

Program note for *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell
Written by Julie-Anne Whitney, Dramaturg
Boston Conservatory at Berklee
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In Sophie Treadwell's 1928 feminist tour-de-force, *Machinal*, a Young Woman struggles to find her place in a society that was not made for her. Treadwell uses theatrical expressionism— shallow characters, repetitive dialogue, episodic scenes, and invasive sound effects— to portray a world that has become impersonal and unfeeling; a world that only has room for those who are willing to submit and conform.

Throughout the play, the Young Woman repeatedly finds herself in opposition to the mechanization and materialization of the modern world. She is resistant to the daily office grind, resistant to marriage and motherhood, resistant to the idea of female purity and sexual restraint. But when she refuses to submit to society's demands, she disrupts the rhythm and intention of the modern "machine." The machine was not designed to accommodate disruptions. It was not designed for women to thrive. The Young Woman's inability and/or unwillingness to submit to the demands and expectations of a society that values conformity over individuality is what ultimately takes her life.

Despite having been written nearly a century ago, *Machinal* shows us a world that is strikingly similar to our own. The male characters have more power, wealth, stability, and influence than the female characters because that is the machine's intended function. It's the men in the Young Woman's life— her husband, a doctor, her lover, a judge— who have the power to determine her fate. How, then, can a woman fight back? How can she resist and also survive? Is she destined, as one character states, to "submit— right to the end"? In a society that holds no space for her, she must find a way to make a space for herself.