

2004

A performance genealogy of "Etchings of Debutantes"

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A PERFORMANCE GENEALOGY OF ETCHINGS OF DEBUTANTES

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
the School of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by
Melanie Kitchens
B.A. Theatre, Georgia Southern University, 2001
December 2004

Acknowledgements

My humblest thanks to all those involved in this process. Namely, Alice, Amy, Andy, Angela, Anne, Andrew, Bella, Ben, Bridgette, Brittany, Bruce, Carlton, Caroline, Carrie, Connie, Danielle, Danny, Dianne, Doris, Drew, Dan Paul, David, Don, Doug, Dudley, Eric, Gary, Ginger, Gretchen, Holly, Ivy, Jane, Jessica, Jim, Jimbo, Jim, Joan, Joe, Joey, Joseph, Jon, Josh, Justin, Kristen, Lisa, Linda, Mabel, Madison, Maggie, Marie, Mary Grace, Michael, Miles, Miron, Missy, Molly, Nancy, Necie, Nick, Odessa, Pam, Patti, Ralph, Rob, Ruth, Sarah, Scott, Suzanna, Tom, Tracy, Trish, and Tyler. Absent or present, productive or counter productive, with knowledge and without, this thesis would not have made it without each of you. Thanks.

One more special thanks to my committee Michael Bowman, Trish Suchy, and particularly Ruth Bowman.

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Abstract

In this thesis history performs that which Della Pollock terms “historicity” in her “Introduction” to *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History*. History as historicity is no longer an evolutionary master narrative that dictates essential Truths. Rather, it is a site for performance where unfinalized and partial fragments of the past cluster into stories that mingle fact and fiction. Historicity defines a space or an event where history is a doing. The performer of this history embraces agency, which she uses to place herself within history rather than dominate or be dominated by it. Observing history as historicity, Joseph Roaches “genealogies of performance” provide a method for my analysis of the performances of debutante culture as I represented them in *Etchings of Debutantes*, a script I compiled, and the performance of that script.

This thesis traces the historical performance of southern debutante culture by comparing and contrasting various texts and materials, included in my script, *Etchings of Debutantes*, as equal co-texts. The script is a belated response to my skeptical performance of a debutante at the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion in Augusta, Georgia on November 26, 1999. At that time, I was assured by my mentor to one day be able to creatively engage dialogue with my performance of the debutante ritual. In 2001 I began the dialogue by collaging a script of icons, photographs, invitations, magazines, fairytales, personal narratives, music, dance, film, and literature. The following year, I staged the script in the Hopkins Black Box theatre at Louisiana State University. Learning about Joseph Roach’s genealogies of performance shortly after, I found genes or themes in the script and performance to insight new ways of exploring and interrogating my history performing debutante culture.

My thesis engages scholarly and performative discourse with the cultural performance of debutantes by observing various representations of debutante culture in the script and performance of *Etchings of Debutantes*. *Etchings of Debutantes*, followed by its staging and the writing of this thesis, are all part of my continuous dialogue with southern debutante culture.

Chapter One
Introduction

I cannot see the hidden picture when I stare into a magic eye book, but I was fortunate to make my debut at

The Cotillion

In honor of

The Augusta Symphony Debutantes

on Friday, the twenty-sixth of November

Nineteen hundred and ninety-nine

at seven o'clock

Radisson Riverfront Hotel

Augusta, Georgia

Presentation

at eight o'clock

I am revealed. It is in my history book, my performance piece, and my thesis. It is where I and twenty-six other girls were presented as women on a cool night in November, each of us gazed upon by our parents and numerous guests all in attendance as spectators at this ritual performance of culture. Some were quite happy to gawk as we curtsied now here and now there while others drank booze just to bear the sight/site of us, the ridiculous.

I knew my invite to the “cherished tradition” would arrive at my home one day (“Melanie’s Debutante Ball 1999”), neatly typed on a pristine piece of symphony letterhead perfectly folded and delicately placed inside an envelope addressed to my parents, requesting me to participate in the presentation and a few payments of support for the symphony. I had planned to decline, politely, but sometimes our performances choose us. The Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion is now a piece of my history and I forever a partial piece of it. I appear in photographs on walls I have never seen and in cuttings from the newspaper pasted in a scrapbook, tossed in a box, accessible by computer. There is my name, my picture, my dress, and my smile. I am a piece of my history. I am a piece of that history. And I continue to create a history through the performance of this story.

As each day passes we recall and collect moments that affect us as one collects and preserves particular trinkets, photographs, or [fill in your obsession]. We use them to remind ourselves who we once were, are now, or have yet to become. They are highlighted pieces of our lives displayed for ourselves and those for whom we allow the exposure. Through various means of sharing, we grow within, upon, and against our experiences and their restoration in memory. In this history, it is restored memory through performance that allows me to explore the many facets of my experience as a debutante.

Snapshots fill the albums.

Snapshots clutter the desk.

Snapshots create the gaps, the lapse,

Fill the voids.

Snapshots are the memories.

The teas, mimosas, luncheons, pearls, whiteness, smiles, candlelight, forced hellos and handshakes—proper handshakes at that.

Snapshots capture the particular evening.

The twenty-six lovely debutantes here, the nine there, the forty-two somewhere.

Would somebody marry these girls, please.

So they can branch out of this town and infect your cities with their seeds.

Spread the family wealth.

Honor the tradition.
A dowry here, a dowry there, a dowry somewhere.
It's a southern thing passed over from England!
You should feel special.

In this study, I use Joseph Roach's "genealogies of performance" to analyze the performances of debutante culture as I represented them in *Etchings of Debutantes*, a script I compiled and a stage performance I directed in 2001. In the chapters that follow, I document the script and my staging choices and investigate the various texts and materials, visual and acoustic elements I used in terms of Roach's method. My purpose is to analyze the numerous components as historical traces, "restored memories," that ignite the disparate aspects of the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion tradition and cultural performance as recalled by me through the script and stage performance (Roach 3). In Roach's terms, the history I staged in 2001 is a "displaced transmission" (28) of the 1999 cultural performance just as it is a displaced transmission of a British courting ritual of the Stuart monarchy. In so far as all histories are displaced transmissions, my aim is not to evaluate the accuracy of the representations in light of an original or to advocate one history over another. Rather, as Roach offers, my aim is to investigate the memories and counter memories, or the disparities between histories, as they are transmitted and publicly enacted. In this way, I hope to show the significance of my script and stage performance as sites of history making and, more generally, as publicized research. In turn, the significance of the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion, as a historical memory and counter memory, will arise. Lastly, the study will contribute to our understanding of how "genealogies of performance" might be a beneficial way to analyze performance scripts and their live stage performance. Below, I identify and discuss the subjects of the study, Roach's method, and further explain the significance of the study to the discipline of performance studies. To conclude, I outline how I have organized the study into chapters.

Subject of the Study

The primary subjects of the study are the dramatic and performance texts I adapted and directed titled, *Etchings of Debutantes*. The first draft of the script was completed for an Independent Study course I took in the Department of Communication Studies at Louisiana State University in the fall of 2001. In spring 2002, I proposed to direct the piece the following academic year in the department's HopKins Black Box theatre. My proposal was accepted by the members of the Black Box board and, over the summer, I redrafted the script to prepare it for production in fall 2002.

The script of *Etchings of Debutantes* consists of multiple texts and materials, directly and indirectly related to debutante culture, adapted for performance and arranged in a collage. The composition features a diverse assemblage of oral and literary, visual and acoustic fragments rather than a single, coherent story line. Adapted for five female characters or debutantes who constantly morph one into the other, the script highlights the numerous roles a debutante plays. The collage of representative roles and discourses include personal expressions and narratives, etiquette that marks class and gender, the Barbie doll and fairytale princess, beauty ruminations, campy songs, and dance. I also wanted to investigate the historical "origin" on which the debutante tradition is based, that of presenting young, middle-upper to upper-class women to society in hopes that marriage to a likewise situated young man will result. My initial intent was to compile a range of texts, from absurd to heart wrenching, to demonstrate and interrogate the debutante ritual as a warped and barbaric ball of our past and present day.

In my research for the piece and in my scripting and staging of it, certain themes or genes arose consistently. In Chapters Three and Four of the study, I organize and discuss the piece in terms of these recurring themes, and the texts, materials, and practices I used to recount them.

One prevalent theme concerns class and etiquette. I discuss class and etiquette within debutante performance as a rite of passage ritual. The materials I drew on to express this theme in the script include a video titled “Melanie’s Debutante Ball 1999,” a 1930’s etiquette book, surveys of popular names, the website of the Dunbar Social & Charity Club, Emily Post’s “The Average day of a Debutante, and the set and movement patterns of the performers. The theme of beauty and gender is investigated through the figure Barbie and texts concerning her, two poems by Kip Ran, “On Beauty” by Kahlil Gibran, “How to be a Specialist in Success” by Emily Post, and the costumes and movement of the performers. Fairytale nostalgia is the third theme I find to be interwoven through the script and performance as manifested by my adaptation and staging of Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Princess and the Pea* and *The Butterfly*, *The Debutante* by Leonora Carrington, and my set and costume design. The final theme I explore is the space betwixt and between oppositional views of the debutante tradition and ritual. I analyze the personal narratives I included in the piece, my experience as represented by the character, Jessica, stage angels, and Barbie protests.

The public performance of *Etchings of Debutantes* took place on Wednesday, September 18, 2002, through Sunday, September 22, 2002. The Sunday matinee included a preshow tea party for the attending audience in honor of the debutante/performers who made an appearance at the tea as well as performed in the show afterwards. In the translation of the script to live performance, additional elements for study arise, such as the set, lights, and sound, physical presence, costumes, movement, gestures, and voices of the characters/performers, and paratheatrical components such as publicity materials and the pre-show tea. In my documentation of the script, in Chapter Two, I describe these elements in full and, in later chapters, I analyze them as “restored memories” of the genes I noted above. For instance, rather

than costume the actresses in veris-realistic white gowns common to the debutante ritual, I had them wear over-sized gowns of sheet plastic, bubble wrap, and colorful fabric remnants. In silhouette and detail, the dresses recalled the fairytale reality of the debutante ball. However, due to their scale and texture, the costumes also served to parody the plasticity of the fairytale role, the Barbie gender and beauty construct, and the presumed associations between “good” taste and upper-class society.

While the script and performance of *Etchings of Debutantes* are my main subjects of study, both are informed greatly by my collection of memories and artifacts as a debutante at the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion in November 1999. As is customary of most contemporary debutante balls, the Cotillion was a fundraiser for a community institution, namely, the Augusta Symphony. Established in 1957 by Mrs. Joseph B. Cumming, the Augusta Symphony Guild held its first ball, a “Waltz Night,” in 1958 and, after a few years of successful fundraising, they increased the ante by holding a debutante ball in 1963. The Guild continues the tradition today, the members deciding whom they should invite to participate on a “who you know” basis. Depending on the amount of debutantes, each, in turn, invites a certain number of guests to the ball. In 1999, there were twenty-six debutantes and our allotment was infinite. I invited about twenty guests, each of whom paid one hundred dollars for the affair and honor.

The Cotillion is held on the Friday night after Thanksgiving at the Radisson Riverfront Hotel in downtown Augusta. Everyone is gussied up in formal attire for an enjoyable evening of debutantes, dinner, dancing, and drinking. The highlight of the event is the presentation of the debutantes. One by one, each debutante is escorted across a stage and through the huge ballroom by three gentlemen usually consisting of her father and brothers. During the promenade, each girl performs a to-the-floor bow or curtsy. After each girl is presented in such a fashion, all the

debutantes, now women, assemble for one last tableau. Then, they find the tables where their guests are seated and sit down for dinner. Dancing follows with excessive picture-taking and an open bar, though most girls who participate are only twenty years old and not of legal drinking age. Although the ball is the main event, the debutantes also host and are hosted to numerous teas, luncheons, coffees, and other events from the time they receive their invitations through the time when the invitations are mailed for the following year. Thus the cycle continues and Augusta is graced with a new set of “eligible women” each year.

Etchings of Debutantes is the result of my having participated in the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion. For the purposes of the thesis, I view *Etchings of Debutantes* as an accumulation of memories and, as Foucault termed theory, “counter-memories” regarding my participation in the Augusta event in particular and debutante culture in general (quoted in Roach 26). Although, in my analysis, I discuss particular aspects of the cultural performance, I begin my investigations with the genetic traces I find in the script and performance. On that point, there are a number of genetic traces I do not pursue, such as the particulars of the British courting tradition, other female rite of passage rituals, histories of domesticity, the economic history and relationship between the producing institution and the cultural performance and so on. My selection and study of genetic links are partial, highlighting the themes and power dynamics I find to recur in the script and performance of *Etchings of Debutantes*.

Another limitation in the study concerns my inclusion of additional research materials, besides those I used in the script and performance. If I feel that my analysis will benefit significantly from additional scholarship on a particular subject (such as Barbie) or concept (such as the female body on display), I pursue and include it. However, since I view my script and performance as publicized research, one of my aims is to understand how they operate as such,

as a research document. Specifically, I am concerned with the history or histories they make, what they remember and forget, emphasize or not, as regards to debutante culture and performance. In my study, then, I focus on the texts, materials, staging choices, and underlying concepts I integrated in the script and performance and investigate how they operate as a performance genealogy. As such, the main outside text I draw on articulates the concept and method of performance genealogies. Namely, I draw on Joseph Roach's discussion of genealogies of performance in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*.

Method of the Study

When I adapted, compiled, and staged *Etchings of Debutantes* in 2001, I was unaware of Roach's method of historiography. I did not learn of it until I was a student in a history of performance studies course offered in the Communication Studies Department at Louisiana State University in 2003. At that time, I realized that my analysis of *Etchings of Debutantes* might benefit from Roach's genealogical approach to performance and/as history, specifically as a site/cite of restored behavior and memory.

In his "Introduction" to *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, Joseph Roach offers that the aim of a performance genealogy is "to document—and suspect—the historical transmission and dissemination of cultural practices through collective representations" (25). Further, according to Roach, a performance genealogy aims "to excavate the past that is necessary to account for how we got here and the past that is useful for conceiving alternatives to our present condition" (Arac quoted in Roach 25). With these guidelines in mind, I understand that the method prompts me to view *Etchings of Debutantes* as a piecemeal assemblage of materials, transmissions of the likewise assembled of cultural bits and pieces that constitute the Cotillion. In both cases, the collection is unstable; it shifts over time as those involved in

debutante culture and my view of it alter in light of changing needs, desires, conditions, and contexts. Embedded in the Cotillion practice, *Etchings of Debutantes* and the history I write here are disparate memories and counter-memories, which I am to disseminate and interrogate in terms of the politics of producing culture, history, and performance.

In academic history, genealogies of performance derive from “new historicism,” as defined and practiced by H. Aram Veenser and Stephen Greenblatt among many others. In short, new historicism aims to substitute a synchronic model of historiography for a diachronic model. That is, rather than concentrate on a single or binary-based subject, text, and interpretive perspective over time, new historicism urges the historian to view the subject as complex within a discrete time period or periods. The subject, text, and perspective exist simultaneously with other subjects, texts, and perspectives that impact each other on multiple levels in various ways. In her research and writing, a new historicist embraces this multiple, porous, and interdisciplinary model of history by giving equal weight to diverse and to what often appear to be unrelated materials. For instance, in my script, a range of Barbie texts are used to understand a discourse of beauty as practiced in debutante culture while the beauty discourse and debutante practices are used to interpret Barbie. In this way, new historicists/genealogists exercise an expanded notion of what constitutes a historical archive, and they treat the multiple materials therein in a relatively balanced way, as co- or equal texts with no seamless progression.

A related aspect of new historicism and genealogies of performance is the perspective that history does not proceed in a clear cut, evolutionary fashion, such as many histories would have us believe. Rather, due to the multiple and porous texture of life and the changing needs of people in and over time, cultural practices alter and mutate. As James Clifford explains, “groups negotiate . . . their identity in contexts of domination and exchange” by “patch[ing]

themselves together” in different ways (Roach 191). The patchwork quilt is an assemblage of various practices that groups attempt to replicate, adapt, or transform so as to express who they are to themselves and others and, given their position within the broader systems, in explicit or implicit ways.

The children’s game of “telephone,” which I encountered at slumber parties as a child, helps clarify this patchwork process of a genealogical history for me. To play telephone, a group of people sit in a circle. One member whispers a message to the person sitting next to her who whispers it to the next and so on all the way around the circle. The message, its words and delivery, are reconfigured as each person hears, understands, and voices it to the next person. When the message is repeated by the last person, it is compared to the original and usually found to be quite different. Sometimes the group is able to pinpoint where the alterations occurred while other times it is impossible to make the distinction. A genealogical perspective is much like this game. One never knows what one might hear or how one might hear it, although there comes a time when one must articulate it and make some sense of it. A genealogical perspective also reminds me of how memory seems to work. While I may think that a childhood memory is mine and it actually happened, in many cases the memory is constituted by other memories I have collected from others over the years. In a sense, I replace the multiple tellers and claim the memory as my own. This is the process that a performance genealogy encourages, acknowledging of course that there are multiple and disparate versions of the memory in and over time.

A final basic precept that genealogies of performance share with new historicism is the understanding that all histories are made by certain people for certain reasons. In other words, all histories are partial, subjective, and political. For instance, regardless of how many co-texts

and practices I include in my history of debutante culture, inevitably I have overlooked or deliberately chosen to omit certain texts and practices and, thereby, the memories of people who wrote or enacted them. The history I offer is partial and incomplete and my selection representative of certain interpretive and evaluative perspectives, their associative values, and the social and cultural groups who hold them. By so documenting my history, I empower these particular views, values, and groups. Rather than ignore the politics of history making and representation generally, both new historicism and performance genealogies urge the historian to acknowledge her partiality, perspectives, and politics. As I illustrate in my study, the historian might fulfill this expectation by means of explicit statements, creative reflexivity, and, in performance especially, presentational modes and tactics.

Roach's genealogical method differs from new historicism in so far as it concentrates on performance as the subject and method of the history. Roach further specifies the connection between performance and history by means of an overarching theory of "surrogation" or substitution (2). As regards to the performance subject, Roach urges the historian to include instances of "orature" in the expanded archive of materials and practices she studies (11). To aid the analysis of both live and archival performance, Roach offers three basic practices that govern performance: space or "behavioral vortices," body movement or "kinesthetic imagination," and time or "displaced transmissions" (26). Lastly, to address the confluence of components that constitute the method, Roach urges the historian to take a "walk . . . in the city" (13). Below, I define and discuss each of these elements and briefly explain how I anticipate applying them or not in my study.

Early in his study of history and memory as performance, Roach calls on Richard Schechner's "widely applicable definition of performance . . . [as] 'restored behavior' or twice-

behaved behavior” (3). Della Pollock extends the definition by observing that “performance draws from history its practical, analytical, critical, and theoretical capacity to make history, to make history exceed itself, to become itself even as it rages past the present into the future” (Pollock 2). Pollock’s view urges us to consider that without performance there is no history or historiography. Pollock uses the term “historicity” to define the performative sites “where history works itself out” (4). Embodied “practices,” these sites not only mark differences “but also contest claims” (Pollock 4). “History makes the past visible” and “performance makes history go” (Pollock 11, 27).

Roach extends restored behavior to a theory of surrogation, which he bases on Nietzsche’s and Foucault’s negative view of devolutionary histories (and ideology) as turned toward disabling origins or truths. Roach defines surrogation as a “doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins” (3). Because the search is based on imperfect recall, or memory, of an origin that was constructed likewise (i.e., there are no origins or essential truths), the search is doomed. Also due to the partiality of restored memory through restored behavior, surrogation “is at once resemblance and menace,” a “relentless search for the purity of origins [through] a voyage not of discovery but of erasure” (Roach 6). That is, in an attempt to retain or claim power, groups restore certain memories and forget others. In Roach’s application of his theory, two basic types of surrogation arise. Typically, those groups with power attempt to reproduce the origin, as they perceive it, without changing it, without difference. Those with less power are more inventive; they reproduce past practices in an attempt to alter prevailing power relations. They reproduce with a difference in mind and practice.

Roach’s analysis of Mardi Gras float parades in New Orleans, Louisiana, clarifies his use of surrogation as a marker of power. He describes the Mardi Gras performance tradition as “the

transformation of a bourgeois elite into a mystified pseudoroyalty through iconographic manipulations of costumes, tableaux, and floats,” the aim being to uphold established social hierarchies of class and race (Roach 245). Roach traces the tradition to the “old-line krewes,” which include the “Mystick Krewe of Comus (founded in 1857)” and their claim to crowning the King of Mardi Gras, Rex (245). The King and his Krewe replicate through surrogation “a closely knit local aristocracy” of “inclusion and exclusion” as they stand atop their mystic float and throw handfuls of beads at the “commoners” who perform various degrading stunts in thanks for the cheap, plastic tokens (Roach 245, 243). Countering the Comus tradition is an African American Krewe, “the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club” and their King Zulu (Roach 18). While also atop a float throwing beads, the Zulu Krewe wears blackface to recall the history of their erasure by whites and to mock the continuance of white entitlement by means of Mardi Gras practices. While Rex reproduces his tradition without irony, King Zulu deconstructs white privilege through a trickster patchwork of diverse traditions (Roach 18-25). For Roach, the Zulu performance is an example of surrogation that “is useful for conceiving alternatives to our present condition” (Arac quoted in Roach 25). It also appears to be more indicative than Rex’s performance of surrogation as “a busy intersection’ in which unanticipated or novel junctures may occur” and, as a result, a “cultural transmission” is “detoured, deflected, or displaced” (Roach 29).

The study of surrogation, or restored memory through performance, involves being aware of orature in print texts, other materials, and live bodily practices. Termed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, orature is any “gesture, song, dance, processions, storytelling, proverbs, gossip, customs, rites, and rituals” practiced in living form or residing in the print record and other artifacts, such as dancing figures etched on a vase (11). The concept of orature insists that oral

and literate practices inform each other and that, in the archive, we can sense and study bodies and voices in print. Orature, then, urges the historian to pursue an expanded archive of diverse materials, to look for implicit and explicit instances of performance and performative behavior, and to consider the recurrences and ruptures between them. In my research for *Etchings of Debutantes*, for instance, I found instances of orature in icons, photographs, invitations, magazines, fairytales, personal narratives, music, dance, film, and literature.

Roach specifies orature in terms of place, body, and time factors. He terms these three components as behavioral vortices, kinesthetic imagination, and displaced transmissions, and contends that if we look at an event such as the debutante Cotillion with these factors in mind we can gain a better understanding of it as a performance of restored memory and history.

“Vortices of behavior” are places “where the gravitational pull of social necessity brings audiences together and produces performers” (Roach 28). A vortex is a place of social contact where people enact restored behavior in order to retain, gain, or counter the status attributed to the place and its practices. Specifically, Roach describes a vortex as a “spatially induced carnival” in which “the magnetic forces of commerce and pleasure suck the willing and unwilling alike” (28). The space can seduce the innocent into participation, whether performer or spectator. In *Cities of the Dead*, Roach discusses many vortices that have induced performance behavior in the past and also currently. For instance, he discusses the New Orleans slave auctions in the rotunda of the St. Louis Hotel and Exchange Alley. If one was in the market for slaves, who were used “to promote the sale of other commodities as well,” then one would attend “the eye-filling scenes of the public flesh market” (211). Today this space is not used for the same purposes although, in my experience, lurking memories haunt the place. Likewise, commerce and pleasure combine to incite performance in the spatial vortex of the

Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion, a crucial difference being that all the performers at this ritual are volunteers.

Not only does the space define the performance but also the bodies that perform there. In Roach's terms, the performer's movement and adornment articulates the kinesthetic imagination, "the transmission (or transformation) of memory through movement" (26). At the Cotillion ball, my body was on display, performing the debutante ritual that had been marked and rehearsed so precisely. The crucial performance began when I entered the hotel, the vortex, and put on my long, white debutante gown. The costume facilitated the ritualized movement I performed because it marked my body as shaped by the debutante tradition, as me/not me. A character I could engage or from which I could detach was created by the adornment and the movement it implied. As Cotillion debutantes we were taught how to walk, sit, smile, and bow. The dress, make-up, gloves, shoes, earrings, and purse also helped to create the proper debutante persona. In the scripting and performance of *Etchings of Debutantes*, I re-visited this "mental space where imagination and memory converge" (Roach 27). My aim was to prompt the audience to think about the debutante's body as both vulnerable and violated, and a vortex of commerce and pleasure. The debutantes in my show appeared as I felt when I was on display in the Cotillion ritual. Garbed in layers of plastic and lace, their corporeal bodies disappeared. They became objects of the constructed origin, scrutinized by the Cotillion audience and, on the meta-level of performance, the audience in the HopKins Black Box.

Roach's component of displaced transmissions is analogous to historical and genealogical processes generally. That is, all representations become displaced transmissions because "no action or sequence of actions may be performed exactly the same way twice"; rather, they are "reinvented or recreated at each appearance" (Roach 28). As people cross borders, times, and

places, their needs and desires, conditions and contexts change and as a result they alter their “own” traditions and pirate from others those they deem of value. In my opinion, displaced transmissions are displaced transmissions of surrogation. Substitution is used as a means of individual creation of history through performance. The debutante ball in which I participated was a representation of a ritual that through my scripting and staging became re-presented again and, yet again, in the writing of my thesis here. Displaced transmissions allude to the possibility that history as replication without difference is an impossibility. In some way, at some level, it is always created.

One way to collect restored memories is to take a “Walk . . . in the City” (Roach 13). For Roach, walking in the city is a crusade with the intent of “gain[ing] an experience of the cityscape that is conducive to mapping the emphases and contradictions of its special memory” (13). Thereby, living memory is compared and contrasted to the memory in the historical record, and the genealogical aims of accounting for “how we got here” and for “conceiving [of] alternatives” are fulfilled (Arac quoted in Roach 25). While Roach calls on Michel de Certeau’s idea that “to walk [in the city of your subject] is to lack a place” (quoted in Roach 13), he appears reluctant to engage what that might mean. As I understand it, to walk with lack is to recognize that my view of history is partial and incomplete. Further, the restored memories I find can be configured in multiple ways. Just as I pieced together selected bits I discovered on my walk through the city of debutante culture, so too my audience will embark on their own walk when they view *Etchings of Debutantes*. In a sense, the audience participates in their own genealogical making of history.

Roach’s method provided the basis for my understanding of *Etchings of Debutantes* as a genealogical history. As I have discussed them here, the terms and concepts are used in my

analyses of the script and performance as they appear relevant to the texts, materials, and staging choices I undertake.

Significance of the Study

This study legitimates a script and live stage performance as sites of publicized research. Both are historiographies from a genealogical perspective. I investigated debutante culture by collecting and juxtaposing diverse materials that allowed the disparate memories and counter memories to surface. By analyzing how the genealogies operate in the script and performance, I hope to legitimate further performance as not only the subject of history but the means too. Also, by studying the similarities and differences between Roach's text, written for the academic press, and my script and performance, we might theorize as to the possibilities of writing for the academy in terms of the agency of performance and its poetics.

This study also aids in our understanding of Roach's method of genealogy as applied in practice. The advantages and disadvantages of viewing a script and a performance as a performance genealogy arise as do possible amendments, additions and deletions to the method. The study then contributes to our understanding of how genealogies of performance might be used to analyze scripts and live stage performance from a historical perspective.

Finally, this study legitimates the cultural performance of the debutante Cotillion as a site of history making and enables a more complex understanding of the signs and codes encountered there. These performances exist. People participate in such rituals all the time. I did, even though it made little sense to me at the time. Although my account of debutante culture is partial, I attempt here to uncover what performing a debutante is about. By drawing on Roach's method, I gain a better understanding of my participation and current obsession and, I hope,

document the many and disparate histories at work within, upon, and against the debutante tradition.

Do debutantes become debutantes because of social standing? Would you say that I and the twenty-six other girls and the thousands before and after us were born to perform the debutante ritual? What happened at the debutante balls when there was no such thing as photographs? How were the ideas and images retained? Who maintains this culture? How do rituals like this survive when women are supposedly equal to men? What are we saying by preserving this tradition? In what ways does it enable as well as disable agency? How do we justify participation in such events, whether a debutante or an audience member? What happens when we mark this performance as a performance by transforming it into a staged show? By using my experiences as a form of research and study am I backfiring on the tradition?

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter One, I describe the subject of the study and discuss my research method, which is Joseph Roach's genealogy of performance. I extenuate the components of Roach's method by drawing on examples from *Cities of the Dead*, the cultural performance of the debutante Cotillion, and my scripting and performance of *Etchings of Debutantes*. In Chapter Two, I offer a detailed script of *Etchings of Debutantes* with complete staging notes. I use endnotes to distinguish and clarify the many sources. There also are additional materials included in the script, which are italicized and front the right margin. These afterthoughts have been collected and written since the scripting and staging of *Etchings of Debutantes*. I include them to demonstrate the on-going production of history and historical recall, in general and as I produce this study. In Chapter Three, I define and track the different categories of genes I find in the script, treating them as historical traces, memories and counter memories that restore

debutante history and culture in various ways. In Chapter Four, I pursue the same process as in Chapter Three but as it applies to my staging choices and the live performance of *Etchings of Debutantes*. In the final Chapter, I discuss the significance of my study in terms of live performance as a site of historical research and history making. I also theorize as to the benefits and drawbacks of Roach's method as a means to discuss live performance. I then offer my thoughts as to what the study tells us about the restored performance of debutante culture. Lastly, I use excerpts from a performative writing paper I composed while drafting my thesis to further explore and exemplify how genealogies perform.

Chapter Two

The Script of *Etchings of Debutantes*

In this chapter, I provide an expanded version of the script I compiled and staged for live performance in September 2002 at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Unlike the working script, this version includes the lyrics of songs that played pre- and post-performance, and lighting, costume, and prop choices I made during the rehearsal process. My description of blocking, dance and gesture sequences also are new to the script since the performers and I processed these choices together in rehearsal. In the stage directions, I occasionally make second person audience references in an attempt to include the reader as audience to certain staging elements, such as seeing the set for the first time upon entering the theatre. I also have integrated short excerpts from solo performances and papers I have produced since scripting and staging *Etchings of Debutantes*. My aim is to imply how cultural histories are unstable, on-going processes produced by people in light of their changing perspectives and conditions. In other words, if I were to script and stage debutante culture today, it would restore, delete, and add to the memories I recalled in the 2002 version. These additions are formatted in italics against the right margin. Lastly, I have included endnotes to document the texts and materials I compiled and adapted.

Etchings of Debutantes

Adapted and directed by

Melanie Kitchens

Performers	Cast of Characters	
Lisa Flanagan	Debutante Barbie Customer Hyena Mint	
Angela Funches	Debutante Barbie Customer Katie Mills Mother/Coach Butterfly	
Danielle Sears	Debutante Storyteller Pea Blossom Potted Plant	
Jessica Slie	Debutante Woman singing Linda Blanchard	
Gretchen Stein	Debutante Bob Young Hacker Barbie Girl Narrator	“I must increase my bust” I must! I must! I must increase my bust! The bigger, the better The more the boys will lust. I must! ¹

[All performers, except Jessica, are dressed in huge, plastic versions of a classical white debutante gown. The costumes combine plastic, bubble wrap, and colorful sheer material in various styles that differentiate each woman. The women wear bows in their hair that match their dresses made of plastic, gift wrap bows, and ribbons. Jessica is dressed in an old, white lace dress and wears a flower wreath on her head. She carries a purple scarf made of the same sheer material found in the dresses.]

[Lisa Flanagan is a tall woman with well defined features, fair skin, and beautiful, jet black hair. Her movements are often awkward which makes her body a center for focus and contemplation. She carries herself with poise and confidence and blasts her voice through the room like a punk rocker with a timid glance.

Angela Funches is a fit, black, and sexy woman of medium height. Angela’s movement and voice are strong, commanding, and precise. Her voice shakes the soul while her body adopts and adapts to any space. She previously played a debutante in Opelousas, Louisiana.

Danielle Sears demonstrates amazing vocal variation, using her voice for distinct characterization. Her zinging curly hair and medium build mesmerizes you as she darts around the stage. It's hard to say which is stronger: her voice or body. She has the control and commitment every performer envies.

Jessica Slie is a petite woman with sharp, defining features. Her voice is soft but strong and carries well throughout the space. She moves with grace and as precisely as a ballerina.

Gretchen Stein is a captive and powerful presence on stage. She uses intense concentration and commitment to reap flawless performances. From poem to narration, she delivers every line with precision and an ear to ear grin.]

[Walking down one of the long narrow corridors of Coates Hall at Louisiana State University, you are greeted by a cheerful box office person who sits behind a round table covered with colorful lace and, on top, glittery golden sticks stuck in a vase. After purchasing your ticket, you sit on a bench covered with pink polka-dotted material. The doors of the HopKins Black Box theatre open and you are zapped into the debutante universe that haunts my dreams of remembrance. You are greeted immediately by Lords of Acid's "I Must Increase My Bust," followed by Ericka Badu's "Appletree," and Aqua's "I'm a Barbie Girl."]

"Appletree"

I'd like to dedicate this to all of the Creator's
righteous children.
I have some food in my bag for you.
Not that edible food – that food you eat?
No. I have some food for thought.
Since knowledge is infinite it has infinitely fell
on me.
So umm . . .

It was a stormy night
You know the kind where the lightning strike
And I was hangin' out with some of my "artsy"
friends
Ooh wee ooh wee oooh
The night was long the night went on
People coolin' out until the break of dawn
Incense was burnin' so I'm feelin right – ah'ight

See I picks my friends like I pick my fruit
& Ganny told me that when I was only a youth
I don't go 'round trying to be what I'm not
I don't waste my time trying ta get what you got
I work at pleasin' me cause I can't please you
And that's why I do what I do
My soul flies free like a willow tree
Doo wee doo wee do wee

And if you don't want to be down with me
You don't want to pick from my appletree
And if you don't want to be down with me
Then you don't want to pick from my appletree
And if you don't want to be down with me
Then you don't want to pick from my appletree
And if you don't want to be down with me
You just don't want to be down

I have a ho

And I take it everywhere I go
 Cause I'm planting seeds
 So I reaps what I sow – ya know
 Oh on & on & on & on
 My cipher keeps movin' like a rollin' stone
 I can't control the soul flowin' in me
 Ooh wee . . .²

[Twinkle lights, hung across the entire light grid, cast a glowing light. Mannequin body parts and Styrofoam heads with colorful sheers hang at different heights throughout the room. The torso of the mannequin, Tanga, hangs C. Attached to Tanga's underside is a strobe light, which is used later in the show. Four different sections of slanted seats stretch along the right side of the room, lengthwise, creating a semi-thrust stage.]

[A glow-in-the-dark etching of the logo of the show is sketched in white chalk on the far L wall. It depicts all five of the actresses' faces morphed into one. While you sit down you examine the glittery stars spread out like snow along the floor in sweeping patterns. C, under Tanga's torso, is a 2x5x3 platform surrounded by four set pieces. At UR is a ladder, from which are draped colorful pieces of sheer fabric. Just DR is a three foot long pink polka-dot bench with a gold hand-held mirror, face down, lying on top of it. A white vanity chair hosting a Barbie bag of magazine cut-outs is directly in front of the platform. At L is a stair unit set on a diagonal and covered with fake plastic grass. Each piece serves as a station of definition for the debutante playing in that area. The ladder is a place where beauty is contemplated, the bench a place for personal narratives of the non-fictional and fictional varieties, the chair a place for recalling and marking history, and the stairs a spot for a human Barbie to come out and play. Another 2x5x3 platform is between the DL house risers near the back door of the Black Box. A set of stairs allows the performers to walk directly onto the platform where there is a black music stand with a small light attached. At the end of "I'm a Barbie Girl," the lights fade to black. Jessica enters DR, through the audience, singing "A Little Bird" in a sweet, sincere, soprano voice and holding a candle that lights only her face. She wanders the length of the stage around to the C platform and down the Barbie stairs.]

"I'm a Barbie Girl"

-Hi Barbie!
 -Hi Ken!
 -You wanna go for a ride?
 -Sure Ken!
 -Jump in!
 -Ha ha ha ha!

I'm a Barbie girl in the Barbie world
 Life in plastic, it's fantastic
 You can brush my hair, undress me everywhere
 Imagination, life is your creation

Come on, Barbie, let's go party

I'm a Barbie girl in the Barbie world
 Life in plastic, it's fantastic
 You can brush my hair, undress me everywhere
 Imagination, life is your creation

I'm a blonde single girl in the fantasy world
 Dress me up, take your time, I'm your dollie
 You're my doll, rock and roll, feel the glamour
 and pain
 Kiss me here, touch me there, hanky-panky

You can touch, you can play
 You can say I'm always yours, oooh whoa

I'm a Barbie Girl in a Barbie world
Life in plastic, it's fantastic
You can brush my hair, undress me everywhere
Imagination, life is your creation

Come on, Barbie, let's go party, ha ha ha, yeah
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, oooh, oooh
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, ha ha ha, yeah
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, oooh, oooh

Make me walk, make me talk, do whatever you
please
I can act like a star, I can beg on my knees
Come jump in, be my friend, let us do it again
Hit the town, fool around, let's go party

You can touch, you can play
You can say I'm always yours
You can touch, you can play
You can say I'm always yours

Come on, Barbie, let's go party, ha ha ha, yeah
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, oooh, oooh
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, ha ha ha, yeah
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, oooh, oooh

I'm a Barbie girl in the Barbie world
Life in plastic, it's fantastic
You can brush my hair, undress me everywhere
Imagination, life is your creation

I'm a Barbie girl in the Barbie world
Life in plastic, it's fantastic
You can brush my hair, undress me everywhere
Imagination, life is your creation

Come on, Barbie, let's go party, ha ha ha, yeah
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, oooh, oooh
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, ha ha ha, yeah
Come on, Barbie, let's go party, oooh, oooh

-Oh, I'm having so much fun!
-Well, Barbie, we're just getting started!
-Oh, I love you Ken!³

JESSICA: (sings) There's a little bird somebody sent
Down to the Earth to live on the wind
Blowing on the wind
And she sleeps on the wind
This little bird somebody sent

Light and Fragile
Feather sky blue
Thin and graceful
The sun shining through

She flies so high up in the sky
Way out of reach of human eye

[Also entering from DR, the other debutantes join Jessica in singing the refrain. Danielle and Gretchen sing alto with Jessica while Lisa and Angela sing soprano. All of the women have large candles, which Jessica lights as they enter the room. Jessica continues to move freely through the space as the debutantes make a single file line across the DS arc of the stage area. Angela is DL, Lisa and Gretchen frame DC, and Danielle is DR.]

ALL: Light and Fragile
Feather sky blue
Thin and graceful
The sun shining through

JESSICA: She flies so high up in the sky
Way out of reach of human eye

ALL: Light and Fragile
She's feather sky blue
Thin and graceful
The sun shining through

JESSICA: And the only time
That she touches the ground
Is when that little bird
Little bird
Is when that little bird
Dies.⁴

[Remaining still, Angela, Lisa, Gretchen, and Danielle deliver Hans Christian Anderson's "Princess and the Pea" by candlelight. Jessica blows out her candle and sits on a small pink bench, LC, under the glow-in-the-dark wall etching.]

ALL: Once upon a time

LISA: there was a prince who wanted to marry a princess;

ANGELA: but she would have to be a real princess.

LISA: He traveled all over the world to find one,

ANGELA: but nowhere could he get what he wanted.

GRETCHEN: There were princesses enough,

DANIELLE: but it was difficult to find out whether they were real ones.

GRETCHEN: There was always something about them

**GRETCHEN/
DANIELLE:** that was not as it should be.

[Gretchen blows out her candle.]

DANIELLE: So he came home again and was sad,

[Danielle blows out her candle.]

ANGELA: for he would have liked very much to have a real princess.

[Angela blows out her candle.]

LISA: One evening a terrible storm came on; there was thunder and lightning, and the rain poured down in torrents. Suddenly a knocking was heard at the city gate, and the old king went to open it.

It was a princess standing out there in front of the gate. But, good gracious! What a sight the rain and the wind had made her look.

The water ran down from her hair and clothes; it ran down into the toes of her shoes and out again at the heels. And yet she said that she was a real princess.

“Well, we’ll soon find that out,” thought the old queen. But she said nothing, went into the bed-room, took all the bedding off the bedstead, and laid a pea on the bottom; then she took twenty

mattresses and laid them on the pea, and then twenty eider-down
beds on top of the mattresses.⁵

[Lisa blows out her candle.]

*There's no earthly way of knowing
Which direction we are going
Is it raining? Is it snowing?
Is a hurricane a blowing?
Not a speck of light is showing
So the danger must be growing
But the rowers keep on rowing
And they're certainly not showing
Any signs that they are slowing
Stop the boat!⁶*

[Lights rise to reveal the stage setting in full. The debs spout lines from *Good Manners*, an etiquette book from the 1930's, in an exaggerated, serious tone. Similar "etiquette" segments are delivered throughout the show.]

ALL: TREAT ALL GUESTS ALIKE.

[Debs stand on the Barbie staircase, on a diagonal, top to bottom. Angela is on the top step with Lisa one step below, then Gretchen, and then Danielle.]

DANIELLE: As a hostess, you should never show any preference toward one or more of your guests.

ALL: ALL SHOULD

DANIELLE: receive from you the same

ALL: CORDIAL

DANIELLE: attention.⁷

[Lights bump to black. The strobe light turns on, and a photo transition begins. Photo transitions occur several times in the show. During the transitions each actress performs four exaggerated body gestures, or gests, as if posing for a fashion photograph. She repeats these images as she Xs to her next position. Due to the strobe light, only fragments of the debs' bodies can be seen.]

[During this photo transition the debs X to their first positions. Gretchen Xs to the beauty ladder where she runs a piece of the sheer fabric through her hands slowly and repetitively in a soft but angular motion. Danielle Xs to the personal narrative bench

where she lies on her stomach observing herself in the mirror, which she moves in a large circular motion. Lisa Xs C to the history chair. From a Barbie satchel beneath the chair, she removes magazine cut-outs of beauty/body parts and tacks them on to her dress. Angela remains on the staircase with her arms raised, rigid and stiff on the balls of her feet, like Barbie. As the show progresses, each deb takes a turn at each of the stations. While there, she assumes the station traits.]

*I see you through the camera.
I see me.
But it all happens so fast. Click.
I don't know who you'll be after the development,
But I am anxious to see us.⁸*

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL: Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!⁹

[Strobe light turns off. Full lights fade up.]

GRETCHEN: (Discovering) To ask what is beauty today is to come face to face with the changing definition of beauty. Perhaps more than any other time in history, we are preoccupied with, even confused by beauty: Its power, its pleasures, its style, and its substance. Beauty may not be the most important of our values, but it affects us all; today more than ever, because we live in a Media Age where our visual landscape changes in seconds, and our first reaction to people is sometimes our last. Given this reality, the so-called “triviality” of beauty suddenly seems not so trivial after all.¹⁰

LISA: (Matter-of-fact) The debutante tradition, as we know it in the United States, has its roots, as many of our customs do, in England. The idea that a girl should be presented to society stems from the time when a daughter of marriageable age needed to find a husband of suitable and similar social standing. The daughters of the landed aristocracy, the lords and ladies of England, married within a very small circle and often had a very large dowry that went with them.¹¹

[Angela depicts Barbie by means of small scale, angular, mechanized movements. As the show progresses, Barbie’s movements become more exaggerated and complex. The change in movements coincides with the dialogue: as the Barbie-doll becomes more advanced so too do the movements of the performer portraying her. Barbie’s vocal quality is mechanical throughout the show.]

ANGELA:

Despite her fixed measurements and stable features, Barbie represents a performative self endlessly adapting to a fluid environment. She is an icon of improvisation. Barbie perpetually performs so as to become whatever the situation demands—a venturesome camper, a capable babysitter, a fashionable shopper, a graceful skater, a competent pediatrician, and on and on. Barbie's innumerable accessories and props—her identity kit—point to a self, continuously in the making, under shifting circumstances.¹²

When I was in high school I had a green clay pendent that hung from a black cord gently resting below my throat. A staple for my teenage self, it said something about me. Though I don't quite remember what. I do, recall, however, one night when I wanted badly to sink my teeth into its clay core and bite it in half.¹³

LISA:

The word, “debutante,” comes from the French word, “debuter,” which means “to lead off.

DANIELLE:

(Snobbishly) The Friday night Debutante Ball is sponsored by the active Dunbar Club Members. In order to attend, you must be an invitee of an active or honorary member of the Dunbar Social Club. Seating and invitations are very limited which makes this a must attend event each calendar year.¹⁴

GRETCHEN:

The beauty we see today is different, more complex. It's elusive, evolutionary, even controversial. No longer is beauty limited to a pretty face or a pretty picture: beauty has come to personify and reflect the social and cultural issues of our day.¹⁵

DANIELLE: The presentation starts promptly at 8:30 PM on Friday. Out of respect for the presenter, Debutantes, members, parents and guests, no one is allowed to enter the Ballroom after the presentation begins. Walking during the presentation is also strongly discouraged.¹⁶

LISA: The court of the kings and queens of England is known as the court of St. James. It was the center of all power. Because of the weather and the requirements of the hunt, the court was in London from April until the end of July. During this time the aristocracy came in from their country homes and opened their city houses and the “social season commenced.”¹⁷

GRETCHEN: Who shouldn't enjoy the continental, great society? With its bonanza incomes of highest standard of living In a country of super-technology, extremely rich Having rioting, war, spaceocracy, foreignade giving, With “sound inflation,” brainwashing, propaganda, not a hitch!¹⁸

ANGELA: Barbie is a teacher, of expectations, materialism, body shape, style, and fashion. She demonstrates a type of social power, showing where it comes from, and how to gain access to it. Barbie is an indicator of social fears, an image of a human being, a symbol of femininity,

ALL: (mechanical voice) A model, a doll, a toy, a tool.¹⁹

LISA: After the industrial Revolution, as the middle class began to make large sums of money, the aristocrats were anxious to make alliances with wealthy entrepreneurs. The middle class daughters could be presented if they could find a sponsor from among the aristocracy. The Season started with the presentation to the Court during which the young lady bowed to the Queen—thus the name the St. James Bow. Parties followed this, each family giving their share. It was hoped that at the end of the season, a girl would have found a husband.²⁰

[Lights bump to black. Strobe light is turned on. Debs enact photo transition in place. Jessica, who has been watching the action from a bench CL, Xs to stand behind the podium on the platform DL, in the house.]

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL: Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!²¹

[Jessica switches on the reading light at the podium. Strobe light turns off. Low lights fade up on stage.]

JESSICA: (Exaggerated, southern twang) I'm Linda Blanchard, chairman of the Augusta Symphony Cotillion. On behalf of the guild and the Cotillion Committee I would like to welcome you and our twenty-six lovely debutantes to the 1999 Cotillion Ball. Since 1963, this evening has supported our award winning Augusta Symphony Orchestra, which continues to provide this community with beautiful music. Dr. Donald Charles Portroy, music director and conductor of the Augusta Symphony, is our honorary chairman. Dr. Portroy, would you please stand.

[Debs applaud!]

JESSICA: I would like to extend a special thanks to Mrs. Cheryl Curtis and the staff of the Radisson Riverfront Hotel as well as our sponsors for their invaluable assistance in helping create this miracle evening.

[Page turn.]

[Debs Applaud! You might applaud too, as the debs seem to be encouraging it.]

JESSICA: Also I would like to express my personal thanks to every one on the Cotillion Committee. Without they're tireless efforts this evening would not have been possible. You'll find your names listed in the program at your table.

[Page turn.]

JESSICA: As we begin our presentation I would like to remind you to remain seated and as quiet as possible. Also please refrain from using flash cameras. We have professional photographers and videographers documenting the evening.²²

[Page turn.]

[Lisa picks up the history chair and moves it DC four feet. She sits back down and continues attaching magazine cuttings to her costume.]

LISA: Yes, I felt silly being dressed up as a "princess" referred to as a "Lady in Waiting" and parading in front of so many people. And yes, I could have looked at the experience as demeaning.²³

JESSICA: The bars are now closed until after our presentation. We are honored to have as our master of ceremony someone who needs no introduction. Lady's and Gentlemen please join me in welcoming the mayor of the city of Augusta, the honorable Bob Young.

[You and Debs applaud! Gretchen Xs UL.]

GRETCHEN: (A manly voice) Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here tonight and I was thinking as I was driving downtown from the house tonight, is this the last group of debutantes of the millennium

or is the group next year [Debs laugh] the last group of debutantes of the millennium? Now I want all of you to think about it. Is that your final answer? [Debs laugh.] No, no that's enough, let's, ah, let's move on through the evening. First we'd like to introduce...²⁴

[Debs stand profile L to face and look at the etching.]

ALL: BE SURE TO INTRODUCE CAREFULLY.

ANGELA: (Pivot turn pausing to face DS) Do not slur your words or mumble.

LISA: (Pivot turn pausing to face DS) Mention each name clearly, so that each one introduced will have no trouble in hearing the other's name.

DANIELLE: (Pivot turn pausing to face DS) Failing to pronounce names distinctly is a common fault. It makes an introduction embarrassing for everyone concerned.²⁵

GRETCHEN: (Slowly) ...Mr. William Carlyle Story Jr.

[Deb playing father, Danielle, steps in front of Gretchen, holding her hand out, palm up.]

GRETCHEN: Presenting Miss Martha Anne Story.

[Deb playing deb, Angela, steps out and places her hand on top of her father's hand. They stand for a moment, smiling broadly.]

GRETCHEN: Martha Anne is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Carlyle Story Jr.

[Deb Angela bows gracefully: she drops down on her left knee without touching the floor. Her right hand, full of imaginary flowers, reaches out to her right. She holds the pose for a few seconds, then rises, and resumes the "escort position."]

GRETCHEN: She is escorted by Mr. William Carlyle Story III and Mr. Richard Right Story Jr.

[The debs playing the escorts, Lisa and Gretchen, assume their positions behind the father and daughter pair. The father takes the deb's hand and places her arm in his. The four promenade across the stage from DL to DR while Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* plays. The escorts walk around either side of the father and daughter pair to face them. The father swings the deb around for one more bow.]

GRETCHEN: Miss Martha Anne Story.²⁶

[The debs applaud themselves daintily. You applaud too most likely. Lights fade to black. Jessica turns out the light on the podium.]

["The Girlfly Shuffle," the first of a series of three dances begins. A red, pink, green, and blue light special fades up to a low level on C as Frente's "Girl" plays. Jessica returns to her bench as the other debs do a laughable, waltzy-shuffle around the stage.]

[Gretchen
leads
Danielle,
Lisa, and
Angela in
a two-step,
follow the
leader
dance.
Their
arms, by
their sides,
briskly
float left
and right
to the beat.
They
circle
around the
chair
several
times.
Then
dance up
the stairs
onto the
platform.]

"Girl"

A girl is the word
That she hasn't heard
The truth is tiptoeing the edge of her skirt
The traffic's a blur
The street's a river
She's bigger and braver than she is clever

See it's her! It's her!
See it's her! It's her!

A mind so complex
It's breaking her neck
She thinks she's a car
Driving to its own wreck

Too wild and cool, vulnerable
To think one could change her
That's where I'm a fool

Won't you see it's her! It's her!
See it's her! It's her!

A girl is a verb
A whirl of colour
In doing she's being
She never thought she was thinking
Anything you could

See it's her! It's her!
See it's her! It's her!

A girl is a word
A girl is a verb
A girl is the world.²⁷

[Full stage lights rise to reveal the debs standing in a straight line across the front of the platform. The two on the outside stand ¼ L and R, while the two in the center stand FF.]

ALL: Human beings are a symbol using species. We are image makers, and image consumers. Symbols are tools that can be used to craft a reality that effectively serves the self.²⁸

[The following names are spouted off in a quick, crisp, and clear manner.]

DANIELLE: Megan, Meg, Melissa, Meredith, Michelle, Mackenzie,
Marie, Mary, Mary Katherine,
Melanie?

LISA: Katherine, Kathleen, Kristin, Christine, Christina, Carolyn,
Caroline, Courtney, Kelly, Kelly Anne,

ANGELA: Anne, Anna, Amanda, Amy, Alyssa, Ashley, Emily, Erin,
Elizabeth, Liz, Lindsey, Leslie, Lauren, Laura, Leigh Anne, Ginny
Leigh, Jenny,

GRETCHEN: Jennifer, Jenna, Janna, Jessica, Julie, Julia, Rebecca, Rachel,
Brittany, Brooke, Beth, Bethany,

DANIELLE: Beth Anne, Deborah, Debbie, Deb, Stephanie, Sarah, Sarah Beth,
Pamela, Nicole, and

ALL: Tiffany.²⁹

ALL: SHAKING HANDS.

[The debs turn to face each other in pairs. Danielle and Angela then turn and take a step US, while Gretchen and Lisa step in toward each other. Danielle and Angela turn back in toward each other. The debs now form a perfect square. On her line, Gretchen turns out FF.]

GRETCHEN: When men are introduced to each other, they usually shake hands. Women do not as a rule, though they may if they wish. A man being introduced to a woman, does not extend his hand first. It is the

ALL: WOMAN'S [with a quick unison nod DS]

GRETCHEN: place to show whether she wants to shake hands. If a man offers his hand, the

ALL: WELL-BRED WOMAN [with a full unison turn DS]

GRETCHEN: accepts it. To do anything else would be rude and unfriendly.³⁰

LISA: You ask, "What is the average day of a debutante?"

ALL: Well...

[Danielle and Angela jump to either side of Gretchen and Lisa to form a tight, huddling line. Their bodies are slanted in toward each other.]

ANGELA: As lots of people think a debutante leads a butterfly life, it would probably be as well to describe an average day.

[During this segment, the debs execute four gestures, which accent the lines delivered. The gestures are passed down the line of debutantes, from Danielle to Gretchen to Angela to Lisa, as if passing secrets in a game of telephone. The gestures are as follows: mimicking talking on a telephone, mimicking turning over a piece of paper on a list, mimicking dusting in a small figure eight, and mimicking talking on the telephone.]

GRETCHEN: (Enacting telephone gesture) To begin with, you wake up quite early—about nine o'clock. In fact, you are generally awakened by the telephone.

DANIELLE: (Enacting list gesture) You of course give a special list to your own maid—or to the butler, if he is worthy of confidence—so that you are never wakened except for someone on the list.

LISA: (Enacting dusting gesture) It really is necessary for you to have a telephone extension by your bed, because it is really impossible to have to sit in the library in your wrapper and bed slippers with the parlor maid brushing around, when you could be comfortably breakfasting in bed and having conversation at the same time.

GRETCHEN: (Enacting telephone gesture) You talk on the telephone until the very last minute, when you simply have to rush into your clothes and go to the first social event of that day.³¹

[Lights fade to black. Strobe light turns on.]

1999-2000 Debutante Parties
Wednesday, November 24 Luncheon
Friday, November 26 "The Big Ball"
Friday, December 17 Mexican Party 7:30pm (casual)
Saturday, December 18 Luncheon 12noon
Street Party 8pm
Sunday, December 19 Tea 4-6pm
Monday, December 20 Tea 4-6pm
Tuesday, December 21 Brunch 11am
Tea 4-6pm
Wednesday, December 22 Coffee 10-12noon
Thursday, December 23 Luncheon-12noon
Evening Party 8pm (black tie optional)
Monday, December 27 Luncheon 12noon
Tuesday, December 28 Luncheon 12:30pm
Wednesday, December 29 Luncheon 12noon
Mexican Fiesta 6-8pm
Thursday, December 30 Tea 4-6pm
*Saturday, January 8 Scrapbook Luncheon 12noon*³²

[Photo transition.]

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL: Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!³³

[Strobe light turns off. Full stage lights fade up. Gretchen Xs to the Barbie station, positioning herself on the stairs. Lisa and Angela X DR and stand back to back. Danielle Xs to sit on the history chair and tapes cut-outs to her costume.]

GRETCHEN: (As Barbie) Mattel announced today their new line of Barbie products, the "Hacker Barbie," designed to reverse the stereotype that women are numerophobic, computer-illiterate, and academically challenged. This new line of Barbie dolls comes equipped with Barbie's very own X-Terminal and Unix documentation as well as several Sun and Intel-based servers on an Ethernet network. The Hacker Barbie's wardrobe consists of a dirty button-up shirt and a pair of worn-out jeans, and her

accessories include a Casio all-purpose watch and thick glasses (pocket-protectors optional). The new Barbie's vocabulary consists mainly of technical terms such as "IP address," "TCP\IP," "kernel," "NP-complete," and "HTML tags."

"We are very excited about this product," said John Olson, Marketing Executive, "and we hope that the Hacker Barbie will offset the damage incurred by the Mathophobic Barbie." A few years ago, Mattel released Barbie dolls that said, "Math is hard," with condescending companion Ken. The Hacker Barbie's Ken is an incompetent consultant who frequently asks Barbie for help. Says one happy customer about the new Barbie's,

ANGELA: (As customer to you and Lisa) "My niece can't get enough of Hacker Barbie's Dream Basement Apartment! The pink Sun workstation in the corner, the little containers of takeout Szechwan scattered across the floor, her 'Don't Blame Me, I Voted Libertarian' T-shirt – it's on every little girl's Christmas list!"

LISA: (As customer, in agreement) "To me, the most realistic thing is how if you put her in the chair in front of the monitor, she'll stare at it for hours without blinking or taking her hands off the keyboard."³⁴

[Angela Xs to the personal narrative bench and looks at her face in the hand held mirror. Lisa Xs to the history chair. She picks up a bottle of glitter stars from behind the chair and sprinkles them over Danielle's head as Danielle delivers her speech.]

DANIELLE:

Debutante balls, like ball gowns, come in all different shapes and sizes. Depending on the particular town, and the traditions binding that town, a ball may honor anywhere from one to sixty young women who range in age from 18 to 22. Some deb balls are lavish Mardi Gras celebrations with a “royal court” and huge production, while others are smaller, simpler gatherings. But whether a town has one ball or ten, big or small, such parties are always elaborately planned, beautifully decorated, important community events. The central premise behind the balls remains consistent, despite other disparities. Debutante balls are moored in the old tradition of “presenting” young women to society at a suitable age. Therefore, though today’s balls are certainly not geared toward the same purpose (my parents were not presenting me to anyone!), the women remain the focal point of the event, no matter what the nature of the ball. The participants typically wear white ball gowns. Arrays of parties or gatherings are usually thrown prior to the main event to honor the women participating. Even today, there is usually some type of “presentation,” where a participant’s father escorts his daughter in front of the other guests. This presentation is followed by an elaborate party—food, drinks, dancing and revelry into the wee hours of the morning.³⁵

GRETCHEN:

In 1945 Ruth and Elliot Handler formed Mattel.³⁶

[Gretchen claps her hands sharply twice to get the other debs’ attention. They join her on the staircase, each standing on a separate step and posing as if they are climbing it.

Gretchen stands on the top step, then Danielle, then Angela, and lastly Lisa. As the group delivers the unison line, they turn FF, extending their left hands as they turn.]

ALL: GOOD MANNERS DO COUNT.

[As each deb says her next line, she drops her hand.]

LISA: In social life

DANIELLE: in business

GRETCHEN: in homes

ANGELA: at the theatre

LISA: or on the street

DANIELLE: in the train

GRETCHEN: wherever you are

ALL: you are judged by what you do and say.

DANIELLE: No matter who you are, whether you are rich or poor, you cannot overlook the importance of good manners. Any one can have good manners if he wants to. All that is necessary is to learn how well-mannered people conduct themselves and then practice what you have learned.³⁷

[Lisa Xs down the stairs and the others crowd around her. As Lisa speaks, all the debs sit down one by one on the steps. The lights focus in tightly on them.]

LISA: (Pathetic, looking for sympathy from the other debs) I felt very much on display at this debutante ball. I felt as though those present—family, friends, neighbors, and strangers—were watching my dress, my steps, my smile, even my date, throughout the evening. And the element of male supremacy is still a clear

element of the event—the men present their daughters, the dates escort the young women to and fro, while the women must be gracious and polite and beautiful...and above all else, smile.³⁸

ALL:

(sing) Smile, though your heart is aching
Smile, even though it's breaking
When there are clouds in the sky you'll get by
If you smile through your fears and sorrow
Smile, there will be tomorrow
You'll see the sun come shining through
For you. Light up your face with gladness
Hide every trace of sadness
Although a tear may be ever so near
That's the time you must keep on trying
Smile, what's the use of crying
You'll find that life is still worthwhile
If you, just, Smile...³⁹

Smile

When smiling the corners of the mouth usually move slowly upward. A smile usually indicates that one is pleased with one's momentary existence. The entire face contorts to create a new image—a happy image. Smiles are known to brighten the wearer's and the receiver's days. Some even say that smiling transforms feelings of ill-will.⁴⁰

[The debs grin cheesily at each other and you. Suddenly, Jessica begins to sing “A Little Bird.” As she sings, she Xs slowly around the staircase and then returns to her bench LC. The others watch her in confusion and amazement.]

JESSICA:

(sings) There's a little bird somebody sent
Down to the Earth to live on the wind
Blowing on the wind
And she sleeps on the wind
This little bird somebody sent

Light and Fragile
Feather sky blue
Thin and graceful
The sun shining through

She flies so high up in the sky
Way out of reach of human eye

Light and Fragile
Feather sky blue
Thin and graceful
The sun shining through⁴¹

Say cheese!

When one is “posing” for a photograph one is usually urged to smile, though some snapshots have been known to catch smiles without prompting.⁴²

[Lights fade to black. Strobe light turns on. Photo transition.]

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL: Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!⁴³

[Strobe light bumps off. Full stage lights fade up. Angela is on the beauty ladder, which she has moved to the UR corner of the stage. Gretchen is on the Barbie staircase, Lisa is on the personal narrative bench, and Danielle is on the history chair.]

GRETCHEN: In 1957 Ruth conceives of a three dimensional adult like doll. The body is based on a German doll called "Lilli" which is sold as a sex toy for men.⁴⁴

[During the following segment, all debs except Angela leave their stations. The poem is delivered with a modulated force, as if the debs are in a trance.]

ANGELA: (On the ladder) Where shall you seek beauty, and how shall
you find her unless she herself be your way and your guide?
And how shall you speak of her except she be the weaver of your
speech?

The aggrieved and the injured say,

DANIELLE: (Stands up, Xs two steps DL) “Beauty is kind and gentle.
Like a young mother half-shy of her own glory she walks among
us.”

ANGELA: And the passionate say,

GRETCHEN: (Xs two steps down the staircase) “Nay, beauty is a thing of might
and dread.

Like the tempest she shakes the earth beneath us and the sky about
us.”

ANGELA: The tired and the weary say,

LISA: (puts mirror down, rises, and Xs two steps DR) “Beauty is of soft
whisperings. She speaks in our spirit.

Her voice yields to our silences like a faint light that quivers in fear
of the shadow.”

ANGELA: But the restless say,

DANIELLE: (Xs into the C aisle) “We have heard her shouting among the
mountains,

And with her cries came the sound of hoofs, and the beating of wings and the roaring of lions.”

ANGELA: At night the watchmen of the city say,

GRETCHEN: (Xing to DL audience riser) “Beauty shall rise with the dawn from the east.”

ANGELA: And at noontide the toilers and the wayfarers say,

LISA: (Xing to DR audience riser) “We have seen her leaning over the earth from the windows of the sunset.”

ANGELA: In winter say the snow-bound,

DANIELLE: (In C aisle) “She shall come with the spring leaping upon the hills.”

ANGELA: And in the summer heat the reapers say,

DANIELLE: (At back wall of audience) “We have seen her dancing with the autumn leaves, and we saw a drift of snow in her hair.”

ANGELA: All these things have you said of beauty, Yet in truth you spoke not of her but of needs unsatisfied,

And beauty is not a need but an ecstasy.

It is not a mouth thirsting nor an empty hand stretched forth,

But rather a heart enflamed and a soul enchanted.

It is not the image you would see nor the song you would hear,

But rather an image you see though you close your eyes and a song you hear though you shut your ears.

It is not the sap within the furrowed bark, nor a wing attached to a
claw,

But rather a garden for ever in bloom and a flock of angels for ever
in flight.

Beauty is life when life unveils her holy face.

ALL: But you are life and you are the veil.

ANGELA: Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror.

ALL: But you are eternity and you are the mirror.⁴⁵

[As Suzanne Vega's "My Favorite Plum" fades in, the second dance sequence, "Plum Madness," commences. Gretchen, Danielle, and Lisa turn to face C and Angela descends the ladder as the lights X fade to the multi-colored special. In unison and facing each other, the debs execute the debutante bow. Then they X to the four corners of the stage, forming a large square. Angela is UR, Lisa is DR, Danielle is DL, and Gretchen is UL. They bow again. Then they walk slowly to the beat of the song into the center of the square raising their arms as if they're lifting a giant beach ball off the ground and up to the ceiling. They stop when they reach C and hold the pose for a moment. Then they reverse the action, returning to their respective corners. They stand tall gazing into the center of the square and at one another. Then as if walking a tightrope, they walk counter clockwise to the next corner. There, they face each other and bow again. They repeat the sequence except, rather than walk the tightrope, they return to C, beach ball raised, twirl together in place, and then drop their arms to their sides. The music stops and they turn outward, facing back to back.]

"My favorite plum"
Hangs so far from me
See how it sleeps
And hear how it calls to me
See how the flesh
Presses the skin,
It must be bursting
With secrets within,
I've seen the rest, yes
And that is the one for me

See how it shines
It will be so sweet
I've been so dry
It would make my heart complete
See how it lays
Languid and slow
Never noticing
Me here below
I've seen the best, yes
And that is the one for me

Maybe a girl will take it
Maybe a boy will steal it
Maybe a shake of the bough
Will wake it and make it fall

My favorite plum
Lies in wait for me
I'll be right here
Longing endlessly
You'll say that I'm
Foolish to trust

But it will be mine
And I know that it must

Cause I've had the rest, yes
And that is the one for me
I've seen the best, yes
And that is the one for me⁴⁶

GRETCHEN: The images I make to represent me are more important than my physical well being. How I am perceived by my peers is more important to me than my physical health.

LISA: Women often lose sensation in their nipples after breast enlargement surgery. They would rather look sexy than feel sexual pleasure.⁴⁷

[Lights X fade from special to full stage lights. Angela remains in place and delivers her speech in a mechanized Barbie voice. Lisa Xs to the Barbie stairs, Danielle Xs to the beauty ladder, and Gretchen Xs to sit on the history bench.]

ANGELA: The alarm sounds. The day for which I have been training the past seven years has finally arrived. I begin the long day with some last minute tasks—buying the necessary off-white stockings, covering my white gown with a plastic dry cleaner's cover, and I'm off to get my hair put up into a pretty and refined little bun.⁴⁸

[Angela turns to face Lisa.]

LISA: In 1958 the first Barbie dolls are manufactured in Japan.⁴⁹

[Angela adopts the rigid Barbie body, though she is not on the staircase. She seems to be receiving the Barbie energy from Lisa, who also is playing Barbie on the Barbie staircase.]

ANGELA: The bun was pulling tight against my scalp and the bobby pins were poking their way into the most uncomfortable places, and I knew this was only the beginning of what was to be a very controlled, regulated, and carefully planned evening. [Turns to

face Danielle at the beauty ladder.] I was rushed to the dressing room by the coordinating mothers and told that my pictures were to be taken in five minutes on the second floor. This was already turning into a disaster because before I could have my pictures taken, I had to have my faced “touched up,” a fifteen minute procedure.⁵⁰

[Angela walks mechanically toward the ladder during Danielle’s speech. When she reaches it, she assumes a static pose with her head and body folded down.]

DANIELLE: I am interested in cosmetics, beauty, and fashion as vehicles for play. Applying makeup and dressing up are part of the entertainment world, like films, circuses and amusement parks. They allow a woman to create a persona to present to the world. It’s like having a little armor that provides a chance to connect with people while still protecting one’s inner self.⁵¹

[Gretchen Xs to C and lies down with arms and legs sprawled wide.]

ANGELA: (Remaining in static position) For the next two hours, I would wait in my off-white stockings, jeans, button-down shirt, and my taut bun pressed against my head chatting with friends and nibbling on cheese and crackers (careful not to eat too many so that I could still fit into my dress by the end of the evening).⁵²

[Angela turns to face FF.]

LISA: The average woman is 5’5” (on tiptoe) while Barbie is 5’9”. The average woman’s bust is 37” and Barbie’s is 33”. Waist

difference is 31.5” to 16.5”. I measured my cat, who is of average cat size, and her waist was 15.5” around. 16.5????⁵³

[Angela collapses at the waist, bending forward, and delivers the first line of her speech in a malfunctioning voice. Danielle throws sheer fabric from the ladder over Angela’s head and body. Angela rises, shedding her Barbie physical and vocal traits as she does so.]

ANGELA: At five o’clock, the twenty-four girls, who will be women in society’s eyes by the end of the evening, are told to begin to get ready for the Grand March. The blood starts flowing and everyone frantically changes back from jeans to gown and makes a few last minute touch-ups to hair and face. Everyone wants to look her best.⁵⁴

DANIELLE: Restrained in inner misery
With heartache, tensions, loneliness,
Is hard-core poverty not shown
By tinsel tawdriness of dress!⁵⁵

[While humming her song, Jessica Xs to Gretchen who is still lying on the floor C. Jessica traces a chalk line around Gretchen’s body.]

[During her next speech, Angela paws at the sheer material that Danielle has placed over her head and body, as if she is discovering something.]

ANGELA: As the list of names makes its way to the M’s my heart begins to pound. I must make it down two flights of marble stairs in front of two different sets of people. The first flight—my friends, escort, and extended family, the second—my immediate family, not to mention all of the other girls’ guests as well.⁵⁶

LISA: Barbie has her debut in winter 1959 at the American Toy Fair in NYC.⁵⁷

[Angela continues to paw at the material dreamily yet delivers her lines with forthright concern.]

ANGELA: What if I trip and fall down the stairs on my face? What if my father trips and he falls down the steps? Suddenly, my father tugs at my white-gloved arm, and we were given the signal to proceed.⁵⁸

[Lisa, with Barbie body and voice, attempts to gain Angela's attention again.]

LISA: In 1967 the "Twist and Turn" Barbie was released with swivel waist and hips.⁵⁹

ANGELA: This was it. There I stood; peering down the flower lined case of stairs that seemed to stretch all the way to Hell and back.

GRETCHEN: (Manly voice) "Osborne Mills Jr. presenting Katherine Swan Berrian Mills."

ANGELA: I heard the announcer say calmly into the microphone making me all the more tense, but somehow my feet began to move. Left, right,

[The other debs join in and continue to say "left, right" beneath the rest of the speech.]

ANGELA: left, right.

[Angela steps out from under the material and executes a large, slow, sexy X to the history chair. Gretchen begins to make snow angels as Angela walks and talks.]

ANGELA: Mechanically, militarily, my father and I made it down the first staircase. There was an eerie silence of anticipation lurking about

my nervous body. I took a deep breath, which was quickly restricted by the confining white threads of my gown, and began to descend. My searching eyes finally connected with my mother's. We exchanged smiles of relief and contentment. Her last daughter had made it down the stairs in one piece wearing the dress that she had worn to the same event thirty years earlier.⁶⁰

[Angela reaches the chair and stands in front of it engrossed in her body and its decor.]

DANIELLE: The daughter is for the mother at once her double and another person...she saddles her child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it. The same process is to be found in pederasts, drug addicts, in all who at once take pride in belonging to a certain confraternity and feel humiliated by the association.⁶¹

Her grandmother taught her to say dammit. It was her favorite cuss word. When her mother asked her where she heard the word she said, "I don't know." Her mother still enjoys telling that story because she says she knew she did not teach her that word because her favorite curse word is shit. Though she did not hear her say it often. The story makes her sound a little more hip. Seem a little more human. My favorites are "bastard," "jack ass," and "fuck."⁶²

LISA: In 1975, "Skipper," Barbie's sidekick, sprouts breasts.⁶³

ANGELA: I was now a woman and so I followed the rest of the newly presented women to the reception line and proceeded to shake all of the guest's hands, ninety-eight percent of whom I had never seen before in my life. Forced smiles and compliments were the making of the next two hours in line.⁶⁴

ALL: WHENEVER YOU ARE INTRODUCED,

[Gretchen sits up on the floor, Danielle Xs to kneel behind her, Angela Xs to sit on the edge of the platform behind Danielle, and Lisa Xs to kneel behind Angela. Together, they form an ascending vertical line. They face FF and speak directly to you.]

GRETCHEN: speak with a pleasant smile. Show your new acquaintances that it is a real pleasure to meet them. We all like to be liked and it is very easy for us to like people who seem to like us. Talk with your new acquaintances as if you were interested in them. Make them, whoever they may be, feel at ease.

ALL: DO NOT

[Angela and Gretchen look right, Lisa and Danielle look left.]

DANIELLE: act or speak as if the introduction is of no importance to you. Never turn to the friend who introduced you and talk about something the other person may know nothing about.

ALL: ALWAYS INCLUDE HIM IN YOUR CONVERSATION.⁶⁵

LISA: In 1979 Barbie gets a new accessory, the “Fur and Jewels Safe” with a security alarm. Just in time for the 80’s.⁶⁶

ANGELA: Once everyone had made it through the line it was time to eat, drink, and dance.⁶⁷

ALL: A GIRL ACCEPTS AN INVITATION TO DANCE

[Gretchen and Angela X R to sit on the ground next to each other and Danielle and Lisa X L to stand together on the platform. They deliver this exchange to their partner.]

GRETCHEN: by saying, “Yes, I would like to dance.” Or, if the man says,

DANIELLE: “May I have this dance?”

GRETCHEN: she may reply, simply, “Yes, certainly.” She should accept it as if it were a

ALL: PLEASURE,

GRETCHEN: but she should not seem too eager. If a girl does not wish to dance with a certain man, she

**GRETCHEN/
DANIELLE:** MAY REFUSE

GRETCHEN: his request without giving any reason. It should be done in a kind, gentle way in order not to give offense. She may say that she is not dancing that number and must then be very sure

ALL: NOT

**GRETCHEN/
DANIELLE:** TO DANCE

GRETCHEN: it with ANOTHER man, as that would be extremely rude to the first man and to her hostess.

ALL: THERE IS A CORRECT DANCING POSITION,

[The debs X and stand in place in front of the C platform. Danielle and Gretchen manipulate Lisa’s and Angela’s bodies into the “correct dancing position.”]

DANIELLE: which couples should always observe. For instance: the man places his right hand

ALL: (All soft, except Danielle) LIGHTLY

DANIELLE: between the girl’s shoulders; his left arm is held horizontally. The girl’s right hand rests

ALL: LIGHTLY

DANIELLE: in the man’s left hand; her left hand is placed

ALL: LIGHTLY

DANIELLE: on the man's right shoulder. A girl should never dance with her arm around the man's neck. The man should never hold the girl too tightly. There must always be room enough between them to allow plenty of freedom. "Hugging" while dancing is of extremely poor taste.⁶⁸

[Lights bump to black. Strobe light turns on. Photo transition.]

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL:

Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!⁶⁹

[The debutantes prepare to perform Leonora Carrington's "The Debutante." Danielle, the Storyteller, Xs to the history chair DL facing the podium. She sits holding a peacock feather, which she uses to aid in telling her story to you. Angela Xs to stand behind the podium on the DR platform and faces Danielle. Angela plays the Mother in the story and the Coach for manners. During the manners segments, Angela instructs Danielle in manners, as if Danielle is a child in an etiquette class. Danielle hides the peacock feather behind her back during these segments. Gretchen, who plays Danielle's character as a Child in the scene, Xs to sit in the middle of the C platform. Lisa, who plays the Hyena, Xs to the personal narrative bench, moves it DR a few feet, and kneels in the center of it, as if meditating. She shifts into various yoga positions as the story progresses. Gretchen tries to imitate these positions on the platform, as a child might.]

*Did you ever have one of those magic eye books?
You stare at the odd shapes on the page until your eyes cross in some strange hypnotic
stare. And, for a moment, if you are one of the fortunate ones, you can decode some
simple image, like a dolphin or a heart, a skull—or even boxing kangaroos?*

Those books always puzzled me.

*When I was little, I would stare and stare at the pages until I was cross-eyed and,
sometimes, on a good day, I might catch a glimpse of a dolphin's fin, or, yes, it could be a
kangaroo's boxing glove. But usually I saw nothing. Nothing, but a bunch of swirling
colored mess.*

*Of course, all of the other kids could see alien heads and dinosaurs and even Ludwig van
Beethoven, as plain as day, they would say. Which would puzzle me even more and make
me all the more determined to find a way to make my eyes see the shapes that everyone
else had such a simple time seeing. I picked that book apart! Page after page, trying to
figure out how the images were hiding—there had to be another way to see them! Until
one day, I just gave up on my "Magic Eye: A New Way of Looking at the World" book.*

Who wants to look at the world with a squinty eyed face anyway?

My mom told me once that if you cross your eyes for too long they might stay that way.⁷⁰

DANIELLE:

(Mysteriously, waving the feather) When I was a debutante,

I often went to the zoo. I went so often that I knew the animals better than I knew girls my own age. Indeed, it was in order to get away from people that I found myself at the zoo every day. The animal I got to know best was a young hyena. She knew me too. She was very intelligent. I taught her French, and she, in return, taught me her language. In this way we passed many pleasant

hours. My mother was arranging a ball in my honor on the first day of May. During this time I was in a state of great distress for whole nights.

GRETCHEN add: (Faintly) I've always detested balls, especially when they are given in my honor.

DANIELLE: On the morning of the first of May 1934, very early, I went to visit the hyena.

[Lisa moves into "the cat."]

GRETCHEN: What a bloody nuisance,

DANIELLE: I said to her

GRETCHEN: I've got to go to my ball tonight.

[Lisa moves into "the cow."]

LISA: You're very lucky

DANIELLE: she said.

LISA: I'd love to go. I don't know how to dance, but at least I could make small talk.⁷¹

ANGELA: MAKE YOUR CONVERSATION INTERESTING.
SPEAK CLEARLY. One who converses well is popular. Read WORTHWHILE BOOKS and magazines. Information on many subjects gives you something to talk about. Knowledge is power. Keep yourself supplied with some good anecdotes. Above all, be sure that you choose the right words and that you are correct in your English.⁷²

[Lisa moves into “child’s pose.”]

*It was she. Not me.
It was she.
She who embodied all the wonder characters that keep the train trucking
Watering the seeds already planted
Vivacious Vivid
In loose sundresses and reddish brown hair flowing curly smiling creases in the corners
Of her eyes freckles marking her older than she really was
She
With no brand secret intrigue

Laughter echoes in her footprints
Boosting confidence in absence, amazing

That smile forever imprinted.⁷³*

GRETCHEN: There’ll be a great many different things to eat,

DANIELLE: I told her.

GRETCHEN: I’ve seen truckloads of food delivered to our house.

LISA: (Looking up) And you’re complaining,

DANIELLE: replied the hyena, disgusted.

LISA: Just think of me, I eat once a day, and you can’t imagine [looking
back down] what a heap of bloody rubbish I’m given.⁷⁴

ANGELA: KEEP YOUR MOUTH CLOSED WHILE CHEWING.

This will avoid making the disagreeable

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** noise

DANIELLE: that you hear when people chew with their mouths open. And, it is
not a

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** PRETTY

ANGELA: sight to be forced to look at half chewed food in the mouth.

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** WHEN YOUR MOUTH IS FILLED WITH FOOD,

DANIELLE: do

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** NOT

DANIELLE: try to talk. Chew and swallow before talking.

ANGELA: SIP WATER or any drink

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** QUIETLY.

ANGELA: Beverages should never be

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** GULPED

ANGELA: down in large quantities.⁷⁵

DANIELLE: I had an audacious idea, and I almost laughed.

[Lisa pushes up into “downward facing dog.”]

GRETCHEN: All you have to do is to go instead of me!

LISA: We don’t resemble each other enough, otherwise I’d gladly go,

DANIELLE: said the hyena rather sadly.

GRETCHEN: Listen

DANIELLE: I said.

GRETCHEN: No one sees too well in the evening light. If you disguise yourself, nobody will notice you in the crowd. Besides, we’re practically the same size. You’re my only friend, I beg you to do this for me.

[Lisa moves to sit “Indian style.”]

DANIELLE: She thought this over, and I knew that she really wanted to accept.

LISA: Done,

DANIELLE: she said all of the sudden.

LISA: I'll do it.

DANIELLE: There weren't many keepers about; it was so early in the morning. I opened the cage quickly, and in a very few moments we were out in the street.

[Lisa lays on her back with her legs in the air "bear hug."]

DANIELLE: I hailed a taxi; at home everybody was still in bed. In my room I brought out the dress I was to wear that evening.⁷⁶

DANIELLE: The pure white gowns can cost anywhere between 150 to a few thousand dollars depending upon the family, and how much you're willing to spend.⁷⁷

[Angela Xs down from the platform and stands in front of Danielle. Danielle stands up. Angela and Danielle rip the cut-out images off of each other's bodies and toss them on the ground. The ripping and tossing become more frenetic as the interaction proceeds.]

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** WHAT

ANGELA: you

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** WEAR

ANGELA: tells people what you

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** ARE.

ANGELA: Your taste in clothes and how you wear them, tells as much about your character as what you say and do.

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** DRESS IN GOOD TASTE.

DANIELLE: Not only should your clothes be in good style and correct for the time and place, but they should always be in good taste. “Flashy” things,

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** TOO EXTREME

DANIELLE: styles and

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** TOO BRILLIANT

DANIELLE: colors are not worn by well-bred people. The evidence of GOOD TASTE is much more important than the amount of MONEY you spend. Wear the

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** RIGHT

DANIELLE: dress at the right time and be sure that it is becoming. That is all that you need to think about regarding wearing apparel.

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** DRESS FOR THE OCCASION.

ANGELA: Do

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** NOT

ANGELA: wear an elaborate afternoon gown on the golf course, or a sport costume at a formal dinner. Do not wear things that create a false impression of your social position. People who

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** PRETEND

ANGELA: to be what they are not are certain to be discovered with results that may be embarrassing, to say the least.⁷⁸

[Angela returns to stand behind the podium. Danielle sits back down in the chair, and Lisa, lying on her back, begins to do “the bicycle” with her legs in midair.]

DANIELLE: It was a little long, and the hyena found it difficult to walk in my high-heeled shoes. I found some gloves to hide her hands, which were too hairy to look like mine.⁷⁹

ANGELA: Kid gloves cost \$300.⁸⁰

ANGELA: IF YOU CAN AFFORD ONLY A FEW CLOTHES,
AVOID

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** EXTREMES IN STYLE

DANIELLE: and

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** “LOUD”

ANGELA: colors. Quiet, simple clothes are always in good taste and less liable to be noticed for their sameness. Cultivate a sense of harmony and buy only the things that will harmonize.⁸¹

DANIELLE: By the time the sun was shining in my room, she was able to make her way around the room several times, walking more or less upright. We were so busy

[Lisa curls up into a ball.]

DANIELLE: that my mother almost opened the door to say good morning before the hyena had hidden under my bed.

ANGELA: There’s a bad smell in your room

DANIELLE: my mother said, opening the window.

ANGELA: You must have a scented bath before tonight, with my new bath salts.

GRETCHEN: Certainly,

DANIELLE: I said. She didn't stay long. I think the smell was too much for her.

ANGELA: Don't be late for breakfast,

DANIELLE: she said and left the room.

[Lisa stands erect on the bench.]

DANIELLE: The greatest difficulty was finding a way to disguise the hyena's face. We spent hours and hours looking for a way, but she always rejected my suggestions. At last she said

[Lisa bends over at the waist with her fingers touching her toes.]

LISA: I think I've found the answer. Have you got a maid?

GRETCHEN: Yes,

DANIELLE: I said, puzzled.

[Lisa pulls her right leg back into "a lunge."]

LISA: There you are then. Ring for your maid, and when she comes in we'll pounce on her and tear off her face. I'll wear her face tonight instead of mine.⁸²

[Danielle and Angela break out of scene, vocally.]

DANIELLE: Reality is the map I make of the world. It is drawn with symbols, images, words, beliefs, and abstractions. It is a thought. It cannot be touched.

ANGELA: What does a well crafted reality look like?⁸³

[Danielle and Angela return to scene.]

GRETCHEN: It's not practical,

DANIELLE: I said.

GRETCHEN: She'll probably die if she hasn't got a face. Somebody will certainly find the corpse, and we'll be put in prison.

LISA: I'm hungry enough to eat her,

DANIELLE: the hyena replied.

LISA: And the bones, as well

DANIELLE: she said.

[Lisa pulls her right leg back in to meet her left leg. She bends at the waist, touching her toes again.]

LISA: So, it's on?

GRETCHEN: Only if you promise to kill her before tearing off her face. It'll hurt her too much otherwise.

[Lisa pulls her left leg back into "a lunge."]

LISA: All right. It's all the same to me

DANIELLE: Not without a certain amount of nervousness I rang for Mary, my maid. I certainly wouldn't have done it if I didn't hate having to go to a ball so much. When Mary came in I turned to the wall so as not to see. I must admit it didn't take long. A brief cry, and it

was over. While the hyena was eating, I looked out the window.

A few minutes later she said,

LISA: (Embodying the “downward dog”) I can’t eat any more. Her two feet are left over still, but if you have a little bag, I’ll eat them later in the day.⁸⁴

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** TOOTHPICKS

DANIELLE: have gone out of date. It is very impolite to pick your teeth. Some people try to cover up the operation with their napkins. This makes a bad matter worse because it calls attention to what is going on. If you

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** MUST

DANIELLE: pick you teeth, be excused from the table and retire to another room.⁸⁵

[Lisa sits back into “meditation” pose.]

GRETCHEN: You’ll find a bag embroidered with fleurs-des-lis in the cupboard. Empty out the handkerchiefs you’ll find inside, and take it.

DANIELLE: She did as I suggested. Then she said,

LISA: Turn round now and look how beautiful I am.⁸⁶

ANGELA: Appearance is a powerful thing. I know sometimes people can’t remember what you said but can tell you exactly what you were wearing.⁸⁷

DANIELLE: In front of the mirror, the hyena was admiring herself in Mary's face. She had nibbled very neatly all around the face so that what was left was exactly what was needed.

GRETCHEN: You've certainly done that very well,

DANIELLE: I said.⁸⁸

ALL: FISH BONES

DANIELLE: may be taken from the mouth with the fingers

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** NEVER

DANIELLE: with the fork.⁸⁹

DANIELLE: Towards evening, when the hyena was all dressed up, she declared,

LISA: I really feel in tip-top form. I have a feeling that I shall be a great success this evening.

DANIELLE: When she heard the music from downstairs for quite some time, I said to her,

GRETCHEN: Go on down now, and remember, don't stand next to my mother. She's bound to realize that it isn't me. Apart from her I don't know anybody. Best of luck.

DANIELLE: I kissed her as I left, but she did smell very strong.⁹⁰

ANGELA: Do you smell sweet? Not with perfumes, powders, bath salts, pomades—oh no! Sweet with a clean odor that advertises your habit of the daily bath.

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** EVERY DAY! EVERY DAY! EVERY DAY!

ANGELA: Not once a week, twice a week, or every other day; or days important to you when you are stepping out with the boy friend—but every single day in the year.⁹¹

DANIELLE: Night fell. Tired by the day's emotions, I took a book and sat down by the open window, giving myself up to peace and quiet.⁹²

[Lights bump to blackout.]

ALL: Without emotion there is no beauty.⁹³

[Lights bump back up to full.]

DANIELLE: I remember that I was reading *Gulliver's' Travels* by Jonathan Swift. About an hour later, I noticed the first signs of trouble. A bat flew in at the window, uttering little cries. I am terribly afraid of bats. I hid down behind a chair, my teeth chattering. I had hardly gone down on my knees when the sound of beating wings was overcome by a great noise at my door. My mother entered pale with rage.

ANGELA: We'd just sat down at the table,

DANIELLE: she said,

ANGELA: when that thing sitting in your place got up and shouted,

[Lisa stands up on the bench with her hands on her hips and addresses you.]

LISA: So I smell a bit strong, what? Well, I don't eat cakes!

ANGELA: Whereupon it tore off its face and ate it. And with one great bound, disappeared through the window.⁹⁴

[Photo transition.]

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL: Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!⁹⁵

[During this transition, Angela and Lisa move the Barbie stairs UL. Lisa resumes her position as Barbie on the Barbie stairs. Danielle Xs to climb the beauty ladder. Gretchen Xs to lay on the floor C with her arms and legs sprawled wide. Angela Xs and stands on the history chair, facing FF.]

ANGELA:

This event that I have just described may sound like a *kaleidoscope* of different things—a wedding, a circus, a tradition, a nightmare, a joke. Being a debutante at The Assembly Ball is the final step in a long process of etiquette training for both girls and boys.⁹⁶

LISA:

Barbie represents the sort of contemporary selfhood some see as embattled and others see as liberated. Hers is a mutable, protean, impression-managing, context-bound self whose demeanor shifts from situation to situation and role to role. Barbie's identity is at root indeterminate. We know what she does, we know how she looks, we know what she appears to be. Ultimately, though, Barbie eludes us. Her personality is inchoate, even ethereal; her morals and values are more implicit than expressed or affirmed; her intimate life – her dreams, her passions, her abiding attachments – remains a mystery. Barbie is the next door neighbor whom we keep meaning to get to know better; she is a co-worker with whom we are friendly but not friends; she is the babysitter whose judgement we trust but whose life we know not. Barbie represents the sort of interaction as well as the sort of selfhood ascendant in postindustrial societies with their commodity cultures.⁹⁷

[Standing on the history chair, Angela turns profile R.]

ANGELA: It all begins in fifth grade with dancing school. At the given hour, girls and boys of the same grade were filed neatly into the ballroom and seated boy, girl, boy, girl accordingly. The boys wore the standard coat and tie and always competed for the “shiniest shoes award” while the girls sat politely with their skinny ankles crossed and dressed in their dark velvet dresses and glossy patent leather shoes.⁹⁸

[Jessica interrupts with the refrain from “Little Bird.” She remains seated on her bench under the etching CL as she sings.]

[The debutantes deliver the following manners segment in place.]

ALL: CUTTING IN

ANGELA: is actually

ALL: NOT

ANGELA: correct. But it is done everywhere in this country and one has become used to it. When a man “cuts in,” he should do it gracefully and with as little disturbance as possible.

ALL: ROUGHNESS

DANIELLE: has no place on the dance floor. The man who “cuts in”

**ANGELA/
DANIELLE:** TAPS THE SHOULDER

DANIELLE: of the partner of the girl with whom he wishes to dance. The partner may dislike to do it, but he should give the other man an opportunity to dance with the girl at once.⁹⁹

ANGELA: We all endured this weekly ritual of learning the Box Step, the Fox Trot, and the infamous Cha-Cha-Cha along with such social graces as the proper way to ask, accept, and decline a dance, until the eighth grade. The next stage of the etiquette programming which began when we started high school was the biannual formal dinner and dance parties held at various country clubs.¹⁰⁰

LISA: In 1971, with the “Malibu Barbie,” Barbie’s eyes look straight ahead for the first time. Older Barbie’s eyes looked slightly down and to the side.¹⁰¹

[Standing on the history chair, Angela makes a quarter turn clockwise, facing Lisa on the Barbie stairs.]

ANGELA: The final step in this series of etiquette education is the Assembly Ball. The Ball is held not only to honor women themselves, but also to display their social graces, carry on tradition, and highlight the fact that they are now presentable to society as respectable and eligible women—women who come from reputable families and attend credible schools.¹⁰²

LISA: In 1980 Black Barbie is released. She is designed by Kitty Black Perkins, a black woman.¹⁰³

[Still facing Lisa, Angela re-adopts the mechanized Barbie body and voice.]

ANGELA: Unlike some other debutante balls, the Assembly ball does not contribute its proceeds to a charity or foundation. Therefore, the money is simply put back into the entire system and back into

the same pool of people. In the past the cause was for the girl to be presented to society and find a husband of suitable and similar social standing. It is now seen as welcoming the debutante into a world of civic responsibility and social awareness.¹⁰⁴

LISA: Vanessa Williams becomes the first black Miss America in 1983.¹⁰⁵

[Angela breaks from the Barbie body and voice and jumps off of the history chair angrily. She marches around the staircase, looking at Lisa who returns Angela's gaze while, slowly and mechanically, shifting into the Barbie pose. By the end of her speech, Angela is yelling. It is as though Angela is protesting Lisa/Barbie.]

ANGELA: The Assembly Ball continues to be a tradition within my family. It may not be something that will endure through further generations. For me, coming out last year was not to celebrate myself nor [sic] re-affirm my social adequacy. Rather, it allowed me to identify with my heritage and the other women in my family. However, it does not stop there. All of the women in my family have made something of themselves and are proud of who they are. WE are all strong women and fight for what we believe. We celebrate the right of independence and equality, and whether or not my children walk down a flight of stairs in a white gown, that belief will continue to be a tradition that will carry on in my family.¹⁰⁶

[Lights bump to black. Strobe light turns on. Photo transition.]

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL: Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!¹⁰⁷

[During this transition, the actresses prepare to perform Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale, "The Butterfly." Gretchen, the Narrator, tells the story from high on the beauty ladder. Angela, the Butterfly, stands on the personal narrative bench while the Flowers, Lisa, L, and Danielle, R, stand on either side of the bench. The Flowers enact beauty regimen gests, in repetition, at various points in the piece. The Butterfly, Angela, repeats a balletic arm sequence throughout: she raises her arms, fingertips touching, in front of her torso, then raises her arms over her head, then lowers them to either side of her body to touch fingertips again at bottom, and repeat slowly. For the first few lines, Angela moves alone while Danielle and Lisa are frozen in different flower/beauty poses. A blue and purple light special fades up on the scene, RC.]

DANIELLE: The idea that beauty is unimportant is the real beauty myth.¹⁰⁸

GRETCHEN: (as Narrator) There was once a butterfly who wished for a bride, and, as may be supposed, he wanted to choose a very pretty one from among the flowers. He glanced, with a very critical eye, at all the flower-beds, and found that the flowers were seated quietly and demurely on their stalks, just as maidens should sit before they are engaged; but there were a great number of them, and it appeared as if his search would become very wearisome. The butterfly did not like to take too much trouble, so he flew off on a visit to the daisies. The French call this flower “Marguerite,” and they say that the little daisy can prophesy. Lovers pluck off the leaves, and as they pluck each leaf, they ask a question about their lovers; thus:

DANIELLE: Does he or she love me?

ANGELA: —ardently?

LISA: Distractedly?

DANIELLE: Very much?

ANGELA: A little?

LISA: Not at all?

[Lisa and Danielle begin to move, in repetition. Danielle’s sequence consists of a plea from second position and then she mimes painting a picture. Lisa hops on both feet and mimes picking up something off the floor, as though she is playing hopscotch.]

GRETCHEN: And so on. Every one speaks these words in his own language.

The butterfly came also to Marguerite to inquire, but he did not

pluck off her leaves; he pressed a kiss on each of them, for he thought there was always more to be done by kindness.

ANGELA: (as Butterfly) Darling Marguerite daisy, you are the wisest woman of all the flowers. Pray tell me which of the flowers I shall choose for my wife. Which will be my bride? When I know, I will fly directly to her, and propose.

[Lisa and Danielle's second repetitive sequence begins. With hands cupped, Danielle mimes whispering and then listening. Lisa looks to the right, as if someone is talking bad about her, and then she turns to the left and crosses her arms, as if she knows someone is talking bad about her.]

GRETCHEN: But Marguerite did not answer him; she was offended that he should call her a woman when she was only a girl; and there is a great difference. He asked her a second time, and then a third; but she remained dumb, and answered not a word. Then he would wait no longer, but flew away, to commence his wooing at once. It was in the early spring, when the crocus and the snowdrop were in full bloom.

[The third repetitive sequence begins. Danielle's body blooms, fades, and blooms again as she rises from a bent over position to a full extension upward, pauses, and then bends rigidly to the right and down. Lisa takes two careful steps forward and two careful steps back balancing an imaginary book on her head.]

ANGELA: They are very pretty, charming little lasses; but they are rather formal.

GRETCHEN: Then, as the young lads often do, he looked out for the elder girls. He next flew to the anemones; these were rather sour to his taste. The violet, a little too sentimental. The lime blossoms, too small,

and besides there was such a large family of them. The apple-blossoms, though they looked like roses, bloomed to-day, but might fall off to-morrow, with the first wind that blew; and he thought that a marriage with one of them might last too short a time. The pea blossom pleased him most of all; she was white and red, graceful and slender, and belonged to those domestic maidens who have a pretty appearance, and can yet be useful in the kitchen. He was just about to make her an offer, when, close by the maiden, he saw a pod,

[Lisa leans over, becoming the pod.]

GRETCHEN: with a withered flower hanging at the end.

ANGELA: Who is that?

DANIELLE: (as Pea Blossom) That is my sister.

ANGELA: Oh, indeed; and you will be like her some day.

[In the fourth repetitive sequence, Danielle holds her arms out to the right as though she is hoping to dance. She holds this pose for a moment and then collapses to the left as if she has been denied. Lisa offers her hand to someone on her right and then leans to her left to give someone kisses on each cheek.]

GRETCHEN: He flew away directly, for he felt quite shocked. A honey suckle hung forth from the hedge, in full bloom; but there were so many girls like her, with long faces and sallow complexions. No; he did not like her. But which one did he like?
Spring went by, and summer drew towards its close; autumn came; but he had not decided. The flowers now appeared in their most gorgeous robes, but all in vain; they had not the fresh fragrant air

of youth. For the heart asks for fragrance, even when it is no longer young; and there is very little of that to be found in the dahlias or the dry chrysanthemums; therefore the butterfly turned to the mint on the ground. You know, this plant has no blossom; but it is sweetness all over,—full of fragrance from head to foot, with the scent of a flower in every leaf.

ANGELA: I will take her,

GRETCHEN: said the butterfly; and he made her an offer. But the mint stood silent and stiff, as she listened to him. At last she said,

LISA: (as the Mint) Friendship, if you please; nothing more. I am old, and you are old, but we may live for each other just the same; as to marrying—no; don't let us appear ridiculous at our age.

[The fifth repetitive sequence begins. Danielle raises both arms to different heights, becoming a tree blowing in the wind. Her right arm, bent a little, reaches upward and her left arm, bent awkwardly, reaches left. Both arms and hands shake, slowly and inconsistently. Lisa lunges forward and reaches out with both arms. Then, she yanks something back over her head as she pulls her feet together again. Angela continues to repeat the balletic arm movement but with her right arm only.]

GRETCHEN: And so it happened that the butterfly got no wife at all. He had been too long choosing, which is always a bad plan. And the butterfly became what is called an old bachelor.

It was late in the autumn, with rainy and cloudy weather. The cold wind blew over the bowed backs of the willows, so that they creaked again. It was not the weather for flying about in summer clothes; but fortunately the butterfly was not out in it. He had got a

shelter by chance. It was in a room heated by a stove, and as warm as summer. He could exist here well enough.

ANGELA: But it is not enough merely to exist. I need freedom, sunshine, and a little flower for a companion.

[Angela freezes with her right arm up in the air and a surprised look on her face. Danielle bends over to the right with her arms perched behind her back. Lisa drops down on one knee and faces to the left with her left arm raised like Angela's.]

GRETCHEN: Then he flew against the window-pane, and was seen and admired by those in the room, who caught him, and stuck him on a pin, in a box of curiosities. They could do no more for him.

ANGELA: Now I am perched on a stalk, like the flowers. It is not very pleasant, certainly; I should imagine it is something like being married; for here I am stuck fast¹⁰⁹

*Do not walk with toes pointed upward.
Do not stand with feet in midair.
Do not move skirt when sitting.
Do not move feet when lying down.
Do not remove the binding for there is nothing esthetic beneath it.¹¹⁰*

GRETCHEN: And with this thought he consoled himself a little.

DANIELLE: (as Potted Plant) That seems very poor consolation

GRETCHEN: Said one of the plants in the room, that grew in a pot.

ANGELA: Ah

GRETCHEN: Thought the butterfly

ANGELA: One can't very well trust these plants in pots; they have too much to do with mankind¹¹¹

[Danielle breaks from her pose and delivers the following quote, FF, directly to you.]

DANIELLE: All human life is a permanent dance between different orders of abstractions.¹¹²

[Lights fade to black. Strobe light turns on. Photo transition.]

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL: Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!¹¹³

[During this transition, Gretchen Xs to the personal narrative bench. Angela Xs to the history chair. Danielle Xs to the beauty ladder. And Lisa Xs to the Barbie stairs. Things are beginning to fall apart. The debutantes are becoming more carefree and a bit sloppy. The strobe light turns off. Full stage lights rise.]

ANGELA: The young women are indeed doll-like, the epitomes of “purity” in white dresses and gloves. And they are, quite literally, presented by their fathers to the community. And though today’s debutantes are not necessarily being presented to be eligible for marriage, or eligible to be “accepted into society” as was once the case—there is still the element of spectacle that makes the rituals relevant to today’s society.¹¹⁴

GRETCHEN: My friends knew exactly where to look for *me* when they were allowed to walk around freely again--behind the building with a glass of *white* wine and a cigarette in hand.¹¹⁵

ALL: SMOKING ON THE STREET.

LISA: a man, when walking with a woman in the street, should

ALL: NEVER

LISA: smoke. He will throw away his cigar or cigarette should he meet her and walk along with her.

ANGELA: A woman

**LISA/
ANGELA:** NEVER SMOKES ON THE STREET.

ALL: SMOKING IN THE PRESENCE OF ANYONE.

DANIELLE: Before smoking, a man should offer his woman companion a cigarette. If she accepts (which she shouldn’t), he should

ALL: ALWAYS LIGHT THE CIGARETTE

DANIELLE: for her. If she refuses, he should ask her if she objects to his smoking.¹¹⁶

LISA: In 1984 Barbie is sold with the slogan

ALL: “We girls can do anything.”

LISA: “Day-to-Night” Barbie comes with a briefcase, calculator,
newspaper and business card. And Mattel releases “She-Ra,
Princess of Power,” promoted with the slogan

ALL: “The fate of the world is in the hands of one beautiful girl.”¹¹⁷

*A silky white sensation.
The purist shiniest but glossiest white you have ever seen.
Maybe you would call it antique white.
White with a slightly off-white glow.
Slip your hand in.
Mmm.
A snug warmth follows.
All the way up the forearm to the elbows where they loosen up a bit.
Fit and sized just for you.
Kid leather, as pure as they come.
With two pearl buttons at the wrist.
Difficult for one to fasten by oneself.
Fingers entrapped individually.
One by one they grasp the air to make room for movement.
Enough movement to hang on to a bouquet of white lilies and roses.
A one night wonder.
Slightly pushed or crunched down at the elbows.
Creating the perfect crease.
And allowing perfect elbow movement.
Important for escort position and the deb curtsy.*

*The damp flowers left a slightly green water stain on the whiteness that once covered the
palm.*¹¹⁸

GRETCHEN: The idea of the presentation of young women to society
started in this country in 1748 when 59 colonial Philadelphia
families held “Dancing Assemblies,” the forerunner to the
Debutante Ball.¹¹⁹

DANIELLE: Beauty is something very personal that you sense and respond to on a deep level. It's hard to define, but when you see it, you feel it very strongly and are moved by it. The beauty I love is in people who look real. A beauty that is pure, natural, and not glamorized.¹²⁰

LISA: Barbie is made from polyvinylchloride.¹²¹

[Gretchen Xs CL chanting.]

GRETCHEN: Cherry Mr. Misty's and brain freezes. Small crushes. French fries dipped in frosties, the fox trot. Cheese sandwiches without the crust.¹²²

[Gretchen, FF, sings the following in a childish tone with accompanying gestures. Using her arms and hands, she makes a roof shape to represent Pizza Hut and arches to represent McDonald's and, for KFC, she puts her hands under her armpits and "clucks" her arms like a chicken.]

GRETCHEN sings: A Pizza Hut, A Pizza Hut. Kentucky Fried Chicken and a Pizza Hut. A Pizza Hut, A Pizza Hut. Kentucky Fried Chicken and a Pizza Hut. McDonald's, McDonald's. Kentucky Fried Chicken and a Pizza Hut. McDonald's, McDonald's. Kentucky Fried Chicken and a Pizza Hut.¹²³

DANIELLE: The things which the child loves remain in the domain of the heart until old age. The most beautiful thing in life is that our souls remain hovering over the places where we once enjoyed ourselves.¹²⁴

GRETCHEN: And in my mind I was a child, and it felt good.¹²⁵

ANGELA Fascinating socio-cultural implications...

[Gretchen Xs to Angela, slaps a piece of tape over her mouth, and takes over her lines.]

GRETCHEN: ...come to light when one considers the traditions surrounding deb

balls. Such implications speak primarily to the history behind the event. Yet, the fact that this tradition has survived into a new millennium speaks also to issues and concerns present in today's culture.¹²⁶

LISA: Barbie is eleven and one half inches tall.¹²⁷

GRETCHEN: The exclusive, lavish and carefree atmosphere surrounding these events hints at a society desperately clinging to old glories. Many southerners have this idealized (and likely unrealistic) vision of a Gone With the Wind "Old South" filled with glamour, grace and gentility. In some sense, by donning white, hoop-skirted dresses and gloves, southerners are attempting to reclaim a past long ago abandoned and destroyed by war and change.¹²⁸

[The lights X-fade to the multi-color special for the third dance, "Static Mania." An instrumental song, "The Drunken Piper" by Natalie MacMaster, from Putumayo's "Women of the World: Celtic II" begins to play. During the dance, the lights are bumped on and off catching the debs in static poses. The debs X C to recreate the final image from dance two. They are in a square facing each other with arms uplifted. They hold this position and lights bump to black. Lights bump up to reveal the debs in the same square executing the deb bow. They hold, and then the lights bump to black. When the lights bump up, the debs are standing side by side FF with their arms around each other like they are having their photograph made. Lights bump to black and bump up on the debs lying on their backs on the floor with their heads touching C. Lights bump to black and bump up on the debs sitting up from the last position. Lights bump to black and bump up as the debs struggle to stand up. Lights bump to black and bump up to find the debs standing FF with their skirts off. The lights fade to black and the debs X to stand in a straight line FF on the platform. In the following segment, the debs apply tape to various parts of their face, and they deliver the lines with a grotesque, valley girl accent.]

LISA: How to be a specialist in success...

GRETCHEN: Of course, according to school teachers and the family, the girl who is pretty and good and sweet and obedient—meaning "meekly

ladylike” –is a howling social success. But if I tell you facts instead of fairy tales, I can assure you that any howling that she is likely to encounter will be of the silent kind. In other words, the day of the wax-doll debutante that squeaked “Ma-ma” if ever so lightly pressed is over. The baby doll of today has a smooth-working dynamo under her indestructible exterior instead of a little squeak bellows buried in the sawdust! Today’s specialist in success has got her wits about her, and her will working overtime, to do better and better the things that she can do; and to frankly tag “discard” on the things that she can’t. In fact, just as a man chooses between being a broker or a manufacturer or an architect, or going in for diplomacy, a modern up-to-date debutante specializes in Beauty or Amusement or Sports or

DANIELLE:

Personality. I’m putting Personality at the top because it is the highest quality there is. Mickey says it might be called X-ray quality because it just does reach straight through the most hard-shelled indifferences of others, and I don’t know any better way to describe it. And, anyway, it’s something you have or you haven’t. If you have, nothing can keep success away from you, and if you haven’t—well, you’ll need every other asset there is to make up for its lack. Such as

ANGELA:

Sports. This includes games like bridge as well as all outdoor sports, exercises, and contests. This is the most important

specialty subject, because success (to an at least passable degree) is merely a question of determination and patience.

LISA: Amusement. This means being a born wit, a mimic, a news bringer, or having an overabundance of high spirits—I mean real ones, not alcohol—of the quality that makes things go! Or it can just as well mean one who provides orchestras, theatre tickets, automobiles, supper parties, and other diversions.

DANIELLE: and Last but certainly not least Beauty. Luckily for most of us, Beauty is ever so much less a born asset than it used to be. There was a time when beauty was bestowed upon you as a birth gift—or you were overlooked. But today the face and figure you were born with aren't half as important as the perfect ensemble which

ALL: (praise Heaven)

[The following is incomprehensible as the valley girl accent overwhelms the clarity of the words.]

DANIELLE: you make to suit yourself. I mean in New York, unless beauty includes the last word in smartness, it isn't even an asset—except, of course, if you have the most beautiful body and don't cover it too much. But beauty counts for almost nothing.¹²⁹

[Lights bump to black.]

ALL: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.¹³⁰

[Strobe light turns on. Photo transition.]

DANIELLE: Hold it.

GRETCHEN: Right there.

ANGELA: Yes.

LISA: Smile.

DANIELLE: That's it.

GRETCHEN: There we go.

ANGELA: Just like that.

LISA: Hold on now.

DANIELLE: Hold on.

GRETCHEN: Good!

ANGELA: Tilt your chin.

LISA: A little to the left.

DANIELLE: Perfect.

GRETCHEN: Take a tiny step back!

ANGELA: Yep.

LISA: Magnificent!

ALL: Say, I'M BEAUTIFUL!¹³¹

[During the transition, Gretchen Xs to sit on the history chair. Danielle Xs to become Barbie on the Barbie stairs. Lisa Xs to climb the beauty ladder. And Angela Xs to sit on the personal narrative bench.]

*Snapshots became a means for marking time as my obsession found me fumbling through
the works of Roland Barthes.
Sometimes the image builds and bleeds into the cracks of my skin
And I ask myself*

"How did I get here" ?¹³²

GRETCHEN: This is about self definition. It is about image making,
creating an image of the self. This image is a protector. By

believing in the image, I can re-make myself, or convince myself that I am closer to success or to safety or to love. It is about a protective shell, map of the world, a guide.

LISA: Images store knowledge. I see what I believe is there.¹³³

DANIELLE: Barbie is a defining force for both women and men, for the culture in general.¹³⁴

ANGELA: Debutante balls and similar phenomena, such as country clubs, cotillions, the Junior League, etc, are part of an effort to clearly delineate class lines and divisions that were blurred in post Civil War days. The exclusive nature of such events perpetuates a self contained upper echelon of southern society.¹³⁵

LISA: Uncle Fred says that the important thing in all situations of life is to have nonchalant grace.¹³⁶

DANIELLE: Barbie says a lot about the world. I can't think of any other icon that is more widely distributed or so accepted as an image of femininity. We have chosen this image, voted for it with our dollars, promoted it unconsciously or consciously. When archeologists dig into the ruins of our world they will find the Venus DiMilo of the 20th century:

ALL: Barbie.¹³⁷

[Angela X's to the history chair and sits next to Gretchen. The pair begin to tape themselves to the chair.]

ANGELA: Though most deb balls are usually organized to raise money for a charity, the events themselves are often reserved for

the elite families and friends who have participated for years. There is little room made for expansion or reaching out to her community members, but the exclusion allows for the same families to celebrate their prosperity and heritage throughout the passage of time.¹³⁸

[Over the course of her speech, Danielle breaks from the Barbie gest and Xs to kneel next to Gretchen. She also begins to tape herself to the history chair.]

DANIELLE: I think it's about time this icon diversified a little. What about those aspects of our society that are not represented by Barbie? Let's open up the doors and let out the repressed real-world Barbie's; Barbie's extended family of disowned and inbred rejects; politically incorrect Barbie's that celebrate the ignored and disenfranchised.¹³⁹

DANIELLE: In 1992 the average American girl owned 7 Barbies.¹⁴⁰

[Lisa Xs to the history chair and stands behind Gretchen. The debs pass the tape around to each other, taping themselves to the chair and to each other. The ripping of the tape causes the debs to speak louder, and they become more desperate.]

GRETCHEN: I was one of them.¹⁴¹

[They all reply at various intervals "me too."]

GRETCHEN: Perhaps the issue that is more confounding is the debutante ball as a symbol of a male-dominated society in which women are doll-like commodities to be "given away" in courtship or marriage. Regardless of the actual progress communities may have made, the rituals and symbols of the debut are certainly reminders of a past that most women would like to leave behind.¹⁴²

ALL: And I was also a debutante.¹⁴³

[Jessica rises from her bench with a glass of white wine and a cigarette. She positions herself against the UL wall in the shadows where she proceeds to light her cigarette and drink her wine while watching the end of the show.]

LISA: On this the princess had to lie all night. In the morning she was asked how she had slept. “Oh, very badly!” said she. “I have scarcely closed my eyes all night. Heaven only knows what was in the bed, but I was lying on something hard, so that I am black and blue all over my body. It’s horrible!” Now they knew that she was a real princess because she had felt the pea right through the twenty mattresses and the twenty eider-down beds. Nobody but a real princess could be as sensitive as that. So the prince took her for his wife, for now he knew that he had a real princess; and the pea was put in the museum, where it may be seen, if no one has stolen it.

ALL: There, that is a true story.¹⁴⁴

[The first song, “The Rights of Man” by Eileen Ivers, from Putumayo’s “Women of the World: Celtic II” begins to play as the lights slowly fade and the women tear off the tape in which they have bound themselves. Jessica stands against the wall watching, smoking, and drinking. In full black out, Bette Midler’s “I’m Beautiful” rises and the debutantes form a line for curtain call. Full stage lights rise, the debs bow, and you clap. Ru Paul’s “Work It, Girl” plays as you leave the space and return to your ordinary lives, hopefully changed in one way or another.]

“I’m Beautiful”

“That’s it, baby! When you got it, flaunt it, flaunt it!”

“This is the divine miss m and I’m here to share with you some rare and stimulating insight into my cosmic

fabulosity. It's really very simple. I simply believe with all my heart:"

I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, dammit!
I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, dammit!
I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, dammit!
I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, dammit!

"go away, little girl," they used to say.
"hey, you're too fat, baby, you can't play."
"hold on, miss thing, what you trying to do?
You know you're too wack to be in our school."

Too wack, too smart, too fast, too fine,
Too loud, too tough, too too divine.
I said you don't belong. You don't belong.
Too loud, too big, too much to bear,
Too bold, too brash, too prone to swear.
I heard that song for much too long.

Ain't this my sun? Ain't this my moon?
Ain't this my world to be who I choose?
Ain't this my song? Ain't this my movie?
Ain't this my world? I know I can do it.

I'm not too short, I'm not too tall,
I'm not too big, I'm not too small.
Ooh, don't lemme start lovin' myself!
Ooh, don't lemme start lovin' myself!
I'm not too white, I'm not too black,
I'm not too this, I'm not too that.
Ooh, don't lemme start lovin' myself!
Ooh, don't lemme start lovin' myself!

I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, dammit!
I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, dammit!

It's time to call it what it is. Don't play the naming game.
Become what you were born to be and be it unashamed.
"go away, little boy," I can hear them say,
"everybody on the block says they think you're gay.
Hold on, my friend, do you think we're blind?
Take a look at yourself, you're not our kind."

Too black, too white, too short, too tall,
Too blue, too green, too red, too small.
I said you don't belong. You don't belong.
Too black, too white, too short, too tall,
Too blue, too green, too red, too small.
I heard that song for much too long.

Ain't this my sun? Ain't this my moon?
Ain't this my world to be who I choose?
Ain't this my song? Ain't this my movie?

Ain't this my world? I know I can do it.

People always ask me,
"Miss m, how did you get so far
On so little?" Shut up!
Well, I woke up one morning,
Flossed my teeth and decided,
"Damn, I'm fierce!" You look good!
You can be just like me! A goddess? Yeah!
Don't just pussy foot around and sit on your assets.
Unleash your ferocity upon an unsuspecting world.
Rise up and repeat after me: "I'm beautiful!"

I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful!
Can you say that?
I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful!
I don't hear you!
I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful!
Louder!
I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful, I'm beautiful!
Hey!

That's it, baby, when you got it, flaunt it, flaunt it!

Aaaaaah!
Ain't this my sun? My sun! Ain't this my moon?
My moon!
Ain't this my world to be who I choose?
Ain't this our song? Ain't this our song?
Ain't this our movie? Ain't this our movie?
Ain't this our world to be who we choose?

I'm not too short, I'm not too tall,
I'm not too big, I'm not too small.
Ooh, don't lemme start lovin' myself!
Ooh, don't lemme start lovin' myself!
I'm not too white, I'm not too black,
I'm not too this, I'm not too that.
Ooh, don't lemme start lovin' myself!
Ooh, don't lemme start lovin' myself!
I'm beautiful, dammit!¹⁴⁵

Notes

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- ³ from Aqua, "Barbie Girl," *Aquarium*, 1997.
- ⁴ Jewel, "Little Bird," *Spirit*, 1998.
- ⁵ Hans Christian Anderson, "The Princess and the Pea" (1835) online, 9 Dec. 2001 <<http://hca.gilead.org.il/princess.html>>.
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- ⁷ *Good Manners* (L.M. Garrity and Co. 1930) 10; emphasis in original.
- ⁸ Melanie Kitchens, "Pattern Plummet," unpublished paper, Performative Writing seminar, LSU, spring 2004, 15.
- ⁹ Melanie Kitchens, "Photo transition," written for *Etchings of Debutantes*.
- ¹⁰ Dorothy Shefer, *What is Beauty* (New York: Universe, 1997) 9.
- ¹¹ Dunbar Social and Charity Club Inc., "The History of the Debutante," online, 26 Sept. 2001 <<http://www.dunbar-socialclub.8m.com/DEBUTANTEHISTORY.html>>.
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¹⁴⁴ Anderson, "The Princess and the Pea."
¹⁴⁵ Bette Midler, "I'm Beautiful," *Bathroom Betty*, 1999.

Chapter Three The Script as Genealogy

When I picture an etching, I envision a penciled sketch drawn to represent something that is yet to come. An etching is an outline with individual poetics that can stand on its own or be used as a blueprint for something else. There is a child's toy called an *Etch-a-Sketch*, which a child can use to make etchings by turning two knobs that control a cursor. The etch-a-sketcher's freedom of production is limited because the knobs manipulate a single cursor that marks straight lines and sharp angles, up and down and left and right. It is hard to manipulate the knobs in such a way as to create curvature. However, with practice, the etch-a-sketcher can make do within the angular constraints and manipulate the knobs in such a way as to produce curves.

The discrepancy between an image created on an *Etch-a-Sketch* by angles or curves is a metaphor for what I find to be troublesome in Roach's theory of surrogation. In terms of memories, the *Etch-a-sketch* can be used as prompted, to create angular images simulating Roach's notion of conservative surrogation as practiced by those who want to maintain the status quo. If one etches in terms of lines and angles, following the expected patterns, it is equivalent to memories restored in search of an origin. For example, the video of my debutante ball assumes to provide accurate documentation of the evening's festivities. Titled "Melanie's Debutante Ball 1999," it attempts to reproduce my debutante experience, although I know it does not. It is but a fragment of my experience, captured from the point of view of a videographer I do not know.

If and when I learn to create curves with the *Etch-a-Sketch*, the video begins to have multiple functions. It begins to be informed by a number of other histories and memories that may or may not be related to the debutante ball itself. With a finite origin out of the question, I recall my experience in multiple ways, as it is indefinite. Realizing that an original cannot be

defined, memories and counter memories or alternate histories are available and remembered and radical or alternative surrogation made possible. The realization that there is no unique place of origin and that substitutions are multiple becomes important in my application of surrogation.

As I walk down the streets of my past, traces of memories and counter memories arise, allowing me to access the histories I interwove to create *Etchings of Debutantes*. Searching this past for clues that informed my participation in the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion, I gather “fragments ‘rescued’ from different textual pasts” (Rokem ix). These fragments of stories, icons, speeches, music, activities, imagery, and poetry combine in a collage, through which I access and make sense of my debutante experience. Reflecting on this experience, I find familiar materials and texts of orature from various times and places that “cut across disciplinary boundaries and the conventional subcategories and periodizations” to regroup in my collage script (Roach 11). I become my own historian as the orature gathers itself from the archive of my life. Freddie Rokem observes, “Historians today . . . consider themselves in one way or another to be ‘storytellers’ involved in piecing the past together through narrative” (9). Each story I recall or discover gives rise to another and, when combined, they aid in my understanding of the debutante ritual and its participants. As the conveyer of this experience through various forms of orature, I become “the storyteller, besides being a great mother, a teacher, a poetess, a warrior, a musician, historian, a fairy, a witch, a healer, and a protectress” (Minh-ha 25). I become empowered by my past once I begin to play all of these roles. By “realizing oneself in the tongue of the other,” I begin to understand the performance that consumed me that night (Pollock 6).

My script is an attempt to define the performer of the debutante ritual by means of my personal history and memory, which I understand to be impacted by and interwoven with other

histories and memories. My debutante experience is more than just the debutante ritual of that evening. It is about all the experiences that did and did not bring me to that point in my life. These experiences never stop but continue to grow and be tracked and traced to different places at different moments. *Etchings of Debutantes* is a performance within itself and continues to grow and perform as my experiences increase.

A performance genealogy enables me to create and voice my experience of being a debutante at the 1999 Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion through various related voices of history. As Roach might have it, I am creating and recreating the context of my experience through “the self-reflexive interaction of identity and role” (1). In this chapter, I use my understanding of Roach’s method of genealogy to discuss the multiple texts and materials compiled to compose the script, *Etchings of Debutantes*. Although the texts and materials of orature can be discussed within their own contexts and the reasoning for their use explained in much the same way, for the purposes of this chapter I discuss the orature in terms of several themes or genes, which function as memories and counter memories defining my debutante experience.

In *Cities of the Dead*, Roach defines memory as “forgetfulness” (2). He argues that “memory is a process that depends crucially on forgetting,” causing us to create “satisfactory alternates” that we “substitute” for a lost original (2, 4). He upholds that “memories” can and are “embodied in and through performance” (xi). He describes counter memories as “the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences” (26).

The memories and counter memories I have of my experience as a debutante inform my selection and arrangement of the many texts and materials I used in the script. Embedded in the

resulting history are the genes or themes of class, etiquette, beauty, fairytale nostalgia, and the spaces in-between. Understanding that the various texts and materials operate within and across the boundaries of these genes, my aim is to discuss each gene using examples from my script to clarify my application of genealogy in the scripting of *Etchings of Debutantes*. In the last section of the chapter, I focus on the techniques I used to compose or arrange the materials in the script.

The genes of class, etiquette, beauty, and fairytale nostalgia interact and inform each other in both the cultural performance and my recounting of it. As embodied through etiquette rituals and beauty regimens, class hierarchies are displaced or normalized when contexted within the frame of a fairytale. The fairytale placement implies that the practice is not real, and the participants can feel more at ease in performing the debutante ritual. Within the debutante subculture, etiquette and manners inform and signify class. These learned behaviors must be maintained within a shell of beauty. Women are expected to adhere to the rules and restrictions of a particular female role, an “ideal” of femininity, epitomized by the debutante on the night of the ball. Encased in a white dress on display in a candlelit room, the debutante is a fantasy that operates to mask the less than innocent agendas of the performance.

In the center of my collection of debutante culture lies what Roach would term the “vortex” of the event (28). In this case, the “‘place’ of memory” is the ballroom of the Radisson Riverfront Hotel in Augusta, Georgia on the night of November 26, 1999 (Roach 27). The physical embodiment of the performance, or “behavioral memories,” constitute part of my collection through what Roach terms “kinesthetic imagination” (27). These and other memories are also recalled through “written records, spoken narratives, architectural monuments, and built environments” (Roach 27). Displaced transmissions are evident in the script as I transform “experience through the displacement of its cultural forms” (Roach 29). The place of memory

combined with behavioral memories prompts additional research and experiential recall, which results in “the adaptation of historic practices to changing conditions,” namely, the script I wrote and this thesis (Roach 28). Using the evening as a springboard for thought through combined history and memory my script began and thus continues to take shape.

Class and the Etiquette of Placement

The past and present must be enacted to serve the needs of a hallucinatory future. (Roach 142)

Roach writes that in the “reinvention of ritual, performers become the caretakers of memory” (77). In the debutante ritual, the debutante is “the ritual subject” attempting to complete a “rite of passage” as she performs a “change of place, state, social position, and age” (Stern and Henderson 117). Thereby, she becomes the caretaker of a broader memory that conserves the social fabric of the community she represents.

In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner discusses van Gennep’s three phases of “separation, transition, and incorporation” common to most rites of passage (24). During these phases, the subject is separated, tested, and reintegrated into society through a series of highly disciplined regimens and activities. As Turner relays, “the first phase of separation clearly demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular space and time” by use of “symbolic behaviors” (24). In the second phase of transition, “called by van Genep ‘margin’ or ‘limen’ . . . the ritual subjects pass through a period . . . of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo” (Turner 24). “Enhanced status” is reached through “symbolic phenomena and actions” at the culmination of the third phase of incorporation, as the subject returns to her “new, relatively stable, well-defined position in the total society” (Turner 24).

In debutante culture, an oral transmission of information prevails, which made my collection of it difficult. It is nearly impossible to access the intricacies of the ritual unless you are “in the know.” Therefore, to describe and analyze the debutante ritual, I draw on my experiences as a debutante in the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion of 1999.

Turner’s separation phase is implied at the level of the institution that sponsors the event and, at this implicit level, class is the factor of and for separation. For instance, the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion is a fundraiser for the Augusta Symphony. Young women are invited to participate with the understanding that they, or more likely their parents, will contribute \$1800 to the symphony, which in turn will “grace Augusta with beautiful music” (“Melanie’s Debutante Ball 1999”). Add in the cost of peripheral events, the debutante gown, and formal attire for family members who attend the Cotillion, and the debutante ritual marks and is marked by economic class distinctions. So, too, the “highbrow” aims of the fundraiser imply a separation of class as based on “taste.” The instigating goals of the ritual also conceive the separation of women from men, implying that the objectification of women for the betterment of music is not only acceptable but a cause for celebration.

The aforementioned aims of the ritual are realized by a Cotillion committee made up of elite, upper class women who plan the event for the entire year prior to its execution. For those involved in the planning process, every intricate detail must be thought out and arranged, such as who should be invited to participate as a debutante. In 1999, Linda Blanchard chaired the committee, and it was under her watch that I was invited to be a debutante.

My experience of the separation phase began upon my reception of the invitation to participate. Once I agreed, I attended a meeting held by the Cotillion committee where I and the other twenty-five debutantes were informed of the rules we were to follow. As evocative of

class, rules of social etiquette prevailed. We were expected to attend many parties, teas, luncheons, brunches, and coffees throughout the year, and the main event, the debutante ball, over the Thanksgiving holiday. Given for the debutantes by various friends and family members, the peripheral events occurred prior to the ball and continued through late December, at which time the next group of girls received their invitations from the Cotillion committee. At every party, tea, lunch, brunch, and coffee, we were expected to distinguish ourselves from the “common woman” by embodying, in dress and action, the appropriate social grace and etiquette of the debutante.

My well-mannered attendance at numerous social functions, including five parties hosted by loved ones in my honor, indicates not only ritual separation but also a progressive move toward and into the transition phase. The pre-ball parties acquainted me with my role and served as rehearsals for the big event, while the post-ball parties celebrated my successful “passage” and thereby my “enhanced status” as a woman capable of meeting the obligations of class and gender as performed in the ritual proper and its peripheral events (Turner 24). The main event, the ritual vortex, was the evening of the debutante ball, where the key transitional activity was the presentation of each debutante. Escorted by my father, brother, and closest family friend, Jimbo, I enacted the debutante bow for the community of invited family and friends. The bow is the main symbol of the debutante’s transition from girlhood to womanhood as determined by class in this case.

Although, in my experience of the ritual, I did not feel as if I were presenting myself as marriageable material, I was transformed by the event. I separated my corporeal and discursive body from its college environment and familiar behavior. I was no longer Melanie, a theatre student at Georgia Southern University who frequently wore blue shoes and a tongue ring, but

Melanie, a proper southern lady outfitted in a Jim Hjelm dress with the background, know-how, and skill to be presented to Augusta Society. In David Byrne's terms, I wondered "how did I get here?" and, in response, ghostly memories of my etiquette training as a child began to surface and inform my performance of a debutante.

I now realize that the rehearsal process, a mixture of the separation and transition phases of the ritual, did not begin when I received the invitation from the Cotillion committee. Rather, it began long before. Etiquette is a behavioral thread that has been woven into my life since childhood. I have always been expected to respond to authority with a prompt "yes, sir" or "no, m'am." I was taught proper table manners at the age of seven by a woman in my neighborhood named Mrs. Olive and, during my adolescence, I was involved with an organization called "Social," which was and still is run by a woman named Dorothy McCloud. In seventh grade and four years thereafter, I attended Mrs. McCloud's studio where I and others learned how to waltz, foxtrot, electric slide, shake hands, and eat properly, among other etiquette practices.

In retrospect, it appears that all of these activities were in preparation for my debut. I had been rehearsing the role of debutante many years prior to my awareness of the ritual. In Jessica Johnston's terms, I became a "role player" (Featherstone 95) of a certain class and gender and "voluntarily discipline[d]" myself and my body "to meet institutional standards" (e.g., Augusta Symphony Cotillion standards) that conserve and are conserved by the role I learned to play (Johnston 177). Once I was invited to participate in the debutante presentation, I was expected to "recreate" that role "through a variety of techniques" applied to my body (Johnston 186). In the peripheral and key events, I recalled the kinesthetic experiences I had learned earlier. The ritual then did not ask me to restore behavior I did not know as much as be tested on my ability to adapt behavior I knew well to new situations. Thereby, I demonstrated my ability to perform a

escorts and the audience watch her execute the movement, right knee to the ground, right arm out, and smile.

In *Etchings of Debutantes*, I depicted the bow in much the same way I had performed it on the evening of my debut. Drawing on “Melanie’s Debutant Ball 1999,” I scripted each move so as to clarify this debutante marker in terms of the restraints it places on the body. The bow became the basis for each of the three debutante dances, which operated to defamiliarize the bow and the body. I discuss my staging of the dances, kinesthetically imagined from the bow, in Chapter Four.

As a participant in the 1999 Augusta Symphony Cotillion, I received a video that documents the night’s events. I assume the gift was intended to aid in my celebration and preservation of the debutante tradition. Labeled in gold paint, “Melanie’s Debutante Ball 1999,” the video opens with several shots of the preparation/separation process. The ritual vortex is established as committee members are shown decorating the ballroom while debutantes learn and rehearse the intricacies of placement, walk, and bow. The video then documents each woman’s climatic moment of presentation, her promenade and bow before the assembled audience. To conclude, the documentary shows the incorporation phase, a brief segment of fathers and daughters dancing a dance, which we had rehearsed two nights prior at Dorothy McCloud’s “Social” studio.

Caught on tape, our performance of the bow, one by one, twenty-six times over, is an act of conservative surrogation. So too, the video, which restores and transmits the high points of the ritual in chronological order, preserves the search for an origin. Unconsciously partial, the video celebrates class and gender hierarchies through the show of etiquette imprinted on the bodies and on tape. Through restored behavior and its replication, time and again at the touch of

a button, the debutante ritual is conserved and my “newly gained status” confirmed—or so that is the illusion.

In addition to igniting certain kinesthetic memories of the ritual, the video also provided me with the text of Linda Blanchard’s speech, which she delivered that evening and I restored in *Etchings of Debutantes*. Augusta socialite and chairman of the 1999 Cotillion committee, Linda Blanchard offers a speech that serves “to welcome you and our twenty-six lovely debutantes to the 1999 Cotillion Ball (“Melanie’s Debutante Ball 1999”). In the speech, Mrs. Blanchard introduces herself carefully, thanking all those who helped coordinate the evening. In the script, the stage directions suggest that the lines should be delivered “with an exaggerated southern twang” (*Etchings* 33). This delivery prompt highlights the humor within the etiquette expected at such an event. In both the video and the script, Mrs. Blanchard offers the audience the reasons for the event, namely, “to provide the community with beautiful music” (*Etchings* 33).¹ Through class distinction, delivered with perfect etiquette, Mrs. Blanchard’s welcome, rationale, and gracious thanks help to recall the cultural ritual of the past in and to the present performance.

The most obvious representations of etiquette in my script are the repetitive manners segments I extrapolated from a 1930 publication, *Good Manners*, by an unknown author. The old, worn-out book dictates the etiquette expected of upper-class members of 1930’s society. Offering advice on how to be a “hostess” and a “well-bred woman,” the book teaches the reader how to shake hands, introduce others, accept an invitation to dance, embody the “correct dancing position,” “make conversation interesting,” eat dinner, “sip water,” “dress in good taste,” and “smoke on the street,” among other suggestions. While applicable to upper-class society generally, *Good Manners*, is indicative of training I received in preparation for performing the debutante. Imprinted on and through the body over the course of many years, the rules attempt

to conserve body etiquette through repetition and training. Although by nature the body is unruly and unpredictable, the constant rehearsal and performance of good manners renders the body “in control,” the excess countered or veiled. In turn, the control, restraint, and propriety associated with the “well-bred” upper crust are figured forth.

As I saw it, the class presumptions of the discourse in *Good Manners* begged to be parodied. I felt that all viewers would find the outdated advice humorous, especially if interwoven throughout the script like the nagging voice of one’s mother or father. When I found the book, it made me laugh because I could hear the disembodied voices of all the people, such as Mrs. Olive and McCloud, who had had a hand in my debutante training, reciting the ridiculous rules in earnest, although I am certain they too would laugh at many of the customs today. In *Etchings of Debutantes*, I exaggerated the figure of a disciplinary “Miss Manners” by having all the debutantes embody her simultaneously as they dictated the rules in a rapid fire manner. Yet garbed in their debutante gowns, the infusion of “Miss Manners” on and through their bodies signified the mark and marking of discipline and, further, its transmission to the audience. The segments also provided a repetitive home base that continued to represent the gene of class as married to etiquette and also gender it restored. The repetition also highlighted the continuous physical labor that is required to imprint such practices successfully on the body.

One of my favorite texts in the script was the listing of popular names, which I collected from websites developed to help expectant parents name their children. The websites list the most popular names for different years and time periods. As I scrolled through the lists, I began to wonder if names create identities. That is, if a name is “popular,” will it affect how the child behaves and how people respond to her? Can our parents decide who we are going to be based largely on the name they give to us? What history is restored by means of a name?

I am glad to have been given my name because it holds family significance. My mom named me Melanie after her sweetest college friend, Melanie Flowers, with hopes that history would repeat itself, and I might turn out just as sweet. The sweetness of my mom's relationship with Melanie, Melanie herself, and the sweetness suggested by her last name, Flowers, was intended to be passed on to me, although with a difference. I am not a surrogate or a substitute for Melanie Flowers, although I am a partial reminder, a restored memory mixed in with the history and memories I make as myself. I have met Melanie Flowers just a few times, so I cannot say if I have acquired any of her qualities. However, I suspect my knowledge of her history has affected me, and it certainly affects those people who know both of us. In retrospect, I realize that I should have included my own name in the listing in *Etchings of Debutantes*, because it was and is a "popular" name too.

The names of women who participate in the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion tend to be repetitive; that is, similar names recur and in many cases the names signify class and status. For instance, Blanchard is a popular name in Augusta, signifying the so-called social elite. If one has the last name Blanchard, associations with the upper crust are assumed regardless of how true or false the assumption might be. The popular names list in my script is a comical way to comment on the recurrence and importance of names in upper-class society. The list restores names of acquaintances, strangers, friends, and enemies of mine. I also have included contrived names, such as Deborah, Debbie, and Deb. I do not know anyone with these names, but their inclusion was appropriate in terms of subject matter because they riff on the word debutante. The discussion of names brings me to one final point. For those both within and outside debutante culture, there is a tendency to react negatively to the name or label, "debutante." As I explored in a one person show about debutantes, I wonder what history of me is restored to you

by means of a name. “What would you say if ‘debutante’ was the only image of me etched in your mind?” (Kitchens, “Displaced Debutante” 6).

In *Etchings of Debutantes* there are several texts that counter the assumption of good manners in debutante culture. One such text is the Dunbar Social and Charity Club. I first encountered the text on the web when searching for organizations that sponsor debutante events. Introduced by a flashing ticker at the top of the screen, the website of the Dunbar Social and Charity Club offers a history of debutante culture, an introduction to the organization, blurbs regarding invitations to the ball, and a description of the ball itself. At first glance, I thought the site was a parody of debutante culture because the format and some of the content were so cheese-y, “taste-less” if you will. On the one hand, the site offered an informative “History of the Debutante,” parts of which I adapted and used in the script for a similar purpose. On the other hand, the site prescribed rules and regulations for attending the event that seemed outrageous, such as “no one is allowed to enter the Ballroom after the presentation begins” and “walking during the presentation is strongly discouraged” (*Etchings* 31). As bad manner counters haunting the good manner façade, the rules imply a class conceit that, in the thick of things (i.e., in the production of class and politics), might be considered “bad taste.”

Surrogating Beauty and Femininity

Like learning how to curve the *Etch-a-Sketch* lines, I have been hip on making cut-out collages for holidays and other celebrations since I was a child. Gathering glue sticks, scissors, and every magazine at my disposal, I cut and paste images relevant to the occasion. Influenced by the beauty and gender ideologies to which I have grown accustomed, I compiled one of these collages as I scripted *Etchings of Debutantes*. The magazines from which I drew the imagery were issues of *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, and *Vanity Fair*, among several others. The images

I tended to select depicted enlarged fragments of women's bodies, colorful make-up accessories, tips on make-up application, cocktails, diet pills, floral bouquets, and fancy dresses. I snipped and pasted anything that caught my eye until the entire piece of poster board was a mess of fragments so jumbled that one might turn one's head away in confusion rather than attempt to engage it. My question became and remains one of wonderment. Why do I allow myself to be influenced by the imagery found in these magazines? While there are times the magazines collect dust in my magazine basket, when I think of beauty, I think of decorating my body, and out come the magazines. It is as if I have a moment of amnesia and forget about other beautiful encounters I have experienced, that surround me daily. I become so distracted by my appearance that I forget that the beauty within and behind the luster is what remains and exists of beauty.

In a society where beauty, health, and sex are conveyed to girls and women through magazines like *Glamour*, I felt it necessary to retrace my understanding of beauty and gender. Asking myself how I define beauty in people and in life, I began to explore the performances, the restored behavior and memories, of beauty and gender that contribute to my experience of these loaded words. My aim was to recognize why I and so many other women are "restrained in inner misery" by beauty ideologies (Ran 10).

Needless to say, perhaps, a debutante ball does not advance multiple meanings of beauty. As I see it, beauty is displaced to the surface and sight appeal of the dress, the body in the dress, the make-up, the gloves, the flowers, the whiteness, the escorts, and the dinner. As Mike Featherstone might observe, the women are made to feel that "appearance and bodily presentation express the self" (95). The emphasis is not on who the women are in their daily lives but on how they look for their brief walk across a stark stage on one brief night, remembered by smiles in several fading photographs. These smiles, prompted by the presence of

photographers and videographers, are markers of the gaze that is present at such an event. As Laura Mulvey might observe, “in herself the woman has not the slightest importance” because she adorns herself for the audience’s gaze (188).

In “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey defines “scopophilia” as the phenomenon in which “looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at” (186). In Mulvey’s terms, within the ball context and the entire ritual, the debutantes become “icon[s] displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men” (190), and also the women who view each other in terms of how attractive they appear to be to the men. The attending men and women are the “active, controllers of the look” (Mulvey 190). The debutante is aware of the presence of the gaze and displays herself “for the enjoyment” of her audience who transforms the women into “objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (Mulvey 190, 186).

The gaze is similar to the gaze I adopt when I look through a fashion magazine. The images capture my eye and I begin to identify with them (Mulvey 186). Although, at first, the image of the person or object is not me, I collect or consume it so as to make it my own, possess it in my mind’s eye as evocative of “I.” My relationship with the magazine imagery is a one-way consumption of the image. Due to the living presence of both the audience and the debutante/model in the debutante ritual, the gaze is two-way, the one informing the other and vice versa as to how to perform the ritual. They feed off of each other, making the experience and meanings through their mutual observations. If the subject of debutante is objectified, it is because she does not return the living gaze of the other. She enacts a fourth wall subjectivity, as if she desires, needs, or assumes she should enact the ritual within the detached world of a beautiful snow globe. The sparkle of the snow as it falls masks the two-way potential of the

gaze, creating the illusion of one, trapped within the glass walls of a globe she has built and finding power in the pleasure of being gazed upon.

In *Etchings of Debutantes*, I used the plastic beauty icon “Barbie” to represent the surface ideal of beauty and to ignite the complexities of the gaze I experienced at my debutante ball. In Barbie’s ability to “adapt to any environment” (*Etchings* 30), she served as an apt stand-in, a surrogate, for the debutante on display, shaped by and shaping the gaze and expectations of her onlookers. In replacing myself with her, I gained a new perspective of my performance as debutante. Barbie, like a debutante, offers an ideal of feminine beauty and body display that many women recognize. Girls and even some boys grow up playing with Barbie. Barbie in turn imprints her ideals on them through their representative play.

These days, there are multiple Barbies playing various female roles, such as “a venturesome camper and competent pediatrician” (*Etchings* 30). Each Barbie is labeled with a specific persona and dressed accordingly. The latter operates to conserve female roles and identity through the emphasis on surface display and purchasing power. Further, despite her multiple roles, Barbie’s body type remains unchanged. She is a plastic figurine with unrealistic body measurements. Her body restores, relentlessly, the original image of femininity associated with her. Like the debutante in her white dress, Barbie casts the alluring threat of an unintelligent woman who has no goals save to marry rich so she can play tennis at the country-club while the “parlor maid” tends to the kids at home (*Etchings* 39). The difference between Barbie and the debutante is that the latter has a brain and may use it to escape the plastic stereotype by questioning the debutante tradition and ritual.

My childhood fascination with Barbie was with her clothes, putting them on and taking them off. I became a fashion designer in control of my Barbies, and they wore what I told them

to wear. I was the boss of Barbie, and she followed my command without complaint. She became my friend and my enemy as I clothed and unclothed her, cut off her hair, contorted her, and gave her voice. She had a persona given to her by Mattel, but I found I could transform her into anyone, make her “adapt to [my] environment” of corporeal desires and memories (*Etchings* 30).

Barbie texts and images are ever present throughout the script to remind the viewer that there is more to beauty than what the eye can see. On the one hand, Barbie and the debutante have fixed bodies with gestural codes, while, on the other, we play multiple roles with many possibilities. The presence of Barbie within the script is haunting, as she continues to reappear. She can be used to transmit, relay, and displace messages through her recognizable image, which is exactly what happens to debutantes. She replaces them, who replaced the debutante from the year before, and the year before that. Their bodies are the main attraction of surrogation. But, keep in mind, Barbie can and does fulfill various roles, such as historian, computer hacker and, in my script, debutante. There is more to her than her presentation of body image, she is “a model, a doll, a toy, and a tool” (*Etchings* 31). I also call on her to query the idea that “women are not ‘naturally’ acceptable, but must work at changing themselves in order to be available, receptive, and attractive to men” (Johnston 69). The shifting enigma that is Barbie, analogues the multiple possibilities and personalities of a debutante. The debutante label does not tell everything about a person.

I found the short story, “Hacker Barbie,” on a website that is dedicated to creating over-the-top Barbies that mock the “authentic” Barbies sold in stores. A computer geek with “a casio all-purpose watch and thick glasses,” Hacker Barbie “is designed to reverse the stereotype that women are numerophobic, computer-illiterate, and academically challenged” (*Etchings* 40). She

counters the ideal image of Barbie as a “capable babysitter, fashionable shopper, and graceful skater” (*Etchings* 30). Likewise, she counters Barbie’s typically submissive relationship with her well-known partner Ken. Rather, “Hacker Barbie’s Ken is an incompetent consultant who frequently asks Barbie for help” (*Etchings* 41). The text also offers feedback from “happy customers” who appreciate the interrogation of the origin-al plastic figurine and the values she perpetuates. Some find Hacker Barbie more real, in fact. One writes, “To me, the most realistic thing is how if you put her in front of the monitor, she’ll stare at it for hours without blinking or taking her hands off the keyboard” (*Etchings* 41). In *Etchings of Debutantes*, Barbie becomes “real” too in the sense that an actress is scripted to embody the figure and deliver her lines. Of course, whether the authentic gal in her black and white swimsuit or the hacker parody, Barbie is never real or, rather, she is real but not really. Me/not me.

In John Berger’s discussion of the visible and the self in *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, he defines “natural beauty” as “beauty . . . experienced as a form of revelation” when “look and meaning, become identical” (50). He proceeds to explain that the fusion of looking and meaning “changes one’s spatial sense, or, rather, changes one’s sense of Being in space. . . . With his inner eye man experiences the space of his own imagination and reflection” (50). In an effort to resituate my experience of beauty from external to internal signifiers, I tried to make my script beautiful by re-imagining beauty. I pursued this aim by including poetry that retained and questioned the typical ideals of beauty. Below, I discuss the three poems I used in *Etchings of Debutantes*, Kip Ran’s “Hidden Poverty” and “Eligibility for Great Society,” and Kahlil Gibran’s “On Beauty.”

As I experience them, the poems by Kip Ran question the sappy, fluffy kitten, fairy-winged image of beauty that I appreciate immensely. “Who shouldn’t enjoy the continental,

great society?” I found the poems hiding in a dusty book in the Louisiana State University library. “Restrained in inner misery.” They did not sparkle because of their sweetness. “With heartache, tensions, loneliness.” Rather, they sparkled in their interrogation of sparkle. “With its bonanza incomes of highest standard of living.” The poem, “Hidden Poverty,” implies that upper-class society is a cage, where poverty, though not physically apparent, exists in the heart. “Is hard-core poverty not shown by tinsel tawdriness of dress?” Ran’s other poem, “Eligibility for Great Society” mocks capitalism where the “extremely rich” get richer, creating for themselves “high standards of living” that destroy the earth and the communal bond of the people (*Etchings* 31).

Contexted within a piece about debutante performance and culture, Ran’s poems counter the praxis of beauty advanced there, by the “eligible” of the “great society.” Through irony, the poems defamiliarize beauty as addressed from atop the Beauty ladder. Both poems insist on other memories, counter memories, to the celebration of a wealthy young woman in white or the “fashionable shopper” that is Barbie. They make beauty reflex on itself, on its “tinsel tawdriness. . . .”

In country of super-technology, extremely rich

Having rioting, war, spaceocracy, foreignade giving,

With “sound inflation,” brainwashing, propaganda, not a hitch! (*Etchings* 32)

I was introduced to *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran by my father when he gave me the book when I was in high school. As I recall, it offered me peace from my bedside table during this awkward stage of my life. The book is based on the understanding that everything exists in opposition. The poem, “On Beauty,” offers a philosophical exploration of “true” beauty as it relates to the aura of beauty. The poem resonates with me in the constant struggle I face with my

attraction to the aura and provides aid in exploring my debutante self because it recalls the flaws that create beauty. The debutante tradition tends to embrace the outward presentation of beauty, the aura of the debutante image on display. In the script, I used Gibran's "On Beauty" as a reminder to myself that beauty comes from many sources, "an image you see though you close your eyes" (*Etchings* 47).

The smile song I used in *Etchings of Debutantes* relates to the theme of beauty and gender because of how I first encountered it. When I was young, I saw a movie called *My Girl II* in which another young girl, Veda, searches desperately for traces of her mother, who died while birthing her. Eventually Veda locates a man who once had loved her mother. From him, Veda learns that her mother was a boisterous actress with a lovely singing voice. The man has home movies of Veda's mother that he shares with her. As we (Veda and I) watch the films together the woman's round face and gigantic blue eyes stare at us through our respective television sets and, on me, they imprint an image that I as yet cannot escape. When I hear the song "Smile," I see the woman in the film singing it, and I recall how touched I was the first time I watched and listened to her. When I return to this moment I am embarrassed by the feeling of nostalgia that overcomes me, although watching the film does not recreate the exact feeling I experienced many years ago. It is like seeing a photograph of myself at my debutante ball, smiling. The photograph tells a different story than the one I am writing now.

The Enveloping Nostalgia of Fantastic Fairytales

"Making history" is "the very process of challenging facticity" (Pollock 18).

Shannon Jackson describes nostalgia as "the desire to possess lost performances" (280) or, in Susan Stewart's terms, "Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually

threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack.” It becomes a “loss in spite of possession” (quoted in Jackson 280). Nostalgia is a longing for a fantastic fairytale that never existed. While often viewed as negative, nostalgia also excites the creation of alternative realities that enable new or different ways of viewing and making sense of the world.

The fairytale and fantasy theme proposes a questioning of reality and truth, which runs rampant throughout my script. *Etchings of Debutantes* is my fantastic representation of my debutante experience, which was itself an attempt to restore a past that never existed. In the script, I combine reality and fantasy into a fairytale that allows me to recreate my experience of performing the debutante in a comfortable way. The piece is a nostalgic fairytale that is a surrogated representation of another nostalgic fairytale.

Storytelling is the means by which fairytales are relayed and preserved through time. In our oral tradition, an assembly of people gather around a fire on a cold winter night to celebrate and entertain one another by telling stories of the past, stories that are passed on from generation to generation, gaining in complexity with the embellishments of each storyteller. Mysteries of giants, dwarfs, and princesses whisper on the eyelids of young children as the sandman approaches. An imaginative world, over the rainbow and through the hills where cows jump over the moon and anything is possible. The “alternative worlds” created by fairytales “amuse, enchant, satirize, and criticize” us and our everyday reality, with which we are not always “content” (Hearn xxvii). The stories are told to entertain but also to teach, the moral of each tale retaining its base lesson but changing in perspective as different cultures recount the tale in light of their desires and needs.

In the script, fairytale nostalgia is figured forth in two fairytales by Hans Christian Anderson, “The Princess and the Pea” and “The Butterfly,” and Leonora Carrington’s tale, “The Debutante.”

Etchings of Debutantes was framed by my adaptation of “The Princess and the Pea.” At the top of the show, the women entered with candles and told the story up to the point where the Queen hides the pea under the mattresses. At the end of the show, when the women are taped to the history chair, Lisa concluded the tale, a “true story,” as she said (*Etchings* 90). Due to the breakage of the tale into two parts that framed the other materials, associations were prompted between the fairytale and the debutante tradition and ritual. The tale is about a woman whose validity as a Princess and virgin bride must be tested before the Prince decides to “take her for his wife” (*Etchings* 78). To do so, the Queen concocts the “mattress test,” the intrusive pea proving to render the Princess “black and blue all over [her] body” (*Etchings* 90). The corporeal imprint proves that the Princess is of the aristocratic class and a virgin while it also marks her body as a possession of the Prince and his family.

A debutante must pass a similar transitional test. Her presence at the Cotillion, white gown, presentation, and bow of submission validate her claims to class and femininity and symbolize her virginal hence marriageable status. So too, within the context of the performance of *Etchings of Debutantes*, the performers experienced similar transitional rites. Their abilities as performers both to imitate and interrogate the debutante were tested by the display and use of their bodies in public. As I used it, then, “The Princess and the Pea” was a loaded text that allowed me to mark the debutante performances as nostalgic fairytales where fact and fiction are called into question.

“The Butterfly” is a story about a man, the Butterfly, deciding which woman, or flower, he should marry. The Butterfly tests and evaluates women in order to make his decision and, in doing so, he objectifies them. In the end, the Butterfly receives the same treatment in that he becomes objectified too, a beautiful icon stuck on a pin for all to see and possess. Through irony, then, the fairytale questions the very origins of beauty, gender, and display on which it constructs its story.

As a conceptual exercise, when I merge these two fairytales, the Princess becomes the flower and the Butterfly the Queen, each protagonist and antagonist experiencing the same lesson but from opposite perspectives. The fusion urges me to think about how female and feminine bodies play a front stage part in both tales and, likewise, in the organization, preparation, and enactment of the debutante fairytale. In all cases, are women but inept surrogates for the King, who sits around backstage doing very little at all, but in the end reaps the political rewards? Or is there some truth to the claim that power is gained through act-ing? In these cases, is the patriarchy far more clever than some fairytales and nostalgic theories would lead us to believe?

In her playful tale, “The Debutante,” Leonora Carrington uses a talking hyena to investigate practices and values associated with the debutante ritual. She interrogates class, gender, and beauty norms by substituting a talking hyena as the protagonist for the beautiful young debutante. In this case, the surrogate both replicates and exposes the “horror” of the rites by highlighting rather than neutralizing the damage they do to the corporeal body and its practices. To become a debutante, the hyena enacts horrific behavior by killing and consuming the maid, a representative of those classes who service the upper crust in the tale. However, like the hyena’s bad smell, the mask of the maid does not fit the occasion and the hyena is exposed as

a fake, a monster debutante. The mask then signifies both collusion and rebellion on the part of those who service the tradition, and on the part of those debutantes who do not quite fit, who see the monster in their midst.

Carrington's bizarre and clever tale reminds me of moments in my performance of a debutante. When attending some of the functions, I occasionally had the impulse to tear off my mask and proclaim, "So, I smell a bit strong, what? Well, I don't eat cakes" (*Etchings* 68). Like the young girl and the hyena who replaces her, performing the prim and proper role of the debutante is not always easy or fun, particularly when the fairytale binaries of good and bad, sacred and profane, pretty and ugly, rich and poor dictate behavior and prove problematic.

My experience as a debutante was much like a fantastic fairytale. My fairy godmother tapped her wand and there I was enjoying an evening of decadent privilege. I felt like a princess who had to sleep on a pea covered by twenty mattresses to prove her worth, and a butterfly who had been caught and stuck on a pin for observation. There were moments when it was an evening beyond my wildest imagination, and times I felt like the hyena, both attracted to and repulsed by the event. Twenty-six women dressed in long white dresses promenading through a ballroom executing curtsies to the floor in the year 1999 is enough to make me question my reality anyway. The debutante ball is a nostalgic fairytale, its degradation masked in the luster of its fantasies, true/not true, me/not me.

Betwixt and Between the Gaps

In the gaps, betwixt and between the class, gender, and fairytale binaries that uphold the debutante tradition, are other and alternative debutante memories. These ambiguities exist "between the lines, in the spaces between the words, in the intonation and placements by which they are shaped, in the silences by which they are deepened and contradicted" (Roach 69). They

create and are created by the “space[s] between domination and disappearance, between history as an all-powerful ‘master narrative’ and history as loss [and] fragmentation” and, as such, they are “spaces of agency in which historical subjects recover and write their own histories” (Pollock 19). The ambiguous space of memory, identity, and history articulates a place where I neither accept nor reject the debutante tradition. Rather, I create new knowledge and possibilities for myself through my investigation and performance of the tradition and its fissures or gaps.

I exist within the liminal space of my debutante experience. I am sucked into a vortex of indecisiveness as I attempt to transmit my experience into a creative investigation. The images and assumptions embedded in the word “debutante” send a tinge down my spine, and I am reminded to stand tall, like a lady. A list of pros and cons will not settle my dueling opinions concerning the debutante ritual as both good, bad, and in-between memories arise in my remembrance of it. The conflicting memories continue to communicate with one another in my attempt to take a stance. I do not agree with many of the representations in and purposes for the barbaric ritual, and yet I was there, in the moment, enjoying myself; I was there, in a white dress, smiling; I was there with twenty-five other women, each with her own reasons for participating in the event.

In *Etchings of Debutantes*, the inclusion of personal narratives was to function in this betwixt and between way. In the in-between space where fact and fiction are immaterial debutantes invent their own debutante history and reasons for participation. My aim in including the personal accounts was to explore the different feelings that women experience when they involve themselves in the debutante cultural performance.

The personal narratives I included in *Etchings of Debutantes* were drawn from my experiences and two on-line personal accounts by Elizabeth Murray and Katherine Mills. I

found Murray's account in the style section of a University of Virginia online magazine titled "The Angle," and Katherine Mill's account, called "The Debutante: Past, Present, Future," was one of the first websites I visited after doing a Google search on the word "debutante." Excerpts from both accounts were threaded throughout the script and used to express debutante history and the experiences of being a debutante.

Both women support and question the existence and preservation of the debutante ritual in their accounts. For example, Murray states, "Yes, I felt silly being dressed up as a 'princess' referred to as a 'Lady in Waiting' . . . and yes, I could have looked at the experience as demeaning" (*Etchings* 34). In her online account, Murray continues, "the key . . . is to take a step back and look at the situation objectively and critically, while at the same time, allowing yourself to appreciate and become involved in the traditions and celebrations with those closest to you" (Murray). Like Murray, Mills discusses the debutante ritual as "a tradition within [her] family" and hence its practice is geared toward familial more so than social solidarity. Female agency appears to be less a point of contention too in that the Osborn women are "strong women and fight for what [they] believe" whether they participate in the debutante ritual or not (*Etchings* 73). I realize that I am not alone in my ambivalent view of debutante culture. There are other women who have been a part of the culture who are undecided as to the value of the ritual and their participation in it. The inclusion of the women's narratives adds a personal quality to the script that invokes empathy, which contrasts much of the satire found in the other texts and materials I used.

Jessica as Melanie: Stuck in the Liminal Vortex

The most evident example of a counter memory in my script is the character I identify as "Jessica," the fifth debutante. Initially, the character was to sing the song, "Little Bird," at the

beginning of the show and then disappear. Over time however, she developed into a debutante who, along with “The Princess and the Pea,” framed the entire piece. “Jessica” led the other women into the space and watched them perform from the sideline, only interjecting to perform Mrs. Blanchard and sing the refrain of “Little Bird.” At the end of the show, she returned to the stage with a lit cigarette and a glass of white wine to watch the women from behind as they taped themselves to the history chair. Her observatory role gave her power in so far as she never had to play within the staging that controlled the other debutantes. As participant, she was able to move into and out of the world easily, whereas the other women were taped into it. Even when the debutante tradition was drained of all its fluid, like a snow globe with the text dripping out, the other women were still there taped to the history chair, unable to free themselves from the past. Jessica was the surrogate historian and narrator, representing me in the script and its performance.

Performing the debutante will always be a part of who I am and each of the debutantes defines my experience playing the role of a debutante. Even though I fight my debutante past through critique, I cannot escape it, just as Jessica still exists smoking cigarettes while watching the other girls attempt to free themselves. These moments, forever etched into the pages of the script are now in the hands of the reader. My choices are open to the interpretation of those who choose to embark on their own adventure, using mine as a catalyst. Genealogy allows me to create history in a way that allows my readers and viewers to interact with what they read and see, and to fill in the blanks with their own memories and counter memories.

Radical (Re)Construction

My composition of *Etchings of Debutantes* fulfills the aims of a historical genealogy in that it acknowledges and makes sense of the disparate memories and counter memories of

debutante practice by means of the discourses I apply to them. In the case of composing the script, discourses are signified by the selection of texts and materials, their arrangement, adaptation, and the correspondences that arise as a result. To enable the disparate histories, I used a collage of competing texts and materials that refuse a tidy view of debutante culture and performance. Thereby, too, I attempted to counter the abstract essences or Truths associated with debutante history and its participants as well as those at work within that history. As discussed in this chapter my selection of materials offers a vast range of views from diversified media that work within, upon, and against each other.

The script is a collage arranged to change shape as it progresses. As we enter into the fairytale world of debutante ritual, the texts and materials seem to conserve the manifest history of the tradition. Over the course of the script, this history degenerates, revealing histories that embrace difference, disappearance, partiality, and excess. Jessica as surrogate for me, the historian, appears and disappears in and out of the degenerating frame of the script. At the beginning, she introduces us by candlelight to “Little Bird,” a sweet soft song about a bird who will fly high until it dies. Leading the debutantes into the tidy frame of the story, she suddenly disappears, and the adventure begins with the relaying of the familiar fairytale, “The Princess and the Pea.” Jessica reappears several times, shifting the tone of the piece and keeping the reader guessing. She drifts in as the Cotillion coordinator, Linda Blanchard, returns to her place beneath the etching only to appear again to hum “Little Bird,” in and out, a part of but not fully the place of remembrance that she/me, the historian, has made. At the end of the piece, we find her leaning against the back wall smoking a cigarette and watching the other women frantically tape themselves to the history chair. Her pose celebrates and interrogates itself as it implies reflexive agency and a superior overview regarding the history in which she has played a part.

Observing history as Veenser and Greenblatt might in terms of new-historicism, the texts and materials that represent my experience of performing a debutante function as co-texts. This view enables me to contrast the binaries of good and bad manners, upper- and lower-class, beauty and ugliness, female- and maleness, and fairytale/fantasy and nonfiction/truth. In the space between the binaries, the co-texts perform with and against each other, revealing many new insights. Observing the interplay between “Smile” and “Hacker Barbie” may not seem beneficial at first, but try it. “Smile” is a hokey song encountered in countless movies that are usually about the loss of love. “Hacker Barbie” is a parody of the icon Barbie, which contests the ideal image of Barbie as a plastic, dumb blonde. What would happen if “Hacker Barbie” sang “Smile”? We would have a parody of Barbie and “Hacker Barbie,” the one mocking optimism despite an aching heart, and the other the detached pose of skepticism. The Barbies smile differently, implying a gap between their opposition where other “Barbies” might play. These kinds of comparisons and contrasts arise between the texts and materials in *Etchings of Debutantes* due to the collage structure and its movement from a coherent to less coherent pattern.

Different tactics of adaptation and transformation contributed to the shifting collage. Some texts were cut into small fragments and woven throughout the piece while others remained intact. Some materials were repeated and others used just once. My main aim was to reiterate the themes or genes of etiquette and class, beauty and gender, and fairytale/fantasy. For example, personal narrative texts were cut up and threaded throughout the script so as to query the binary of realism and fantasy. While the narratives prompted empathy for the real life experiences of the women, they also carried a note of the fantastic due to their content and the texts with which they were interwoven. “The Debutante,” by Leonora Carrington, remained

mostly intact, the lines adapted (split and assigned to the four performers) so as to distinguish between the four key perspectives in the story: the telling situation of the narrator, the past told situation of the narrator as a young woman, the mother, and the hyena. Interspersed within the telling of the story were sections from the *Good Manners* text. The two texts interrupted and defamiliarized each other. For instance, right after the hyena eats the maid, “Angela” as Miss Manners interrupts the story with etiquette rules regarding the proper use of toothpicks. This interjection parodies the “taste” of upper-class conceit and the etiquette that upholds it. “The Princess and the Pea” was split directly in half to frame the entire show. Everything that happened seemed to occur within the fairytale frame, almost as if we had never left it. The frame marks the debutante experience as fantastic but no less real for being so. For instance, I thought I would never participate in such an event but somehow, all of the sudden, there I was at teas and brunches participating in a ritual that is against everything I, as an individual, believe. “The Princess and the Pea” context had a mesmerizing effect, instigated but quickly abandoned by Jessica in the pose of the historian.

Notes

¹ For all quotations cited in the script, I reference the script, as formatted in Chapter Two, rather than the primary texts, which are referenced in the script. I make this choice to retain focus on the main subject of study, which is the script and/in performance.

Chapter Four The Live Performance as Genealogy

When a child is given a coloring book and crayons, the common expectation is that she will attempt to color within the black lines of an existing image. The black lines hinder the possibilities of the imagination, teaching the child to adhere to rules or regulations within an activity that is meant to inspire creativity. If we give the same child a *blank* piece of paper and crayons, she is prompted to create from the imagination, where the possibilities are endless. As there are no immediate inhibiting restrictions in the activity of coloring on a blank page, the colorer has free range of motion and activity with her crayon. The freedom the child has with her blank paper and crayon is analogous to the freedom of staging performance.

Performance enables me to take an idea, or ritual in this case, and recreate it on stage allowing exploration of text, performer, and audience. Like Harold, the main character in Crockett Johnson's children's book *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, who creates new worlds with his purple crayon, I was no longer limited to one story in the retelling of my debutante history. "Performance represents one powerful way in which cultures set about the necessary business of remembering who and what they are . . . and what they might someday be" (Roach quoted in Pollock 49). Performance is doing. It is through the doing of staged performance that we can further access and explore our histories.

In this chapter, I discuss the staged performance of *Etchings of Debutantes* in terms of Roach's genealogies of performance. Using the same structure as Chapter Three, I interrogate the orature present at the site/sight of the performance calling directly on specific examples of set, lighting, costumes, and the performers' gestures and voices. I continue to compare and contrast the script and the cultural performance to the staged performance and discuss all performances in terms of space or "vortex," movement or "kinesthetic imagination," and time or

“displaced transmissions” using the specific genes of class and etiquette, beauty and gender, fairytale nostalgia, and the spaces between (Roach 26).

“Genealogies of performance document—and suspect—the historical transmission and dissemination of cultural practices and attitudes through collective representations” (Roach 25). The cultural performance of debutantes and the staging of *Etchings of Debutantes* are alike because they are both staged performances requiring rehearsal, but as I see it they differ contextually. The cultural performance of debutantes is a representational performance that masks its social agendas in the contextual frame of a fairytale, while *Etchings of Debutantes* is a presentational performance that exposes the fairytale-like quality of debutante performance by comparing and contrasting disparate memories and histories. In either case, the performers join and activate a culture, which is “an actual community and an imagined one; it is a special way of doing things together and a way of insisting on the more or less compensatory ‘normality’ of that specialness” (Roach quoted in Pollock 49).

Getting gussied up for the actual debutante ball perpetuates an acceptable historical event memorialized and preserved for generations with hopes of the continuation of the hierarchical class constructions. The audience, who attends the cultural performance of the debutante ritual, supports the presentation earnestly, without realization of the implications and possibilities that they might be participating in a live, present, and very real fairytale. Both the debutante ball and the performance created for the stage at Louisiana State University include performers displaying themselves for an audience. By re-positioning the ball in a new context, then magnifying and exaggerating the details, a parody is created and the performers and audience alike are enabled a laugh at the ridiculous. In large part, the actual event itself mostly escapes the critique of its own audience because they are tied to the tradition. The “insider,” elite middle- to upper-class

people, who are the participants and their families, are not likely to observe the tradition with an outside eye. The participants who do question the tradition must do so on the sly, as there are no conventions in place for critique within the ritual proper. On the sly, *Etchings of Debutantes* is an “insider out” performance that has aided in my reflection and sense making of the tradition of which I was a skeptical participant. As Rokem observes, “performances of and about history reflect complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identities and subjectivities and power structures and can in some cases be seen as a willful resistance to and critique of the established or hegemonic, sometimes even stereotypical, perceptions of the past” (8).

The central hub or vortex for rehearsal and performance of *Etchings of Debutantes* was the Hopkins Black Box theatre, located in 137 Coates Hall on the Louisiana State University campus. For six weeks, the space was transformed into a debutante universe, or as I referred to it in the early stages of the process, a deb galaxy: a deserted snow globe where we rehearsed deb-ness in anticipation of placing ourselves on display in front of an audience. The five women who inhabited the deb galaxy and embodied the debutante experience were Lisa Flanagan, Angela Funches, Danielle Sears, Jessica Slie, and Gretchen Stein. “The act[resse]s serve as a connecting link between the historical past and the ‘fictional’ here and now of the theatrical event; they become a kind of historian, what I call a ‘hyper-historian,’ who makes it possible for us . . . to recognize that the actor is ‘redoing’ or ‘reappearing’ as something/somebody that has actually existed in the past” (Rokem 13). The five women were the physical representations of the orature collected to “re-do” debutante history, adding to my historical archive, *Etchings of Debutantes*, their own debutante voice.

To begin the performance process, I *politely* introduced the performers to my debutante past through my debutante scrapbook of photographs, newspaper clippings, and invitations,

collected and compiled throughout the process of the cultural performance. The video, “Melanie’s Debutante Ball 1999,” which captured the evening of November 22, 1999, also was useful in the introductory phase. Finally, the cast read through my script, a genealogical archive re-presenting my debutante experience through memory and counter memory. We then embarked on our journey to stage *Etchings of Debutantes*.

When attending a performance about debutantes, one might expect to see women, dressed elegantly in white ball gowns with matching gloves and shoes, politely addressing debutante tradition. Not in *Etchings of Debutantes*. The performance of *Etchings of Debutantes* recreated the debutante ritual on stage perversely. My intent was to make the rules and regulations experienced in the cultural performance clear but to twist them around, redistributing them to support and critique one another simultaneously.

“The eye of the vortex,” the set for *Etchings of Debutantes*, highlighted the various social constructs I experienced in debutante culture (Roach quoted in Pollock 54). Restoring with a difference the setting of the cultural event, the performers and I created a subversive theatrical culture/community within the Hopkins Black Box where bodies in defined space were explored. When inhabiting certain sites on stage, such as the beauty ladder, the personal narrative bench, the history chair, and the Barbie staircase, the debutantes embodied the norms identified by the area. For instance, the beauty ladder was a place where beauty and beauty philosophies were contemplated. The debutante occupying this space used poetic language in a soft melancholic but enlightening tone while running a piece of sheer, colored fabric ever-so-slowly through her hands and across her fingertips. With the exception of Jessica, every performer occupied the beauty ladder at some point in the performance. When she left the site, she took a piece of sheer fabric with her, tying it to a part of her body. This marking of the body recalls the debutante’s

marking of the body in the rites of passing from girl to woman. In the eyes of her community, the debutante is marked and transformed by her participation in the debutante ceremony.

By means of progressive rotation, all four performers occupied every station over the course of the performance. While in these stationary positions, the performers attempted to simulate identical gestures despite their differing body types. For instance, when positioned on the personal narrative bench, the debutante delivered her lines into a hand held mirror, while rotating it slowly counter clockwise. As she contemplated her debutante existence, the slow, methodical movement implied a circular, self-reflective/reflexive evaluation. Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all? Since the audience observed the woman observing herself in this case, the gest of the gesture remarked on our beauty obsessions, the individual and collective gaze and, due to the differences between the performers' enactments of the gest, the individual within the social restoration of memory and history.

In the debutante ritual, if the debutante performs well, she and her family are recognized as upstanding members of the middle- to upper-class subculture. The four debutante stations and the gests the debutantes embodied there drew attention to this aspect of the debutante ritual. The stations highlighted the cultural practice of putting on a show, while also demonstrating how we enact our individual existence within, and without disrupting the greater social agenda.

Ground Zero, (Re)Producing Class and Etiquette

Class plays a significant part in the cultural performance of debutantes. The debutantes and their families utilize debutante culture to signify, claim and mark their place in society.

The Black Box audience was able to mark their place on *Etchings of Debutantes* at the Sunday matinee debutante tea. Prior to the final performance there was a tea in honor of the debutante/performers. The tea was planned and catered to enable the audience to perform

the video. “She is escorted by Mr. William Carlyle Story III and Mr. Richard Right Story Jr.” (*Etchings* 36). The escorts, Lisa and Gretchen, stood behind the father and daughter pair dutifully, and the four promenaded across the stage to nineteen seconds of music from Tchaikovsky’s *Swan Lake*. The scene would have been quite realistic, barring the birdlike whistle of the music and the rustle of the gigantic, plastic gowns. The scene then was a parody of the moment when the debutante proves herself to be a part of the elite subculture by executing the bow, a disciplined gesture of submission, in public. This climactic moment—the crowd hushed watching a girl transform into a woman, a duck into a swan—becomes highly comical when presented by the performers in the Black Box. However, to parody the ritual, the performers must enact it, which begs the question, are they now debutantes too?

The script also calls for the performers to play collective characters, social types that all the performers enact the same way. In addition to Barbie, the characters in the manners and photograph segments are examples of collective characters. Their representation (times four) excites the collective consciousness that is present when an individual participates in the debutante ritual. Further, since these segments recurred throughout the show, they offered the audience a polite gesture of predictability amidst the staged chaos. “Good manners do count. . . . at the theatre . . . you are judged by what you do” (*Etchings* 44).

The manners segments that recurred throughout the performance operated as counter memories to the class and etiquette norms of debutante culture. My intention was for the women to relay to the audience the ridiculous rules and regulations of proper etiquette as outlined in *Good Manners*. The resulting collective character was like a Greek chorus on acid, who lectured the audience on good manners. Curd by blinding white light, one debutante usually called the others into action, where upon they began to function as a collective, disseminating and enacting

various etiquette rules in different locals of the deb galaxy. They performed minimal, synchronized gestures, such as slight head tilts and body turns, feet pivots and arm movements, to exemplify the strictly regimented behavioral codes one must abide by when performing a debutante. The gestures accented the authoritative voicing of the rules, which seemed endless, outdated, and ridiculous to performer and audience alike. The manners segments provided a comic critique of the expected behaviors of middle- to upper-class society when participating in the debutante ritual. By linking the power dynamics present in the debutante tradition to an authoritative voice, the Greek collective character implied that practices such as debutante balls separate and distinguish class by means of the presumed power of etiquette.

The photograph transitions surrogated the presence of the photographer or videographer at the cultural event. Paid to mark the event by way of tangible memorabilia, the photographer creates tension with his or her incessant presence. The watchful eye of the camera is ever present at the performance and, threatened with exposure, participants and attendees remain on their best behavior just in case of documentation. The repetitive lines delivered by the photograph collective replaced the watchful and controlling presence of the actual photographer. Disembodied due to lack of light, the voices captured the quick “click” of the camera and the uneasy feeling provoked by the constant “taking” and shaping of one’s image. The exaggerated “picture” poses embodied by the performers were adaptable both to static and moving or traveling images. When the lights faded for the transitions, the strobe light hanging at the base of Tanga’s torso was turned on, allowing the audience to see but parts of the performers’ bodies as they moved across the stage or struck a still pose.

The photograph collective character also highlighted the predictability of the debutante ritual. Photographs from debutante balls represent and remember that which the photographer or

the coordinator asks the debutante to portray. While in *Etchings of Debutantes*, the debutante played her own photographer, the poses were repeated as were the segments themselves. As a result, the photograph transitions became predictable to the audience. Just as an audience knows what to expect when attending a debutante ball, so too they came to know what to expect during the photo transitions. In this way, they gained a sense of power and knowledge regarding the stage action and its surrogation of the predictable “pose” of the debutante ritual.

The debutantes also performed a few segments in which they formed a straight line across the center platform. The platform held the debutante galaxy together, forming a bridge where the debutantes could convene and voice their collective messages. Several pieces were performed from atop the platform, such as the popular name segment, “The Average Day of a Debutante,” and “How to be a Specialist in Success.”

When reciting “The Average Day of a Debutante” by Emily Post, the four debutantes were positioned on the platform in a straight line, standing shoulder to shoulder with bodies slanted inward, facing one another. The formation resembled a group picture of debutantes taken in the hotel lobby prior to the 1999 Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion. Post’s text describes a typical day of a debutante, which includes “[waking] up quite early—about nine o’clock. . . . by the telephone. . . . [giving] a special list to your own maid. . . . breakfasting in bed and having conversation. . . . until the very last minute, when you simply have to rush into your clothes and go to the first social event of that day” (*Etchings* 40). To accompany the text, the debutantes slowly passed four gestures down the line, as one passes a secret in the game of telephone. A telephone gesture, a giving gesture, a dusting gesture, and another telephone gesture punctuated in an explicit manner the conceit of leisure that is at work in the text.

“The Average Day of a Debutante” is a disgusting little piece of literature that I used to interrogate and mock the stereotypical lifestyle of a debutante. The automaton gestures that accompanied the delivery of the text accented my disgust. The debutantes performed the exact same gestures, one after the other, in imitation, and thereby they highlighted the threat to individuality imposed by the class base discipline of etiquette discourses and practices.

Some of the performance choices I made derived from activities I enacted as a child. I learned to sing the “Pizza Hut” song, for example, in my third grade music class. In retrospect, it does not seem like a song that well-mannered private school children would sing. My etiquette teachers, Mrs. Mcloud and Mrs. Olive, would have been appalled to learn how much I dug “Pizza Hut.” In terms of social class and consumerism, however, I think it makes good sense that we sang about our favorite fast food restaurants to entertain ourselves. The hand gestures that accompanied the song were easy-to-learn (fast food) icons of the named corporations. For McDonald’s, we carved a large “M” in the air with our arms and hands. For Kentucky Fried Chicken, we put our hands in our armpits and shook our elbows up and down like the “funky chicken.” For Pizza Hut, we made a slanting roof over our heads with our hands in imitation of the red roof of Pizza Hut.

In her reenactment, Gretchen embodied the childlike energy and bliss I recall when I sang the “Pizza Hut” song as a child. Revisiting her own childhood memories, Gretchen remembered a song that had the same effect on her and she applied it to her delivery of the “Pizza Hut” song. Like a jolt of Dada “nonsense,” Gretchen’s hopscotch version interrupted the flow of the show and foreshadowed the strange dance and massive taping of bodies that soon was to take place on the stage. The song also parodied the debutante singer in that, dressed in a plastic gown, a grown woman was singing a song of consumerism, masked in the innocence and play of a child.

Beauty Embodies the Grotesque

Plastic is a key to understanding Barbie: Her substance is her essence...chemists manufacture it. (Lord 73)

The visual story of *Etchings of Debutantes* became important as the performers began to rehearse the script. The texts I used to retell my debutante experience had to be embodied and brought to life by the performers. The images the actresses created combined to tell a visual story, which ran parallel to the aural tale.

When the lights faded up for the first manners segment and the performers' costumes were revealed, I suspect the audience realized they were not going to witness a linear account of ordinary debutantes. The costumes the debutantes wore countered the classical white, bride-like attire of "real" debutantes. The poofy gowns of plastic, bubble wrap, colorful lace, and sheers were brilliant exaggerations that further extended the warped world of debutantes created by the script, set, and lights. Although all four were built of the same materials, each dress had its own color scheme and design, differentiating each debutante. Loose enough to enable a wide range of movement, the dresses allowed the performers to embody diverse imagery and were a parodic image in themselves. The debutantes also wore large wrapping paper bows in their hair and colorful tights that matched the dominant color of each dress. No shoes or gloves were worn.

The dresses worn at the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion are always white. Each girl is allowed free choice of the design of the dress. Hence, debutantes are allowed to differentiate themselves by means of style but not color. The white signifies the girl's status as debutante, and links her to symbolic codes of innocence, youth, purity, virginity, and spirituality. Most dresses are form fitting and uncomfortable requiring corsets and other "sucking in" mechanisms. The required accessories of white shoes and gloves are also restrictive. The body

that must fit into the debutante costume is not comfortable in the threads that contain it. Because of the discomfort, most debutantes end up shedding some part of the outfit by the evening's end. For instance, I kicked off my uncomfortable shoes (which have never graced my feet again), as soon as the presentation of the debutantes was over.

The odd textures of plastic, bubble wrap, sheer, and lace, sewn together in crazy patterns operated to defamiliarize the tidy beauty of the predictable debutante dress. The costumes signaled that beauty and gender as marked on the body play a significant part in the debutante ritual. Though unconstraining, the plastic costumes represented the discipline of dress and body display present in the cultural performance of debutantes.

Discussing bodies and discipline in terms of image further aids in my exploration of the genes of beauty and gender in the performance of *Etchings of Debutantes*. Below I discuss the genes by drawing on examples of how the cast performed Barbie, the yoga Hyena, the two dances "Static Mania" and "The Celtic Rip," and "How to be a Specialist in Success."

As discussed in Chapter Three, the icon Barbie is a fantastic representation, or surrogation, of beauty and gender norms, which the performers defamiliarized by means of performed images. At some point in the performance, each debutante occupied the Barbie stairs and simulated a life-size Barbie doll. Up on the balls of the feet, calves flexed, arms locked at the elbows, fingers sharp and tight, straight posture, chest out, neck up, head high with a plastic smile, embodying Barbie is not an easy task. In this position, the performer could make restricted moves but nothing exceeding those of an actual Barbie doll. Sharp, mechanical, angular, and awkward movements were the result of embodying Barbie's regimented body, accompanied by a mechanical, high-pitched voice.

It is not difficult to link Barbie to the debutante. Here are a few examples. As M. G. Lord states in *Forever Barbie*, “Barbie is a space-age fertility symbol” (75). Likewise, the debutante ritual is a means to present women to society as marriageable and hence fertile. Barbie is “a toy designed by women for women to teach women what—for better or worse—is expected of them by society” (Lord 6). The debutante ritual intends to launch women in/on-to society. “The relationship of the observed self to the observing self is much like that of a Barbie doll to its owner. When a girl projects herself onto a doll, she learns to split in two. She learns to manipulate an image of herself outside of herself” (Lord 53). Just as Barbie is able to change from a “venturesome camper” to a “competent physician,” the debutante is able skip from girl to woman, and the Black Box performer to re-represent each and all of these personas (*Etchings* 31).

I found *The Debutante* by Leonora Carrington to be the most difficult text to stage because I could not decide how to represent the Hyena. I chose Lisa Flanagan to enact the Hyena because of her sharp facial features and jet-black hair. Her physical traits best matched my image of the enigmatic Hyena, who serves as a debutante surrogate for her human friend. In order to stage the odd tale and particularly the character of the Hyena, I asked Lisa to perform yoga poses throughout the story. The stationary but dynamic poses created an engaging, limbodinic site/sight on stage.

Yoga is a disciplined practice that retains or restores the body’s health by focusing on sustained stretches and breathing. Yoga attempts to connect the corporeal body with the inner spirit, causing the practitioner to become peaceful and in tune with her surroundings. As Emily Jenkins recalls her yoga experiences, “The eye movements, though still boring, have started to serve a purpose for me . . . moving something deliberately that I usually move only instinctively,

readjusts my perspective” (189). Yoga practices also aim to connect the practitioner with the animistic nature of the world we live in. Again, Jenkins recalls, “Imagining myself as each of these and replicating their qualities—the taught string of the bow, the exposed belly of the fish, the reared head of the cobra—is simultaneously a vacation from my body and a reinvestment in it” (188).

By representing the Hyena through yoga movement, Lisa defamiliarized our expectations of a veris-realistic depiction of a hyena, just as Carrington defamiliarizes the debutante tradition by using a talking hyena in the first place. Although a way to balance the body and mind, yoga is a means of control over and manipulation of the body. The sight of the debutante/Hyena performing yoga is humorously disturbing because, as in Carrington’s tale, the Hyena/debutante appears to have deliberate, disciplinary control over her actions, which include eating the maid. On the other hand, the discipline constrains her. When she attempts to walk upright, like a human debutante, she experiences difficulty. As the night continues, the Hyena becomes more impatient with the debutante cage of discipline in which she has (dis)placed herself and, finally, she frees herself by exposing the monstrous aspects of the debutante role she has played and its traditions.

In the performance, I included four dances, “The Girlfly Shuffle,” “Plum Madness,” “Static Mania,” and “The Celtic Rip.” Each dance explored the genes of beauty and gender interwoven throughout the show. Using the debutante bow as the basis for choreography, the women’s bodies moved to the rhythms of four different songs, each of which set a tone for the next section of the performance. “Static Mania” was my favorite dance because unlike the others the audience did not see the movement of the performers’ bodies. Rather, they witnessed a series of photographs, static images posed in sync with the lights as they “bumped” on and off. As in

photographs, the created illusion was that of time stopping for a brief instant, the debutantes caught in time, space, and action. The poses began with the last image seen in “Plum Madness,” the debutante bow, which was followed by an image of the debutantes standing in a straight line smiling, then lying on the floor with their heads touching, sitting up, struggling to stand up, standing up with skirts off, and, lastly, standing in a straight line on the platform for the next scene.

The composition of the photographs showed the debutantes’ bodies under strain, as if caught and fixed in mid-movement. While the images were disturbing, they became even more so when juxtaposed with the accompaniment of the lovely, Celtic music. As moments of strain and beauty, the photographs defamiliarized the gaze that is ever present at the debutante ball. It is the stillness of the images that catches and returns the gaze of the audience who, in turn, wonder why they are looking at women who appear to be so miserable in their desire to be gazed upon, stuck like the butterfly on the head of a pin. When the debutantes lose their skirts, it is unclear whether they are freeing themselves from the ritual that binds them or whether, in figurative terms, it is a result of the audience’s desire and gaze. “Static Mania” then is a dance about our simultaneous desire and repulsion of forms of control.

“How to be a Specialist in Success” followed “Static Mania.” In the final two blackouts of the dance, the women removed their plastic skirts and crossed to the center platform to stand in a straight line, just as they had when they performed Post’s other piece, “The Average Day of a Debutante.” Their bodies maintained the same angular line, facing one another as if posing for a picture, but their physical appearance was much different. For one, they had lost an important part of their costumes. They also had pieces of tape stuck to their faces. The tape referenced beauty masks but taken to the grotesque extreme. One performer had taped up her nose to look

like a pig, another, her eyes to droop, a third sported a pinched grin, while the fourth had a heavily wrinkled brow. The women also used disturbing, high pitched voices to discuss their “howling social success” by means of their “personality,” “sports,” “amusements,” and “last but not least beauty” (*Etchings* 86-87). By the end of the segment, the lines were barely comprehensible because the debutantes were in such a frenzy of self-adoration.

The piece operated to interrogate plastic surgery and other forms of body enhancement women feel are necessary to realize beauty ideals. The interrogation arose due to the ironic contradiction between the content of the women’s speeches and their vocal and physical performance of it. While the debutantes boasted to the audience such claims as “today’s specialist in success has got her wits about her,” their physical presence suggested the opposite. Minus their skirts, with botched face lifts, speaking rapidly or too loudly or with a valley girl accent, the women’s bodies mocked their professed “wit” and its attendant values, such as success through external beauty regimens. While hilarious, the piece also was disturbing because the fragmentation of identity was taken to a negative extreme and literally embodied, “worn” and showing the wear and tear of beauty ideologies as imprinted on the bodies of the debutantes/performers. The safe boundaries of the debutante galaxy were breached in this piece, exposing the grotesque underbelly of reality generally and the debutante fairytale in particular.

At the very end of the show, the women taped themselves to the history chair. This station had been a place where the debutantes memorialized and preserved their past. It was a place where, with pride, they made themselves into a collage of cutout magazine images, covering their plastic dresses with paper and tape. Drawn to the site/sight, they found themselves hunched on and around the bench at different levels, passing between them four roles of tape, which they used to tape themselves together and to the history chair. Prior to this act, the

women had changed locations around the room. By taping themselves to this particular chair in this particular spot on stage, the women willingly entered a domain from which they could not readily escape. In the end, they freed themselves from the binding, implying that histories change. We cannot marry ourselves to our memory. It is inevitable to forget.

The Return to Nostalgic Fairytales

If we rely on history to tell us what happened at a specific time and place, we can rely on the story to tell us not only what might have happened, but also what is happening at an unspecified time and place. (Pollock 17)

The vortex of the HopKins Black Box is a flexible space, adaptable to the diverse performances enacted within its concrete walls. Before performers or an audience enter the theatre, it lies empty with memories, waiting. Like the many fairytales stored away on bookshelves or in our memories, the space waits for a story, which waits to be retold.

During the run of *Etchings of Debutantes*, the space was decorated in an elaborate fashion. Twinkle lights ran along the batons of the light grid, causing the entire space to glow. The glow lit up everyone's faces as they entered the space, performers and audience alike. Draped in colorful sheer material and twinkle lights were mannequin body parts and painted Styrofoam heads, which hung from the ceiling. Music beamed over the speakers and dim stage lights cast shadows on the deb galaxy. Each detail was waiting to tell its own tale, waiting for inquiry, imagination, embodiment, and reenactment.

Fairytales blur the boundaries. They tend to be placed somewhere else, outside of reality. They are the story in a book, or the one told by an elder. They are the Black Box and its performances. Once upon a time, in the fairytale portion of this chapter, I discussed the fairytale

gene drawing on the examples of the opening image in the show, the etching on the wall, and glitter balls.

Once the audience entered the Black Box and, stimulated by the softly glowing set, began to imagine their own fairytales, the lights blacked out. With candles in hand, the five women—the debutantes—entered the stage singing the melancholy yet lilting song, “Little Bird.” Then, by candlelight and with graceful simplicity, they recited the first half of Hans Christian Anderson’s tale, “The Princess and the Pea.” Although the story was familiar to the audience, its performance in this context was not. In light of our representation, the audience had to accommodate additional signs, such as the setting, the bodies of the performers, the introductory song, multiple voices, and the candlelight.

The sign that seemed most significant to me at this point in the performance was the glowing faces of the performers as they recited the story. The disembodied heads of the performers, aglow by candlelight in the pitch black room, did not extend a warm welcome to the audience. The effect was not like that of curling up with Mother Goose and a warm blanket in a rocking chair. Rather, it was my hope that the audience would respond to the introductory gesture with curiosity and skepticism, something akin to my attitude toward performing the debutante ritual.

The etching, on the stage left wall of the Black Box, was drawn by Corey Miller who translated the image from the photographic design I used on the *Etchings of Debutantes* promotional poster. The latter was created by Joey Cataldie and consisted of a fusion of close-up head shots of the five performers. Joey chose facial features from each woman and collaged them together to create the face of one debutante. This hybrid debutante made her way onto the wall, etched in glow-in-the-dark chalk. The image had a light shining up on it. When the light

was off, the glow-in-the-dark etching was barely visible; it seemed a shadow, an afterthought, a memory. The ghostly presence of the etching implied the piecemeal assemblage of debutante histories and blurred the lines between fact and fiction, reality and the fantastic fairytale.

Midway through the script, Danielle delivers a passage in which she describes the event of a debutante ball. Sitting on the history chair, center stage, taping magazine cutouts to her plastic gown, Danielle tells us, “Debutante balls, like ball gowns, come in all shapes and sizes” (*Etchings* 43). Immediately thereafter Lisa crosses behind the history chair, picks up a can of glitter, and sprinkles it gently over Danielle’s head as Danielle continues to narrate, “women remain the focal point of the event” (*Etchings* 43). By the end of her tale, Danielle is covered in a thick layer of iridescent glitter, her body a marker by her discourse, which concludes with her observation that the “presentation is followed by an elaborate party—food, drinks, dancing, and revelry into the wee hours of the morning” (*Etchings* 43).

This moment recalls conventions of the nostalgic fairytale. In the pose of a fairy godmother, Lisa transforms Danielle into a glittering princess, a fairytale in herself. On the one hand, the image suggests the continued mystification of the debutante tradition and ritual. On the other hand, it demystifies the history and its enactment through the re-imaging of what constitutes the performance. No prince in site/sight, Danielle makes history through story; through both the mechanical regurgitation of the debutante tradition and its alternatives in this performance. As Pollock offers, “truth is . . . a representation—a story—from which real events [may] derive” (13).

(Re)appearing Between and Behind the Gaps

Being truthful is being in the in-between of all regimes of truth. (Pollock 17)

For the most part, the performance of *Etchings of Debutantes* operated in the gaps of class, etiquette, beauty, gender, and truth as viewed and enacted in debutante culture. As the show progressed, the performers reshaped the set of the deb galaxy, which began as a cluster of set pieces arranged around and supporting the center platform. As the set pieces were repositioned across the stage, the gaps between them articulated fissures in the deb galaxy, breathing spaces that allowed the debutantes/performers alternative relationships to the space, each other, and their stories. These alternatives threatened the center of course. Once protected by the beauty ladder, the personal narrative bench, the history chair, and the Barbie stairs, the center platform lost power as the debutantes investigated and thereby imagined alternative views and enactments of “debutante” beauty, narrative, history, and gender. Performing in the gaps between “center” and “margin” queries the very essence, the place and placement, of those terms.

The debutante who was most deviant in her deb behavior was Jessica. In Boal’s terms, she was a Joker figure because it was difficult to place or define her behavior. As Ruth Bowman notes, the objective of Boal’s Joker figure is “to present simultaneously in the performance both the play and its analysis” (140). In *Etchings of Debutantes*, Jessica danced in and out of the scene, at times seeming to support the tradition and, other times, showing opposition to it. This in-the-gap Joker space that Jessica claimed and occupied enabled her to watch the performance from afar. From this detached position, she was “able to move easily between the there-and-then world” of the tradition “and the here-and-now world” of reflexive critique (Bowman 140).

Do we trust our fair Joker Jessica? It all began with her singing “Little Bird.” Seemingly innocent, Jessica filled the space with her sweet, supple singing voice calling the debutantes to enter by candlelight. In the dark, the debutantes and the audience did not know what to expect

and, when the lights were turned on, they were sucked into the deb galaxy. Jessica sat down on a bench, on the margins of the stage, to watch as the other debutantes told and enacted their stories. She occasionally reappeared to play other characters or to sing, her interruptions surprising the other debutantes. For instance, just after the others concluded the “Smile” song and were enjoying a moment of mushy happiness, Jessica appeared, singing parts of “Little Bird” and wandering through their space. Her actions were haunting, reminding the debutantes of how they had entered the stage, as disembodied faces lit by candles. By means of her interruption, Jessica questioned the unreflexive sentiments of the “Smile” song as engaged and performed by the debutantes. In their response to finding fulfillment in the present, Jessica insisted that they recall their past and consider how it inflects their “being” present as a “doing,” a construct.

After luring the debutantes into the space, then sitting down to observe them for a while, Jessica assumed the role of Linda Blanchard, the coordinator of my debutante ball. With a southern twang, Mrs. Blanchard welcomed everyone to the evening with the utmost confidence that all assembled agreed with the values and aims of the Cotillion. Like Jessica, who led the debutantes into the space, Blanchard assumed control through her directorial coordination of the ball, the debutantes, and the audience. Jessica/Blanchard’s actions mocked and interrogated my own, of course, as I was the director of the piece and Jessica was my on stage surrogate, a skeptical debutante, a historian, and coordinator of the event.

As myself, Jessica, “the Joker is omniscient in that she knows, better than anyone else, the history, the plot, the characters, and the ending of the story, adopting what is essentially an authorial point of view” (Bowman 140). Although I am unable to pinpoint the exact meanings of her roles, I know that Jessica, as a Joker debutante and historian, drifted back and forth between supporting and criticizing the event, and that this act became a metaphor for how the piece as a

whole functioned. That is, the genealogical history I cobbled together has led me to recognize my liminal position in debutante performance.

To some degree, all the characters perform in the gaps of the debutante tradition as it is represented in *Etchings of Debutantes*. Noteworthy examples include Angela's portrayal of Katherine Mills, Gretchen's stage angel, and the Barbie protest.

Unbeknownst to me, the same year I participated in my debut, Katie Mills was a debutante in Ohio. Her personal narrative highlights a debutante who performs in the gaps between acceptance and rejection of the debutante tradition. I asked Angela to play the character of Katie because Angela also had been a debutante and I thought she might draw on her experiences to portray the character.

Although I cut Katie's story into fragments, it was easy to follow because of the way it was staged. Once Angela assumed the character, she maintained it despite the interjections of the other texts. When these interruptions occurred, Angela would assume a static or frozen pose on stage, thus retaining the presence of Katie. While Angela's speech acts were always drawn from Katie's narrative, her physical actions drew on the social types and metaphors we had developed to depict and interrogate debutante culture. Born out of the colorful sheers of the beauty ladder, Angela as Katie then embodied the mechanized aspects of the Barbie figure. A confident Katie who explored her sexuality followed. Then, atop the history chair, Katie assumed the Barbie pose briefly, breaking from it to protest the same at the Barbie stairs.

Angela's performance of Katie suggests how history does mark the identity and agency of a debutante and yet how debutantes draw on and enact different pieces of debutante history and memory, which they patch together with other histories and memories. Angela as Katie finds agency in the gaps implicit to the pieced-together self.

When Angela assumed the role of Katie, Gretchen crawled center stage and lay on her back with her arms and legs spread wide. When Angela crossed downstage, Gretchen began to create stage (snow) angels in the pile of confetti that Lisa had previously sprinkled on Danielle. Gretchen's movement underscored Angela/Katie's account and represented the imprint that cultural performances of all kinds leave on our lives. The stage angel also suggested that the debutante can and does reflect on her experiences.

At the end of her story, the Katie character proved to do battle with Barbie. The moment marked the most aggressive evaluation of debutante culture made by a debutante in the show. In it, Angela as Katie awoke from the spell Barbie had cast on her, shook off her Barbie body constraints, and approached the Barbie stairs angrily. With a forceful voice, the Katie character insisted, "We are all strong women and fight for what we believe. . . . independence and equality, and whether or not my children walk down a flight of stairs in a white gown, that belief will continue to be a tradition that will carry on in my family" (*Etchings* 74). Within the context of the staging, Katie's lines imply that whether a debutante or not Katie does not need or desire that part of debutante culture that is "Barbie." While the Katie character does not condemn the whole of the tradition, she does condemn the "doll," excising it from her performance of herself as debutante.

Where Memory Is, Theatre Is

Herbert Blau's statement "'Where memory is, theatre is'" (quoted in Roach 4) acknowledges, amplifies, and justifies Roach's link between genealogy and performance, and my rationale for producing *Etchings of Debutantes* as a public performance. Not only is this study an attempt to restore and question debutante memories, it is a study of how history and memory are collaborative explorations, a figurative concept made practical in the doing of the debutante

ball, the performance of *Etchings of Debutantes*, and the writing of this thesis. It is in the doing of history that we realize the partial and piecemeal nature of identity, memory, and history, which in turn we perform. We invent ourselves by performing our pasts in, and in terms of, the presence of others (ct., Roach 5). Thereby we collaborate to create new or alternative versions of ourselves and the ever-changing histories we remember in our future.

Chapter Five: Conclusion A Genealogical Faeryland

A performance genealogy of *Etchings of Debutantes* has extenuated my understanding of history, performing that which Della Pollock terms “historicity” in her “Introduction” to *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History*. History as historicity is no longer an evolutionary master narrative that dictates essential Truths. Rather, it is a site for performance where unfinalized and partial fragments of the past cluster into stories that mingle fact and fiction. Historicity defines a space or an event where history is a doing (Pollock 10). The performer of this history embraces agency, which she uses to place herself within history rather than dominate or be dominated by it.

Genealogies of performance perform historicity. In *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, Joseph Roach provides us with a fine method for observing our history as historicity. Borrowing from new historicism, Roach urges us to investigate history by comparing and contrasting various texts and materials as equal co-texts. Doing so provides us with further insight into our subject by means of our method (i.e. we perform performance).

It is time to take a walk in my study. To observe the multiple performances documented within these pages and state the significance of them. Let us go/let go.

Applying Roach’s concept of surrogation to my memorialization and counter memorialization of my past experience performing a debutante at the Augusta Symphony Debutante Cotillion has proven to be an expansive project. It began in Chapter One with an attempt to unpack the method, genealogies of performance, in order to apply it to my scripting and staging of *Etchings of Debutantes*. I defined Roach’s borrowed and adapted terms and concepts, namely, surrogation, orature, behavioral vortex, kinesthetic imagination, displaced transmission, and walking in the city. I then stated my intent and rationale for adopting these

concepts for the analysis of my scripting and staging of *Etchings of Debutantes*. Chapter Two followed with the presentation of my collaged script in a reworked and polished form. The texts and materials I compiled, adapted, and wrote remained intact, with additional asides of performance writing offered in italics. The additions perform a performance genealogy in their continual sparking of memory. In Chapter Three, I described and interpreted many of the texts and materials used in the scripting. Guided by the selected genes of class and etiquette, beauty and gender, fairytale nostalgia, and the gaps in-between I discussed the relationships between the texts and materials in detail, explaining how they represent and re-present the cultural performance of debutantes. In Chapter Four, I furthered the study by using the same genes to describe and analyze the performance of the script in the HopKins Black Box theatre in September of 2001. I “did” history in my scripting and staging of *Etchings of Debutantes*, and I am still doing history in this study. Applying Roach’s genealogies of performance to performances of debutante culture as I represented them in the scripting and staging of *Etchings of Debutantes* exemplifies how history is done. And because it is done it is still doing.

As I see it, the difficulty of using genealogies of performance is finding a place to end. The historian can become overpowered by the histories as the piecemeal assemblage continues to gain strength in the plentitude of memory. How does the historian let go of this performance? Does my archive end here, as I pluck away several more paragraphs on the computer keys? What happens when this study is properly edited, printed, bound, and packed away in the Louisiana State University thesis archive? Does it become a has-been, ceasing to perform genealogically?

With these concerns in mind, I would like to pursue one more adventure with my study. In the spring of 2004, I took a Performance Studies course on “performative writing” at

Louisiana State University. Our quest in the course was to show the academic significance of writing performatively. Weekly writings in response to readings that ranged from Greg Ulmer's *Internet Invention* to John Berger's *And Our Faces My Heart, Brief as Photos* guided our investigation for the scholarly validity of performative writing. My writings tended toward writing about writing my thesis. At the end of the semester we wrote final papers based on the work that we had been writing all semester. I thought it appropriate to conclude my thesis by attempting to "let go" by surrogating my writing process with fragments extracted from my performative writing final paper, titled "Pattern Plummet." Some of the fonts, font sizes, and text placement (pace) have been changed to adhere to the strictures of publication policies.

The following performative writing attempts to connect the past with the present as intermingled and flowing into the future. It is a performance of genealogy that continues to make new connections as it grows and changes through time and space. It also attempts to highlight the important connections between performative writing and the scholarly thesis as it questions, reinforces, and changes the genes of etiquette, beauty and gender, fairytale nostalgia, and the spaces between, previously and continuously explored. It is a fight for the possibilities in the performance of writing, as it allows me to creep between the binary of absence and presence. Writing in this style allows me to let down any boundaries that may have barred me from observing my debutante performance without disdain. So, it all comes down to this—the finale.

Beat. *Rhythm*. Flow.
I'm tapping rapping mapping my feet to the sound of connecting words
lalalaconnectthedotslalala

Responding to the journey of a pattern

My head bobs to the **tune** of the language that oozes onto the page.

Uttered performances or performative utterances not by me but not not by me nor Della, Patti, Peggy, Pee-wee, Peter, Kevin, Kathy, Anne, Amy, Alice, Andy, Brian, Bill, David, Drew, Judith, J.L., Jon, Tiffany, Tyler, Michael, Megan, Melanie, Greg, Jessica, James, Oli, Odessa, John, Cecilia, Carlton, Carrie, Connie, Charlotte, Eric, Raymond, Roland, Rodger, Ralph, Ruth, Ric, Nick, Nancy, John, Laurie, Linda, Lena, Lucy, Liza, Guy, Gil, Anne, Robert, James, Jessica, Jenny, David, Walter, William, Willy, Shannon, Spalding, Simon, Sekou, and Trinh, nor others.

Beat. *Rhythm.* Flow
Where do I go?
I slip between the words again.
And fall asleep in a pattern.
A peaceful slumber,
Whereupon,

*The kittens paw at the computer screen,
And I laugh at myself as I place the spray painted, faery wings on my back
And fly around the room for several moments, which seem to last longer than they did the last
time this happened. Click.
I catch a buzz thanks to my flight
And ponder the words beneath the words
In the pattern.*

I found a picture of a woman sitting at my computer vigorously typing performance. The expression on her face was one of pure enjoyment, as her nervous thoughts mysteriously connected to the words that found themselves on the page. A recollection of a performative utterance captured, as she glances at my cat making a strange face of aggravation. She has placed herself pristinely in the center of a wicker chair. Her ears point in opposite directions perplexed by the hum of some sound, which I remain unaware of. She stares at me with deep green eyes and begins to lick her paw at the very moment I begin wondering if it is acceptable that I just ended a sentence with a preposition.

But the picture did not exist. And I am forced to prompt you to “imagine that.”

I will be right back. I’m eating an apple. I’m taking notes. I’m reading my paper. I’m paying attention. I’m cleaning my house. I’m writing. I’m talking.

Thinking. Writing. Talking.
Feeling. Breathing.
I hear different sounds. I’m listening to some of them.

I smell them. Smells like angel flower incense.

Intended to offer joy,
happiness, energy
and a harmonious, positive atmosphere

I drink some water. It tastes good. Fresh.

I gather the strands of my thoughts eager to float away on their prospective balloons.

The words are causing me to do this.

[Imagine that.]

*I find that I am forever making to do lists—
For the grocery, the thesis, the performance
—only to leave them in the most obscure places.
To be found months later stuck to a bill or the bottom of a shoe.
Under the car seat, lost in a bottomless purse
Or new home to a chewed piece of chewing gum.*

Several months ago I found myself curled up on my couch drawing arrows that gradually began to get bigger

(loonnnnggggeeeeeerrrrr and **fatter**)

(loonnnnggggeeeeeerrrrr and f **atter**)

(loonnnnggggeeeeeerrrrr and **fatter**)

(loonnnnggggeeeeeerrrrr and **fatter**).

Four of them, delicately etched in red ink across the top of a page. The final one (the biggest) points at anything to its right. Right now, it is pointing to one of those small daily calendars.

Thursday, November 11, 2004

“Passivity and quietism are invitations to war.”

-Dorothy Thompson, the first American journalist
banned from Nazi Germany

When I was curled up on the couch in the act of drawing these arrows, they must have been pointing sort-of, upward at my wall, to the right of my front door, possibly at the mirror hanging there. I then discovered myself writing a narrative to accompany my doodling. It reads:

One arrow ate the other arrow,
Ate the other, which ate the other.

A chain of events that proved to be a most difficult habit,
Hard to break.

It was as if I checked out for a moment, as I created doodle plus narrative. And when I realized what I had produced—I was quite puzzled. In fact, I am still quite puzzled.

(Click) (Click) (Click) (Click) (Click) (Click) (Click)

*A silent artist lost in transmission
A repressed verb in favor of a vision
In favor of intellect
Silenced
Meaning is relayed through the telling
Not just the text
Teller & Listener
An active, immediate, communal bond
Confusion of truth and fiction
Rescued from Modernism
What is the language relative to this community?
Allegory: texts which say one thing and mean another
We add meaning to each image
They add meaning to themselves
Power through language and representation
Alternatives
Reject and shame
Challenge
Resist
Acknowledge, expose
Social activism
Hearer, viewer, respondent
Writing into a social act
Anachronistically*

What is/was is always on the verge of becoming something else.

Metamorphosis

Writing speaking as writing

Language like paint, like performance

My canvas squeals for attention

Opening language to what it is not and can never be

The not-me dwelling within me

It is dark in a cave until you bring in a little light

Writing as rewriting

Writing writing

Writing within writing

Writing

Words work

For writing ourselves out of ourselves

Pheww.

[Wiping my brow]

[Silence and the snapping of pictures]

Did you ever have one of those dreams?

I watch myself, unable to utter a word to myself—the air just passing with a linear, sweeping motion. Repeating, straining, stretching. A violence. Myself, floating in midair, spying on my body, searching for voice, thinks that if I can articulate the airborne observation, then I can more readily explain it when the eyes I see, so closed, awaken in wonderment of this paralyzed land.

My voice embodies me though I have become speechless. I am stretched out, each fiber of my being interwoven with the new smell that lingers, as I walk the pathway leading to the wooden stairs. Who step by step bring me closer to my front door. Only it is on the backside of my house. I suddenly remember how much I used to write about houses, particularly attics. A pane of nostalgia and the kittens turn from the computer screen to laugh at me. And they borrow the fairy wings to fly around the room. I don't mind. I watch them and we laugh together.

(Click) (Click) (Click-Click)

I must come into being: the story depends on me, on us. But what does the story itself dream to be? The transformation, manipulation, redistribution of my collection is overlooked. The division continues its course. Storywriting becomes history-writing, and history quickly sets

itself apart, confining story to the realm of tale, legend, myth, fiction, literature. IS IT A TRUE STORY? Literature and history once were/still are stories. Tell me, and let me tell my hearers what I have heard from you, who heard it from she, who heard it from older she. So that we may transmit it to the future she's, and we will be guarded, and we will be embarking on an adventure [Barthes 19]. *Adventure allows my snapshot to exist. Adventure says: okay, moment, you existed. Click.* An imaginative world, over the rainbow and through the hills, where cows jump over the moon, and anything is a possibility. Each story is at once a fragment and a whole. My fragment is imprinted. It intertwines its existence into its disappearance and I have become a part of the telling, though I am no longer present. Do marks count if they are not recognized? I have plenty imprinted all over my body and my mind, threaded through the past into the present into the future, creating a quilt which I sometimes forget is patched from varying sources. What happened to the source, after I took my fragment and sowed it into my blanket and covered myself? The source is still out there making its own collections. My warmth has caused me to forget, yet again, but sometimes I wake up in a cold sweat.

Panicking
A
Sweaty
Scream

A cry that allowed me to look at myself from outside my voice,
which would not work as I tried to speak.

I mouth the word “stuck” several times. But no sound escapes my breath. I remember how easily it usually is to say “stuck.” I wonder, quite puzzled, *have I taken stuck for granted?* But relaxing, I remember where my fabric came from and wonder what it would be like if I had taken a different piece. And wonder what your piece looks like, and if I could make a copy

because I like the way you see things sometimes. And wonder if I am still here after all of my pirating.

Until I see myself grasping a familiar doorknob. Sticking in a key and unlocking without thought, the knob turning to the right. I enter.

But I woke up in wonderland

I watched Alice eat her cake

She grew

and she **shrank**

her voice followed her body

Large and small

And she whispered

sweet and sour secrets.

And laughed at me in a deep throated cackle,

But she was shrinking, so it turned into a high pitch squeal.

And it hurt my ears,

So I walked away

S l o w l y

She called out to me,

In a pinched voice

“there’s no place like home.”

And I looked back, with a furrowed brow and a crinkled nose,

To find that a house had landed on her head.

But instead of green and white socks shrinking from underneath

It was only the ruby slippers,

Sparkling shiny in my eye.

A voice inside me told me to grab them and try them on.

And immediately I was confronted with what seemed to be my evil step sister, who snatched the shoe from my hand and began to cram her fat foot into a shoe that was

W

A

Y

.....too

small.

And her red lips puckered in lip-sync fashion, sure of what they were relaying. But the lip movement did not quite match the sound escaping her vocal chords. There was a five second delay and I saw the poison apple.

Mesmerized

I took a red delicious bite

Upon which I woke up to . . .

Dada, quietly whispering a fairytale into my ear?

I write “once upon a time I performed a debutante” onto a pink index card and rip the paper into eight uneven bits. The card will never be the same as I realize I have written something on the other side of it. A Shakespeare quote of some sort, that I am sure is written somewhere else. So I don’t bother to try to place the fragments back in position to remember what it said. I jumble up the bits and randomly piece together something new.

I upon debutante a once performed a time.

I re- and re-read the sentence, attempting to make sense of something that is purposefully nonsensical. I like it. The new formation meshes awkwardly as it smiles at its’ self configuration. The words win the battle. Once again victory is attributed to a voice in my head. The words take over, as they decide where they would like to be placed. They have so many options but are much more decisive in their precision, as they appear typed on the computer screen.

[I wonder if I could turn in what I have of my thesis thus far in a dada state.]

Once upon a time . . . a bigger person’s world collided with a smaller person’s world, and both worlds knew that living is neither oral nor written. I like to think that everything in the universe speaks and to listen is to live. Speech is strength because it creates a bond of coming-and-going, which generates movement and rhythm, and therefore, life and action. Sometimes I cannot see or hear the speech taking place all around me, but the knowledge that it is there is comforting. Destroying and saving become one process in upholding tradition. Stories are

bound to circulate once they are told. The fairy tales I heard and secretly experienced became firmly impressed on my mind. Transmission is powerful. To preserve is to pass on, not to keep for oneself. We are storytellers: mothers, teachers, poets, warriors, musicians, historians, fairies, witches, healers, and protectresses. It is perhaps difficult for an analytically trained mind to admit that recording, gathering, sorting, deciphering, analyzing, and synthesizing, dissecting, and articulating are already imposing our/a structure. One can look for a structure without structuring. Is recognition of reconstruction important? If structure as Roland Barthes defines it is the residual deposit of duration then rare are those who can handle it by letting it come, instead of hunting for it or hunting it down, filling it with their own marks and markings so as to consign it to the meaningful and to lay claim to it. The story is a self and has its own way of life. The truthfulness of the story does not limit itself to the realm of facts.

In saying something we are doing something
 Saying
 Saying certain words

Actions in general are liable

To be done under duress

Writing the same

but

what about accidents?

Unintentionality.

THAT IS NOT A WORD!

Refused to become linear in structure a mind receptive to thoughts able to nurture and connect them and susceptible to happiness in their entertainment the absolute privilege of the writing act itself is not to describe my doing or to state that I am doing it it is to do it how language constructs or affects reality rather than merely describing it all language is performative not only that but it's most performative when its performativity is least explicit consider gender as an act which is both intentional and performative Performative that of theater on the one hand and of speech act theory and deconstruction on the other performativity signals absorption the performative is theatrical performativity to mean an extreme of something like efficiency dislinkage precisely of cause and effect between the signifier and the world a radical estrangement between the meaning and the performance of any text beyond beneath and beside hypothesizing testing and understanding there is no such thing as textural lack I shall only he promises later give you a run around or rather a flounder around the filthy workshop of its creation criss-crossed with skid marks epistemology performativity/performance can show us whether or not there are essential truths and how we could or why we can't know them *Touching Feeling* particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions tactile plus

emotional time and aim affects have greater freedom with respect to object Just as the experience of redness could not be further described to a color-blind man so the particular qualities of excitement joy fear sadness shame and anger cannot be further described if one is missing the necessary effector and receptor apparatus relational and somehow also ontological

*Construction through corporeal acts. I am writing...
a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities
One does one's body A construction that regularly conceals its genesis
My pain, silence, anger, perception are not mine alone.*

Snapshots became a means for marking time as my obsession found me fumbling through the works of Roland Barthes. Sometimes the image builds and bleeds into the cracks of my skin.

And I ask myself,

How did I get here?

It was another body that performed the debutante that day. “My self never [seems to coincide with the] image” reflected in the snapshots. Barthes Twelve. Snapshots create the gaps, the lapse. Fill the voids. I look in a mirror and I don’t see the me that performed that day—Or any day. Looking at myself on paper I am “the corset of my imaginary essence” as I imitate myself. Barthes Thirteen. I become an object—an “adventure” “[informing, representing, surprising, causing, signifying, and provoking] my own desire.” Barthes nineteen, twenty-eight. Or is it yours? Caption me if you will. Save me. A picture of me. A debutante in white. I recognize her! But she is dressed differently today. What if it was the only image etched in your mind? What would you say about her? About me? What does your eye tell you? What does mine tell me? Playing tricks all of the time. The object, the objective, the subject, the subjective. Do I take that picture so I can forget? Barthes fifty-three. Did you? Do you? To stash away for later. In books stacked delicately against one another—millions of tiny moments. Each willing and ready to inspire and inform the next. Retrieved—vaulted through the air. Catch a glimpse. Mold it, shape it. What do you have? Created. Déjà vu.

Pages. Four to a page. Three to a page. Two. None. Placement has become something different. Observations Change. I take. I pose. I look. On looking. Spying. I see you through the camera. I see me. But it happens so fast. Click. I don't know who you'll be after the development. I am anxious to see us. Rolls and rolls. Strips of film. A waste. But always something unexpected. A punctum. I close my eyes and I see thousands of photographs pieces fragments of times. Lives. Of me, by me, new to me. Images. "That-has-been." Barthes Seventy-Seven. What is the truth? What is this "reality that one can no longer touch?" Barthes eighty-seven. What is the future? This? A counter memory. I live in. I live. Livedlivelive-edlivelive.

Time & s p a c e

Consciousness of past to future realized as such my heart beats in the palm of your hand, squeeze until the silvery liquid leaks into the cracks of the floor to be licked up by the mop of time. History, which once was the guardian of the past, becomes the midwife of the future. As the faces appear before, drooping of lost moments, caricatures stretched widely with smiles that seem to laugh under the belly of the jolly.

"Is it I who cross the barrier that normally excludes them, or is it they who cross it?"

What does the envelope of the past hold? I can barely read the words through the thin paper that holds me. An empty frame, suggesting the absence of a photograph, leads me to wonder about the pattern of no pattern. The absence of my expectations canceled void, in the black lines creating a rectangle. I imagine your face placed in this space and wonder if I ever really saw you. If there is an image to place in the box that once seemed so colorful. Rainbow smudged lips lead me to believe in the puppet I conjured you up to be.

"I saw the village street at that moment, as seen from the future. What I was seeing had become the distant past. This transformation was calm, so calm that it resembled a

stillness.”

An image in the mind, completed incompleteness, and what has been experienced cannot and will not disappear. The foggy representation of a ghost on the wind floats as the experience is given shelter by the acknowledgement of language. “A principle and a presence,” the writer becomes the language, creeping between the words to contemplate them backwards, the language becomes a place which I might be able to call home.

“I am wordless.”

*And the moment inverts itself into an imaginary implosion.
How do you experience time in the story I am telling?
The narration has begun and I can no longer control my characters.
What do you think of them?*

“A seamless experience of wordlessness.”

“The deeper the experience of a moment, the greater the accumulation of experience.”

“One no longer counts what one has, but what one has lost.” “Through the visible one orientates oneself.” The risk of being lost in the world consumes the images, as I paste them together in a cluster of remembrance. “The visible with its space also takes the world away from us. Nothing is more two-faced.” A waterfall is a waterfall is a waterfall, as I stroll down the swirls of bubbly tickle the back of my throat, a lump I tried to swallow encircles the drain of my pillow. I am tired as I squint my eyes, searching for Berger’s idea of natural beauty. Look and meaning become identical in fusion—a revelation, and I am catapulted onward into a page of words, so naturally beautified, my heart beats extra palpitations that shake images loose onto post-its stuck to my forehead. I find my voice by borrowing words already borrowed, twice-removed, reused, abused language teetering on the edge of my lips. My voice echoes your language, trapped in the reality of my heart. Why add more words? I abandoned myself again to the unreal in all

its absurdness. I question the validity, as I dodge the ball bouncing directly toward my forehead—it hits and post-its fly everywhere, whipping in the wind exhausted upon our first meeting, they greet me with a cackle that becomes “the center of the world.” Unit[ing] two displaced persons encircled.

“Aesthetic experience is the purest expression of this equation.” “Reality is art.”

It is as if you knew me twice too. Long lost playmates, we banter in my dreams, and I wonder what it would be like to sit on a cloud with you for one whole day. White, puffy somehow supporting our weight in its feather mist we chat as I appreciate every sound you make, even the ones strung out on your string, tied between two poles, which I cannot quite reach spinning ink in the airy space, providing our oxygen. “You are everywhere. Yet . . . I can never meet you face to face” as I am busy walking in the city concentrating on something I will regret, consuming my contemplation once I begin to re-visit my moments. Your shadows offer

me a roof and walls to conceal something that still manages to emerge protruding droop. Can my life's desire really be expressed by a glance? Did you catch it?

Remind me of the hole I fell in last week. My ankle still twisted I dance about, my body flowing to the inner beat of freedom grows weary and wants to land back on your leaf for a drip of rain and a suckle of honey. The buzz and bees rock me to sleep as I abandon myself desperately in the most beautiful moment of truth. Losing myself in the desired my body flares with light in an interior of darkness as the universe calls me to leave once again. But I will be back.

I try to find my way through the maze with a pencil, but some unknown force keeps jerking it upward causing my lines to separate. I try to start over where I left off but keep collecting gaps. Maybe a place to catch a brief nap. I can sleep there in peaceful repose to a lullaby reminding me of someone I once knew. Absent, I practice sketching faces with new characteristics. I retrace my steps over and over. The curves and angles combine, and it becomes an iridescent stain of lead until the paper starts to disappear. A huge hole I look through expecting to find something new, a budding plant of some rare exoticness lushly green with yellow flowering. A hushed peek-a-boo I see you and my heart hurts, the pain of truth, lost but found, buried in words continuing to be typed underneath a train traveling. I am aboard.

I thought this was supposed to be about debutantes.

[Expression of wonder and puzzlement.]

Something is missing.

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Vita

Melanie Kitchens received her Bachelor of Arts degree in the spring of 2001 from Georgia Southern University in Statesboro, Georgia. Majoring in theatre with a minor in psychology she spent most of her time performing, directing, and lighting for the theatre. With a little direction from Dr. Patricia Pace, she came to realize that a master's program in performance studies would be the logical next step. She moved to Baton Rouge in August of 2001 and began the masters program in the Department of Communication Studies at Louisiana State University. She immediately began teaching small group communications and has since then taught public speaking, interpersonal communication, and assisted with film classes. She will receive her Master of Arts degree in communication studies with an emphasis in performance studies in the fall of 2004 and plans to continue in the PhD program.