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The creation of "Trash the Dress" : a solo play

Kristina Sutton

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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THE CREATION OF “TRASH THE DRESS”
A SOLO PLAY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of Theatre

by
Kristina Alexandra Sutton
B.A., Brenau University, 2004
May 2013

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my Mom and Dad for their support, and for their inspirational marriage.

I am grateful to my sisters for their encouragement as well. The LSU MFA Theatre Faculty including George Judy, Nick Erickson, and Joanna Battles contributed to my artistic growth immeasurably over the last three years. I am so thankful for my models, Katrina Despain and Olga Verba, for evoking so much of what I wanted to capture in my trash the dress photo shoots. They were also the team behind my own trash the dress shoot; Katrina volunteered as make-up artist and photographer's assistant to Olga, the photographer, on that shoot. I must also thank John Guare, Leigh Fondakowski for broadening my creative process as I developed my script. Dr. John Fletcher and Dr. Alan Sikes contributed to expanding my critical thinking as an artist, and I am so appreciative of their teaching and guidance. Special thanks to Joelle Caputa for bringing a voice to women celebrating divorce in their 20s. Lastly, none of my photo shoots could have been possible without my camera, the little Olympus that could.

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Abstract

The thesis project called for the MFA candidate to create a one-person show of originality and entertainment between 25 minutes and 45 minutes in length. This thesis, submitted to the Graduate School of Louisiana State University as partial requirement for graduation with the Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre, follows the creation of a solo performance piece by Kristina Sutton, called “Trash the Dress.” The thesis includes inspiration for creating this solo performance piece, initial correspondence between the MFA candidate and consultants, research material and a copy of the script, personal reflection on writing and rehearsal challenges, photos from the production and a conclusion revealing artistic and personal growth achieved in creating this show and what the artist hopes to do next with this production.

This solo project is a performance art piece exploring the expectations of marriage and how the union is often overshadowed by the celebration of that union, the wedding. Monologues reveal how weddings are often put on a pedestal by not only brides, but also wedding industry vendors and society, creating exceedingly high standards for all involved. “Trash the Dress” examines when those expectations are and are not met on both the wedding day and the marriage itself. Inspired by trash the dress (TTD) art, the artist incorporates her own photography into the piece through projections and fine art prints of her work, as well as a live trash the dress session with audience interaction. In deconstructing and destroying the gown, the audience, together with the performer, creates something new each night, a new piece of art.

Introduction

My MFA Acting class was required to do a solo performance piece as part of the graduation requirement for our terminal degree. In preparation, we took Professor Alan Sikes' Performance Theory and Criticism class, required as a part of our degree training, in the spring of 2012, rather than in our last semester, so we could evaluate the nature of theatre and performance, and brainstorm ideas for our own performance in the spring semester of 2013. The result of this process for me is performing, "Trash the Dress," a solo-play exploring the expectations of marriage and how the union is often overshadowed by the celebration of that union, the wedding. TTD (Trash the Dress) art and weddings are the mediums through which the production gives a unique look into the worlds of marriage and divorce.

I first heard of the artistic movement in photography known as Trash the Dress from my sister, Michele Atwood, when I was planning my own wedding in the spring of 2010. She knew I was interested in having unique photos taken in my wedding dress, beyond the traditional bridal portraits. I looked up the trend online and the photos inspired me both as a bride and as a photographer. "The wedding photographer John Michael Cooper introduced the term 'trash the dress' . . . in an internet essay in 2006" (White 118).

"The photographer Mark Eric helped to create th[e] TTD lineage. He read Cooper's essay; . . . and turned trashthedress.wordpress.com, trashthedress.com, and freetoflaunt.com into promotional venues for photographers' related imaging practices" (White 119). Reading about this new movement in photography, I knew I wanted to have my own trash the dress session as a bride and looked forward to shooting these creative sessions (as a photographer) for other brides and models as well. The images I saw ranged from brides floating in pools or lakes in a very Ophelia-like fashion to a bride amidst a blaze of fire as her wedding dress burned through the use of Photoshop and pyrotechnics. The photos were disturbing in that there was a sense of danger and grittiness to them. Traditional bridal portraits depict brides in safe, pristine conditions, with their hair and makeup flawless and their wedding gowns immaculate. In contrast, trash the dress photographs often presented wild hair and makeup uncommonly seen on brides and exhibited soiled, wet or torn wedding gowns. Once spotless gowns were sometimes marred with paint. The symbolism of these photographs and the mysterious stories behind these photos intrigued me.

In the summer of 2010, I participated in my own trash the dress session on the beach, but it was not until I separated from my husband two years later that I fully trashed the dress without reservation. These experiences played into my choice to develop a play using weddings and trash the sessions as the theatrical vehicles through which I address marriage and divorce.

When in the spring of 2012, we began to discuss matrixed and non-matrixed elements of Happenings in my Performance Theory and Criticism class at LSU, trash the dress elements immediately came to mind. Through the art of TTD sessions, photographers place brides in abnormal settings, and the wedding gowns become sullied in unusual

circumstances. (Brides and wedding gowns being the matrixed parts amidst non-matrixed elements, i.e. muddy swamps.) I recognized these matrixed and non-matrixed components as the mechanisms of Happenings. As a result, I initially thought my thesis production was going to be the creation of a Happening, but as this paper will discuss, I considered various artistic vehicles through which I could tell the story, and I ultimately developed a solo play loosely inspired by Happenings that includes non-matrixed components (ex: photographs that do not necessarily have significance to the monologues), but also contains a matrixed foundation of storytelling through the use of monologues and traditional theatrical staging. This thesis paper follows that journey from origins to fruition.

“Trash the Dress,” was performed on January 15, 2013 and on January 18, 2013, as an invited dress rehearsal and one-night only performance, respectively, in the Studio Theatre at the MDA Building on the campus of Louisiana State University. The production crew was as follows: Jason Bayle, soundboard operator; Nicholas Hamel, light board operator; Nicholas Hamel, lighting designer; Ben Koucherik, projection operator; Katrina Despain, Chia-Wen Hsu, and Gregory Leute, properties and run crew.

Sources of Inspiration

The ensuing sections detail the origins of ideas incorporated into the thesis production. These ideas were developed through class work explorations and papers, as well as correspondence with consultants.

Happenings

Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright, John Guare, visited my MFA class at LSU in the spring of 2012, and I told him of my interest in Happenings. The following is initial email correspondence between Guare and myself as we communicated about the idea of incorporating a Happening into my thesis project:

From: John Guare
Sent: Sunday, April 1, 2012 6:00 PM
To: George Judy
Subject: happenings

Dear George, i'm still buzzing from my talk with your students and our dinner last monday night. **the young woman who is doing her piece next year on happenings** has brought back an avalanche of memories of where i was when happenings were new. tell her she cannot begin to understand happenings and the impulse behind happenings without being aware of d t suzuki who brought zen buddhism to america in 1950 and made a sudden and radically new path for artists - the beat generation comes out of him - kerouac and on the road - john cage's music - abstract expressionism - and happenings. i remember how we carried our copies of the i ching around with us asking it questions about everything - throwing the coins. i even asked i ching what my play the house of blue leaves shd be about. it gave me the answer. zen introduced chance into american art and life. urge her please to go to this source for understanding and enrichment. im grateful to her for all that she brought back to me. all best jg (Guare)

From: Kristina Sutton
Sent: Tuesday, April 17, 2012 10:55 AM
To: John Guare
Subject: Happenings

Dear Mr. Guare,

I am so grateful for your feedback and the resources you have sent our way. I was incredibly moved that you took the time to speak with all of us about our thesis ideas and then passed on to George more information for us to delve into regarding Happenings. I look forward to reading the material you suggested. Thank you for that! I appreciate any guidance from you and would love to correspond with you further.

I am inspired by "Trash the Dress" (TTD) art. Brides question what to do with their wedding dress after the big day. Traditionally, brides often have their dress cleaned and

stored away. Many sessions feature the bride in mud, the ocean, swamps, and swimming pools. There are many reasons why brides trash their gowns, and my research thus far reveals that they know they will never wear it again and want to have a final romp in the gown and epic photos taken to cherish it; some trash it as a symbol that they will never marry again; others as a relief to wedding planning anxiety, and most recently, a movement started by Huffington Post Divorce blogger, Joelle Caputa, for divorced women in their 20s who trash their dress as a step in letting go of their disillusionments from their failed marriages. My thesis would explore why women, and why I specifically ignore instincts and feel societal pressures. Since the idea of TTD sessions is to capture an elegant gown out of place, I think this would fit nicely into the matrixed/non-matrixed components of Happenings. I want to incorporate my photography, my performance, and trash the dress art into my piece. Allan Kaprow's description of an artist moves me to want bring my vision to fruition: a person willfully enmeshed in a dilemma of categories, who performs as if none of them existed. What I envision when brainstorming is perhaps performing monologues and telling stories while in my wedding dress, surrounded by my photography in prints and also by projections, then beginning to trash my dress. Yoko Ono's "Cut" piece inspired this element, that I would cut myself out of the gown and then somehow participants would trash the dress. I would have nails, scissors, hammers, paint, dirt, and other materials with which they could deconstruct/destroy the dress and a canvas on which to **create something new—a fresh art piece**. They could cut and tack, nail, and pin drapes of fabric and other wedding memorabilia onto the canvas. Meanwhile, I would continue with my performance (monologues I've written, etc) amidst the activity while my photography, including non-matrixed pieces are projected onto the participants now. I know I need to expand my knowledge and vocabulary about Happenings. When you told us that we ultimately need to get out of our own way. I may not know where I am going, but knowing that being lost is part of the path makes me feel that I am on my way.

This past week, I saw *Time Stands Still* at Steppenwolf. It provoked a great deal of thought for me regarding the piece I am creating...there is a second when as a photographer I capture a moment (or want to) that I want to share, but is that moment even mine to share? where is the line for photographers, writers, artists in exploiting others' pain in their work? This thought stems from not wanting to produce "me me" masturbatory work...but is it exploitative regardless, whether it is of my moments or that of others? In a happening though, perhaps the referential element of these works would be applied to me by the audience, rather than by me, and which is sort of the point of such an event....

Sorry this was so long! I just wanted to let you know about what your feedback has been percolating. Thank you kindly. (Sutton)

From: John Guare

Sent: Tuesday, April 17, 2012 10:55 AM

To: Kristina Sutton Udy

Subject: Re: Happenings

hi kristina you sound very much on the right track. back up your work on happenings and kaprow with looking into the zen buddhism that suzuki brought to the US in 1950 and changed so much of and expanded our thoughts on what art is - play with the i ching and see what it reveals to you youre all very inspiring
all best and please give my regards to all your classmates xxxx jg (Guare)

Class Work

The following is an excerpt from my first paper, "Trash and Other Ruminations," to Professor Alan Sikes for my Performance Theory and Criticism class regarding potential thesis proposals:

Another idea that is percolating was inspired by "Trash the Dress" art. Brides question what to do with their wedding dress after the big day. Traditionally, brides often have their dress cleaned and stored away. Reasons include sentimental purposes, the hope that their own daughter will want to wear it, or simply because they don't want to give away/throw away an expensive gown. When I married in 2010, I thought of the likelihood that my daughter would even want to wear my dress (style is so personal), be close to the same size, or even if I would have a daughter at all. I came across gorgeous, edgy TTD ("Trash the Dress") photos and knew I wanted to have fun, epic photos taken in the same vein. As an artist and photographer, it was the right choice for me, and so the day of my honeymoon I ran around the beach and got sand and dirt all over the gown in my TTD session. The fact that my husband was the photographer was also meaningful to me. However, I could not bring myself to trash the gown completely. Many sessions feature the bride in mud, the ocean, swamps, and swimming pools. There are many reasons why brides trash their gowns, and my research thus far reveals that they know they will never wear it again and want to have a final romp in the gown and epic photos taken to cherish it; some trash it as a symbol that they will never marry again; others as a relief to wedding planning anxiety, and most recently, a movement started by *Huffington Post* Divorce blogger, Joelle Caputa, for divorced women in their 20s who trash their dress as a step in letting go of their disillusionments from their failed marriages. According to her website, magazinesbyjoelle.com, Caputa is writing *Trash the Dress: Stories of Celebrating Divorce in your 20s* to show women that the end of marriage in their 20s is just the beginning of the lives they were meant to lead, and "will be a collection of stories from women who survived divorce in their 20s and are celebrating their new lease on life." She writes, "Rock bottom is definitely a rancid place to exist, however, I chose to dance in the dirt."

As someone who just turned 30-years-old just days ago, this is a topic that I am close to and fearful of...could it be serendipitous that I did not completely trash my dress after my wedding as I was meant to do this instead? Whatever happens to my marriage, it is clear I ignored warning signs that all was not well between my husband and me...that there were issues in our relationship that had not been fully addressed. I could not shake a foreboding even on our wedding day. I was dry-heaving moments before I walked down the aisle and even after the ceremony was over during wedding pictures, I had to stop to dry heave some more—apparently, an involuntary attempt to purge a pending sense of doom.

My thesis would explore why women, and why I specifically ignored my

instincts, felt societal pressures, and fell for the sweeping romance from my fiancé, though I feared it would not last forever. I would also address my current fears of starting over, how I feel behind in my plan, and how my dream to have children is not helped by statistics like the study published by the University of St. Andrews and Edinburgh University in Scotland that women lose 90 percent of their eggs by age 30, and only have about 3 percent remaining by the time they are 40. And again, I hesitate in choosing this topic, though I believe it will give me creative fulfillment and cathartic, personal perspective, I do not want self-pity, but want to tell my story in the hopes that if I am not able to stop others from making the same mistake, they will recognize signs, or at the very least carry the experience with them for when and if they need it in the future. I choose to say experience because I am drawn to manifesting these ideas in a Happening.

Since the idea of TTD sessions is to capture an elegant gown out of place, I think this would fit nicely into the matrixed/non-matrixed components of Happenings. I want to incorporate my photography, my performance, and trash the dress art into my piece. Allan Kaprow's description of an artist moves me to want bring my vision to fruition. "Artist refers to a person willfully enmeshed in a dilemma of categories, who performs as if none of them existed," he explained. The fact that my categories and subject matters are non-matrixed, so varied, most certainly constructs a dilemma for me as an artist, makes a Happening that much more logical for me. What I envision when brainstorming is perhaps performing monologues and telling stories while in my wedding dress, surrounded by my photography in prints and also by projections, then beginning to trash my dress. Yoko Ono's "Cut" piece inspired this element, that I would cut myself out of the gown and then somehow encourage participants to trash the dress. I would have nails, scissors, hammers, paint, dirt, and other materials with which they could deconstruct/destroy the dress and a canvas on which to create something new—a fresh art piece. I have the silk boutonnieres and bouquet from my wedding that participants could use as well. They could cut and tack, nail, and pin drapes of fabric and other wedding memorabilia onto the canvas. Perhaps I would have a photographer there capturing all of this or cameras for the participants to document their own perspectives. Meanwhile, I would continue with my performance amidst the activity while my photography, including non-matrixed pieces are projected onto the wall and onto the participants.

I know these ideas are "out of the box." But as an artist I feel I do not fit into a particular box with what I want to convey. Granted, the idea behind these one-person shows is to make your own work that you can take out into the world when the phone is not ringing for us as actors, but I feel this project could be beneficial to me. Though Happenings can technically not be replicated, this will give me experience to create more Happenings in the future and though not quite the same, I could get another thrift shop dress with which I could do an encore performance if I wanted to do this piece again. I need to expand my knowledge and vocabulary about Happenings, and if approved, I need to determine what I want to say, though I know how I want to say it. When playwright John Guare visited the LSU MFA students and I told him of my interest in Happenings, I felt relief when he told me this would require me to get lost for a while and then to ultimately get out of my own way. I may not know where I am going, but knowing that being lost is part of the path makes me feel that I am on my way. (Sutton)

The following is the second paper to Professor Alan Sikes for my Performance Theory and Criticism class regarding further thesis exploration:

Kristina Sutton Udy
12 May 2012
Performance Theory and Criticism
Professor Alan Sikes

Thesis Explorations: Part Deux

I have had a lot of inspiration since my last endeavor to organize my thoughts on my thesis and my one-woman show. My thesis would still explore why women, and why I specifically ignored my instincts, got swept up in the romanticized idea of a fairy tale wedding and life, even though I honestly feared it would not last forever. My current thoughts are more specifically on why the actual wedding and **not** the actual upcoming **marriage** is such a coveted event (for women specifically), and why we put that event on a pedestal with such high expectations that some portions of the event are bound to disappoint us...impossible standards to reach. Now my work as a wedding photographer comes into play. I submitted some of our professional wedding photos as MadTight Photography and some photos of my own wedding to blogs and magazines for publication, and was sorely disappointed when we were rejected by not some but all. How could this be I asked myself? Our photos were just as good, if not better than what I had seen featured on these publications. Granted, I understood (despite disclaimers) that advertisers were probably given precedence, and that networking, social media relationships and high numbers of followers were probably factors in selections, but in all reality, some of the work featured was just plain boring or overdone. Then a wedding blogger I follow, TheKnottyBride.com, (FYI wedding blogging is currently much more prevalent than wedding print publications) blew the lid off an industry secret I was not aware of: many of the featured weddings and engagements were staged! As a performer, how did I not see this?! I looked back at my favorite postings and print publications and began to wonder where the wedding guests were. I saw the standard shots of the gown hanging, the bride and groom looking adoringly into each other eyes, the close-ups of the invitations, the rings, the garter, the place settings, the bouquets, etc. But often times wedding guests in the background of ceremony shots were not present. Then I looked to the top of the posts or articles and noticed sometimes the word “styled” wedding was included. The aforementioned blogger had posed the question to vendors and brides if they had problem with “styled” sessions and the message it sent to brides and vendors. She also asked if the word “styled” or a disclaimer should always be included in a post/print publication. Aha! Vendors were collaborating to create “dream” wedding photos for “wedding inspiration.” With so much that can go wrong on a wedding day, these features upheld vendors and brides to impossible standards that cannot be attained perfectly, thus perpetuating the dream of the “perfect wedding.”

As a vendor myself, a wedding photographer, I now understood “the game” and that you had to play it to get accolades, notoriety and the attention of potential clients to get work. I also understood, as a former bride, how this perpetuates the problem of attaining the perfect wedding...if you grew up with fairy tales and as an adult see images

of perfect weddings, in some way are you not set up for disappointment about the wedding and marriage, or at the very least set up for stress to live up to that standard? Hence, the twisted voyeuristic infatuation with “reality” shows like “Bridezillas,” “Cake Boss,” “My Fair Wedding,” and “Say Yes to the Dress” (which, of course, have producers instigating drama and pushing for a dynamic end result). This system also sets a high standard for wedding vendors the day of to deliver results based on preconceived notions of what should happen “the big day.”

As a test, I staged an engagement shoot in October 2011 with actors and had sponsors contribute a location, bouquet and cupcakes to the shoot. I was published. I understood the game, now I questioned how I wanted to play it. Perhaps my thesis and my one-woman show will help me answer such a question, or perhaps I will just bring awareness to others about the wedding industry and that will be enough for me...or perhaps I can accomplish both.

My show may still also address my fears of starting over, and how I feel behind in my plan. I still want to incorporate photography, performance, and trash the dress art into my piece. What I envision when brainstorming is perhaps performing monologues and telling stories while in my wedding dress, surrounded by my photography in prints and also by projections, then beginning to trash a dress to create something new. The act of deconstructing a gown that symbolizes a perfect wedding and marriage to create something new very much reminds me of the desert of the real—a reflection of a reality no longer exists. I am drawn to your feedback that I can perhaps deconstruct the wedding gowns of others, which will still be personal, but create a sense of distance for the audience and me and give the event a more concrete possibility for future Happenings.

I am extremely inspired by “Trash the Dress” (TTD) art. Since the idea of TTD sessions is to capture an elegant gown out of place, I think this would fit nicely into the matrixed/non-matrixed components of Happenings. I have compiled a Pinterest board of inspirational quotes and images to guide me.

This summer I need to expand my knowledge of Happenings and its origins. I attended a John Cage happening this month at LSU that included music from John Cage’s original happening, dancers or “movers” and a sculptor. The experience was beneficial in that it confirmed my suspicion that audience participants would take awhile to “warm up” and have the courage to move around the space and engage with the performers. Most people were skeptical at first, even snickered, but by the end they all seemed engaged, if not inspired, and many walked away in awe or with a smile on their faces.

The playwright John Guare advised me, “Back up your work on happenings and Kaprow with looking into the Zen Buddhism that Suzuki brought to the US in 1950 and changed so much of and expanded our thoughts on what art is - play with the i ching and see what it reveals to you.” In another correspondence he also advised I check into, “Kerouac and On the Road - John Cage’s music - abstract expressionism - and happenings.” He goes on to say, “I even asked i ching what my play *The House of Blue Leaves* should be about. It gave me the answer. Zen introduced chance into American art and life. [I urge you] please to go to this source for understanding and enrichment.” I am ever grateful for this advice and look forward to delving into this material.

In April, I saw *Time Stands Still* at Steppenwolf in Chicago. The play is about a photojournalist who focuses on war photography. When an acquaintance ridiculed the photographer for capturing a moment rather than stepping in to change the moment or

help the subject (i.e. a distraught mother or starved child) the photographer responded, "Our job is to record life, not change it." This play provoked a great deal of thought for me regarding the piece I am creating...there is a second when as a photographer I capture a moment (or want to) that I want to share, but I question if that moment (sorrow, elation, desperation, hunger) is even mine to share? I question where the line for photographers, writers, and artists is in exploiting others' pain in their work? This thought stems from not wanting to produce "me me" masturbatory work...but I wonder if it is exploitative regardless, whether it is of my own moments or that of others? In a happening though, perhaps the referential element of these works would be applied to me by the audience, rather than by me, and would sort of be the point of such an event.

Wedding Blogger

As a wedding photographer, I often peruse wedding blogs for the latest trends and news in wedding photography and style. On August 30, 2011, I came across TheKnottyBride.com's blog post entitled, "The Styled Shoot Argument," regarding styled shoots featured in wedding magazines and blogs and whether these shoots were accessible or misleading to brides. The post appeared as follows:

I often get asked my thoughts on styled shoots, and whether they're achievable or problematic. And my short answer is... yes and no. I know, I know, that's not much of an answer. But here's the thing. There are A LOT of styled shoots out there, and they vary WIDELY as far as their level of attainability goes. And I must say, I adore staring into their face's eyes, and soaking up the inspiration they're offering, and letting it inspire me and what I do... whether or not it's easily replicated.

But there's a lot of concern out there, voiced by brides and bloggers alike, that styled shoots are leaving a bad blemish on the world of weddings, and can be disappointing and frustrating for brides. I have to say, I agree.... AND disagree. I DO agree that, when a styled shoot is not **marked as such** and made to seem like an **actual wedding** – that's a problem. I have no idea why anyone would do that, though. It's highly misleading and pointless to do that.

As long as a styled shoot is properly marked as an inspiration shoot, thereby indicating that the photographer had time to pose the models for hours and ready the table settings and just generally *perfectificate* EVERY. LITTLE. DETAIL. going on that day, then... it's more than acceptable, in my opinion. I really believe that styled shoots can provide incredible inspiration for brides, and lead weddings along new, innovative paths and just generally offer some guidance as to what has the potential to turn out **pretty** in your photos, if that's what you're after. I adore them, personally. It's really just about keeping the truth about them visible to everyone. I'm curious... what do you think about styled shoots? [...] So, zee questions:

As I posed up in the writey part of this post all the way up top, I'd love to know what you think of styled shoots and whether they're a good thing about the wedding industry.

I'd also love to know if today's shoot makes it feel like the prettiness is actually achievable on a less than Park Avenue budget? Lemme know, I wanna hear it!

xoxo! (Alison)

When it came time to create characters for my show, I was inspired by this post and wanted to utilize this unique voice in my play. The following is the initial email correspondence between Alison (also known as The Knotty Bride, the aforementioned wedding blogger) and myself, as I request to use published material on her blog for a character in my thesis production.

From: Kristina Sutton
Sent: Thursday, October 4, 2012 11:06 AM
To: theknottybride@gmail.com
Subject: Blog inquiry

Hi Alison!

I'm a follower of your blog and also a wedding photographer and actress. I'm in my final year of graduate school getting my MFA in Acting and am writing my thesis on my performance art piece. I am creating a one woman show about the wedding industry and am going to represent different voices, including brides, newlyweds, caterers, coordinators, bloggers, divorcees and a mother-of-the-bride. I really LOVE your blog post on August 30, 2011 "The Styled Shoot Argument" (I was one of the people to comment on it last year) and wanted your permission to use part of that post as the voice of a fictional wedding blogger in a monologue. I am really excited about my project and hope you will consider allowing me to use that blog post in the monologue.

You can read more about my project
here: <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1090955831/trash-the-dress>
I would definitely credit and thank The Knotty Bride in the program of the show and in my references for the thesis paper. I can send you a copy of the program too.

Thanks for your time and all the fun reads! :)

All the best,
Kristina Sutton
Co-Founder, MadTight Photography LLC
madtightphotography@gmail.com
www.madtightphotography.com (Sutton)

From: Alison The Knotty Bride
Sent: Thursday, October 4, 2012 1:28 PM
To: Kristina Sutton
Subject: Re: Blog inquiry

Hi Kristina,

Thanks for your email and the kind words, really so sweet of you to say, I truly appreciate it. And congratulations on nearly wrapping up graduate school, no simple feat!

Re: your request, I'm very glad to hear the post stuck with you enough to want to quote it in your piece. That's a lovely compliment :) Would you be able to provide confirmation that it won't be used in a negative/exceedingly sarcastic way? Then we'd be all set. Always need to look out for the brand, I'm sure you understand.

Talk soon!
Alison (Alison)

From: Kristina Sutton
Sent: Thursday, October 4, 2012 3:59 PM
To: Alison The Knotty Bride
Subject: Re: Blog inquiry

Hi Alison,

Thanks for the response! Yes, I will not use the voice of the fictional wedding blogger in any kind of sarcastic or negative way. (As a wedding photographer, I must be careful with my branding too, even in my performance work). The monologue is actually about the joy of wedding blogging and how the blogs are a tremendous resource for inspiration and money saving tips etc for brides. Every monologue should have some kind of conflict to overcome, since it is a dramatic piece, and that's where your blog post comes in...how styled shoots can be controversial to some and the blogger explains why she finds them useful, how these shoots can benefit the industry and how she overcomes the challenge of styled shoots being misused or misrepresented, but rather useful to her brides. Hope that helps! And thanks for your consideration!

All the best,
Kristina Sutton
Ktinassutton@hotmail.com
www.kristinasutton.com
SAG-AFTRA (Sutton)

From: Alison The Knotty Bride
Sent: Friday, October 5, 2012 1:38 PM
To: Kristina Sutton
Subject: Re: Blog inquiry

Thanks for the thorough response, Kristina, I appreciate it! Sounds like a performance I'd wanna attend, very interesting!!

Everything sounds good, I'm touched that you want to use content from the blog. I can't

wait to hear how it goes! (Alison)

Trash the Dress book

The following is email correspondence between Joelle Caputa and myself, as we discuss possible collaboration/networking for my show and her forthcoming book. Caputa is writing *Trash the Dress: Stories of Celebrating Divorce in your 20's*, a book for divorced women in their 20s who trash their dress as a step in letting go of their disillusionments from their failed marriages.

From: Kristina Sutton
Sent: trashthedressbook@gmail.com
To: Sun, Jul 8, 2012 11:41 PM
Subject: TTD Play

Hi Joelle!

I'm so pleased I came across your website and info on your book! I recently joined the Facebook group and just trashed my own dress yesterday. It's nice to know I'm not alone because as you know, so much of the time going through this all I feel is loneliness and that most people don't understand. It feels like he died, a part of me died with him, and I am grieving the loss. Thank you so much for starting this group. I can't wait to read the book!

I am really excited about you creating this book too because for my grad school thesis I am creating a one woman show inspired by Happenings, TTD art and Yoko Ono's "Cut" piece. I love that we are in the development process of our creative endeavors because I would love to include anything you would want to share about that and incorporate it into my show somehow. A bit background on me, I am an actor, photographer and director. By the time my second wedding anniversary is here (next month), I will be separated officially. I wanted to feel like I tried everything to make our marriage work but my husband did not share the same thoughts. His latest reason for wanting a divorce is that it's not "fun" anymore. Whoever got married because they thought it would be all fun?! Lol

We have a photographer business together, so that's going to be fun to figure out what to do with, lol. I hope we can help each other out. Let me know if you would like to share more info. Here is the link to my Kickstarter page to give you a background on the premise. It won't be Live yet for about another week. <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1090955831/667649653?token=e3037c4d>

Right now, I'm writing monologues from different perspectives...brides, wedding vendors, mother-of-the-bride, bridesmaids, etc. I am also compiling used wedding gowns for art I will create and to use during the performance art piece in live trash the dress sessions. I'm stoked about this and think it will be really cathartic and fulfilling. I'm sure you feel the same way about your book!

All the Best,
Kristina (Sutton)

From: Joelle Caputa
Sent: Tuesday, July 10, 2012 1:04 PM
To: Kristina Sutton
Subject: Re: TTD Play

Hi Kristina,

This sounds awesome. Once the book is done, I am going to launch an awesome website. I'd love to post your photos on there and get your story. Interested?

Do you have photos from others yet? (Caputa)

From: Kristina Sutton
Sent: Monday, July 16, 2012 12:31 PM
To: Joelle Caputa
Subject: TTD Play

Hey Joelle!

That does sound great! I haven't gotten photos from others yet. I plan on shooting some outside the ones that were taken of me. (Sutton)

From: Joelle Caputa
Sent: Friday, August 3, 2012 9:04 AM
To: Kristina Sutton
Subject: Re: TTD Play

Hey!

I just posted about your project in the newsletter :)
Hope it helps! (Caputa)

Letters

On October 12, 2010, my father wrote a letter from my mother and himself addressed to me and to my husband. We received the letter two days later in the mail. My parents have been married over 40 years and I highly valued their counsel on marriage. Portions of this letter found their way into my solo play, as I wanted to share this astute advice with my audience. Though the letter was from both of my parents, my father penned it; therefore, he became a character in my show to provide an authentic, experienced voice on marriage and lend a mature, masculine voice to the text. His is the only male voice in the play. The original letter is transcribed below:

Dearest Kristina and [son-in-law],

I hope this finds you two doing well and adjusting to your new surroundings in Baton Rouge.

[Son-in-law], I hope that your new job is still enjoyable and that you are able to learn new things that will help you increase your knowledge and skills for the future, and that your possibilities of other additional paying gigs will become reality.

Kristina, hopefully your school classes are becoming more interesting and that rehearsals will add more challenge to your master's experience. Hang in there and do your best (I know you will).

Your Mom and I had wanted to sit down with both of you together to provide you both with a little more advice and hope that it will help you in your travels through life and marriage. But since timing did not allow us to do that, I thought that I would write to the two of you what we would have said to you had we in fact been able to sit down with you two prior to your leaving after the wedding.

First, let us say that the first years of marriage are difficult for all married couples. It is more difficult than some than others because everyone's circumstances are somewhat different (their childhood, educational background, maturity, and the degree they covered certain topics prior to marriage). Hopefully, the retreat you went to together will help you as you go forward.

No one really knows their marriage partner well until you have lived with one another for a while. A few months is not long enough. Sometimes it takes years – it depends on what obstacles are thrown your way and the everyday circumstances that you are faced with – before you really learn whom the other person really is. Your marriage made you partners and each of you must adjust to thinking differently; not just yourselves as individuals but as partners – in terms of “we,” what is best for “us” and not just “me.” Each of us, and you two are no exception, have our flaws. You have to learn to dwell on the good of your partner and overlook the bad as much as possible. However, you both will need to learn what things you each do that the other does not like and try as best you can to not do those things that irritate each other.

In changing your viewpoint of thinking from “me” to “us,” each of you will need to put the other first in your thoughts and actions. Your love for the other should want you to place the other first as long as that results in not placing both of you in a worst situation or position in your lives.

One of the most troubling problems in marriage will be finances, especially in the early stages of one's marriage. You are now partners and should not look at finances as mine and his or mine and hers. Starting up a household is expensive and it takes time. You will not be able to afford to buy everything at once. So in order to keep peace between you, you must develop 1) a budget and 2) a priority list of what you hope to spend money on. After bills are paid, then you can begin to purchase or save for the items on the list

you agreed upon. Circumstances do change, so periodically you will have to revisit the list – together.

Our advice: Partnership...not hiding anything or money from the other. Put your words into action, plan together, be open. Love one another and help one another, not work against one another. Life is tough enough and will throw hardships and obstacles your way. Face them together as partners and of one mindset- “us.”

[Son], you made a promise to us to love and take care of our dear daughter, our baby. We expect you to do that and hold you to that promise. And KK, you do the same for [your husband]. We also expect and hold you to that too. We send our love. Mom and Dad (Sutton, William)

As noted previously, my parents have been married for more than 4 decades. I respect their relationship and advice. I know it has not always been easy, but they have stood beside each other come what may. They have had many obstacles, and from their letter included above, one can discern that they have faced financial hardships and the typical adversities that come with adjusting to married life. I included much of the letter in my show because I found my parents’ observations to be honest and relevant to my own case, and I felt other married couples would feel the same. For singles, I saw the inclusion of this letter to be a helpful warning about what comes with married life, so as to not feel alone or surprised by said difficulties.

Another letter I included in my solo show originated from a letter my Ecuadorian grandmother, Alba, wrote to my mother, Nancy, for her wedding day. My grandmother was unable to travel from Ecuador to the United States at the time to attend my mother’s wedding. The original letter in Spanish was handwritten as follows:

Hijita de mi alma:

Hoy sera el dia mas feliz de tu vida, el dia que ilusiones entregaras ante el altar, tu vida al hombre que entregarastes tu amor y que tu corazon ha elegido como companiero para siempre! Para siempre my amor! Para toda la vida. Que podre yo decirte desde la distancia? No se corazon, quisiera decirte tantas cosas pero no me salen. Lo unico lo que mas pronto me sale desde el fondo de mi alma es que seras feliz, eternamente feliz. Y se que lo seras, porque has sido una buena hija y asi mismo seras una buena esposa y una buena madre. No creas mi amor que el nuevo camino que vas a emprender sera todo cubierto de rosas, no mi Corazon (no creas que trato de asustarte) encontraras tambien espinas que aveces duelen aveces duelen, que aveces hieren, pero en el corazon donde hay amor, todo se sustana, todo se olvida, todo se perdona y luego viene una paz, como que nace una muere ilusion. Yo siempre he ecido y sigo creyendo que la felicidad de un hogar la hace la mujer inteligente dando de si todo su alma, toda su comprension.

En fin, todo lo noble y grande que uno pose. Trata de ser alma mia comprensiva con tu esposo, dulce y carinosa, comprensiva en todo aspect y ceder, ceder, ceder siempre aunque a veces tu tengas la razon, aprende a dominarte tu character vida mia, olvida tus rencillas, tus pesares, y de nuestra siempre tu carita sonriente desde el amanecer hasta el

anochecer. La suerte no ha querido que este día tan feliz para ti este la madre contigo, pero no, que digo si estare, estare en la sombra, en las luces, en las flores, en el aire, desde todos los rincones, yo te vere, vere a mi linda novia, la mas bella de todas las novias con su carita sonriente alado de su padre, el mas lindo tambien de todo los hombres, porque es lindo verdad mi amor? En el tambien me veras a mi ya que estas acostumbrada a que siempre hemos sido uno solo, mi Corazon estara contigo en todo momento, en todo segundo y instante y desde aca desde la distancia recibe con el corazon y el pensamiento la bendicion de tu madre.

Alba (Uscocovich)

The letter focuses on the responsibilities of a married woman as a wife and lifelong companion to her husband. My mother gave me a copy of this letter in the weeks prior to my own wedding. My grandmother's words were so heartfelt and elegant, that when I read the letter with my own mother, we had tears in our eyes. Years later, when gathering material for my thesis show, I knew my grandmother's voice must be shared. Her sage advice and the poetic tone of her writing made for a dynamic and heart-wrenching addition to my play. The fact that it was in Spanish made it that much more meaningful and personal to me as Spanish is my second language. I wanted to keep the beauty of the language in tact, so I pre-recorded the letter in Spanish and played it as a voiceover in the show, allowing occasional spacing in the recording for live translation. I did not want to use subtitles or completely translate the letter live in order to allow the audience to enjoy the sound of the language and as to not distract fluent Spanish speakers in the audience. Artistically, I was fine with non-Spanish speakers only understanding portions of the letter; through my reactions to the letter and the inflection of the words, I hoped they could understand enough to have and/or witness an evocative experience.

Moment Work

In the Fall semester of 2012, Leigh Fondakowski of Tectonic Theatre Project and Head Writer of *The Laramie Project*, held a workshop with my MFA class at Louisiana State University. This workshop focused on using a technique utilized by Tectonic Theatre Project in the writing of such plays as *The Laramie Project*; this technique is called moment work. Fondakowski introduced us to this technique as we developed the scripts for our thesis shows. I found this technique very helpful in pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of my script. By focusing on theatrical elements such as space, sound, objects, etc. we began to think "out of the box" about our material and how we wanted to utilize these elements to tell our stories. The workshop also included discussions of outlining the dramatic event versus the theatrical event of our plays. The conversations we had were dense and extremely helpful in that it provided clarity for what I wanted to present to the audience and how I wanted to express the material in a theatrical form.

Practical solutions for my show developed from the moment work as well, such as the realization that the characters of the Young Woman and the Photographer could be combined into one dynamic character, and essentially the protagonist whose journey we follow in the play. Also, the moment work revealed key objects that were essential to the storytelling of the play and if need be, the play could be performed with just a wedding dress, letter, veil, camera, laptop, and

projector. I understood that other props were luxuries and learned that with solo plays especially—simplicity and clarity give the work strength.

Fondakowski posed to us the following question: “If your piece is an answer to a question, what is the question?” When I tried to write down my answer, I could not choose one question; I listed three questions. This affirmed I needed to clarify the overall message of my play. After careful consideration and more moment work, I finally settled on, “Why is it important for a bride to strive for a more beautiful marriage than her wedding?” The answer is simple, but it is often upstaged by wedding industry hype and societal pressure: do not lose sight of what a wedding stands for—to celebrate the union of a couple in marriage. In addition, I hope my play serves as a cautionary tale for couples to not get swept up in the glamour of having a wedding and saying yes to marriage before they are ready. A successful marriage takes work. I want to remind audiences that though the wedding industry can provide great inspiration, society can get swept up in the planning vortex because:

“...the increase in bridal magazines (and now websites), consumer shows, and wedding-themed films and advertising sustain traditional bridal rituals. These wedding texts are directed at women and assert that the wedding is the most significant event in their lives rather than portraying it as an important occasion for the couple, family, and social network, or presenting it as one of many life occurrences” (White 117).

Sustainable marriages stem from solid relationships, not beautiful weddings. Divorce is a hard path for both genders. “Women take an average of 3 to 3.5 years and men 2 to 2.5 years to reestablish a sense of external order after [a] separation” (MF 371). I encourage couples to avoid this detour by rearranging their priorities: prepare for sustainable marriages over incredible weddings.

Research Material

Pinterest

The social media platform, Pinterest, became a very useful component for collecting inspirational images of TTD sessions, visual art, empowering messages and divorce quotes. According to the website, Pinterest.com, “Pinterest is a tool for collecting and organizing things you love. Ben Silbermann, Evan Sharp and Paul Sciarra co-founded the site in March 2010.” Basically, Pinterest is an online “pin board” enabling me to have a more efficient and eco-friendly way of compiling images I utilized as “keys to the world” of my play. I did not have to spend time cutting out images or quotes from magazines or newspapers, as I could create a digital scrapbook of helpful and inspirational material on my computer. Liz Heron, Social Media Director of the Wall Street Journal describes, “The beauty of Pinterest is its staying power. It’s not as ephemeral as something like Twitter. And it’s slightly different than other social networking sites because it’s not just about what you want to share and re-pin; it’s also about what you want to save” (Tenore). Having this resource at my fingertips was extremely useful in that I could send a link to the board to the models and makeup artists of my trash the dress shoots to give them an idea of the overall mood and look I wanted for a shoot. I also sent a link to the photographer who shot my TTD session, Olga Verba, as she had never shot this particular type of photography. Pinterest made pre-planning much more efficient, and I also utilized the site to share material with my thesis advisors so they could track my progress in the development stages of my brainstorming for the actual play. The link to my board is as follows:
<http://pinterest.com/KSuttonPhoto/trash-the-dress-ttd/>

Texts

Louisiana State University’s library provided helpful resources on the topics I researched for the play to create a well-rounded viewpoint of weddings, marriage and divorce. I wanted my play to not only have a personal touch, but to also have universality based upon psychological, sociological and economical findings in published research. I first set out to learn more about the career paths of my characters. Though much of the first drafts of their monologues came from personal experience through my encounters of wedding vendors as a former bride and also as wedding photographer, I wanted a little more substance to their character voices.

Sarah, the wedding coordinator, is a highly optimistic, bubbly personality who likens wedding planning to theatre. As a theatre artist and wedding industry vendor myself (photographer), I have thought of the similarities between the two fields. When I found the following advice from a planner to a bride in *The New American Wedding*, I knew I wanted to endow Sarah with a theatrical mindset: “Dress as though you’re performing in the same show as your guests, but dress like the star, not a member of the chorus” (Delaney 114). Her romantic view of the world grew after reading the following passage from the aforementioned text: “As an event organizer, I believe it is the job of a wedding planner to transform your dreams into reality...Nothing is left to chance. We are your guarantee that come the big day everything will be in place, leaving you free to enjoy your celebration” (Haywood 21).

The New American Wedding also provided fodder to round out my baker, Amanda. Her highly competitive mentality stems from the following:

“In marketing, we have a creed when it comes to establishing a brand’s identity against its competition. You can beat them by staking a different claim, or you can join them; but if you join them—you have to beat them at their own game.” (Delaney 86-87)

Amanda takes her bakery very seriously, so making her brand conscious of her “Dream Day Bakery” was a natural next step.

A controversial character in my play is the lesbian bride, Emily. Though you only hear her story as the photographer tells it, I wanted her to be very real to the audience. Therefore, I had the photographer describe her conversation with Emily prior to revealing Emily’s sexual preference. I wanted her to be a bride to the audience first and foremost, and the fact that she was gay to be secondary, in the hopes that they would see that all brides go through very stressful wedding planning, but that being gay in current America makes planning a wedding that much harder. I do not see this scene as pushing my political views on the audience, but rather as exposing a very real human rights issue in today’s society. In order to take this step I wanted to understand more about the opposing views of same-sex marriage. In *Just Marriage*, a compilation of essays on the matter, Amitai Etzioni explains, “Many gay people feel strongly that unless they are entitled to exactly the same marriages as heterosexuals, their basic rights are violated which they (and many liberals) hold as semisacred” (Etzioni). Furthermore, another essay in the compilation revealed:

“In the public arena, defenses of the legal recognition of same-sex marriage like the majority opinion of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court are grounded in a commitment to equal rights and nondiscrimination. Opposition to same-sex marriage, on the other hand, rests on traditional moral values, sometimes religious, and the right of the people (not the courts) to decide what marriage is and who may marry” (Shanley 110).

I interpret this to mean that the character of Emily must feel like a second-class citizen when trying to plan her wedding, as gay marriages are not universally recognized, therefore attaining wedding vendors for a gay wedding must prove difficult for some gay couples. Emily, just like any other bride, is simply trying to celebrate her union to the love of her life. She wants the best she can afford because she knows, “The photographer is probably the important professional you will hire on your wedding day...If you try and save money here you will likely be disappointed. Your photos, and the video if you have one, are the only visual memento[s] *sic* of your day” (Haywood 217). Her phone call to the photographer is the culmination of that search for a photographer who will simply capture the best memories of her wedding day and not turn away from the event because she is labeled as a “gay bride.”

Savannah, the southern belle, is loosely based on young women I grew up with in the South. Many of them wanted to attend college to attain their “MRS”. An article, in LSU’s *The Daily Reveille*, featured a young woman that could very well have been a real-life Savannah. “A lot of people my age [21] say they couldn’t imagine getting married right now, [LSU psychology senior Kayla] Robicheaux said. “I’m sure some people think I’m too young, but that’s OK. They don’t know us or our relationship “ (Yoder). Savannah is just as hopelessly romantic and

she even wants to trash her dress as a testament to her love for her husband. When I read that “[Marc] Eric encourages women to... ‘show your husband how committed you are by trashing the dress’” (White 123-124), I knew I wanted Savannah to do trash her dress for that reason. “The encouragement for brides to sacrifice dresses is similar to the idea that married women will give things up for husbands” (White 124). This way of thinking may be old-fashioned to some, but I find it very relevant to married life in the South. In that vein, Savannah is “tickled pink by tradition.” “The trend for the traditional white gown was set by Queen Victoria in 1840...Although brides had been wearing white since ancient times it wasn’t the norm” (Haywood 91). Savannah has been raised on wedding folklore, so I knew this debutante sorority girl would be very particular about her wedding dress. She describes in detail what she wants her gown to look like and would believe, “What you wear on your wedding day is a serious statement of personal style and is likely to be among the most costly clothing you’ll ever buy” (Haywood 91). She and her family would be more than happy to splurge on this once-in-a-lifetime event, so I researched current wedding prices. “The Knot’s 2010 estimate of the cost of a wedding is \$27, 800” (White 116) and according to TheKnot.com’s 2011 Real Weddings Survey, “weddings in New York City, cost an average of \$70,000, while weddings in suburbia typically cost almost \$30,000” (Dutton). Basic wedding photography can be expensive, and Savannah also discusses additional shoots such as bridals, boudoir and TTD. As a playwright, I decided Savannah would have a median budget of \$50,000 and wrote the monologue accordingly. It was important to me to have a bride in my show that trashes her dress for love, as Savannah does. People trash their dress for all sorts of reasons, but many people think it’s just a movement for divorcees. A TTD session of a divorcee is a risky shoot for wedding photographers as it, “may threaten photographers’ sales, when it relates sessions to failed relationships. This is why TTD Photographers so rarely market divorce sessions” (White 127). I have felt said apprehension in protecting my own brand as a wedding photographer, but ultimately, I got into photography for the art form, so I am making the choice to market divorce TTD sessions despite the stigma. I am choosing creativity over commercialism as so many artists before me.

In addition to character research, I felt it prudent to do research regarding trash the dress sessions and the general public opinion of these sessions as well as wedding industry viewpoints of the photography trend. In Michele White’s critical essay, “The Dirt on ‘Trash the Dress’ Resistance: Photographers, Brides and the Mess of Post-wedding Imaging Sessions,” she deduces:

Photographers, heterosexual brides, and reporters relate “trash the dress,” or TTD dress post-wedding photography sessions, with changing wedding cultures and the visual position of wedded women. They associate TTD with resistance. . . Photographers regularly market these images as artistic, unconventional, and distinct from wedding photography in their promotional blogs as well as in internet wedding forums and news reports. (114)

That sounded straightforward enough, but I began to wonder, was this aforementioned “resistance” of TTD, code for being seen as anti-wedding or anti-marriage photographs?

TTD allows women to oppose wedding norms and being mannered...Most women [TTD] participants are pro- rather than anti-wedding because they choose to get married

and engage in many of the features of traditional weddings. TTD may enable these women to work through frustrations at organizing such complicated events, dieting for months, trying to maintain the whiteness of dresses, and not enjoying their weddings. (White 123)

I could definitely identify with these points. Planning a wedding, a destination wedding at that, was one of the most stressful and time-consuming tasks I had ever encountered. I felt the need to make the reception enjoyable, even unforgettable for my guests, and I often quarreled with my fiancé about how to best appease both sides of our family over reception details. I was obsessive about fitting perfectly into my dress and not having any wrinkles or stains on it; I most definitely did not want my fiancé to see the dress prior to the wedding day. There were many arguments about the guest list as it became larger in efforts to appease both of our sides of the family. There was so much pressure to have beautiful invitations, a classy, but edgy gown, an eco-friendly wedding, an exquisite cake, a lovely venue, fun music, an open bar, a delicious buffet, etc. I designed the centerpieces and created them with the help of my mother, but there just never seemed to be enough hands, funds or time to perfect it all. As I have mentioned before, I had two TTD sessions: one the day after my wedding and another after my separation. The former relieved wedding planning anxiety and the second celebrated my new freedom from a taxing marriage as I began my journey to a divorce.

Much of my research at the LSU library consisted of studying the causes, effects and facts about divorce. I found the following data very interesting:

In the mid-nineteenth century, most of the dissolutions in a given year were caused by the death of one spouse, but by the mid-1970s, for the first time in our nation's history, more marriages ended every year in divorce than in death. (Cherlin 25)

I was struck by the mention of death in discussing divorce rates because so often during my separation I felt as if my spouse had died. Not having him in my life most certainly felt as if he had passed. My research revealed, "...few adults who are about to separate are prepared for the intense emotional difficulties that often are experienced by both partners during the first years after separation. . ." (Cherlin 87). I too felt unprepared for this transition and took comfort in knowing that many divorcees feel this sense of loss. "The death of a spouse has been identified as the most stressful event that can occur in a person's life" (Schwartz 461), and my studies divulged that the stages of grief for divorcees are likened to the stages of grief for death. As I mention in my script, there is a lot of shame with divorce, but one must allow oneself to feel the grief in order to heal and try not to feel ashamed of the pain that comes with this transition:

According to Fredda Wasserman, Clinical Director of Adult Programs and Education at Our House Grief Support Center, 'Absolutely nobody grieves correctly, according to everybody else.' Similar to other types of grief experiences, the *death* of a marriage is not just a moment in time, but a process that is filled with many different feelings. Grief is not linear! In other words, you cannot just pass through the stages of shock, denial, anger, and acceptance in a well-defined order. Divorce, like grief, is chaotic and circular, with the stages changing daily or moment-to-moment. (Warner)

There is a silver lining in this process. In my experience, I am able to focus on parts of my life such as art, academics and other relationships now that I am not busy fighting for my marriage. I am not unique in this regard. In 1992, when Andrew Cherlin wrote, *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, he noted, “more than one million couples per year—are experiencing the distress of marital separation. Yet the process of divorce does benefit many adults who go through it, because it frees them from the tensions of an unhappy marriage” (87).

As my monologues reflect, rebuilding your life after a broken marriage is not all roses and rainbows. “Many women especially those in traditional marriages, suffer a loss of status, identity, and their domestic sphere—the home” (Schwartz 369). There are so many factors you face beyond losing your companion, including legal fees, moving costs, buried dreams, what feels like social suicide, division of community property, insurance and tax matters, social media embarrassment, the hassle of changing your married name back to your maiden name if you are female, and if you have children, the dreadful custody battles.

Your confidence is shot, but as clichéd as it sounds, it uncovers strength you did not know you had. I am not alone in that sentiment as it has been found that “. . . women are more likely than men to experience a sense of growth in self-esteem after a divorce. . .” (Schwartz 370). Undergoing a divorce as I wrote my thesis show was undoubtedly tumultuous timing, but the show must go on, and I would not allow myself to back down from the challenge.

Challenges

Writing

When I auditioned and interviewed for the LSU MFA program in the spring of 2010, I learned that accepted MFA candidates were to write and perform a one person show in order to graduate with their terminal degree in Theatre. This information both terrified and excited me. I never thought I would be capable of achieving such a feat, but I trusted in the faculty and the curriculum of the department to guide me along the way.

I minored in English at Brenau University, tutored English throughout those undergraduate years, and for a brief time even served as an Assistant Director of the Writing Lab at Darton College after graduation. However, analytical writing was my strength and creative writing scared me just as much as it satisfied me. I love to read classic fiction and creative non-fiction, but I never felt my own creative writing decent enough to feel proud of or realistic enough to seem adequate. The idea of writing a one-person show seemed miles beyond what I would ever be capable of and the idea of writing something that I would want to perform confounded me. But the topic of my show, “Trash the Dress,” revealed itself organically, much like the training in the LSU Theatre Department prepared me for this event.

The Script Analysis class I took with Dr. John Fletcher in the Fall of 2010 and the Performance Theory and Criticism class under Dr. Alan Sikes in the Spring of 2012, undoubtedly prepared me to not only write my thesis show, but also this thesis essay. Looking at scripts more critically, deconstructing what makes a performance, and defining theatre in its essence immeasurably enhanced my critical thinking and helped to fine tune my verbal and written communication skills in discussing not only theatre, but also art. I began to critique my own work as an actor, director and photographer in this capacity and with this new viewpoint came to see my work as interconnected. This realization that my artistic work did not have to be separate components of my creativity was paramount to the development of my thesis. I utilized not only my writing to create my thesis show, but also incorporated my acting and photography in this self-directed and self-produced work. For the first time in my life, I considered myself an artist. And as an artist I now had the courage to create.

Having discussed the academic challenge of writing my thesis play, I must also address my personal challenges in this endeavor. Graduate School is no easy feat, and the third year of a rigorous professional actor-training program, such as the one at LSU, requires the utmost dedication, focus and collaborative spirit. In my experience, going through a divorce during said time is the mecca of all challenges. Soon after our nuptials, it was apparent we differed in our ideas of what being in a marriage meant. A study by sociologists of 50 separated and divorced people found “the median length of deliberation between thinking that divorce is a possibility and the certainty of divorce was 12 months for the men and 22 months for the women” (Schwartz 362). This time frame most certainly coincides with my experience. I married my ex-husband a week prior to beginning graduate school, and I will graduate a divorcee, but I will gladly have my MFA. “Most people who divorce do so early in their marriage—about half of all divorces occur by the seventh year of marriage” (Cherlin 25). This was true in my case, and in my research for my one-person show I uncovered, “the behaviors most commonly cited as

leading to divorce are poor communication, extramarital sex, constant fighting, emotional abuse, drug or alcohol problems, and financial mismanagement” (Schwartz 364). Some of these factors played into the dissolution of my marriage, and the more research I did, the more I realized I was writing the right show for me. Nevertheless, writing a play about marriage and divorce was extremely challenging—to have those raw feelings and to know I had to be brave enough to eventually say these words I’d written was a near intolerable thought. However, it was all I could think about; it is a common adage to “write what you know.” So I did.

Performance

The challenge of performing such personal material made me a braver artist. In my experience, actors have often expressed that the most difficult roles to play are the ones that are closest to them; furthermore, playing a theatrical version of yourself on stage requires a very vulnerable state. You are exposing yourself when you are used to playing characters on stage. The protagonist, Photographer/Young Woman, of my play is very much close to my own self. Granted, there were creative liberties taken with the character to make for a more dynamic theatricality, but overall she has my quirks and is in essence—me. Overcoming the fear that she/I, or rather, we, are not interesting enough to be put live on stage alone in a one-person show was sometimes exacerbated in rehearsal by my lack of confidence. As previously noted, divorce takes its toll on your self-esteem, and I had to push past that to perform the material in an open, honest manner. It may not have always been pretty or comfortable, but neither is overcoming divorce, so perhaps that rawness enhanced the monologues in a very real and positive way.

Nick Erickson, Associate Head of the LSU MFA Acting department, was also our Professor of Movement. The training I experienced under his leadership included character and mask work, body conditioning, stage combat basics and movement exploration. Movement was one of my weaknesses when I entered the program, and though I by no means excel in it, I feel I now have proficiency in a movement vocabulary and understand how I can utilize my body’s strengths and limitations to my advantage in developing character work. This foundation was imperative to differentiating the characters in my solo show. I definitely feel I could have gone further in distinguishing the characters physically and vocally, and I look forward to additional exploration of these characters for future performances. In “Trash the Dress,” I was able to utilize my vocal training and IPA knowledge gained from our Professor of Voice, Joanna Battles. Not only did I have the training to perform with ease vocally for 45 minutes alone on stage, but I also had my foundation in IPA to assist me in producing more accurate sounds for the dialects in my show. In addition, understanding how pitch, pace, placement etc. can play into the distinctive sound quality of a character enhanced my ability to distinguish characters in my solo show, including that of my father who was raised in the American South and that of my Ecuadorian grandmother.

George Judy, Head of the LSU MFA Acting program, often encouraged our class to make bolder, braver choices as artists. His guidance in brainstorming and his support of the unique, interactive piece of theatre I was creating facilitated my courage to try new things. Understanding that it’s okay to fail in some things you try was a common theme amongst his teachings as well as that of Nick Erickson and Joanna Battles. It was through my training from the faculty that I understood that you never truly fail in your artistic choices; a choice may “fail” in that it gave you an unforeseen outcome, but that discovery is a gift and leads you to another

choice. The unique quality of acting is the endless choices actors can make as they live their characters' lives truthfully; no two performances are ever the same. Some choices may make for a more dynamic performance, and it is part of our job as actors to be in the moment and to make the most honest and dynamic choice in that moment. George Judy would often tell us to "just let them live," and to just "tell the story." Technique and training are so vital to being the most evocative performer you can be, but at some point you have to trust in your homework and just let the characters live. This knowledge gave me the confidence to perform my one-person show and just tell my story.

Technical

Sound

Johann Pachelbel's Canon in D is the song that opens my show. I selected this song for various reasons. Not only was it the piece that I walked down the aisle to at my own wedding, but it is also commonly played at weddings in the United States. The romanticism and rhythm of the piece was a lovely underscoring for the opening scene that is movement based and contains no dialogue. Nick Erickson and George Judy assisted me with the blocking of this scene, and I believe we found an interesting combination of gracefulness, quirkiness and humor in the movement. My stage directions indicate:

She glances at dress and veil, crosses dance-like to them. Caresses wedding dress fabric. Takes veil and crosses to vanity, sits. Looks in vanity "mirror" and attempts to apply veil. Her quirkiness and awkwardness begin to peek through her gracefulness. (26)

George Judy has pointed out that I should use my natural quirkiness to my advantage in my character work. It was a natural choice to then allow some of my quirkiness to shine through in this opening scene. The classical music provided a nice juxtaposition to the eccentricity of some of the actions we saw on stage, including how she "begins to caress veil as she stares at her fiancé's photo. Inhales, Exhales. Realizes she has gotten chocolate on veil, frantically tries to clean it before putting it back" (26).

My pre-show music included only songs about weddings or marriage. Most of the scenes of my play included musical transitions that paralleled themes or messages in the forthcoming monologues. I wanted to give the audience a taste of what was to come and set the appropriate mood. This also allowed me to ease into the characters organically and quickly with the assistance of sounds from the world of the play. The musical selections in the interactive trash the dress portion of the play were inspired by the bio-pic of pop star Katy Perry's 2011 world tour in "Katy Perry: Part of Me." Katy Perry is also a divorcee and, I found her film refreshingly inspirational.

In addition to music, my solo show also included voiceover. The scene, "Carta a Mi Hija en La Distancia" featured a pre-recorded track of my voice reading my grandmother's letter in Spanish. I chose to utilize voiceover to enable for live translation and to fine-tune the sound of my grandmother's voice as I felt she would have read it. My stage directions indicate: "The idea here is to communicate the love, humor and wisdom of the letter, not to have distracting subtitles or translation" (32). With the assistance of Jason Bayle, my classmate and the Sound Board Operator of the production, we recorded the track in LSU Theatre's sound booth. We added a slight effect to the sound quality of my voice with a slight reverb. This effect enveloped the scene in a memory-like quality. Since the letter was written over 40 years ago in a foreign country (Ecuador), the effect also punched up the sense of passing time and distance. I was very pleased with the end result.

Visual

The visual components of my show were imperative to creating my Happening inspired performance piece. As the audience entered the theatre they viewed framed fine art prints from both my own TTD session and staged TTD sessions I photographed for this production. The signature shot for the Trash the Dress series was printed on an 11x17 inch canvas and exhibited as well. This image, simply titled “Trash the Dress,” is featured in the Appendix of this thesis paper, and features my classmate and model for this shoot, Katrina Despain, kicking over a trash can in a cemetery as she dons a wedding dress and rain boots. This photo is both evocative and empowering to the viewer. There is a sense of the model’s frustration and sense of taking control. Setting the photo in a cemetery also brings together another series of images in this set, entitled, “Buried Dreams.” Katrina was delightful to work with and her nuanced poses captured the feelings of lost love, dying dreams and new hope that divorcees often feel. She also served as my photographer assistant on another series I produced for my show titled, “Broken Home.” This series featured a photography colleague and friend, Olga Verba, as a bride amidst a burned out home. The location proved stunning and gritty, and I was lucky to find an abandoned, dilapidated home that had recently caught fire. Unfortunately, the location also proved dangerous as we had to cut the photo shoot short to care for Katrina’s foot; she had accidentally stepped on a rusted nail. I am very grateful to her for her good attitude and willingness to another photo shoot after this incident. She was even eager to heal quickly so as to continue on with the planned photo shoots.

Overall, there are four themes in the “Trash the Dress” series. These include the aforementioned “Broken Home” and “Buried Dreams,” as well as the “Detour” and “Lost Focus” series. The “Detour” photos reveal an abandoned and trashed wedding trash beside road signs. They pay homage to the journey, pain, and decisions one faces in marriage and divorce. The path is rough either way, and sometimes not that far apart. The struggle is visceral, the heartache palpable, and for good or ill, we often ignore the signs along the way. “Lost Focus” photos symbolize the loss of identity in some marriages and the lack of self-worth that divorced people often experience. These photos are simply and literally out of focus.

Throughout the pre-show, a projector depicted images from real weddings I actually photographed as a professional wedding photographer. During scene and character transitions, new photos were projected. These photos were often non-matrixed to the monologues in that they did not necessarily correspond in any obvious way to the upcoming monologue. For example, the scene “Forever Girls” showed an image of dozens of fire extinguishers. Other photos obviously coincided with the theme of a scene, such as the photo of a wedding cake for “Dream Day Bakery.”

Microsoft PowerPoint was the program I used to create the slideshows for this production. The slideshow playing during the live trash the dress section at the end of the play featured photos from my own TTD taken by Olga Verba, and images I took of Olga and Katrina during their styled TTD sessions. Much pre-planning was done for these shoots. I raised funds to purchase wedding gowns, veils, art supplies and paint for these shoots and for the live trash the dress part of my show through a social media fundraising platform from Kickstarter.com. My online Kickstarter page enabled people to read about my project and donate funds electronically to the cause. Donors were offered rewards for their contributions such as thanks in the program, fine

art prints, or a complementary photo shoot. I did have to spend some of my own funds on acquiring material for this production, but it would have been a much more expensive feat without the \$400+ in donations raised. It definitely would have been an unachievable task in terms of scale without the donations.

Pre-production of the visuals began in June of 2012. Olga photographed my TTD session in late July 2012, and I photographed Olga and Katrina in the Fall of 2012. Prints were ordered and mounted by December of 2012 in time for the January 2013 exhibit at the production.

Script

Trash the Dress: A Solo Play

Pre-show: In lobby or foyer, there are a few fine art prints of the artist's photography work in this series. Images are also projected in the theatre. During pre-show slide show, there is a slide warning about potential for audience participants to get dirty, wet and/or have possible stains on clothes or shoes from non-toxic paint. Projector will exhibit slides of the performer's photography throughout the show as well.

THE PREP

Palchebel's Canon in D begins to play.

Projection of a black and white photo: An angel on a tombstone. Angel bears a pink flower (the blossom is the only color in the photo and is fading to grey.) Angel sits beside a lamb. Lights up on stage. A veil rests on a dressing screen. A wedding dress is visible from behind the screen upstage right. A vanity and bench are set downstage right. Perfume bottle, picture frame, piece of chocolate and various other items on vanity. A pair of heels are beside vanity.

Projection changes to a bride walking into a mist filled forest, her back to us. Lights up on Young Woman as she enters upstage left in a wedding march, and crosses downstage center. She occasionally admires her engagement ring, twirls around. She glances at dress and veil, crosses dance-like to them. Caresses wedding dress fabric. Takes veil and crosses to vanity, sits. Looks in vanity "mirror" and attempts to apply veil. Her quirkiness and awkwardness begin to peek through her gracefulness. Applies perfume. Looks at piece of chocolate. Looks concerned and jumps to weigh herself on scale beside vanity. Is relieved. Goes back to vanity, eats chocolate - as she savors it, she peers into picture frame, sighs, smiles, begins to caress veil as she stares at her fiancé's photo. Inhales, Exhales. Realizes she has gotten chocolate on veil, frantically tries to clean it before putting it back. Laughs at herself. Puts on a blazer. Crosses to center stage back turned to us, posed in the same position as the bride in the projection. Beat. She crosses to camera and tripod upstage left and addresses audience.

THE FILTER

YOUNG WOMAN/PHOTOGRAPHER

I see in pictures. I'm a wedding photographer. The most significant picture in my life was undeveloped for so long until I was finally compelled to develop its negative, or in photographer terms, the raw image. I was married.

(Holds up left ring finger)

And now I'm not.

(Moves ring to right hand. Beat.)

But I love to shoot weddings, and I still believe in the ever-elusive long lasting marriage.

MEETING THE ONE

Late afternoon, SARAH, impeccably and stylishly dressed, late 20s, overly upbeat, overlooks wedding reception activity, adjusts items on book signing table.

SARAH

Yes, they are really sweet. Yeah, I'm the coordinator. You? Nice to meet you, Eric. So what do you do—you're an actor? Like theatre, film? I used to do theatre in high school. Musicals. Rogers and Hammerstein...yep, you know it. I miss theatre sometimes. This? Oh, I kind of fell into it. I was working for an event planner in college and when I graduated, I thought it was time to start my own business. So I did! Nah, it's not impressive, it was actually—impulsive, and scary, to be honest. That first year was hard—it's all about word of mouth. Networking to get that next gig. I guess that's true for you too. I couldn't imagine doing anything else.

(Beat)

You know, theatre and wedding planning are sort of similar. *(Laughs)* No, they are! You have a leading lady and the leading man—bride and groom, the supporting players are the wedding party, you have costumes, a set, props, a lot of pre-planning for both, a theme and they both bring people together! But this is what I love: they both tell a story. A great wedding coordinator knows part of the job is to tell the couple's love story through the wedding. That's the fun and challenging part for me. The wedding celebrates the new chapter of the couple's story—so each wedding is different, I mean if you love what you do they are. It's always a new story so it's never boring. *(Smiles)* Yeah, I do. *(Laughs)* I really love what I do. And I like meeting new people all the time. Yes, like you. *(Smiles)* Yeah, let's do that. I'd like to chat more with you too. And I'd love to see you in a show. Great! So, it's a date.

ENGAGED (IN 3 PARTS)

(Part One)

YOUNG WOMAN/PHOTOGRAPHER

I won't look at it. No. I'm not looking. Don't pull it out. Don't! Put it away. No! *(Beat)* Did you just propose? In a Best Western parking lot? Wow. No, I won't marry you. Are you kidding me?! You propose after not speaking to me or even seeing me for months and you propose after 2 minutes? I'm not going to marry you because you think I just want a ring. I can buy a ring. That's not any reason to propose. You would hate me forever if you thought I gave you an ultimatum. And I would hate you forever for proposing in a Best Western parking lot. Ask me to marry you when you are ready for a lifetime commitment, not just ready to get back together.
Music.

DREAM DAY BAKERY

Amanda, early 30's, sits behind desk on the telephone. She is intense about cakes.

AMANDA

Yes, tasting is most certainly allowed at the meeting. We'd be glad to have samples ready for your consideration. *(Whispers across desk, hand over the phone)*

Be with you in a moment. *(Back on phone)* Yes, typically buttercream frosting is more appealing to most palettes than fondant. But both will be available to you. *(Listens)*. The deposit reserves your event date. Yes, credit card is fine. We are very flexible. We know wedding planning can be stressful and want you to know we will take excellent care of you. *(Listens)*. Thank you, Savannah, looking forward to meeting you- *(glances at paperwork)* and Steven. Great! We'll see you on the 5th. And congratulations again! We're so happy for you. Alright. Bu-bye. *(Hangs up the phone)*

Hi! Sorry about the wait. You met with my business partner last week for the office manager position, right? I'm Amanda-Lead Baker. You would be doing- well, pretty much what you saw me doing. Taking calls, booking tastings, following-up, sending out invoices and ordering supplies. *(Looks at resume)* I see you have a lot of experience. I have one concern. You have no wedding industry experience. You would be the voice of Dream Day Bakery-the first contact clients have with us, and usually the last-you send out thank you notes after the event. How do you feel this industry differs from other workplaces? *(Prospective client gives a succinct answer)* Yes, they do need to feel special, but this industry, unlike any other, requires the utmost customer service. Our clients must feel we are the ONLY ones to deliver a cake worthy of their big day, a cake of their dreams. If they leave a phone call or meeting with a bad taste in their mouth, so to speak, we won't get the booking. It's highly competitive. They need to feel they are the first and only couple to EVER get married. It can be annoying, their micromanaging us sometimes, but we never show that. Do you believe you can make each client feel like they are the greatest beings to ever walk the earth? *(Smiles)* Welcome aboard.

ENGAGED (IN 3 PARTS) **(Part 2)**

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't want you to. No. Don't go down. I don't want that right now. *(Sighs)* Seriously. We only just started dating again. Get up. You just proposed a few days ago. No, I don't want to be your wife. Because you proposed high. Come here. Why do you want to marry me? *(Listens)* I really hope that's true. We'll just have to see. *(Smiles)*
Music.

TRASH THE DRESS: A TESTAMENT TO LOVE

Former Debutante, Southern Belle, early 20s. Sits demurely in chair. Wedding magazines in her lap.

SAVANNAH

A horse drawn carriage. A princess style gown. A lace veil with drops of rhinestones that shimmer like diamonds. My prince charming awaitin' me down the aisle in a tailor made seersucker suit. Those are the images that come to mind of what I want on my wedding day.

But there is somethin' else I may want you to coordinate later, my sorority sisters would think I was just bananas if I were to do this...have you ever seen those trash the dress photos? Oh! Aren't they just stunning - but I've NEVER done anything like that. Do you think-I mean would that be somethin' you think you could also help me with? I just think it's a shame to never wear the dress again. And if my fiancé and I are blessed enough to some day have a daughter, I just wonder, would she even want to wear my gown? You know, girls have such particular ideas of what they want their dress to look like...but I do hate the idea of not havin' anything to pass down to her for her wedding day. I'm usin' my grandmother's brooch in my bouquet and wearin' my mother's pearls. I am just tinkled pink by tradition!

Oh, I hadn't thought of that! Saving the veil would be so sweet. Oh, Sarah, you really are good at what you do! You're gonna make a beautiful bride some day. Bless your heart!

I don't know if I have the courage to get all gussied up and then destroy the gown, but I do love all those pictures I see with the bride and groom embracin' in the water, like a lake or the ocean, it's just so romantic! What better way to show the world we're in it forever than to trash my dress?! I'll never need the dress again-I'd like to dedicate the shoot to him, like a testament to our love. It would be like saying goodbye to his bride because for the rest of our lives I'll always be his wife.

Do what? A boudoir shoot? Before the wedding day? Oh, that would make such a perfect wedding gift for him in a little book! Do you know a photographer that could do all this? When can I meet her? Well butter my buns and call me a biscuit-I'm really gonna do this thing! A boudoir shoot! What ever will my sorority sisters say? *(Giggles)* Music.

TAKE A SHOT

Photographer (she is the young woman we have seen before) fiddles with tripod as she begins to speak.

PHOTOGRAPHER

I'm questioning myself now. I had a call from an out of town client the other day, a bride, interested in booking a photographer for next Fall. And she's calling far enough in advance that there should be plenty of availability, but I was stunned when she said all the photographers she'd called in her area were booked already. She was really anxious. She wanted to know, first thing, about my availability- usually they inquire about my price range first, and then we discuss location and availability. So I looked at my

calendar and told her I only had one wedding booked for that October. She started sobbing saying she really hoped I was sure I didn't have anything booked the third weekend of October. I reassured her I didn't, and I asked for her e-mail address so I could send her the wedding packages. I asked her fiance's name too (I like to greet the couple by name when I e-mail them info). She hesitated and said, "Emily. My fiance's name is Emily. It's a gay wedding." I was silent for a moment, it felt like forever, but it was probably a second, and this girl, this bride, she said, "you missed something on your calendar didn't you?" I was blushing, on the phone, and stuttered something stupid like, "Well, I don't think I did, but I will e-mail you back with the pricing." Then I thanked her for calling and congratulated her on her engagement and we hung up.

So, of course I have no problem shooting their wedding. I mean, we didn't grow up like that, right, I mean to be prejudiced or homophobic or something? But I feel so embarrassed that I was shocked when I was asked to shoot a gay wedding. Why did I feel that way? I believe in marriage equality; I have a Human Rights Campaign Sticker on my car! So why was I shocked? And then I question what I stand for because I wondered, if I book this wedding, would I post photos from it on my website. I actually thought to myself, the photos could turn clients away. I'm glad that bride called because it forced me to evaluate my business, my values, and my future in this industry. So I sat down and thought about it. And I realized I was thinking like a businesswoman, and that was okay because sometimes business decisions are hard. And I know I am making the right choice for me...that if any potential client would be offended by my shooting a gay wedding, I don't want them as a client of mine.

ENGAGED (IN 3 PARTS) **(Part 3)**

YOUNG WOMAN

What's that in your pocket? I don't know if I want to look! (Laughs) Ok, I'm gonna look. WHAT ARE YOU—? I don't want you to keep proposing. (Beat) I want to be your wife. ("Is that a yes?") Wait, was there a question? Aren't you supposed to ask me something?! Yes! Yes, I will marry you. I love you too! I'm so happy. I can't believe we're engaged. Third times the charm! (Holds out hand for ring, beaming).
Music.

THE STYLED SHOOT ARGUMENT

Lights up on female blogger, typing on laptop at desk. Mid 30s, French, straight shooter, haughty, and sassy.

BLOGGER

You pose an interesting question, Olivia. Back when I first decided to create this wedding blog, I was just starting out with my own wedding planning. I often get asked my thoughts on styled shoots, and whether they're achievable or problematic. And my short answer is...yes and no. I know, I know, that's not much of an answer. But here's the thing. There are A LOT of styled shoots out there, and I adore staring into their face's

eyes, soaking up the inspiration, and letting them inspire me to do what I do...But there's a lot of concern out there, voiced by brides like you and bloggers, that styled shoots are leaving a bad blemish on weddings. I agree AND disagree. I DO agree that, when a styled shoot is not marked as such and made to seem like an actual wedding-that's a problem. Don't get me wrong, I love collecting the absolute best of what's going on in the world of weddings and bringing all that delicious eye candy here to you, so that often includes publishing styled shoots on my blog. I've crashed my hard-drive enough times to know that what I really need is a house on the internet where all good ideas come to live and thrive; one peachy place for planning perfection. As long as a styled shoot is properly marked as an inspiration shoot, thereby indicating that the photographer had time to capture EVERY. LITTLE. DETAIL, then styled shoots can provide incredible inspiration for brides. It's also a wonderful means of vendor collaboration...having a florist, photographer, etc. donate their resources for a shoot produces divine results! But when blogs simply post pictures from these styled shoots, they do a disservice to the couples leaving them with unrealistic expectations. Many of even the most over the top shoots' looks are achievable, but we all know it's about budget. Inspiration shoots are often very high end, and I think that is why they are becoming to be perceived so negatively. I think it's time to create and feature shoots on limited budgets as well. To my wedding vendor readers: Think of what an average wedding costs in America (about \$25K) and develop shoots with less than average budgets. And brides, when in doubt about whether a shoot is from a real wedding or styled shoot, do some sleuthing. Do you see any wedding guests or an officiate in the photos? Are there table settings for more than just the wedding party? If not, chances are, it's all make believe, but don't let that ruin your fairy tale day.

ACCOUNTABLE

(Addresses audience, sits straddling chair backwards as she cleans camera lens)

YOUNG WOMAN

I am accountable too, though I ardently tried to save my marriage. He admittedly agreed that he didn't give it his all. They say it takes two to destroy a marriage, but I have learned it takes two to salvage it. My first mistake was saying yes to his proposal. He thought he was ready and I could sense he wasn't, but I loved him so much and was so swept up in the idea of marrying him... I did give him the out of waiting a year or so before we actually got married but he was so adamant that he didn't want to wait any longer than he had to for me to be his wife, and that melted my heart. So we married within 4 months and joked people probably thought I was pregnant. We should have taken our time. It was too much to expect of us, we'd just gotten back together and there was still so much hurt from before. My second mistake was not taking care of him. He needed help I was not qualified to give him. I also couldn't give him the attention he wanted with all of my artistic and academic commitments. But I did try. And he told me to stop trying so hard. I was at a loss. That leads me to my third mistake. The time we worked best was when we were building a relationship through God during our engagement. Though now I wonder if his energy in that was more for me than for

himself since his interest in faith quickly dissipated after our wedding. I won't go into his mistakes, that is for him and it's not my problem anymore. They say divorce is one of the hardest and most stressful events a person can go through, second only to the death of your child or spouse. Guess it makes sense, divorce is the death of those dreams you once had, and it is the death of your spouse, maybe not their actual death, but their death to you as your spouse, the one person who you vowed to love and be loved by til death do you part. But you are not dead. And you have to bury those dreams or the new reality of your broken home will bury you.

BEAT.

FOREVER GIRLS

Lights up on Young Woman as she speaks to her best friend. They get ready for a night out. Music transitions us into next scene.

YOUNG WOMAN

"Forever Girls" don't belong with "For Now" guys. You're a forever girl, Amanda, the kind people marry. He's a for now guy, the kind you have fun with. Nothing will remain consistent but his inconsistency. You want a guy to complement your life, not complicate it!

What is it with for now guys anyway? Sometimes it's the fire. If you have fire for someone, you are bound to get burned. Think about your history. Even though you don't like him or his behavior sometimes, don't you still ache for him and his way with you in bed? That fire, that passion can burn you alive. In my case, he had a history of fucking me so hungrily and so often right before he would leave me, that I was left, and left insatiable. During the good times, sex was good, during the rough times, the sex was dangerous and breathless, if we had it at all, but the Ahhh-mazing sex came to mean he was on his way out the door. After the second heartbreak, I realized it was a pattern. The great sex before a broken heart! It was cruel and unfair and provided no closure, and I let him do it AGAIN, because I married him and it inevitably reared it's fiery head before he definitively said he was leaving me and wanted a divorce. What was different that time?! We had vows, at least they were vows to me. We had a covenant before God, our friends, and family, and on my wedding day I would have never dreamed that we wouldn't make it to our second anniversary. No, that's a lie. Remember, I was dry-heaving on my wedding day? I feared he would break my heart, but I told myself this time would be different. This time he was a groom, I was his bride, and he had promised me and my parents he never wanted to live life without me again...until he did...and despite the covenant and blessings, this time was no different at all.

(Beat)

CARTA A MI HIJA EN LA DISTANCIA

(Letter to my daughter in the distance)

Lights up on Young Woman holding letter from her Ecuadorian grandmother, she occasionally translates. Voiceover airs. (Note: translation available. The idea here is to communicate the love, humor and wisdom of the letter, not to have distracting subtitles or translation)

YOUNG WOMAN

It's not that simple really. My mother and father don't have the perfect marriage. No one does. But after 41 years of marriage, it's not a bad picture. My grandmother also had a solid relationship with my grandfather. Living in those shadows is my reality and a weighty aspiration. My grandmother couldn't be with my mom on her wedding day, so she wrote her this letter instead.

MADRE

Hijita de mi alma:

Hoy sera el dia mas feliz de tu vida, el dia que ilusiones entregaras ante el altar, tu vida al hombre que entregarastes tu amor y que tu corazon ha elegido como companiero para siempre! Para siempre my amor! Para toda la vida. *Companion for life! forever my love! For all of your life*

Que podre yo decirte desde la distancia? What can I tell you from the distance?

No se corazon, quisiera decirte tantas cosas pero no me salen. Lo unico lo que mas pronto me sale desde el fondo de mi alma es que seras feliz, eternamente feliz. Y se que lo seras, porque has sido una buena hija y asi mismo seras una buena esposa y una buena madre.

Because you have been a good daughter, I know you will soon make a good wife and a good mother

No creas mi amor que el nuevo camino que vas a emprender sera todo cubierto de rosas, no mi Corazon (no creas que trato de asustarte) *I'm not trying to scare you* encontraras tambien espinas que aveces duelen, que aveces hieren, pero en el corazon donde hay amor, todo se sustana, todo se olvida, todo se perdona y luego viene una paz, como que nace una nueva ilusion. *A new illusion*

Yo siempre he creido que la felicidad de un hogar la hace la mujer inteligente dando de si toda su alma, toda su comprension.

I have always believed the happiness of a home is made by an intelligent woman.

En fin, todo lo noble y grande que uno pose. Trata de ser, alma mia, comprensiva con tu esposo, dulce y carinosa, comprensiva en todo aspecto y ceder, ceder, ceder siempre aunque a veces tu tengas la razon, aprende a dominarte tu caracter vida mia, olvida tus rencillas, tus pesares, y de nuestra siempre tu carita sonriente desde el amanecer hasta el anoecer. *Smile from morning til night*

La suerte no ha querido que este dia tan feliz para ti este tu madre contigo, pero no, que digo si estare, *I'll be there* estare en la sombra, en las luces, en las flores, en el aire, desde todos los rincones, yo te vere, *I'll see you* vere a mi linda novia, la mas bella de todas las novias con su carita sonriente alado de su padre, el mas lindo tambien de todo los hombres, porque es lindo verdad mi amor? *Because he is handsome isn't he, my love?* En el tambien me veras a mi ya que estas acostumbrada a que siempre hemos sido uno solo,

mi Corazon estara contigo en todo momento, en todo segundo y instante y desde aca desde la distancia recibe con el corazon y el pensamiento la bendicion de tu madre.
Receive with your heart, the thoughts and blessings of your mother.

SOCIAL MEDIA SEPARATION

INT. Music transitions to next scene.

College girl, 21, on cellphone. Paces.

OLIVIA

NO, you can't call me anymore! I'm not going to let you. Through the power of technology! I will block your number from calling me, texting me, even from emailing me! It's so refreshing! I don't have to see your drunken status updates every time you think you're clever. You darkened my doorstep for too many years, but now I have the power to keep you from ever contacting me! I will simply delete you. Delete you from my phone, my Facebook, my contacts, my Flickr, Tumblr, Linked In, Pinterest, Spotify (sighs, deep breath) AND I'll block you on my Instagram, Foursquare, Twitter, Vimeo and YouTube, ugh, how many ways do I have to delete you from my fucking life? Not only do I have to handle all the legal bullshit to change my name back, but I have to do all this damned social media shit. You didn't ask me to change my name? Fuck you! And I will delete all our wedding photos and ask our friends to untag us in all 458 photos of us on Facebook because I don't want to see your two-timing pill popping face EVER again. You will regret this someday, but don't you dare try to contact me...my spam filter and unlisted address will keep any of your lies or unwanted apologies from being forwarded my way. I'm getting off the phone now. Were you not listening to me? To go unfriend you!

LETTING GO

Music transitions us into next piece. Young Woman changes camera lenses.

YOUNG WOMAN

You were letting go long before you left. I will always love you and it hurts you want to forget our times...I have hurt you and you have hurt me, but still I love you unconditionally. And the hard part is you know it and don't want it. Why is it that you push me away, degrade me and I stand up for myself, or I just let you, but I never leave you? You told me once you couldn't show me respect because you couldn't respect someone you knew would always take you back, you couldn't respect someone that weak...or is it that you felt you didn't deserve a love that strong? I also remember you telling me once you didn't want to live a life with consequences. How did I forget that before I said yes to you on your third proposal? Of course you would bring that mentality into the marriage...a union that is supposed to be a blessed partnership and about making choices together that won't have negative consequences on our family. But we never had a family, did we? As desperately as I wanted it...partnership and compromise were dirty words to you. They bored you and made you feel limited.

I want to tell you that it's OK not to have all the answers, to compromise and to not like your partner 100% of the time. That you don't have to be "dark and twisty" to be interesting or to be loved, or maybe you do, and that's why you push me away. And I love you anyway. I forgive you. And please don't call me self-righteous. It's not about that, if anything, I love you...to a fault. I hope you forgive me, and I hope some day you can understand that forgiveness is not condoning what was done but is releasing resentment. I hope some day you can truly recognize your destructiveness and take responsibility for it, but most importantly, I hope you can forgive yourself.

I'm sorry for all the pain I've caused you and allowed you to cause me. I pray your conviction can turn into commitment in all aspects of your life. I know you like to keep people at a distance, but I pray you will have more compassion and empathy for those closest to you. They deserve your respect too, despite their unconditional love for you.

FATHER OF THE BRIDE

Music transitions us into next scene. Father sits behind desk, finishing a draft of a letter. Occasionally drinks from his coffee cup and eventually crosses to vanity in his daughter's old room.

FATHER

Dearest Daughter and Son-in-law,

Your Mom and I wanted to provide you both with a little more advice and hope that it will help you in your travels through life and marriage. But since timing did not allow us to do that, I thought that I would write to the two of you what we would have said to you had we been able to sit down with you two prior to your leaving after the wedding.

First, let us say that the first years of marriage are difficult for all married couples. It is more difficult for some than others because everyone's circumstances are somewhat different (their childhood, educational background, degree they covered certain topics prior to marriage). Hopefully, the engagement retreat you went to together will help you as you go forward.

No one really knows their marriage partner well until you have lived with one another for awhile. A few months is not long enough. Sometimes it takes years before you really learn whom the other person really is. Your marriage made you partners and each of you must adjust to thinking differently; not just yourselves as individuals but as partners - in terms of "we," what is best for "us" and not just "me." Each of us, and you two are no exception, have our flaws. You have to learn to dwell on the good of your partner and overlook the bad as much as possible. However, you both will need to learn what things you each do that the other does not like and try as best you can to not do those things that irritate each other.

In changing your viewpoint of thinking from "me" to "us," each of you will need to put the other first in your thoughts and actions. Your love for the other should want you to

place the other first as long as that results in not placing both of you in a worse situation in your lives.

One of the most troubling problems in marriage will be finances, especially in the early stages of one's marriage. You are now partners and should not look at finances as mine and his or mine and hers. Starting up a household is expensive and it takes time. So in order to keep peace between you, you must develop 1) a budget and 2) a priority list of what you hope to spend money on. Circumstances do change, so periodically you will have to revisit the list - together.

Our advice: Partnership...not hiding anything or money from the other. Put your words into action, plan together, be open. Love one another and help one another, not work against one another. Life is tough enough. Face life together as partners and of one mind-set "us."

Son, you made a promise to us to love and take care of our dear daughter. We expect you to do that and hold you to that promise. And daughter, you do the same for your husband, as we expect and hold you to that too.

All our love,

Dad and Mom

(Father signs letter. Folds letter and puts it on vanity. Places hands on vanity. Beat.)

THE SCARLET D

Music. Young Woman sits on the desk addressing the audience. Trash the Dress images are projected.

YOUNG WOMAN

I have a scarlet letter. I feel like those who know and love me understand that it wasn't by choice. But strangers, acquaintances, co-workers: they silently judge me by the scarlet D they see plastered on me. There is a lot of shame with divorce, imposed upon myself and by society too, that I didn't make this work, that my marriage failed. I'm tired of being branded with that scarlet letter. I want to transform that D for Divorcee into an R for Renewal or a C for Celebration. Although that part of my life is dead, I am not, and I want to bury that shame and celebrate my new stronger self. I'm trying to figure out how to express this beyond words, so maybe with images? That's where you come in. I want the photos to reflect this journey and new beginning. Trash the Dress images are so relatable to me-liberating and mournful at the same time. I see the story the pictures tell, and I'm looking for a way to tell my story. I feel like through a Trash the Dress session, it could maybe help me in the healing process for closure and be fun. I know closure won't come easily, if ever completely, but maybe that's the point. It will always be a part of me, but it doesn't have to define me. The scarlet D they see is not all I will ever be. My advice: prep and shoot for a more lovely marriage than your wedding.

(Beat)

Young Woman rises. Crosses to hanging wedding dress we saw in first scene.

TRASH THE DRESS: A CELEBRATION OF RENEWAL

Projector exhibits slide of instructions for those interested in participating in the following event. Slides of the performer's own TTD session are also projected throughout this sequence.

Music. The performer pulls dress off rack. Lays out a drop cloth. Dumps paint supplies and silly string cans onto it. Throws bottles of bubbles into the audience. She changes into wedding gown and begins to trash her dress with paint and various other materials. The mood is wild, passionate, purposeful and liberating. A projection encourages audience participants to come forward. The artist signals for them to join her on stage and begins to hand them various forms of paint (in squirt bottles, powder form, etc) and water guns. Those not interested in participating with paint are still encouraged to blow bubbles provided.

She stands center stage and with arms wide open, begins to twirl as they trash her dress. She jumps up and down as if at a rock concert. When the song ends and the lights fade, she signals for the participants to take a bow with her during the curtain call.

End of play.

Final Presentation

An invited audience attended the final dress rehearsal of my solo play on January, 15, 2013 at the Studio Theatre of the LSU Music and Dramatics Art Building on Dalrymple Drive in Baton Rouge. I had tremendous anxiety on that day and during the performance. Several causes contributed to this nervousness. One factor I have already addressed: performing material very personal to me. Another issue was my rehearsal process. I found it challenging to memorize lines that I had written and then rehearse the scenes as both actor and director. As I memorized my lines, I found myself editing the script as a playwright. This made it very difficult to keep straight what I had revised and kept for rehearsals. I understand fully now the need for staged readings of plays so the playwright can hear the play out loud and make changes to fluidity and flow of the play before an actual full-scale production. I discussed this dilemma with my faculty and classmates and it was encouraging to know I was not alone in experiencing this challenge. It was very hard to stop editing myself as I rehearsed; the editing stifled my creative process as an actor and director. Gregory Leute, a fellow classmate, advised me to just be an actor, let the playwright and director go, and let the play fly. This encouragement helped me immensely. I just wish I had more time to rehearse before the final dress rehearsal.

I was so obsessive about the script that I was editing the day before the final dress rehearsal. Needless to say, this was unproductive to the acting. I had managed my time such that I worked on editing the photos, gathering my sound cues and finalizing the script for my show over the Christmas break. I had about half of the show memorized by New Years and planned to use the first couple weeks of January to finish memorizing and rehearsing my play as much as possible. However, I lost a few days of rehearsal to create slideshows for the photos as the technical team working with projections needed images in a specific format. I had labeled and electronically filed the images in separate folders to correspond to the cues in the script over the holiday break, but this organization was not as useful to the team. So, I had to redo this organization and relearn PowerPoint (it had been at least 5 years since I had really used the program). In addition, some of the sound files I converted to the format specified by the soundboard operator would not play in the sound system. We couldn't figure out why since I correctly converted the files, but we eventually figured it was because the files were corrupted during conversion. As a result, I had to spend precious rehearsal time fixing this problem. Luckily, the voiceover track I had recorded before Christmas break was fine, so there was no need to meddle with that track.

What I learned from this experience is to plan for unforeseen circumstances, particularly technical difficulties. Though I felt I had planned accordingly, I did not account for these issues. Including a buffer for such issues in my rehearsal schedule would have reduced my anxiety and made me feel more prepared. I lost my place in the "Forever Girls" scene during the dress rehearsal because I did not stay in the moment and was trying to recall if I had just spoken lines I meant to cut. This moment was death to the rhythm and pacing of the scene, and I had to ad-lib and improvise until I got back on track. Of course, I felt horrible about this scene, but my peers were very gracious and encouraging. Another scene in the play that didn't run as smoothly as I hoped was, "The Styled Shoot Argument." Hours before the opening of the show I rehearsed with George Judy, and he gave me the brilliant suggestion to make the blogger character French instead of British. Making her French really opened up my body and she became much more dynamic and interesting to listen to during the scene. The rhythm of the dialect picked up the

pace of the scene as well. However, since I did not have time to properly rehearse the monologue in a French dialect, I was too preoccupied with getting the sound changes right while in performance that I did not stay in the moment. Thereby, I dropped a few lines and the pacing was by no means seamless. On the other hand, I'm glad I made the last minute change because the audience still seemed receptive to the wittiness and eccentricity of the character. I think I might have bored them otherwise.

The interactive trash the dress segment went over very well with the audience. I had about 10 participants and they appeared to have a blast. I could tell some audience members were not sure what to do or what was going on. I anticipated such confusion because I knew what I was doing was so different from what many people have seen before in theatre, so this did not disappoint me. Rather, I felt pride that I gave them this unique night in the theatre. Despite the confusion, the seated audience members clapped in time to the music and were overall very engaged, if not actively supportive, as we trashed the dress. The only factor I wish had gone differently were the bubbles I handed out to the audience; I wanted audience members both onstage and off to blow the bubbles but on neither night did I notice any bubbles! Perhaps they just wanted to keep them for later use—I honestly don't know, but one can never predict happenings in live theatre.

The actual performance on the 18th of January went much smoother. I was very excited to perform as it was my one and only performance. I channeled any nervous energy into excitement and couldn't wait to tell the story of my play. The audience seemed very engaged and more people participated in the live TTD session at the end. Afterwards, several people thanked me for being so brave and still others expressed how touched they were by the evening. Of course, some people couldn't help but ask the obvious question, "How much of it actually happened?" The answer, of course, for the photographer/young woman character is all of it, to some degree. The greatest compliment I received from that night was from three divorced people: 2 females and 1 male. With tears in their eyes, they thanked me for my honesty and for putting the journey and heartache of divorce on stage.

Conclusion

Women trash their gowns for many reasons—for love, commitment, vanity, fun, heartache, empowerment, celebration, art etc. Having trashed my own gown twice in real life (once for fun and once for empowerment) and other gowns twice on stage for art, I can honestly say for whatever reasons people trash their dress, it is invigorating. I appreciate the creativity behind so many of these happenings. Lisa Roehm-Gensel wore her wedding dress to run in the 2011 Gladiator Rock ‘n Run race. She explains,

The dress weighed at least 10 pounds, so I thought I’d hem it or at least cut off the train. But Kenny, my second husband wouldn’t hear of it. He’s all about creating memorable experiences. If I was going to run in the dress, I had to run in the whole dress. I’m so glad I listened to him. Conquering the obstacles—walls, cargo nets, piles of logs—in my giant gown felt like so much more of an accomplishment. (Roehm-Gensel)

TTD, though controversial, provides a thrilling sense of fulfillment for the participants and photographers. In all of my research I did not find one story of someone who expressed regret in trashing her gown. Perhaps the phenomenon is too young to have such stories circulate. I just feel that it is an unfortunate circumstance that the so many people get swept up in the planning of a wedding and lose sight of weddings are all about, celebrating a lifetime commitment to another person. I feel that if society put as much energy in preparing for beautiful marriages as they do beautiful weddings, people might have a better chance of avoiding toxic marriages that end in divorce.

Some people do not like the idea of TTD because it seems to destroy a lovely gown that could be used again. In reality, most wedding gowns are stored away, collecting dust and cluttering closet space. Sometimes, gowns may be sold, donated or passed down, but as in my case, many brides want one more chance to don the gown they dreamed of, and TTD gives them an artistic, fun chance to accomplish this desire. I understand concern that it is wasteful to destroy the gown, but I also feel it is wasteful to only wear it once; in that vein, I have found a Save the Dress project in Belgium that collects trashed gowns to clean and salvage for donations. If the project can clean a gown, they do, and if not, they save whatever fabric they can from the gown to make new gowns for underprivileged women. My plan is to send my trashed gown and the gowns from my show to said project.

I also plan to continue work on this solo show. I would like to have a couple staged readings of this show to attain more feedback. I seek to bring this piece to fringe festivals and regional theatres. Researching, writing, producing, acting, directing and marketing my solo show, much like my Graduate School journey, has certainly been a challenging, yet memorable and rewarding experience. I am grateful for the training and artistic counsel provided by the LSU Department of Theatre. The ultimate reward is the viewpoint I now have that I am an artist. I look forward to creating more characters as an actor and playwright. I plan to continue my artistic exploration of telling stories as a photographer, actor and director. From the camera lens to the stage, I have powerful tools to bring stories, entertainment and enlightenment to humanity.

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Appendix

Trash the Dress Gallery

Selected images from the exhibit are included below:



Above: “Trash the Dress” (Signature Shot) ©2012 Kristina Sutton



Above: “Buried Dreams” © 2012 Kristina Sutton



Above: Broken Home © 2012 Kristina Sutton

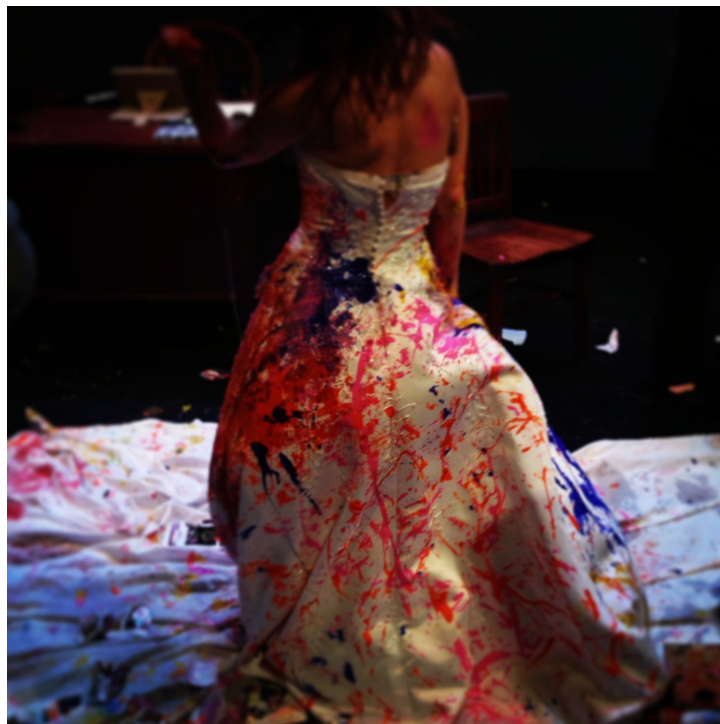


Above: Detour © 2012 Kristina Sutton

Production Photos



TTD iPhone January 18, 2013 (Photo by Nick Erickson)



TTD January 18, 2013 (Photo by Laine Korn)

Production Photos below courtesy of Ben Koucherick



Above scene: “The Prep”



Above scene: “Engaged (Part 3)”



Above Scene: “Social Media Separation”

Vita

Kristina Sutton was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and spent her childhood in North Carolina, Arizona and Georgia. During most summers of her youth, she visited family in her mother's native country, Ecuador. Kristina graduated Magna Cum Laude from Brenau University with a B.A. in Theatre in 2004. While pursuing acting and directing, she has lived in Atlanta, Orlando and Los Angeles. She was a co-founder and co-owner of MadTight Photography, LLC. Kristina attended Louisiana State University's MFA professional actor training program from 2010-2013, appearing in Swine Palace shows such as *August: Osage County*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *All the King's Men*. She directed *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged* for Swine Palace's 2012 Summer Season. As a graduate student, Kristina served as a Pellar Creative Arts Entrepreneur Fellow. She is a proud member of SAG-AFTRA.