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Queer Librettist; Or, Notes on the Composition of “Fox: An Opera Comique”

Benjamin Arnberg

Abstract

My article is a writing process narrative for social justice scholars. Arguments seem apropos, considering the academic genre in which I write. For clarity's sake, I shall list these arguments, then spend the article demonstrating (through practice) how my arguments hold. (1) There is no universally accessible and effective process for writing to/for contemporary academics, so (2) If anyone gives you tips, read said tips with skepticism and open-mindedness, because (3) Academe needs to reduce the amount of stylistic and onto-epistemological similarity, which yields banal and esoteric (white-hetero-patriarchal) products, that (4) No damn body wants to read, for (5) How useful is our work if no damn body wants to read it, learn from it, and apply it in “everyday” life?

Introduction

Arguments seem apropos, considering the academic genre in which I write. For clarity's sake, I shall list these arguments, then spend the subsequent space demonstrating (through practice) how my arguments hold. (1) There is no universally accessible and effective process for writing to/for contemporary academics, so (2) If anyone gives you tips, read said tips with skepticism and open-mindedness, because (3) Academe needs to reduce the amount of stylistic and onto-epistemological similarity, which yields banal and esoteric (white-hetero-patriarchal¹) products, that (4) No damn body wants to read, for (5) How useful is our work if no damn body wants to read it, learn from it, and apply it in “everyday” life?

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I am not here to give tips, so you need not immediately read this document with skepticism, which I know is what I told you to do in Argument #2. Instead, this document is a narrative of how I wrote the opening chapter of my dissertation (now monograph) despite having no models, no timeline, and (almost) no encouragement from my peer group at-large. You can decide whether the product was a success; your opinion on its efficacy is really not my concern. Rather, I hope you read this and discover that meandering, discombobulated, ass-dragging, emotionally-energating, stumbling across a due date with god knows what in your document is part of getting shit done. Anyone who tells you drafting can be simple if you follow a model or a streamlined process* is lying or privileged or both (*My statistics professor insisted all writing take the exact same form for each study: “To what extent is there a statistically significant difference...etc.”).

I spent two years writing my dissertation (now monograph): *Pink Lemonade: An Autoethnographic Fantasia on Queer Campus Themes* (the monograph had a title change of *Queer Campus Climate: An Ethnographic Fantasia* as insisted upon by Routledge). Two years is misleading. I started interviewing gay men at my institution two years prior to completing the first draft. I started making observations and notes thirteen years ago. My B.A. and M.A. are in English Literature; I aspired to some literary career, hence I kept copious observation notes and character sketches of friends/acquaintances for future inspiration for my fiction opus. (Hint: Never came). Even after the dissertation and monograph left for review, I conducted further interviews while my IRB was fresh. The subsequent interviews* yielded my first victim of ex-gay therapy, my first sero-positive participant, and my first fraternity president. (*Check out the sequel to *Pink Lemonade/Queer Campus Climate* within my lifetime; it’ll be a macabre, irreverent pipeline of laughs and tears, complete with a “Scholar Strikes Back” agenda aimed at all my critics and skeptics, one of whom suggested rejecting publication because I did not cite a publication that never existed in the first place.² A preview: Lucas, recently sero-positive, described it being easy to remain sober in college, “Booze costs; the dick is free.” Thus, there is much for me to curate regarding the experiences of out gay and queer* men on my Bible-belt campus. (*I use the term queer as shorthand for gender and sexual non-hetero-conforming students, or any intersection of gender and sexual non-conformity. I acknowledge that, semantically, queer’s opposite is “normal,” and that usage may connote a problematic binary. I do not intend “queer” to connote such a binary. I use it primarily as shorthand and as a reclamation. When a participant refers to themselves through specific terminology, i.e. “gay,” I honor their usage. While we’re on the subject of semantics, queer writers who read this, I recently received a scathing review of my work wherein the reviewer criticized my use of queer claiming that an “ongoing argument” exists in the field about its acceptability and that I should cite a source supporting my usage. First, a queer person should not have to cite a source supporting their own usage of “queer” (I am queer, and I use the term because I use the term). Second,

if there is an “ongoing argument,” then a single source is not enough to solve the argument anyway. Use the terms your participants use for themselves. Move on.³).

I began reporting my curated data through conventional means (validating data and presenting “sterile” and “reliable” results in findings and discussion sections, bookended by a literature review and a conclusion). When I provided drafts to the men I interviewed (member-checking to serve the “Eight Big-Tent Criteria”⁴ I felt beholden to kowtow before), these men were disappointed. The resulting drafts did not fully immerse a reader into a multi-sensory experience of their lives.⁵ How could I call the work a *fantasia*? Where was the *magic*? Why did it read so *hetero*? Drag queens, in particular, lamented the lack of information about the costumes they wore, the music they danced to, the wigs they teased, or, in one case, how it felt to have a wig snatched off by a ceiling fan mid-performance (it landed in a pitcher of daiquiris across the room, which rested on the table of a bewildered group of self-proclaimed “diesel dykes.”). I revisited the data, by which I mean I looked at transcripts, photos, videos, and notes. A few weeks following, I came across MacLure’s⁶ post-qualitative treatise on the importance of “sense” and “glow” and the “frisson” that comes when the research context generates a bodily reaction, not just an intellectual one. Soon after, I came across Daza and Gershon’s⁷ call to move “beyond ocular inquiry” through sonic cartography; within their call, they asked us to consider sound data rather than visual data. Finally, I revisited Jones and Adams’s⁸ foundational piece on queer autoethnography wherein the researcher captures “fragments of lived experience [that] collide and realign with one another, breaking and remaking histories” to “create good stories.”⁹ I reconsidered what constitutes “good stories” (I was expert at evaluating stories, as a B.A. and M.A. in English Literature; known to some in my circle as “professionally unemployed” but rather well-read) rather than “good research.”¹⁰ I selected autoethnography to disrupt conventional qualitative inquiry into queer lives; I selected autoethnography* to provide a liberating intellectual space in which marginalized voices could be heard without over interference from researcher (or disciplinary) interpretation. (*It may not be readily clear how autoethnography provides a “liberating intellectual space” without “over interference from researcher interpretation.” My simplest response: Autoethnography makes the researcher a participant; thus, the researcher’s life, not intellectual tradition, becomes part of the project.¹¹ The researcher is in the experience rather than interpreting the experience. Curated data are selected because they were personally resonant rather than epistemologically verifiable and reliable).

I revised my initial chapters into sonic cartographies built around musical genres that suited the context, the content, and the pattern of speaking for each participant (and bystander). The last component was built on Deavere Smith’s¹² indication that people speak in organic poems; I extended that idea to lyrics. One chapter became a transcript from a space ship built upon lyrics from David Bowie’s “Space Oddity” (documenting the experience of interviewing Hamp,

a “twink” with ADD who spent the whole interview moving around the room, drinking my latte, and hacking my phone to send his phone number to my best friend on whom he had a crush). I felt like Ground Control calling Major Hamp back down to Earth, at first; then I just let him act himself, and I recorded the result. Another chapter became an opera-comique based upon the experiences of a man named Fox who spoke in arias. Long-winded, impassioned, melodramatic. He sometimes began to sing within his speeches; he called himself a tenor, even. He was a former show choir member and university mascot. He narrated his time serving an organization whose adviser became infamous in the 90s for revoking the charter of the campus’s Gay/Straight Alliance, with the help of the state legislature (an event that was covered by *The New York Times*). He spoke of working in an office in which his boss, upon hearing Fox was gay, called him into his office to let Fox know that he and his wife would pray for Fox. He spoke of gay sex shame. He spoke of finding a community of role models in the Washington Gay Men’s Chorus. He spoke of being a sausage salesperson (literal sausage, folks; that is not a euphemism for whore). I paired his experiences with ones I shared (we worked with many of the same people and attended undergrad at the same time) and transformed our shared story (and its counter-transference, under Langer’s¹³ adapted definition) into opera-comique form, incorporating arias from Wagner, Puccini, and Purcell (oddly enough, not composers of opera-comiques) alongside songs from contemporary rock operas like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Tommy*. The resulting text did two things: it disrupted standard reporting methods (resting on curation of multiple forms of data rather than analysis/validation of “brute” data;¹⁴ it (hopefully) generated a frisson of multiple senses, since the incorporation of opera texts evoked sound. Indeed, I suggested opera recordings to play as accompaniment to reading (such as Waltraud Meier’s “Mild und leise” from Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde*, performed in Berlin, 1995). The frisson was essential for rendering the “research” resonant and immersive.

Fox

“I’m Fox, and Van says you’re thinking about taking my old job.”

I confirmed, and Fox swept me away to the Starbucks, one floor up, to offer me career advice. Ostensibly. Really, it was more like a lunch break with the only other gay man on campus his age that he could find. A relationship was born of our impromptu kiki.¹⁵ Fox acquiesced to participate in my dissertation project.

Rendering Fox’s story was the most convoluted task of the whole project. First, I needed to capture Fox, the man. The man who took me to Bear Pride at Atlanta’s The Heretic (I am not a Bear, let me make that clear; if I am anything, it’s a Secretary Bird). The man who consented to be part of a promotional shoot for The Heretic, which included dancing shirtless on the stage with a Bear head on while bumping and grinding* among a group of Brazilian (*Papaizinhos?*) Bears

(*Ursos?*)¹⁶ up for Pride from Rio. (*I have pictures of this event, but have been explicitly forbidden from publishing them, research or no research). The man who offered to take me to a bathhouse only to rescind the offer en route, since he was not prepared for me to see him gang banged in a public swing. The man who sang while going down the corridors of campus buildings, which enabled me to register his pending appearance in my office. The man who insisted that I document the sole glory hole on campus, to immortalize it in a work of scholarship.

Second, I needed to capture the context in which Fox lived. Fox graduated undergrad from our institution in 2006 (for reference, I attended from 2005-2009). He was in a prominent fraternity, he was a university ambassador, he was a mascot, he schtupped his fraternity's president in the house* (*A dry house, at least when it came to liquor). He interacted with ever major administrator, donor, alum, and campus guest for over a decade. Thus, he, more than any other man I interviewed, represented a generational window into the campus climate for gay/queer men at our institution. I decided to eject the dissertation format* common among my peers (*Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Findings, Discussion); that was too passé and confining for a queer project, especially for a swing-schtupped, sausage-selling Bear.¹⁷ As a result, Fox's chapter would serve multiple purposes. The chapter would provide: (1) Narrative of Fox's personal experiences based on his interview(s), (2) Historical overview of the campus climate for gay/queer men in our context since 2002 (his freshman year), (3) Auxiliary autoethnographic narratives of my own, which complemented and/or expanded Fox's accounts, and (4) Methodological explanations for Fox's chapter and the dissertation as a whole. All this in addition to being a "hook" through which to enthrall readers and compel them further into the depths of my study.¹⁸ I had no model to follow. Even the autoethnographies and queer narratives available to me (i.e. Adams¹⁹ whose work I admired, although it followed a more straightforward mode of inquiry and dissemination; although I had some inspiration from Callier²⁰ and Edmonds²¹ for article-length post-qualitative riffs on queer experience).

These purposes were to be supported by approximately twenty pages of single-spaced interview transcripts, a one-hundred(+) page reflection and audit journal, dozens of pages of observation notes, photographs (including six photographs of a glory hole), scads of institutional documents, news articles covering on-campus events, and my own thirteen-year corresponding narrative.

Suggested chapter length? Thirty pages.

Yeah, sure.

I began drafting while at the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators Summer Symposium in Orlando, summer 2017. I identified the pieces of data that were essential. I placed them in a Word document. The document was 200 pages. I went to Epcot, drank around the world, got overwhelmed, gave up.

I resumed drafting during the summer of 2018. I was in the midst of reading Richardson's *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*²² and Saunders's *Lin-*

coln in the Bardo.²³ I immersed myself in alternative ways to: (1) Write research, and (2) Write ensemble narratives. As an aspiring methodologist, I delved deep into an idea I had, based on a new materialist paradigm, of curation-as-analysis.²⁴ EXPAND HERE.²⁵ My initial approach to curating Fox's chapter resembled an epistolary novel, such as *Dracula*,²⁶ wherein the narrative is told through carefully ordered placement of documents. The cumulative impact is a sense of authenticity at having reviewed a case file documenting a specific real, sensational tale that could only be felt authentic if readers read the *original*, unfiltered documents. One problem arose instantly: including *original* documents meant revealing identities. Even redacting names from documents could not prevent readers from Googling excerpts and locating online versions, thus putting pieces together and identifying the gay/queer men and their networks. A second problem arose soon after: including *original* documents as a means to generate *authenticity* was at odds with a queer theoretical commitment to disrupt conventional onto-epistemological conceptions of truth and reality. Gay/queer men spent such extended periods of time being the victims of varying "truths," I was reluctant to generate a text that contributed to that victimizing impulse by using individual participants to articulate monolithic conclusions.²⁷

Aside from these ethical and paradigmatic concerns, the text was dull (non-immersive, non-accessible). The text's arc was tenuously constructed. The text did not do any of the things I advocated research should do: be non-ocular, engage multiple temporalities, register viscerally. Here's what I mean (excerpted from a summer 2018 draft):

July 26, 2005. Office of the President. The university convened its inaugural Strategic Diversity Plan Committee and reported its findings and suggestions. The membership included some student representatives; two were white, straight, Christian men who presided over the most racially and socioeconomically exclusive organizations on campus at the time.

2015. Strategic Diversity Plan Revisions Committee. The university convened its second Strategic Diversity Plan Committee to revise the plan and report on progress. The new membership included Circe, who would go on to fire a black man and a gay man in the same year that she promoted two straight, white, Christian men who met their girlfriend and wife (respectively) while serving as the women's direct supervisors. Circe²⁸ also disciplined an organization adviser for attempting to introduce a diversity component to the training curriculum. Circe's stated mentor is Helios,²⁹ who was responsible for revoking the Gay/Straight Alliance Charter.

June 12, 2016. Orlando, FL. Pulse Nightclub was the scene of a mass shooting, which killed nearly fifty gay men.

June 13, 2016. The university president issued a two-sentence statement expressing remorse for the Pulse shooting. He did not reference the gay community. The

statement was removed shortly thereafter and replaced by one from the Provost. Circe's department made no statement at all, despite being a student life department. Circe did not attend the subsequent vigil. Notably, Circe made time to attend the speech given by Milo Yiannopoulos,³⁰ who visited the campus as part of his "Dangerous Faggots" tour. Circe told her graduate assistants, "He made some good points."

August 2016. Circe's Corner Office in the Student Union. Benjamin reports a philandering adviser³¹ who has also made racist comments to (and about) a student. Circe discredited Benjamin as exhibiting the "melodrama" common of his "kind" and for exaggerating circumstances. According to Circe, said adviser had a strong track record of inclusion. This track record included sexual discrimination, an affair with an undergraduate student, blocking the nomination of a Trans* student to the Senate, removing two African American students from executive office for GPA violations (without removing White students guilty of the same offense), outing a gay officer through the campus newspaper as a publicity stunt, leading an organization-wide discussion asking the question "Why isn't there a White Student Union?", and lecturing Benjamin that academic diversity was more important than demographic diversity.

April 2017. Circe's corner office. Circe removes Benjamin from his job for "budgetary reasons" despite Benjamin raising more money than any other staff member in his department.

If this looks like an ornate grocery list to you, well spotted. Though this report provides some impression of the campus climate, it comes across as personally vindictive and mean-spirited.³² Not to mention lifeless. In addition: Where is Fox? Fox did not appear until page sixteen of thirty-three. What leading man makes his appearance halfway through the text? When Fox does appear, he does so in a rather lackluster fashion. I asked him to identify five words to describe himself. He answers:

Witty. Anxious. Friendly. Loving. And deceptively sad. I accomplished all these things that were really exciting and represented ambition, but all the while...I was turning away from some really important growing opportunities. I feared who I always wanted to be. That euphoria could not be sustained. I think that I worked so hard to keep that going for so long that by the time that it stopped, I was just tired. The recession prevented me from being able to find jobs that would give me the prestige and fuel that unhealthy place of self-worth. Choosing to live in a liberal city, in Nashville, allowed me to be a little more anonymous. I found myself in my first relationship ever. After nine months, when that relationship failed, that exposed wounds. I think we allow ourselves to use accomplishments to plug holes in ourselves. We use people, especially romantic relationships, to love parts of us that we don't truly love ourselves. Not having the jobs, being in my first relationship, and it ending, revealed to me that I was a pretty unhealthy person, and I've never been able to fully pull myself out of that depressing discovery and space. I look back on my life with a mixed bag of

emotions. It's pride and happiness but also a lot of sadness because I feel like I was tricked. A lot of tricking myself.

Curating this speech first introduced readers to a common trope in social-science research: the tragic queer. One who is depressed, suicidal, regretful, engaged in risky behavior.³³ Though Fox could express feelings of depression and regret, those feelings were not central to his being. One could not get a grasp of Fox's *joie de vivre*, his wit, or his sing-song way of speaking. In addition, one could not get a sense that the dissertation as a whole would counter tragic-queer narratives in order to provide a positive account of queer life.

In the midst of Fox's transcripts and my month-by-month reporting of anti-queer activity, I attempted to show how queer men became associated with melodrama through a series of curated cultural artifacts in which, well, prominent queer men were melodramatic. Interspersed in all of these data bits were chunks of paradigmatic concepts articulated by scholars of queer theory and methodological theory, namely Laurel Richardson and David Halperin. I closed with a series of news reports about LGBT centers being shut down or vandalized. For example:

May 20, 2016. *Knox News*: "The University of Tennessee has disbanded its Office of Diversity, including eliminating four staff positions and a \$131,356 operating budget. Meanwhile, Donna Braquet, director of the UT Pride Center, will resume her full-time position as an associate professor in the University Libraries. On Friday, she wrote on the center's Facebook page that she would no longer head up the Pride Center. 'We provided a brave space for students who are the most marginalized on campus to be their true authentic selves with our space, our programs, our resources, and our events.'"

Why bother with my dissertation at all? Why not just read the original documents for yourself?

I presented the work to my dissertation co-chair. She liked individual data points, although she did not care for a scene in which Fox's cock ring fell out in Starbucks* (*That scene will be in the sequel).³⁴ She suggested looking back into Richardson as well as at a piece we read titled "Befriending Snow."³⁵ I also expanded my reading (including begrudgingly listening to reviewer suggestions, such as reading Kohn's work on screenplays). In December 2018, I traveled to Sydney, Australia to present my work-in-progress at the Australian Association for Research in Education. While there, I met a man from India who took me for drinks at a private club, followed by shots at Arq, and...Hold up, not the point* (*The point will be in the sequel). Midway through my trip, I saw Vivica Genaux in *Artaserse* at City Recital Hall. Midway through the performance, I realized: Fox spoke in arias. He was melodramatic. He knew how to walk in Louboutins (like Genaux). He was gay. He *was* opera.

I selected an opera-comique³⁶ format, since I am not a composer and did not want to expend too much effort making Fox's transcripts map onto existing

musical compositions. Data would accompany musical scores and musical scores would complement the emotional tenor³⁷ of the data. The range of emotions would include deep sadness all the way to irreverent silliness (hence, the inclusion of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Tommy*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*). An opera-comique would also enable me to summon varied data sources (memories, senses, sounds, clothes, music); one instance included translating my memories into a ghost named Longitude (so named because Longitude gave a longitudinal account of my experiences and attitudinal changes). In addition, any scholarship that was *necessary* would be included as if the scholar was a character in the text. Formal documents took the form of newsboys (like *Newsies*) standing on street corners, announcing their headlines to the public.

Fox liked the idea. He confirmed his vocal range was tenor and offered to perform excerpts on the promotional tour* (*Academic books do not generally receive promotional tours). I gave him an alto and a soprano aria, to reduce the likelihood of his publicly performing the opera-comique.

In the opera, we are introduced to Fox in the Dramatis Personae as “A member of the administration; self-described cub; tenor.” I am introduced in the Dramatis Personae as “A student and teacher; alto (or a soprano, if he’s had some vodka and a few ibuprofen to relax his vocal chords.” The third primary character is Longitude, introduced in the Dramatis Personae as “A spirit of Alistair Hall; sometimes tenor, sometimes alto, sometimes soprano, sometimes mute; he is the ghost of Benjamin’s straight identity who still sometimes haunts Benjamin to remind him of his previous worldview.”

The scene:

SCENE:

(Persimmon University.⁶²³⁸ A semi-rural campus in the American South. Oft referred to as a Bible-belt campus; rated conservative, politically. The campus rests on a plain, shaded by a canopy of oaks, crepe myrtles, and magnolias; designated a “Tree Campus” by the Arbor Day Foundation. Buildings are predominantly Georgian, made of red brick with white detailing; a few buildings are antebellum. The campus is a “pedestrian” campus, on which there are no roads for vehicles. Students dress in athletic casual, mostly; however, Wednesdays are known as collar and dress days, since Greek life organizations meet in the evenings and expect members to wear “preppy” attire.

Benjamin’s office is in the tallest building on campus, and in the county: Alistair Hall; it is a ten-story brutally minimal structure that is allegedly causing ocular cancer due to its hazardous material construction. His office contains one iMac computer and a series of small stacks of books spread across a gray desk. It is the room in which Benjamin first meets Fox.)

FOX: There’s a glory hole on campus.

BENJAMIN: New?

FOX: I guess?

BENJAMIN: Found it mincing about, did you?\

FOX: Heard about it on Grindr. Want to go see if we can find it?\

BENJAMIN: Don't you have work?

FOX: I'm taking a minute. Came out to my boss. He said he and his wife would pray for me.

BENJAMIN: It'll take the prayers of millions.

FOX: This is sort of work; the glory hole needs to be documented for your dissertation.

BENJAMIN: I could hear you before I could see you, by the way. Your tenor floated down the hallway. I tried to hide.

FOX: (*pointing at Benjamin's shoes*) Look at you, honey. She splurged. She's high trash, today.

BENJAMIN: Thanks. Gucci. Alessandro's first collection. And what is that on your tee?

FOX: Two bears humping.

BENJAMIN: You wear that to work?

FOX: I told you: I'm taking the afternoon off.

BENJAMIN: Where is this glory hole?

FOX: Grove Hall.

BENJAMIN: Let's move.

LONGITUDE: (*mimicking the one drag queen she ever saw as Benjamin and Fox exit an exterior doorway onto the campus green*) Enema? Party of two. Enema? Party of two.

BENJAMIN: (*to Longitude*) Pardon?

LONGITUDE: Once heard a drag queen restaurant hostess yell Enema, party of two, to a crowd before correcting herself. Emily, party of two. With you two heading to a glory hole, it's for sure Enema, party of two.

SCENE:

(*A gritty, emerald-green mosaic tiled men's bathroom. Large: four urinals in a row precede a string of four stalls. Across the walkway is a series of sinks and a large mirror. The bathroom's tiles echo sounds of leaks and drips in perpetuity, despite Grove Hall being the home of many engineering courses*)

BENJAMIN: Which stall?

FOX: Third. Take a look at the poetry etched above it.

BENJAMIN: (*reading from within*) I got a blumpkin right where you're sitting.

FOX: She took elocution lessons.

BENJAMIN: Well, I do try to read poetry clearly and elegantly. (*photographing the hole*) Of course a glory hole survives in Grove Hall; the building is slated for demolition.

FOX: (*sitting on a sink*) Well, shit. Then Persimmon will destroy its only resource for gay students!

BENJAMIN: I'm kind of surprised it's here. Were it not for impending doom, the glory hole would probably go the way of the sodomy drawings, racist commentary, and pro-Trump Nazi propaganda that usually gets plastered and painted over.

FOX: Watch out for that black mold growing behind the toilet.

BENJAMIN: I can't believe I'm wearing Gucci where someone got a blumpkin.

FOX: It's kind of fitting it's in Grove Hall. It was built in the seventies...

BENJAMIN: (*interrupting*) Your era?

FOX: Yeah, right after your swinging sixties. Anyway, this building was built during the gay liberation. Just prior to the trauma and re-closeting of the AIDS epidemic of the eighties.

BENJAMIN: Have you used it?

FOX: No. But not because I'm shy. I'm into well-endowed daddies. Not college twinks.

BENJAMIN: A man of taste.

FOX: Anyway, I'm not trying to violate human resources policy by sleeping with students. Lance was fired for his tryst with an intern. Fired the same day he was outed.

BENJAMIN: Meanwhile, Acontius lives large. (*exiting the stall*) Is this a meeting spot? Had anyone invited you here as a rendezvous point? Is that how you heard?

FOX: I haven't been here for a clandestine sword-sheathing. Maybe you should linger here a few hours a day over the coming week to determine just how widely known the hole is.

BENJAMIN: I'm not doing a mixed methods study.

FOX: Come again?

BENJAMIN: You're suggesting I count the number of times used. That's quantitative. I'm strictly qualitative. Although, at this point, an opera-comique with a scene in a glory-holed bathroom stall, I'm not so sure I still can call myself a researcher...

FOX: This is research. You're examining the one safe zone that we have on this campus.

BENJAMIN: My foot is stuck to the floor.

This scene enabled me to provide a capsule of the campus climate (one in which the only queer resource was a non-plastered glory hole in a dilapidated, soon-to-be-demolished building). Fox also comes across as a multi-dimensional person rather than a stereotypical tragic-queer. The scene itself is somewhat tragic, when accounting for the undertone: Fox's boss said he'd pray for him for being gay; Fox and Benjamin live on a campus with no dedicated resources for queer faculty, staff and students; A queer staff member was fired for flirting with a student, while straight men were promoted; The only available option for social and/or sexual networking is an app, and even then, the context dictates extreme discretion among the people using the app. Yet, the scene is comic and high-spirited. The two men are self-aware, witty, and able to rise above an otherwise bleak situation; most important, they are able to bond over a common experience of otherness.

I wanted to build on Fox's verve to demonstrate how queer individuals can overcome tragic and oppressive circumstances. I also wanted to have his experiences counterbalance my own. Fox was a sexual extrovert, while I was a sexual introvert. How can the same context produce two opposing results? An analysis of this question risked taking on a clinical tone; moreover, there is no "valid" way to conclusively answer the question. I found it better instead to depict the two of us operating sex lives in tandem.

SCENE:

(Benjamin sits on the patio of a local deli, well bar, situated in a shack-like building just across from campus. The patio contains dozens of iron outdoor furniture, a few television sets play ESPN. Multi-colored lights hover above the setting)

LONGITUDE: Fox likes to talk sex, doesn't he?

BENJAMIN: I think he views himself as my sex mentor.

LONGITUDE: You need one.

BENJAMIN: I'm celibate by everyone else's choice. Not my own.

LONGITUDE: When you had insomnia and visited the doctor, he told you, quote: The bed is for sleeping and sex. And how did you respond?

BENJAMIN: Could you prescribe the sex so I can go to Walgreen's and get some?

LONGITUDE: Pathetic. I've had more sex than you.

BENJAMIN: With women.

LONGITUDE: Nevertheless.

BENJAMIN: I'm a lady. I don't care for people touching my handbag, much less my body.

FOX: (*approaching from behind, his favorite direction, and sitting; pouring Benjamin a cup of beer from his pitcher*) It's internalized homophobia, I think. Drilled into you through years of hell fire dogma that painted sodomy as the reason the world ended.

BENJAMIN: I mean, sodomy is just unappealing anyway.

FOX: I don't get you guys who get prissy about anal. Like, given the circumstance, not to mention the sexual preference, sometimes there's going to be a little shit.

BENJAMIN: I suppose we could say the same about life.

DAVID³⁹: (*from behind a nearby azalea; almost a serenade*) Sodomy, that utterly confused category, was applied historically to masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, and same-sex sexual relations, among other things. I use the term active sodomy specifically to denominate a certain model or structure of male homosexual relations for which there is no single proper name.

FOX: When was the last time for you?

BENJAMIN: The last time? Well, this one guy on Grindr asked me a few weeks ago what kind of freaky shit I'm into. I responded, quote: I have an abandonment complex fueled by masochism and low sense of self-worth, so if you could leave your Rolex and wallet on the coffee table and leave me here by myself, that would really turn me on.

FOX: What?

BENJAMIN: One guy was trying to explain how to get to his house over the phone. He asked, "Masc?" I thought he meant masking tape. I looked in my drawer. Found none. Replied: No, but I could stop by the Home Depot on the way over and pick some up.

FOX: Why don't you come with me to Atlanta tomorrow? I have to give a fundraiser. After, I'll take you to Swinging Richard's.

BENJAMIN: What in God's name?

FOX: What's short for Richard?

BENJAMIN: Rich.

FOX: Get your mind off Givenchy for a minute, sister. Richard. Dick. Swinging Richard's...

BENJAMIN: Swinging Dicks? Sounds classy.

FOX: All nude. All male. We'll go to Blake's, then Swinging Richard's, then Fort Troff...

BENJAMIN: I don't go anywhere with a trough...

FOX: Troff. T. R. O. F. F. It's like a bath, kind of.

BENJAMIN: Absolutely not.

FOX: On second thought, I'm not prepared for you to see me in that environment...

BENJAMIN: I don't even walk around my bedroom nude.

FOX: The Heretic, then. It's got a leather shop and blacked-out sex room.

BENJAMIN: Someone might try to steal my jewelry.

FOX: Those people don't know the difference between Claire's and Tiffany.

BENJAMIN: How dare you? This is Cartier.

FOX: Not the point.

SCENE:

(Benjamin sits outside Joe's on Juniper in midtown Atlanta watching Kamala Harris give her first nationally televised interview since becoming a Senator. Benjamin's table is dotted by the five or six Sophia Petrillo cocktails he's drunk. Fox enters and sits beside him, orders a Red Bull and Vodka)

FOX: Why are you in a nude tank? Are you dancing in a ballet later?

BENJAMIN: I spilled a latte on my Rag & Bone henley. This was underneath. New topic. How is your relationship with Todd?

FOX: Complicated.

BENJAMIN: Why?

FOX: My prolonged period of closetedness and coming out in my mid-twenties, it, well, caused a type of a relationship disorder. I mean, I didn't have my first full sexual encounter with a man until my mid-twenties. Hadn't had a real relationship until then either. I spent so much time denying sexual impulses that when I came out, I started having sex so frequently and with so many different partners that I started to strip away emotional reactions to sex partners.

MARY MAGDALENE: *(singing from a karaoke machine on the patio of Joe's)*
I don't know how to love him
What to do, how to move him
I've been changed, yes really changed
In these past few days, when I've seen myself
I seem like someone else

FOX: *(joining)*
I don't know how to take this

BENJAMIN: Don't you take poppers?

FOX:
*I don't see why he moves me
He's a man. He's just a man
And I've had so many men before
In very many ways*

BENJAMIN: You're just a whore.

MARY MAGDALENE:
*Should I bring him down?
Should I scream and shout?
Should I speak of love?
Let my feelings out?*

FOX:
*I never thought I'd come to this
What's it all about?
Yet, if he said he loved me
I'd be lost
I'd be frightened
I couldn't cope, just couldn't cope*

MARY MAGDALENE:
*I'd turn my head
I'd back away
I wouldn't want to know*

FOX:
*He scares me so
I want him so
I love him so*

FOX: *(to Benjamin)* Do you have that problem?

BENJAMIN: Yes. My emotional reaction is: Get away from me and don't touch my jewelry.

FOX: I find it difficult to sustain long-term relationships with men with whom I slept. I'm accustomed to using men as sexual partners only. Not as potential life partners.

MADAME ARMFELDT: *(singing from her Mercedes, which is stopped at a traffic light on Juniper Street)*
*Too many people muddle sex with mere desire
And when emotion intervenes, the nets descend
It should on no account perplex, or worse, inspire
It's but a pleasurable means to a measurable end
Why does no one comprehend?*

FOX: I identify as gay. But I can envision myself marrying a woman.

BENJAMIN: Because female companionship seems more plausible than male companionship?

FOX: I could be married to a woman, start a family with a woman, and use men only to extinguish same-sex urges.

SCENE:

(Benjamin reapplies his YSL Shade 10 lipstick in the mirror of Swinging Richard's bathroom. The walls are a gold color with a faux marble finish. The fixtures are brass. The light overhead, combined with Benjamin's nude tank, makes Benjamin appear as much an apparition as Longitude)

BENJAMIN: *(reflecting on Fox's earlier comments)* Isn't that a more evolved form of being closeted?

LONGITUDE: Maybe? Does it matter? You're no further along.

BENJAMIN: I am at the opposite end of the same spectrum.

LONGITUDE: Are you though? You don't sustain relationships with men.

BENJAMIN: I do not try to establish them either.

LONGITUDE: Proving my point.

BENJAMIN: My mind is poisoned against men.

LONGITUDE: I was indoctrinated to believe gay men were promiscuous, diseased, sexual deviants.

BENJAMIN: I internalized that homophobia. Believed that any partner would be interested in me only as a sex object.

LONGITUDE: I never sought companionship among gay men; I assumed such a thing was impossible.

BENJAMIN: My only prior attempt includes a two-month period with a peer in my Master's program.

LONGITUDE: The one who's life story is now a major motion picture starring Nicole Kidman.

BENJAMIN: You were watching?

LONGITUDE: It was me.

BENJAMIN: Oh, yeah. That's right.

LONGITUDE: He was older.

BENJAMIN: But a year behind me in the degree program.

LONGITUDE: He grabbed me by the rib cage and asked . . .

BENJAMIN: Who do you think you're kidding with this straight boy act?

LONGITUDE: I eventually acquiesced to his advances.

BENJAMIN: We'd spend time making out in my living room with the door dead-bolted to prevent my roommate from a surprise entry.

LONGITUDE: Then he'd disappear for days to work on his memoir.

BENJAMIN: I still haven't read it.

LONGITUDE: Our relationship ended at an impasse. I wouldn't come out.

BENJAMIN: He wouldn't be in a closeted relationship.

LONGITUDE: We kissed goodbye in the parking lot.

BENJAMIN: Right after I touched his penis.

LONGITUDE: Way to turn this moment into something crude.

BENJAMIN: You died that night.

LONGITUDE: But you were born.

DESIREE ARMFELDT: *(singing from a bathroom stall)*

Isn't it rich?

Are we a pair?

Me here at last on the ground

You in midair

Send in the clowns

BENJAMIN: *(singing from an adjacent bathroom stall)*

Isn't it bliss?

Don't you approve?

One who keeps tearing around

LONGITUDE: *(singing from atop the paper towel dispenser)*

One who can't move

DESIREE ARMFELDT:

Send in the clowns?

There ought to be clowns

BENJAMIN:

Don't bother

They're here

BENJAMIN: While Fox feasts grandly on sexual experience, I abstain out of a desire not to be outed or cast aside.

LONGITUDE: See? You are also in an evolved closet.

BENJAMIN: I can say: I am gay. But only to one person at a time, and I can never imagine possessing a companionable partner of the same sex.

FOX: *(entering the bathroom with his hands full of cocktails, which he places on*

the counter) Enter Xanax. Enter a bottle of Ketel One. Enter Quincy.

BENJAMIN: Quincy?

FOX: The name of the BBC⁴⁰ that you just purchased a private dance from.

BENJAMIN: Jeezuss.

FOX: I think it was therapeutic for you. In a way. Quincy came on stage, singled you out, flirted. Well, by flirt, I mean he took off your Ferragamo sandal, slid it between his thong and thigh. You freaked and climbed on stage to fetch it. You crawled a few yards with your Givenchy sunglasses on. The more you crawled, the more Quincy receded into the heart of the room.

BENJAMIN: There was no room for skittishness when four-hundred dollars of Italian leather hung in the balance.

FOX: Oh, it was hung in the balance. For sure. You stood, walked, stuck your hand in his package, plucked out the shoe, and returned to your seat.

BENJAMIN: I recall you vibrating with glee. Didn't you give me a tip when I hopped off stage?

FOX: Well, it was money you gave me as my allowance. I slid it back into your nude tank and said: She works hard for her money.

(The scene shifts back in time by thirty minutes, as Fox narrates Benjamin's encounter with Quincy. Benjamin and Fox sit at a two-person cocktail table adjacent to the catwalk. A tall, muscular man does a handstand in front of Benjamin. Benjamin delicately offers a dollar. The man, Quincy, accepts, does a back handspring, walks back to Benjamin, squats and says)

QUINCY: You've got style.

BENJAMIN: I know.

FOX: *(narrating as Benjamin and Quincy reenact next to him)* You threw money at him. He followed you back to the table. He prodded. Rubbed. Poked. Pinched. He liked tugging your chest hair.

QUINCY: I'm forced to shave mine.

FOX: You were intrigued by his hustle. You bought a half hour with him in a VIP suite at the back of the bar.

(Benjamin and Quincy leave the table, walk a few yards, pass the catwalk, enter a private room complete with red leather sofa and a coffee table complete with a pole)

LONGITUDE: *(narrating the action from the VIP suite, since Fox could not see it)* You talked. You sat. You fidgeted with your jewelry. Looked any which way but straight.

FOX: Not the first time she looked anything but straight.

QUINCY: Why are you so nervous?

BENJAMIN: I need a Ketel One and Cranberry.

QUINCY: What is that? (*nodding his head toward Benjamin's hands*)

BENJAMIN: Xanax. (*taking the pill and chugging his cocktail, to wash it down*)

LONGITUDE: You took the whole glass in one gulp.

QUINCY: Give me your hands.

LONGITUDE: He pinned you to the wall. Gave compliments. Kissed. Stroked. Hugged you to him.

FOX: He said it was his last night on the pole.

BENJAMIN: Me too.

QUINCY: I start a job as a fork lift operator next week.

BENJAMIN: Good for you.

FOX: You came back without your sunglasses.

BENJAMIN: I think he dick-slapped them off.

FOX: You got carried away by Quincy.

BENJAMIN: (*returning to the table with Fox*) I think I settled into it because he was a stranger. He wasn't in my social network. There were no witnesses. It was a mutual hustle. He was into me because I paid him.

FOX: You were also the only man in there, besides me, under the age of sixty.

LONGITUDE: Hot by default.

BENJAMIN: I was into him because I knew that I could have the moment and move on. No need to worry about being cast off, unloved, deviant, unattractive, found out, unworthy of something more than...

FOX: Whack, bang, wiggle wiggle.

DAVID: (*speaking from an adjacent table to Troye Sivan, who is in town for a concert*) The male sexual penetration of a subordinate male certainly represented a perverse act, but it might not in every case signify a perversion of the sexual instinct, a mental illness affecting the whole personality: it might indicate a morally vicious character rather than a pathological condition. Implicit in this doctrine was the premise that there was not necessarily anything sexually or psychologically abnormal in itself about the male sexual penetration of a subordinate male. If the man who played an active sexual role in sexual intercourse with other males was conventionally masculine in both his appearance and his manner

of feeling and acting, if he did not seek to be penetrated by other men, and/or if he also had sexual relations with women, he might not be sick but immoral, not perverted but merely perverse. His penetration of a subordinate male, reprehensible and abominable though it might be, could be reckoned a manifestation of his excessive but otherwise normal male sexual appetite. Like the somewhat earlier, aristocratic figure of the libertine or rake or roué, such a man perversely refused to limit his sexual options to pleasures supposedly prescribed by nature and instead sought out more unusual, unlawful, sophisticated, or elaborate sexual experiences to gratify his jaded sexual tastes. In the case of such men, pederasty or sodomy was a sign of an immoral character but not of a personality disorder, moral insanity, or psychological abnormality.

Earlier, I mentioned that I wanted to demonstrate how queer men are culturally stereotyped as melodramatic. A supervisor in my department brushed aside my report that a colleague was making racially derogatory comments to and about his students; she said that I was probably exaggerating since my kind are always melodramatic. I wanted a way to depict the cultural context that justified, to people like her, believing that “my kind” were melodramatic, and thus untrustworthy.

SCENE:

(The tube. A Samsung with an AppleTV. Benjamin appears on screen. He enters a mad tea party as if he stepped through the looking glass.)

BENJAMIN: *(Eating a flapjack cupcake from Baked and Wired, a bakery in Georgetown, DC.)* I became notorious like my girl Ruth Bader Ginsburg. I’ll take it, I guess. Notorious for melodrama. Typecast in the role. But how did melodrama become our type?

LUCILLE BLUTH: *(Yelling from her yacht nearby)* Everything homosexuals do is so dramatic and flamboyant. It makes me want to set myself on fire.

LAUREL RICHARDSON: *(Sipping a tea)* The cultural story is told from the point of view of the ruling interests and the normative order and bears a narrative kinship to functionalism. Since, for example, the central character is a patriarchal system is the male, a cultural story of adultery is about the normative status of marriage and how an other woman tries to ruin a family by stealing a man from his wife. The central character in this story is the husband, and the story line blames the minor characters, the women: the wife for her deficiencies in sex, love, and understanding; the other woman for her deficient morality. This particular cultural story, in the United States, transcends race and class lines, making it seem true and giving it a hold on the imaginations of men and women. Cultural stories, thus, help maintain the status quo.

STANFORD BLATCH: *(Stopping at the other end of the table, where Carrie Bradshaw sits with Oliver Spencer)* If it isn’t Mr. and Mrs. Down Under.

CARRIE BRADSHAW: *(in an aside to the audience)* I was so preoccupied with my gay boyfriend, I kept forgetting about my gay husband. *(to Stanford and Oliver)* You remember Stanford? From brunch?

STANFORD: Apparently, it was more than just brunch. Don't fall for him; he's just another pretty face. He doesn't love you like I do. I knew this woman when she took the subway and wore Candies.

OLIVER: (*laughing*) Candies?

CARRIE: I assure you, I never wore Candies.

STANFORD: You wore pink suede Candies, and I adored you anyway. (*to Oliver*) And how dare you try to steal her away with your dreamy eyes and your probably fake accent?

ZANDRA: Oh look, the crying fag!

BENJAMIN: (*Discussing methodology with a disinterested Lily Tomlin, who's busy speaking into a microphone narrating The Celluloid Closet for the table's entertainment*) I once interviewed a drag queen. I asked what he'd have me do if I wanted to get a taste of what it was like living as a drag queen and genderfucker on our campus. He told me to wear makeup and get nails done and walk around campus for a day. I wore Steel Waters Run Deep by OPI, Clinique Matte Bisque powder, and YSL Shade 10 lipstick to Circe's office the day I reported Acontius. She stared at my nails the whole time. If my hand moved up, so too did her attention. Each time she challenged my report, she looked at my nails.

JACK MCFARLAND: (*wrapping his arms around Karen Walker*) Before language, people communicated through intricate choreography, costume changes, and lighting. Language was only invented when unattractive people were born and needed to be commented on. My grandfather was one of the first ballerinas to land on the beach at Normandy. Fact: D-Day stands for Dance Day! Now, let's start with a simple box step. It is called that because we lead with our box.

BERNADETTE: (*chastising a woman who mocked her hair*) Now listen here, you mullet. Why don't you just light your tampon and blow your box apart? Because it's the only bang you're ever gonna get, sweetheart.

ALBERT: (*standing from the table with such force that Benjamin's mimosa top-ples*) Don't give me that tone! That sarcastic contemptuous tone that means you know everything because you're a man, and I know nothing because I'm a woman.

ARMAND: (*placing a palm over his face*) You're not a woman.

ALBERT: You bastard!

BLAZING SADDLES DANCERS: (*singing behind Lily Tomlin*)

Throw out your hands

Stick out your tush

Hands on your hips

Give 'em a push

You'll be surprised

You're doing the French Mistake

(stopping due to a burst from stage left and the entry of a horde of rowdy cow-boys who begin rumbling with the dancers)

CHOREOGRAPHER: Not on the face!

COWBOY: *(punches him)*

DANCER ONE: *(squeals)* Come on, girls!

DANCER TWO: *(squealing)* You brute, you brute, you brute, you vicious brute!
(collapses)

BENJAMIN: *(facing outward as if talking to the TV viewing audience at home)*
I worked for three years in Persimmon's Department of Student Affairs. In that time, I was called: petty, catty, sassy, queen, melodramatic, storyteller, trifler, shit stirrer, sarcastic, cynical, a bad influence, alcoholic, crazy, paranoid, foul-mouthed, tactless, blunt rude, critical. Twice, I was granted interviews for promotions. In one, I was asked, quote, Will you be able to develop tact and diplomacy so you can better represent our office to external stakeholders? end quote. In another, as you know, I was asked, quote, How will you maintain professional boundaries with your students? end quote. In both interviews, I was asked, quote, How do you inspire trust in others and build relationships with people who are different from you?

FOX: *(entering Benjamin's office, finding Benjamin slumped over his computer's keyboard, dozing, while Absolutely Fabulous plays on the screen)* What are you watching over there, girl?

LONGITUDE: *(painting her nails Steel Waters Run Deep, based on a recommendation she recently heard about it)* Girl, she's over there trying to demonstrate how media portrayals of gay men caused him to be fired.

FOX: That's a stretch.

BENJAMIN: Shut the fuck up, both of you. Haven't you ever seen The Celluloid Closet.

FOX: I mean, those questions you were saying you were asked, I can add to those. And I can add feedback I received. We're looking for a service leader. Or, We're not the multicultural affairs office. Or, We're looking for someone who will fit in with our team. According to my friend in human resources, the line, We're looking for someone who will fit in with our team, is a maneuver to dance around discrimination by claiming that the gay candidate's personality does not jibe with the office.

BENJAMIN: The way they perceive of my personality is largely influenced by the gay personalities these people see in the media.

FOX: Didn't I see you take a day off work to drive to Saks in Atlanta to exchange a pair of Gucci loafers that were shipped in the wrong color?

BENJAMIN: I needed them for a wedding reception the next day, and I was going to be photographed.

LONGITUDE: Yep. It's all the media's fault

BENJAMIN: Fox, while you're here. I want you to tell me five words describing yourself. It's for my campus climate study on gay men's experiences on this campus. I'm trying to describe you in my opera on the dramatis personae page.

FOX: Opera's aren't melodramatic?

BENJAMIN: Word one: Bitch.

FOX: I'll tell you this. That's always been my hang up. Like, who am I? And who do I perceive myself to be? And what do I prefer others to see myself as? Right? Those three people have always been present and they always look and feel different. Who am I?

PAUL: *(singing)*
Who am I anyway
Am I my resume
That is a picture
Of a person I don't know
What does he want from me
What should I try to be
So many faces all around
And here we go
I need this job
Oh, God
I need this show

LONGITUDE: Does anyone else hear that singing? Or is it just me hearing shit in purgatory that you live ones can't?

BENJAMIN: What is most important to you in the moment? One of Nora Ephron's, whom I stole this exercise from, in the middle of her life was divorced. And then later it was mother. Independent of what you think anyone else thinks of you, what is you?

FOX: Witty. Anxious. Friendly. Loving. And deceptively sad.

EXPAND HERE.⁴¹

Notes

¹ I spent a year as a graduate assistant in my institution's Office of University Writing, and I have taught English Composition at the collegiate level for many years. As a result, I'm about to throw some writing pedagogy your way to help demonstrate the pervasiveness of white-hetero-patriarchy in academic writing/discourse. It's annoying as fuck. I'll start with Laura Greenfield, who notes that, "'Standard English,' ultimately, is invoked as that ideal, superior language. The assumption that 'Standard English' is superior to other English varieties is also prevalent among language educators in the United States...the language varieties deemed inferior in the United States (so much so that they are often dismissed not simply as inferior varieties but not as varieties at all—just as conglomerations of slang, street talk, or poor English) tend to be the languages whose origins can be

traced to periods in American history when communities of racially oppressed people used these languages to enact agency. It is no coincidence that the languages spoken by racially oppressed people are considered to be inferior in every respect to the languages spoken predominantly by those who wield systemic power: namely, middle- and upper-class white people” (p. 36). See Laura Greenfield, 2016, “The ‘Standard English’ Fairytale: A Rhetorical Analysis of Racist Pedagogies and Commonplace Assumptions about Language Diversity,” In *Writing Centers and the New Racism: A Call for Sustainable Dialogue and Chance*, ed. Laura Greenfield and Karen Rowan (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press): 33-60. I must acknowledge that I am a privileged white person, with advanced language training; thus, I cannot claim to be a victim of exclusionary language practices based on my racial and economic background. However, many of my participants communicate through conglomerations of slang, street talk, and ancestral dialects. Often, our academy pressures scholars to sanitize this communication for consumption by a racially and economically elite community. In my work, my participants also speak in a community-based language that intersects race, gender, and sexuality: queer speak. Queer speak is derided as crass and vulgar, since much of it was developed as code/euphemisms for sexual activity; moreover, large swaths of queer speak emerged from communities dominated by queer people of color (for example: “kiki” is a commonly used queer term that originated among queer people of color, and it is immortalized (and white-washed) in the 2012 song “Let’s Have a Kiki” by the Scissor Sisters. I could go on and on about queer slang, but that’s not the point of this extensive footnote. The point is that the dominant discourse in academic publishing does not provide space for “Non-Standard” English; if space is provided, it’s only for directly quoting participant transcripts. Researchers are not (usually) permitted to participate in the “Non-Standard” language communities to which they might belong. A recent reviewer of my work, for example, criticized my “personal tone,” which exhibited itself in an autoethnographic project wherein I spoke in an irreverent, assertive, even sassy tone that was laden with slang and abstract queer references. Harry Denny writes that scholars, teachers, and administrators who oppose the racist standardizing forces of academic discourse are often derided and relegated to/as institutional backwaters, whose work is taken less seriously (I mean, really, how many of you humanities scholars out there doing social justice scholarship have been condescended to by a “hard scientist”?). “Like queer people, writing center professionals continually confront our marginality: we daily encounter students and faculty alike who approach our spaces with uneasiness. Though some might understand writing centers as ‘safe harbors’ of progressive politics and pedagogy, our spaces are also liminal zones, transitory arenas always both privileged and illegitimate. Writing centers are known as cutting-edge and institutional backwaters; they are celebrated and denounced; they are noisy and silent/ed; they are spaces where much organic, lasting learning happens, but spaces where often no record of achievement or assessment gets granted. Writing centers are places overflowing with structuring binaries: directive/non-directive, editing/tutoring, expert/novice, teacher/student, graduate student/undergraduate, professional/peer, women/men, ‘American’/ESL, advanced/basic, faculty/administrator, administrator/secretary, faculty/lecturer, lecturer/teaching assistant, teaching assistant/tutor, white/people of color, black/Asian, Latino/black, straight/gay, etc. These binaries and their negotiations of which side is privileged and which is illegitimate are ubiquitous in sessions” (p. 97). See Harry Denny, “Queering the Writing Center,” *The Writing Center Journal*, 30 no. 1 (2010): 39-62. I find that one way “Non-Standard” communication is encouraged out of scholarly discourse is the *insistence* that researchers speak on behalf of their participants through in-

terpretation, representation, conclusion, and dissemination. In addition, researchers themselves are often shuttled out of the conversation through reviewers who *insist* on citational inclusions of privileged scholars who may or may not have had any impact on the development of the project/methods nor on the composition of results. In writing and sharing “Fox: An Opera-Comique” (and subsequent chapters) the most common criticism is that I do not provide enough interpretation(s) of Fox’s story, nor do I provide discrete conclusions about Fox’s story to inform policy decisions at an institutional level. If Fox had given me discrete conclusions about policy decisions, I would have shared them with the audience. He does not. Who am I to say, on his behalf (as a privileged researcher), what should be done for gay/queer men like him? That question becomes even more complicated when one considers that I interviewed a Latino/Native American drag queen, a Cuban/Puerto Rican gay man, a survivor of fourteen months of ex-gay therapy, a lesbian woman, and a trans* woman. After all this talk, I do not know the essence of what I am trying to tell you, other than writing on behalf of your participants is tricky, especially when you’re supposed to be translating these marginalized people into the language of their oppressors so that their stories may be taken seriously. For additional information on how white-hetero-patriarchy pervades the academy and collegiate pedagogy, see: Frankie Condon and Bobbi Olson, “Building a House for Linguistic Diversity: Writing Centers, English-Language Teaching and Learning, and Social Justice,” in *Tutoring Second Language Writers*, ed. Shanti Bruce and Ben Raforth (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2016): 27-52.

² The reviewer also wrote: “It reads as if the researcher found postqualitative research and thought that it was really neat and added it in, to be quite honest.” Only a straight man would write something this condescending, especially right after admitting he knew nothing about queer theory and right after suggesting I cite a scholar of colonial-era navigational practices (for a contemporary queer research project). Seems legit.

³ A transwoman, who consults the Department of Defense on gender inclusion, once told me to teach my students to simply: Ask our names; Call us by our names; Refer to us as we wish to be called. Is actually legit.

⁴ Sarah J. Tracy, “Qualitative Quality: Eight ‘Big-Tent’ Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 16, no. 10 (2010): 837-851.

⁵ One way I wanted to create an immersive, multi-sensory experience of their lives was by allowing their words to dominate the project. In my “Prologue” to *Pink Lemonade*, I wrote that the body of the project was composed near exclusively by data (interviews, observations, notes, reflections, memories, sounds); scholarly commentary took place in footnotes, which served as scholarly “live tweets” accompanying the fantasia going on above. Within the footnotes, I attempted to preserve a queer spirit through code-meshing, as defined by Vershawn Ashanti Young. Young is foundational to my work in countering “standard language ideology” and academic elitism, which forces marginalized scholars to assimilate into white-hetero-patriarchal writing and research styles. Young writes, “standard language ideology insist sthat minority people will never become an Ivy League English department chair or president of Harvard University if they don’t perfect they mastery of standard English [don’t believe him...take a look at the Cornel West/Larry Summers dispute at Harvard University]. At the same time the ideology instruct that white men will gain such positions, even with a questionable handle of standard grammar and rhetoric (Didn’t George W. get to be president for eight years, while all kinds of folks characterized his grammar as bad and his rhetorical style as poor? And hasn’t former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin made up words like *refudiate* for repudiate and *lamestream media* to

poke fun at mainstream media? Just askin...[Stanley Fish] must don't like [this information]. He say we should have student to translate the way they talk into standard English on a chalk board. He say, leave the way they say it to momma on the board and put the standard way on paper. This is wrongly called code switching. And many teachers be doin' this with they students. And it don't work. Why? Cuz most teachers of code switching don't know what they be talkin bout. Code switching, from a linguistic perspective, is not translatin one dialect into another one. It's blendin two or mo dialects, languages, or rhetorical forms into one sentence, one utterance, one paper...But since so many teachers be jackin up code switching with they 'speak this way at school and a different way at home,' we need a new term. I call it CODE MESHING! ...it's multidialectalism and plurallingualism in one speech act, in one paper" (p. 66-67). See, Vershawn Ashanti Young, "Should Writer's Use They Own English?" *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, no. 12 (2010): 110-117. I bet you \$5.00 that someone is going to take issue with my minor code-meshing in this paper as well as my cavalier bending of *Chicago Style* by having jacked up, extended footnotes (since *Chicago Style* recommends footnotes be brief complements to the body, not a forum for ongoing scholarly conversation). Fuck that.

⁶ Maggie MacLure, "Researching Without Representation? Language and Materiality in Post-Qualitative Methodology," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 26, no. 6 (2013): 658-667.

⁷ Stephanie Daza and Walter S. Gershon, "Beyond Ocular Inquiry: Sound, Silence, and Sonification," *Qualitative Inquiry* 21, no. 7 (2015): 639-644.

⁸ Tony E. Adams, *Narrating the Closet: An Autoethnography of Same-Sex Attraction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

⁹ One good, semi-autobiographical story that I attempt to emulate (though I most assuredly fail at) is Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2019)

¹⁰ Here are some examples of "good research" according to my field, which intersects queer theory with higher education administration. Thomas Ylloja, Gerald Cochran, Michael R. Woodford, and Kristen A. Renn, "Frequent Experience of LGBQ Microaggression on Campus Associated with Smoking Among Sexual Minority College Students," *Nicotine & Tobacco Research* (2018): 340-346; Michael R. Woodford, Perry Silverschanz, Eric Swank, Kristin S. Scherrer, and Lisa Raiz, "Predictors of Heterosexual College Students' Attitudes Toward LGBT People," *Journal of LGBT Youth* 9, no. 4 (2012): 297-320; Perry Silverschanz, Lilia M. Cortina, Julie Konik, and Vicki J. Magley, "Slurs, Snubs, and Queer Jokes: Incidence and Impact of Heterosexist Harassment in Academia," *Sex Roles* 58 (2008): 179-191; Jill M. Chonody, Michael R. Woodford, David J. Brennan, Bernie Newman, and Donna Wang, "Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbian Women Among Heterosexual Social Work Faculty," *Journal of Social Work Education* 50 (2014): 136-152; Michael R. Woodford, Jill M. Chonody, Alex Kulick, David J. Brennan, and Kristen Renn, "The LGBQ Microaggressions on Campus Scale: A Scale Development and Validation Study," *Journal of Homosexuality* 62, no. 12 (2015): 1660-1687; Susan R. Rankin, "Campus Climates for Sexual Minorities," *New Directions for Student Services* 111 (2005): 17-23; Susan Rankin and Jason C. Garvey, "Identifying, Quantifying, and Operationalizing Queer-Spectrum and Trans-Spectrum Students: Assessment and Research in Student Affairs," *New Directions for Student Services* 152 (2015): 73-84; Jodi L. Linley, David Nguyen, G. Blue Brazelton, Brianna Becker, Kristen Renn, and Michael Woodford, "Faculty as Sources of Support for LGBTQ College Students," *College Teaching* 64, no. 2 (2016): 55-63; Jason C. Garvey, Dian D. Squire, Brett Stachler, and Susan Rankin, "The

Impact of Campus Climate on Queer-Spectrum Student Academic Success,” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 15, no. 2 (2018): 89-105; Martin A. Swanbrow Becker, Stacey F. Nemeth Roberts, Sam M. Ritts, William Tyler Branagan, Alia R. Warner, and Sheri L. Clark, “Supporting Transgender College Students: Implications for Clinical Intervention and Campus Prevention,” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 31, no. 2 (2017): 155-176; Jason C. Garvey, Susan Rankin, Genny Beemyn, and Shane Windmeyer, “Improving the Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students Using the Campus Pride Index,” *New Directions for Student Services* 159 (2017): 61-70; Jason C. Garvey, Laura A. Sanders, and Maureen A. Flint, “Generational Perceptions of Campus Climate Among LGBTQ Undergraduates,” *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 6 (2017): 795-817; Kimberly F. Balsam, Yamile Molina, Blair Beadnell, Jane Simoni, and Karma Walters, “Measuring Multiple Minority Stress: The LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale,” *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology* 17, no. 2 (2011): 163-174; Robert D. Brown and Valerie J. Gortmaker, “Assessing Campus Climates for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Students: Methodological and Political Issues,” *Journal of LGBT Youth* 6, no. 4 (2009): 416-435; and Matthew J. Mayhew, Alyssa N. Rockenbach, Nicholas A. Bowman, Tricia A. Seifert, Gregory C. Wolniak, Ernest T. Pascarella, and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: 21st Century Evidence That Higher Education Works*, Volume 3 (San Francisco, CA: Wiley: 2016).

¹¹ I primarily incorporate evocative autoethnography, as described by Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis in *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016). I also mesh autoethnography and queer theory, as theorized by Stacy Holman Jones and Tony Adams, “Autoethnography is a Queer Method,” in *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, ed. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010): 195-214.

¹² Anna Deavere Smith frequently refers to “organic poetry” in interviews and speaking engagements. However, her most concise rendering of the concept occurred in her 2007 TED Talk “Four American Characters,” available on *YouTube*.

¹³ Phil C. Langer, “The Research Vignette: Reflexive Writing as Interpretive Representation of Qualitative Inquiry—A Methodological Proposition,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22, no. 9: 735-744.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, “The Appearance of Data,” *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies*, 13, no. 4, 2013: 223-227. See also: Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, “Haecceity: Laying Out a Plane for Post Qualitative Inquiry,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 23, no. 9 (2017): 686-698.

¹⁵ An example of code-meshing. In queer subculture, “kiki” refers to social gatherings, largely for queer people of color, to dance and socialize (and, presumably share gossip). Adolfo, one of my participants, seems to use it to underscore the insular nature of kikis, in which participants develop inside jokes and tastes.

¹⁶ More code-meshing!

¹⁷ More code-meshing!

¹⁸ A reviewer, previously mentioned, suggested rejecting my monograph for omitting the work, on scriptwriting, of Nathaniel Kohn. So here it is: Nathaniel Kohn, “The Screenplay as Postmodern Literary Exemplar: Authorial Distraction, Disappearance, Dis-solution,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6, no. 4, 2000: 489-510.

¹⁹ Adams, 2016.

²⁰ Durell M. Callier, “Living in C Minor: Reflections on the Melodies of Blackness, Queerness, and Masculinity,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 22, no. 10 (2016): 790-794.

²¹ Shaun E. Edmonds, “Connected to Orlando: An Autoethnography in Three(ish) Acts,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 23, no. 7 (2017): 519-526

²² Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

²³ George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* (New York, NY: Random House, 2018).

²⁴ A paper I co-wrote for this very journal discusses a curation-as-analysis approach. Benjamin Arnberg, Hannah C. Baggett, and Carey E. Andrzejewski, “[...] Resurrecting Dead Data,” *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education* 19, no. 3 2020: 43-61.

²⁵ I told you I was going to model an imperfect writing process. Well, here you go. I planned to “EXPAND HERE,” but it seems easier to just point you to another source that is yet to be published. See, Arnberg, et al. “[...] Resurrecting Dead Data.” I seriously cannot explain it anymore.

²⁶ Bram Stoker’s, obviously.

²⁷ For additional reading on how queer subjects have been characterized through untruths, see Patrick A. Wilson, Pamela Valera, Alexander J. Martos, Natalie M. Wittlin, Miguel A. Munoz-Laboy, and Richard G. Parker, “Contributions of Qualitative Research in Informing HIV/AIDS Interventions Targeting Black MSM in the United States.” *Journal of Sex Research* 53, no. 6, 2016: 642-654; Tamara de Szegheo Lang, “The Demand to Progress: Critical Nostalgia in LGBTQ Cultural Memory.” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 19 (2015): 230-248; Sara Ahmed, “Queer Feelings,” in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013): 422-441; Jose Esteban Munoz, “Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, The Performativity of Race, and The Depressive Position,” in *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, ed. Donald E. Hall, Annamarie Jagose, Andrea Bebell, and Susan Potter (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013): 412-421; Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Jose Esteban-Munoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009); Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ*, no. 1 (1993): 17-32.

²⁸ An alias for an administrator in my department.

²⁹ An alias for an administrator on my campus.

³⁰ Not an alias, because this gasbag deserves all the criticism he gets.

³¹ He was caught having an affair with his student in his former fraternity house; another student turned him in. He was subsequently promoted; in the same time frame, a queer man of color was fired for the same offense.

³² I try to limit my pettiness to five acts per day.

³³ Dean, 2009.

³⁴ More code-meshing! Well, code-bouncing.

³⁵ Pauliina Rautio and Anna Vladimirova, “Befriending Snow: On Data as an Ontologically Significant Research Companion,” in *Disrupting Data in Qualitative Inquiry: Entanglements with the Post-Critical and Post-Anthropocentric*, ed. Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, Teija Loytonen, and Marek Tesar (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2017): 23-33.

³⁶ I refer to opera comique the genre, not the opera company in France. According to Allison Latham, *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), “the use of spoken dialogue remained a distinctive characteristic” of the genre,

despite “traditional requirements” of French opera requiring all acts be sung through. I adopted the genre of opera comique to accommodate spoken data. My opera comique does not contain original music and lyrics, nor does it contain references to classic works of opera comique (such as Bizet’s *Carmen*); it does, however, contain arias from classical operas as well as contemporary rock operas.

³⁷ OMG, a pun!

³⁸ I used footnotes to provide additional insight and information in the libretto so that it remained free from distracting scholarly intervention. In addition, I didn’t want to mesh the irreverent tone of the libretto with the serious tone of the scholar.

³⁹ As in David M. Halperin, “How to do the History of Male Homosexuality,” *GLQ* 6, no. 1: 87-124, 2000. Quote from page 92. Here is an example of where I included scholarship as a character. Dr. Halperin is no personal acquaintance of mine, and, as of yet, has not agreed to appear in any productions in a cameo.

⁴⁰ BBC is slang for “big black cock” and is common parlance in gay discourse. However, the acronym is culturally problematic, since it simultaneously stereotypes and fetishizes black men’s bodies. I was first made aware of the problems of fetishizing black gay men when reading Donovan Trott, “An Open Letter to Gay, White Men: No, You’re Not Allowed to Have a Racial Preference,” *Huffington Post*, June 19, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/an-open-letter-to-gay-white-men-no-youre-not-allowed_us_5947f0ffe4b0f7875b83e459

⁴¹ A last bit of imperfect process. I intended to conclude, but the August 1, 2019 deadline snuck up on me. That’s life. That’s writing. If you need an expansion, just email me at benjamin.arnberg@auburn.edu. Let’s chat soon. XOXO.