Generations of Desire:

*Belle Reprieve* and the “Beautiful Dream” of Blanche DuBois

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For Babbo,

thank you for the life you’ve given to the writer in me.
Introduction

*A Streetcar Named Desire* has haunted me almost my whole life. My dad was a high school English teacher when I was little, and when we went to the park, he used to tell me stories based on great American literary works. As a six-year-old, I could tell PG-versions of the 19th and 20th century American literary canon from *The Crucible* to *The Scarlet Letter* to, of course, the tragedy of Blanche DuBois. The ending of *A Streetcar Named Desire* terrified me as a little girl and still does today: the idea of being forcibly taken away to what was known then as an insane asylum, having one’s hidden past unearthed to the world, and most of all, because I was too young to understand rape, the thought of being forcibly kissed by one’s brother-in-law. I remember the exact park in which we walked when I heard the story, the same park where I learned to ride a bike and play soccer. I have carried Blanche DuBois with me since then.

After flashing up once again in my own high school English class and in its 1951 film adaptation,1 *Streetcar* earned its place as my favorite play. I felt a sympathy towards Blanche DuBois that I couldn’t quite articulate, and as my classmates condemned Blanche for her ridiculousness and her lies, I, as much as I hated to admit it, identified with her. This Blanche DuBois visited me at the moment at which I was grappling with a fundamental dissonance between the way I understood myself and the way I had presented myself to others. Blanche and I both, whether or not we were aware, longed to fit into an impossible American fantasy of femininity, grace, and straightness that in actuality reflected deeply rooted traditions of white supremacy and elitism. Even for all of her snobbery, her deceit and her melodrama, Blanche came to embody the knot I was and perhaps still am trying to untie in my own life. She confused me, and I hated how much I loved her.
When I first met Blanche, I hadn’t also met the words of Judith Butler, Jose Muñoz, Elizabeth Freeman, and bell hooks. In the past few years, as I’ve fallen in love with this early-nineties post-structuralist moment, in which theorists, activists and performers were untangling everything we thought we knew about the “objective”: linear time, truth, fact, and gender, I have begun to understand why my relationship with Blanche DuBois is so terrifyingly confusing. After falling in love with queer theory and performance studies and mentioning my love of *Streetcar* to my professor, they told me about *Belle Reprieve*, a drag rendition of *Streetcar* which emerged out of this very early-nineties cultural moment that had caught my attention. In the world of *Belle Reprieve*, Blanche DuBois was a beautiful drag queen, the star of the show, Stanley was Stella’s butch lover, and Stella was queer and femme. At this point, Blanche DuBois’s ghost had flashed up in my life too many times for me to keep ignoring her.

*Belle Reprieve*, a joint production by Split Britches and Bloolips emerging from London in 1991 and then New York shortly after, is labelled in a *New York Times* article as a “sendup” of *Streetcar*. One quiet night this past July, I finally found a film recording of the show in the NYU Film Archives, fuzzy and with muffled sound. As I watched that nearly inaudible and shaky video at my dining room table, I myself felt a sense of reprieve from the ways in which Blanche’s rape had haunted me throughout my life. I saw the characters from *Streetcar* I loved and hated so fiercely in drag, turning moments of drama and hyperrealism into jokes and over-the-top musical numbers. I heard the audience laugh and go wild at the actors’ references to the iconic 1951 film, and my heart skipped a beat during a Blanche’s musical solo, performed by the drag queen, Bette Bourne.

Since that night in my dining room, I’ve visited Tennessee Williams’s historic homes in St. Louis, now called the “Tennessee Lofts” in a trendy area downtown. I’ve discovered a
chapter my grandfather wrote about Streetcar earlier in his academic career. I’ve visited
Tennessee Williams’s grave, and attended talks on the theories around drag and performance.
This play carries a harmony that grows more resonant with each new note of it I hear. These
notes, these moments across time and space in which Blanche DuBois comes back to haunt me
harmonize into a feeling I attempt to describe and understand in this argument. I’ve come to
realize that this is about time, in all senses of the phrase.

What this piece aims to explore is this mysterious communication between the many
Blanches I’ve met in my life, a communication that has occurred across time and space, a
communication that might disrupt the way we understand the temporality of citation. The
relationship between Belle Reprieve and A Streetcar Named Desire offers an example of the way
in which a sendup, a story that references and plays with the past, exists in a two-way
conversation with its referent, being influenced by its “predecessor” and influencing it
simultaneously. This non-linear artistic genealogy offers a way in which characters like Blanche,
who desire pasts that may not have existed, can find possibilities that grow from their
experiences of longing. First, I will explore this issue of longing in and through close reading
Blanche DuBois’s musical solo in Belle Reprieve. I then will draw on critical frameworks to
articulate the melancholic and temporal nature of Blanche’s longing. These frameworks will
inform an analysis of a scene in which Blanche introduces herself to the audience in Belle
Reprieve, and more broadly, the capacity Belle Reprieve affords Blanche to both survive within
and imagine new possibilities for an oppressive world. I use this framework to disrupt readings
of Belle Reprieve that reduce the show to an oasis for Blanche, refocusing the conversation on
the politics of embodiment and temporality surrounding Blanche herself. And lastly, I will
underscore the way in which new possibilities are imagined and repair occurs in *Belle Reprieve* within the space of longing across time. This argument is not concerned with allowing Blanche to live the white Southern fantasy in Belle Reve she articulates in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It is concerned, rather, with the ways in which the space of her desire across time that *Belle Reprieve* helps to highlight can open new possibilities that might move Blanche even beyond Belle Reve. What I aim to argue in this overall project is that, both in its deeply problematic and also fundamentally liberating moves, *Belle Reprieve* offers a reimagining of queer futurism that asks us to yearn for, imagine, and perhaps even realize alternative queer pasts. The system of citation in *Belle Reprieve* transcends Blanche’s dreams of Belle Reve: it makes space for new pasts, new Blanches, new realities.

**The Beautiful Dream Has Passed/Past**

The staging is simple: Blanche stands in the center of the stage, in the spotlight, in a white dress with a cigarette, with dark makeup and full, curly hair. The scene that made me fall in love with *Belle Reprieve* was Blanche DuBois’s musical solo, which begins as she nostalgically recounts her club-going past and smokes a cigarette. Stanley, her brother in law, in this rendition a butch lesbian, screams “ha ha ha!” from backstage, but is tuned out by the soft piano and Blanche’s song, with the refrain, “the beautiful dream has passed.” The song feels wistful, romantic and indeed nostalgic. Blanche does not dance or sway, but looks with somewhat discomfort into the audience as the piano plays. Blanche sings with the tone of an older person looking back on their youth, emphasizing the line, “so long ago now.” This romantic nostalgia reads as a tad over-performed, as Blanche looks into the distance dramatically. The song blends these melancholy looks and nostalgic lyrics with a little joke about Blanche’s love for bathing, a reference to her excessive bathing in *A Streetcar Named Desire* that
reappears throughout the rest of the show. But the joke appears in almost a dark way, the way one might make a joke in the middle of sobbing or recounting a sad memory. The song ends on a soft note, with the piano fading out and the spotlight fading into darkness.

Amidst the irreverent, loud and raunchy humor of the rest of the play, the softness of the piano, the vulnerability of Blanche’s description of the death of her “beautiful dream” disarms the audience to silence. Whereas the rest of the NYU archive’s recording of *Belle Reprieve* is overpowered by laughter and squeals, the audience remains completely silent during this song, except for a single joke, which earns only a soft, relieved laugh from the crowd. This song interrupts and quiets Stanley’s loud laughs from backstage and the audience’s loud laughs and noises, stealing the attention from the rest of the room. The other actors as well as the audience must bear witness to this moment.

Given the simplicity of Blanche’s gestures, her lack of dancing or physical movement overall, her voice and her face demand the most attention. Her voice, with a slight British accent and a high pitch that renders it almost comic throughout the rest of the play, in this particular scene lend her a softness and sadness that come to shape a form of femininity that transcends Blanche’s character in *Streetcar* or perhaps even Vivien Leigh’s performance in the 1951 film. But the realization of such softness becomes puzzling alongside the lyrics of her song, “the beautiful dream has died.”⁵ It is in her very sadness, in her very melancholic state that the audience most bears their reverent attention rather than laughter. It is in this scene when Blanche, through her solo song and the admittance of her lost dream departs from the guardedness of the animated humor that characterize her arguments and conversations with Stanley and the other characters of the play.
I would argue that in the context of *Belle Reprieve*, this solo begs the audience to understand Blanche’s relationship to the past as no longer ridiculous or over the top but rather deeply melancholic. For this small, fleeting moment, Blanche retreats from her status as a humorous character and emerges as believable and indeed deserving of the utmost attention and silence. In the uttering and recounting of her dead dreams, these dreams that both “have passed” and “have past,” Blanche seems to grasp, for just a moment, an alternative past (or pasts) that might offer her “reprieve” from her conditions in the present.

Thus, in the naming of “beautiful dreams” as dead or passed, new dreams and possibilities are realized for her in the present. Blanche’s ultimately generative state of longing for the past is theorized by Judith Butler in “Melancholy Gender: Refused Identification.” Butler engages with the idea that melancholy embodies a grief that cannot be relieved, a yearning for something lost that can never again be found. In Blanche’s solo, her lament that her beautiful dream “has passed” expresses a mourning for a memory she can perhaps never again revisit. And when we understand the line as “the beautiful dream has past,” Blanche’s melancholia actually offers a space for alternative “memories” to exist. That is, to say that her beautiful dream both “has passed” and “has past,” is to say that in the mourning for a “passed” dream, new “pasts” might emerge. Melancholy thus becomes a space simultaneously of loss and for the realization of queer desire, reimagination of the past.

*Belle Reprieve* thus allows for Blanche’s melancholy to yield new pasts and worlds. Butler understands the artistic form of drag as a creative capacity generated by the disconnect between a subject and an impossible and oppressive standard of gender. Butler writes:

Where there is an ungrieved loss in drag performance, perhaps it is a loss that is refused and incorporated in the performed identification, one that reiterates a gendered
idealization and its radical uninhabitability...the performance allegorizes a loss it cannot
grieve, allegorizes the incorporative fantasy of melancholia whereby an object is
fantasmically taken in or on as a way of refusing to let it go.”

Bourne’s performance operates in complex relationship to this understanding of gender and
melancholy. As Butler describes, the uttering of the beautiful dream as well as the drag
performance itself gesture to an unrealized desire, a thing Bourne tries to grasp but cannot fully.
Butler’s alignment of drag and melancholy identifies melancholy as a creative space, a terrain on
which new possibilities and new selves can be created. In the space of drag, the initial “desire” of
the drag queen is not necessarily realized, but something beautiful is created in the process.

“Looking Forward, Feeling Backward”: Blanche DuBois’s “Backwards” Desires

_Belle Reprieve_ creates these new temporal possibilities through a queered system of
citation in which it is both informed by and retroactively informs its so called “predecessors,”
most notably the Tennessee Williams script of _A Streetcar Named Desire_ and Elia Kazan’s 1951
film adaptation. This analysis of _Belle Reprieve_’s citational system relies heavily on José
Muñoz’s concept of “disidentification,” in which a subject revives a lost object with a new life,
rather than reclaiming that object as it was. Bette Bourne’s performance of a past Blanche
DuBois and Blanche DuBois’s performance of a past Belle Reve, both reparative reimaginations
of fragmented, painful, or lost pasts make room for these “new lives” Muñoz theorizes. As
performers reach back into the past, draw on it, retrieve it, disidentify with it, they also make
room for new genealogies that allow them to survive. Belle _Reprieve_ not only offers a space in
which one can feel melancholy for that which, in a straight world, cannot exist, but it also
proposes a possibility of longing something new into existence. It is not the “sendup,” nor its
referent, that alone allow lost desires to be realized, but the conversation between them.
Before moving any further, it is important to acknowledge what exactly Williams’s Blanche DuBois’s own idealized understanding of the past might be, and why she might need the “reprieve” delivered by the perhaps godmotherly figure of Bette Bourne. The moment in Streetcar that lay latent to me until after I watched these fuzzy scenes of Belle Reprieve concerns a sort of nightmare of Blanche’s past, a reality she might wish to escape in her beautiful dreams. In the world of Williams’s 1947 script, the southern belle, Blanche comes to visit her sister, Stella and her husband, Stanley in their apartment in New Orleans. Tension rises between Blanche and Stanley, as Stanley digs through Blanche’s things in an attempt to find the “truth” about this beautiful but melodramatic and high-maintenance woman, who refuses to be seen in the light. Meanwhile, Blanche and Stanley’s single friend, Mitch, begin to fall for each other even as Blanche clashes with Stanley’s lower class and racialized social circle, who often come to the apartment to drink and play games. As Mitch and Blanche’s love interest begins to escalate, Blanche’s scandalous past is revealed through one of Mitch and Stanley’s friends. Though she has claimed to teach English and live at Stella and Blanche’s lavish childhood estate, she in actuality has been fired from her job due to inappropriate relations with students and was known across town for liberally sleeping with men at The Flamingo, a seedy joint in their area. After this information is unveiled, Stanley rapes Blanche and she is sent off to an insane asylum in part for saying, to the disbelief of those around her, that she has been raped.

Though Blanche herself is not queer, she does experience time in the play in ways that may mark her as such. Many aspects on the surface of Streetcar feel straight: the heterosexual relationships, the generally linear progression of time, and perhaps most of all, its at least surface-level emphasis on realism. Blanche’s famous line, “I don’t want realism...I’ll tell you what I want. Magic!” on some register paints her as problematic, unable to live in or even
accept the world that surrounds her. And for good reason: that world is one in which she is rendered undesirable, raped and sent off to an insane asylum. The ways in which Blanche feels and experiences the world are not compatible with the “straight” world around her, a world that forces her to perform in order to survive. Once her elaborate performance is exposed, Blanche is condemned.

The beautifully and disturbingly paradoxical quality of Blanche lies in the idea that she feels her disturbing past but acts on a past that allows her to survive in the world. She performs one register while experiencing another, which, although her love interests mark her as straight, queers her. Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward* frames an aspect of queer existence as looking forward and feeling backward, that is, moving through life on one temporal register, perhaps a straight one, and affectively feeling or acting out the residue of the past. Love focuses on “the negative affects -- the need, the aversion, and the longing -- that characterize the relation between past and present. This decision to look on the dark side comes out of my sense that contemporary critics tend to describe the encounter with the past in idealizing terms.”

Here, I choose to examine the effects of this longing, characterized by the disconnect between the past and present that Love describes. Furthermore, Blanche’s longing is directed towards a past that never existed, which may even further serve to complicate Love’s criticism of a critically “idealized past.”

When placed alongside Butler’s analysis of gender as melancholic, the dissonance becomes even clearer between Blanche’s reality and what the world thinks she “should” be. She feels on one register, but survives in the world on another. *Belle Reprieve*’s work does not ignore the imposed reality of the outside world, but rather celebrates the possibilities generated when subjects, such as Blanche, survive and creatively navigate those oppressive realities. Namely,
Belle Reprieve operates not by attempting to solve or fix those realities, but by artistically dwelling within them. This fundamental tension between felt and imposed temporal registers drives the Blanche of Streetcar, Belle Reprieve, as well as the relationship between the two plays. There is, in an actor performing an already-played role from a canonical script, a fundamental distinction between what is and what was, the expectations and the reality. Belle Reprieve, while exploring Blanche’s desire for the past, in the same move itself dwells within a temporarily that exists in the present while haunted by the past.

An ongoing communication thus exists between the play unfolding and its referent. Elizabeth Freeman explores these politics of queer temporality, making a point to problematize and disrupt straight, linear understandings of time. To Freeman, gender identity, sexuality and time are intimately connected. In her exploration of queerness and historiography, Time Binds, Freeman writes:

This is more than desire, for desire is a form of belief in the referential object that the subject feels s/he lacks and that would make him or her whole (and insofar as this referential object is often posited in terms of a lost object, desire is ‘historiographical,’ a way of writing that object on to the present). Erotics, on the other hand, traffics less in belief than in encounter, less in damaged wholes than in intersections of body parts, less in loss than in novel possibility.¹¹ Freeman’s interventions thus primarily concern erotics, these interactions between people, historical moments, and art forms. But in this argument, in the spirit of the title of A Streetcar Named Desire, I choose to focus on this issue of desire from which Freeman chooses to move away. I feel that desire, for magic, for a “beautiful dream” of the past, is something for which Belle Reprieve makes room. Freeman seems to depart from desire in part because it both assumes
a non-wholeness of the subject as well as a missing part that may forever be lost. But what makes both *Streetcar* so haunting to me and *Belle Reprieve* so electric to me are the possibilities unleashed within this state of desire, this effort to be “whole.” A melancholic lack of wholeness is not only accepted in this creative space of desire, but allows the very conditions for it. The subject not only does not rely on wholeness to create, but on the contrary, mobilizes their felt lack of wholeness. In the space of loss, new pasts, selves, and spaces are created to survive.

What was Blanche missing? What exactly does she desire that she feels will make her whole again? This is one of the central questions of the play that has followed me for so long. Perhaps this fixation emerges from my own false nostalgia for a South that may or may not have existed in my life. Since moving away at the age of four, I myself have allowed the South to embody lost pasts and possibilities of innocence. The South, both in my case and in Blanche’s, comes to lay a landscape for temporal desire and fantasy rather only than possessing intrinsically desirable qualities.

Blanche’s nostalgia for the South becomes troubled by perhaps the queerest and most heartbreaking moment of the play, a moment in which her past begins to come into the light surrounding a love lost. I didn’t discover this moment or even understand it until after I watched *Belle Reprieve*, which creeps back into this moment in confusing but potentially restorative ways. Blanche recounts the end of her past love to her new love interest, Mitch, in Stella’s apartment. She recounts:

> He was a boy, just a boy, when I was a very young girl. When I was sixteen, I made the discovery — love. All at once and much, much too completely. It was like you suddenly turned a blinding light on something that had always been half in shadow, that’s how it struck the world for me. But I was unlucky. Deluded. There was something different
about the boy, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness that wasn’t like a man’s, although he wasn’t the least bit effeminate-looking — still—that thing was there…. Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly in a room that I thought was empty—which wasn’t empty, but had two people in it.¹²

There are so many ways in which Blanche’s past lies so deeply in the desire to desire and to be desired, and so many ways in which her story, the story of a blinding light violently exposing a sense of queerness within her, parallels that of her lover. Perhaps that is why it feels so right for her to be played by Bette Bourne, by a drag queen performing an identity the audience may assume she “doesn’t have” according to hetero and cis normative understandings of gender and realism. In this scene, Blanche starkly describes an innocent young state she inhabited before this exposure occurred in which she was “a very young girl,” virginal, vulnerable and “deluded” from reality. As she marks herself as a “Virgo” which, as she points out, means “Virgin,”¹³ Blanche seems to perform a virginal role, a life before this traumatic event occurred. And furthermore, this issue of light, love as a “blinding light” starkly contrasts her unwillingness to be in the bright light throughout the play. This love thus exposes something in her as well as her partner she hates to see, her own perceived undesirability, unfitness for love, delusion about her partner. She runs away desperately from this exposure until Stanley violently forces it upon her.

As Blanche uses means of illusion, performance, and, as she describes, magic to survive, Stanley’s theft of her capacity to perform, both affectively and literally in the plotline of *Streetcar*, kills her. Blanche cannot let her performance be “exposed” because the world will not allow her to live without it. Stanley uses exposure, the metaphorical and the literal light in *Streetcar*, to disarm Blanche. This exposure takes the form of the lamp, which Blanche covers in her room, her clothing, her hidden stories, and of course her body, which Stanley exposes as he
rapes her. The stakes of Blanche’s performances across time and context, I believe, are thus of life and death.

**Who is this Blanche? Bette Bourne’s Southern Femme Realness**

It thus becomes relevant, if we are to allow Blanche any sort of reprieve from the violent world of *Streetcar*, to take her introduction in *Belle Reprieve* on its own terms. I will now analyze Blanche’s first entrance in *Belle Reprieve*, a moment in which she seems to take control of what counts as “real,” setting the tone for the way the audience is to see her, as well as the queered conditions of viewing *Belle Reprieve* as a whole. The moment she, played by Bette Bourne, emerges on stage for the first time, laughs, squeals of pleasure and applause erupt from the audience. The sounds seem to say, of course she is a drag queen, of course Bette Bourne. She appears fabulously fashionable but a bit disheveled, taking in the scene around her and remarking, “How sweet it is to arrive at a new place for the first time, the future stretching out before us like a clean white carpet.” The drama with which she dreamily and wistfully utters these words lends itself to a self-aware form of irony. Blanche seems to be, in this scene, just as aware of the “joke” of a clean slate as the characters that surround her.

As the introduction unfolds following this grand entrance, Stanley and Blanche share a playfully aggressive exchange in which Stanley asks Blanche to “prove” her identity. When Stanley (Peggy Shaw) asks to see her “papers,” a reference to the repeated scenes in which *Streetcar*’s Stanley digs through Blanche’s things in the movie and play, Bourne responds emphatically, “I present myself as overwhelming evidence that I am actually here.” In this playful jab, the laughter turns towards Stanley, who has dared to question the legitimacy of both the iconic Blanche DuBois and Bette Bourne. She has now stolen the stage from Stanley’s now comical suspicion.
Now that she has the floor, Blanche formally introduces herself both to the other actors onstage and to the viewer. With almost an eye-roll, she names herself as “Blanche DuBois. My namesake is a role played by the incandescent star Vivien Leigh. Though the resemblance is not immediately striking, I have been told we have the same shoulders...The information in that document is a convention.” Blanche delivers this introduction in a matter-of-fact manner, as if, in this reality, of course she has the same shoulders as Vivien Leigh. Her hyper-confidence in this reality that here seems to override the papers Stanley requests simultaneously earns laughs from the audience as well as, perhaps at least for me as a viewer, a fierce love for this “new” Blanche.

Here, Bourne’s Blanche both identifies herself with and distances herself from Williams’s role of Blanche DuBois as well as Vivien Leigh’s rendering of that role in the 1951 film adaptation. Her use of the term, “namesake” also immediately sets up and disrupts a system of straight, familial genealogy in which a daughter is named after a family member, a name or legacy passed along. Naming Vivien Leigh as someone other than herself, she acknowledges the “ghosts” that accompany her role. But she also, in the manner of someone speaking about her grandmother, playfully marks physical resemblances that the audience can see do not “literally” exist but instead are performed or “put on.” In the name of realness, she insists that her performance of Blanche is and always was. She asks, by naming her passport as a convention, for us to take her at her word.

What does it mean, then, for the audience to take Blanche at her word? Bette Bourne’s Blanche, by comically demanding the audience to assume her reality, calls into question what it means to “put on” or perform an identity for an audience. Anthony S. Abbott, my grandfather, once conceptualized Blanche’s performance of femininity and virginity in Streetcar as a “Vital Lie,” arguing that Streetcar offers more sympathy to Blanche’s character and her aversion to
realism than one might see on the surface. Lying while knowing and feeling her true past in her heart is, as he understands it, a survival strategy she employs intentionally, not deluded surrounding the reality of her situation but rather acutely aware of it. In his book, *The Vital Lie*, he distinguishes between the way Stanley and Blanche understand the lie: “He can’t tell the difference between an external and an internal lie [...] Blanche protests, ‘Never inside, I didn’t lie in my heart.’ What she means is that her distortions of what we would call truth are only attempts to make outward reality to conform to what it would have to be if life were bearable to her.”¹⁵ That is to say, Blanche makes calculated decisions based on the realities of the world around her so as to curate a world in which she can survive. My grandfather’s idea of lying to survive is compelling to me, and valuable as it communicates the gravity of Blanche’s performance, the stakes of her lies, and of the loss she desires so passionately to fill.

I wonder too about other ways in which her actions can be classified outside the framework of the “lie.” It seems to depend, as *Belle Reprieve* shows us, on whose eyes look at Blanche’s passport, whose “conventions” determine her identity. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, published in very much the same cultural moment as the emergence of *Belle Reprieve*, demonstrates the dangers in a distinction between a “natural” or “objective” truth, particularly surrounding gender, and a performed or chosen gender.¹⁶ Every act done to us and by us carries gender, molding together to form a perhaps false understanding of gender as stable, inherent and unmoving. Given that Blanche’s performance and her context are gendered, where do “lies” and “truth” fall in her departures from her words and from the conventions of the world around her?

Bourne’s performance of Blanche conveys the use of performance and illusion to survive harmful and oppressive structures. Here, Marlon Bailey’s conceptualization of realness in the ballroom and drag scenes becomes crucial. Bailey explores the very issue of realness in *Butch
In the ballroom scene, Bailey conceptualizes,

Realness is based on the individual and communal recognition of what I will suggest is the way in which members enact their realness performances to create the illusion of gender and sexual normativity and to blend into the larger heteronormative society to avoid homophobic discrimination, exclusion, violence, and death.\footnote{17}

The enactment of this “illusion” thus suspends drag, and, by extension, \textit{Belle Reprieve} and Bourne’s Blanche DuBois, in the space of survival my grandfather locates, but also in new possibilities that extend beyond the “lie.” Even the etymology of illusion, \textit{ludere}, which means “to play” and \textit{in} which means against, coming together to form \textit{illudere}, which means “to mock,” conveys a deeply complex relationship to truth that begins to reject realism. In the move of performing or enacting an identity that will allow the subject to survive an oppressive world, the means of “illusion” also allows the subject in drag to mock and subvert the forces that endanger them, in this case, straight or oppressive impositions of realism. Thus, rather than conveying “truth,” realness and performance more broadly might allow us to question the way “truth” is constructed, and open ourselves to more possibilities for what truth could be. Realness may appear deceptive to the outside world, but, as Bailey theorizes, that perceived deception reflects an integral part of its complex relationship to truth in the drag and ballroom scenes.

Blanche’s realness thus gains recognition as such by the audience and setting of \textit{Belle Reprieve}, a group that seems to understand her performance as an exploration of what constitutes “truth.” It takes both Blanche’s form of embodiment and the setting and audience of \textit{Belle Reprieve} to allow her “lies” to transcend the logic of “truth” and “lies”: to become performance.
When Bourne’s Blanche walks onstage in *Belle Reprieve*, mocking Stanley’s as well as the audience’s notions of “truth” and “lies,” she demands to survive.

**Making Space for Blanche: *Belle Reprieve* and Setting**

The audience and context of *Belle Reprieve* in many ways help to read even the title of *Belle Reprieve* as a spin-off of Blanche’s former estate, Belle Reve. In this theatrical move, Bloolips and Split Britches create a new space for Blanche, an imagined “elsewhere” in which Blanche can not necessarily live Belle Reve, but create and perform new fantasies. Theatre critic, Gail Leondar writes that Bette Bourne, who plays Blanche “discovers that realism, in the case of *Streetcar Named Desire* (and indeed, in Western theatrical tradition), means that the female character gets raped and goes crazy…The heightened theatricality of *Belle Reprieve* liberates the characters from their roles and fates. It is also tremendous fun.” In the structure of Leondor’s last sentence, she reveals thus the meaning of the choice to change “Belle Reve” to “Belle Reprieve.” It is unclear in Leondar’s last sentence whether she refers to *Belle Reprieve* as a production or, alternately, as a space alternative to Belle Reve. Ultimately, the two reveal themselves to be, in many ways, one and the same.

This idea of creating a space in which Blanche might “pass” as character as opposed to actor thus becomes closely intertwined with the essential move of *Belle Reprieve*. Split Britches, a theatre group transformed by its performance in the Wow Café Theatre of the eighties, is intimately connected with and even indebted to the politics and power of theatrical space. Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, in an interview with Alisa Solomon, recount some of their first performance pieces as part of lesbian festivals held in New York. Weaver recounts, “We did have a reputation for [doing lesbian work]. We liked to create environments, so some of the time we might have kissing booths, when it went along with the theme, but we were open to all
women.”20 Even in the remembrance of a kissing booth, a space in which lesbian sensuality and love is not only allowed but encouraged, “supposed” to happen, points to the nature of the soon-to-emerge WOW Café and lesbian theatre scene Weaver and Shaw were beginning to build. Weaver’s reflection, “we were creating environments” may begin to inform the intentionality of an environment that allows Blanche, in the setting ten years later of Belle Reprieve, to be “allowed” to pass in the eyes of her audience.

In the space of WOW Café, and by extension, in the spaces of Split Britches performances, identity could ideally exist in fantasy and in flux. Kate Davy quotes an early participant, Heidi Griffiths at WOW Cafe who reflects, “You could invent yourself, become your fantasy...If you didn’t find the little slot you fitted into, you’d just make it or invent something else. The categories were slippery and ever changing.”21 As a Café made for and by audience members of lesbian feminist theatre, the space thus served as one in which identity could lose its essentiality or stability. Thus, the stage begins to be set for a space not only for an audience member like Heidi Griffiths, but also for a character like Blanche DuBois, who wishes to finally “pass” or be accepted into her surroundings.

Split Britches began to drift apart from WOW and collaborate with the gay men’s theatre troupe, Blooplips in 1989, specifically in Odyssey, also in conjunction with Hot Peaches and Spiderwoman.22 Belle Reprieve “originally” emerged in London, the homeplace of Blooplips, shortly thereafter. Gail Leondar describes Blooplips as a “London-based troupe comprised of female impersonators Bette Bourne and Precious Pearl.”23 Embedded in their description is the inherent belief that they are impersonating women and not becoming them or “being” them, acting as or fantasizing about being women and not “actually” being women. Blooplips thus
serves, after the height of the WOW Cafe, as a group that explores the gap between realities, realities performed and realities imposed.

It is clear that the vast majority of previous scholarship on Belle Reprieve has focused on its capacities to create space for Blanche to survive. Alisa Solomon argues that the essential move of Belle Reprieve is to re-fashion the world that drives off Blanche DuBois in Streetcar.

She writes, “As the title suggests, Belle Reprieve sets out to offer the characters a reprieve from stifling constraints by placing them within a liberating, non-narrative form. Rather than remain subjected to a narrative order that leads inevitably to violence against women, the characters in Belle Reprieve break down the structure.” Alisa Solomon’s reading of Belle Reprieve, when put alongside a history of Split Britches that so crucially focuses on creating space where alternate realities can occur, highlights the central theme of an almost utopic worldmaking that opens up new fates, new futures for its characters. Solomon focuses primarily on the “alternate ending” in Belle Reprieve, one in which Blanche is not raped and taken away. But Solomon’s work in Redressing the Canon, as well as Leondar’s review, in attempting to address the question of theatrical space, of reprieve, and of alternate space in theatre, fail to address at length where Blanche herself fits in to all of this. The idea that Split Britches has created a space for Blanche to find reprieve rests on an engagement of Belle Reprieve’s Blanche as the same as Streetcar’s Blanche. Solomon does address the fact that the two characters may be different (she notes, “If a transvestite Blanche discovered she’s married a homosexual boy, there would have been no cataclysm in her life—and thus no play”) but does not fully dive into the implications of these differences.

My argument draws on this articulation of Belle Reprieve as an alternate world for Blanche DuBois, but is more interested in Blanche herself as she comes to exist in and negotiate
between multiple environments. Furthermore, I am concerned not only with the construction of worlds in which Blanche can survive, but also with the temporal and spatial possibilities generated in and through her struggle to survive in a violent world. The majority of criticism around Belle Reprieve celebrates the alternate worlds that Belle Reprieve creates for Blanche. But I argue that this does not account for the full depth of what Belle Reprieve does. As Solomon and Leondar’s arguments themselves demonstrate, it is impossible to talk about Belle Reprieve without also considering Streetcar both in its theatrical and cinematic forms. It is not as if Vivien Leigh is being dropped into a happier early nineties, lower east side world. Leigh instead exists a perhaps ghostly presence alongside the Blanche produced by and emerging in this new setting, part of the show.

To invite these many ghostly Blanches to the stage, Belle Reprieve as a whole draws on its relationship to Streetcar to work comically, conceptually, and aesthetically. Joseph Roach provides a helpful theoretical framework for the ways in which collective cultural memory, in this case, the memory of A Streetcar Named Desire operates in the context of performance. Roach coins the term surrogation to describe a process that “does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure, I hypothesize, survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates.” In Belle Reprieve, the performance in drag pointedly marks itself as a not-quite “replacement” for the characters of Streetcar, and works from and within this understood disconnect, a disconnect that allows most obviously for humor and the performance of the more fantastical world for which Blanche once yearned. In a relationship of substitution, one understands both the substitute and the substituted through their
simultaneous alignment and contrast, which operates heavily between *Streetcar* and *Belle Reprieve*.

In this way, seeing *Belle Reprieve* after having seen or read *A Streetcar Named Desire* duplicates both sets of characters. That is to say, when one sees *Belle Reprieve*, the characters from *Streetcar* appear in the room. But simultaneously, the characters from *Belle Reprieve* imprint themselves with how one reads the “original play.” Roach’s analysis opens up the possibility for the temporality of performance to create a two-way conversation between the past and the present, particularly in the context of a rendition or “substitution” such as this one, that transcends linear or one-way understandings of time. The “alien” substitute, in the case of *Belle Reprieve*’s Bette Bourne, finds originality in its relationship to the predecessor it substitutes. Roach writes, “Candidates for surrogation must be tested at the margins of a culture to bolster the fiction that it has a core. That is why the surrogated double so often appears as alien to the culture that reproduces it and that it reproduces. That is why the relentless search for the purity of origins is a voyage not of discovery but of erasure.” Roach’s analysis, the idea that a departure from language of “authenticity” is necessary to open up the potential of a performance act, matters most crucially in *Belle Reprieve*’s drag context. It also opens up into questions of realness, which, as I have previously outlined, itself “imitates” gender performance in an effort to comment on and disrupt it. The alien surrogate performing the culturally accepted role in ways familiar to the audience in many ways can offer the most nuanced critique of that cultural object.

Once I saw *Belle Reprieve* for the first time, I couldn’t not see Bette Bourne next to Vivien Leigh, or Peggy Shaw on screen next to Marlon Brando as I watched or even imagined *Streetcar*’s film adaptation. Not only do the ghosts of Blanche’s former embodiments sneak onto stage in *Belle Reprieve*, but thereafter, Bette Bourne sneaks into their shows too. That is, as
Blanche yearns so deeply to have lived a different past, *Belle Reprieve* also seems to exert a temporal force on its cultural “predecessors” that perhaps makes us question whether we can even call them that. *Belle Reprieve*’s engagement with the iconic cultural phenomena of both *Streetcar* the play as well as *Streetcar* the film matter because they fundamentally queer the way we see artistic genealogy.29

*Belle Reprieve* explicitly aligns itself with Elia Kazan’s 1951 adaptation of *Streetcar* by featuring the mid-century old Hollywood styles featured in the film, such as full calf-length skirts, old leather suitcases and pocketbooks. Even the lace drapery of the set mirrors that in Stella and Stanley’s apartment in Kazan’s adaptation. *Belle Reprieve* clearly riffs off, embodying and disembodying the 1951 film, while also irreversibly transporting itself into the film in the experience and memory of its audience. In this way, Roach’s idea of surrogation becomes especially apparent in the way *Belle Reprieve* “substitutes” for Kazan’s film, reflecting but not imitating. *Belle Reprieve* both comprises Roach’s “alien surrogate” and also renders any future viewing of *Streetcar* an “alien surrogate” of itself, queering a hierarchical line of citation in which it must be derived from an “original” *Streetcar*. *Belle Reprieve*, by aligning itself to the 1951 film, gives itself permission to be “original” in the way it is remembered.

**“Blanching”: Disidentification and White Femininity**

Queer theatre as a whole has the capacity to serve as a place of embodiment and disembodiment, a space where actors can take up an identity “off limits” to them so as to question the premise of and limits around identity itself. José Muñoz writes in *The Queerest Art*, “The queer of color’s performances of memory transmit and broadcast effectively charged strategies of minoritarian survival and self-making, carving out a space for resistance and communal self-enactment. Their memory performances thus work as calls intended to solicit
Muñoz’s intervention may offer a reading of *Belle Reprieve*’s Blanche as a radical re-embodiment of *Streetcar*’s Blanche, one that complicates Solomon’s reading of *Belle Reprieve* as centrally concerning Blanche’s environment rather than Blanche herself. Perhaps, as Muñoz’s theoretical framework might allow, the production is more than a “reprieve” for Blanche, but instead a questioning of how we can understand Blanche herself as a character and signifier. Muñoz still acknowledges the work of queer-of-color performers as one of making space, but making space “for resistance and communal self-enactment.” And the enactment of Blanche, her embodiment, and her role, are central to what exactly *Belle Reprieve* does.

And issues of embodiment as a whole are also central to understanding both the extent of and limits to what *Belle Reprieve* does. Namely, can Split Britches and Bloolips, two all-white theatre groups be discussed in a queer of color performance framework? Muñoz writes that queer-of-color performances, “amplify and transmit [...] recitations of dreams and contribute to a project of setting up counterpublics—communities and relational chains of resistance that contest the dominant public sphere.” I have engaged with the notion that Split Britches and Bloolips do the work of setting up a counterpublic, an alternate world to the one featured in *Streetcar*, but as an all-white cast, it remains unclear the degree to which they contest the dominant sphere. They surely do on the grounds of their queerness, but they do little to no work of commenting on, playing with, or engaging with their own whiteness as well as the whiteness of some, but not all, of the characters in *Streetcar*.

And at the same time, many of the issues of time and embodiment with which Muñoz engages are alive and at work in *Belle Reprieve*. Muñoz quotes Jonathan Boyarin’s analysis of Walter Benjamin’s angel of history: “Part of the importance of Benjamin’s image is the lesson that we are always once again being driven out, in some sense we have always just lost paradise,
hence we are always close to it. The ongoing state of emergency Benjamin also speaks of doesn’t just mean we are always in imminent danger, but also that something precious is eternally being lost.”32 This quote crucially allows for Belle Reprieve’s Blanche to both embody and disembody Streetcar’s Blanche. It also calls back Bourne’s solo, “The beautiful dream has passed.” Belle Reprieve echoes this sense of loss, of incompleteness embedded within Benjamin’s rendering of history, in which we are “always once again being driven out.” Blanche is both literally and figuratively “driven out” in the context of A Streetcar Named Desire, and Belle Reprieve draws on the conditions, implications, and memory of this experience to exist. Muñoz calls this, in the concept of Latinx queer theatre, the “double gesture” which “recognizes the need to reclaim the past while also resisting the temptation to succumb to a nostalgic and essentialized conception of it.”33 This further opens up in Bourne’s refrain, “The beautiful dream has passed” the alternate meaning of “The beautiful dream has past,” acknowledging a possession and engagement with the past allowed in her dream perhaps banned or taken away in her life in Streetcar.

The double gesture works by allowing the characters of Belle Reprieve to simultaneously look into the past with great feeling, while also disrupting cliche’d nostalgia through theatrical hyper-nostalgia. Muñoz’s framework, the double gesture, the embodiment of the thing combined with its rejection, thus proves useful in understanding how exactly Blanche is to be dealt with in Belle Reprieve. She, in her hyper-glamorous makeup, dramatically melancholy gaze and over-the-top graceful movements both embodies and disembodies her gender, systems of time and nostalgia and her character.

And indeed, in the context of the relationship between Streetcar and Belle Reprieve, the names of Streetcar’s characters and the roles themselves, become performative gestures. The iconography of Stanley, Stella, Blanche, Mitch, and the other characters of Belle Reprieve allows
for the audience’s understanding of their former characters to actually act as a gesture in the play. This operates primarily in the form of humor and allusion. For example, an ongoing joke stretches throughout *Belle Reprieve* of Blanche’s love of baths and excessive bathing. By the end of the show, whenever *Belle Reprieve*’s Blanche even mentions bathing, the audience breaks out in laughter. The comedic allusion to her love of bathing functions on an assumed knowledge that Blanche’s character in *Streetcar* did bathe excessively and was characterized by the other characters for doing so. In this sense, Bourne’s Blanche simultaneously aligns herself with the “role” of Blanche and expresses a critique of her excess. As the characters oscillate between being “themselves” and rejecting their former “selves” or roles in *Streetcar*, they in many ways interact with their former “selves.”

**Homecoming Day: Nostalgia and Gay Cheerleaders**

These disidentifications surrounding femininity, specifically Blanche’s white femininity, are negotiated and exposed perhaps most clearly in *Belle Reprieve* during Stella and Blanche’s duet, in which they wear cheerleading outfits and reminisce about their youth. The joke of the song dances around an implied incest between Stella and Blanche in their youth, and Stella begins the song by describing wistfully the way Blanche used to get ready to greet her “gentlemen callers.” The signal to this nostalgic moment is Blanche’s emergence from the bathroom, causing Stella to wait and, with dreamy eyes, describe the way Blanche used to put on her shoes and touch her cheeks. Blanche sees that her lemon coke is gone and becomes distressed, and as Stella comforts her, she reminisces about the morning of their homecoming football game, when Blanche was captain of the cheerleading team and Stella was the mascot (which earns a laugh from the audience). They stay in a deep embrace as Stella softly but
excitedly recounts the story, and the story begins to increasingly take on a sensual, but also romantic tone.

On homecoming day, Stella’s corsage had broken, causing her to cry, as receiving it had meant “imagining all the things a grown-up woman could be.” Stella recounts Blanche inviting her up on the parade float with her to cheer her up. There Stella stood with, as she describes “the great white virgin, with her round bare shoulders and her rhinestone tiara.” Both recount this moment with an air of joy and nostalgia, but it is clear that in this moment, Blanche possessed a sense of feminine power over her sister, in which she, the cheerleader, could pull her crying sister, the mascot with the broken corsage, up to the parade float. It is not completely clear whether Stella tells this story merely to recount the joyful memory or to make Blanche feel better in some way. As the younger sister hugs Blanche and describes her idealistically, Blanche chimes in to add details about how beautiful she herself looked that day and how sad Stella looked. As the conversation builds up in energy, Blanche flings off her robe to reveal a cheerleading outfit, and the two do a tap dancing number in full cheerleading attire, with pom-poms.

The song that follows features the refrain “under the covers,” alluding to both sisters under the covers “exploring each other” and “staying cozy and warm.” Clearly, the scene is subversive as it concerns incest between two sisters, but is framed as humorous and enjoyed by both. Another layer to the comedic or surprising effect of the song is in fact the context of cheerleading, which places the sisters in a sexual “lesbian cheerleaders” trope. There is a mix here of the “classic”—the old uniforms, the neat hair, the reminiscing—mixing with the subversive and the deviant. The sisters, in an almost old-Hollywood style (which gestures back to the old Hollywood iconography of the film) perform an idealized picture of the past, while
gesturing to its more subversive edge. Much in the manner of *Belle Reprieve* itself, the hyperfemininity and overperformance of the high-school cheerleader trope yields and signals a disruption of that very trope, pointing out a latent reality beneath the surface. The concepts of surrogation and disidentification become helpful here as the sisters perform something in order to draw attention to what is missing in their performance: a straight or non-“deviant” sexuality. The past, most importantly, is performed to demonstrate what we might remember but refuse to say or sing out loud. The sisters poke fun at nostalgia for high school and football games by overperforming the trope and introducing a “hidden side” to the story. Furthermore, the combination of the tap dancing with the hairstyles and the cheerful singing creates a new ideal for the past, one the sisters still enjoy.

In its twist of contradiction, disrupting by overperforming, subverting the past by celebrating it, the scene bears a complex relationship to race. Here, femininity is linked inextricably to whiteness, from Stella’s description of Blanche as a “white virgin” to even, in a broader sense, the use of a predominantly white-American high school trope. In many of the same ways that femininity is disrupted through its overperformance, whiteness and white culture are satirized through dramatic over-celebration or nostalgia. The whole story, the corsage and the float, the relative mediocrity of the cultural moment is highlighted through its overly nostalgic rendering.

This scene of humor in and through the overperformance of white womanhood both enacts and self-consciously satirizes a sort of white femininity *Streetcar* also both romanticizes and condemns. bell hooks problematizes the ways in which Jennie Livingston’s *Paris is Burning* fails to challenge whiteness within the ballroom scene, which pointedly subverts and pokes fun at aesthetics of white femininity. hooks warns against mistaking this with, as Livingston conveys
it, a worshipping of “that brutal imperial ruling-class capitalist patriarchal whiteness that presents itself—its way of life—as the only meaningful life there is. What could be more reassuring to a white public fearful that […] exploited black folks are all too willing to be complicit in perpetuating the fantasy that ruling-class white culture is the quintessential site of unrestricted joy, freedom, power, and pleasure?” This critique articulates the stakes in distinguishing Blanche’s act of longing, her relationship to her “beautiful dream” and that dream itself. Blanche’s dream of Belle Reve, a Southern estate that gestures towards the space of the plantation, is seeped in violent histories of white supremacy. Blanche’s reverence towards that past, satirized in this cheerleader scene, reflect a type of woman she “should” be, but cannot be. Thus, it is the disconnect between Blanche and this “beautiful dream” that matters, not the beautiful dream itself.

This is, in many ways, the genius of Belle Reprieve’s cheerleader scene. It pointedly overperforms, makes fun of, puts on the past in drag. Blanche and Stella’s reverence for a white, virginal, “all-American” past is queered and subverted, reframed as a queer, incestuous encounter between cheerleaders. Elizabeth Freeman coins the term “temporal drag,” in which she explicitly plays on the word “drag”—drag signifying gender performance, but also dignifying, as she puts it, delay, backwardness, and resistance. Freeman writes, “This kind of drag, an underdiscussed corollary to the queenier kind celebrated in an early 1990s queer studies influenced by deconstruction, suggests a bind for lesbians committed to feminism: a gravitational pull that ‘lesbian’ and even more so ‘lesbian feminist,’ sometimes seem to exert on ‘queer.’” Belle Reprieve’s cheerleader scene, and perhaps the show as a whole perform a form of temporal drag by gesturing towards and celebrating a queer past while also dwelling in it, refusing to
leave. *Belle Reprieve* agrees to dwell in and subvert a fantastical past in a world that, as Freeman demonstrates in *Time Binds*, never stops pushing us forward.

**Conclusion**

I do not wish to argue for the romanticization of the past, nor the denial of it, but I believe that we might have more power in engaging with it than we might think, more capacity to not just reclaim what we have lost, but actually imagine new possibilities from that space of loss. Thus, as I have argued, the performers of *Belle Reprieve* are not telling a lie about the past, but rather taking hold of lost possibilities and returning them home. I have my own senses of loss around *Belle Reprieve*, such as its all-white cast engaging in a play so much about race in this country, and its relative radio silence around Blanche’s whiteness, but perhaps this essay itself has traveled back in time to provide it with new possibilities. These voices, of Blanche DuBois, *Belle Reprieve*, of *The Vital Lie*, of Tennessee Williams, of Kazan’s *Streetcar*, of the Tennessee Lofts, of my professor, of Bette Bourne, and my dad on the playground, and perhaps even now this essay, can still speak to each other, befriend each other, and heal each other.

Something was unlocked for me from my past when I found *Streetcar*. There was some resonance, some old memory, something in me that knew that my grandfather had written about it, that Tennessee had grown up right next to my childhood home, that my professor had studied *Belle Reprieve*, that Tennessee had been disparagingly called “Blanche” during the formation of the *Streetcar* film, and that knew I had to write this. Whether my dad could attest to this, or whether it was a “beautiful dream,” I somehow remember that day in the park like it was yesterday. For her instability, her craziness, her racism, love of literature and false pasts, hatred of being in the light, in many ways, I’ve disidentified with Blanche my whole life, rejecting her while understanding her, hating her while being her.
I believe that when we dare to touch the past, we can forgive something inside us. In so many ways, the world of Streetcar, as well as the world in which we live have both stolen my heart and let me down. As I’ve gotten to know Blanche and even Tennessee over the course of my life, I’ve come to suspect the same is true for them. Tennessee wrote once, “But how can you expect audiences to be impressed by plays and other writings that are created as a release for the tensions of a possible or incipient madman? It releases their own.”36 I have come to forgive Blanche, and perhaps myself since writing this essay.

When I visited Tennessee Williams’s grave at Cavalry Cemetery in St. Louis, the sun was setting on a gloomy afternoon. The cemetery does not explicitly point one to Williams’s grave, rather, one must find section 15a by driving around long enough to end up there. The grave caught me by surprise, not bigger than any other, but close by the road and with large print. Only a few flowers lay at the foot of his grave. Inscribed on the grave are the words: Tennessee Williams, 1911-1983, Poet, Playwright, “The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks” - Camino Real. I realized embarrassingly that I had no flowers to give Tennessee, and no pencil to write a note. So on that winter day I took off my earrings and tore out a page of my notebook which had a list of my favorite works I’d scribbled down for an interview, one of which, of course, was Streetcar. I lay the earrings and the list at his grave and drove away.

Notes

1 A Streetcar Named Desire, directed by Elia Kazan (1951; Los Angeles, CA: Warner Bros.) DVD.
2 Jaclyn Pryor (Haverford professor) in phone conversation, July 2017.
4 Bette Bourne et al., Belle Reprieve, NYU Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics (1991), hidvl.nyu.edu/video/000515808.html.
7 Jose Muñoz, Disidentifications (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
9 Ibid, 86.
12 Williams, 66.
13 Ibid, 51.

In citing and analyzing my grandfather’s work here, I aim to practice my theoretical concerns methodologically, by disrupting “straight” or “linear” models of citation and creative genealogy. Though I did not literally discover that my grandfather had written about Streetcar until I began this project, I know and feel that my grandfather and his work left an incalculable imprint on me before I even knew what Streetcar was. As he and I continue to discuss his work and my opinions as I write this, I attempt to, in the spirit of Belle Reprieve crack the constructed wall between the past and present, engaging with his work as his work might also engage with mine.

16 Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 2006)
18 Ibid, 388.
20 Ibid, 16.
21 Ibid, 8.
22 Case, 8.
25 Ibid.
28 Ibid, 6.
29 Jaclyn Pryor, Time Slips (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017). Here and throughout the essay as I explore the ways in which Belle Reprieve leaves imprints on its past, particularly in my own viewing experience, I am indebted to the ideas of Jaclyn Pryor and our work together on their book, Time Slips. They introduced to me the possibility that a performance could actually reach back into the past and change it. This possibility has allowed me to understand the ways in which my experiences of Streetcar across time can be connected, and begin to untangle the mystery of these stories. I carry the memories of our conversations as I write this piece.
31 Ibid, 232.
32 Ibid, 234.
33 Ibid.
35 Freeman, 62.