



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

and



present

# *Becky's New Car*

by Steven Dietz

March 23 - April 11, 2010 • IRT Mainstage

## ENRICHMENT GUIDE

*edited by Richard J Roberts*

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## **Becky's New Car by Steven Dietz**

Becky wants a new car. Her job is kind of a grind, her marriage is maybe a little bit stale, and her 26-year-old son still hasn't left home. But when she meets a lonely, wealthy widower, Becky realizes what she really wants is a new life. Mistaken identity meets midlife crisis as this sweet, goofy comedy bubbles over the brim of the stage.

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# Benita's New Play

by Janet Allen, Artistic Director

Charles & Benita Staadecker  
photo courtesy of Cornell University



It's a pretty joyous day when we find a smart, insightful contemporary comedy to produce! Sadly, these days, comedy seems to be relegated to serial television and romantic movies—largely disposable forms. The shelf life of a comedy in the theatre isn't all that long. In part, this makes a lot of sense; comedy is very time sensitive, and based on social mores and customs which are forever subtly changing. A comedy that hits just the right issues and edges today may seem horribly outmoded, or simply dull, in even five years. While there are timeless comedic ideas (farce elements seem never to die), social comedy, and the idiomatic language in which it is transmitted, changes practically overnight.

It's also a joyous day when that comedy comes from a playwright we enjoy, whose work we have produced: and that's the case with Steven Dietz. We opened last season with Steven's *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure*, to considerable audience enthusiasm. Consequently, we are pleased to be putting a very different piece of his into public attention in Indianapolis. We are joined in this little Steven Dietz celebration by our colleagues at the Phoenix Theatre, who are producing his *Yankee Tavern* in April—it's a rare (and planned!) occurrence to be able to see two works by the same writer, and we hope by sharing this mini-festival with the Phoenix to stir some discussion among our patrons about contemporary American playwriting.

There's another wonderful feature about this play that we didn't know about until after we had selected it for production: the story behind its creation. The play was commissioned by Seattle's A Contemporary Theatre (ACT). The funds for the commission were donated by Seattle businessman Charles Staadecker, who chose to honor his wife Benita's birthday in 2005 with a special living gift: a new play. The program, titled *New Works for the American Stage* and devised by ACT's artistic director, Kurt Beattie, seeks to match individual donors with writers to create works of art that honor the honoree as well as the artist and the art form. *Becky's New Car* is receiving 10 regional theatre productions this year (not surprising, given its delightful content and refreshing style), and the Staadeckers are traveling to see them all. While spreading the word about the joy they have experienced in helping launch the play into the world, they will encourage other arts patrons to step up to help create art work that inspires them.

In an article in the October edition of *American Theatre*, ACT artistic director Kurt Beattie noted, "This sort of thing happens all the time in classical music." (The Staadeckers' arrangement with ACT was inspired by their discovery of a similar practice at the Seattle Symphony, and the couple has since commissioned a trombone concerto from its resident composer Samuel Jones for their 25th wedding anniversary.) "If it happened more in the theatre it could be incredibly valuable, for both the artist and the philanthropist."

So, as we open *Becky's New Car*, and enjoy the play itself, we are also looking forward to meeting the folks that made it happen, and hearing first-hand the story about their role in its creation. In these challenging economic times, we need not only the laughs and the surprises that *Becky* brings us, but we need to reflect on how art gets made—one play at a time.

# Steven Dietz, playwright

Steven Dietz is one of America's most-produced contemporary playwrights. Since 1983, his 30-plus plays have been seen at over 100 regional theatres in the United States, as well as Off-Broadway. International productions have been seen in England, Japan, Germany, France, Australia, Sweden, Austria, Russia, Slovenia, Luxembourg, Greece, Argentina, Peru, Korea, Singapore, and South Africa. His work has been translated into eight languages.

Mr. Dietz received the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award for his plays *Fiction* (produced Off-Broadway by the Roundabout Theatre Company) and *Still Life with Iris*; the 2007 Edgar Award for Best Mystery Play for *Sherlock Holmes: The Final Adventure*; the PEN USA West Award in Drama for *Lonely Planet* (produced Off-Broadway at Circle Rep); and the 1995 Yomiuri Shimbun Award (the Japanese "Tony") for his adaptation of Shusaku Endo's novel, *Silence*. *Becky's New Car* was a finalist for the 2009 Steinberg New Play Award.

Mr. Dietz's other plays include *Last of the Boys* (Pulitzer and Steinberg Award nominations), *Inventing van Gogh*, *God's Country*, *Private Eyes*, *The Nina Variations*, *Trust*, *Rocket Man*, *Halcyon Days*, *Ten November*, and *Foolin' Around with Infinity*. Mr. Dietz's award-winning stage adaptations include *Honus and Me* (from Dan Gutman), *Force of Nature* (from Goethe), *Over the Moon* (from P. G. Wodehouse), *The Rememberer* (from Joyce Simmons Cheeka), *Paragon Springs* (from Ibsen), *Dracula* (from Bram Stoker), and, with Allison Gregory, *Go Dog Go!* (from P. D. Eastman).



Recent widely-produced plays include the 9/11 conspiracy thriller *Yankee Tavern* (which will be seen in April at the Phoenix Theatre in Indianapolis) and the romantic comedy *Shooting Star*. In addition, Mr. Dietz is currently at work on new plays commissioned by Steppenwolf Theatre (Chicago) and the Guthrie Theater (Minneapolis).

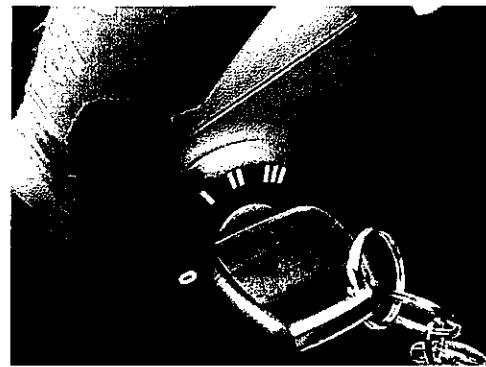
A native of Denver, Mr. Dietz and his family now divide their time between Seattle and Austin, where he teaches playwriting at the University of Texas.

# Liberation

by James Still, Director

What if Cinderella goes to the ball and stays past midnight?

I have liked, admired, and followed Steven Dietz's work as a playwright for 20 years, so it's especially sweet to find myself directing *Becky's New Car*. As a student of other writers, there's nothing like directing a play to unlock its secrets of construction, to observe and marvel at the craft of that writer's work. I like how smart Mr. Dietz is as a craftsman, and I admire that his body of work reflects a restless curiosity, a love for the theatre, and characters who aren't always what they seem and might even bare a little heart in the process.



I had the great pleasure of seeing the world premiere of *Becky's New Car* at ACT/Seattle in a wonderful production. The next morning I called Janet and said, "I saw a new Steven Dietz play and you're going to want to read this one." It's not unusual for me to see work at theatres around the country and to report my experience to Janet. In fact, I view that as part of my job, part of what I contribute to the artistic conversation that's ongoing at the IRT. As an audience member, I immediately liked *Becky's New Car* because it is direct and funny. I was also struck by its use of a unique dramatic structure to tell a good story without a bit of self-consciousness. This play requires all of us—director, designers, and actors, as well as the audience—to embrace a kind of theatrical verve at its heart. The playwright makes his intentions clear in a preface to the play: "*The play will move without transition between four primary locations.... Simply. It is not necessary, nor is it desirable, to fully depict any of the play's locales.*" Our production is a response to the playwright's liberating wishes.

Liberation (as Becky confronts in the play) is probably never as easy as it looks; and a production (like life) is an accumulation of details and choices. *Becky's New Car* has its own vocabulary and ways of telling a story, a kind of free-wheeling fast-moving comic spin that isn't afraid to be funny any more than it's afraid of having true heart. Mr. Dietz may be one of the few American playwrights who knows that sentiment isn't a bad thing, especially when there's something real at stake for the characters who risk it. Feeling and yearning turn out not to be liabilities but a wake-up call. What begins as a question gnawing at midlife ("Is this all there is?") might finally be answered with another question: "Maybe ... and isn't that wonderful?" Sometimes the best adventure of all turns out to be our own messy, tender, funny lives. By the end, it isn't just Becky's car that's new.

For me what makes *Becky's New Car* so winning (and so deceptively simple) is that it is a play about people—knowable characters who can also surprise you. And make you laugh. I'm glad to have spent time with them, and I hope you will be too.

# Zero to Sixty

## Kate Sutton-Johnson Scenic Designer

The staging dynamics for *Becky's New Car* drove the set concept and early environmental decisions more than any other style choice. The pace at which Becky's story unfolds and the undeniable sense that the various locations in her life overlap and occupy a shared space were departure points from which the set was conceived. The repeating doorways provide quick surprise entrances, while their overall effect is one of theatricality and whimsy. The set attempts to capture a contemporary, somewhat pedestrian look, while at the same time providing a highly presentational and theatrical space: 1950s rambler meets Shakespeare's Globe.



*Preliminary sketch by scenic designer Kate Sutton-Johnson.*

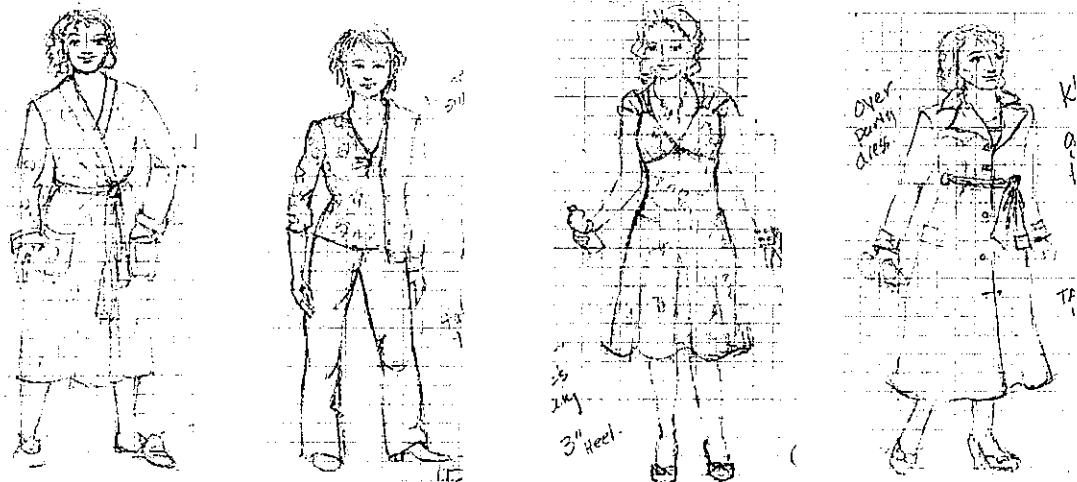
## Michael Lincoln Lighting Designer

Built into the script of *Becky's New Car* is the necessity to shift instantly from one location to the next. As the play picks up momentum in the second act, the collision of those separate realities becomes part of the humor of the play. The lighting design is the key to providing those instant shifts, so establishing them clearly and distinctly in the first act is critical. To this end, the director, the set designer, and I have collaborated to build light sources into the set, which motivate those changes. One simple example is a desk lamp that has two different bulbs on separate circuits, so that when Becky is home it's warm and inviting but when the scene pops into her cubicle at work, the lamplight is a fluorescent source that is harsher. There are many other examples; see if you notice them!

## Nan Zabriskie Costume Designer

Steven Dietz has given us a play full of truths, full of personal journeys, full of humor, and full of depth. As we looked at the rhythm and structure of the play, we knew we needed seamless, simple, and fast transitions to capture both the melodrama and the poignantly serious aspects of Becky's journey. Clothes would need to be changed, but not too many, and not too often. Simplicity became our watchword. "What do we really need to tell help our characters tell their stories?" became our guiding question.

Establishing location (a city like Seattle), establishing time period (the present), establishing season (summer), and most importantly establishing personalities and relationships. One of my favorite parts of the design process is when the director and designers dig deeply into the script to find our interpretations. Ideas fly, images are presented, and together we create a world. We have to satisfy the logistics of the play while finding (in my case) the item of clothing that most effectively illuminates the character. Where does she shop? How does she feel about her body? What colors does she like? What colors establish the right balance with the other characters in the scene? What class of society is she in? Do we want her to look good in this scene? Becky Foster has many transitions from wife to worker to mother to 40-year-old woman who may want a new life. While it is not our intention to realistically depict each transition, some transitions (such as her on-stage change to a party dress) must be quite specific and realistic, while others may not even involve a clothing change. As Becky's life gets more complicated, she cannot quite keep up with the pace of the play. Realism is supplanted by theatricality, as clothes do not get changed in accordance with time and locale. Becky's story is one of seven in the play, and each has provided James Still and me with lots of fun and sometimes incredibly geeky discussion. The final story will be told by the actors who take our ideas add their own, bringing to life the full characters you will live with for an evening.



*Costume sketches by Nan Zabriskie for Becky.*

# Text Glossary

## Page

7 **title clerk**  
Resellers of automobiles, trucks, and commercial and recreational vehicles must keep records of the receipt and sale of every vehicle that they manage. The title clerk makes sure that vehicle titles are managed in a timely and correct manner so that new vehicle owners, including the financial organizations that loan money, are given proper ownership records in accordance with local department of motor vehicle regulations.

12 **Self-Awareness**  
Self-awareness is the awareness of the self as separate from the thoughts that are occurring at any point in time. Without self awareness the self perceives and believes the thoughts that are occurring to be who the self is. Self awareness gives one the option or choice to choose thoughts being thought rather than simply thinking the thoughts that are stimulated from the accumulative events leading up to the circumstances of the moment. Self awareness results in silent moments of epiphany, as the self realizes and is aware of being the thinker of the thoughts rather than the thoughts that are occupying the conscious moment.

12 **the “Unexamined Life”**  
At his trial for heresy, Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” He was on trial for encouraging his students to challenge the accepted beliefs of the time and think for themselves. The sentence was death but Socrates had the option of suggesting an alternative punishment. He could have chosen life in prison or exile, and would likely have avoided death. □ But Socrates believed that these alternatives would rob him of the only thing that made life useful: Examining the world around him and discussing how to make the world a better place. Without his “examined life” there was no point in living. So he suggested that Athens reward him for his service to society. The result, of course, is that they had no alternative and were forced to vote for a punishment of death.

12 **Socrates**  
Socrates (469 BCE–399 BCE) was a Classical Greek philosopher. Credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy, he is an enigmatic figure known only through the classical accounts of his students. Plato’s dialogues are the most comprehensive accounts of Socrates to survive from antiquity. Through his portrayal in Plato’s dialogues, Socrates has become renowned for his contribution to the field of ethics, and it is this Platonic Socrates who also lends his name to the concepts of Socratic irony and the Socratic method. The latter remains a commonly used tool in a wide range of discussions, and is a type of pedagogy in which a series of questions are asked not only to draw individual answers, but to encourage fundamental insight into the issue at hand. It is Plato’s Socrates who also made important and lasting contributions to the fields of epistemology and logic, and the influence of his ideas and approach remains strong in providing a foundation for much western philosophy that followed.

12 **self-actualize**  
A basic definition from a typical college text book defines self-actualization simply as “the full realization of one’s potential.” Self-actualization is a term that has been used in various psychology theories, often in slightly different ways. The term was originally introduced by the organismic theorist Kurt Goldstein for the motive to realize all of one’s potentialities. In his view, it is the master motive—indeed, the only real motive a person has, all others being merely manifestations of it. However, the concept was brought to prominence in Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory as the final level of psychological development that can be achieved when all basic and mental needs are fulfilled and the “actualization” of the full personal potential takes place.

**12 Plato**

Plato (428/427 BCE–348/347 BCE), was a Classical Greek philosopher, mathematician, writer of philosophical dialogues, and founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. Along with his mentor, Socrates, and his student, Aristotle, Plato helped to lay the foundations of natural philosophy, science, and Western philosophy. Plato was originally a student of Socrates, and was as much influenced by his thinking as by what he saw as his teacher's unjust death.

**12 Gandhi**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) was the pre-eminent political and spiritual leader of India during the Indian independence movement. He was the pioneer of *satyagraha*—resistance to tyranny through mass civil disobedience, a philosophy firmly founded upon *ahimsa* or total nonviolence—which led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Gandhi is commonly known around the world as Mahatma Gandhi (*mahatma* is Sanskrit: for “Great Soul”).

**12 Einstein**

Albert Einstein (1879–1955) was a theoretical physicist, philosopher and author who is widely regarded as one of the most influential scientists and intellectuals of all time. He is best known for his theories of special relativity and general relativity. He received the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics “for his services to Theoretical Physics, and especially for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect.” Einstein published more than 300 scientific and over 150 non-scientific works. Einstein additionally wrote and commentated prolifically on numerous philosophical and political issues. He is often regarded as the father of modern physics.

**12 Bono**

Paul David Hewson (born 1960), most commonly known by his stage name Bono, is an Irish singer and musician, best known for being the main vocalist of the Dublin-based rock band U2. Bono writes almost all U2 lyrics, often using political, social, and religious themes. During their early years, Bono's lyrics contributed to U2's rebellious and spiritual tone. As the band matured, his lyrics became inspired more by personal experiences shared with members of U2. Outside the band, he has collaborated and recorded with numerous artists, sits on the board of Elevation Partners, and has refurbished and owns the Clarence Hotel in Dublin with the Edge. Bono is also widely known for his activism concerning Africa, for which he co-founded DATA, EDUN, the ONE Campaign, and Product Red. He has organized and played in several benefit concerts and has met with influential politicians. Bono has been praised and criticized for his activism and involvement with U2. He has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, was granted an honorary knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, and was named as a Person of the Year by Time, among other awards and nominations.

**12 Perceptual Constancy**

Subjective constancy or perceptual constancy is the perception of an object or quality as constant under changing conditions.

**13 Erikson**

Erik Erikson (1902–1994) was a Danish-German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory on social development of human beings. He may be most famous for coining the phrase *identity crisis*.

### 13 **Childhood and Society**

The ideas of Erik Erikson underlie much of our understanding of human development. His insights into the interdependence of the individuals' growth and historical change, his now-famous concepts of identity, growth, and the life cycle, have changed the way we perceive ourselves and society. Widely read and cited, his works have won numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Combining the insights of clinical psychoanalysis with a new approach to cultural anthropology, *Childhood and Society* deals with the relationships between childhood training and cultural accomplishment, analyzing the infantile and the mature, the modern and the archaic elements in human motivation. It was hailed upon its first publication as "a rare and living combination of European and American thought in the human sciences" (Margaret Mead, *The American Scholar*). Translated into numerous foreign languages, it has gone on to become a classic in the study of the social significance of childhood. In the book, Erikson explains eight stages of psychosocial development through which a healthily developing human should pass from infancy to late adulthood. In each stage the person confronts, and hopefully masters, new challenges. Each stage builds on the successful completion of earlier stages. The challenges of stages not successfully completed may be expected to reappear as problems in the future. The eight stages are:

1 Hope:	Trust vs. Mistrust	(Infants, 0 to 1 year)
2 Will:	Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt	(Toddlers, 2 to 3 years)
3 Purpose:	Initiative vs. Guilt	(Preschool, 4 to 6 years)
4 Competence:	Industry vs. Inferiority	(Childhood, 7 to 12 years)
5 Fidelity:	Identity vs. Role Confusion	(Adolescents, 13 to 19 years)
6 Love:	Intimacy vs. Isolation	(Young Adults, 20 to 34 years)
7 Care:	Generativity vs. Stagnation	(Middle Adulthood, 35 to 65 years)
8 Wisdom:	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	(Seniors, 65 years onwards)

### 13 **Generativity**

In Erikson's theory, Generativity is the concern of establishing and guiding the next generation. Socially valued work and disciplines are expressions of generativity. Simply having or wanting children does not in and of itself achieve generativity. During middle age the primary developmental task is one of contributing to society and helping to guide future generations. When a person makes a contribution during this period, perhaps by raising a family or working toward the betterment of society, a sense of generativity—a sense of productivity and accomplishment—results. In contrast, a person who is self-centered and unable or unwilling to help society move forward develops a feeling of stagnation—a dissatisfaction with the relative lack of productivity.

### 13 **General Inquiry**

The first step in any scientific process is to define the question which the experiment hopes to answer. This is the general inquiry; the basic question.

### 17 **Normative Social Influence**

Normative social influence is one form of conformity. It is the influence of other people that leads us to conform in order to be liked and accepted by them. This often leads to public compliance—but not necessarily private acceptance—of the group's social norms. Social impact theory states that the more important the group is, the closer the physical distance is between the group and oneself, and the number of people in the group all affect the likelihood that one will conform to the group's social norms.

### 38 **Cedar Cove**

In the context of the play, a fictional location. There are 13 communities in the United States named Cedar Grove; none is within driving distance of Seattle.

**60 Lauren Hutton**

Lauren Hutton (born 1943) is a former model and occasional actress. She is best known for her starring roles in the movies *American Gigolo* and *Lassiter*, and also for her fashion modeling career.

**61 dysphoria**

Dysphoria (from the Greek *dysphoros*, difficult to bear) is an unpleasant or uncomfortable mood, such as sadness (depressed mood), anxiety, irritability, or restlessness. Etymologically, it is the opposite of euphoria. Dysphoria refers only to a condition of mood and may be experienced in response to ordinary life events, such as illness or grief. Additionally, it is a feature of many psychiatric disorders, including anxiety disorders and mood disorders. Dysphoria is usually experienced during depressive episodes, but in people with bipolar disorder, it may also be experienced during manic or hypomanic episodes. Dysphoria in the context of a mood disorder indicates a heightened risk of suicide.

**61 euphoria**

Euphoria is medically recognized as a mental/emotional state defined as a sense of great (usually exaggerated) elation and wellbeing. Technically, euphoria is an affect, but the term is often colloquially used to define emotion as an intense state of transcendent happiness combined with an overwhelming sense of wellbeing. The word derives from Greek *euphoria*, “power of enduring easily, fertility.” Euphoria is generally considered to be exaggerated, resulting from an abnormal psychological state with or without the use of psychoactive drugs and not typically achieved during the normal course of human experience. However, some natural behaviors, such as activities resulting in orgasm or the triumph of an athlete, can induce brief states of euphoria. Euphoria has also been cited during certain religious or spiritual rituals and meditation.

**71 endorphins**

Endorphins are endogenous opioid polypeptide compounds. They are produced by the pituitary gland and the hypothalamus in vertebrates during exercise, excitement, pain, consumption of spicy food, and orgasm, and they resemble the opiates in their abilities to produce analgesia and a feeling of well-being. Endorphins work as “natural pain relievers.” The term endorphin rush has been adopted in popular speech to refer to feelings of exhilaration brought on by pain, danger, or other forms of stress, supposedly due to the influence of endorphins. When a nerve impulse reaches the spinal cord, endorphins are released which prevent nerve cells from releasing more pain signals. Immediately after injury, endorphins allow animals to feel a sense of power and control over themselves that allows them to persist with activity for an extended time.

**76 Proximate Urgency**

This term may be Chris's own.

**80 Reciprocal Determinism**

Reciprocal determinism is the theory set forth by psychologist Albert Bandura that a person's behavior both influences and is influenced by personal factors and the social environment. Bandura accepts the possibility of an individual's behavior being conditioned through the use of consequences. At the same time he asserts that a person's behavior (and personal factors, such as cognitive skills or attitudes) can impact the environment. These skill sets result in an under- or over-compensated ego that, for all creative purposes are too strong or too weak to focus on pure outcome. Reciprocal determinism is the idea that behavior is controlled or determined by the individual, through cognitive processes, and by the environment, through external social stimulus events.

**80 Emerging Factors**

The factors in a scientific experiment or inquiry which seem to be growing in prominence and importance rather than receding.

**80 Definitive Question**

As opposed to the first general inquiry, the final question that leads to the ultimate answer.

**88 dick**

detective (slang)

**96 Deception Pass**

Deception Pass is a strait separating Whidbey Island from Fidalgo Island, in the northwest part of the U.S. state of Washington. It connects Skagit Bay, part of Puget Sound, with the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

**104 Paranormal Transference**

This term may be Chris's own.

**105 Hindsight Bias**

Hindsight bias is the inclination to see events that have occurred as more predictable than they in fact were before they took place. Hindsight bias has been demonstrated experimentally in a variety of settings, including politics, games, and medicine. In psychological experiments of hindsight bias, subjects also tend to remember their predictions of future events as having been stronger than they actually were, in those cases where those predictions turn out correct. This inaccurate assessment of reality after it has occurred is also referred to as "creeping determinism."

# Resources

## Books

*Childhood and Society* by Erik Erikson

*Marrying George Clooney: Confessions from a Midlife Crisis* by Amy Ferris

*Awakening at Midlife* by Kathleen A. Brehony

*Don't Bite Your Tongue: How to Foster Rewarding Relationships with your Adult Children* by Ruth E. Nemzoff

## DVDs

*Thelma and Louise*

*Alice Doesn't Live Here Any More*

*Married Life*

*Bull Durham*

*Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*

*Fried Green Tomatoes*

*It's Complicated*

*The Bridges of Madison County*

*Catch Me If You Can*

*Sleepless in Seattle*

*Moonstruck*

*Something's Gotta Give*

## Websites

Support for Middle-Aged Men and Women

<http://midlifeclub.com/>

Midlife Crisis: The Dangerous Opportunity

<http://www.lessons4living.com/midlife.htm>

House Rules for Adult Children Living at Home

[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/118393/house\\_rules\\_for\\_adult\\_children\\_living.html?cat=25](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/118393/house_rules_for_adult_children_living.html?cat=25)

## Discussion Questions

What is an epigraph? Playwright Steven Dietz uses this quote from fiction writer Bernard Malamud as an epigraph for *Becky's New Car*: "We have two lives—the one we learn with, and the life we live after that." What do you suppose this quote means? How does it relate to Dietz's play?

The scenic design of the IRT production shows four locations in one space, as suggested by the playwright in his stage directions. This arrangement enables a character to move from location to location in the blink of an eye, without actually exiting or entering. What various clues told you where you were at any given moment of the play? Think not only in design terms (scenery, lighting, sound, and perhaps even costumes) but also in terms of dialogue and staging. Were there moments when you did not know where the characters were? How did you figure it out?

*Becky's New Car* features a great deal of direct address—that is, actors speaking directly to the audience. What other plays have you seen which featured direct address? How do audiences take in information from direct address differently from how they listen to dialogue between characters? Why do you suppose the playwright might have made this choice?

*Becky's New Car* features a great deal of audience participation; audience members are brought on stage to participate in the action, direct questions are asked to individual audience members, etc. Such a large amount of "chance," that is unpredictability, is rather rare in the theatre. What other forms of entertainment (within or beyond the arts) does this practice remind you of? What do you suppose might be the challenges in such an effort? What do you imagine might be the various contingencies for which the actor (and the crew) must be prepared in these moments? What do you think the playwright was trying to achieve by weaving these moments into the play?

At one point in the play, Becky says, "When a woman says she needs new shoes, what she really wants is a new job. When she says she needs a new house, she wants a new husband. And when she says she wants a new car, she wants a new *life*." Do you think Becky's statement is accurate? Why or why not? If what she says is true, why do you suppose one thing is said when another is meant? What similar situations do you know, where a certain phrase or sentence actually means something else?

Becky's 26-year-old son, a graduate student, still lives at home with his parents. This sort of arrangement is becoming more and more common today, as it was for previous generations in the past. Why do you suppose this is? Does your family or any of your friends' have such an arrangement? What are the particular advantages and challenges of such family situations?

Although the details are not clearly specified by the playwright, it is clear in the play that Becky has some sort of extra-marital relationship with Walter. As you watched the play, did your feelings about Becky change as this relationship developed? How would you describe this relationship in terms of ethics or morality? Is this the same way you would respond to such relationships in general? If not, why do you think you responded differently? How do you feel about Joe's response to his wife's experiences? What do you suppose the playwright is trying to say about such relationships through this play? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

## Writing Projects

For a time, Becky sees her new car as a way to step out of her life, to "be" someone else for a change. Imagine another life for yourself. What would you want to change, even if just for a little while? Who would you want to be? What would be the object or the event that could suddenly appear in your life and make that new life possible? Write a short story called "[your name]'s New [      ]" ("Jane's New Dress" or "John's New Tennis Raquet"). Rather than some sort of magical fantasy, try to make your story something that could really happen if one change in your life suddenly opened a door.

Write a review of *Becky's New Car*. Discuss all aspects of the production: writing, staging, acting, design. Post your review in the "Review It" section of [www.irtlive.com](http://www.irtlive.com).

## Activities

Create a set design for your life as the IRT production does for Becky's life. Select the places that are most important and most prevalent to your everyday existence: of course your home (would it be your own room, the kitchen, the family room?) and your school (a classroom, your locker, the gym, the band room?); but also where else? What is your favorite hangout? Where do you go to meet your friends? Decide which elements of each of these areas is most significant. Create a ground plan for a scenic design that features all of these different places in one place. How might the various elements blend, or jar with each other? In the play of your life, how would the audience know when you were moving from place to place within the single space? Draw a sketch or build a small model of your design. Imagine how you would stage "A Day in My Life" on your scenic design.

The more difficult the obstacle, the harder a character has to work to overcome it. In acting, this concept is called "stakes"—what is at stake for the character? As an acting exercise, divide into pairs. One partner has Becky's role: trying to get the audience member to participate. The other partner should be as uncooperative as possible, forcing "Becky" to work hard and be creative to achieve her goal. Half way through, switch roles, so both of you get the opportunity to experience both sides.