

ABSTRACT

A Director's Approach to Rinne Groff's *The Ruby Sunrise*

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Rinne Groff's *The Ruby Sunrise* tells the story of a poor, self-educated girl who creates the first electric television set in 1927. Her accomplishment goes unnoticed, but twenty-five years later her daughter stops at nothing to bring her mother's story to life during TV's Golden Age. Groff's play examines the mechanics of storytelling, of the ways in which truth can be compromised and histories revised. This thesis provides a textual analysis of *The Ruby Sunrise*, followed by a detailed description of David Reed's directorial approach to the work. Chapter One gives a brief biography of the playwright, examines her dramatic cannon, and traces the play's production history while Chapter Two offers a theoretical and analytical approach to the production. Chapter Three and Chapter Four outline the practical journey of the collaborative process, and Chapter Five concludes with the director's critical evaluation of the production.

A Director's Approach to Rinne Groff's *The Ruby Sunrise*

by

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A Thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	v
Acknowledgments	vii
Chapter One: The Playwright and the Play	1
Biographical Information	2
Writing Techniques and Body of Work	5
Framing Devices	7
Theme and Idea	10
Production History and Critical Reception	16
Conclusion	23
Chapter Two: Directorial Framework	24
Synopsis	24
Given Circumstances	26
Theoretical Approach	30
Structure and Style	37
Character	46
Themes	70
Conclusion	73
Chapter Three: Collaborative Process with Designers	75
Conceptual Approach	75
Choice of Stage and Audience Configuration	77
Collaboration With Designers	78
Scenic Design	80
Costume/Makeup Design	85
Lighting Design	88
Props Design	91
Sound/Video Design	94
Conclusion	97
Chapter Four: The Rehearsal Process	98
Early Considerations	98
Pre-Audition Work and the Audition Process	100
Rehearsal Process	106
Conclusion	121
Chapter Five: Production Analysis	123
Storytelling	123
Technological Integration	127

Blending of Acting Styles	131
Production Values	134
Conclusion	138
Appendices	139
A—Initial Design Imagery	140
B—Scenic Design	151
C—Costume Design	158
D—Lighting Design	165
E—Props Design	170
F—Circle Players: A 1945 Code of Ethics for Theatre Workers	172
Works Consulted	173

LIST OF FIGURES

Initial Design Imagery	140
Fig. 1 Stained Glass with Reflected Image	140
Fig. 2 Light Refracted Through Stained Glass	140
Fig. 3 Stained Glass (White Light)	141
Fig. 4 Stained Glass Components	141
Fig. 5 Earth Tone Color Palette	142
Fig. 6 Color and Texture Palette – 1920s	142
Fig. 7 Wood Texture – 1920s	143
Fig. 8 Farm House Inspiration – Appearance, Line, Texture	143
Fig. 9 Rustic Kitchen – 1920s	144
Fig. 10 Turn of the Century/1950s Kitchen Comparison	144
Fig. 11 Value Color Palette	145
Fig. 12 Office – 1950s	145
Fig. 13 Executive Office – 1950s	146
Fig. 14 Office – 1950s	146
Fig. 15 Norman Rockwell – The Runaway	147
Fig. 16 Norman Rockwell – Fixing a Flat	148
Fig. 17 Norman Rockwell – Homecoming Marine	149
Fig. 18 Norman Rockwell – The Diving Board	150
Scenic Design	151
Fig. 1 Design Part One	151
Fig. 2 Part One – The Barn	151
Fig. 3 Ghosted Set – Rendering: The Scenic Elements of the 1920s Remain	152
Fig. 4 Ghosted Set – The Scenic Elements of the 1920s Remain in the 1950	152
Fig. 5 The 1950s Studio Set	153
Fig. 6 The Ring – Rendering	153
Fig. 7 The Ring	154
Fig. 8 Office and Ghosted Imagery from Part One	154
Fig. 9 The Studio	155
Fig. 10 The Diner Counter – Rendering	155
Fig. 11 The Diner Counter	156
Fig. 12 The Tech Table	156
Fig. 13 Studio Set with Televisions – The Final Moment	157
Fig. 14 The Studio Crew	157
Costume Design	158
Fig. 1 Ladies wear – 1920s	158
Fig. 2 Ladies wear – 1920s	158
Fig. 3 Ladies wear – 1920s	159
Fig. 4 Ruby Rendering	160

Fig. 5 Ruby Costume	160
Fig. 6 Liz Hunter Rendering	161
Fig. 7 Liz Hunter Costume	161
Fig. 9 Lulu Costume	162
Fig. 8 Lulu Rendering	162
Fig. 10 Ethel Rendering	163
Fig. 11 Ethel Costume	163
Fig. 12 Wig Skullcap Line	164
Lighting Design	165
Fig. 1 Beams of Light	165
Fig. 2 Beams of Light	165
Fig. 3 Beams of Light	166
Fig. 4 Initial Firefly Consideration	167
Fig. 5 Firefly LED	167
Fig. 6 Firefly LED	167
Fig. 7 Firefly Lighting Effect	168
Fig. 8 LED Blowtorch	168
Fig. 9 Dark Lighting in Part Two	169
Props Design	170
Fig. 1 Farnsworth Prototype	170
Fig. 2 Red Glass Bottle	171
Fig. 3 Sugar Glass Bottle	171

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CHAPTER ONE

The Playwright and the Play

The landscape of the American theatre has changed drastically in recent years positioning a younger generation of playwrights as major contributors in the field. In the last century, the American theatre has been dominated by a handful of great playwrights—Williams, Miller, O’Neill, Wilder—whose work has become a part of the American theatrical canon. More recently the theatre community has taken interest in fostering young playwrights. This younger generation of playwrights, still eager, filled with ideas, and determined to be produced has been encouraged and aided through grants, awards, and new play festivals such as the Humana Festival of New Plays at the Actor’s Theatre of Louisville. Many of these newly produced playwrights have parlayed their initial work into growing and developing theatrical careers, carving out their own niche in the American theatre, and commanding attention in both the theatrical and academic realms. Among these young playwrights is Rinne Groff, who has received attention for productions at the Actor’s Theatre of Louisville, Trinity Repertory Theatre, and The New York Public Theatre. Groff has been celebrated for creating deeply personal plays that penetrate to the heart of dynamic moral and social issues while maintaining a sense of accessibility, a familiarity of situation, character, and dialogue that allows her works to reach a deep resonance with her audiences. Her increased popularity and success on the stage position her as an emerging postmodern playwright capable of speaking to a contemporary audience through well written dialogue, relevant themes, and a keen understanding of the human condition.

Biographical Information

At an early age, Rinne Groff, the daughter of American and Dutch parents, was exposed to various types of artistic expression, including theatre, which gave her an appreciation for art at an early age. In an interview with Adrien-Alice Hansel, Groff describes the impact that her parents' love of the arts had on her formative years.

My parents ... were and are close with poets, painters, filmmakers, writers. My father knew the folks in the Living Theater and even traveled with them for a time. I had a suburban Florida upbringing in certain respects, but my parents took me and my brothers to the symphony and the ballet and the theater when we were little. (105)

Embracing her love of the arts, Groff chose to study theatre at Yale University where she received her BA in 1991. Hoping to begin a career as an actress, she moved to New York immediately after college. She was unable to find consistent work as an actor, so in 1991 Groff and several of her friends created their own theatre company, Elevator Repair Service Theatre Company (ERS). As a member of ERS, Groff found consistent work and began honing her acting skills.

ERS was created to be an ensemble company, focusing on theatrical projects that covered a wide range of subject matter and literary forms. The company "combines elements of slapstick comedy, hi-tech and lo-tech design, both literary and found text, found objects and discarded furniture, and the group's own highly developed style of choreography" (<http://www.elevator.org>). While Groff and the other company members would eventually become recognized for their work at ERS, the early years were filled with growing pains. Instead of folding under the pressure, however, the company was strengthened by these initial struggles.

As the company moved beyond the infancy stage, their ensemble based approach and organic creative process became firmly entrenched. It was from this creative process that Groff grew as a theatrical artist, specifically as a playwright. The ERS created their “performances through extended periods of collaboration,” finding inspiration from such sources as “novels, non-fiction writings, films, plays, television programs, and various other media” (<http://www.elevator.org>). Groff flourished in this type of creative environment. She found artistic nourishment as an actor, playwright, and a member of a collaborative ensemble. The company’s creative process as well as Groff’s own desire to find more acting work greatly impacted her transition from an actor to a playwright. She discovered her new calling as a writer in much the same way as many other theatre practitioners — as an actor fulfilling the needs of the ensemble with which she was working. She describes the beginning of her journey:

So there were these two tracks going on: I was in an ensemble that created work collaboratively and I was pursuing a more traditional acting career. I started writing the way a lot of actors do, creating solo work for myself. I wrote a couple of pieces for a cabaret and was so petrified the first time I performed that during tech I just went blank. I'd never felt that vulnerable before, but there was something in all that terror that really interested me. I decided to devote myself to writing more and see where it would take me. (qtd. in Hansel 105)

It was this sense of vulnerability and terror which Groff experienced as an emerging artist that provided a key influence in her work as a playwright.

During this period in her life, when she was functioning as both an actor and playwright, Groff began to understand “the process of figuring out how things get put together to make a piece of theater” (qtd. in Beer). Beyond merely embracing the “terror” of writing, Groff also credits ERS’s process of creation as a key to her style. She states: “I’m in a room with a bunch of people, writing with our bodies as we try to figure

things out, as we bring different texts and viewpoints to the table. I think it's very healthy for a writer to be exposed to that. It's a totally different creative process than sitting alone at your computer" (qtd in Hansel 105).

As she became more interested in playwriting, Groff sought further training, studying at New York University's Tisch School of Performing Arts, where in 1999 she received her MFA in playwriting. Since graduating from NYU, she has compiled an impressive list of works: *Jimmy Carter was a Democrat*, *House of Wonder*, *Practicing*, *The Elevator*, *Orange Lemon Egg Canary*, *Inky*, *Molière Impromptu*, *The Ruby Sunrise*, *What Then*, and *Compulsion*. She co-wrote *You Never Know* with Charles Strouse and book and lyrics for the stage musical adaptation of the movie *Saved!* She was also a screenwriter for the first season of the television series *Weeds*. Her plays have been produced at such notable theatres as The New York Public Theater, Trinity Repertory Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Clubbed Thumb, and the Women's Project.

She was honored in 2005 as the recipient of the Whiting Writers' Award and was a finalist for the 2002-2003 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for her play *Orange Lemon Egg Canary*. Groff has also received an Obie Award grant, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a New York State Council on the Arts Individual Artist grant. She has been accepted as a fellow at the Sundance Theatre Lab, the MacDowell Colony, and has received commissions from The Guthrie Theatre, Berkeley Rep, The Public Theater, and Manhattan Theater Club. In addition to her work as a playwright, Groff teaches "Collaboration in the Theatre with The Public" and "Craft of Dramatic and Visual Writing" in the Department of Theatre at Tisch School of the Arts in New York.

Writing Techniques and Body of Work

As Groff's career as a playwright has progressed she has remained rooted in the creative process established as a young artist. Groff's use of framing devices and her consistent return to particular areas of thematic interest has become a hallmark of her work derived from her theatrical experience as well as exterior influences. While it is obvious that the ERS has influenced Groff's writing, she also credits writers Maria Irene Fornes and Virginia Woolf as major influences in the style and substance of her writing. Commenting on Maria Irene Fornes, Groff remarks:

What I'm drawn to is the combination of her realism—almost a hard-core social realism—with her deep theatricality and mystery, a sense of the familiar made strange. ... There's a lot in her writing that can be associated with masculinity and testosterone—violence, aggressiveness, brutality. The question of what it means for a woman to be interested in these things really intrigues me, and I like the way these typically male things become feminine in her hands. (qtd. in Hansel 106)

While Groff is inspired by Fornes' dramatic depiction of femininity infused with aggression, she is also drawn to Woolf's treatment of the feminine. "Virginia Woolf is one of my idols ... Woolf looks at some decidedly feminine things without disrespect ...and handles them with machismo. I'm interested in gender issues, examining what masculine writing and feminine writing are, what masculine concerns and feminine concerns are" (qtd. in Hansel 107). Both Fornes and Woolf each had a decidedly different effect on the substance and style of Groff's writing. In Fornes' drama, Groff locates a visceral driving force and a sense of the "familiar made strange," and in Woolf's novels, she finds a non-apologetic femininity which leads her to question preconceptions of gender roles (Hansel 107).

The scope of Fomes' influence may be seen most notably in Groff's use of universally understood and revisited ideas which she in turn envisions from a slightly skewed perspective. These ideas, which appear in the form of communally understood or remembered concepts, character types, or situations grounded in the collective memory of her audience provides Groff with familiar subjects for her plays that she then explores in divergent manners. For example, *The Ruby Sunrise* introduces the "Golden Age of Television" as a connecting thread. Groff begins the story in a single time period with a single guiding action, but she alters this path midway through the play, exploring a different series of events altogether. The shifts in the play allow Groff to examine multiple themes through the various time periods and styles of writing, while breaking the audiences' expectations of a linear plot.

Fomes' influence is further seen in the aggressive and often violent urges that propel many of Groff's characters. Works such as *House of Wonder* and *Compulsion* draw upon deep seeded emotions, hidden within the characters and exposed through interactions with others. The release of these emotions often comes in a climactic flash that reveals the core desires of humanity. The influence of Woolf's stance on femininity and her questioning of gender roles can be seen in *The Ruby Sunrise*, *Inky*, and *Orange Lemon Egg Canary*.

Despite her interest in the work of Fomes and Woolf, Groff's writing is not mere imitation. Her play *Orange Lemon Egg Canary* exhibits characteristics more heavily representative of Woolf, in this case the power dynamic between a female assistant and a male magician. The play also displays Fomes-esque traits unleashed in the raw emotion and violence resulting from unfulfilled expectations. Such comparisons may be seen in

much of Groff's work, and although the influences of both writers may not be seen equally in each play, both are present, either shaping the script directly or subtly guiding the action. Fornes and Woolf act as constant influences in Groff's artistic landscape.

Groff's career as a playwright has also been influenced by the Elevator Repair Service's model of creation, specifically in the practice of utilizing found media and familiar literary works to create plays capable of reaching a media savvy audience. For Groff, the creative process begins with her choice of material. She is an avid reader who finds inspiration in various sources ranging from classic literature to articles in the local newspaper. Fellow playwright Deron Bon describes Groff's creative process in the following way: "As she free associates how the Sunshine state [Florida] might yield a play idea I got a glimpse into her writing process. The world comes first, and as she questions her relationship to the material, the form emerges to frame it, tease out the story and reveal the sometimes latent, but always present passion in her characters' hearts" (Bon). Groff honors and upholds the lessons she learned in her time with the ERS by keeping an open mind about how a story can originate—anything can provide a moment of inspiration capable of reaching a modern and connected audience.

Framing Devices

Once Groff has established the world of her plays, she next discovers the manner in which the story will be told. Groff utilizes framing devices in each of her plays. A framing device can be defined as any element used at the beginning of a work that is seen repeatedly throughout the text and used as a structural framework for the story. Elements can include an action, scene, or event that adds structure to the play: "Sometimes the framing device is slowly explained throughout the work, and other times it is revealed

suddenly. These devices create suspense or interest in the story. The device is often used to show how a character changes or remains unchanged through the story” (Rossilo 1). Groff utilizes these frames to isolate and enhance certain elements of the story that she deems important, to focus the story, and to express the larger themes in an interesting manner. For example, in *The Ruby Sunrise*, the life of the character Ruby forms the primary subject matter of the play. Her story is told over three distinct periods of time; the 1920’s when she was alive, the 1950s as the subject of a teleplay, and in the final filming of the teleplay. Utilizing Ruby’s life as a consistent and remembered subject matter allows the world of the play to be familiar for the audience, while simultaneously challenging the conception of a realistically based linear plot.

The framing devices which Groff employs are designed not only to focus the scope of the play, but also to foster a deeper connection with her audiences. Playwright Deron Bon explains: “The framing device of the plays are built partly to welcome the audience and partly to challenge them to see the plays in a different way. As Rinne suggests, once this is accomplished it also gives them a chance to invest deeper within those limitations” (Bon). For Groff, the inclusion of the audience is essential, but she does not provide easy answers to the questions her plays pose. Groff’s framing devices provide borders for the vast worlds that she creates while also challenging the audience as they begin to experience the journey of her characters.

Groff’s constant return to the frame as a structural tool is of critical importance within her entire body of plays. For example, her play, *Orange Lemon Egg Canary*, which explores the world of illusions and the metaphysical, is framed by magic. The play focuses on a magician named Great and Trilby, his lover, who trains to become his

assistant. As Great begins to teach Trilby magic, both are haunted by the ghost of Henrietta, the former assistant of Great's grandfather (also named Great). Henrietta is drawn to Great and Trilby as they attempt to perfect the trick that caused her death many years before. Through the utilization of Henrietta's spirit, Groff is able to freely move between eras, flashing back and forth between the past and present, between modern realistic events and stylized stage action. Framing the play with Henrietta and the world of magic allows Groff to comment upon the major themes of the play—redemption, love, guilt, forgiveness, and despair. Through the use of the framing action, the play becomes much more than a simple story about a girl's love affair with a magician.

The same depth and interest is gained through the framing device in *House of Wonder*. The action of the play is centered on a young man (Eddie) who is said to have received the power to heal others after he survived being shot in the head. Richard, a crippled college professor confined to crutches and leg braces, comes to study Eddie's miraculous recovery and immediately becomes witness to the neglect, mistrust, and disconnection of Eddie's family. While this part of the story alone is excellent material for a play, Groff chooses to have the character Richard move freely between Eddie's living room and a lecture podium at the university. His lectures mirror and comment on the events in the play. The framing device allows *House of Wonder* to be complex and engaging on many levels.

This type of frame exists in many of Groff's works, including *Compulsion*, a play which utilizes a puppet of Anne Frank to speak to author Sid Silver, *The Five Hysterical Girls Theorem*, a work grounded in the world of mathematics, *Jimmy Carter was a Democrat*, a play that places the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization

(PATCO) strike of the 1980's inside a single bedroom apartment, and *Molière Impromptu*, in which the playwright uses three Molière scripts to frame the actions of his acting company on a single day.

Theme and Idea

Once Groff has established the framework and focus of her play, she continues to expand and embellish the world she has created. She states in her interview with Adrien-Alice Hansel:

I love to do research. I try to fill myself with voices that are not my own, to get a smorgasbord of influences. When I was writing *The Five Hysterical Girls Theorem*, the mathematician play, I was reading arcane material, turn-of-the-century academic stuff, to get that meter into my head, to find a more formal way of expressing ideas. ... When I was transcribing news reports for Jimmy Carter, I found commercials that were just extraordinary. They were so revealing and beautiful. There's one for Vaseline Intensive Care, with a farmer in a small town talking about chapped hands and saying, "America, we're going to be strong again. Workin' hands, workin' hands." (106)

The "voices" Groff creates add yet another level of richness to her texts. *Orange Lemon Egg Canary* enhances its framing device by finding a voice rooted in the specific language of magic and illusion. *The Ruby Sunrise* utilizes the language of 1950s teleplays and features dialogue filled with period specific camp and rhetoric. *House of Wonder* combines spiritual, academic, and domestic language, blending the three in order to determine how each type of speech may be either constructive or transgressive when used outside of its environment. Each of these plays speaks in a language that is geographically, chronologically, and socially accurate. Groff's ability to utilize specific rhythm, tone, and meter in the play adds realistic layers to her work, enriches the already deeply vibrant scripts, and aids in the clarity of her writing.

In *The Ruby Sunrise* Groff achieves variety through the use of layered story structure and her conscience effort to draw memory associations between the 1920s and the 1950s. While the time periods change, Groff maintains a constant link between the action of the two sections, positioning each audience member's memory of the events in part one as crucial to the interpretation of part two. Groff further aides the formulation of varied interpretations through her utilization of the 1950s teleplay in part two and three. Part three depicts the actual filming of the teleplay, yet as the television production is in its final moment, Ruby re-appears, occupying the same space as the 1950s actress that is playing her in the teleplay. This temporal disparity allows the television studio to act as a conduit between the two time periods, further complicating the relationship between the three distinct parts of the play. Groff never states what really happens in part one. Were those scenes history? Is that what really happened? Is that the idealized teleplay, which becomes derailed when the actress slated to play Ruby is blacklisted? The audience is never entirely certain about what happens to Ruby or if, in fact, the story is actually true. A single, universal truth is denied to the audience through Groff's intentional inclusion of ambiguous elements.

Much like *The Ruby Sunrise*, *House of Wonder* contains ambiguity. The play never answers the question of whether Eddie's power to heal people is real—a direct result of his injury—or if he has simply become a religious symbol for a group of zealots willing to cling to anything that appears to be a miracle. The play also never seeks to answer questions about the professor (Richard) that comes to meet with Eddie. He is first seen in the play wearing leg braces, using crutches, and apparently comes to Eddie to be healed. Despite his appearance, Eddie's aunt believes that Richard is lying and is not in

fact crippled. The unanswered question of Eddie's condition lingers until the end of the play when Richard is seen standing at a lecture podium without the aid of braces or crutches. Groff never reveals whether Richard was miraculously healed by Eddie's gift, or if the braces were merely a means to study the phenomenon up close. She does not need to. Instead, she intends for the ambiguity to drive the audience into a conscious thought process that questions the reality of what they are seeing on the stage.

From the final fate of the air traffic controllers in *Jimmy Carter was a Democrat*, to the implications of the mathematical theories in *The Five Hysterical Girls Theorem*, and even the basic background and social positioning of the nanny in *Inky*, this feeling of uncertainty is present throughout all of Groff's plays. She is interested in creating theatre that urges the spectator to become an actively thinking participant in the production.

Her desire to reach an actively engaged audience begins with her choice of thematic material. Groff identifies three main themes she consistently returns to: failure, fearlessness in the face of despair, and efforts made to drastically change the world. All of these thematic interests, while appearing somewhat similar, are actually quite different in meaning and scope. The first of these themes is failure, which permeates, to some extent, all of the work that she has produced. She is interested in exploring all facets of failure, from the act itself to the fear of failure and its ability to paralyze her characters. Groff neatly describes what failure means to her as a playwright: "In all the work I do, with ERS and in my own writing, I'm interested in the idea of failures. But failure doesn't have to be a bad word. ... Failure is a very beautiful and human thing. We can't know everything. We can't make it perfect. This is the best we can do" (qtd. in Hansel 107). For Groff, it is human nature to attempt and fail or to attempt and succeed in lesser

degrees. Groff embraces the idea of human failure and the effects of failure on the human psyche. *Jimmy Carter was a Democrat* is based on the narrator Sammy's failure to complete a narrative of the PATCO labor strike. His story is constantly burdened with the same misinformation and inability to communicate that historically plagued the labor union's dialogue with the federal government. The air traffic controllers that appear in Sammy's narrative of the strike also experience failure. As members of the most stressful profession in America, the characters are positioned to fail in both the personal and professional areas of their lives. Failure also permeates *The Five Hysterical Girls Theorem*, a story of a once brilliant mathematician's inability to come to terms with his declining skills. Groff's play *The Ruby Sunrise* explores not only the title character's failure to invent the television set, but also her daughter's failed attempt to televise the complete and true story of her mother's life. Each of these productions speaks to Groff's interest in human failure and disappointment as the subject of dramatic material.

While failure is an intriguing theme, Groff also understands that failure cannot occur unless characters are driven to achieve a goal. As much as Groff may delight in the exploration of failure, she is also attracted to the intermediary between failure and success, the moment when one is derailed from their path toward self-fulfillment and happiness. Groff is not interested in exploring "preordained" failure, rejecting the idea of "fate" entirely. Her interest rests in her belief that people are responsible for their actions. She seeks to understand what makes people strive for their goals and dreams in the face of disappointment and despair. She states:

The worlds that I deal with range pretty wildly. But, in a way, I think all my plays are about how to make a contribution to the world. How to keep on target toward your goal when so much seems to be pulling you away from your goals. And I think you can see that strain in a lot of my work

... people trying to stave off despair and keep working toward their goals.
(qtd. in Rodriguez)

Exploring the path that each character takes to achieve their goals and dreams provides Groff with a more potentially optimistic subject matter insuring that she does not merely linger on the idea of failure.

The human drive for success provides much of the humanity in her plays. She creates real characters that strive to reach incredibly daunting goals while hanging on to the smallest thread of hope. Beyond this, however, Groff is concerned with how people continue to find reasons and means to move forward. This forward motion is essential not only in driving the action of her plays, but also in establishing a sense of empathy towards her characters — the audience wants them to succeed.

The Ruby Sunrise explores two strong but very different female characters driven to achieve their goals in the face of extreme societal resistance. While neither is entirely successful in their efforts, Groff celebrates her characters' courage to follow their dreams in spite of personal setbacks and failures. *House of Wonder* examines Eddie's drive to help people even though each effort brings him closer to death. Even in the plays that Groff has written for children, she creates characters driven to better their world. *40 Thieves* is a theatrical retelling of *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves* in which Ali Baba's story is told to a great king. While telling the tale, the storyteller's assistant becomes connected to the characters, falling in love with the fictional brave serving girl, Marjanah. In the moment Marjanah is about to be killed, the assistant pleads to the storyteller for the girl's life to be spared. The assistant's love for the girl is so great that he enters the story and stops the girl from being killed at the cost of his own life. The assistant is resurrected

in the Ali Baba story, but sadly in his drive to save the serving girl he exchanges his real life for that of a fictional character.

Groff's third thematic interest is helplessness, how powerlessness and vulnerability affect her characters. Her interest in this theme is directly forged from her personal history, specifically her experiences growing up between the radically different decades of the 1970s and 1980s. The drastic change that occurred during these decades struck a particular chord with Groff. Commenting on *Jimmy Carter was a Democrat*, Groff states:

I was born in 1970. When I was growing up, everything was focused on feminist empowerment. It was this heady *Free to Be You and Me* time. I became a teenager when Reagan was in the White House. My life was all about *Seventeen* magazine, how to make cookies and, at the same time, how skinny I should be. I went from Gloria Steinem and Mother Goose to a very conservative world clamping down on me ... Some of that personal history funnels into the character of Emily. She has her moments early on when anything is possible and she's going for it, totally unafraid. As things start to close down on her personally, professionally, and emotionally, something in her closes down politically as well. I'm interested in a person who could be so fearless and yet feel so helpless. (qtd. in Hansel 107)

Groff is interested in the emotional walls that people build around themselves for security when the safety of their surroundings begins to disappear. She often examines how a character's humanity is changed or threatened when faced with forces he or she cannot control. *House of Wonder* examines a young boy, Eddie, who is confined to his bed and kept alive by machines. While Eddie is literally helpless and trapped, his family members are emotionally and metaphorically trapped in the same manner. His mother is confined to a loveless marriage where both parties blame the other for their son's condition. The same idea of a loveless marriage may be found between Moses and his wife Vera in *Five Hysterical Girls Theorem*. The frustrations of the failed marriage are

compounded as Moses copes with the loss of his once brilliant mind. He is trapped mentally and emotionally, and he is forced to watch his mind deteriorate. Each play further examines Groff's interest in characters that are completely stripped bare, left vulnerable, and exposed as they try and fail to fulfill their dreams.

Production History and Critical Reception

Rinne Groff's themes of failure, fearlessness, and perseverance reach their fullest expression in *The Ruby Sunrise*, which received its world premiere in 2004 at the Actor's Theatre of Louisville's (ATL) Humana Festival of New American Plays. The play was later transferred to the Trinity Repertory Theatre where director, Oskar Eustis restaged the piece. A year later (2005), Eustis restaged the production after becoming artistic director of the New York Public Theatre. Eustis admits that he connected with the script the first time he read it, immediately securing a spot for it in the Trinity Rep's upcoming season. "I have never made such an immediate and abrupt decision about an unproduced play, before or since" (qtd. in www.theatermirror.com). Eustis adds, "*Ruby* combined three things I rarely see in one package: wonderfully rich characters and dialogue, fresh and innovative formal thinking, and political and historical consciousness ... In a young writer, the combination is breathtaking" (qtd. in Rodriguez). Eustis's admiration for Groff's play led him to seek out further opportunities to work with the playwright, including their most recent collaboration of *Compulsion* at the New York Public Theater.

After his initial reading of *The Ruby Sunrise*, Oskar Eustis was impressed with Groff's mastery of language and style as well as her ability to create depth and richness in a text while still keeping the work accessible and light. Eustis's comments regarding Groff's *Compulsion* are equally true of *The Ruby Sunrise*: "She manages to combine a

genuine intellectual sweep and ambition, with a lightness of touch and a sense of whimsy that means she's always coming at the most difficult subjects from a slightly off angle that seems to open them up and illuminate them with a kind of gentleness that is really intoxicating" (The Public Theatre). Groff's approach to writing allows her to provide a deep sense of humanity to the most conceptually challenging scripts.

Ultimately, it was Eustis's fascination with Groff's theatrical style that led to their initial collaboration on *The Ruby Sunrise*. This production, inclusive of performances at The Actor's Theatre of Louisville, Trinity Repertory Theatre, and The Public Theatre, garnered mixed reviews that focused on three specific areas of the production: literary style and form, language, and staging. Critics commented on each of these areas, often unable to come to a consensus of how to respond to the form and style of her work. In a review for *Variety*, Critic David Rooney questioned the style of the play citing that the "abrupt transitions between naturalistic, melodramatic and comic tones make for a lumpy first act; as a result, the actors' work seems inconsistent and the audience's patience is tested" (Rooney). Rooney accurately points out that the episodic nature and potentially melodramatic dialogue of the first act, conventions that Groff has effectively modeled after television programming, has the potential to be very off-putting to the audience. Rooney admits, however, that the disjointed scenes in the first act begin to make sense as the second act ties together all of the loose ends: "The purpose becomes clearer only later on with 'persistence of vision' — to borrow a phrase from the title character — pulling back to reveal a diagram of storytelling as a complex assembly of often ill-fitting parts" (Rooney). Rooney's comments point to the jarring and confusing effect that the disjointed script can have on the audience. Despite his eventual understanding of the

work, Rooney's remarks highlight the potential for the deeper themes present in *The Ruby Sunrise* to be lost in the abrupt transitions and episodic nature of the script.

Given Rooney's concern, it is interesting to consider how the shifting tones, which are intended to mimic the 1950s teleplay, actually work against the progression of the script. For the modern audience, the style, vocabulary, and flow of the dialogue that is reminiscent of 1950s television, is quaint, inspiring nostalgic feelings, yet this same language is at odds with the expectation of modern theatrical dialogue. The presence of this carefully constructed 1950s camp can create a potential disconnect with the audience. Critic Loren Noveck, who found that the play's style was appropriate, noted that the "elements are stylized in a way that's almost tongue-in-cheek, calling to mind Hollywood clichés of the two periods, but never crossing the line into parody" (Noveck). Despite Noveck's praise, her review highlights the potential for parody or farce to emerge from the style of Groff's writing.

Critic Doug Strassler finds other problems in Groff's form and style. Although in his review Strassler does not possess a keen understanding of the play's central action, he does find the script to be overly simplistic: "Groff's plot ... is structurally complicated but also elementary when it comes to its ideology. As Groff's parallel plots ultimately interlock, one cannot help but think they feel slightly amateurish... all the characters are one-dimensional, stock types" (Strassler). Strassler's assessment of the script is countered by fellow critic Jeremy McCarter who writes: "Yet somehow Groff makes the dramatic irony seem not diminishing but ennobling. Even as her play shows the folly of Ruby's and Lulu's dreams, it celebrates them for persisting in those dreams; she exposes the limits of idealism while inspiring us to embrace idealism anew. It is a mature work

from a young playwright” (McCarter). Rather than criticizing a lack of depth in the play, McCarter finds genuine purpose and meaning in *The Ruby Sunrise*.

Between these two opinions, which are common among critics that reviewed the production, Strassler’s assessment goes further in explaining the potential reaction that an audience might have to the play’s first act. Groff’s choice to mirror the simplicity of storytelling found in 1950s teleplays provides a logical basis for Strassler’s comments, however he assesses the play on a superficial level. By dismissing the stylized language that Groff employs, Strassler significantly undervalues the nostalgic associations that such language may bring about in the audience’s memory. However, Strassler’s critique is certainly useful in speaking to the confusion that may result from Groff’s use of a past era’s stylized lingual forms.

Groff’s choice of language also brings about conflicting opinions from critics and raises questions regarding the quality and flow of dialogue. While some critics, like Steve Luber provide glowing praise of Groff’s “snappy, affected dialogue ... tinged with tragic irony,” others like Charles Isherwood have a dissenting opinion of Groff’s work (Luber). Isherwood suggests that Groff’s language is crude and empty:

Ms. Groff's writing could sorely use some nuanced acting to soften its blunter edges ... she has a tendency to make her points rather baldly in the dialogue, and her satiric impulses aren't much more subtle...The later scenes depict the rehearsals for and filming of the compromised version of Ruby's story that is finally approved. Here Ms. Groff pokes frisky fun at the clunky dialogue and tortured acting of the growing medium. But the jokes have a hollow ring. A playwright shouldn't toss satiric darts at the tube if she can't tell her own story with more delicacy and grace.
(Isherwood)

The bulk of Isherwood’s arrows are aimed at the dialogue which he believes kills the progression of the story. He provides few examples of this “clunky dialogue” in his

review, but it can be assumed, in part, that he is referring to the teleplay of the first act.

As with the play's structure, critics find this element of the play to be problematic. The dated and campy dialogue inspired by 1950s teleplays is the first aspect of the work that the audience encounters, potentially establishing the production as a period piece. While Luber presents a glowing review that contrasts Isherwood's highly scathing column, the reality of the production is most likely found in the moderate view expressed by critic Loren Noveck:

The first third of the play, set in the Indiana boardinghouse, represented by a conventional turntable set that shifts from barn to kitchen, can feel a little contrived and melodramatic ...[However] *The Ruby Sunrise* is a complicated, challenging play, sometimes requiring great patience from the audience—but that patience is rewarded with a thought-provoking and rich theatre experience, one I can't stop thinking about. It's a risky play, whose various set-ups don't really start paying off until about two-thirds of the way in— but once the payoffs begin, each new twist brings another new pleasure, capped off by a stunning final scene (the pleasures of which I will not reveal here). And it's a play that revels in the power of theatre; both Groff's tightly constructed script and Oskar Eustis's elegant direction make effective and witty use of all the tools at their command. (Noveck)

Noveck realizes that the contrived and melodramatic moments of the play could be read as awkward and weak. On the other hand, she recognizes the campy 1950s language within the opening section of the play and understands the reason Groff uses that language in the manner she does. Rather than brushing away dialogue that at first appears out of place, Noveck embraces it as an artistic decision.

Whether deriding Groff's work or praising her artistic choices, each of these reviews note the importance of the language of the text. Groff's varied use of language in part one and part two creates a transition from one style to another that can be difficult to follow. If the audience doesn't comprehend the change in style between each part, then the production risks losing the inherent depth and mood of the play.

The final element that critics noted about the production was the effectiveness of Oskar Eustis's staging. Understanding Eustis's directorial choices permits insight into problematic portions of Groff's script while evaluating the effectiveness of the production as a whole. Once again, critics' assessments differed greatly. On the whole, the majority of the critics believed that, at the very least, the production was neatly staged, but each felt that the production lacked the depth of character and theme found in the previous productions of Groff's plays. Although Isherwood's distaste for the production is well documented, he also states that the production could have been improved with stronger direction. He explains: "His decision to start this phase of his directing career with a known commodity is certainly understandable, possibly wise, but it's a little discouraging that his clear affection for this play has not resulted in a more artful production" (Isherwood). It could first be argued that calling *The Ruby Sunrise* a known commodity seems slightly ridiculous as the play had only been performed at ATL and Trinity Repertory prior to Isherwood's review. However, Isherwood does not challenge the direction, but the writing. He does not indict Eustis's work, while other critics such as Jeremy McCarter openly criticize Eustis's staging: "Groff's wisdom isn't always borne out by her script or Oskar Eustis's production. Thanks to wobbly casting and sluggish pacing, Ruby's early scenes miscarry badly" (McCarter). It is interesting to consider that in most reviews of the play, critics found the writing in the first act to be one reason for its failure; however, McCarter was unimpressed with the pacing of the act. While the two reviews differ on where the blame for the slow pacing should lie, both point out the necessity for *The Ruby Sunrise* to be directed in a quickly paced manner, progressing seamlessly between eras. Permitting the action to stall, spending too much

time on any specific moment, or lingering too long on philosophical questions, allows the production to become self-indulgent and sluggish.

The wide variety of critical views proves the difficulty of producing *The Ruby Sunrise*. The presence of stylized features, specifically the 1950s campy dialogue, has the potential to jar the audience, distancing them from an otherwise intimate production. The script's focus and thematic content may be lost behind what seems to be a simple love story, and the staging may diminish the value of a rich and vibrant work. All of these issues are potential hazards that must be addressed when considering a production of *The Ruby Sunrise*.

The variety of critical responses clearly outlines several possible pitfalls that require delicate guidance from a director. Any attempt to be too overt with the style, themes, and character relationships in the script will lead the production toward exaggeration and melodrama. If these dramatic elements aren't carefully delineated and effectively communicated, then the play will fall flat. As seen in Eustis's original production, the director's hand must be subtle while firmly guiding the play to a poignant and dramatically interesting production. It is this type of well-conceived and moving performance that prompted Steve Luber to comment: "Groff has done a valiant job of communicating how the theatre can engage with television in a way that could redefine and reclaim the medium's cultural production" (Luber).

Addressing challenges in acting, technical elements, and temporal shifts in order to create a coherent production that communicates a profound meaning to the audience is a lofty expectation. Yet any director attempting to produce *The Ruby Sunrise* must understand how all of these elements contribute to the production and attempt to reach

clarity in action, character, and themes. This is the challenge of directing *The Ruby Sunrise*.

Conclusion

Throughout her brief career, Rinne Groff has compiled an impressive body of work that has been generally well received by theatre artists and critics. Early training as an actor and her collaborative work with the ERS has shaped Groff's interests as a playwright, creating reoccurring stylistic choices and thematic concerns. Her dramatic interest lies in the exploration of poignant human activity; the choices, agency, hopelessness, and failure resulting from ordinary people attempting the extraordinary. Groff's deeply humanistic areas of concern are twofold: discover how and why people make certain choices and how those choices affect their lives. In order to address these concerns, Groff fills her work with emotionally charged characters striving for a chance at success. To these reoccurring themes and character types, Groff adds her interest in theatricality and unique performance conventions that help her tell ordinary stories in a unique manner. Each element of Groff's creative process is deeply ingrained in *The Ruby Sunrise*. The following chapters of this thesis will explore the theoretical and literary elements that Groff uses in her plays. The thesis will track Groff's work as a playwright, provide a director's analysis of the script, and discuss the production process (including design and rehearsal) of Baylor University Theatre's production of *The Ruby Sunrise*.

CHAPTER TWO

Directorial Framework

The formation of a directorial framework for *The Ruby Sunrise* requires a keen understanding of the text derived from a thorough script analysis. In the play, Rinne Groff creates a complex work that leaps between varied time periods, blends genres, and covers many weighty themes. Understanding the manner in which the play's thematic ideas, characters, and style are utilized in order to create dramatic structure provides a cohesive thread for the entire production. This chapter will present a directorial analysis of *The Ruby Sunrise*, exploring elements utilized in the play's construction including given circumstances, theoretical approaches, plot and structure, genre and style, characters and idea.

Synopsis

The Ruby Sunrise is written with a two-act structure, yet within the two acts, Groff divides the work into three individual and unique sections. Part one of the play takes place in 1927, and examines Ruby, a poor farm girl, as she endeavors to create the first television set. Ruby's mission is complicated through her interactions with Henry, a young college student, and Lois, Ruby's aunt. As Ruby moves closer to achieving her goal, her blossoming love affair with Henry and her strained relationship with her aunt block her forward progress. As part one concludes, Ruby is electrocuted by her television set and thrown across her workspace. As she attempts to stand she utters, "My

baby,” in reference to the child resulting from the consummation of her relationship with Henry.

In part two, the play shifts to an unnamed television studio in New York City in 1952. Ruby’s daughter Lulu has left Indiana and moved to the city in hopes of pursuing a career in television. Upon meeting a scriptwriter, Tad Rose, Lulu sets about righting the wrongs in her mother’s life by working with Tad to create a live teleplay about Ruby. In much the same manner as her mother, Lulu’s quest is complicated through her social interactions as well as by political forces of the period. While her initial attempt to create the teleplay meets with failure, she is finally able to succeed by understanding the lessons of persistence, a virtue found in her mother’s story.

The third part of the play examines the filming of Lulu’s teleplay. Set on a New York sound stage, the concluding moment of the play revisits Ruby’s life and blends dialogue and occurrences from both eras. Through the airing of the teleplay, Lulu provides Ruby a chance for success, not in the creation of the television set, but by granting her an opportunity to live a life unencumbered by regret and failure, a chance to realize her thwarted potential.

Each independent part is tied together through connection between the characters as well as the play’s main thematic focus: storytelling. The play explores the creation and telling of a story, finding drama within the characters’ struggles to create and relate their experiences in a truthful way. Through the focus on storytelling, the play explores how “truth” and facts are re-envisioned and compromised as a story is developed and told. In this way *The Ruby Sunrise* examines how oral traditions are constructed and how people rewrite their own histories in order to change and shape their future.

Given Circumstances

Each part of *The Ruby Sunrise* combines a series of scenes linked temporally and geographically that bind the characters and the action to recognized historical, political, and social events. Part one begins in the winter of 1927 and continues over a four-month period in Ruby's life as she attempts to create a television set. The action takes place on a run-down farm in West Lafayette, Indiana, near Purdue University where Henry studies agribusiness. Much of the play is deeply connected to this rural setting. The action of part one is set in the farmhouse and barn, iconic symbols of a rustic, earthy, and difficult farm life in the 1920s. Within the kitchen of the farmhouse and the barn, there is a lingering sense of the rural farm life that existed before electricity was made accessible. This very pastoral setting is contrasted greatly with the appearance of the electrical wires and components that Ruby uses in the creation of the television set. The appearance of these modern fixtures is juxtaposed with the overtly rural world of the farmhouse and barn.

The appearance of electrical mechanical devices in the rural setting are quite telling of the 1920s, a time marked by great technological innovation throughout the world, and most notably by the career of Philo Farnsworth, the inventor upon whom Ruby's character is based. Farnsworth, who lived in a rural setting much like Ruby, began experimenting with electricity at a very young age, inventing devices such as the "image dissector," and the all-electric "image pickup device," which were both used in his all-electronic television, the first of its kind. Farnsworth was also the first to introduce this technology to the public, capping a publicized race to invent television between Farnsworth, media mogul David Sarnoff, and Radio Corporation of America's

(RCA) Vladimir Zworykin. This competitive pressure to invent the television hangs over *The Ruby Sunrise*, and provides a major through-line in Ruby's initial quest. Her seemingly unshakable drive to create the television set is grounded in the historical race to invent an all-electronic television system.

While the increased presence of electric machinery is important to the setting of the play, the influence of society upon the play is also important to consider. Ruby's optimism concerning television's ability to change the world is counterbalanced by several other societal events occurring during the action of the play—Prohibition and the impending stock market crash of 1929. Each of these historical events produced a large-scale impact upon the culture and people of the time. In contrast to those optimistic dreamers like Ruby were workers, farmers, and businessmen unable to see past their desolate circumstances to a better future. These ordinary Americans were stuck in a time that offered little hope beyond mere survival. With such a bleak vision of the future, so prevalent during the age, Ruby's optimism is made even more apparent.

Apart from the effects of Prohibition and the Great Depression, Groff intentionally removes all other outside influences. The removal of other exterior social factors allows the interactions between Ruby, Henry, and Lois to be the major focus of the play. By isolating the characters on a run-down, turn of the century farm, the play highlights the characters' agency in their actions and implies that their shortcomings are not the fault of society but of their own insecurities. With no contact to the outside world, Ruby's optimistic motivations for the creation of a television set seem pure and uncorrupted. She is driven by her thoughts of the betterment of humanity rather than by external social or monetary expectations, demands, or influences.

In part two, the world of the isolated farmhouse is replaced by 1950s New York City and several locations connected to a television studio. With the exception of the studio sound stage, which incorporates the barn and farmhouse from part one as set pieces in the teleplay, the scenes shift between two offices and a diner. Unlike part one, which takes place in intimate and private locations, part two incorporates public spaces that are more heavily populated with professional people. The heavy traffic in these scenes helps to establish the working conditions in the financially driven 1950s television studio. The stressful environment of the studio combined with the process of creating a teleplay that would not only sell the sponsor's product but also cater to the desires of the critics and the viewing public is key in understanding the pressures placed on the producer (Martin) and the writers (Tad and Lulu). Driven by money and power, the studio cares little about historical facts, familial bonds, or other humanistic concerns in the creation of the teleplay.

In addition to the pressures in the television studio, the 1950s also marked a time of major social and political unrest. The appearance of anticommunist propaganda provides another impending obstacle for the characters. The "Red Scare" or "McCarthyism" of the 1950s affected the entire country, hitting the entertainment industry particularly hard. This ten-year period of time, from 1947 to 1957, was marked by a heightened paranoia of communist ideology and espionage subverting the government and destroying the American way of life. During this period, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), a government sanctioned investigative organization, established the blacklist as a means of outing members and supporters of the Communist Party, insuring that they were not allowed to infiltrate positions of power

in high profile occupations such as the government, media, and entertainment. The blacklist divided the entertainment industry and ruined the careers of many writers, directors, and actors of the period, often without cause. Fear of being associated with known communists heightened the preexisting paranoia of the period and blanketed the industry with a cloud of uncertainty, fear, and betrayal. This paranoia hangs over the events in *The Ruby Sunrise*, seriously influences the characters' actions. Forced script edits which conform to censors' standards, the replacement of blacklisted actors, and the alteration of the arch of Ruby's story all result from the fear and suspicion of the era. These drastic alterations speak to the massive societal and industrial fallout from the "Red Scare," providing a very immediate example of society's influence on the play and the process of storytelling.

While both part one and part two are grounded in the reality of very specific time periods with unique given circumstances, part three is a "combination of parts one and two" (Groff 6). The setting remains the 1952 television studio, but the social and political influences that are so pressing and imminent in part two are noticeably absent in part three. This section is entirely devoted to the filming process. The television soundstage becomes its own world, an unhindered space focused on the act of creation. The character of Ethel describes the atmosphere in the studio as she relates her desire to act in a live performance:

The calm before the storm when everyone on set hums with a silent electricity... And then when I go out under the lights, when I know I have one chance, to get it beautifully and do it effortlessly, live on camera, right now. One shot at nailing it because when this moment passes, it's gone... They're shooting. I know precisely what I have to do for all you lovely, sad people at home, and I do, and it goes out on the airwaves... (55)

Ethel describes an atmosphere free from outside influence. Everyone involved in the filming process is entirely focused on creating a work of art. This is the moment of creation, of absolute focus, as everyone in the studio is aligned and committed to the moment of storytelling. However, it is this absolute connection to the story's telling that unites the two time periods. As the teleplay is aired live, as her story is being told to millions, Ruby appears in the television studio allowing the two time periods to merge into one space, in a single moment in time. The airing or telling of the story allows the studio to become an open portal of communication to the past where Ruby and Lulu transcend their time and space and connect emotionally in the final moments of the play. They are united in spirit through the completion of the story.

Theoretical Approach

While history plays a major role in *The Ruby Sunrise*, the actual events utilized in the play are far less important than the associations that these time periods create within an audience. The play engages "memory" as a theoretical device in order to actively build a connection to each time period. The events of the 1920s and 1950s are not depicted as actual historical occurrences, but rather as a means to explore modern socially relevant themes through the scope of the communally understood past. By engaging memory in this manner, the play utilizes the nostalgic recollections within the audience as an ironic means of exploring how stories are altered and retold. In this sense memory, not history became the guiding theoretical influence for the entire production.

In *The Ruby Sunrise*, the thematic interest of storytelling is complicated through the appearance of technology as a means of disseminating Ruby's story. The use of the television in cooperation with actors performing on stage introduces a multimedia

experience that exposes the audience not only to the live theatrical event but also to performances broadcast (both prerecorded and live) on the two-dimensional medium of television. Any modern work that blends varied media in such a manner is, in some way, grounded in the theoretical work of media theorist Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan's far reaching media theories seek to explore the manner in which technology affects the audience's reception of varied media. In his treatise, "The Medium is the Message," he theorizes that the form of media that is used to deliver a message alters the manner in which it is received:

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium — that is, of any extension of ourselves — result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by new technology. (151)

McLuhan further adds that both theatre and television, by virtue of the fact that they are both mediums, inherently bring different "personal and social consequences" to the receiver (151). The use of varied media in *The Ruby Sunrise* can do nothing but create divergent responses as the variation in mediums resonates in a different ordered system in the receiver. For Groff, McLuhan's theories help to explain the complex manner in which stories are received and processed, but more importantly, how individual audience members will be affected and changed by the performance. McLuhan notes: "our human senses, of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies... they also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us..." (161). The varied forms of media utilized in *The Ruby Sunrise*, allow the play to explore a

medium's effect on the process of storytelling while also providing a means of dissemination that enhances the diversity of meanings that the audience may interpret.

While technology, specifically the use of the television, provides a means of distributing Ruby's story, the play also explores history and the way in which it is remembered and re-visited. The play contains specific historical events in each section that guide the action and shape the interaction between the characters. This attention to actual events creates an interesting area of exploration in terms of determining the structure and style utilized throughout the play. The incorporation of history in *The Ruby Sunrise* could be seen as the use of a literary creation that theorist Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction, a piece of postmodern literature which:

rejects projecting present beliefs and standards onto the past and asserts the specificity and particularity of the individual past event. It also suggests a distinction between "events" and "facts" that is one shared by many historians. Since the documents become signs of events, which the historian transmutes into facts, as in historiographic metafiction, the lesson here is that the past once existed, but that our historical knowledge of it is semiotically transmitted. Finally, historiographic metafiction often points to the fact by using the paratextual conventions of historiography to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations. (Hutcheon 122-123)

Although *The Ruby Sunrise* contains very specific events on an historical timeline, classifying the play as a historiographical work is problematic due to the specific manner in which historic elements are incorporated in the play. The most obvious point is that *The Ruby Sunrise* is not a historical retelling of television's invention. Although Ruby's life is loosely based on the life of Philo T. Farnsworth, she is clearly a fictional character. While the events of the 1920s and 1950s are referenced in the play, their inclusion is not intended as a means of historical examination, nor are they intended to "inscribe or undermine" the dominant belief of either historical period (122-123). In fact, these

historical elements appear specifically to outline the world of the play and to create a historical framework for the characters rather than defining or informing the action.

While the play's historical framework is not the focus of the play, its utilization is still important to the play's structure and style. Each of the play's time periods and historical references are specifically chosen for their connection to the idea of storytelling. Part one, with its focus on the invention of the television set, examines a historical period before mass visual communication was possible while part two explores how television was first utilized to bring stories to a mass audience. In Groff's desire to analyze the manner in which stories are told she has chosen two historical periods that allow her to explore the optimism surrounding the invention of television and what that optimism eventually became. In this sense, the idea of storytelling, not history, becomes the most important theme of the play.

Groff is a postmodern playwright, but unlike other playwrights who employ historical fiction such as Timberlake Wertenbaker and even Tom Stoppard, her focus is not to undermine but rather to engage history in a deep sense of play, to explore the potential outcomes of history and of Ruby's story, the potential that Ruby's life has to offer. To achieve this sense of play, Groff is interested in imbuing *The Ruby Sunrise* with a sense of common recollected history. She utilizes the familiar cultural and social identifiers of an era without being burdened by historical verisimilitude. *The Ruby Sunrise* is grounded in what theatre theorist Attilio Favorini refers to as "collective memory." In his book, *Memory in Play: From Aeschylus to Sam Shepard*, Favorini defines the distinction between memory and history:

I take collective memory to be a set of recollections, repetitions, and recapitulations socially, morally or politically useful for a group or

community History tends to be individually generated, univocal, and responsive to evidentiary protocols. Collective memory tends to be group-generated, multivocal, and responsive to a social framework. History is reinforced by rewriting; collective memory is reinforced by social occasions such as rites and commemorations (including theatrical performance), as well as by body practices such as gestural behavior and properties. (48)

Favorini claims that, when used in the construction of a play, memory serves to engender communal feelings, images, and associations of history rather than factual and evidence based events on a historical timeline.

The incorporation of history as a means of “recreating and absorbing the past” is obvious in each of the historical time periods utilized in *The Ruby Sunrise* (Favorini 273). Favorini claims that the past may be recycled as memory for use in the present, explaining, “the past is continually reinvented in living memories, continually revised to suit the present” (48). In his book, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as a Memory Machine*, Marvin Carlson further explains memory as it is used in the theatrical re-visitation and reconditioning of the past.

Theatre, as a simulacrum of the cultural and historical process itself, seeking to depict the full range of human actions within their physical context, has always provided society with the most tangible records of its attempts to understand its own operations. It is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. (2)

Through the use of memory, *The Ruby Sunrise* conjures both a familiar time and set of characters that are encoded with culturally determined meanings and functions, yet that are malleable enough to shape to Groff’s needs.

Memory in *The Ruby Sunrise* is most noticeably seen in two distinct areas: “ghosting” and nostalgia. Carlson begins his definition of “ghosting” by citing theorist

Herbert Blau's assertion that the theatre is rife with recycling and remembering—"seeing what we saw before." Carlson bases his theories of "ghosting" on the link between memory and theatre, the

process of using the memory of previous encounters to understand and interpret encounters with new and somewhat different but apparently similar phenomena... Unlike the reception operations of genre, in which audience members encounter a new but distinctly different example of a type of artistic product they have encountered before, ghosting presents the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context. (7)

This definition of "ghosting," which details the exploration of the familiar from a slightly different angle, is a defining component in Groff's own creative process, and proposes that the audience is preconditioned to interpret and digest new information with the assistance of previous and familiar experiences. Groff expands upon the story of the 1920s and creates metaphors that apply to the 1950s through the use of Ruby's life as the dramatic material for the teleplay in part two.

Groff consciously utilizes "ghosting" as a postmodern means of play throughout *The Ruby Sunrise*, as a means to examine what could have been, and to influence the audience's reception of the story. Carlson discusses the importance of memory in the postmodern theatre, claiming that the use of communally remembered concepts are often "consciously utilized by the theatre culture, but, even when they are not, they may well continue to operate, affecting reception in powerful and unexpected ways" (Carlson 8). The idea of memory in *The Ruby Sunrise* appears most notably in the use of the familiar and often sentimentalized time periods of the 1920s and the 1950s. Within these familiar time periods, Groff constructs a play based entirely upon the "ghost" of Ruby's story. The events of the 1920s that occur in part one linger throughout the remainder of the play

as Ruby's story is told in the 1950s. As each revelation about Ruby's life is uncovered, it is received by an audience that possesses intimate knowledge about Ruby's past and her eventual fate.

Additionally "ghosting" is utilized in several other ways in the script. The use of consistent subject matter produces major themes that remain unchanged despite the drastic shifts in time and location. Groff further utilizes "ghosting" in the creation of her characters by producing a series of reoccurring types and traits mirrored in both eras. Beyond the re-use of specific traits, a more concrete form of "ghosting" is seen through the use of doubling, or the appearance of an actor assuming multiple roles throughout the play. The use of specific actors that play multiple characters creates a sense of "ghosting" through the repeated appearance of the actor's physical bodies.

The recycled body of an actor, already a complex bearer of semiotic messages, will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghost or ghosts of previous roles if they have made any impression whatever on the audience, a phenomenon that often colors and indeed may dominate the reception process. When the new character is of the same general type as the previous one, then the reappearance of an already known body operates rather like one of the variable reoccurring components that allow readers to recognize genre. (Carlson 8)

The appearance of consistent themes, character types, and double casting allows the play to engage "ghosting" as a means of illuminating main thematic interests, exploring the potential of the story, and shaping the audiences' reception.

Through the use of memory, the play also achieves a sense of nostalgia surrounding each time period. The term nostalgia generally refers to a desire to return, whether in memory or in actuality, to a former time or place. In *The Ruby Sunrise*, however, nostalgia is used as a means of ironically highlighting the sentimentality associated with the eras of the 1920s and the 1950s, pointing to each era as a time in

American history associated with prosperity and strong values, the American “Golden Age.” The appearance of period specific elements of language, action, and characterization act as memory signifiers intended to imbue the play with sentimental associations to each time period as pure and “problem free.” As the audience begins to fondly recollect the simplicity of “better times” the nostalgia is complicated by the introduction of historical elements—the Red Scare, blacklisting, and censorship—that are conveniently forgotten in nostalgic memory. This misbegotten sentimentality, the belief that the past was in fact better or more pure than it actually was, is a guiding influence in the play. In this manner, the play’s themes are granted a more universal resonance, they become as meaningful in modern society as they were in the past eras.

Structure and Style

The use of memory, nostalgia, and “ghosting” in *The Ruby Sunrise* results in a wide variety of stylistic approaches within each different part of the play. The varied literary styles employed appear at first to make the play a collection of three independently functioning scenes, yet the subtle manner in which each section is interwoven allows the play to function as a coherent whole. In part one, the play explores Ruby’s quest to invent the television set. Part one is presented as a sprawling realistic drama, encompassing a series of loosely connected scenes that depict important moments in the characters’ lives over a four-month period. The action of the play is not structured in a causal manner; consequently the passage of time is not emphasized as an important factor. There is an unhurried feel to part one as only the most important events that occur over a wide span of time are used as dramatic content. By exploring only the most

compelling moments of dramatic action over an extended time span, part one contains a sprawling and realistic structure.

Although the dramatic story of part one is crafted in a realistic manner, the language and dialogue endow this section with qualities that enhance the thematic interest in storytelling, but also make the text appear strange and anachronistic. Most notably this may be found in the use of language as a means to reinforce a nostalgic sensibility in the play. The language in part one initially sounds out of place as the characters speak in a manner that appears anachronistic with the time period. While the action is set in the 1920s, the characters speech sounds more like the dialogue of a 1950s teleplay. Instead of maintaining a realistic connection to the 1920s, the dialogue acts as a memory trigger that recollects the qualities associated with television and film of the 1950s and 1960s era. It is intentionally kitschy and ironically utilizes the language expressive of an earlier naive era. Groff endows the characters with a sense of innocence grounded in the nostalgic naivety found in the remembrance of the 1950s, but her use of quaint and campy language from this era also serves to disconnect the play from its apparent realistic style. Specific examples of this stylistic incongruence are found throughout the dialogue.

HENRY. That home brew? Better put it away. Could get you arrested.
LOIS. Johnny law understands when a lady needs to pour herself a drink
at certain junctures.
HENRY. Junctures?
LOIS. You judging me?
HENRY. No Miss Haver. I just hate to see you blue. (12)

Terms like “Johnny law,” “home brew,” and “hate to see you blue” add a reminiscent quality to the language that is an ironic nod to the style of 1950s teleplays which engenders nostalgic feelings of an earlier time. In effect, Groff uses language to clarify

that part one is a work of fiction, a story being told rather than a depiction of historical facts.

The dialogue of part one is also imbued with rural speech patterns and quaintness. The appearance of words like *momma* and *daddy*, the dropping of the “ing” on many words (i.e. “*wanna*” and “*gonna*”), and multiple contractions (i.e. *wouldn’t’ve*) which are not found in a Midwestern dialect, provide a southern quality to a script set in Indiana. The simplistic and intentionally rural language also provides a sharp contrast to the witty, lively, and fast-paced dialogue of the New York television studio. By relying on the nostalgic view of 1920s Indiana as easy, laid back, and problem-free, Groff continues to suggest that part one is a fictive story rather than an historical representation. The play depicts innocent characters in a naïve era and utilizes memory to allow them to become universally accepted spirits of Americana, stock characters in a new mythology rather than independent, psychologically realistic characters grounded in historical accuracy.

In addition to the use of language as a means to undercut the realistic qualities of part one, the play also contains the theatricality of direct audience address. Part one begins as Ruby works in the barn. She addresses the audience directly, relating the moment of her inspiration to build the television set. This unique moment is the only structural element in the play that breaks the fourth wall. By beginning the play with a moment of direct address, the play explores the actor/audience connection as it relates to the creative process of storytelling.

Part one is presented as a single narrative through line that encompasses Ruby’s quest to invent the television set. The audience’s expectation is that the play will maintain a continuous dramatic action, but continuity is broken when the play shifts from

1927 Indiana to 1952 New York. This shift is drastic and jarring, but the use of memory in the structure and style of *The Ruby Sunrise* helps clarify the action. While part one has the potential of being a self-contained play, part two is almost entirely dependent upon memory and the “ghosted” information and characters created in part one. The play uses the memories of part one as the foundation for part two, helping to further the story and focus on the play’s central action, to maintain universal character types, and to minimize the abrupt transition between the two parts.

The close connection between the sections also provides an explanation for the appearance of stylized language in part one. Throughout part two, the characters of Tad and Lulu struggle to create the teleplay of Ruby’s story. They are able to write the first act before social and relational pressures force the couple to stop. In this sense, part one can be read as the first act of the teleplay that Tad and Lulu have written, complete with the stylized language of the 1950s era. Structuring the play in this manner allows for the introduction of the “universal” characters from the 1920s, the necessary foundation for the 1950s, and the thematic idea of storytelling, without the necessity of extensive exposition. By the time part two begins, Ruby’s quest to invent the television set is part of the audience’s memory. They are already invested in Ruby’s quest and want to see her succeed. While it is never revealed whether part one is the relation of events as they “truly” happened, or simply the first act of Tad and Lulu’s teleplay, part two is utilized as a means of questioning the reality of the story in part one. By connecting the two sections in such a way, the play succeeds in telling an engaging story in part one, the truth of which is questioned by the audience’s memory in part two.

In order to encourage the audience to question the reality of part one, differences in structure, style, and language between parts one and two are highlighted. The first of these structural changes is the tightening of the temporal distances between each scene. Unlike the scenes in part one, which examined only the most important events over a four-month period, part two follows a much tighter and causally linked structure. Part two presents time as a commodity, a much sought after luxury for the characters that are constantly engaged in the hectic world of the television studio. While the lack of causal links in part one aides storytelling, the presence of causality in part two makes time an important factor, and helps establish both the pressures of the television studio and the struggles involved in the creative process. Focusing on these causal links between scenes, the play's structure becomes more episodic. While part one explores longer scenes occurring specifically in two locations, part two utilizes a multiplicity of locations in and around the New York studio. Part two feels much larger in terms of space, yet more temporally restricted. The combination of the episodic scenes and the tightly confined time frame allows part two, a section dedicated to the exploration of the creative process, to seem scripted in a manner congruent with a television production. Part two's construction from a group of interconnected scenes that build to a series of climactic crisis points is similar to the structure utilized in television programming both in the 1950s and today.

The two sections are further differentiated through the use and structure of language. The action of part one is seen as a means of exploring the inherent difficulties found in the act of creation, specifically in the characters' inability to properly communicate with others. Initially, the play achieves this communicative breakdown

through the use of words such as “vibrational patterns,” “electromagnetic radiation,” and “vibrating membrane” that appear in Ruby’s explanations of technical concepts which are beyond Henry and Lois’s understanding. The appearance of this language provides a blockage in communication as she attempts to speak to the other characters. Further, language is used to express lingering feelings of resentment and mistrust as each character struggles to speak to those closest to them. The characters in part one repeatedly employ language as a shield to avoid revealing their true feelings. Through the use of abbreviated, evasive, and guarded dialogue the play explores the depths to which strained communication affects the characters’ lives. By limiting the communication in this way, the play examines the inherent irony of characters that are unable to connect while they attempt to create a device that allows universal communication.

While part one explores struggles in communication, part two examines an alternative idea of communication blockage. In part two, communication is abundant, as the new medium of television has opened the door for discussing numerous topics on a national scale, but in spite of the many possibilities for communication, very little is actually said. Censorship and societal fear, resulting from the “Red Scare,” has created an environment in which true communication cannot exist. The threat of becoming blacklisted for expressing unpopular political beliefs is a very palpable fear for the characters, making them unable or unwilling to express their true beliefs. They converse and flatter, but never really speak to each other. Groff’s concern with the lack of communication is justified in McLuhan’s media theories and his belief that modern technology has both positive and negative effects:

We are no more prepared to encounter radio or TV in our literate milieu than the native of Ghana is able to cope with the literacy that takes him out of his collective tribal world and beaches him in individual isolation. We are as numb in our new electric world as the native involved in our literate and mechanical culture. (157)

By emphasizing the lack of communication in an era rich with the potential for immediate worldwide contact, Groff, like McLuhan, warns against the isolating effects that technology has on communication.

The language in part two is differentiated from part one through the utilization of dialogue fashioned after the 1950s motion picture. Fast paced, witty, and evasive, the dialogue is strikingly similar to that found in Restoration comedy where the characters use their wit and verbal skills as masks. This style of dialogue allows the characters to gain power through the manipulation of information that on the surface seems unrelated to the characters' objectives. By using quick wit and fast paced conversation to catch others off guard, the characters are able to manipulate the conversation in order to achieve their goals. In *The Ruby Sunrise* these conversations appear in two distinct arenas: business and pleasure. The business dealings of the television studio and Lulu and Tad's romantic flirtation both provide examples of fast paced, evasive, and manipulating dialogue masked behind the pretense of casual conversation. While often comedic and eminently enjoyable to hear, this quick paced dialogue also obfuscates the characters' goals and desires behind their mask of banter.

TAD. You're a liar?

LULU. When I have a worthy agenda. It runs in the family.

TAD. What's a worthy agenda?

LULU. Something you're trying to accomplish that you believe in desperately. What do you think a worthy agenda is?

TAD. I meant what's *your* worthy agenda? (30)

This "romantic sparring" continues as the two begin to flirt in earnest.

TAD. ...That might account for the funny nose.
LULU. But aren't you Jewish?
TAD. Is that a problem?
LULU. Are you asking me out on a date?
TAD. If I were, would it be a problem?
LULU. I'm a bastard from the Midwest; is that a problem?
TAD. Are you equating Jews and bastards?
LULU. Yes, I'll accept a date with you. Does that answer your Jewish question? Tad. (31)

The rapidity of the dialogue highlights both characters as they deftly maneuver through conversation, attempting to one up each other. While this verbal style is seen in Tad and Lulu's flirtatious conversations it also manifests itself in other ways. As the characters encounter more challenging situations they deflect, self-edit, and attempt to gain power and control. Their evasiveness and careful choice of words is fitting in an era such as the 1950s where personal revelations were dangerous and censorship threatened creative thought.

Part three is crafted as an amalgamation of each of the two parts that came before, focusing on the filming of *The Ruby Sunrise* teleplay. Part three begins as a continuation of part two, possessing the same structure, but as the filming begins the footage is simultaneously seen on monitors, splitting the focus into three different areas: the live story being told, the crew filming, and the action being shown through the two dimensional medium of television. By creating three different areas of focus, the audience is allowed to craft their own perception based upon which medium they watch. This diversity of visual stimulation, specifically in terms of the television and the act of filming, creates a McLuhan-esque example of the medium as the message. Each of these different mediums (live feed to the televisions, theatrical performance in front of

the camera, and performance of the production studio) allows the audience to formulate a different understanding of the play's deeper meaning.

Part three is further aligned with the preceding parts through the utilization of familiar language styles. Part three is a memory amalgamation of each of the previous parts. Though the action of part three is a continuation of the events of Ruby's life in part one, the language and dialogue is almost entirely constructed from lines and situations that occurred between Tad and Lulu in part two. The inclusion of these familiar elements creates a completely new story for Ruby, combining the action of Ruby's life seen in part one with the compromise and persistence of part two. Ruby's opportunity for success is born of the trials and compromises in Tad and Lulu's story. Success in the creative process is found only by tempering the sheer optimism to improve humanity with difficult compromises. While each of the proceeding sections focused entirely upon challenges inherent in the creative process, part three focuses on the realization of the story.

Within the telling of Ruby's story, the play contains several structural elements that diverge from the previously established structure of parts one and two, helping to establish part three as a unique entity. The presence of the studio crew filming the stage action is unique to part three, providing an intrusive characteristic to the performance. These crew members are necessary for the teleplay to be told, yet stand outside the main action or storyline of the play. The presence of the crew actually serves as a means of acknowledging the innate theatricality of part three. Through the presence of the stage crew and the cameras recording the action, the studio scene utilizes a play within a play structure to tell Ruby's final story. Part three further exhibits a sense of theatricality

through the presence of a “voice over” heard through the auditorium speakers and the televisions. Although the play does not contain direct address beyond the opening moments of part one, this final moment of recorded speech mirrors the beginning monologue. However, while the opening monologue creates an intimate sense of connection with the events that are to occur, the “voice over” creates a detached quality that allows the lines to serve as a final summation of the play. The recorded lines unify the action of all three parts allowing the studio, the barn, and the events of both the 1920s and the 1950s to converge in a single, unified space, unbound by location or time. Ruby and Lulu are finally able to connect through the process of storytelling. These structural alterations serve to acknowledge the theatricality of part three, encouraging the audience to actively recognize the process of a story being told.

Character

The Ruby Sunrise is a text that mirrors the style of 1950s television programming. During this time, American drama, specifically live television drama, examined ordinary Americans caught in moments of personal crisis or heartbreak. By focusing on the common man, the studio writers sought to create characters with universal appeal struggling to succeed against difficult odds. Mirroring the creative style of the era, Groff depicts the same style of “universal” story in *The Ruby Sunrise*. Drawing upon recognizable types, the play examines the characters’ motivations and need to achieve their goals. Analyzing the important character traits of the 1920s provides a basis of determining how “ghosting” is used to illuminate those traits in the characters of the 1950s.

Ruby marks the logical starting point for analysis as she is one of the play's most complex and driven figures as well as the eponymous character. The most notable and interesting element of the feisty Philo T. Farnsworth-inspired heroine is her optimism and compulsion to create a television set.

... television's gonna change people. Make a whole different world where people can see the world right in their own homes... Soon, we'll get pictures from all over the world, and learn about our comrades in other countries... If we could see their faces, we'd understand them better, and all our differences could be settled around tables, instead of going to war. Television will be the end of war. Who could bear to see war right in your own living room? (21)

More than any other characteristic, Ruby's optimism for television's power to change the world drives her actions and sets in motion her conflict with the other characters. Her optimism endears her to an audience, making her success compelling and her ultimate failure tragic.

Ruby's optimism for technology's potential is born from her innate understanding of how machinery and electricity work. Her ability to visualize the possibilities inherent in machinery is apparent within the first scene of the play.

HENRY. But all in parts, it's not a generator.

RUBY. Is so. Now more than ever, when you can see how every inch works. (9)

Ruby's understanding of how pieces are put together to form a whole and her belief that technology can improve life are constant themes in the play. Cleaning and fixing the generator, assessing Lois's electrical system, and using scrap pieces of junk to create a television set are all examples of Ruby's ability to see and understand how technology can make a better world. She is able to look beyond the present condition of the disparate pieces and see the potential that can be found in the completed whole.

Although Ruby's optimism makes her a likable character, her beliefs and interactions with others provide a source of conflict. While her understanding of technology is shaped by a well-intentioned optimism, this vast knowledge also negatively affects her relationships. Her free spirited belief regarding the ownership of technology is one of the earliest points of friction in the play. Her understanding that "...electrons ought to be free anyway," a view that Lois rightly labels stealing, highlights a very liberal view of technology and communal property with which Lois does not agree (11). Ruby further manifests this belief when constructing her prototype, relying on material that Henry "borrows." Ultimately, Ruby rationalizes her moral flexibility by believing that "Television'll make for better people..." without considering how her actions will affect those closest to her (21). In Ruby's opinion, the ends justify the means.

Ruby further distances those closest to her by the manner in which she speaks to them. Her compulsion to finish building the television set occupies a great majority of her time and when she does communicate with Henry or Lois, her conversations are either technological in nature or very direct, bordering on curt. In fact, it is not until Ruby's explanation of how the radio works that she utters a lengthy remark to anyone. Ruby uses her discussion of technology as a means to avoid discussing the sadness of her own life.

RUBY. Energy in the form of waves. Radio—like how the songs on the radio travel over miles to get to you—is just one example. Light, the kind of light you see, that's another. In radio—okay? —vibrational patterns that are music or speech are converted into a pattern of electromagnetic radiation. It flows from the transmitter at the station to the radio receiver.

HENRY. What do you mean receiver?

RUBY. That's the radio, like your Zenith. The receiver converts the radio waves back into sound by vibrating a membrane, called the speaker. Television aims to work similar, but it's seeking to reproduce visual

patterns of dark and light, rather than just sound.
HENRY. Where'd you learn to talk like that? (15)

While Henry is initially mesmerized by the exotic sound of Ruby's superior knowledge, Ruby's inability to speak without using technological descriptions as a safety net inhibits her from opening herself to him.

When Ruby is not discussing technology she avoids creating meaningful social connections. Throughout the script, her dialogue is abrupt, moving quickly and cautiously away from personal issues towards what she views as more important conversation. This creates a sense of abrasiveness in her dialogue, that, when combined with her lack of social skills, often leads to a combative tone.

LOIS. I'm Looking at a ghost.
RUBY. Not likely.
LOIS. You got your mamma's hair, her eyes.
RUBY. I got my own eyes. (10)

Even when Ruby does not feel she is being attacked, her nature shines through. When Ruby first meets Henry, she tries to be playful but inevitably her tone comes across as abrupt, callous, and laced with sarcasm.

RUBY. Take these wires here and link 'em up with your tongue.
HENRY. No, sir.
RUBY. Seems like you got it perfect enough.
HENRY. You were kidding with me? About putting it to my tongue?
RUBY. Ummm, yes, I was. (9)

This exchange, while light hearted and innocent, exemplifies Ruby's tendency towards terse and potentially aggressive conversation.

Ruby's inability to connect is further hindered by her refusal to discuss intimate details of her life. During moments that she is forced to discuss familial experiences she averts the issue, attempting to keep people at arms-length. She is terrified of letting

people get close and chooses to abruptly change the topic of conversation when it becomes uncomfortable for her.

HENRY. I thought you said your mamma died giving birth to you.

RUBY. Not right in birth. Not exactly right then.

HENRY. After.

RUBY. Uh huh, a little after

HENRY. When you were old enough to read magazines. (*Pause*)

RUBY. Can I take that liquor now like you said was okay? (15).

Ruby's social awkwardness is a direct result of her difficult family life. When she is forced to discuss her family, Ruby offers an idealized image of her past, telling imagined stories that make her life appear better. This is an act that her daughter Lulu repeats in the 1950s. By creating a continually shifting picture of her past, the division between Ruby, Lois, and Henry intensifies when Ruby's erroneous façade begins to crumble.

Ruby's carefully constructed and idealized family history encompasses every member of her family, yet while her mother and siblings account for minor roles in her contrived life story, her relationship with her father dominates the lies she tells Lois and Henry. Initially using the news of her father's death to secure lodging with Lois, Ruby's stories of her father becomes increasingly more revealing. In discussions with Henry, Ruby says that her father taught her about technology and supported her in her quest to invent the television set, but when she speaks to Lois her positive perceptions of her father are shattered. Ruby explains that her father, a violent alcoholic, neglected and abused her:

I was doing my chores all the same, I swear I was—but he would get mean drunk, worse than when my mamma was alive, and you know how he used to do to her. You saw her face when we came here... When she got sick, it stopped for a while. But after she died... I don't mind the hits; he can smack me all he wants, and scream at me. But my equipment. He smashed everything. My lab in pieces. My notes in the fire... (22)

Ruby's drive to create becomes stronger as she slowly reveals the truth of her past. In defiance of her abusive father and driven to prove the world wrong Ruby hides her haunted past beneath optimistic stories of hope and courage. The ghosts of Ruby's life propel her toward her goal, to finish the television set and thereby avoid personal failure.

These positive stories also conceal her fear of connection with others, masking a deep loneliness in Ruby. She needs the stories that she creates to give her life meaning. Although she openly admits she is alone, her interaction with others and her drive to create the television set is based upon lies about being an orphan. Ruby routinely tells herself and others that she is happier and more productive alone, falsely proclaiming that her relationship with Henry is "slowing her down" (23). While Ruby doesn't openly admit her loneliness, other characters note her isolation.

HENRY. I feel sorry for Ruby: she's alone in the world
LOIS. That's the way they like it. Crafty dreamers... (164)

Although Ruby's lack of companionship may not be as purposeful and pessimistic as Lois claims, she does willfully attempt to keep others at a distance. While her attempts prove fruitless, her initial mistrust of others, a direct result of her father's abuse, creates a large amount of her conflict with other characters.

Ultimately, in spite of her appearance as a loner, Ruby cannot help forming connections with those around her. In Henry, Ruby discovers an intimate romantic interest that forces her to choose between her love for the boy and her compulsion to finish the television set. Ruby's frustration and confusion is made known to Lois, who asks the young woman to consider her options. "I am thinking, Aunt Lois. All I do is think" (23). Despite Ruby's constant efforts to maintain distance from others, she is ultimately alone and cannot stop herself from falling in love with Henry.

While her relationship with Henry takes precedence in the play, Ruby's connection with Lois is also interesting. The dialogue between the two begins in a very icy manner as Lois, obviously still holding a grudge against Ruby's father, reluctantly allows Ruby to stay in her home. While their conversations are never nurturing, Ruby eventually softens her stance towards her aunt, calling her Aunt Lois, and seeking her aid in a time of crisis. Although they begin with a complicated relationship, Ruby ultimately names her child Lois—Lulu for short—an act that speaks to the respect the two women share.

These relationships supply Ruby with love and a steadying presence, yet when problems arise with the television set, she redirects her frustration, taking it out on those closest to her. Ruby is prone to exhibit a violent temper, and she reveals her self-destructive nature when after failing to create the television set, she unleashes her temper and ultimately destroys her lab. Ruby's temper, though hidden beneath a seemingly cool demeanor, reveals itself in the face of failure, and is directed at those closest to her.

Ruby's compulsion to change the world through the invention of television drives her actions, yet the source of that drive is grounded in abuse and suffering. This mistreatment has made her wary of interactions with others, positioning her as socially awkward and combative. Ultimately, Ruby's inability to reconcile her relationships with her need to create causes her story to end in despair rather than optimism or persistence. It is this tragic ending that Lulu hopes to amend through the writing of a teleplay; she seeks to celebrate rather than mourn her mother's life.

The character with the greatest effect upon Ruby is Henry, a handsome all-American farm boy, whom she meets on her Aunt's farm. It is quickly evident that while

Ruby is a mysterious loner, Henry is Ruby's opposite in nearly every way. Unlike Ruby, Henry is an open book: "Grew up in West Baden. My father runs a Feed and Dried Goods. My mother's a saint. I got six sisters, each of them married already. I could tell you about our swimming hole" (14). As Henry explains his life, we discover that he has been supported and loved by his family. They have helped to shape him into the quintessential American boy. He is an endearing character that is well mannered and consistently polite to those around him. He refuses to call Lois anything other than Miss Haver, and acknowledges each person in the room before leaving: "Morning, Miss Haver. Morning, Ruby" (10). His politeness and overall good nature make him a likable character able to disarm Ruby's defenses and to enter her personal world for a brief time at least.

Henry's good nature also gives him an optimistic quality, a trait he shares with Ruby, yet Henry's optimism is focused on the immediate present rather than the distant future. Although much of his optimism for television can be linked to his infatuation with Ruby and their ensuing love affair, Henry focuses on each moment of creation rather than looking to the future. Henry is not inventing the television set; he is not aware of the benefits technology could have for mankind. Rather he finds excitement in building each piece of the set and celebrating each successful moment. "Whatta you think of that? I made a photo-cathode tube," he remarks. "Well, we did. But you couldn't have done it alone" (16). Henry's ability to live in the moment allows him to find interest in every step of Ruby's process, and to point out the smaller joys in the world that Ruby would otherwise ignore. Henry seeks to distract Ruby from the failure of her prototype cathode tube by pointing out the fireflies outside the barn. This endearing scene highlights

Henry's ability to notice the smaller details of the world and also leads to the first kiss between the young lovers.

Henry's upbringing has instilled within the boy a very clear vision of a man's "duties." Although Henry's attempt to run off Ruby with his "gun," a stick that he has picked up from outside, is laughable, he embraces his "duty" as the man of the house, the protector. Henry exhibits signs of the dominant male and while his desire to safeguard those around him is well intentioned, his need to "protect and save" the ladies is often chauvinistic, creating conflict between him and the independent Ruby. Henry's view of duty blocks him from understanding Ruby's needs and desires. For him, it is a foregone conclusion that he will graduate from college and take over his father's Feed and Dried Goods Store. After meeting and becoming intimate with Ruby, however, Henry is forced to reexamine his life goals. He chooses to allow his views of responsibility to affect their love. To Henry, sexual intimacy portends marriage and with this in mind he gives Ruby an ultimatum: choose either him or the television. "I love you. I want to do what's right," he pleads, "Two people who've done what we've done ought to do what's right" (25). Henry's unbending moral values and need to honor his "masculine duty" ultimately drive a wedge between the two. His sheltered upbringing and immaturity stifle his ability to break from his preconceived worldview in order to accept divergent viewpoints.

Henry's failure to accept Ruby's commitment to build the television set creates mounting frustration in the young man, revealing a previously unseen vulnerability. Sitting alone in the kitchen with Lois, he vents his frustrations. "I could have any girl in West Baden... But I'm yearning after one who'd rather be messing in a barn on something that won't ever do nothing as far as I can tell than holding my hand in front of

my friends. It hurts. And all the world knows that I am not worth loving” (20). Henry follows this emotional outburst by lashing out at Lois in pure frustration. In Ruby, Henry finds what he believes is love, but he is ill equipped to handle the emotions. His beliefs dictate that Ruby must love him and only him, but his attempt to solve his dilemma does not take into account Ruby’s feelings. Henry’s strength is found in his unwavering belief in his values, yet without Ruby he is emotionally weakened, his ideals don’t hold up, and he is left alone in the world. In Henry, Groff has created a character whose unwillingness to envision a larger worldview stands in diametric opposition to Ruby’s vision of a better future through television, pointing to the necessary yet difficult process of compromise. It is their inability to change that is responsible for Ruby’s story ending in tragedy rather than persistence. Their flaws inevitably lead the story to its tragic end.

Loneliness is a common emotion in *The Ruby Sunrise* but no character embodies this isolation more fully than Lois. She has succumbed to bitterness and anger after being betrayed by Ruby’s father. These feelings of pain and loneliness drive her actions.

HENRY. Mission isn’t bad

LOIS. If you don’t care who gets hurt to do it, it is. Better not to have hopes.

HENRY. Everybody’s got hopes.

LOIS. Not me; no more. I’m free. My aspirations crushed a long time ago. (12)

Lois’s ironic use of the term “free” provides a fascinating view of her life. Her inability to move beyond the events of her past has trapped her in a downward spiral. She has never forgotten the sting of being scorned by Ruby’s father in favor of her younger sister. Instead of overcoming her heartbreak, she has fallen into a steady pattern of drinking to forget her problems. Drinking has only compounded her sorrow, anger, and loneliness. When intoxicated, the depth of Lois’ grudge against Ruby’s father becomes unbearable.

She speaks badly of Ruby and asks Henry if he would “kill that girl...” (12). But in spite of her anger, Lois is conflicted. She remembers her sister every time she sees Ruby, but she feels a sense of connection to the girl she named “Sunrise.” Lois’ conflicted feelings are a constant reminder of her own failings and they ultimately cause her to lash out at those she believes are responsible for her misery, namely Ruby. Her misdirected anger creates a lasting tension between the two women.

By focusing upon the resentment she feels, Lois has formed an overly developed sense of pride that forbids her to accept Ruby’s generosity. Lois stubbornly rejects the young woman’s peace offering to repair the generator (“don’t need a Delco,”) (10).

RUBY. I’m gonna make it [sic] you got light in every room.

LOIS. I can’t pay for that.

RUBY. Who said pay? Electrons running out there all along miles of wire. We’ll just borrow them.

LOIS. Take whatever you want and to hell with the consequences. Sounds familiar.

RUBY. I’m not my mamma. Electrons ought to be free anyway. Like air, like water. I’ll rig it for you.

LOIS. Did I ask you for light? (11)

In this scene, “light” becomes a metaphor for knowledge and advancement, but Lois rejects Ruby’s help. Her sorrow is so profound that she cannot accept anything that could improve her quality of life. She is a bitter woman holding tightly to the only thing she knows, pain and anger.

Lois’ loneliness and lack of emotional outlets lead her to form attachments to only those she trusts, namely Henry. Lois is proud of Henry and his collegiate success. Outwardly, she appears to take a motherly interest in him but when she has been drinking their relationship becomes laden with sexual tension. Even though Lois is twice Henry’s age, she has tried to seduce the young man numerous times. In a drunken stupor, she

envisioned Henry as everything she lost, everything pure and good. Henry's rejection wounds her deeply but Lois' love for Henry is so strong that she is willing to sacrifice her own happiness for his. She tries to convince Ruby to marry Henry. "Don't be smart. I'm offering you something here. It rips my heart all over again, and still I'm offering it" (23). In spite of her feelings of animosity, Lois eventually begins to care for Ruby.

Despite the formation of a relationship between the two women, Lois becomes a destructive model for Ruby whose own life eventually drifts into hopeless despair and self-destruction. Ultimately, Ruby's story is not one of hope or personal success; but rather, like Lois, her life becomes marred by despair and "obscurity from alcohol poisoning without ever having achieved her goals" (40). Ruby's life and death after the barn is not seen on stage, yet through the understanding of Lois' despair, Ruby's life is "ghosted" allowing the audience to imagine a mirror image of Ruby's own pathetic final days. The connection between the two women is the first of many "ghosted" or mirrored characters. As the play moves from part one to part two, "ghosting" continuously appears in the form of doubling of character types and behavioral traits, in order to engage the audiences' memory and to ease the potentially jarring transition. The actions of the characters in each part are very different, but the appearance of these universal behavioral traits links each of the main characters in the 1950s to a counterpart in the 1920s.

Lulu, the protagonist of part two, shares the same goal-driven attitude and desire to succeed as her mother, Ruby. Lulu is obsessed with telling Ruby's story; she is determined to give her mother's life meaning. Lulu, like her mother, is a strong woman who engenders feelings of caring and respect. She is very likeable and possesses her mother's sense of optimism and drive, as well as her conflicted nature. She is every bit

her mother's daughter, even to the extent of refusing to acknowledge how closely her goals and actions parallel those of her mother's.

The most notable area in which the mother and daughter share a common bond is in their interactions with others. Appearing more socially polished, Lulu blends into social situations in which Ruby was never comfortable, utilizing all of the aggressive, wittily biting qualities of Ruby, both as protection and as a weapon to achieve her goals in a male dominated world. Lulu avoids opening up to others and provides only necessary surface information during conversations. She redirects the focus of her discussion with others toward her own ends and evades emotional connection.

LULU. Bastard and orphan. I never met my father and my mother passed.

TAD. I'm sorry

LULU. About which one?

TAD. That just must be hard.

LULU. Hard, yes.

TAD. But you made it here?

LULU. As fast as I could

TAD. How does a poor girl from Indiana make her way to the big bad city?

LULU. You're interested? (33)

While Ruby tends to deflect conversations to avoid discussing her personal life, Lulu uses conversation to reach her goals. By evading and divulging only minor details about her life, Lulu is able to use conversational evasiveness as a means of flirting with Tad, placing herself in a position to deliver her mother's story to a screenwriter.

While Lulu navigates social interactions with more ease than Ruby, beneath her polished veneer she shows traces of her mother's temper and self-destructiveness. Her temper manifests itself in large-scale meltdowns similar to her mother. As Tad questions the legitimacy of Lulu's story, her cool demeanor drops and she verbally attacks Tad.

LULU. He couldn't have known how strong her will would be.

TAD. I don't buy it.

LULU. You weren't doubting my word when act one showed up on Martin's desk.

TAD. I thought you called him Mr. Marcus.

LULU. If you want to steal someone's story, steal it whole. (40)

Lulu bears further resemblance to her mother in her understanding of television as a vital medium with the potential to change the world.

MARTIN. ... Miss Miles is the best mind I've encountered since I started this racket. She has a feel for the medium like no one else.

TAD. It's like she was born to do it. (34)

While Ruby was able to understand the manner in which wires and current combined to create the working television set, Lulu possesses a keen sense of how television can be used as a vehicle for education and entertainment. She understands the power of television and how the medium can communicate to the masses.

What TV does is democratic: a machine that treats everyone equal, so a girl in Indiana is as important as a fat cat in New Jersey. TV is free. It moves through the air that we breathe. You don't have to buy a ticket. You don't need a car. We're all together even if we're a thousand miles apart. We all belong. (40)

Lulu's optimism fuels her drive to make her mother's story known via the very medium that Ruby attempted to create. For Lulu, the teleplay is the only way to redeem her mother's life, giving Ruby the credit that she deserved.

While Lulu's optimism for television mirrors Ruby's, the reasoning behind her relentless drive remains obscured, a point noted by Scott Harrah in his review "Big dreams, grim realities in 'Ruby Sunrise.'" Harrah notes, "... it's hard to fathom that a woman this eloquent and elegant could be Ruby's daughter, and there's no real explanation as to why she's on a [sic] such a crusade to bring her mom's story to the masses" (Harrah). While Harrah correctly points out the difficulty in locating the source

of Lulu's drive, he underestimates the similarities between Ruby and Lulu. In much the same way as Ruby was shaped and driven by the ghosts of her past, Lulu's focus is grounded in her tumultuous experiences with an alcoholic mother who was never able to come to terms with her own failure. Lulu is driven by her past in two very distinct ways. First, she is sworn not to repeat her mother's mistakes; she will not become her mother. Although Lulu possesses a more refined social demeanor than her mother, her intense fear of failure, inherited from Ruby, drives the young woman in all her actions.

LULU. My career is finished.
TAD. Stop it.
LULU. No one's ever heard of me.
TAD. No.
LAD. I've been erased. (56)

Lulu's recreation of her mother's dialogue reveals the fear of loneliness and failure that are an inescapable and driving force in her life. Growing up hearing Ruby's embittered rants, Lulu has had the fear of failure instilled in her from birth. She believes that if she cannot "change" her mother's past, then she will end up like Ruby, bitter and angry. Lulu's fear of failure, combined with her need to "change the past" is responsible for her extreme drive to succeed.

Secondly, Lulu believes that if she can make her mother successful, it will erase the scars of her childhood. Ruby was not a good mother to Lulu, and this mistreatment has shaped her, creating a driven young woman who is entirely isolated from others. Although scenes of Lulu's childhood are absent from the script, Ruby's role as an absentee mother is clear. Her bitterness and obsession with her own troubled life marked her treatment of Lulu: "So she shattered it all and ran away. Nothing to show for her labor; except of course, a little girl who never seemed quite able to please her" (57).

Lulu's motivation to tell Ruby's story initially comes about not only because of her desire to do something to please her mother, but also from an attempt to heal the scars of her own past.

Yet, Lulu's compulsion to tell her mother's story is hindered by her inability to understand what to include in its construction. Lulu creates an idealized story that she believes will change her past, initially noting "...we just have to be certain we tell it (the story) accurately," but truthfully she is more than willing to alter multiple details of the story including her own existence (34). Lulu believes that writing herself out of the story will give Ruby a chance to succeed. She also alters the events of Ruby's story by choosing to blame the barn fire on Henry. But Lulu is unable to understand that the altered story does not change her history; it merely shifts the blame. Ruby's story still ends in despair and failure. Instead of celebrating Ruby's persistence, Lulu's version of the story deals only with lies and revenge. She gives little thought to how changing the story diminishes Ruby's life and cheapens her story and although she has no problem writing or re-writing history, her attempt to tell a story grounded in revenge fails. Only when Tad explains that she must "...invent a new ending for them," (58) does Lulu recognize that she must change her mother's history in order to create a successful teleplay. By telling Lulu's tale of compromise and change the play illuminates the belief that humanity's oral traditions persevere while both history and stories are open to change.

Lulu is a complex and driven character with a dark and emotionally abusive past. Despite personal hardship she has turned her fear of failure into a quest to create a story that would make Ruby proud. The final version of the teleplay is not perfect but Lulu

comes to terms with the compromises necessary to tell Ruby's story of persistence.

Lulu's ability to cope with adversity and to achieve her goals is the greatest difference between her and her mother.

Although the ghosted character traits are most apparent between Ruby and Lulu, Tad and Henry exhibit many of the same qualities. Tad, like Henry, is morally strong and he possesses an active conscience. Yet Tad is an older, worldlier version of the all-American boy, jaded by his professional experiences. The roots of this comparison lay in Tad's background as an appliance salesman, a member of the blue-collar working class whose hard work, determination, and morally upright value system were associated with the "American Dream" of the 1950s.

Although Tad holds these upright all-American values to be true, his experiences in the television industry have left little room for sentimentality. After receiving a critical beating for his teleplay *Return to Morgan Hill*, Tad began to understand the disparity between his values and those of the television studio. He developed a hardened persona in order to take away the sting of harsh criticism: "We resign ourselves to the fact that each project is an extended sales pitch for the sponsor; that takes the pressure off" (33). Even though Tad has been beaten down by the industry, he cannot completely erase his beliefs, cloaking his blue-collar values and his desire to reach and affect his audience behind a seemingly hardened professional mask of cynicism and sarcasm. Yet despite his attempts to maintain the optimistic view of his work, the process of writing for the studio has drained him of his will to fight for his beliefs: "I'm too out of shape for the long run. Look, I'm sorry to be downbeat—and god forbid the girl doesn't marry the boy at the end, you're forever branded with the adjective "downbeat" —but at two hundred and fifty

a script, Martin doesn't pay me enough to talk about work after seven" (32). Even though Tad has nearly given up, his interaction with Lulu reawakens the optimism and faith in his work that had been banished by the studio's creative process. In this manner, Tad's interactions with Lulu are very similar to Henry's experiences with Ruby. By meeting interesting women, both men experience new ideas, concepts, and enthusiasm.

Although Tad's budding romance with Lulu sparks a renewed interest in his work, the pressures of the studio and the desire to have his work produced, creates conflict which leads Tad to violate his own beliefs. Tad is pulled in opposing directions, torn between his morals and the rewards of a successful script. In a moment of weakness Tad gives in to studio pressures and accepts Martin's demands rather than standing up for Lulu and his own moral sense of right and wrong.

LULU. It's my story. You know that.

TAD. No; *The Ruby Sunrise* is mine.

LULU. But it's not.

TAD. I wrote it; look at the goddamn cover page. (47)

Taking ownership for Lulu's work and forsaking his promises to her, Tad agrees to the studio's demand to alter Ruby's story. Like all the major characters in the play, Tad fails in his goal. Despite veiled attempts to fix the problem he creates, he does not possess the courage to stand up for his beliefs or for Lulu. Instead, he falls deeper into self-loathing. Tad's inability to make the proper moral decision highlights not only the loneliness and despair that failure may cause, but also the pressures of the creative process.

As Tad navigates through his self-induced depression, his drive and motivation disappear. All his attempts to finish the teleplay fail miserably until he meets Liz Hunter, the actress slated to play Ruby. Liz scolds Tad for his inability to stand up for what is right: "I thought you believed in this girl. I thought you named her sunrise for a reason.

You don't believe in anything. I don't think God should forgive that" (53). This encounter affects Tad deeply, forcing him to face his actions and to realize that those who do not take a stand for what is right must be held accountable for injustice. Tad finally realizes that he has betrayed Lulu and in an attempt to right his wrong, he convinces Lulu that she must write the teleplay, the story must be told from her point of view, not from the studio's. Tad understands that Lulu must take agency in the writing of her mother's story, not simply because she is the only one that can tell it properly, but also because she needs to understand how her own story will play out. The story must be about optimism: "Because you're lost. That's all. It happens sometimes. You feel lost right now. And it's my fault. I took something from you in front of all those people. And God might not forgive me, but I've got to give it back. Sit down" (58). From an encounter with Liz Hunter, a 1950s television outcast deprived of fame and success, Tad finally understands the implications of Ruby's story. He realizes that Ruby must succeed—she must persist.

Through Liz Hunter's inspiration, Tad begins to repair the damage that he has caused. His choice to make amends proves that despite his transgressions, he is redeemable. Through the redemption of Tad, *The Ruby Sunrise* acknowledges the ability to make amends for past mistakes while also celebrating the power of compromise. Through his actions, Tad is granted the opportunity to create a successful teleplay, one that celebrates the lives of both Ruby and Liz. Tad's actions serve as a reminder that sometimes the past can be altered in order to build a better future.

With the overwhelming similarities between the male and female characters in part one and part two it may seem strange to compare Martin and Lois as analogous types. On the surface, they appear to have little in common. Unlike Lois, Martin is not a

character grounded in despair, but he is rather a consummate businessman trying to keep pace with a bustling television industry. Beyond his ability to keep several irons in the fire, Martin exhibits a keen understanding of the people with whom he works. He is a skilled negotiator capable of achieving grand goals. Whether pitching Jerry Ritt as a director in order to excite Tad's interest in *The Ruby Sunrise* project or understanding Ethel enough to know that life is easier when her coffee is "sweetened," Martin understands how to motivate those around him.

The difference between Martin and Lois is further seen through Martin's blatant sexual references regarding the opposite sex. Martin makes constant references about women being sexualized objects. Pointing out Suzie Tyrone's inability to act, Martin notes, "Who expects Suzie Tyrone to Act? She looks good wet" (37). He continues his inappropriate conversations regarding women as he questions Tad about his relationship with Lulu. Although this line of inquiry is grossly out of place, Martin never acts on any sexual urges or attempts to flirt with any of the women. Instead, he utilizes the lingo of a male driven industry. He speaks the "good ol' boy" language of the network television studio, furthering his image as a character that understands the nature of the business. Martin's language and understanding of the system allows him to operate effectively within the television business.

Despite the apparent differences between Martin and Lois, many of the character traits of the dominant sexist studio head are ghosted from Lois. Martin's language choice, his topics of conversation, and his straightforward speech mark him as a base character driven by the most common human urges, much like the alcoholic and embittered Lois. A very busy man who cannot afford to be indirect, Martin is brusque

and speaks in a blunt fashion in almost every situation. Martin is also a facilitator. Much like Lois, he becomes an unwitting matchmaker between Tad and Lulu. He not only introduces them but also fosters a working relationship between them which inevitably blossoms into a love affair. Martin maintains an active role throughout the play; he keeps characters on tasks, serves as a mouthpiece for the studio, and blocks many of Tad and Lulu's attempts to tell the story. Like Lois, Martin remains sensitive to those around him and even though he must fire Lulu, he shows signs of regret and remorse. While Martin's major goal is to complete the teleplay for commercial reasons, he is not without human kindness.

In a similar manner as Lois, Martin contradicts his hardened persona by exhibiting compassion for others. This compassion is in direct contrast to the studio's cold, austere commercialism. Understanding that the completion of *The Ruby Sunrise* teleplay is necessary to keep his job at the studio, Martin forges ahead in spite of potential setbacks.

Martin: We are going to broadcast. You will not leave me in the lurch here.

Tad: Are you threatening me now? Going to get me listed in Red Channels?

Martin: You want to pretend your hands are clean because you never had to fire anybody, be my guest, but do it on your own time. Now wipe your ass and get me an ending that works. (49-50)

Understanding the impact a hit teleplay will have on the studio and his career, Martin focuses on the task at hand. His attention to the production leaves little room for compassion towards those who have been negatively affected in the process, but in spite of his façade as a pure businessman, Martin cannot help doing the morally correct thing. This is most notably seen in his attempts to give Liz Hunter, the blacklisted actress, an

opportunity to work. Even though the producers have shunned Liz, Martin is sensitive to her plight and goes out of his way to aid the actress.

LIZ. Do you know Martin Marcus?

TAD. The producer?

LIZ. He tried to get me some work on the variety they're shooting upstairs. (51)

Martin's care for others is unusual in a money-driven business but it is his show of sympathy for others that keeps him from being a stereotypical studio executive.

In addition to the central characters in part two, the play introduces several supporting characters that are played by the same actors who performed Henry, Ruby, and Lois in part one. Despite the reappearance of these actors, the role each actor must play is widely differentiated. The character that exhibits the smallest difference in behavioral traits from their earlier role is Paul, who plays Henry in the teleplay. Paul is a young actor who has not yet lost his innocence to the cutthroat television industry. Like Henry, Paul is excited by the opportunities presented by the new medium. His excitement combined with his chivalrous and polite manner allow him to portray the all American boy with a sense of authenticity. Paul is also similar to Henry in his naïveté, taking a majority of what he hears from others as truth without questioning them. Like Henry, Paul is unable to separate history from fiction, truth from lies. However, while Henry shows the potential to question elements in the world around him, Paul never shows any indication of growing beyond his status as an unquestioning, albeit nice and polite, actor who accepts everything he is told.

The difference between character and role is much greater in Ethel and her portrayal of Lois. Ethel is the grand dame, the aging actress too old to play the ingénue role. On the surface, Ethel appears to fully embrace her role as the pampered actress, but

she admits that in her daily life she plays another role based on what the studio expects her to be.

ETHEL. You have to know your place. Even Ethel Reed has to know her place.

LULU. Oh, for heaven's sake: Ethel Reed does exactly what she wants.

ETHEL. No, I do exactly what they want. For me, all this... (*Gesturing vaguely to herself*)... Grows a little tiresome. (55)

Ethel realizes she has two different identities: Ethel, the studio persona, and Ethel, the true and authentic self. Ethel lives a life based entirely upon perception, she lives a studio created role. She is able to work only because she has become what others envision her to be. She has subverted her real self for monetary reasons and no longer possesses any social power apart from what is granted her because of her television image. Ethel's staying power as a celebrity has been achieved by compromising herself. Her realization of this fact allows her to recognize Lulu's dilemma and to convince the young woman to never give up until she has told Ruby's story. Although she is powerless to change her own life, Ethel is a living example of the threat found in giving up and allowing others to dictate the manner in which one succeeds.

The themes of persistence and perception are also exemplified in Suzie Tyrone, the actress cast as Ruby. After Liz Hunter was fired for communist activities, Suzie, a Marilyn Monroe inspired ditzy blonde actress, won the role as Ruby simply because she "looks good wet" (27). Suzie represents everything wrong with the studio's production of *The Ruby Sunrise*. She does not have the depth or skill to perform Ruby and every scene she performs feels wrong. Exhibiting none of the traits that make Ruby and Liz endearing characters, she is an "anti-Ruby," cast specifically for her sex appeal to a wider male audience. Suzie does not possess the drive to learn or to make the world better. She

does not question anything that she is told, instead she takes everything she hears at face value, often misinterpreting the actual meaning of the lines she speaks. Unable to contribute anything to Ruby's character, Suzie's sole reasoning for being cast as Ruby is merely to look good while doing it.

The inclusion of an ill-suited actress to perform the title role of the play does however add to the thematic idea of compromise, specifically in the telling of Ruby's story. When Tad explains what the story must become he introduces this theme of compromise: "...And we'll fight to sneak a thing or two or three, things that matter to us, into our scripts, under the radar, along with all the compromises" (58). Suzie, representative of this kind of concession, does not resemble Ruby in any way but despite any reservations that Tad or Lulu may have, they must accept the actress in order for the story to be filmed. Telling the story is the only way that Tad and Lulu can insure Ruby will be known and that Liz Hunter and those like her can be shown as heroic. While choosing to cast Suzie instead of Liz Hunter is a terrible injustice, her presence does ultimately allow Ruby's story to be told.

While Suzie is the "anti-Ruby," Liz Hunter fulfills the role as the symbolic Ruby of 1952. Liz greatly resembles Ruby as the "girl who ran away from what everyone expected of her, and from her persistence and her vision, she made something fantastic..." (40). Like Ruby, Liz is unable to overcome the social and political forces that block her success. Unfairly blacklisted in the prime of her career, she is a great actress that is perfect for the role of Ruby and her unjust plight parallels Ruby's struggle for acceptance and success which can be reached only through an unwavering drive, persistence, and compromise. It is Tad's awareness of the injustice that has befallen Liz

that inspires him to complete the teleplay. By telling the story Tad and Lulu insure that both Ruby and Liz will be remembered for their success rather than their failure.

Themes

The Ruby Sunrise presents a host of thoroughly developed and conflicted characters that are key to unlocking the play. Finding the motivation and actions of these characters not only uncovers what is hidden behind the oblique and witty dialogue, but it also reveals the play's thematic concerns, the most pressing of which is the exploration of mankind's storytelling tradition. *The Ruby Sunrise's* interest in storytelling is grounded in the creation and utilization of television, a device intended to disseminate stories. The play is interested in the power of storytelling to change the world and to unite people across both time and space.

You'll get to watch the news as it's happening. Or listen to somebody talk while you're looking at them, too; somebody far away that you'd never get to meet, and maybe that person has something to teach you. A lecture about science or safety, or a story. We'll get pictures from all over the world, and learn about our comrades in other countries, heck, other planets. We won't be able to hide from the truth anymore. We'll understand how things really are. And how they could be. (63)

The Ruby Sunrise acknowledges the power of stories to change the way people see the world and explores television as a tool to keep the oral tradition alive.

However, while the appearance of television is a crucial aspect of the play's interest in storytelling, television is also utilized in each part of the play as a metaphor for the process by which stories are created and told. Part one examines the creation of a story, using Ruby's attempt to construct a television set not only as the dramatic content for the play, but also as a metaphor for the challenges inherent in the creative process. Through Ruby's struggles, interactions, and ultimate failure, the manner in which stories

are built and the necessity for persistence and compromise become readily apparent. This metaphor continues in part two as the play explores the manner in which the story is built by examining the process of compiling, editing, and re-envisioning the teleplay. The most important metaphorical idea to emerge from part two is the discovery of how and why the story needs to be told. Tad and Lulu flounder as they edit and alter Ruby's story and are successful only when they realize that Ruby's story is not merely about creating a television set, but rather it is a universal story about the need to persist in the face of adversity. Part two becomes a means of discussing the power of storytelling to shape and change the world, to "understand how things really are. And how they could be" (63). Finally, Part three depicts the actual delivery of Ruby's story, theatricalizing the power of storytelling to bring about change. During the airing of the teleplay, the television studio becomes a conduit to the past allowing Ruby to enter the world of the 1950s, to witness the fruit of her ideas, and to connect with Lulu. The play dramatizes the power of storytelling to bring people together, to change the past, and to shape the future.

In addition to the play's emphasis on storytelling and perseverance, several minor thematic motifs emerge which emphasize and broaden the scope of storytelling. The first of these motifs is optimism in regards to creation and the future. Optimism and its counterpart despair are expressed by nearly all of the characters. While the majority of part one is used to explore characters that are ultimately defeated by personal failure, part two examines the courage necessary for success. The main difference between the characters in each part is that those in part two are able to persevere. Both of these sections focus upon the idea of creating a work of art, a piece of technology, anything that will contribute to society and affect others in a positive way. Tad and Lulu succeed

by understanding and adopting specific ideals, while Ruby and Henry, unable to compromise and move beyond personal setbacks, are doomed to failure.

Further, Tad and Lulu understand the necessity of others in their lives and embrace assistance in achieving their goals. The characters repeatedly point to the fact that many components are needed in the completion of a working machine. Through the use of this metaphor, the playwright infers that the world is made up of many parts and success in life seldom exists in isolation. This idea is most notably illuminated when Tad and Lulu find strength in each other to reconcile their personal problems and to complete the teleplay. Both understand the need for collaboration in the creative process.

Another significant thematic motif in the play is the difference between the mechanical and the organic. Throughout the play, imagery that is imbued with aspects of both of these themes is utilized, highlighting the effect that the mechanical medium of television has on the organic process of storytelling. In part one both thematic motifs are represented by the two performance spaces—the barn and the kitchen. Both spaces are initially worn and rustic. The kitchen stands as a symbol for the domestic, a meeting place where life and love are discussed at the kitchen table, and the barn is a rustic wooden structure weathered by time. Both of these spaces are intended to appear as organic, as living spaces where work occurs. Upon Ruby's arrival, these structures begin to take on mechanical qualities. The addition of electric lights in the kitchen and the appearance of the television components in the barn transform these spaces into a blend of both the mechanical and the organic. Here again, the play reflects the theories of Marshall McLuhan by exploring technology's influence upon the organic process of

storytelling, positing that the mechanical and the organic may each bring different “personal and social consequences,” to the receiver (151).

The McLuhan-esque dichotomy between the mechanical and the organic is also reflected in the mechanized world of the television industry. This is most notably seen in the componential nature of the creation process. Part two is specifically concerned with an examination of the living and the mechanical components necessary to create a story. Actors, scriptwriters, directors, producers, cameras and even the film crew are a necessary part in creating the whole. Understanding how each member fits within the whole is crucial to the completion of a finely tuned working machine. Further, as both Tad and Lulu attempt to tell the story of a young woman’s optimistic goals for humanity, they do so with a full understanding that the organic poetry and drama of the story may only be told through a mechanized medium.

Conclusion

In *The Ruby Sunrise*, Rinne Groff utilizes memory, the recollection of past events, as a guiding structural element in her exploration of storytelling. The play’s use of memory is initially found in the creation of three distinct sections which each examine a different aspect of storytelling. Each section provides a foundation grounded in recollected experience that is necessary for the progression of the play and that forms the action in the latter parts. The reoccurring appearance of memory, either in the preexisting nostalgia that the audience brings to the production, or the “ghosts” that is layered into the work, is necessary in constructing a coherent and unified play.

In addition to the use of memory in the structure of *The Ruby Sunrise*, memory is further engaged to enhance the theme of storytelling and the creative process, through

both the story being told and the characters that tell it. The appearance of “ghosted” characters, of recycled universal behavioral traits, aides in the smooth transition from the 1920s to the 1950s and allows the story to be told across a twenty-five year time period. These vibrant universal characters are interlaced into a structurally complex work, filled with memory and nostalgia, in order to examine the manner in which oral traditions—humanities deep connection to storytelling— and our own memory of the past are able to be altered in a way that may positively shape the present.

CHAPTER THREE

Collaborative Process with Designers

With the thematic ideas of storytelling, persistence, and optimism in mind and after analyzing the play to discover the importance of memory and “ghosting” in *The Ruby Sunrise*, the director, actors, designers, and technical crew entered into a detailed collaborative process. In such an intricate collaboration the director is required to initiate design discussions, to communicate visual and metaphorical conceptual inspiration, and to make the final decisions regarding the production values for the play. While work with the actors will be covered in Chapter Four, this chapter will explore the collaborative process with the designers and technicians. Chapter Three will incorporate the overarching conceptual approach for the production, the methods of communication through which design ideas were agreed upon, and a detailed narrative of the initial choices, modifications, and results of each design element.

Conceptual Approach

The directorial concept is an overarching idea, metaphor, or image utilized as a means of building and unifying the production. The concept must work in cooperation with the play’s preexisting thematic content, images, tone, and structure, creating a specific idea that allows creative interpretation and fosters collaborative dialogue. Since storytelling was the core thematic element at play in Baylor University Theatre’s production of *The Ruby Sunrise* the director’s concept needed to encapsulate this theme and provide a means to artistically approach the production.

While a conceptual statement must take the thematic ideas of storytelling into account, there is also crucial reoccurring imagery that appears in the play. These images are repeatedly seen throughout the text and were essential in providing visual representations of storytelling and in determining a metaphorical overlay to guide the design and direction of the play. The imagery of fire, the duality between the mechanical and the organic, the components or pieces used to form a whole, and the imagistic markers of memory or “ghosting” (of the past returning to build upon the present) are repeated often in the script and help to establish the play’s visual framework. In addition to locating a metaphor to help shape the production, the director’s concept needed to encompass these images, speak to the process of storytelling, and create interesting visual design possibilities. Utilizing theme and image to shape the conceptual approach, stained glass was chosen as the overarching conceptual metaphor. Stained glass relates to the thematic concerns of storytelling, as it is one of the earliest examples of a two-dimensional storytelling medium. It also addresses a story’s ability to be told and received in different ways. A viewer’s perception of stained glass is often altered by variations such as the amount or positioning of light, the location of the observer, and the time of day, to name only a few. In this manner stained glass and *The Ruby Sunrise* share the ideas of perception and reception.

Beyond this initial connection to storytelling, stained glass also contains each of the imagistic markers found in the play. Fire may be found in both the creation of stained glass as well as in the light that blazes through the glass panels. Furthermore, a completed work of stained glass art is built from individual pieces of glass, single components that when placed together form the whole. Finally, there is a deep sense of

memory surrounding stained glass. There is a sense of the past, a feeling of remembrance and reverence that informs the artwork. This sense of awe fits *The Ruby Sunrise* perfectly, giving the metaphor heightened depth and meaning.

In addition to its connection to storytelling and the imagery found in the play, stained glass also encapsulates the stylistic differences between each part of *The Ruby Sunrise*, allowing for the creation of several descriptive terms to artistically define and describe each section. Part one feels out of place, as if something is wrong. It is strange, flat, and distant as though part of some obscured memory. It is just a frame, a memory, something familiar, yet blurred and unattainable. Part two, while more realistic and present, is componential, structured, and built upon the memories of past occurrences. Part two also suggests a clean and attractive veneer hiding an unsightly and dark world. Part three is a culmination of the preceding parts; it is the veneer and the frame. Part three becomes the world capable of communicating with the past; it is the mystic and the ethereal. All of these parts, with their unique descriptive terms, are reflected in the “stained glass” metaphor.

Choice of Stage and Audience Configuration

While professional productions of *The Ruby Sunrise* have all utilized a proscenium stage, the play was incredibly well suited for Baylor University’s Mabee Theatre. The Mabee is a three-quarters thrust performance space that seats roughly 250 spectators on a relatively sharp incline. Despite the larger capacity, the space maintains an intimate atmosphere as the audience is very close to the stage. Due to the play’s connection to the act of storytelling, this intimate space aided the production of *The Ruby Sunrise*. Groff’s work is suited for this personal space for several reasons. First, she

utilizes a small cast of seven characters engaged in private moments in their everyday lives. Such personal and ordinary scenes could seem vague and unimportant in a proscenium space, but in the Mabee they become engaging and memorable. The Mabee also allows for minor scenic changes without requiring blackouts that could hinder the play's momentum. Furthermore, maintaining an intimate environment is crucial in a play dealing with the act and process of storytelling. Allowing the audience to be close to the action fosters personal involvement in the story being told.

The nature of the Mabee's thrust also aids in illuminating the theme of perception. The thrust seating affords each audience member a unique experience depending on his or her location in the theatre. Unlike the proscenium stage that possesses properties more closely aligned with the public act of watching cinema, the Mabee, with the inclusion of television monitors, is equipped to simulate the act of television watching. While *The Ruby Sunrise* could very easily be staged in other venues, the versatility and intimacy gained from the Mabee Theatre made it the obvious choice for the production.

Collaboration with Designers

When the collaborative process for *The Ruby Sunrise* began, the designers and director met informally several times to discuss the play and the overall artistic vision. The initial meetings consisted of relating conceptual and visual ideas inspired by research and analysis. Conceptual conversations related the importance of stained glass as a metaphor for the play and how the ideas of memory, "ghosting," and components could be used in the design process. In these initial discussions elements of shape, color, and imagery were also considered. During the discussions all designers were given several

images to consider for design possibilities. Ultimately, a group of core concepts and images were selected as significant elements to include in their designs.

Several images of stained glass were presented to the designers in order to communicate color and the componential nature of stained glass (Appendix A Figs. A.1-4). Apart from these pictures, the designers were given images relating to each specific section of the play. For part one, color, tone, and texture were extremely important. The designers received an earth tone color palate as well as a fabric sample that communicated the line, texture, and color that felt appropriate for the section (Appendix A Figs. A.5,6). Also included were images of older kitchens and barns that expressed the texture and rustic distressing of a farm setting in the 1920s (Appendix A Figs. A.7-9).

For part two, the images were less concrete. They reflected the clean, fresh, and bright contemporary look of the 1950s period which was in direct contrast to the worn feeling of the farmhouse (Appendix A Fig. A.10). Discussions of color, line, and texture focused on a black and white color palette that would take into account values rather than specific colors (Appendix A Fig. A.11). The design team further discussed adding color highlights that would provide interest to the otherwise stark black and white “values.” Furthermore, photographs of offices were examined and the necessary look and feel of the 1950s workplace was discussed (Appendix A Figs. A.12-14). While images were selected for part one and two, part three retained the same lines and color of the 1950s, yet added the feeling of the television studio.

Apart from specific images for each scene, the designers were also given various examples of Norman Rockwell paintings. These paintings, which are iconographic images of Americana, fit perfectly with the production. There is a very specific color

palate (notably Rockwell's use of the color red) and imagery associated with Rockwell's work that seemed ideal for the production (Appendix A Figs. A.15-18). Along with the very recognizable color palate, Rockwell's choice of subject matter and composition aligned perfectly with the themes and idea of *The Ruby Sunrise*, making his work an important source of design inspiration.

After viewing these images, discussions arose on how to incorporate these visual and sensory elements into the design of the play. Each designer began to formulate ideas and new thoughts about the production. As the process began to move from the discussion stage into the design stage, the production began to take shape.

Scenic Design

The initial collaborative process with the scenic designer was driven by visual research and filled with positive communication. However, while this phase of the collaboration was very positive, the implementation of the designs was hindered by a lack of communication. After the group design discussion, individual meetings with the scenic designer were scheduled in order to thoroughly discuss the look of the set and the need for specific scenic elements called for in the script. The designer was informed that the stage needed to encapsulate the three distinct sections of the play, the 1920s, the 1950s studio, and the 1950s offices and diner. Since Groff's focus on memory and ghosting is crucial in the play, it was important that the events and setting of the 1920s remained prevalent as an outline or framework in the 1950s setting, in order to create a visual memory cue for the audience. The set also needed to be transformable, shifting from a realistic farmhouse to a television studio sound stage.

Following initial discussions, the scenic designer began to contemplate the scope and general appearance of the design and in a week presented thumbnail sketches of the set and specific ideas about each of the individual scenic requirements. The designer and the director agreed that designing a single unit set that would accommodate the small, confined backstage area of the Mabree Theatre would be difficult at best. Instead, the locations of each era were afforded their own location on the stage as well as a distinct scenic configuration.

Ultimately, however, the designer created a versatile set that met with the director's approval. In order to capture the memory qualities of part one, the designer created a set for the 1920s that was comprised of a skeletal frame of each location. Similar to the design theories incorporated by designer Jo Mielziner on such work as *The Death of a Salesman* and *The Glass Menagerie*, the set did not fully realistically recreate a location, but instead utilized only the frame of a structure to establish the location (Appendix B Figs. B.1,2). The façade of the barn and the farmhouse of part one were removed as the play shifted to part two, leaving only the outline of the farmhouse and the barn as the play advanced to the 1950s (Appendix B Figs. B.3,4). The action that occurred outside the television studio soundstage, which included scenes set in the offices and diner, took place downstage with the outline of the barn and kitchen as a backdrop. As the action moved to the studio, the finished elements of the kitchen and the barn for the 1950s teleplay were installed on the preexisting frame, creating a studio set ready for filming. The elements of the finished studio set changed slightly from the scenery of part one, becoming cleaner, and slightly more modern than when they first appeared (Appendix B Fig. 5). This idea emerged from the fact that television productions from

the era were not always period accurate, but rather in line with modern sensibilities, which minimized the importance of realistic detail. In this way, the scenic designer further engaged the idea of memory by creating scenic units that were not period accurate recreations of a farmhouse, but rather nostalgic recollections of these locations.

In addition to the more modern version of the scenery, the designer imagined a large steel ring filled with lighting equipment and televisions that could be lowered into the performing space to cap the stage and create a more realistic looking television sound stage (Appendix B Figs. B.6,7). Designing the set in this manner created three distinct performance spaces which realistically represented each of the required time periods on the Mabree stage (Appendix B Figs. B.8,9).

After agreeing on the completed renderings, ground plans and technical drawings followed. A problem arose in this part of the design process. When designing the ground plan, neither the director nor the designer considered the amount of space that would be consumed by the interior furnishings in the barn and kitchen. The size of the scenic furniture was not included in the design considerations and so none of the drawings clarified how the space would be filled or could be used. After taping out the spaces and placing rehearsal furniture in the designated area, it became obvious that more acting space would be needed in both the barn and kitchen. Since the scenic unit had not been built at this point, adjustments to the kitchen could be made with ease, but alterations to the barn were more difficult because the scenic unit had already been constructed. In both cases, however, the scenic designer and the construction crew were willing to make the necessary changes. The extra acting space greatly aided the actors and director in blocking and movement.

While most of the scenic changes were met with general approval, the communication process broke down as rehearsals began. New scenic elements were added each night of rehearsal but their function and placement on the stage were never expressed to the stage manager or director. Consequently, rehearsal time was lost as the new scenic units were incorporated and existing blocking was changed to accommodate the scenic additions. Beyond the alteration of blocking and lost time, the scenic designer's absence and lack of communication created a sense of uncertainty regarding the final approval of the building plans. While the director of the production must help to decide the appearance of scenic elements and the manner in which they operate, the final decision regarding their construction is ultimately the scenic designer's. Without the necessary communication, many final construction decisions were left in limbo and the building crew was left to its own devices. This necessitated that the scenic units be rebuilt according to the designer's specifications, setting the work and rehearsal schedule farther behind.

Besides the lack of communication, the untimely manner in which the scenic pieces arrived was problematic. Scenic elements such as the diner counter and the technical table arrived so late in the process that it was difficult to incorporate them into the production (Appendix B Figs. B.10-12). The size and functionality of the technical table was never communicated and arrived on the opening day of the performance. Such a large and noticeable element of scenery, positioned directly downstage, should have arrived sooner in the rehearsal process. When the table finally arrived, the obviously manufactured look of the piece was clearly out of place in the realistic world of the television studio. In general, there was a lack of urgency by the designer and building

crew to finish the scenic elements in a timely manner that would allow for proper rehearsal in the completed production space. All of the scenic elements were eventually built, but their completion and implementation was thoroughly delayed. Consequently, many concessions were made by the director, designer, and scenic builders in order to churn out a finished product during the final days of rehearsal.

Although communication waned during the early rehearsal period, the designer's presence during technical rehearsals helped to clarify much of the confusion regarding the set. His presence at this stage of the production was helpful in completing many of the unfinished pieces yet his concern regarding the placement and movement patterns of several scenic units became a point of extended discussion. On several occasions he questioned and changed the onstage placement of certain scenic elements, a decision usually left to the director. These actions became a stopping point during rehearsals as the designer repeatedly requested that two scenic elements be moved farther apart to minimize the length of the transitions. Although this was a valid concern, moving the scenic pieces to the extreme sides of the stage required that each scene be moved farther from center stage, thus moving it from a powerful position in the theatre. However, the designer was concerned that the flow of the performance would stop if the scenic changes were not made. He further suggested that the blocking be completely altered to accommodate the scenic shift. While each point was a valid concern, there was no consideration of how harshly this change would affect both the blocking and lighting in the scene. Ultimately, the decision was made to retain the existing scenic position, blocking, and lighting instead of altering the production at such a late phase in rehearsal process.

The majority of the collaboration with the scenic designer for *The Ruby Sunrise* was mutually beneficial. Many of the ideas and discussions in the early phase of production helped to shape the final product, creating a strong scenic design that enhanced the play's thematic elements. While the final design worked well, the lack of communication greatly hindered much of the collaboration. Although the production did not overtly suffer from the lack of distinct and concise communication between the director, designer, and construction crew, the absence of an open dialogue consumed valuable time, created unnecessary tension, and cheapened production values.

Costume/Makeup Design

While lack of communication proved problematic to the collaborative process with the scenic designer, many of these problems were avoided in the work with the costume designers. The head and assistant costume designer were thoroughly prepared and ready for discussion from the first meeting. Both of the designers had performed copious amounts of research prior to the first discussion and came to the initial meeting ready and willing to discuss clothing options for each character. The costume designer presented specific ideas and research that were perfectly aligned with the director's vision of the production.

The initial conversations included the appearance of each character's costume and revealed two interesting concepts. First was the necessity for the costumes of the 1950s teleplay to appear as a 1950s interpretation of clothing from the 1920s, with little regard for historical accuracy. According to the designer, the costumes from the teleplay would not be the same costumes that appeared in part one, but rather a stylized version of 1920s clothing. Second was the need to create a drastic differentiation between the characters

that appear in part one (Lois, Ruby, and Henry) and those that appear in the teleplay (Ethel, Liz, and Paul). As these characters' behavioral traits varied widely, their choice of clothing needed to reflect these differences. Costume pieces were to be pulled or constructed, and so the designer scheduled fittings and immediately shared photographs detailing the exact look and how the costumes fit specific actors.

Although many of the design choices fit perfectly with the original vision of the play, Ruby's costume proved slightly problematic. The designer's initial research revealed that women of the era would have worked in dresses. The original design choice for Ruby consisted of a 1920s style dress, work boots, and gloves. While many of the images presented to the director were beautiful examples of 1920s dresses, they did not fit Ruby's character (Appendix C Figs. C.1-3). After many discussions, the idea arose to put Ruby in men's trousers and a blouse. The design worked, but the initial blouse was a very delicate white color that once again did not fit Ruby's character. Alterations were made to Ruby's costume to make the final product appear worn and distressed, as if Ruby had been constantly working in the clothing (Appendix C Figs. C.4,5). This change was the only major alteration to the costume designer's initial plans.

In addition to costumes, the designer was also in charge of designing makeup for the production. While none of the makeup needs were incredibly complicated, there were three obvious references in the script where makeup was required, two of which appeared in part one. The first of these is the facial dirt for Ruby that can be seen in Appendix C Fig. 4. This makeup was intended to emphasize the dirt and grime that Ruby acquired while working in the barn. The dirt was supposed to outline Ruby's goggles, revealing a clean spot on her face when the goggles were removed, but this proved

impossible to accomplish since the actress did not have time during the performance to remove the dirt from her face. While it was an interesting idea, the makeup effect was eventually cut from the production. Another makeup effect used in the production was the blackening of Henry's eye in the fifth scene. The makeup was applied every night between scenes, but the dim lighting diminished the visibility of the bruise and the audience hardly noticed that Henry had a black eye.

The final makeup effect was the wig for the actress playing Suzie. The wig was a high quality human hair wig, but the skullcap was visible on the actress's forehead and despite efforts to cover the cap line with makeup, the difference in color was clearly apparent (Appendix C Fig. C.12). The wig communicated ideas of character, but because the presence of the skullcap line made it obvious that the actress was wearing a wig, the effect was deemed ineffective.

The collaboration with the costume designer was a smooth process filled with positive dialogue. The open lines of communication aided in the creation and solidification of many sound ideas which translated into appropriate and stunning costumes. Although several of the final costumes were pulled from existing stock, others were altered or built from scratch. The custom built costumes for Liz Hunter, Lulu Miles, and Ethel Reed were beautiful examples of period appropriate clothing that significantly added to the rich production qualities of the performance (Appendix C Figs. C.6-11). The significant research, communication, and construction effort exhibited by the costume designer paid wonderful dividends to the production and represents a successful model of the collaborative process between designer and director.

Lighting Design

Collaboration with the lighting designer was different in nearly every way from that with other designers. While communication was effective during every meeting, lighting was difficult to imagine because of a lack of visual images presented early in the process. While the other designers provided renderings and technical drawings of their design ideas, much of the early lighting discussions were grounded in theoretical discourse regarding what a particular scene should look or feel like. Each scene was discussed in terms of the values that it contained, and descriptive words such as bright, dark, happy, dreary, cold, exotic, and sterile, helped define how each scene would eventually look. The designer was very receptive to this approach and the discussions helped to solidify the directorial vision of each scene.

The early conversations also covered the specific lighting needs of the play. In these meetings the director presented the lighting designer with several specific images for the opening moments of the play (Appendix D Figs. C.1-3). The director felt that a striking way to open the play was with a visible beam of light shining upon Ruby sitting alone in the barn. These images, however, were the only pictures that were given to the lighting designer. The remainder of the discussion covered the need for specific practical lighting in the kitchen and for the final moments of the play to contain a “magical” quality.

The dialogue ended with a discussion of three very distinct lighting challenges that would require inventive solutions. In three different scenes the script calls for a welding torch to melt glass, a firefly to appear onstage, and an electrical mechanism to short out, shocking the actress playing Ruby. There was absolutely no way that the

actual devices or insect could appear on stage; consequently a unique solution to each of these interesting lighting challenges was required.

Since the lighting designer was not able to reveal a lighting plot until technical rehearsal, much of the continued communication during the rehearsal process dealt specifically with solving the practical challenges of the torch, firefly, and electrocution. Each of these challenges required a long process of research and discussion before any results were finalized. For the firefly, an initial suggestion was made to purchase a mason jar that contained a small electronic light designed to look like a firefly (Appendix D Fig. D.4). The use of this prop was problematic for two specific reasons. First, the “firefly” was not designed to look like a firefly. The wings of the lighting device were thin and long in order to capture the heat from the light bulb, appearing more like a moth’s wings than a firefly’s. While this would not have been noticeable from the audience, these wings also caused the “firefly” to flutter in much the same manner as a moth. The movement did not look like a firefly. Secondly, the light from the firefly was bright neon green and did not resemble a real firefly in any way. The neon green light was very quickly discarded in favor of a battery powered LED light attached to a pressure sensitive conductor (Appendix D Figs. D.5,6). This device possessed the proper color of light and allowed the actor to control the flashing of the firefly. The solution worked very well and did not necessitate a bulky mason jar (Appendix D Fig. D.7).

The torch proved to be much more of a problem. Early in the process, an actual blowtorch was considered, but the fire code would not allow actors to operate an open flame on stage. The suggestion was then made to attempt illuminating compressed water vapor in order to reproduce the look of a 1920s blowtorch. Aerosol spray cans filled with

water vapor were rigged to a device with an LED light (Appendix D Fig. D.8). The device was completely silent and required sound effects from a speaker placed in the barn. This device did not arrive until very late in the technical rehearsal period and never managed to work properly. Ultimately, the water vapor was removed and a piece of blue lighting gel was attached to the torch. The flame of the torch never matched the sound from the speaker, and the effect never achieved the desired result.

The final special effect that the designer devised, the electrocution, once again employed an LED lighting device. The creation of this effect was fairly simple, yet it required a large amount of trial and error to reach the desired result. The effect needed to realistically simulate an electrocution, without being overly dramatic or too subtle. To achieve an authentic effect, the designer combined the LED lights with a sharp electrical pop and smoke. Without actually electrocuting the actress, the combination of light, smoke, and sound created an electrical malfunction and shock in a believable manner. This effect met with the fewest problems through performance and became one of the most effective technical elements in the production.

During technical rehearsals the lighting designer was finally able to implement the lighting design. The production was beautifully lit in a natural manner requiring little alteration. The designer accurately realized many of the fades and subtle lighting shifts needed for the production. Specifically, lighting for the opening scene was masterfully created. The collaboration with the designer during the technical rehearsal process was smooth and concise as many of the lighting levels were discussed and changed due to the lack of brightness in part two. The designer was vocal when specific lighting didn't work and very prompt in fixing any problems that arose. There were a few disappointments in

the lighting, however. Because of the lack of diverse lighting instruments in the theatre many of the scenes in part two were darkly illuminated (Appendix D Fig. D.9) and the lighting in the final moments of the production never captured the needed ethereal quality called for in the play (Appendix B Fig. B.13). For the most part, these glitches were caused by the director's unfamiliarity with lighting design, and the lack of time given to solve the problems. The final scene of the play reveals Ruby in the television studio of the 1950s. This moment allows a complete break from realism as the process of storytelling bridges the gap of space and time between the two eras. Attempting to verbalize how this very theatrical moment in the play should look, the director kept returning to the word "magical." Significant changes were made to the final moments in an attempt to embody this vague term but the final moment of the production never completely captured the required magical essence.

Despite a lack of concrete material, the collaborative process with the lighting designer was incredibly successful. The designer was able to take very difficult concepts and communicate them in a clear and coherent manner to a director that was not fully able to grasp lighting terminology. Given the complex lighting effects and the sense imagery provided in the beginning of the process, the designer was able to effectively communicate with the director, creating concrete results from intangible descriptive terms.

Props Design

The Ruby Sunrise is undeniably a prop heavy production, requiring close collaboration between the director and the props designer. The need for a close dialogue between the two was apparent very early in the process. After the initial group meeting

several attempts were made to communicate with the designer in order to assure that props arrived on schedule for the benefit of the actors. This did not happen. No progress was made for the first two weeks of the rehearsal process, resulting in the original props designer being dismissed. After the new designer was appointed there were immediate positive results. The new props designer scheduled a meeting in order to discuss conceptual ideas and the most pressing needs of the production. Directly after the meeting the designer spoke with the dramaturg, requesting information on Philo Farnsworth's prototype television set and then manufacturing a very convincing replica of the original set with scrap mechanical equipment from the scene shop (Appendix E Fig. E.1). The designer continued to collect and build much needed props throughout the rehearsal period

Most of the props worked very well for the production, but there were a few that did not meet expectations. Acquiring historically authentic props is a major problem for any production and period specific props for this production often proved difficult to acquire or accurately construct. The designer relied heavily upon the dramaturg for period specific research, but the dramaturg was also the sound and video designer for the production. The triple responsibility meant that many of the props did not receive final approval and needed to be changed late in the process. The inconsistent communication between the dramaturg and the designer resulted in several anachronistic props appearing on the stage.

Apart from the difficulties in acquiring or creating completely period specific props, there were several items that never arrived or did not work in the manner that was expected. The most important of these props were the components necessary to build the

prototype television set. Although the actress playing Ruby had many metallic pieces to work with, specific electrical components never arrived and so she was unable to incorporate them into her stage business. The actors were left to use rehearsal props such as trampoline springs and plastic flywheels, none of which resembled the elements of a television set. Ultimately, this did not affect the production in a negative way, but it did limit the actor's ability to fully incorporate the props.

The most disappointing prop in the show was the glass bottle that was to be shattered. Initially, the designer had researched purchasing sugar glass bottles, but the bottles were incredibly expensive. The designer then attempted to produce the sugar glass from self-created molds, but the molds never produced a functioning bottle. After several weeks of attempting to create glass, the project was abandoned and sugar glass bottles were ordered from a manufacturer. When the bottles finally arrived (on the night of final dress) the director realized that they were completely wrong for the production. In the script, Lulu becomes enraged and shatters a red bottle as she reveals the true story of her mother's life to Tad. The breaking of the same red glass bottle that appears in part one is symbolic of Lulu's frustration and failure (Appendix E Fig. E.2). When she breaks the bottle, she is metaphorically shattering her connection to her mother and destroying any chance of redeeming Ruby's life. The bottle is incredibly important. However, when the bottles arrived, they did not remotely match what was ordered, and instead of possessing the vibrant red color that was promised, the bottles were dark amber (Appendix E Fig. E.3). Instead of achieving the metaphor of Lulu shattering her own past, the breaking of the bottles became merely an effect to express the rage that she was feeling. The action worked for the production, but it did not possess the strong affect

necessary to fully express the symbolism of the red bottle or the weight of Lulu's anger. Despite the fact that these specific props did not meet expectations, the vast majority of the props worked well. Considering the challenges that were encountered through rehearsals, the change in the props designer was a necessary step that had significant ramifications.

Sound and Video Design

Video design was a crucial element of *The Ruby Sunrise*. Video was utilized not only for the final moments of the script, which call for the live filming of the teleplay, but also for the commercials that were used as transitions between the scenes of the play and during intermission. Because of the importance of the commercials, the video and sound designers had to work closely together. From the initial design meeting the video and sound designers formed a close attachment, constantly communicating ideas both interdepartmentally and to the director. This relationship helped to create a positive collaboration from the initial meeting.

From the beginning, the sound designer was intrigued with the componential nature of "stained glass" as a metaphor. The designer expressed interest in discovering a known orchestral piece that was divided into sections in which only a single instrument played. The hope was that by playing only a single part of the orchestration the song would remain unfamiliar to the audience until all of the instrumental components merged together. The idea was intriguing; however, the designer discovered that the only way to produce this type of song would be to record live musicians. This initial idea was struck and the designer began to look for works by an American composer that contained elements of 1950s Americana. Searching for period specific orchestral work yielded no

results, so the designer settled on the movie soundtrack of *Pleasantville* by American composer Randy Newman. Newman's music recalls television shows of the 1950s and 1960s and contains a suite that is very representative of the nostalgic sense of 1950s. This suite was sampled and then chosen as the featured music of *The Ruby Sunrise*.

The sound designer was also prepared for specific sound effects required by the script. While consideration was given to the use of recorded sound effects for the production, many of these effects sounded hollow when they came through the Mabey Theatre's speakers. There was a jarring disconnect between the sound and the action that was occurring on stage. Ultimately, most of these early sound effects were struck in favor of sounds that could be created live. While the idea was to create the vast majority of the aural landscape in the playing space, several sound effects could not be recreated. Among these were the blowtorch and the electric short that occurred in part one. Both of these effects were run through a hidden localized speaker and although the speaker worked very well for the sharp and quick electrical pop, the blowtorch sound did not meet expectations.

Apart from creating the soundscape for the production, the sound designer worked with the video designer to acquire and edit commercials that played during the scene breaks in part two. The decision to include the commercials was made by the director prior to the design process for several reasons. First, part one and part three are both modeled after a television production of the 1950s and by including the commercials part two also became reminiscent of a television production, complete with commercial breaks. The commercials were obviously dated examples of product advertising and they served as nostalgic reminders of an earlier time. These commercials were utilized to

underscore the action of the scenes. Finally, the commercials served to mask the scenic transitions and made it possible to avoid extended blackouts. By giving the audience something to watch as the scenes changed, the production was able to maintain momentum.

Early on, it became obvious that the original plan of fifteen-second commercial spots would not work as originally planned. Most of the commercials of the 1950s were not the short spots that appear on television today, but rather extended commercials in which the sponsor of the television show was able to extensively speak to the television viewer. Many of these commercials were three or four minutes long. At first, this appeared to be problematic, but the designer soon discovered that while most of the commercials consisted of a spokesperson talking to a viewing audience, all of the commercials contained some sort of catchy jingle that could be edited to ten or fifteen seconds of usable content. From these much longer works the designers were able to pull useful, catchy, and poignant advertisements for each of the scene breaks.

In addition to the commercials, the sound and video designers were asked to splice together clips from *Playhouse 90*, an actual 1950s teleplay series, with filmed footage of a Baylor University actor introducing *The Ruby Sunrise* teleplay. The spliced footage helped to inform the audience that the action of part three was the filming of a live teleplay and it also helped to minimize the awkwardness of the transition into part three. The video maintained the same nostalgic qualities established by the television commercials, yet also became part of the action of the play, introducing the studio's aired teleplay. The presence of the introduction helped to establish part three as the actual filming and airing of the live teleplay, the act of storytelling was occurring.

Although the sound and video designers met with challenges in the installation of the televisions and speakers, this never hindered their collaboration. Through their work together, both designers maintained open communication with the director and utilized their combined talent to create a video and sound design that ultimately enhanced the thematic content of the production.

Conclusion

By utilizing the initial research and metaphorical stained glass concept the collaborative process between the director and the talented members of the design team produced remarkable results for the production. The initial meetings and discussions proved invaluable in determining the technical appearance of *The Ruby Sunrise*. Each designer met with challenges throughout the collaborative process, but the majority of these issues were solved through communication, ingenuity, and hard work. Despite several shortcomings, the vast majority of the technical elements functioned remarkably well and embodied the conceptual metaphor successfully, creating a unified aesthetic and aural atmosphere for *The Ruby Sunrise*.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Rehearsal Process

For the audience, the most visible and relatable part of any production is the actors' work on stage. While the technical elements are crucial to the manner in which the audience perceives the performers, the audience cannot help but react to human action on stage. The need to interpret the script, to succinctly explain directorial choices to actors, and to work with the cast through the rehearsal process are important aspects of the director's work on a production. This chapter will detail the rehearsal process of *The Ruby Sunrise*, from pre-audition preparation to final performance, focusing on the directorial choices that helped shape and guide the coaching of actors.

Early Considerations

The director's analysis and interpretation of *The Ruby Sunrise* played a major role in both casting decisions and work with the actors during the rehearsal process. Several aspects of the script were incredibly important in the consideration of casting and acting styles. Among the most important of these was Groff's focus on the idea of storytelling. Since this element of the play is immensely important, the need for actors capable of understanding and communicating a story to the audience was most significant.

The various time periods recognized in the play were also considered when making acting decisions. The three parts of the play contain unique styles in language and behavior reflective of the time period in which they are each set; yet despite the differences, when viewed together, the parts form a seamless whole. The unique

language utilized by Groff requires the mastery of several different acting styles. The majority of the play is grounded in psychological realism requiring actors capable of understanding the complex behavioral actions of the characters. Groff creates vibrant, realistic, and living characters in her script necessitating actors capable of reproducing the behavior and inner journey of each of the characters in a truthful manner. However, while the vast majority of the script necessitated this behavioral approach to acting, Groff's tendency to vary her stylistic approach created interesting challenges. In part one, Groff utilizes language that is specifically aligned with the teleplays of the 1950s. The use of this stylized language, in both part one and the rehearsal scenes of part two, required an acting approach closer to the acting style of the era. Falling short of achieving true "melodrama," the acting of this time appeared emotionally heightened, as though the stakes that the characters faced were all a matter of life or death. While the utilization of this exaggerated style had to be tempered during part one in order to maintain a sense of realism, the language needed to be embraced in the rehearsal scenes of part two as a means to produce humor and to differentiate between the world of the 1950s television studio and the world of the teleplay. The seamless change between styles required actors capable of understanding and employing realistic acting techniques, and who were also aware of the subtle shifts in acting styles occurring throughout the play.

The play's realism was further challenged by Groff's choice to double the characters. By utilizing a "play within a play" convention, Groff creates characters that appear in part one and then return in different roles during the later sections of the play. The actors playing these characters needed to be able to differentiate between the unique

behavioral qualities of each character, creating two or more distinct roles in a short amount of time. Recognizing the change in acting style was important in maintaining the flow and pacing of the play and required actors capable of making such a fast transition with precision.

Additionally, the various configurations of the stage in the Mabey were important to the acting decisions. The choice to utilize the Mabey as a proscenium stage for part one, a thrust stage for part two, and a combination of both for part three, required actors able to meet the varied performance demands unique to each space. Assuring that each actor understood how the differences in performance styles and spaces affected the manner in which the story was told became essential in both casting considerations and actor coaching. The focus on storytelling and the styles of the play, both realism and deviations from realism, were important factors in the casting process.

Pre-Audition Work and the Audition Process

The audition process for *The Ruby Sunrise* was conducted three weeks before rehearsals began and took place in tandem with the auditions for Baylor Theatre's production of *Jekyll and Hyde*. Due to a very busy production schedule, time was a critical factor in conducting the auditions in such a manner. Both directors wanted to assure that they received a substantial amount of planning time before the beginning of the rehearsal to consider how to best work with and utilize the actors that were cast. The directors wanted the auditions to be fair and educational for the actors, directors, and the department as a whole. By agreeing that actors could not be cast in both productions and by thoroughly discussing the casting choices prior to posting the cast lists, the directors

were guaranteed that their production would feature talented actors who would meet the demands of both plays.

It was important that the actors, in preparing for the auditions, fully comprehended what would be required of them, both during auditions and throughout the rehearsal process. The actors were informed that the initial auditions would consist of a prepared monologue, while callbacks, conducted the following day, would utilize scenes and monologues taken from *The Ruby Sunrise*. Actors were informed that their audition pieces should highlight what they believed to be their best qualities as an actor, and also show how well they could communicate the most relevant information of their monologue. The manner in which they told their story was highly significant.

Additionally, a character breakdown for *The Ruby Sunrise* was posted on the callboard in an effort to prepare the actors for auditions and callbacks. The breakdown provided interpretative information, including emotional and behavioral traits of each character, and informed the actors of how casting decisions would be made by the director.

Since storytelling is the major thematic focus of the play, it was necessary to inform the actors that part of the auditioning process would explore their ability to effectively tell a story. The actors were notified that the following six acting characteristics associated with storytelling would form a key part of the ultimate casting decisions. Each actor needed to express: 1) truth in characterization, 2) flexibility and diversity in multiple characterization, 3) confidence in making bold acting choices and taking risks, 4) comprehension of physical movement and shape as tools of communication, 5) intimate interaction with fellow actors, and 6) the ability to analyze

and apply choices that shape the style, movement, and progression of a monologue or scene. The elements included in the list provided specific acting concepts that were important to the art of storytelling. They were intentionally worded in such a way as to give the actors an opportunity to interpret the meaning of each concept and express that interpretation in the choices they made during auditions.

Each of the suggestions on the list provided the student actors with a wealth of choices. By exploring the truth in characterization as well as the creation of different characters, the actors would be able to focus on telling the story and realistically embodying Groff's diverse and interesting characters. Emphasis was placed on movement, not only to reemphasize the importance of clearly delineated characters but also to allow the actors to discover how storytelling can be achieved through physicality and contact with others in a defined space. Finally, the ability to interpret the text was necessary in promoting an understanding of the drastic shifts between parts as well as in determining how the constantly changing psychological lives of the characters affect the momentum and action of the play. Ultimately, those actors that were cast in the production were all able to utilize some combination of elements on the list in order to enhance the effectiveness of their audition.

Auditions for *The Ruby Sunrise* were conducted in the Mabree Theatre in order to observe how the auditioners adapted to the performance space. After the actors performed their monologue for both directors, the field of potential actors was cut to forty who exhibited the desired confidence, skills, and storytelling ability. With such a large number of actors in the callback pool, allowing each actor to audition for every role was simply not possible. The actors were divided into groups, based initially on their ability

to fulfill the basic physical demands or qualities of specific characters. For example, several of the younger actresses were not able to effectively play the age required for the character of Lois/Ethel, so they were not asked to read for that role. Each actor was given a list of at least two or three specific characters that they would be asked to read during callbacks. Special care was given during this process to assure that no actors were precast in a particular role or type. Limiting the actors' potential roles provided a more focused audition, while allowing each actor opportunity to showcase their best work.

The callbacks for each production were held in separate rooms in order to allow each director the opportunity to work privately with the actors. The auditioners were divided into six groups with a thirty-minute block of time dedicated to each. All groups received a similar introduction in which they were encouraged to have fun, take chances, and make bold choices. Each group contained actors of both sex, yet due to time constraints, as well as the different demands required of the male and female actors, each were asked to perform different types of material that suited the needs of the characters. Since three of the four females in the play are required to perform two different roles, the actors' ability to differentiate the characters was incredibly important. In addition to the scene work, each of the female actors was asked to read Ruby's opening monologue several times. They were instructed to perform the monologue as a different character in each reading. By conducting the audition in this manner, each female was allowed to audition for several different characters, while also showcasing their ability to change quickly between varying character types.

However, as Paul/Henry is the only male that is double cast (and since there is little variety between the two), the men's auditions focused on the manner in which they

embodied each character. As with the females, the males were encouraged to make different choices with each reading, but since the men were outnumbered by the women, they received more opportunities to audition with a variety of actresses. Overall, the actors and actresses responded well to the auditions and to any characterization modifications that they were asked to make.

While forty talented actors were called back, only seven roles were available. The final casting decisions were difficult. There were three major factors that ultimately helped to solidify the final casting decision. The first of these factors was the actors' willingness to make bold choices. Despite the fact that the auditions were held in a classroom with only a chair in the performance space, several actors were willing to actively engage in the scenes, creating interesting action while giving a cold reading. The actress that was ultimately cast as Ruby turned the chair into a broken generator and spent her entire audition crawling on the ground, attempting to fix the machine from various angles while still communicating with her scene partner. The actress cast as Lois noticed the subtle sexual tension between Lois and Henry, highlighting it during her audition. The result was an awkward moment that correctly pointed out the sexual desire of the older woman. Each actor who was willing to make a bold choice created action that progressed the scene, raised the stakes, and provided visual interest beyond the cold reading of the text.

The actors' physicality also played a large part in the casting decisions. Although the callbacks consisted primarily of short scenes and monologues, several of the actors were able to embrace physicality as a means of differentiating character and telling the story. The most varied use of the body as an expressive tool came in the women's

reading of Ruby's monologue. The most successful auditioners used their bodies as storytelling tools and created a large range of characters through varied physicality and styles of movement. The same actors were able to play Lulu as strong and self-assured, before immediately switching to the drunken and defeated Lois. The change in character was obvious even before a line had ever been delivered. Finding actors capable of this versatility in characterization was not only crucial for the creation of drastically different characters, but also for the actors' ability to tell the story.

The final major focus of the callback process was the actors' ability to follow direction. Throughout the audition, the actors were given specific notes to shape and fine tune their performances. These notes ranged from very subtle alterations of character objectives to major changes in acting style. Although the notes were given to achieve a very specific result, the manner in which the actors processed the notes was also helpful in the casting process. The variations in response ranged from complete disregard of the note, over thinking the note entirely (thus shutting down), and making the requested changes. This process was helpful in separating actors capable of maintaining open lines of communication and accepting direction from those that had difficulty making the needed changes.

Every actor cast in *The Ruby Sunrise* met each of these standards to differing degrees during callbacks. Those actors willing to physically commit to the characters, to make bold choices that were interesting to watch, to connect to the story, and to respond to directorial notes were ultimately cast. The ensemble consisted of mostly seasoned actors who had worked extensively in the Mabey Theatre. Their knowledge of the space was most helpful, since this meant that extra training on the complexities of moving on

the Mabee's thrust stage was not needed. Possessing a familiarity with the cast three weeks before rehearsals began allowed for the formulation of a clear rehearsal plan to positively manage time and the creation of acting strategies necessary to capitalize on the individual actors' strengths.

Rehearsal Process

Rehearsals for *The Ruby Sunrise* were a well-planned process beginning three weeks after auditions. In an effort to make every moment of rehearsal a positive experience, each day was meticulously planned to effectively manage time and to emphasize important conceptual ideas. Each rehearsal was intended to focus on three important aspects of the production: storytelling, the drastic stylistic changes in each part of the play, and the variety of acting approaches required by the script. These elements were important in achieving the directorial vision of the production, necessitating that a portion of the schedule be dedicated to the exploration of each aspect.

Establishing a clear plan to address the acting in the production was also important. *The Ruby Sunrise* is grounded in realism, requiring actors capable of understanding the psychological and behavioral motivations of the characters. Utilizing the acting theories and teachings of Constantin Stanislavski, Uta Hagen, and Robert Cohen, provided a means of exploring the desires and objectives of the characters, examining their motivations and analyzing the tactics utilized by each character to achieve the desired results. Additionally, the use of a behavioral approach also allowed for an emphasis on history and memories as foundational parts of each character's construction. Memory, such a crucial part of the play, is an inseparable part of the characters' makeup. Approaching the characters from a psychological/behavioral

standpoint provided the best possible means of exploring Groff's complex characters, allowing the experiences of the past, the pressures of the present, and the driving motivations in each character to help shape and mold the actors' performances.

Not only was the use of a behavioral approach the most efficient means of establishing the inner "truth" of each character, but it also provided an approach with which each of the actors was intimately familiar. Every actor, as part of their training at Baylor University, must complete several courses on realistic acting that explore how psychological and emotional truth affect a character's external behavior and action. The actors' familiarity with this approach provided a common vocabulary, that included such terms as beats, tempo, goals, obstacles, choices, and stakes.

The use of a behavioral approach required that each actor prepare and familiarize themselves with the life of their character. Over the course of the rehearsal process, that initial understanding would be challenged and clarified through work with other actors and by notes from the director. The behavioral acting style was combined with a repeated "drilling" of scenes in order to arrive at the exact characterization and emotional interactions required by the script. As each scene was rehearsed, the actors were stopped at various moments, given notes, and asked to repeat their performance with specific changes in mind. This process was repeated several times until each actor understood their motivations and had made suitable character specific choices and developed tactics to reach their objectives. Drilling the actors in this way insured that each moment of the play was clean, contained clear actions, and revealed behaviorally motivated choices.

The choice to utilize a behavioral acting approach was, in part, motivated by the need to create psychologically believable characters on stage, yet the utilization of this

method of acting was also intended to aid in the creation of the stylized performances called for in Groff's script. While the actors were all very familiar with a realistic acting style, none had any experience acting in the style of exaggerated realism found in the 1950s teleplays. In order to avoid teaching a completely new acting style and to capitalize upon the actor's preexisting knowledge base, the realistic characters were to serve as the foundation from which the exaggerated acting style could emerge. By creating a "baseline" character, the actors could achieve the heightened realism of teleplays through subtle alterations and stylizations in characterization. Allowing each actor to significantly raise the stakes, to explore ulterior motivations, and to perform to the audience created a stylization that was very similar to the acting styles of the period. Ultimately, the attempt to stylize the performance met with varying levels of success, but the creation and utilization of a behavioral acting approach allowed the actors to build characters and participate in the rehearsals using a previously understood acting technique.

The rehearsal process was divided into five sections: introduction and read-through, blocking, shaping, technical rehearsals, and performance. The first rehearsal was crucial in communicating the directorial concept to the actors, clarifying expectations, and explaining how the remaining rehearsal process would be administered. Paperwork was distributed to the actors that included: a calendar, a scene/beat breakdown, and a list of expectations for the actors (Appendix F). After discussing the general expectations and the rehearsal calendar, the conceptual approach was explained to the actors. Of particular interest in this discussion was how the concept would affect both the design features and the acting within the production. The discussion led to an

examination of the scenic model, which allowed the actors to visualize how the scenic elements would fill the space. The conversation then shifted to the televisions that would be positioned throughout the auditorium and the varied media that would play during the scenic transitions. During this conversation, the actors asked questions and clarified their understanding of the conceptual imagery and the scenic capabilities.

Following the initial conceptual discussion, the cast began reading the script aloud. While the read-through was uneventful, the table work and discussion that followed proved illuminating. The table work was focused upon discovering specific thematic elements of the script that fit the directorial concept and those that could prove difficult to stage. The entire cast actively discussed the text, exploring how thematic issues appear throughout the script, while also intuitively noticing specific moments that could become problematic. In general the cast's overall attentiveness, thoughtfulness, and keen understanding of the play was refreshing, portending a smooth and productive rehearsal process. In addition to the table work and discussions, the cast watched video clips from *Playhouse 90* teleplays, as well as sitcoms and a montage of commercials from the 1950s. The video clips were shown in order to illustrate the style of television programming during this era, to suggest an approach to acting, and to illuminate the unique qualities of the world of the play.

While the majority of the initial rehearsal was dedicated to examining the script, it was also important to focus on physicality as a means of exploring relationships. *The Ruby Sunrise* calls for a close connection between the characters and necessitates active engagement between the actors. To make the actors aware of this connection, several of Vsevolod Meyerhold's Biomechanical exercises were utilized to help actors in exploring

the formation of dynamic relationships. The exercises began with the actors standing in a circle tossing a ball to each other in an established pattern. Once the pattern had been repeated several times, the group broke the circle and began moving throughout the space, maintaining the throwing pattern. As the exercise continued, more balls were added to the throwing pattern. This required each actor to maintain a dual focus, both on the person from whom they were receiving the ball as well as on the person to whom they were tossing the ball.

After warming up with this exercise, the actors were asked to stand in two lines facing the back wall of the theatre. They were then instructed to run as fast as possible, stopping as close to the wall as possible without running into it. The actors repeated this process several times, testing out different methods of stopping, often crashing into the wall. Eventually, the actors discovered their own method of stopping without allowing their momentum to carry them into the wall. Each actor observed as the others found new ways to stop themselves. After this exercise was repeated several times, the actors were asked to form two lines facing each other on opposite sides of the stage. Upon cue, the actors were asked to run towards each other as fast as possible, stopping just before they collided. When they had practiced this several times they were asked to focus on the moment of interaction that occurred when the collision was avoided, the moment of physical connection that occurred when they met in the middle of the stage. The actors were instructed not to preconceive the response to the interaction, but rather to allow the reactions of each individual moment to inform their subsequent actions. The stories that the actors began to tell were remarkable. Though several interactions contained premeditated acts, the majority of the connections were interesting explorations of action

and reaction. The slightest action elicited a response, which in turn caused another reaction to emerge. The actors began to tell stories that resulted from their engagement with each other.

Following these exercises the cast discussed their interactions. Every actor was able to point out specific moments when he or she was fully engaged with his or her acting partner. The actors were able to point out several examples in the text where this type of connection was essential. Returning to earlier topics of thematic and relational content allowed the actors to begin discovering depth and interconnectedness of acting, physicality, and scriptural understanding required for *The Ruby Sunrise*.

After the initial rehearsal, the following two weeks were dedicated to blocking the play. While the main focus of these rehearsals was the exploration of stage business and movement, each rehearsal began with an exercise grounded in storytelling. Rehearsal began with the actors telling stories about their lives that did not have to be overly personal but merely needed to contain a beginning, middle, and end. As the exercise continued, the actors were asked to vary the manner in which they told the stories. These variations were most often determined by the size of the audience to which they were speaking. Their storytelling ranged from an intimate to a more formal setting and was expected to solicit an emotional reaction from the audience, no matter the size. They were also asked to tell the story through physical movement alone, without the aid of language.

This exercise was utilized for several reasons. First, by placing the actors on stage in front of an audience (consisting of fellow actors, stage managers, and the director), the actors were able to discover how best to tell a story and to develop the vocal

and physical skills necessary to keep an audience's attention. From this type of sharing they developed a deep understanding of the intimate and personal acting style inherent in *The Ruby Sunrise*. Further, their personal stories were intended to build a sense of community within the cast. With every story told, the cast grew closer as an acting ensemble. Consequently, throughout the rehearsal process, storytelling remained the constant warm-up activity for the cast.

During the first two weeks of rehearsal, warm-ups were followed by the discovery and creation of blocking. Blocking for *The Ruby Sunrise* was conceived organically. This allowed the actors to create a vast majority of the movement before the sculpting and styling of the play took place. During these early rehearsals however, the director's focus was on creating an open and nurturing atmosphere where the actors' ideas and instincts were supported and reinforced.

The first step in the blocking process consisted of an initial read-through of the scene. The actors were then questioned about the main action of the scene, the given circumstances, and the scene's thematic content. In this way, the actor's knowledge of the play was assessed and specific details of each scene were thoroughly discussed. Following the initial readings and discussions, the actors read the scene a second time while flavoring the dialogue with newly discovered nuances of meaning and subtext. Following this read-through each actor was questioned about their character's motivations and objectives. The actors described their characters' desires and the strategies they were using to achieve their goals. The dialogue benefited from having all the actors in the scene discuss how particular actions affected their characters and how those actions altered their responses. After the second discussion, the actors were asked

to stand up and move throughout the space. This read through was not intended to be an exercise in blocking, but rather a way to observe how the actors physically synthesized the information derived from previous discussions with their own understanding of the script.

After the third reading, the focus of the rehearsal shifted to the creation of a skeletal blocking structure for each scene. This phase of blocking the play was designed to provide the actors with dynamic and motivated movement patterns from which the final staging of the play could emerge. This process was filled with trial and error as suggestions were made, actions were attempted, and movement changed. The blocking for part one proved especially difficult since at this time there were no scenic pieces to use. The actors performed within a taped outline of the set. Although performing with limited scenic pieces is not out of the ordinary during early rehearsals, matters were complicated slightly by the design of the playing spaces. Both of the playing spaces in part one were intended to be flat and filled with furniture, yet the initial ground plans only showed the outline of the rooms without detailing specific size or placement of the scenic furniture. This combined with the flat playing spaces caused difficulty when attempting to create dynamic blocking. The inability to utilize sweeping movements or block on diagonal lines left few options apart from constricted horizontal movement. However, as the location of the scenic furniture was added to the ground plan and a clear understanding of the characters' objectives was reached, inventive blocking solutions were found.

In addition to the flatness of the playing space, several other issues proved problematic in staging the work. The actors' lack of line memorization at this point in

the process greatly hindered blocking. Any attempt to motivate the blocking or to create authentic movement was inhibited by the presence of a script in the actors' hands.

During this pre-memorization stage, the multiple readings performed by the actors proved beneficial. After reading each scene three times successively before blocking commenced, the actors were very familiar with the dialogue and able to actively participate in the scenes without consulting the text.

During this phase of rehearsal, the lack of props also proved to be a problem, specifically in the scenes taking place in the barn. Without the props necessary to "build" the television set, the actors blocking was severely limited. Understanding exactly what hand props were to be included in the space was crucial in helping form the actors' business in each scene. The initial props for the construction of the television set included: a pencil, a ring of car keys, two paper balls, and a hammer. Although many props began to arrive after the original props designer was replaced, the blocking had to be altered with the addition of new props and many were never fully utilized as components of the television set.

Scheduling also presented problems as the rehearsal process continued. To efficiently manage time, a limited number of actors were called to rehearsal each night and the blocking was confined to the scenes in which those actors were involved. For example, on the first night of blocking rehearsal, only the actors playing Henry and Ruby were called, and scenes one, three, and four were blocked. Although each of the scenes received an equal amount of work, the disjointed manner in which the play was blocked had a negative effect on the actors' ability to connect to the narrative of the play. Many times in rehearsals, the performers appeared unfamiliar with how the pieces of the story

fit together. Every scene felt as though it was an individual unit, unconnected to the rest of the play. As rehearsals progressed, scenic elements were added, and transitions between scenes were streamlined, each of the scenes began to feel more like a connected whole.

Following the first two weeks of rehearsal, the shaping rehearsals presented another opportunity to explore deeper meaning within the play. During this period, the focus of the rehearsals remained on the process of storytelling and finding various ways to deepen the subtext, to create meaningful imagery, and to layer meaning into the production. In order to insure that the thematic interest of storytelling remained pertinent to the actors, the storytelling warm-ups remained a vital part of the process. During this time, the actors became much more confident in their ability to address a large group of people with their stories, telling them in more interesting and increasingly complex ways. The actors were asked to alter the manner in which they told stories on a daily basis, telling stories that filled the space with large movement and gestures one day while creating a story without any movement the next day. The culmination of this exercise resulted in cast members telling stories without words, using only their bodies to express their experiences. This final story was incredibly interesting to watch as the majority of the cast was able to take the lessons learned from the different storytelling techniques and apply them to their final tale. The actors were able to communicate the most important details of the story and to find very specific emotional connections to the events they described.

Beyond trying to develop the art of storytelling, the shaping rehearsals were also a period of incredible artistic growth where the actors worked with character interaction,

spatial awareness, and sculpted imagery. The majority of the communal effort during this time was dedicated to discovering and clarifying interactions between characters. Although the majority of the character relationships fit within borders very clearly defined by societal expectations (i.e. the relationship between boss and employee, or the relationship between lovers), several relationships represented transgressive situations that are taboo within modern society. The most blatant of these is the connection between Henry and Lois, a very protective and sexually laden relationship. The actors playing Henry and Lois had a difficult time understanding the sexual connection between a fifty-year-old woman and a boarder half her age. Reaching an understanding of the relationship's balance between sexuality and legitimate compassion was found through repeated trial and error. By repeating each scene with different emotional objectives, the content of the scene finally began to take shape. The actors were able to explore the scene as a compassionate conversation in which Lois consoles Henry, and also as an overtly sexual scene in which Lois attempts to seduce Henry. Experimenting with such opposite ends of the spectrum allowed the actors to find what moments and techniques worked to achieve their goals, while discovering where the motivating drives of the characters originated. Everything that could help determine the behavioral characteristics of each character was thoroughly explored during this phase of rehearsals, and ultimately the actors discovered the reason and source of Lois's unhealthy and misguided attraction to Henry.

Repeatedly performing scenes with increasingly different objectives and tactics allowed the actors to discover several of the more problematic relationships in the play. The personal and business dynamic between Tad and Lulu, the social order of the

television studio, and the sometimes nurturing relationship between Lois and Ruby were extensively explored to help the actors find reasons behind the characters' decisions. Such repeated exploration of character allowed the actors to discover clear motivations and intentions by eliminating the behavioral or psychological choices which did not clarify the characters' actions.

This period of rehearsal was also used to explore the expressiveness of the actors' bodies in the performance space. Most notably, rehearsal became a time to foster a clear understanding of the necessary body awareness and movement techniques required to perform in a thrust theatre. The majority of the cast was familiar with the Mabree stage, but one actor had never worked in the space and the others needed subtle reminders. These rehearsals permitted the actors to explore their bodies in the space, allowing them to understand how their interaction on the Mabree stage shaped the communal story they were attempting to tell.

The focus on storytelling was further developed in the sculptural explorations conducted during this phase of the rehearsal process. As discussed in Chapter Two, Carlson's theories of memory and ghosting in the theatre were important to the directorial interpretation of the production. In the same manner that the 1920s set remained as a ghosted image during part two, the blocking and sculpture of the actors' bodies needed to recall and recycle gestures, poses, and sculpture from part one. As stated by Carlson: "The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the process of recycling and recollection" (2). Specific sculptural poses, character mannerisms, and character relationships from the 1920s scenes were recreated and then used as guides to shape those

of the 1950s scenes. Each of the actors in part two and three were asked to attend the rehearsals of part one to observe imagery, poses, and actions utilized by their character's part one counterpart. For example, the actress playing Lulu was asked to closely watch the actress playing Ruby. She was asked to be aware of Ruby's mannerisms, the way she walked, sat, spoke, and interacted with others. The actress was then asked to utilize these visual cues in building her own character, so that a connection could be formed between the world of the 1920s and the 1950s. The individual examples of this repeated imagery were very subtle, yet each occurrence created another layer of meaning in the production and aided in connecting the various parts of the play. Although the audience could not identify every imagistic reference, the presence of these moments fostered a feeling of the familiar, of the past returning and maintaining its importance in the present.

Despite the meaningful exploration and progress made during this phase of the rehearsal process, it was not without its difficulties. Many of the strides made in creating intimately connected scenes were minimized by the lack of technical elements. Without the necessary scenic units and props the actors were unable to escape the feeling of a rehearsal and imagine themselves within the world of the play. In this phase of the rehearsal process the actors should have been practicing on the actual set with real props, yet they were still seated on wooden rehearsal stools using plastic bottles instead of coffee cups. Although new scenic and prop pieces were added daily, many did not arrive quickly enough for the actors to incorporate them into the production. While the scenery and the props were problematic, ultimately these elements were outside of the director's and actors' control.

Even with the addition of props, the actors continued to struggle with the variation in acting styles. This was specifically noticeable during part two's teleplay rehearsal and during the whole of part three. All of the actors had trouble distinguishing between realistic acting and the exaggerated realism called for in the 1950s teleplay. The actors' initial instinct was to perform the scene in a completely melodramatic style, but the result was unsatisfactory. As the actors continued to struggle, further video research of live teleplays were gathered and shown to provide the cast with specific examples of period acting styles. An acting professor was also asked to attend rehearsals to watch and give notes to the actors. From watching the videos and by utilizing the professor's suggestions the actors' were finally able to perform the variations in acting style required by the play.

On the fifth week, technical rehearsals began. During this phase, the focus on the actors' work became secondary as the technical elements were integrated into the production. However, with the addition of sound, lighting, and costumes, the actors began to exhibit an urgency in their performance, and they began to recognize the boundaries of the stage and how to fully utilize the entire performance space. The actors' performances also became more nuanced and compelling with the addition of the technical elements. Specifically the costumes and lighting helped to unify the production, and create a sense of completion. However, nothing was as helpful to the continuity of the performance as the instillation of the televisions and the copious rehearsal of the scenic transitions, specifically in part two. The scenic transitions provided a through line to the production and helped the actors to visualize the work as a completed whole rather than a series of loosely connected scenes. With the inclusion of

the technical elements and the impending opening date, the actors finally began to fully interact with each other. Notes that had been given previously were finally applied to the actors work. Questions regarding line readings and motivations that had plagued the actors earlier suddenly became clear. The actors became more willing to explore the new, clearly defined space with their acting partners.

The dress rehearsals and the performances of the play also proved to be interesting in terms of the actors' progression. Unquestionably, the cast benefitted from the inclusion of all technical elements, but the most important phase of the rehearsal process occurred with the arrival of a preview audience. The audience was able to provide honest feedback and reactions to the humorous and dramatic moments of the production and to the ability of the ensemble to effectively tell the story of *Ruby Sunrise*. Receiving reactions from a live, friendly audience prepared the actors for the production run to come and the response gave them a sense of how the play might be received. The preview audience alerted the actors to laugh lines, the need to pause for laughter, and ultimately whether or not their performances risked becoming overly dramatic and whether the dramatic material would achieve the intended emotional impact. Those moments that did not receive an appropriate audience reaction were rehearsed after previews and slight but necessary changes were made to the production.

During the performance run of *The Ruby Sunrise*, the actors continued to make subtle changes in their performance, yet instead of fully committing to the improvement of the production, many of the actors allowed the audiences' reaction to alter their performances. Unfortunately, some of the actors began to overemphasize the dramatic moments in the production, while beginning to hold excessively for laughter. These

pauses began to lengthen the production, adding roughly ten to fifteen minutes over the course of the run. While this did not drastically alter the play's dramatic content, it did disrupt the well-rehearsed comedic and dramatic tempo of the play, and marred the clear and concise performance established during rehearsals.

Conclusion

Encapsulating the major thematic, structural, and memory laden concerns present in Rinne Groff's *The Ruby Sunrise* required a highly focused and well-structured plan of action. The rehearsal environment fostered each actor's discovery of the scripts most important thematic elements as well as the behavioral traits of their characters, allowing them to synthesize these ideas in a manner that best suited their individual progress. As the actors formulated and solidified their unique behavioral and psychological motivations, the continued focus on exploring relationships and the group dynamic promoted a cohesive focus for the entire production.

The Ruby Sunrise presents deeply complicated characters desperately struggling to achieve their goals in the face of adversity. Insuring that each actor fully grasped the characters' complex compulsions and conflicted actions was a crucial part of the rehearsal process. Yet beyond the development of authentic characters, other factors became necessary in the delivery of Groff's story. Through the act of storytelling exercises in rehearsals, the actors were able to gain an understanding of how stories are told while building a sense of community between the director and fellow actors. Additionally, the presence and repeated use of memory and ghosting endowed every moment, every gesture, and every action with the weight and meaning of each preceding moment. The story was built, experienced, and told by actors that became engrained in

the audience's collective memory. By participating in extensive explorations of character, memory, and community the actors were prepared to engage the audience in a deeply compelling work rooted in the act of storytelling.

CHAPTER FIVE

Production Analysis

Baylor University Theatre's production of *The Ruby Sunrise* was performed to sold-out houses, and audience feedback was overwhelmingly positive. While this response was encouraging, audience response is only one way of gauging a play's success. Evaluating the contributions of the director and the designers is crucial in determining the manner in which the play was produced and whether the production team achieved the director's intended results. These directorial foci include: storytelling, the integration of technology, the blending of acting styles, and the desire for an uncluttered production. This chapter will evaluate the directorial decisions made in Baylor University's production of *The Ruby Sunrise*, examining how these specific contributions affected the creative process, how the director helped to influence the production in both a positive and negative manner, and what knowledge was gleaned from the production.

Storytelling

Throughout this thesis, the importance of storytelling as a major thematic element in *The Ruby Sunrise* has been thoroughly discussed, and not surprisingly it was also the greatest strength of the production as every design and production element was informed by this theme. The clearest example of how storytelling contributed to the production was in the director's use of actor warm-up exercises that focused on the creation and telling of personal stories. The constant focus on stories, both those in the script as well

as the actors' own tales, served to unite the ensemble and create a cohesive company that understood the importance of the oral tradition in *The Ruby Sunrise*.

In addition to its use as a community building exercise for the actors, storytelling was also incorporated into the conception and creation of technical elements, especially in the scenic design which worked in harmony with the story being told. The majority of the production took place in intimate scenes that were small and uncluttered with a wide variety of scenic elements. The barn and the kitchen were sparse but appropriate, communicating the important elements of the play without including unnecessary and confusing details. The same was true of the individual scenic units for part two. The offices and coffee shops were minimalistic, containing only the scenic elements and props necessary to tell the story concisely. As part two shifted into the studio, which filled the entire stage, the majority of the elements (with the exception of the technical table) also assisted in the communication of the story. Potentially, *The Ruby Sunrise* could be staged with overtly realistic scenery, but the scenic designs used in Baylor's production maintained a simplicity that allowed the story to be told in the most efficient manner possible.

The dissemination of humanity's past and oral traditions through storytelling also produced the greatest inspiration for the director and designers: namely, the concept of "ghosting." The conceptual metaphor that shaped the designers' initial work was stained glass, but after numerous discussions, the use of stained glass as the controlling visual metaphor was abandoned in favor of ghosting. This concept provided a more concrete metaphor than stained glass and gave both actors and designers a clear and concise way to approach the production. Using this metaphor, the actors understood how elements of

the past often resurface to shape the present, and they discovered how movements and gestures could be inherited from other characters to serve as subtle visual signposts to the audience. Additionally, the use of stage crew/actors costumed as 1950s television studio crew aided in the sense of ghosting. The actors that played the film crew in part three were also charged with changing the scenery and props between each scene of part two. This not only helped to establish smooth transitions between the scenes, but also provided another example of reoccurring bodies referenced by Marvin Carlson. The appearance of these ghosted bodies in addition to the ghosting found in the major characters, created a deeply connected and layered production built upon the repetition of familiar bodies and images. The idea of ghosting led designers to highlight important moments in the play and to recycle specific technical elements in order to activate the audience's memory of the past. By emphasizing the outline of the barn and farmhouse set, reusing specific lighting effects, reclaiming images and silhouettes, and recreating character mannerisms and traits, both designers and actors used ghosting to reveal how the past shapes and informs the process of storytelling.

While ghosting was incredibly helpful in making acting and design decisions, the metaphor was not utilized to create an active connection between the two time periods. Ghosting is passive and based on the audiences' memory and connection to past images and events. For the actors, the recreation of attitudes and gestures mirrored in the characters of both eras was essential in providing continuity, but the use of the ghosting metaphor did little to address the compulsions that drove each of the characters to complete their goals. This is most notably seen in the relationship between Ruby and Lulu. The characters' need to accomplish their goals is an incredibly important and

active desire that was not fully born out in the production. Furthermore, the use of repeated gestures and poses as memory symbols did not help to drive the play's action forward or aid in the storytelling process. While the ghosted qualities created multiple layers of meaning in the production, their use as dynamic tools for the actors was minimal.

Similarly, the ghosting metaphor did not help to ensure that the designs actively contributed to the process of storytelling. The designer incorporated the scenic elements of part one into the design of part two, but much like the recycling of familiar gestures, the remaining framework of the set was not incorporated in such a way that would comment on or enhance the action of part two. Instead of serving as a present and active reminder of the past, essential in depicting Lulu's quest, the set became a mere backdrop that was detached from the action of the play. Since the actors did not engage with the ghosted set, the connection between the 1920s and the 1950s was not made apparent to the audience, but rather left to chance. As memory is such an essential part of the play, creating a set that was more universal for the entire play or allowing the actors to engage more with the set would have formed a stronger connection between the two time periods. The inactive qualities of ghosting did not diminish the quality of the scenic design or acting but the production could have been enhanced by utilizing the metaphor to establish a more visceral and apparent connection between the two eras, providing a more present means of engaging the audiences' memory.

Maintaining an open and creative atmosphere during the early stages of the production process allowed the initial conceptual metaphor of stained glass to be replaced in favor of a more suitable guiding concept. Altering the production's conceptual focus

served as a reminder that change and compromise often accompany the creative process. Allowing the play to be reactively informed by challenges and new avenues of thought further insured that the production did not become stagnant or stale. Ultimately, the alterations inspired the designers and actors, helped reveal the deeper meanings of the play, and allowed the director to realize his overall vision. The ghosting metaphor offered a more effective way to shape the production.

Technological Integration

Part three of *The Ruby Sunrise* begins with the stage note: “The following scene is played on the Studio Set and simultaneously shown live on a Television Screen (or screens)” (60). This statement highlights the need to integrate multimedia into the production. Groff calls for the use of the television screen in part three, but early in the conception process, the director made the decision to incorporate multimedia in other ways. The play is predominately about television and the director felt it was fitting that the television set, in some form or another, appeared throughout the production.

Initially, the director and designer agreed that multiple television sets were needed to assure visibility in the Mabey Theatre; however, the screens could not be part of the performance space since they would draw focus away from the action on stage. To avoid the awkwardness of actually installing multiple set during the performance, the screens needed to remain in place and be incorporated into the overall design. To utilize the multimedia tools at the disposal of the production staff, the director decided that the televisions would be used in three ways: to project the introduction to the teleplay, to reveal the live video feed in part three, and to air commercials during scene breaks. By utilizing the televisions in this manner, the problem of integrating the television screens

into the production was solved. In retrospect, the effect of the television screens worked exactly as intended, not only engaging the memory of the audience through nostalgic recollection, but also underscoring the action of each scene.

The use of the television sets also made it possible to use the pre-recorded commercials as multimedia scene changes. During the technical rehearsal phase, the commercials also provided the scene crew with an understanding of the limited amount of time between scene changes. The commercials could not be lengthened, so the crew was required to work within the constraints of the time allotted by each commercial. Understanding that the running time of the commercial was not subject to change, the crew significantly altered their approach to the scenic transitions assuring that each action produced optimal results and minimized the time needed to change scenery. In this manner, the length and pace of the transitions was established by the commercials rather than the run crew. While this approach may not be ideal for all productions, it was essential in building the smooth transitions in *The Ruby Sunrise*.

Despite the eventual success of the televisions, their inclusion in the production was often fraught with challenges in both conception and application. After deciding to use television sets throughout the production, the director considered a variety of possibilities regarding the integration of the monitors into the performance space. A discussion of the televisions' installation and placement is discussed here rather than in chapter three because the director never considered the television screens as scenic units. Although several of the early incarnations of the designs included the televisions on the stage, the televisions were not intended to be a part of the scenic design and were therefore outside the designer's domain. Ultimately, the director wanted the televisions

to be separated from the performance space and the action on the stage to be distanced from the audience in order to emphasize the theme of storytelling.

To counteract the cinematic qualities associated with a single large projection screen, a decision was initially made to install multiple small television sets in different sections of the Mabey Theatre and to place television screens masked by the façade of older television sets at the edge of the performance space where no action would occur. This idea was quickly rejected because it became apparent that the screens would minimize stage space and block the audiences' view of the action onstage. Consequently, to insure that every audience member would have clear visual access to at least one television set, the designer and director decided to mount two 50" television screens on the proscenium arch and one 32" screen in each of the vomes. An 18" set was also mounted on the technical table and masked to look like period studio instrumentation. Only the television screen that was actually a part of the onstage performance was masked; the remaining screens, which appeared outside of the performance area, were left unmasked, thereby maintaining their modern appearance. The modern look of the television screens served as a constant reminder to the audience that they were a contemporary audience watching a play about a 1950s television studio team attempting to create a teleplay about the 1920s. The production became not only an exploration of the 1950s looking back on the 1920s, but of 2011 looking back on and exploring both time periods. The exploration of multiple time periods provided through the delineation of audience and performance spaces was a very subtle and positive addition to the production.

While the director and designers were ultimately pleased with the placement of the television screens, their procurement and installation proved problematic. Finding the actual televisions screens was one of the most difficult concerns that the production team faced. After a month of searching every possible location, the technical director was able to procure the four largest televisions from the university and the final television (for the technical table) from a student. The process of properly installing each television and making sure that they were all connected to the same output was a difficult process requiring no less than five hundred feet of coaxial cable. Despite the difficulties encountered, the televisions were mounted and fully operational by the beginning of technical rehearsals, which made the integration of technology incredibly smooth.

Other challenges also arose because of the televisions. While the overall aesthetic appearance of the televisions worked for the production, the picture quality and aspect ratio distorted the quality of the televised images. Although the picture quality was, at first, too sharp and clear for a 1950s television broadcast, projecting the signal to five different monitors through five hundred feet of coaxial cable served to distort the image enough to be believable. There were also challenges that related to the aspect ratio of the televisions and their visibility. Today's modern wide screen televisions have a much different look than the televisions of the 1950s, which included a bulbous screen and a smaller aspect ratio. The projection of dated commercials onto a modern wide screen television created distortion and cropping issues. The images were often blurry and difficult to see, even from the best seats in the Mabee auditorium. Problems with visibility and visual clarity were never fully solved.

Although some of the deficiencies in visibility could have been resolved through the addition of more televisions (specifically on the “ring” in the television studio) and a more powerful signal boost, a more effective solution may have resulted in procuring re-mastered commercials that were discovered by the designers after the opening of the production. These reproductions would have limited problems of clarity and distortion but due to time constraints, they were never implemented. In the final analysis, however, the placement of the television screens created the desired intimacy without being intrusive or distracting. Allowing the final moment to be shown on a movie style screen would have removed the intimacy from the space and turned the private act of watching television into the very public act of viewing cinema. The two mediums are drastically different and the utilization of a single large screen would not have created a more effective means of dissemination. However, it would have undermined Groff’s choice to create an intimate work about televisions rather than cinema.

Blending of Acting Styles

In *The Ruby Sunrise*, Groff’s use of varied acting styles creates an interesting challenge for the director and actors. Part one utilizes language reminiscent of the teleplays of the 1950s and requires a dated and exaggerated acting style. Part two incorporates both realistic and melodramatic acting styles during the on-stage rehearsal scene. Groff further complicates the acting requirements of part three by combining elements of realism and melodrama in both the live and filmed moments. Groff’s play is not merely divided into three individual sections that require their own acting style, but rather, it is an interconnected work that achieves humor and dramatic interest from the seamless blending of disparate performance styles.

The actors who were cast in the production had previously received a great deal of training in realistic acting, and they were confident in developing truthful behavior and appropriate motivations for their characters. While the actors felt comfortable performing realism, their ability to perform the other acting styles required by the script was less assured. Consequently, developing the appropriate approach to acting in parts one and two drew the most attention in rehearsals. A large portion of the rehearsal process was dedicated to experimenting with character subtext and the emotional intensity of each scene. Subtleties in character behavior and intentions slowly emerged as the director gave constructive notes and requested that the actors make bolder, more authentic choices.

This process continued with the blocking of the filmed teleplay scene. Acting for the camera is much different than acting for the stage. The camera can be imagined as the eye of the spectator, which produces a two dimensional image where minute details and extraneous movements are focused and intensified. Stage plays on the other hand rely upon the individual audience member to act as the camera; the individual chooses his or her own perspective from which to observe the action of the play. The acting in part three needed to address this difference, to be visually interesting, and to maintain a sense of believability. Through continuous work with the actors and several consultations with an acting teacher from the theatre department, who was also familiar with camera work, many of the problematic shifts in acting styles were handled effectively.

The effort to unify the acting styles in *The Ruby Sunrise* ultimately met with varying results. Because of the high levels of actor training, the realistic acting in the production worked well. The actors were able to create rich, full-bodied characters and

provide deeply nuanced performances. The overtly melodramatic acting of the rehearsal scenes added humor to lighten the often dramatic content of part two. Additionally, the subtly nuanced film acting in part three successfully captured the look and feel of the teleplays and television programs of the 1950s.

The blending of performance styles was skillfully handled throughout most of the production, but the acting in part one was unsatisfactory. The majority of part one is grounded in realism, but the flat and stylized dialogue that Groff infuses into each scene subtly undermines its authenticity and believability. The variations in the play's language, structure, and style were difficult to describe to the actors and they were even more difficult to master in performance. In the world premiere of *The Ruby Sunrise*, Oskar Eustis embraced the divergent qualities of the play, creating a stylized design for part one that employed several special effects, such as a turn table that rotated as Ruby and Henry kissed for the first time and drastic light shifts that created a magical, fairytale quality. Eustis's choices confused some critics who claimed that the production did not maintain a consistent style. Though Eustis's directorial decisions accounted for the script's deviation from pure realism, the fairytale qualities of his production actually served to undermine the dramatic qualities of Ruby's story, distancing the audience.

In the staging of Baylor University Theatre's production, the divergent qualities of flatness and distance were handled in a less magical manner, but audience reception to part one was the same. Audience members, specifically theatre appreciation students, found part one confusing, the acting style perplexing, and the characters of Ruby, Henry, and Lois often unconvincing. The exaggerated acting served to distance the audience from the play's action and kept viewers from connecting with the characters on an

emotional level. By utilizing an acting style that distanced the audience from the major events of part one, the gravity of the play's memory foundation was minimized, creating a weak groundwork for part two. While the director decided to align the acting style of part one with the melodramatic style of 1950s television, utilizing a more concrete, realistic acting approach would have probably assured a closer connection and empathy between actors and audience. Despite the drastically different approaches between Eustis' staging and Baylor University Theatre's production, neither fully solved the dilemma of Groff's stylistic strategy.

Production Values

Stories suffer from poor and disorganized telling. Insuring that Groff's work, a play focused on the act of storytelling, would not falter from a lack of preparation and messy execution necessitated that the story was told in a concise and direct manner. Throughout rehearsals, the director focused on creating simple, provocative blocking, free from any extraneous or superfluous details. The director's most important task was to assist actors in clarifying the play's action and in telling the story of Ruby Sunrise in a visually entertaining way. Overall the actors were able to tell the story in a clear, concise manner and the designers created an appropriate and effective setting for the play. Through the use of minimal scenic units that possessed sharp, clean lines and were free from unnecessary props or furniture, the designers created a theatrical world that was at once simple, striking, and picturesque.

While the designs and the acting worked well independently, together they often led to issues of clarity. The director's goal was to ensure that the production flowed seamlessly from one scene to another with precision. This required close observation of

the actors' work and demanded that the director constantly "drill" actors on work problem areas that did not seem believable. While several of the acting moments required repeated and extended work, the transitions between scenes benefited the most from constant drilling. Both actors and scenic crew drilled the transitions repeatedly in order to achieve continuity and efficiency in the scene shifts. During these extended rehearsal sessions it was also crucial that open lines of communication were maintained between actors, crew, and designers. The director's vision of how the scenes and transitions should appear was discussed at length, which allowed the actors and production team to take ownership in the show and also clarified their place in the overall process. These sessions required patience and dedication to assure that the director's vision was realized and that the entire production team understood their place in the scene shifting process.

Despite the vigilance exhibited to insure the smooth run of the play, certain elements of the production did not operate as effectively as possible. Part one in particular contained several problematic transitions between the barn and kitchen scenes. Upon the conclusion of each scene, the actors could have easily walked from one set piece to the other without exiting the playing space, but since the transitions were not conducted in a full blackout, the actors were still visible to the audience. Allowing the actors to break the established fourth wall of the set could have created a jarring effect on the audience's suspension of disbelief. In order to avoid breaking realistic conventions, the actors were required to exit the playing space and reenter after each scene. While the time of these transitions was minimized in most cases, several of them required extended blackouts. To fill these periods of dead space, the preceding scenes should have been lengthened by several seconds in order to highlight the falling action. For example in

scene five, after Henry has lashed out at Lois, the actress must immediately appear in scene six with no time to exit the stage. In the staging of the production she was given an extended blackout to exit, cross backstage, and reenter for the next scene while no action was occurring on stage. In order to minimize this lengthy transition, Lois could have exited after Henry attempted an apology. The lights would have slowly faded on Henry contemplating his next move while the actress playing Lois made her way to the barn set. In this way the lengthy transition and dead space could have been minimized by including a the short dumb show that capped the scene's action.

In addition to a few problems with transitions in part one, the ending of the production never achieved the desired effect. The final scene of the production presented a series of beautiful moments that worked well, but its full potential was limited by its placement amidst the hectic action occurring on stage. It is entirely possible that the failure of this scene to capture the director's vision originates in the manner in which the play is scripted. In the final moments of the play, Groff depicts the filming of the teleplay of Ruby's life, and calls for an excessive amount of action on the stage. Not only does the live action of the teleplay occur on stage, but the televisions are also projecting the live images of the actors while the production crew is filming the scene. At this point, Ruby enters the studio, explores the space, and has a final moment with Lulu before the play ends. There is simply too much action going on in the final moments to stage an intimate, emotional moment between Ruby and Lulu. While several different strategies were used to shift focus to the mother and daughter, ultimately the majority of these tactics only served to overly stylize the moment and to decrease the scene's clarity.

Achieving the correct focus in the final moments of the play was the director's most difficult challenge. There are several reasons for this, the most pressing of which was the director's unfamiliarity with lighting vocabulary. Unable to effectively and accurately describe the desired lighting effects to the designer, the director was left with a cluttered, un-sculpted look for the final studio scene. There was simply no clear focus. Further preparation and lighting knowledge by the director would have been extremely helpful in creating the magical quality called for in the script and in maintaining a clearly delineated focus throughout the entire scene.

Additionally, staging the final moment was problematic due to the amount of studio scenery and props present on the stage. The final staging positioned a camera on each side of the stage filming the action in the kitchen and the barn, while studio crew filled the remaining space. Positioning the cameras and crew in this manner opened the center of the stage for Ruby's entrance (Appendix A Fig. A.13). This moment was not as magical as it should have been, but Ruby's entrance was visible to the entire audience. Ruby explored the studio space before standing beside Suzie during the final monologue. Positioned just outside the camera frame, the "real" Ruby stood next to the actress playing Ruby in the teleplay. This moment along with the final interaction between Ruby and Lulu worked remarkably well, but their visibility amongst the chaotic action on stage was minimized (Appendix A Fig. A.14). While all audience response has indicated that the final moment worked well, and beautifully revealed storytelling's power to connect mother and daughter, the staging of this scene was problematic.

Ultimately, Groff crafts the final moment of play with all its chaotic action to alter the audience's potential reception. With such an innately action filled scene there may

not be a perfect way to stage the production's ending. Attempting to maintain stage focus on Ruby as a version of her story is being told through the filming of a teleplay was challenging at best. However, in spite of the potential for the audience to overlook Ruby's entrance, the final scene of the play contained some of the most effectively and beautifully staged moments in the production.

Conclusion

Despite positive audience reception for *The Ruby Sunrise*, understanding the directorial contributions to the production was most crucial in assessing the success of the production. Despite the existence of several challenges throughout the production process, the extensive work involved in mounting the production of *The Ruby Sunrise* produced positive results that exceeded expectations in nearly every way.

Through the use of metaphors like “ghosting” and “stained glass,” the production team created a compelling work exploring humanity's oral traditions, the act of storytelling as a vital thematic element in the production. Storytelling, such a critical element in Groff's work, provided the foundation from which the entire play was constructed. Groff's play explores how stories are told, how those stories affect humanity, and how the past is altered in the hopes of creating a better future. By examining the compelling story of the vibrant characters in *The Ruby Sunrise*, Rinne Groff speaks to the innately human capacity to endure. Amidst the failure, loss, and pain of the story, hope and optimism emerge. We are left with the hope that humanity's stories—their lives—will continue to be meaningful, long after they are gone.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Initial Design Imagery



Fig. A.1. Stained Glass with Reflected Image



Fig. A.2. Light Refracted Through Stained Glass



Fig. A.3. Stained Glass (White Light)

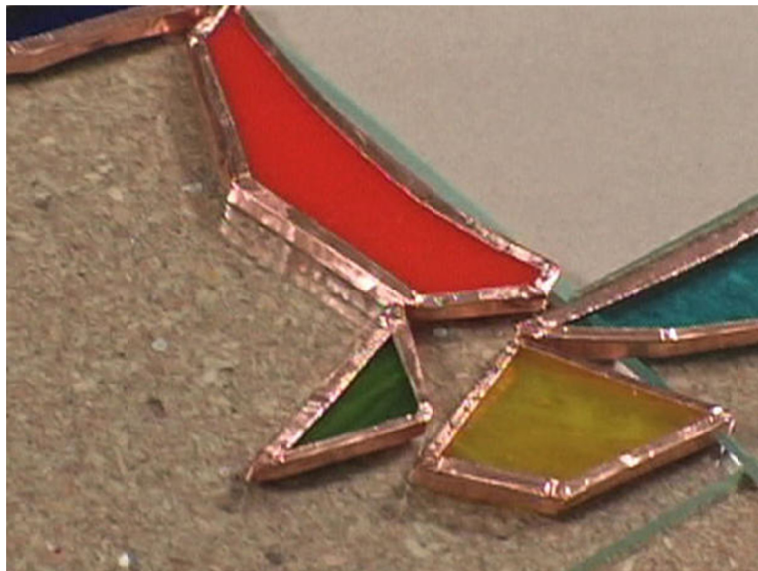


Fig. A.4. Stained Glass Components

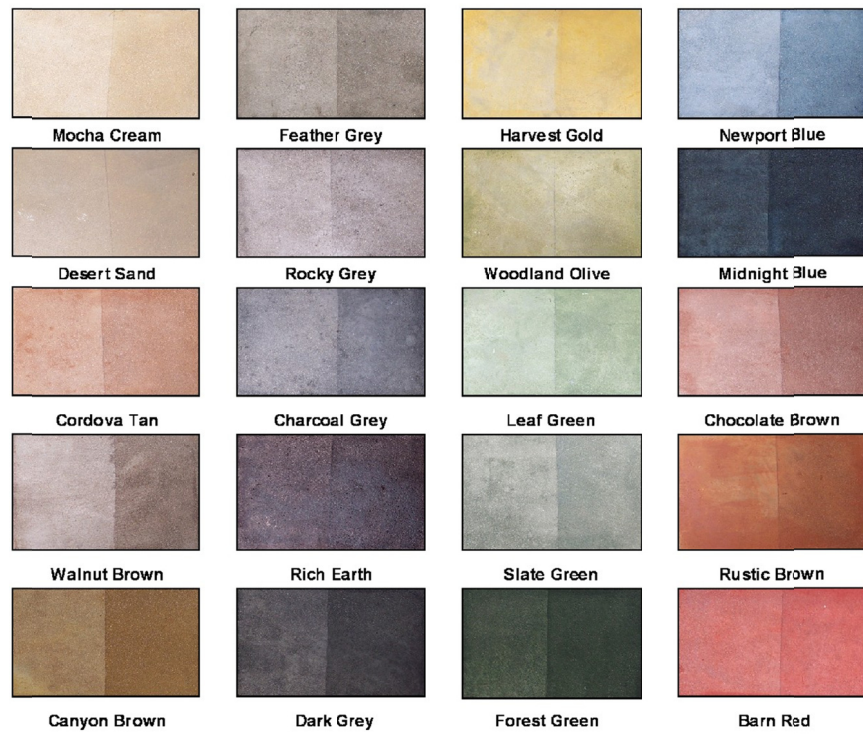


Fig. A.5. Earth Tone Color Palette



Fig. A.6. Color and Texture Palette – 1920s



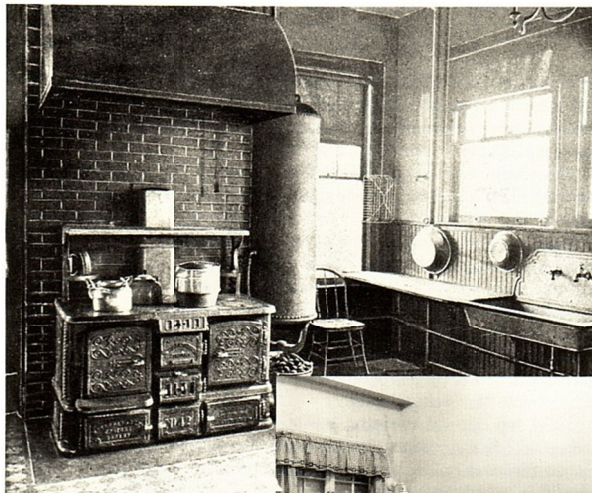
Fig. A.7. Wood Texture – 1920s



Fig. A.8. Farm House Inspiration – Appearance, Line, Texture



Fig. A.9. Rustic Kitchen – 1920s



Model kitchens. A quarter of a century separates these two "model kitchens," indicating how technology and new consumer products—including gas stoves, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners—changed housework. The wood stove in an 1899 kitchen, for example, stands in sharp contrast to the 1924 showcase electric stove. Nevertheless, some innovations were far beyond the means of many American families; over one-third of all American households still had wood or coal stoves in 1940.



Fig. A.10. Turn of the Century/1950s Kitchen Comparison

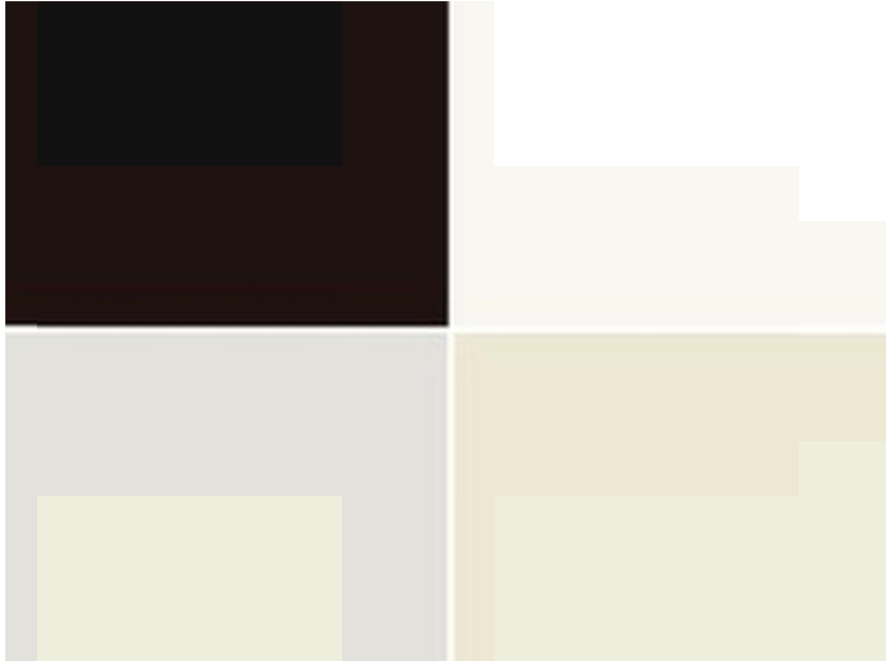


Fig. A.11. Value Color Palette



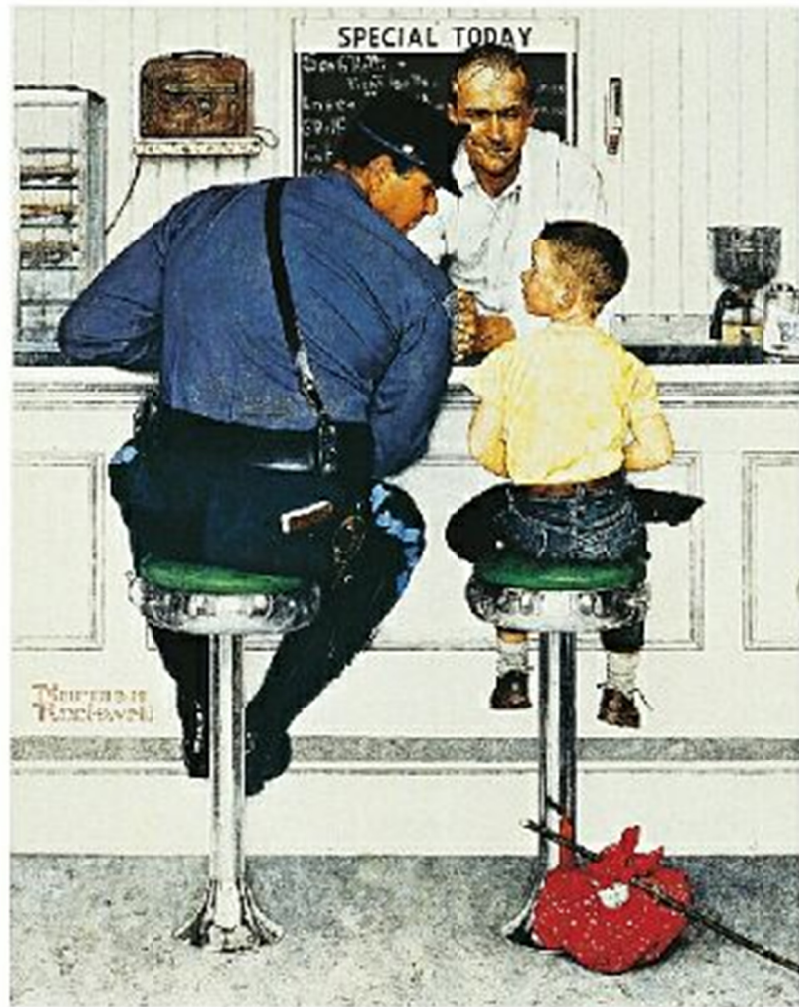
Fig. A.12. Office – 1950s



Fig. A.13. Executive Office – 1950s



Fig. A.14. Office – 1950s



NORMAN ROCKWELL
The Runaway

Fig. A.15. Norman Rockwell – The Runaway



Fig. A.16. Norman Rockwell – Fixing a Flat



Fig. A.17. Norman Rockwell – Homecoming Marine



Fig. A.18. Norman Rockwell – The Diving Board

APPENDIX B

Scenic Design

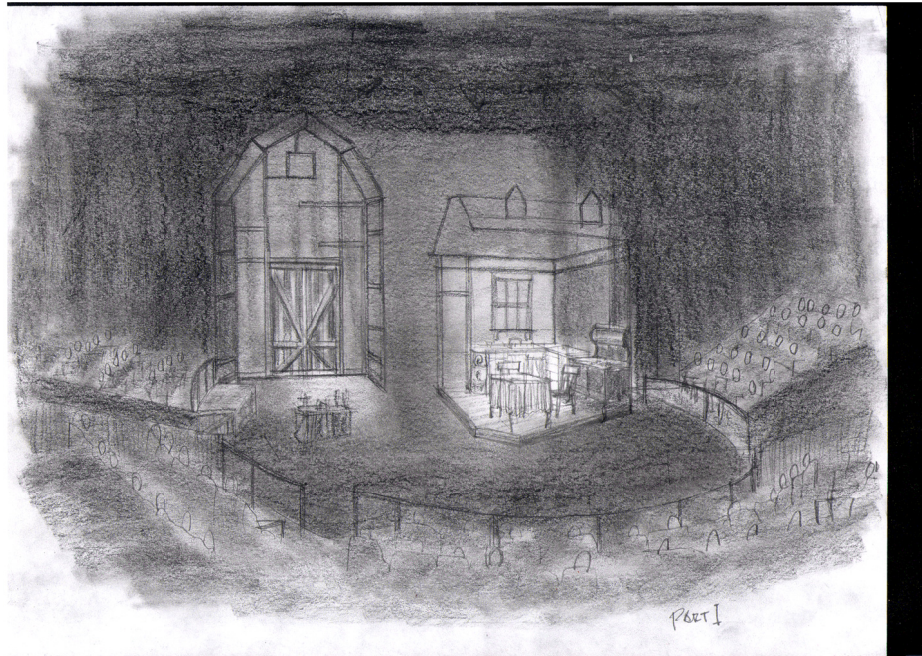


Fig. B.1. Design Part One



Fig. B.2. Part One – The Barn

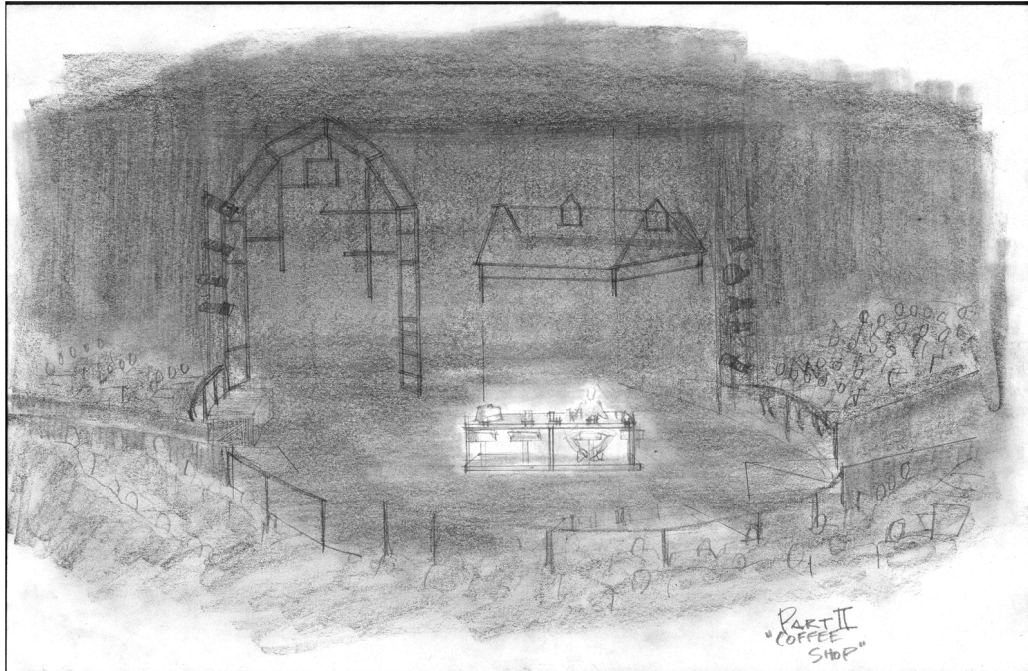


Fig. B.3. Ghosted Set – Rendering: The Scenic Elements of the 1920s remain in the 1950s



Fig. B.4. Ghosted Set – The Scenic Elements of the 1920s remain in the 1950s



Fig. B.5. The 1950s Studio Set

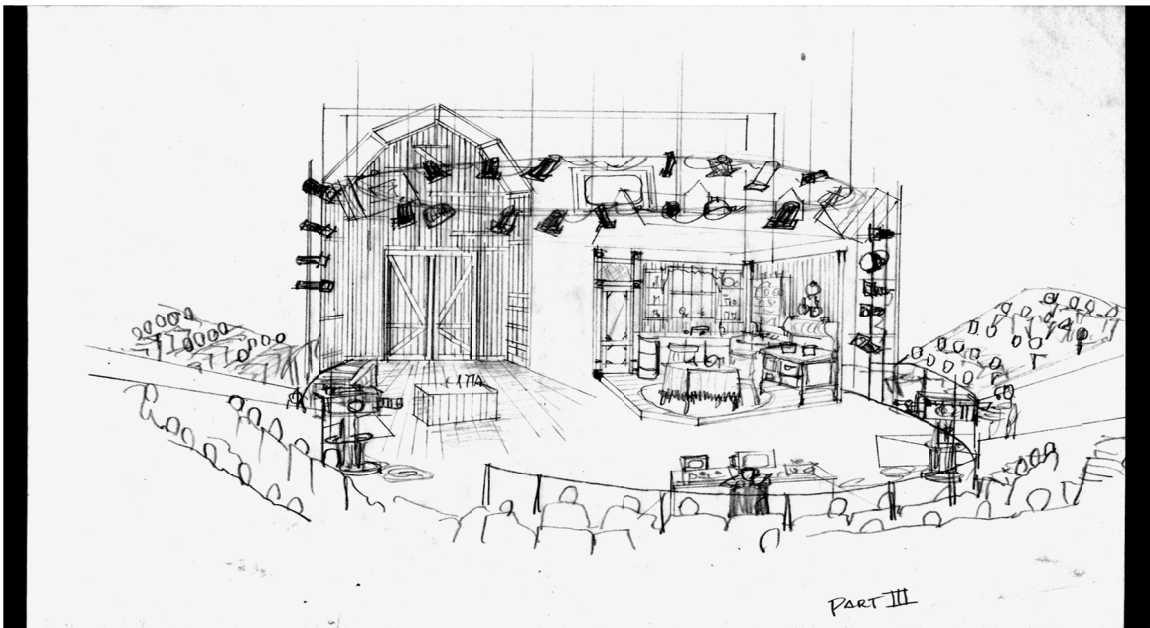


Fig. B.6. The Ring – Rendering



Fig. B.7. The Ring

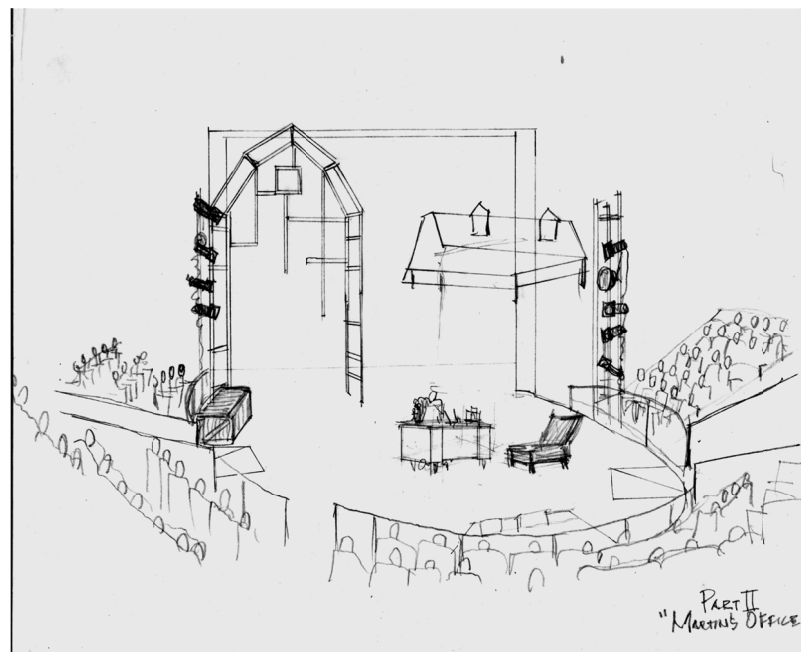


Fig. B.8. Office and Ghosted Imagery from Part One

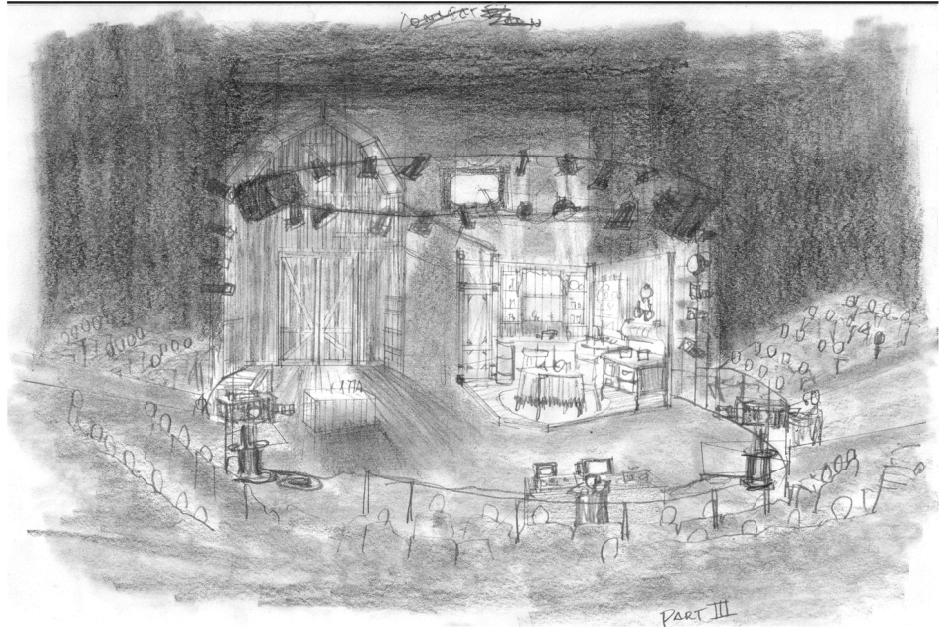


Fig. B.9. The Studio

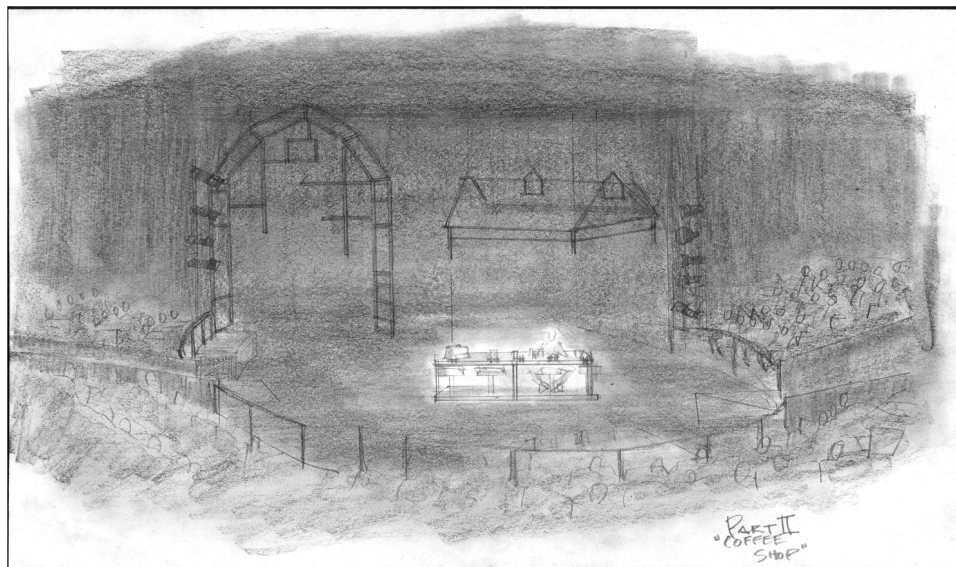


Fig. B.10. The Diner Counter – Rendering



Fig. B.11. The Diner Counter



Fig. B.12. The Tech Table



Fig. B.13. Studio Set with Televisions – The Final Moment



Fig. B.14. The Studio Crew

APPENDIX C

Costume Design



Fig. C.1. Ladies wear – 1920s



Fig. C.2. Ladies Wear – 1920s



Fig. C.3. Ladies Wear – 1920s

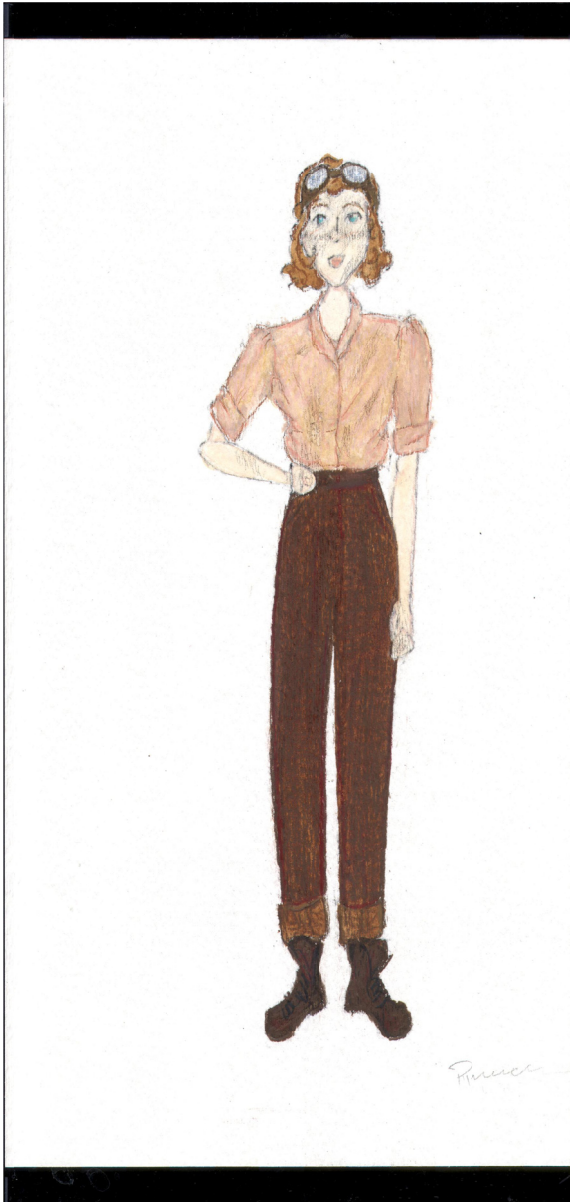


Fig. C.4. Ruby Rendering



Fig. C.5. Ruby Costume



Fig. C.6. Liz Hunter Rendering



Fig. C.7. Liz Hunter Costume



Fig. C.8. Lulu Rendering



Fig. C.9. Lulu Costume



Fig. C.10. Ethel Rendering



Fig. C.11. Ethel Costume



Fig. C.12. Wig Skullcap Line

APPENDIX D

Lighting Design



Fig. D.1. Beams of Light



Fig. D.2. Beams of Light



Fig. D.3. Beams of Light



Fig. D.4. Initial Firefly Consideration



Fig. D.5. Firefly LED



Fig. D.6. Firefly LED



Fig. D.7. Firefly Lighting Effect



Fig. D.8. LED Blowtorch



Fig. D.9. Dark Lighting in Part Two

APPENDIX E

Props Designs

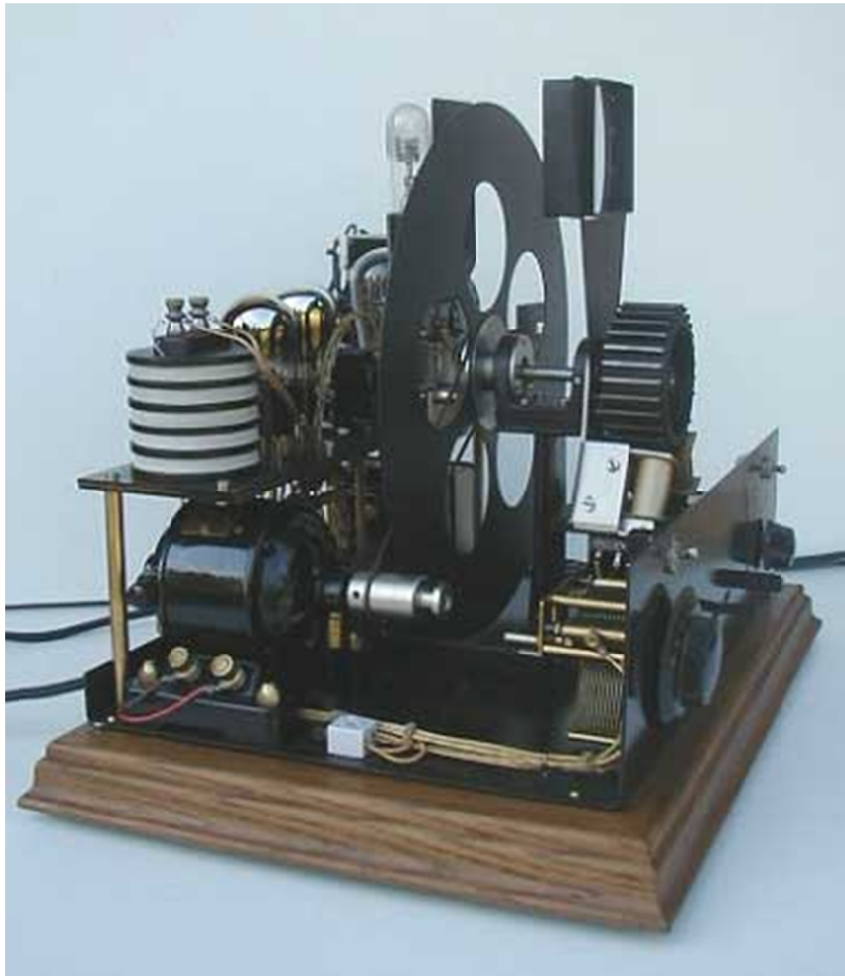


Fig. E.1. Farnsworth Prototype



Fig. E.2. Red Glass Bottle



Fig. E.3. Sugar Glass Bottle

APPENDIX F

Circle Players: A 1945 Code of Ethics for Theatre Workers

1. I shall never miss a performance.
2. I shall play every performance with energy, enthusiasm and to the best of my ability regardless of size of audience, personal illness, bad weather, or even death in my family.
3. I shall forego all social activities which interfere with rehearsals or any other scheduled work at the theatre, and I shall always be on time.
4. I shall never make a curtain late by my failure to be ready on time.
5. I shall never miss an entrance.
6. I shall never leave the theatre building or the stage area until my performance is complete, unless I am excused by the stage manager; curtain calls are part of the show.
7. I shall not let the comments of friends, relatives or critics change my work without proper consultation; I shall not change lines, business, lights, properties, settings or costumes or any phase of the production without consultation with and permission of my director or producer or their agents, and I shall inform all people concerned.
8. I shall forego the gratification of my ego for the demands of the play.
9. I shall remember my business is to create illusion; therefore, I shall not break the illusion by appearing in costume and makeup off-stage or outside the theatre.
10. I shall accept my director's and producer's advice and counsel in the spirit in which it is given, for they can see the production as a whole and my work from the front.
11. I shall never "put on an act" while viewing other artists' work as a member of an audience, nor shall I make caustic criticism from jealousy or for the sake of being smart.
12. I shall respect the play and the playwright and, remembering that "a work of art is not a work of art until it is finished," I shall not condemn a play while it is in rehearsal.
13. I shall not spread rumor or gossip which is malicious and tends to reflect discredit on my show, the theatre, or any personnel connected with them-either to people inside or outside the group.
14. Since I respect the theatre in which I work, I shall do my best to keep it clean, orderly and attractive regardless of whether I am specifically assigned to such work or not.
15. I shall handle stage properties and costumes with care for I know they are part of the tools of my trade and are a vital part of the physical production.
16. I shall follow rules of courtesy, deportment and common decency applicable in all walks of life (and especially in a business in close contact with the public) when I am in the theatre, and I shall observe the rules and regulations of the theatre where I work.
17. I shall never lose my enthusiasm for theatre because of disappointments.

In addition, the document continued:

"I understand that membership in the Circle Theatre entitles me to the privilege of working, when I am so assigned, in any of the phases of a production, including: props, lights, sound, construction, house management, box office, publicity and stage managing-as well as acting. I realize it is possible I may not be cast in a part for many months, but I will not allow this to dampen my enthusiasm, since I realize without my willingness to do all other phases of theatre work, there would be no theatre for me to act in."

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