roles, economics, and social structures, and they still must cope with economic and paternalistic subjugation, externalized and internalized misogyny, sexual repression, and lack of agency. *Hedda Gabler* presents a domestic situation in which a woman is constrained by the limitations of her upbringing and socioeconomic environment (a culture that hasn’t allowed her agency) and by her biology (her pregnancy). Our culture has still not solved the problems presented in the play, with many women able to maintain an identity and autonomy only with great effort, and in terms of human beings being able to maintain fulfilling, equitable relationships, substantially free of social or economic coercion.

Discussing the relationship between feminist directing and feminist theory, scholar Gay Gibson Cima notes that, “The relationship between directing and theory is a complex and fluctuating one, but one thing is clear: we can create as well as test theory in the practice of our art. Feminist directors do not simply put feminist theory into practice but, rather discover theory in practice” (95). In approaching this production, I particularly
related to a ponderation of Cima’s: “The feminist project itself seeks to find a way to explode the hierarchical methods of the patriarchy, so how can the feminist director assume primary power in the production of the artwork? Isn’t this simply reinscribing the subjection of actors, designers, and audience in an ‘age of the director’?” (103) In order to combat the sense of struggle for hierarchy and power that I have sometimes sensed in production meetings, and to promote the free-flow of ideas in the artistic process, my goal was to achieve collaboration by facilitating conversation and helping to focus the team in on a “vision”. Eschewing the model of production as a vertical power structure, this production called for movement and commitment toward vertical functioning to foster artistic and academic partnerships in spite of organizational constraints. While deadlines are necessary, especially for shops building the costume and set designs to complete their work, I wanted to bring a conversational and collaborative approach to production meetings and to the rehearsal process. This required moving the audition process up in earlier than the 2016-2017 departmental calendar had originally scheduled and involved adding a workshop period to the Fall 2016 semester preceding the official rehearsal period. One of the changes that the department had proposed to implement during 2016-2017 season was the guideline that stated that everyone attending a production meeting had to sit at the conference table, and I embraced and enforced this practice in our production process. During my first two years in the program, production meetings consisted of some members of the team (primarily students and production staff) gathered around the table, others, including many design faculty advisors, oftentimes gathered on the periphery of the room in an outer circle. This caused miscommunication when multiple conversations ensued simultaneously and promoted an
overall sense of separation, distraction, and hierarchy. In my experience, production meetings also revolved around a belief that the director was there to dole out information to designers on how to achieve the director’s singular vision, rather than engaging in conversation with collaborators regarding a plan for moving forward on a collective approach to the production. By including everyone at the table, the production meeting process became more transparent. Each student had an opportunity to speak about their particular department, with ideas and problems were presented to the group in a conversational manner that promoted lateral thinking. We were often able to collectively reach a consensus or solution with advisors present to share their insights in the moment, rather than discussing issues with advisees after the meeting had concluded. Additionally, this method clarified if and when advisors were speaking for their students or if a student was feeling hemmed-in by advisors, as each student was encouraged to give remarks and presentations first, with an opportunity to advisors to respond and weigh-in afterwards. It promoted more adventurous ideas on behalf of the students and lead to creative solutions. For example, when we decided that both the costumes and costume changes were to be onstage, a discussion flowed freely between Athena, Bethany, and myself, with the input of advisors, on where and how costumes could be placed in order to avoid damage to the costumes, enhance (or not distract from) the action onstage and the set design, and be easily accessible to actors. As Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement note in an introduction to *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter*, “Anytime a production undertakes to challenge fundamental ideological assumptions, and theory becomes part of the arsenal, the entire production team needs to be included in the
discussion. Not just informed—included” (35). This approach would also play into my work with actors, which I discuss further in the next chapter.

5.2 Subverting Realism

Considering how truly unthreatening realism has become in the western theater, American scenic designer Robert Edmund Jones mused, “Realism is something we practice when we aren't feeling very well. When we don't feel up to making the effort” (qtd. in Bogart 33). For this reason, I was interested in exploring what happened when we removed the period setting and the notions of realism in which modern western theater is still mired. As Matthew Goulish of Goat Island stated, “There is no joy in leading people to a place where they already are” (Goulish et al, “CVZVLC”).

Several elements were important to me going into set design conversations with Athena to avoid the detailed realism that Ibsen outlines in his stage directions; to develop a flexible set design so that the actors and I would be free to explore devising work; and to include Hedda’s piano as the centerpiece of the set. Looking at our image board in a production meeting, set design advisor Kris Stone posed the question, “If any one image on this board could be the set, which would you choose?” An image that was pasted at the center of the board immediately leapt out to me as the ideal option. It depicted an abandoned library with levels and levels of dusty books and large tree in the center of the room that protruded through the ceiling, revealing a shaft of natural light. Other members of the artistic team performed the same exercise independently, and we were fascinated to find that most of us gravitated toward the same image.

We began with a set design that literally copied the image, and began to peel away
at the layers to try to discover what drew us to the image. The tree and natural light conversed with Hedda’s constant draw toward the door and windows. She is revealed to have been an equestrian who was frequently seen riding her horse in her younger days, suggesting a draw toward the natural world and away from the constructed reality of the Tesman living room and insinuating that the room in which the play is set does not feel natural to Hedda. Conversations with advisor Professor Megan Lewis helped us to cull multiple ideas into a single, manageable image to begin to develop into a design: the endless books, which played into our conversations about the canon. We chose to pursue a design developed around enormous bookshelves with a piano in the center, deciding that moveable books could be arranged to create windows in the room, allowing for spying, for example, and could eventually be built-up to close Hedda into the room.

Figure 5.1: The image that inspired Athena Parella’s set design. (Photo: Lori Nix)
We were later surprised to learn that the moving books in the bookshelves had been cut by production and replaced with two-dimensional printouts of books glued to flats. This was a decision that considerably impacted the meaning and function of the design as we had considered it up until that point, so we looked to see how we could best use and embrace the design that had been approved and signed off the set design advisor and technical director. Having to work within this revised space, which initially felt restrictive, actually helped to reinforce the theme of entrapment and the seemingly impenetrable canon. It literally trapped the actors into the set and would deeply influence how we blocked the play. Set designer Athena

From the beginning, we had vocalized how important the piano was to our concept. However, as we began to explore work with the piano that the department owned, we were given instructions limiting how actors could interact with the piano. In production meetings, we discussed the possibility of acquiring a second piano that was playable, climbable, and able to altered. While the artistic team was under the impression that this was just a conversation, a week later, we learned that a second piano had been acquired by the department. The baby grand was a great size and was a suitable color, but to our dismay, it was not functional as a playable piano. Sound designer Amy Altadonna performed further investigation, and determined that tuning would be ineffective at any point and would never function as a workable instrument for the department. The noisy, space-consuming symbol of Hedda’s self-expression was, essentially, mute. Acquiring a third piano was out of the question, so once again, we found ourselves confronted with a production decision that closed off options. However, we did receive permission to allow actors to interact with the piano as they pleased.
By removing some of the elements of realism, unnecessary action filtered to the surface. Initially the set and prop teams provided us with many options for seating surfaces props and other items that cluttered of the stage and ultimately distracted from the language in this particular production. I began to remove props and set pieces minimizing the clutter onstage until the basic necessities were the only items. Should we have had a longer production process, I would have explored stripping down the stage even further. What would it have been like to stage the production with only piano center stage? For this production, however, we ultimately ended up with the piano and piano bench (that doubled as the gun case), a chaise, a stove, and a table upstage. By taking away many options for “stage business,” it became clear when an actor was moving for the sake of moving. For example, when they felt insecure about a scene they tended to just upstage of the piano essentially blocking themselves from the audience. Other times they gravitated towards the books, kicking arranging or leafing through them without purpose. Oftentimes, I had to check my own dependency on the trappings of realism when I felt a strong temptation to add props or set pieces. Frequently, I would try to justify it as giving the actors something to ground them or to help provide variation in their actions, when in reality I was masking our lack of understanding about what was happening in the scene. We learned to read materialism as a lack of grounding in the story and our confidence.

5.3 Poetics of Failure

When did the language of clear steps become an overriding aesthetic vocabulary for the jugglers, puppet-masters, flying machinists, divas, clowns, minstrels, burlesque dancers, bohemians and theater artists who are meant to channel the inexplicable? In other words, the phrase: “I just want to make sure that the steps the character is taking on his
or her journey are absolutely clear.” I wonder if “clear steps” ever did make for a good story? ...Clear steps seem more appropriate for a manual on how to put together furniture from another country.

Making the discovery that physical items onstage were actually serving as a distraction in our process was illuminating. It also meant that scenes took much longer to work because we would need to stop to discuss the action or try blocking a scene to exhaustion, finding that, oftentimes, it still did not work by the time rehearsal ended for the day. This could be frustrating and anxiety-inducing for both myself and the actors, as times. It also shook loose many more options about how to approach the scenes. Once doing the scene is the assumed “right way” proved to be ineffective, actors were more open to letting their guard down and trying things that seemed like they could be “wrong.” The presumed importance of “not doing anything to the play because it’s a classic,” as one actor put it, lost its weight under the buoyancy the ensemble found when they felt they let go of the responsibility of carrying and preserving the canon. In the fall of 2014, when I was first beginning the program at the University of Massachusetts, I was given the assignment of directing Act II of *Hedda Gabler* for a directing studio course.

his presented itself when actors mined the humor that existed within the text. It emerged when they began climbing on the piano after skirting around the edge of it out of fear of breaking it and or doing something “that a woman in that time wouldn’t do,” as another actor brought up. We were talking about Hedda Gabler, a character who is arguably unpredictable, yet actors constantly found that they were trying to stay on track, or even one step ahead.

The idea of “failure” is a big, scary word in society, and ostensibly, an even bigger and scarier word on a university campus. Theorists and artists including Tannahill,
Bailes, and Beckett embrace the idea, with declarations to “Fail again, [and] fail better” in art, but when the stakes of failure in our personal lives and the institutions that make up the political, vocational, financial, and educational factions of society feel so incredibly high, this is easier said than done. Like Hedda in the drawing room, each member of the creative team noted at least one moment when they felt an impulse to behave a certain way, and to not stir up trouble. In production meetings, many of our initial ideas and concepts did not pan out for reasons ranging from given circumstances (including the finite amount of time we had for rehearsals and the we were space assigned), to potential design concepts and framing devices that worked in theory but not in practice, to the implementation of decisions that we didn’t agree with, but ultimately needed to accept and embrace. In her book *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure*, Sara Jane Bailes writes: “The discourse of failure as reflected in western art and literature seems to counter the very ideas of progress and victory that simultaneously dominate historical narratives. It undermines the perceived stability of mainstream capitalist ideology’s preferred aspiration to achieve, succeed, or win” (2). Because the artistic team had so many questions that we wanted to interrogate and dig into with this process, I wanted to focus on creating a laboratory environment for the production process in which we (the actors, designers, dramaturges, and myself) could take risks and make bold choices without the concern of succeeding or winning. For myself, that amounted to standing by artistic choices - including devising and revising within a canonical text and casting seven women in the roles - in spite of my own reservations and occasional pushback from within the department.
CHAPTER 6
CASTING AND WORKSHOPS

JOURNAL: January 21, 2017
In the Rand, the seven actresses and I watched the marches from a laptop in the house of the Rand Theater. There was palpable tension, anxiety, excitement, so I sat down with the cast. In a circle, I presented them with the options that lay before us: we can drop this challenge, and stick to the script. They can each play a single character. It will still be challenging, but the repetition, the revisions, and the long hours might be a little more bearable. Or we can continue on this path of the unknown. I wanted to hear their thoughts. They raise their hands. Their preference is unanimous — they want to share the role. Internally, I was glad. I didn’t want to give up either, but I needed to know they were on-board. I ask them why they want to share the role.

“I would never be cast in this role in the real world,” one actor explains. “I identify with her struggles, but I’m always cast as the funny friend or the old lady. I’m not the type to be considered beautiful. I have never been considered by directors for a role in which the character is described as fascinating and beautiful. I’ve never considered myself for one.”

“I wouldn’t want to do this alone,” says another. “I will still play it truthfully,” she stresses, but the bold moves and different takes she witnesses from her castmates challenge her own vision of the role.

“We need each other right now,” states a third.

6.1 Casting
We did not specifically set out to cast an all-female ensemble. Initially, Finn and I had discussed casting Eilert Løvborg as a woman and considered the idea of an all-female cast as possible methods of exploring our question of gender within this play. When we began exploring puppetry and mask concepts, we wanted to avoid placing too many frames on the play and left those ideas behind. We were, however, interested in cross-gender casting. Feminist director Rhonda Blair encapsulated our reasoning: “We use cross-gender performance to challenge traditional representations, to illuminate gender-as-construction, and to provide actors (especially women) with access to a broader range of roles that they would otherwise have. Cross-gender casting expands a director’s range in conceptualizing a production and can subvert conventional representation and realism” (Blair 291). One of the methods that we used to explore this in auditions was bringing in
a group of actors and giving them a scene to work through. At various points, Finn or I would call “Freeze!” and then swap actors into different roles. Later, we asked them to choose when to freeze the scene themselves and step into any role of their choosing. We noticed that some women who had a strong initial audition were hesitant about trying out unconventional roles or fell into using subservient gestures when conversing with the male actors, even if their character had the upper-hand in the scene. We decided that we would revisit the all-female cast idea by doing a whole block of callbacks with women in ensemble arrangements. The experience was illuminating. We felt that the women showed us things about the characters we had not seen before, opened up with one another in ways we didn’t see in the mixed gender ensembles, and were really able to dig into the power dynamics in ways beyond the visible and aural elements of having a male-female duo on stage. We also had each of them try on the role of Hedda, and found that they each had such fascinating, different, and powerful takes on the role of Hedda. This led us to decide to consider again how an all-female cast could help us ask our overarching questions about gender and what it means to be Hedda today. We also wanted to explore the play from a woman’s perspective by seeing what happened when words intended for male characters were enacted by female ones. Each of the female roles in the play involved a woman who, even when she speaks, features as a topic of someone else’s connection rather than as an authorizing presence in her own. This is evident even in the title *Hedda Gabler*. Ibsen notes that his intention was “to indicate that Hedda as a personality is to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than her husband's wife,”—but we wanted to take it a step further and see her simply — and complexly — as *herself*. Additionally, once the possibility of casting a female ensemble presented itself, I
was struck by how casting a single representation of a character who has been interpreted hundreds, if not thousands of times, felt incredibly limited. Even with the all-female concept, we had plenty of talented women to choose from, so we actively sought to put together an ensemble that came from different places and who were open to the dynamic of a collaborative, but mapless creative process. We cast seven actors to mirror the number of roles that Ibsen originally included in his play: Sevan Dulgarian (Hedda/Brack), Monica Henry (Hedda/Lovborg), Christine Hicks (Hedda), Mallory Kassoy (Hedda/Julia), Ellen Keith (Hedda), Alyssa Labrie (Hedda/Thea), and Emily Tanch (Hedda/Tesman). Each member of the cast is a strong performer, yet there was considerable risk in casting the a full-female ensemble. Even if we did not include devised work and/or have multiple actors play multiple roles, we would still be making a statement by having seven female bodies onstage playing characters who were written by Ibsen as male. Many individuals in the department met the decision to cast these actors with enthusiasm, although others expressed a need to understand exactly what we were planning to do and/or say with this particular casting choice at the first production meeting. It was necessary to continue to explain where we were in the process to these individuals and what we were thinking in terms of them playing multiple roles, while also not rushing to make decisions about the production if it wasn’t vital to the timeline.
Figure 6.1: The full ensemble. From left: Mallory Kassoy, Ellen Keith, Alyssa Labrie, Emily Tanch, Monica Henry, Sevan Dulgarian, and Christine Hicks (Photo: Jon Crispin)
6.2 Preliminary Workshop

Auditions were followed, after an interval, by a two-day creative development workshop in November of 2016, where the material explored and movement work began to be generated. Our plan was to enter this time focused on discovering when each of our actors finds the most connection to Hedda and when each could bring something new to that role. We used this time to begin to notate where in the text the roles switch, who will play each scene, and what external frames will help us successfully tell that story in each section. We were open to adding found or devised text into the actual production, but we weren’t sure what it was or how or when it would be used. Through the use of physical exercises, we observed the actors making interesting adjustments in how much space they claimed and how they physically and vocally interpreted different roles. For example, we would call out the name of a character and the actors, with eyes closed, would perform a repeatable gesture that represented the character to them. We discovered that they frequently performed similar gestures with similar tempos. They were, inadvertently, playing with the semiotics of a Brechtian/feminist gestus, or “a gesture… by which, separately or in series, the social attitudes encoded in the play text become visible to the spectator” (Counsell and Wolf 82). Each of them also played the role of Hedda, bringing something different to her, and showing us how Hedda’s circumstances can and have been each of theirs. Finn and I were intrigued by the possibility of having each of the actresses play Hedda at some point in the final production, and by watching each of them begin to delve into the character, we became more convinced that this would be a fascinating avenue to pursue. In conversation, we also began to dig into the social/political circumstances a woman like Hedda would have faced at the time the
play’s initial publication. In an article dealing with the kind of critical intelligence Ibsen demanded of his early actors, Gail Gibson Cima writes, “The Ibsen actors needed an open-minded attitude toward their characters’ morals. Any actress, for example, unable to perceive a justification for Nora leaving Torvald, or for Hedda’s suicide, would be unable to play either character” (17). It was necessary for them to understand Hedda’s circumstances in order to truly see how their experiences aligned or differed with her. The most pervasive and urgent body on the post-Brechtian stage is the entity that Elaine Scarry refers to the “tortured, disciplined, confined, penetrated, maimed, extinguished” body as “the body in pain” (161).

Figure 6.2: Actors perform exercises during the Fall 2016 workshop. From left: Emily Tanch, Christine Hicks, Sevan Dulgarian and Mallory Kassoy. (Photo: Finn Lefevre)
6.3 Interviewing the Actors

As an experiment during the workshop period, I also interviewed each of the actors, asking them each the same questions:

- Tell me about a time when you felt free.
- When was a time that you felt censored?
- What images or descriptions come to mind when you hear the word “beauty”? The word “ugly”?
- Do you recall an experience when you expressed yourself or when you witnessed an act of self-expression that you feel impacted you in some way?
- What’s stopping you?

Initially, the intention was to use the interviews to generate material to include as monologues or dialogue within the play. Ultimately, we didn’t end up using any outside material, but transcribing these interviews helped me get to know and better understand each actor as an individual early on in the process. The interviews were in a low-stakes environment and the one-on-one conversation with each actor was an opportunity to share memories, inspirations, and fears. When I transcribed the interviews, I used an aesthetic inspired by Anna Deavere Smith that took into consideration the cadence, emphases, and pauses of each speaker so that I could better illustrate their individual voices.9 The result was a variety of word shapes — some looked more poetic in form, while others were steady in rhythm and shaped more like a conventional monologue. Some had words placed all around the page, and others were shaped like steps as the speaker built or dropped vocal intensity. For me, this exercise illuminated aspects of their personalities that aligned with parts of Hedda’s dialogue, and this helped to inform me about where I could begin placing actors as Hedda in the script. It was also revealing to

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9 See Appendix A for examples of the transcriptions.
see how the same image came up with different actors. Climbing or looking at trees was a common image when discussing the theme of freedom, which interestingly coincided with Hedda’s fascination and repulsion of the cut flowers inside and dying leaves outside and also tied into the gesture exercises.

Beyond the physical and thematic elements that the interview exercise revealed, communicating with actors in a one-on-one conversations in an intimate space also opened a dialogue of trust that provided a foundation for the rest of the rehearsal and production processes. Within the rehearsal room, I eschewed the narrow and limiting stereotypical conceptions of the director as a dominant or authoritative voice, choosing instead to focus on a relational approach when possible. Filmmaker Jill Soloway concisely articulated this approach in her 2015 speech at the AFI Conservatory Directing Workshop for Women: “You can own the energy of the set by embodying the idea that everyone is safe, no one is going to get yelled at, that we’re lucky to be called upon to make art together… I mean, it was shockingly, frighteningly easy for me to realize that I could invite actors into their risk spaces by leading with receiving, gathering, feminine, space-creation energy” (UPROXX).
CHAPTER 7

REHEARSAL AND DEVELOPMENT

Rehearsing is the transformation of the idea from the imaginary to the concrete realm. It is the development of philosophical and social inquiry extended through the principals of collaboration. Generally speaking, the term “rehearsal” indicates a specific and finite amount of time—in the case of the Department of Theater, approximately six weeks—to work through the material and stage the production for a public audience. However, in our case, I wanted to emphasize the process rather than the product. This proved to be a hard mindset to break through, as we knew that, by a certain date, we would need to have something “finished” to present onstage. I have never felt that a play I’ve directed has ever been “done” in a finite sense, but rather reaches a stopping point. This production was the same, but in a more extreme sense. By subverting the given, canonical text, every rehearsal encompassed the dynamic of asking questions and making discoveries in the constant pursuit of moving toward something, but not ever knowing exactly what that something would become. It was imperative for me to reconcile myself with the fact that whatever we performed would be the performance, and to keep the actors creatively open and on-board for the journey. Rehearsing the play was a rewarding but difficult task that required breaking out of much of their training in the acting process. They did not need to justify every intuition and we encouraged them to try bold and unexpected choices. Though it was not my intention going into the process, I used several of Cima’s twenty-one theatrical practices for subverting the canon. She suggests “unusual sets, choreographic interludes, and vocal arias such as etiologic repetitions of select words or phrase can also subvert a script in performance” (99), all of which we included
design-wise with non-traditional costumes and set, and through staging that included repetition of gesture and text, as well as devised movements.

To develop the devised movement, Finn and I created and curated a series of exercises that introduced the actors to the world of the play on a visceral level. (Preliminary text work, however, drew on more traditional concepts.) We started work using actions and objectives, and as we began to place actors into different Hedda “scenes,” they were encouraged to develop choices that encompassed that moment—without connecting one moment to that which preceded or followed. We selected key events in the text, explored them physically, and created physical gestures to signify them. Rehearsal further involved collaboration with the actors to find intersections between the strategies of the text and the staging. When the excitement and danger of experimenting with overlapping, echoing, and chorusing began to stale, we approached the actors with a new exercise: talking back to the text. At any point, if they had a comment or reaction to what was being acted out or spoken onstage, they were encouraged to voice their thoughts out-loud. Several cast members were established members of improvisational theater groups on campus, and these particular actors thrived, and ultimately, led the exercise. One of Cima’s theatrical practices states: “If you build your directorial work upon actors’ improvisations, plan carefully, because improvisations can inadvertently reproduced the dominant ideological structures that you are trying to critique. Actors may spontaneously voice their own unrecognized biases or they may move in stereotypical ways, ways that reinforce rather than redirect the traditional values promoted in the canon. Find stage images that raise questions about why the characters are represented as they are” (Cima 96). Considering Cima’s note
regarding the spontaneous vocalization of unrecognized biases, we actually uncovered internalized misogynistic and homophobic reactions to particular lines, actions, and characters. For example, Alyssa Labrie, as Thea, did no more than step into the central playing space before she was met with bullying jeers: “Bitch,” “slut,” “whore.” Similarly, Sevan as Brack uttered the suggestive exit line, “I find back ways intriguing,” and received a particularly pointed insult. Both the directing and dramaturgy teams would note particularly humorous, intriguing, or inflammatory comments or where multiple voices overlapped with similar or contradictory statements, and we would discuss what provoked these choices with actors. Investigating these impulses further helped to inform staging choices, such as when Thea steps downstage center for her line, “I only did what I had to do.” This was in response to the chorus calling out possible outcomes of Thea leaving her husband. We decided to have the entire ensemble surround her, echoing the line, “What will people say?” In order to subvert the idea that Thea is helpless or a victim in this moment, we placed her in a position that suggested vulnerability, and also highlighted the strength and autonomy she finds in making the decision for herself. This choice also played into Cima’s suggestion to “employ and critique, or parody, the historical blocking patterns that marginalized women in the premiere productions of classic scripts, productions in which the actors playing male characters customarily commanded center stage. Allow the female characters, however they seem to be silenced by the script, to take center stage in terms of placement and movement” (99).

In order to determine who was playing Hedda at any given moment, I worked with the dramaturgy team and assistant director Garrett Sager to mark out points in the script when it felt, instinctually, as if a shift in Hedda’s motivation occurred — What is each
version of afraid of? What is each protecting? What, specifically, pushes each one to be ruthless? We created a table mapping out when an actor was playing a secondary character and clarifying who was available to take on the role of Hedda. This logistical process narrowed down the options so that we could then identify which of the available actors would be best to take on the role. We had been using “flocking,” a technique used by Anne Bogart in her Viewpoints work, as a tool for exploring movement and relationships between the Heddas, and it ultimately became a major part of the onstage movement that functioned not only to show Hedda’s inner conflict, but to exchange actors playing Hedda. Flocking is a large game of follow the leader with the actors in a cluster formation that allows for the group to operate in relationship to each other, with one person to remain at the point at all times. This led to some interestingly chaotic moments of discovery as the different Heddas navigated when they were in agreement, and when one or more of them had an instinct to break away. This provided insight into who might be a good option for taking on the next Hedda role. The language onstage was rarely primarily about expressing a condition or a feeling, but the chorus was able to fill that in. This began by having the cast select lines from the play that angered, saddened, or otherwise provoked them and writing them on a slip of paper to place in the middle of the circle.

For lighting purposes, the set design included two narrow openings at the intersections of the upstage and diagonal flats that could also be used for exits and entrances. Initially, the actors entered and exited the space as dictated in the text, but I noticed in rehearsals that when actors left the stage, their energy dropped, stakes were lost, and focus was lost. For that reason I began to explore the possibility of keeping the
full company on stage for the duration of the play. Immediately, the possibility of the actors embodying Hedda any time they weren’t portraying another character — a Hedda chorus — emerged. Five of the actors would be assigned a second character, and all seven would swap in and out of the role of Hedda. This clarified the story, as audiences would only need to follow a single actor is a secondary track, and simplified the requirements of the costumes. Rather than needing a single character’s clothing to fit all seven actors, the items would only need to fit one. Bethany suggested a base costume for each actor in a single color palette. That way, the costumes could be tailored to flatter and reflect the style of each actor, rather than trying to put seven very different body types into a single template. While costumes started out requiring full-scale changes, by keeping the actors onstage, it was necessary to simplify them into one or two items that identified the character. The question of where the costumes would “live” onstage was presented. Looking at the stage, I noted that set design’s black and white palette provided many options to mask costumes. Thea’s flowing skirt, for example, blended beautifully with the paper pile. Brack’s dark coat masked effortlessly into the upstage console table. By anchoring their costume pieces in a single location, actors were also linked to a specific place on the set, and this streamlined their options for entrances and exits. Rather than a melee of actors jockeying for a place to stand, they would always return to the same place against the flats, and this cleaned up the blocking considerably.
Figure 7.1: The ensemble explores Athena Parella’s completed set in the Rand Theater. (Photo: Jon Crispin)
A specific challenge about the project was the conclusion of the play, and how Hedda’s suicide would sit with a contemporary audience. By the end of the play, Hedda is seemingly faced with two choices: commit suicide in order to free herself from society’s confines, or accept her circumstances, and thus kill her self in that way. In Ibsen’s script, Hedda shoots herself offstage, followed by Brack’s infamous utterance, “People don’t do such things.” This conclusion drives many to consider Hedda a tragic heroine, but in a post-feminist society, does her death ring inauthentic, tired, or even inappropriate? Instead of demonstrating bravery and control, does it actually paint as Hedda as a victim, or even a coward, who halts her own dialogue, while the train of society moves on and her manipulator gets the last word? I was interested in exploring how we could devise an ending that kills not the character herself, but the idea of what her repeated presence onstage had come to represent for me: the idea that she must capitulate to a society whose conventions dictate that someone like her cannot exist. Should we be content to let history repeat itself again and again? We discussed the ending with actors as early as the first day of rehearsal, but we did not reach a final choices in terms of interpretation and staging until the last days of rehearsals. As Cima notes, “When subversion is working best it creates a space in which audiences catch themselves in the act of making assumptions and brings them to a halt” (89). We determined that we would include the original, “shocking” ending, but how could we also include surprise and open the audience back up? Finn and I gathered the actors and pooled their ideas of how they would end the play if they could devise any conclusion possible. Again, no idea was considered too expensive, outlandish, or unachievable to discuss. Ideas ranged from having all seven Heddas climb up the ladder and leap out of
the window to having Hedda kill all of the other characters to climbing into the piano together and closing the lid. We were sure that we would have more than one ending, and experimenting with two conclusions provoked a sense of binary that did not serve the piece, as it suggested “right” versus “wrong,” “winner” versus “loser,” and “yes” versus “no,” so for timing purposes and to cull the possibilities into a manageable and coherent sequence for both the actors and audience, we chose three endings: the original Ibsen ending, and two alternatives. We hinged each of these endings on Hedda’s line, “From now on I’ll be quiet.” For the second ending, we chose to have one Hedda not shoot herself, but rather yield to her circumstances. While Tesman and Thea continue collating pages of Løvborg’s script at the piano, Brack places his hands proprietarily on Hedda’s shoulders as she silently gazes at her honeymoon photo album and accepts her current and implied future circumstances. Rather than a gunshot, we heard the album slam shut. (The sound also suggested the flash of an old-fashioned camera, trapping her into a single frame that would define her existence to future generations.) This ending functioned to illustrate what, realistically, a woman in her situation’s alternate option would be, and for many of the cast members, this conclusion felt more unsettling than the original. Our final devised ending witnessed Hedda choosing to break the cycle of the play by not completing the line, “From now on, I’ll be quiet.” Stopping short, she instead made a loud choice, banging her fists on the piano keys. However, the production’s non-functioning piano could not make a sound, so this technical challenge was reframed to provide a hint to both Hedda (now evolving into Hedda/actor) and the audience that she is discovering that the world around her is constructed. She then stood and began to interact with the set, as the remaining three Heddas, who were watching from the
periphery of the set, joined her. They removed costumes from the frozen characters, uncovering the actors beneath, who then “woke up” and joined her in investigating the set and unveiling the construct. Papers that Tesman and Thea were previously feverishly collating were tossed and strewn around the set, breaking the concept of reconstruction and embracing a sense of freedom from historical and textual confines. Finally, they all approached the end of the stage—the fourth wall—and make eye contact with the audience members before stepping offstage and interrupting the closed, inaccessible system of patriarchal culture and the canonical walls. As they stepped offstage onto the level of the audience, the house lights began to rise, washing both the stage and house in a similar light that further broke down the sense of performance, ritual, and separation. The actors continued to take in the audience members around them as they walked up the aisles before taking a last look at the stage. Finally, each actor left the space through the back of the theater, some walking, some holding hands, and others sprinting up the steps.

Throughout this ending, we played a song that we had heard while watching the protests on that Saturday in January. Musical artist Milck performed her song “Quiet” with 25 other female singers of different backgrounds and ages in an acapella “flash mob” choral performance. Finn later posted a video of the group online, and the cast and creative team constantly referred back to the song for inspiration. As soon as Finn and I heard it, we felt an urge to include it in the production. We were unsure where it would fit, as it seemed to apply to different characters at different times. During some rehearsals, we felt confident that the song aligned most closely with Thea’s revelation about leaving her husband and home and considered having Alyssa sing it in the moment. Other times, we considered including it during Hedda’s brief moments alone onstage.
However, as rehearsals progressed, we felt charged by repetition of the line, “I’ll be quiet” throughout the piece, and we knew that it would be the song to end the play. The lyrics related to us through the characters, and they also connected to each of our individual experiences as artists and humans brought together to create the production. This personal conclusion was what we wanted to pass on to those witnessing the piece. In every production we had collectively seen, Brack had the final declaration of “People don’t do such things.” We felt we could recognize that people did, and do, feel compelled to do “such things” but that the script could and would change with us, here and now. We wanted to recognize the past and move, together, toward an evolving place and conversation. We did not include a conventional curtain call in order to avoid turning back to the constructs that we had just broken and to promote a sense of movement rather than finality. We chose instead to have the actors greet audience members in the lobby after they exited the theater and join them in dialogue.
Figure 7.2: The ensemble breaks the cycle with the second of two devised endings. (Photo: Jon Crispin)
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

With audiences at play in the space, each night’s performance concluded in a different way. Some evenings, audiences would immediately stand and follow the actors out the doors to the lobby. Other times, they waited quietly for several minutes to see if the actors would reemerge onstage or in the house. In both cases, with the actors waiting in the lobby, audience members stuck around, and there was a palpable atmosphere of wanting to discuss the play in that moment. I took this to be a good indicator that something about the production had stirred the audience. I was fascinated to hear how many individuals unfamiliar with the original text assumed that our devised ending was Ibsen’s ending. One audience member, an Associate Professor in Women’s and Gender Studies, described the conclusion to be “as if Thelma and Louise made it across the canyon.” Another, from the Department of German and Scandinavian Studies, described it as “a creative approach… and one that worked very well! …The set was appropriately oppressive and vaguely threatening, with all those books looming up before as well as pressing down on the audience and with Georg’s “scholarship” relegated to a large mound of recyclables!” Casting all seven actresses as Hedda “emphasized the different and sometimes conflicting aspects of her character while at the same time it underlined the fact that Hedda is Everywoman.” With unlimited time, I would have liked to explore emphasizing, even more, the words that the women utter onstage. For this production, they were still speaking the dialogue inscribed by Ibsen, though they were reclaiming the words or committing action against the words through echoes and repetition. While I believe that I would avoid a production that eschewed Ibsen’s text entirely, I would like
to further explore when, and how, the women bring their own words to the stage. While
the actors claimed their space at the end of the play and we collectively chose an anthem
that we felt represented our take on the play, they did not actually say anything. I would
be very interested to explore how they could fold in devised or found text, and how they
might translate or transform source dialogue. In addition, throughout the process, had an
ongoing desire and instinct for the Heddas to write on the walls, floor, piano, or even the
characters in “construct” costumes. While this was dismissed as too complex and messy
an idea by the production department, as it was not designated as a priority for the
creative team early on in the production process, I would be excited to see them claim
even more space and continue to subvert the canon.

Another move away from the original play included our decision to call the
production Hedda. I later concluded that I would prefer the title pronounced as “Hedda”
but read as Hedda Gabler to emphasize not only her autonomy, but our reclamation of
Hedda in the face of the patriarchy and western canon. Ibsen stated, “My intention in
giving it this name was to indicate that Hedda as a personality is to be regarded rather as
her father’s daughter than as her husband’s wife,” but we wanted to view Hedda as
simply—and complexly—as her own person, not linked to another individual.

Directing Hedda Gabler was for me a continual unfolding of images, ideas, and
discoveries. And yet the experience, while illuminating in many ways, felt at times
unsettling and inconclusive. However, as Tannahill states, “Do events in our lives come
to neat conclusions and do we invariably derive a lesson from them? More often than not,
everything we experience in life remains unresolved and open-ended” (120). The open
space of discovery and the push for flexibility overwhelmed me at times in rehearsal.
Each choice, instead of paving the way to the next, illuminated the countless other choices that might have been made. At times, especially early on in the process, I found myself feeling paralyzed when working with the actors because I was so focused on what I should not do, that I inadvertently censored myself, and the options of what I could do seemed murky and out of reach. I was, in fact, grappling with exactly what I had identified as the central conflict of the play — my self-expression and artistic instincts were in conflict with what I interpreted as departmental norms and societal expectations. At times, when I did not know how to proceed, I was hesitant to simply make a choice, fearful that I would be prevented from altering my decision.

Although, I cannot speak directly for my entire cast and creative team, the feedback and impression that I received was that the process impacted the performers as much as the audience. A frequent reaction I received from the cast was that in the first performances, they were hoping to create some change for the spectators through the piece, but by the end of the run, they found themselves being transformed by the entire production experience. I The most profound shift I saw among the actors was that we were no longer intimidated by the play as they had been before. The more we pushed against the structure, the braver we became. Silence did not protect us; rather, taking risks in the form of asking questions, making statements, or performing a movement lead to discovery. Transformation and empowerment was uncovered through the process of challenging ourselves and others by following instincts and discussing both the limitations and possibilities of the work, all of which helped diminish some of the discomfort and fear around these seemingly “untouchable" plays.
APPENDIX A

CAST INTERVIEWS

ON FEELING FREE

Interview Example 1:
I recently went on a hike with a few friends, and I haven’t gone hiking in years. I used to, with my family a lot when we would go camping every summer but the past few years we just Haven’t gone camping ‘cause like, I’m the youngest of six kids and so everyone’s older than me now so people are married and have jobs and obligations so we can’t really do whole family group trips. But recently me and like, five of my friends, we just Went hiking. All day. And we reached the summit of a mountain. And I’ve always been a huge proponent of being in tune with one’s self. And in nature. And I think it’s very important to have that connection. And I was just On top of the mountain the wind was blowing against me and I just Threw my arms out and we were just Laughing and I just Felt so Free.

Interview Example 2:
I when I was little I spent a lot of time outside playing in our yard or climbing trees in the local park and just that freedom of being high up in the tree and looking out over my world and feeling a part of it but above it and also just an observer… it was very freeing.

Interview Example 3:
One of the times when I feel most physically free from, like, you know, the constraints of the world is when I’m swimming. I really like swimming. I grew up on a lake and I feel like being underwater where everything’s kind of silent, and stagnant, and gravity’s not
pulling you down and, you can just observe. Um, and I think it — that it really calms me down really calms me down, like, whenever I’m, you know angry or stressed out or frustrated I would go usually go the pool or go to my lake and just jump in. Even this summer, “Okay, I’m going out.” And I would just jump in the ocean and just lay there and feel like I’m just a small being in this huge, expansive ocean and the world.

**Interview Example 4:**

So—

When I—

This is so clich...—

Naaah—

This is not even—

Like I was gonna say —

I was going to say when I got my license. But not really. Like, that’s so mundane. And I didn’t really feel anything.

I like running around? Outside? When it’s nice out.

**ON SELF-EXPRESSION**

**Interview Example 1:**

I remember
for some reason
I don’t know how old I was
I must have been
ten, or like eleven
And I went to like, the pet store with my dad
And I, I was like, I’m gonna...
I took my hair and I like, put it in a ponytail like, over here. *(Points to the side of her head)*
And this was like, this was like early 2000s so it was like, it wasn’t like
So it wasn’t a *trend*  
At All.
I decided I’m going to
GO TO THE PET STORE.
WITH
THIS HAIRSTYLE. *(And like my dad didn’t care he’s really chill).*
And I don’t know,
I think it really shaped me because I thought:
“I can do whatever I want!”
“I can wear my hair however I want!”

Ummmm…. Yeah!
It’s a weird story.
I guess I use my hair as self-expression.
I say this as a joke but sometimes it’s not a joke.

I think my hair’s the most interesting thing about me.

Right now it’s not.
But when it’s its
Full
Expressive
Dynamic
Curly
Self
I love my hair
(laughs)

I think a lot of my power is in my hair.

**ON BEAUTY**

**Interview Example 1:**

I guess
Beauty In General
is, um,
It reminds me of a riddle I know.
And if I were ever to get a tattoo
It would probably be like a reference to this riddle.
It’s — the riddle is:

If I have a bee
in my hand?
What do I have
in my eye?

And it’s beauty.

Because *beauty*
is in the eye of the bee
holder.
*The beholder.*
So.
I think of hands
Holding a bee.

(But not an actual bee, of course.)

Also, my niece’s name is Bea.
My sister - she’s a mom now.
And Bea’s four now.
And my sister loves telling her how beautiful she is all the time.
Which is nice, But I have to be like,
BEAYOURESMARTYOURE
SO
SMART.
So I guess, that’s what I think of,
All those kinds of things
When I think about beauty.

**ON CENSORSHIP**

**Interview Example 1:**

This summer I was traveling,
I was backpacking in Asia and the girls that I was backpacking with I had only met once before but they seemed normal so I decided, “Oh, yeah, we’ll just go all together” I needed partners and my, my parents wouldn’t let me go alone so I was like okay, why not and then gradually throughout the trip
I started hearing from the one girl I was closest with that the other girls… Didn’t Like Me.

And we’re like 21 years old, I was like… This is really catty.
And strange.
And so…

She ended up telling me,
Oh we’re together for six weeks can you just like you know calm your personality down a little bit like maybe like don’t talk.
About like politics or like your interests at all because I think it’s it’s throwing them off a bit and I was like

IS IT NOW? That’s that’s interesting.

And so I —
And for about a week I —
I was just I —
I was

mute.

I —
I — tried to talk to them about their interests which were like,

reality TV
and drinking
and sitting by the pool

instead of going and exploring the country we were in... and I tried my best and it took a lot of stifling of myself to sit there to have these women who are my own age say

We don’t really like her.

Came as a shock, but... you know.

I did it.

Interview Example 2:

So I identify as bisexual. And my parents do not know that. I was raised in a very, very Catholic family and
My mother especially is very, very, very religious. And we’ve, we’ve talked about, like — she’s made it clear that she’s, that she’ll accept gay people — like I have a lot of gay friends and we have a lot of friends of the family who are openly gay and are in homosexual relationships and she thinks that’s all well and fine but she doesn’t have any kids

or she doesn’t know she has any kids

who might want to do...something along those lines. And I’ve brought up the topic of bisexuality with her before and she just doesn’t have an open mind to that at all. Things are very black and white for her and so you’re either straight or you’re gay. And she doesn’t understand that bisexuality is an actual... thing. It’s not just a phase and it’s not
just... I...

I actually mentioned to her that one of my friends is bisexual and she rolled her eyes and turned away and said,

“Ugh. Just make up your mind.”

And I was like, “Mom. Do you really feel like that?”

And she was like, “I just don’t understand that. I think that’s when someone doesn’t know what they want and they latch onto the first person that shows them attention.”

And that was very hard for me. That’s my mother, and she taught me a lot of what I still believe today. Like morality. And ethics. And kindness. And compassion.

She gave all that to me. But this huge topic. This huge thing about me she just doesn’t understand at all.

So that really makes me feel censored. Like I can’t be myself. Like I can’t express myself in that way to the person I am closest to.

And that’s really hard.

**ON WOMANHOOD**

**Interview Example 1:**

Womanhood. The first word that comes to mind is empowerment. I’m thinking of my mom, I just — Just, how important women are to each other.

My mom

(laughs) my mom.
## APPENDIX B

### FLOCKING AND ROLE TRACK BREAKDOWN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>JULIA</th>
<th>TESMAN</th>
<th>HEDDA</th>
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