

ACTING OUT: A PERFORMATIVE EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY, HEALING, AND
WHOLENESS

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

This paper examines the autoethnodrama entitled OUT, a play produced and enacted as a staged reading at the University of Illinois during Spring 2009. As an ethnodrama, OUT explores the authors reflections of reconciling his sexuality and spirituality, challenges rigid and fixed notions of coming out, and instead proffers it as a dynamic ongoing process. Utilizing the methodology of autoethnodrama and other performative based methods—inclusive of but not limited to poetry, framing, monologue, and dialogue—OUT re-imagines and recovers the queer individuals relationship to his/herself, their community, and to the society at large. Specific concepts addressed include, mystory, dramatic structures (i.e. framing, juxtaposition, polyvocality) and poetry. Anecdotes from each show, coupled with actual textual examples from the play will be utilized to illustrate the ways in which recovery—restoring healing and the wholeness of the individual—is enacted by performers, and then interpreted by those attending. Lastly, OUT through its usage of performance method, and critical engagement with Black feminists (see hooks 2004; Lorde 1984) offers for both author and reader a chance to find love, affirmation, and create whole and boundless self-identities.

KEYWORDS: autoethnodrama, recovery, coming out, identity, performance methods

This work is in dedication to my Grandmother Silvine Bradford who passed prior to its completion. Despite the distance Gran, I am forever thankful for the spirit and fervor you instilled in me. I would also like to dedicate this work to my family and the community of support to which I am eternally indebted. Lastly to the men, women, boys, girls, and all else in between who came before me, who stand with me, and those who shall come after me who have chosen to live their lives courageously, simply and “out” on their own terms. It is by your inspiration that this work came into fruition.

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Prologue: Self-Benediction

I think I've heard my last and I mean last

Anti-homosexuality sermon, speech, soapbox oration from in the sanctuary of the Lord

From in the sanctuary of the Lord!!!

No longer can I subject myself willingly or other wise...to be torn down

I have tried...and God knows I have tried to cast out this "demon" called my life

These mannerisms you denounce but are battle scars of a boyhood of difference

You ask me to lie...to ignore the love fostered by the women in my life

These hips move as they do cause my momma raised me

This voice echoes a tenderness of a grandmother

These hands swapped licks with a sis, wrist limp to bend for:

Slide baby 1-2

Rockin' Robin Tweet tweedle dee....and

Miss Mary Mack all dressed in black- black-black...

I have cried one too many nights

Prayed one too many prayers

Lied one too many times to you and myself

Hated who I was for far too long to allow you to poison me any longer,

I think this is where I must depart with you my beloved brethren in the Lord

For you ask far too much from me

My life is no longer up for sale

No longer will I trade you:

Righteousness for rhetoric

Fellowship for silence

Love and affirmation for denial and dishonesty

No longer can I allow you to war against my body and spirit

I take back sanctuary, this sanctuary

Refuge and safety shall I find among the robbers and thieves the gangsters and prostitutes and among the others you rejected

For now on, the drug dealer shall distribute joy to this soul...

The prostitutes breast milk will feed this weary soul....

And the thugs and gangsters shall now administer my peace

Our Lord still Jesus, our love still for the Nazarene, but a love now unfettered

A love which reaches far beyond the four walls for which you erect to paint, remodel, renovate and decorate BUT to hide who we truly are Human...

Among the people shall my tabernacle lie...

With the sheep and not the wolves will I fellowship....

For my dignity, my life and my love for humanity and Christ is NOT and I repeat NO LONGER for sale...

And so may the Lord watch between me and thee while we're absent one from another.

Cause I have tried God knows I have but I have come to love myself far too much to tolerate this any longer...

Amen.

Chapter 1

Call to Worship: A Black Queer Boy's Journey Towards Self-Recovery

The “this” to which the aforementioned poem speaks to would be the years of denial, self-hate, and misery associated with not loving ones self wholly because of your sexuality. Penned after an emotionally traumatizing church service, the poem sets forth an agenda of recovery—mind, body, spirit and even ones participation in civic life. It is through these words, and other personal writings—journal entries, poems, and plays—that I have been able to express myself wholly, freely, and begin to not only do the work of reclamation but also begin to imagine the world differently.

Moreover, my usage of performance is grounded in my belief in the power of performance. By performance, I am referring to any and all creative mediums, which may be utilized to credibly, vividly, and persuasively narrate qualitative data— the participant’s narrative (Saldaña, 2003). These mediums include but are not limited to video documentary, photographic portfolio, poetry, spoken word, dance, music, and visual art installations (see Denzin 2003, Saldaña 2003). Performative texts and events manifest for us bodies—bodies marked in very real ways by their race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.—forcing us to wrestle with both master and counter narratives (see Denzin 2003). However, performance is more than a mere spectator sport, in creating a dialogic of bodies—the corporeal manifestation of a lived experience on stage, juxtaposed against our own lived experiences—we also through this sharing are presented an opportunity to co-create together, and begin to re-imagine, and recover the world as we know it (Denzin 2003).

Furthermore, as an emerging artist scholar my choosing to utilize poetry, and theater as the means by which to express myself and re-present myself as data is about my belief that

performative text allows both performers and audience to exercise a place in which living and life are held sacred. Treading in the footsteps of other Black, queer, and othered artist and scholars who have utilized their lives and performative works (i.e. poetry, plays, etc.) as a means to educate, and speak back to larger oppressive societal structures which seek to dehumanize and diminish the life possibilities and life chances of black, queer, communities and individuals. This work in fostering healing and wholeness is about sustaining life. Via performance we are able to co-create a more utopian world, in which we are able to explore the complexity of the simplest of human interactions while drawing our attention to larger societal structures for critique, criticism and change.

Similarly, *OUT* as an autoethnodrama does the same work, and acts as a culmination of that process, charting for both audience and readers my personal journey of self-recovery, love and wholeness. In utilizing the term autoethnodrama I mean to refer to an autobiographical cultural story in play script format intended for performance (Saldaña 2008). Not only does *OUT* give credence to my voice, but through my usage of polyvocality—a term to be later defined in detail—*OUT* also explores the concomitant voices of other LGBT and queer individuals who share similar stories and experiences of pain and struggle associated with reconciling ones sexuality, while also coming to accept and love ones self. *OUT* in its usage of queer, aligns itself with a queer politics which functions for more than just an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered, but also recognizes and encourages the fluidity and movement of peoples sexual lives (Cohen, 1997). Specifically as a performance text *OUT* explores the ways in which queer identity is performed, developed, and negotiated, by the individual. *OUT* simultaneously interrogates societies rigid and fixed notions of “living out/coming out” and instead proposes understanding living “out” as a dynamic process. Lastly, *OUT* is a reflection of the ways in

which, performative texts can foster healing for marginalized individuals in particular and society at large.

As readers, I desire that you embark on a journey in which worlds collide, where the I singular becomes the I plural, where connections between communities become important and where our humanity is ever present. Where I want this paper to end, is in a reflection of what is lost when individuals and communities become disjointed, when for the sake of group solidarity some of us are asked to quiet the most sacred of places, and commit “soul suicides” (see hooks 2004). Where I want this paper to end is in us exploring the dynamic non-static process of coming out, the need for connecting individuals and communities to each other, and to also find the hope, which lies in this exploration. A hope linked inextricably, and unapologetically to self-awareness, love, and affirmation. Where I hope this paper ends is in each of us knowing the importance of allowing our communities to exist as self-affirming, life giving, communities of love or as Voice 3 of OUT says “....[that] I still love you and need you in my life”.

Chapter 2

Writing to Live: Methodological Approaches in Creating an Ethnodrama

This chapter will begin with an overview of the writing used both within OUT, as well as within this paper with an emphasis on the performance based methodological approaches used. The methodologies, which will be discussed, include, autoethnography, performance ethnography, ethnodrama and poetry. OUT is fore grounded in my experience, growing up, wrestling with and trying to reconcile my multiple identities—specifically my sexuality and spirituality—through writing. The collection of poems, journal entries, private conversations reconfigured into a coherent play started as just that private, intimate moments of self-expression, love, and pain. The reconfiguration of those very private moments—the data—into a play underwent several phases before finally resulting in the autoethnodrama that is OUT. These phases like any other writing process included, brainstorming, gathering materials (e.g. poems, media clips), creating drafts, reworking the materials (e.g. creating dialogued text from poems, integrating media), synthesizing the individual parts into a coherent piece, and final edits.

However, before proceeding to describe my method, it is important to discuss my writing practice. As Richardson (2002) notes, “Writing is never innocent”, simply because it is a subjective practice. Denzin (2003) goes onto state that, “writing creates the worlds we inhabit”. The aesthetically blurred formatting I have chosen to use—as evidenced in my integration of performance texts within this paper—is about the world(s) I inhabit as both an academic and artist. My co-existence in these spaces forces me to wrestle with how to truly write a performative social science text, specifically, a text which would utilize a discourse that showed how the histories and performances that persons live are shaped by ever working societal forces. Denzin (2003) also argues that we perform culture, we do not write it, and we know the world

only through our representations of it. Furthermore, the only way to change the world must be to change how we write and perform it. My usage of a blurred aesthetic is my attempt at creating this change, echoing Dana Pollock's (1998) explanation and belief in performative writing, she states:

[Performative writing] refuses an equally easy and equally false distinction between performance and text, performance and performativity, performativity and print textuality. Rather, at the brink of meaning, poised between abjection and regression, writing as doing displaces writing as meaning; writing becomes meaningful in the material, dis/continuous act of writing. Effacing itself twice over--once as meaning and reference, twice as deferral and erasure—writing becomes itself, becomes its own meanings and ends, recovering to itself the force of action. After-texts, after turning itself inside out, writing turns again only to discover the pleasure and power of turning, of making not sense or meaning per se but making writing perform[...]. (Pollock, 1998, 75)

This is my attempt to perform writing, and to write performatively (Pollock 1998).

Not only does this text serve as an exploration into performative writing, but it is also my way of pushing back, to connect seemingly disjointed parts of myself, and to stay true to myself. Furthermore, this text is my attempt to put into place a subversive performance text which would carry forward Trinh's (1991) agenda for the retelling of stories that the sciences of the human disciplines have reduced to fiction or minor literature, or marginalized, stigmatized, and paternalized as politically correct multicultural performances (See also Denzin 2003, Moreiera 2007, Sanders 1999, Taaffe 2008). This is why I use a blurred aesthetic; this is why I utilize dramatic structures.

Through writing performative text my work gives voice to who I am, and allows me to state to a larger audiences and reflect to that audience: *(i)* the reality of my truth, *(ii)* the reality reflection and truth(s) of a specific community consisting of other gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered (glbt) and queer individuals, and *(iii)* the possibility of a differently imagined

world filled with the acceptance of ones identity, the hope that lies within self-identification, and the healing and wholeness that comes from that journey.

From Autoethnography to Ethnodrama

I use the term autoethnodrama to refer to my usage of autoethnography as a means to collect my data, and the usage of ethnodrama as a means to present the data. Expanding upon Denzin's (2003) explanation of performance autoethnography as a genre within critical postmodern ethnography, and borrowing from Paget's (1993) ethnoperformance, and Mienczakowski (1992) and Saldaña (2003) ethnodrama; autoethnodrama performances exists in a pedagogical borderland, in the spaces where rhetoric, politics, parody, pastiche, performance, ethnography, and critical cultural studies come together (Conquergood 1998).

Autoethnography as noted by Pinar (1994) allows for the recreation and rewriting of the biographic past, in order to make that past a part of the biographic present. Ethnotheatre on the other hand employs traditional crafts and artistic techniques used in formal theater productions to create a live performance event of research participants' experiences and/or researchers' interpretations of data for an audience (Saldaña 2003). As an autoethnodrama, OUT, consists of analyzed and dramatized significant selections from journal entries, and other written artifacts over a period of 5 years.

As a cohesive scripted piece OUT was created through a series of various writing exercises (e.g. writing a monologue) aimed towards creating key play concepts. These writing exercises helped to reshape my poems, journal entries and or memories of conversations into monologues, juxtapose various ideas within the data, and help frame particular ideas, emotions, movements and key concepts. Other outcomes of writing exercises used to help craft OUT

included, the usage of dialogic clashes and that silence, and movement were equally nourished and integral to the piece as was speaking or stillness.

Specifically speaking OUT came into fruition in a course I was taking during the Fall of 2008—Theater 418: Devising Social Issues Theater. It was during the course of that semester that I was challenged to one find a topic which I cared deeply about which dealt with a social issue and two be able to construct a final project—a thirty minute play/presentation around the issue. Having already used a poem previously written, as a performed monologue—an assignment assigned prior to the final project—I decided it was best to continue with the subject matter in the poem. The poem performed initially as a monologue was entitled “Audre Lorde Sho’ Ain’t God”, and is incorporated in the script as a part of Movement II: Silent No More (see full script below), issues addressed in the piece included issues of issues of voice, acceptance, and homosexuality specifically within the Black Church—as is my own personal upbringing and experience.

From that juncture I needed to collect enough data, to write the play, which included re-reading past journal entries and poems I had written, as well as writing a few newer ones. Decisions had to be made in regards to what would be given precedence in the piece, I had already identified the subject to be explored—coming out as a process, seen rather as a continuum than bound by one finite moment in time and about living ones own truth. In offering this counter-narrative, I purposed to allow for other glbt voices to share in the telling of my own story. One of the ways in which this was achieved within the piece was in the moving away from the specific naming of characters, instead each is given a voice, each voice has particular characteristics, but lines are shared so as to symbolize the sharing of an experience, and or an idea. Not only is my personal voice spliced and permeated into four other voices which are but

are not my own—by virtue of the fact that they are given different characteristics and thus become different characters—sound/media clips are also used to allow for further permeation of other voices, giving preference again to a counter narrative which highlights the dynamic process of living/“coming” out as not defined by one finite moment in time as proffered by a very white, gay male culture.

With the topic in mind, data collected—journal entries, poems, media/sound clips—as well as a clear vision for the piece it was time to actually begin to organize and write the play. As previously mentioned a series of writing exercises became necessary to move my writings to iterations utilized by theater—namely, juxtaposition, framing and polyvocality. The sections, which follow, will go into greater detail to define and illustrate the usage of these techniques, as well as other methodologies used in creating OUT.

Mystory as Methodology

In creating OUT, my initial purpose was to explore issues of queerness and coming out as a dynamic non-static process and state of being by integrating empirical data sources, personal narrative and creative text. In this way OUT acts as a montage text, filled with sounds, music, poetry, and images not only taken from my personal life, but from a larger public discourse as well exemplifies the definition of a mystory text (see Denzin 2003). OUT as a mystory text is thus situated in a utopian discourse, one centered on difference not conflict, and a critique of larger sociopolitical systems. As a performed mystory, OUT moves from the reflexive telling of my life, into an intervention of the popular, offering an alternative world, fostering a politics of hope, liberation, and possibility (Denzin, 2003, Madison 1998).

Denzin (2003), notes that the mystory text begins with the moments that define the crisis in question, a turning point, an epiphany. Literally speaking OUT is just that *my story*, however as my biographical experience connects with, interprets and critiques culture, history, and the current social structure, my problematic personal experience enters into a larger discourse no longer allowing me to retain sole ownership of the performance text or event. It is because OUT, as a personal narrative locates itself within popular culture discourses and against the specialized knowledge's which circulate in the larger society, audience members coperform the text, and I as the writer, and narrator not only function as a guide, and commentator but a coperformer as well (Denzin 2003).

Dramatic Structures as Methodology: Framing, Juxtaposition, and Polyvocality

In moving from epiphanies, which were recorded as journal entries, poems or other written artifacts, to writing the actual ethnodrama which is OUT, several other dramatic techniques were employed, namely framing, juxtaposition, and the usage of polyvocality. Polyvocality as noted by Castagno (2001), emphasizes the usage of multiple language strategies and sources utilized within a play in which characters and narratives within the script contain diverse interest of objectives as expressed in different speech forms. Furthermore, polyvocality resists the notion of a single or dominant point of view in a narrative, thereby supplanting the single or privileged authorial voice (Castagno 2001). With this focus in mind, polyvocality is achieved by splitting my own biographical history/voice—as told through journal entries, and poems and other written artifacts—amongst the various other characters. By splitting my voice into speaking parts I allow for each speaker to bring a gendered presence and personal style of speaking to the text.

Moreover, through the usage of various media clips other voices, and thus narratives enter my own biographical history, this is where worlds collide, where the I singular becomes the I plural. As noted by Denzin (2003) the mystery performance event does not take place on a stage per se; the invisible “fourth wall” that usually separates performers and audience does not exist, because all parties to the performance are also performers. By allowing others to share in my experience through their own personal histories whether on stage, in the audience, or through a media clip heard throughout the performance piece, OUT “puts into words the world of experiences, actions, and words that are, could be, and will be spoken (Denzin 2003).”

Framing typically refers to the usage of sound, setting, lighting, or metadramatic technique used to set the stage for a theatrical dramatic event, and/or highlight a particular event. Juxtaposition refers to utilizing similar text, genres, sounds, etc. and placing them alongside one another or in relationship to the other. An example of framing, juxtaposition, and polyvocality is highlighted in the following excerpt, which has been slightly altered from its original form (see full script below):

<Cue Sound : GWS 418 Clip 5: Ramon Boney>

Voice 1: My name is Ramon Boney

Voice 4: Thank you for the hug queer brother

Voice 1: and I am the host for this
evenings gathering.

Voice 1: This is actually

Voice 4: For the love and affirmation

Voice 1: one of the first opportunities I've

Voice 4: we exchange in our
embrace

Voice 4: For in this simple hug I am able to find and reaffirm me...

Voice 2: ah giving us an opportunity to do
what I think

V3 move to hug V4

Voice 4: To love and cherish this we...

Voice 2: is going to be the first of a very important series

Voice 4: And to be ever
grateful for this freedom

Voice 1: of dialogue

V1 move downstage beside V4

Voice 4: Thank you for the hug queer brother....

V1 and V4 hug

V1 & V4: (*look at audience*) No, thank you for the love...

<Lights fade to black>

<Cue Sound: GWS 418 Clip 6: Good Morning (India Arie)>

Framing is illustrated by sound cues in that the actual text is framed within the different sound cues. The two different texts one originally being a media clip is juxtaposed against that of a

poem, as indicated by Voice 1 and Voice 4 respectively. Lastly polyvocality is achieved in two different ways, the first sound clip (GWS 418 Clip 5: Ramon Boney), is the actual recorded voice and speech that Voice 1 uses of Ramon Boney. Secondly, polyvocality is achieved through the multiple characters narratives/voices, which are being told and utilized within the moment.

Poetry as Method

In that much of the text reconfigured within OUT are journal entries and poems, I find it important to also situate these texts and specifically the usefulness and significance of poetry within OUT. In that mystories bring together epiphanic moments, turning-point experiences and times of personal trouble and turmoil, these moments for me are specifically marked by poems (Turner 1986). In nearly each of the movements within OUT, there is a poem, which, reflects my individual conflict, and attempt at resolution as, related to a larger sociopolitical culture, history, and structure. Moreover this poetry acts as a way for me to reimagine the world, to name my existence and the truth of my experience in relation to larger social structures, or as Audre Lorde states this poetry is illuminating. Lorde (1984) states

This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that hope which lies in, we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding.(Lorde, 1984, 36)

My journal entries, many filled with these types of poems and of which are incorporated within OUT serve for me as a site of knowledge production a place in which to understand and make sense of the world. For me this poetry allowed me to make whole my fragmented parts, and to begin to reconcile personal conflicts of my sexuality with larger sociopolitical systems (e.g. church). Nestled in each piece is performance and performativity, the act of being and

becoming (see Denzin 2003, Johnson 2006). Within these poems I was able to make sense of who I was in the moment—my being— as well as who I was becoming and to manifest me, in all of my complexities and contradictory identities.

OUT as a reorganization of my most intimate thoughts— poems, journal entries, rehashed conversations with friends and family members, etc.—thus becomes the culmination and recognition of my birthing process as described by Lorde. It is how I birthed my feelings into ideas, my knowledge(s) into an understanding and moved beyond silence to giving voice to my lived experience. The process of finding that voice, of negotiating and re-negotiating my own silences, that process however cyclical has birthed something even greater, healing.

Chapter 3

From the Page to the Stage: Reflections of Recovery

OUT as recovery work, sets an agenda of restoring wholeness and healing to not only the individual—mind, body, and spirit—but also the individual in relationship to his/her respective community and to society at large. In its duration as a staged reading, I have had the experience to witness and participate in these moments. Therefore, it is my intention for the duration of this paper to highlight the ways in which recovery and healing are enacted not only textually and performatively but also between the individuals present at each show. Anecdotes from each show, coupled with actual textual examples from the play will be utilized to illustrate the ways in which recovery—restoring healing and the wholeness of the individual—is enacted by performers, and then interpreted by those attending.

Each of the movements of OUT can be centralized around a particular theme, in regards to who and/or what is being recovered. For instance Movement Three: Affirmation Through Community serves as an example of the recovering of community by the glbt/queer individual. In particular this text gives rise to recovering the individuals participation within civic life and in relationship to a community which affirms the glbt/queer individuals identity. The scene is imagined around the meeting of several Black Gay Men, who have come together around the expressed purpose of discussing their experiences as Black Gay Men. While this meeting is occurring one of the characters (V4), reflects upon the significance of the embrace shared between Black Gay Men, a typical greeting among family and friends, but one, which expressly has significance within queer communities, particularly in a society which discourages affectionate and intimate expressions between two men. The reclamation of community, which occurs within the scene, can be found within the following lines:

Voice 4: With arms outstretched you say it's ok for us to be

Voice 4: to feel this way

Voice 4: Thank you for the intimacy queer brother...

Voice 4: For this moment shared between two men,

Voice 4: For in this simple hug I am able to find and reaffirm me...

Voice 4: To love and cherish this we...

Voice 4: And to be ever grateful for this freedom

Voice 4: Thank you for the hug queer brother....

V4: No, thank you for the love...

The power of performance, to me, lies in its unabashed critique coupled with its unyielding vision of hope, love, justice and restoration. The excerpt above serves as one of several examples of this critique and vision.

Revelations of Recovery

The first time I realized the significance of OUT, was after an audience member came to me after the show and said, "thank you." The conversation, which ensued, was one of appreciation for a play which was able to display the reality of her life, of the frustrations she had dealt with and the inability at times to accurately convey with others these thoughts in words alone. As I still continue to reflect on all of what OUT did/does moments like these linger indelibly in my mind. Not only for their sincere honesty and vulnerability, but because of the moment created in which individuals with common backgrounds or not so common backgrounds

can be in commune with one another. As stated previously, reclamation of the queer individuals civic life is one of the goals of OUT, and such conversations as exemplify that goal.

Another example of the reclamation and engagement of the queer individuals civic life, and self would be OUT's usage in my personal life. OUT was created as a counter-narrative, critique, and challenge to our rigidly fixed notion of "coming out", as is illustrated by the play and my belief that glbt individuals "come out" daily, and choose to do so unknowingly or knowingly minute by minute. In that this process is dynamic, I still find myself negotiating my identity continuously with strangers and even loved ones. Even, a year after OUT's debut, and as I finish writing this paper, I will have inadvertently "outed" myself to family members, friends, and other individuals who will read this work. On one occasion, the recorded staged reading of OUT was used to come out to a close friend of mine. No words were exchanged initially, but rather the play itself became a vehicle for "coming out". Afterwards, tears, hugs, and words of love, encouragement and support were shared. Another time in which OUT has "outed" me, was when I shared a copy of this unfinished paper with a longtime mentor and friend. After reading my work, here is what he had to say:

Self-Benediction, -- a miraculous poem! You are a blessing to us all, and it is very exciting--both in the Self-Benediction and in the first sections of the thesis and play (which I've been able to glance at) --that you use your extraordinary intellect both to try to figure out your own thoughts and feelings and to try to figure out how to be useful to the rest of us. (J.Gillen, personal communication, January 11, 2010)

The aforementioned examples, help illustrate the ways in which performative text allow for reclamation, and healing. In openly sharing my experience, I have begun to heal wounds of secrecy between myself and loved ones, found and reestablished the bonds of love between myself and the communities to which I belong (i.e. familial, cultural, spiritual) and began to live my life fully and wholly.

For each time I have taken the step to fully acknowledge whom I was, and share it with those I love most, I in return have been met with little opposition. Instead it has been my experience that love and understanding was only deepened, however I take this not for granted. While the more painful of my experiences, have come from the liminal space of denial and acceptance, and being disconnected from community and self, I am well aware of the danger others face in taking the steps that I have. The vulnerability, risk of discrimination, and even sometimes death involved in living “out” is a very real and present danger for other queer individuals. My being here, and my ability to tell my story is nothing short of a miracle, for I am reminded of other queers of color—Sakia Gunn, Jorge Steven Lopez Mercado, and countless others—who are unable to do so. For those of us whose livelihoods, lie at borders may we find some solace in the hope of performance, for its ability to allow us to not only write the world as it is, but as it should be.

Chapter 4

Epilogue: Returning to the Beginning

As you read the script of OUT, you will notice that it is organized into movements. Movements serve as the basic overall organizational unit within OUT. Akin to acts, movements serve as the microcosm for the structure of my play (Castagno 2001). However unlike acts, which traditionally organize time and events in linear chronology so as to signal a building upon, movements signal a continuum. OUT as a performance piece, in particular focuses on the fluid nature of identity. It is also important to note that the unfolding nature of, and the careful surveying of one's life can not be viewed as rigid, fixed moments in time but as continuous unfolding and thus movements of multiple identities, emotions, and the maturation of an individual over time not specifically bound by time. Movements provide a storyline but one in which our fixed notions of a beginning, middle, and ending become interlocking reflections of the other.

Syncopation also becomes important in the way in which one would read this play, and is why words and lines are spaced the way they are, to allow for an overlapping of voices at times and/or the sharing of an idea by multiple voices through the continuation and finishing of that line/idea. As readers you are meant to read with this syncopation in mind, to be able to hear multiple voices simultaneously, while grasping the unfolding nature of the story and stories told collectively at times and singularly at others. It is important to note that where words overlap, they are meant to be spoken at the same time, spacing in a particular line means that there is a pause in a particular line delivery. However there are also times where the script and delivery is delivered in a more traditional dialogue, of which lines are simply read in succession rather than

together or with a particular time sensitivity. You will see both operating simultaneously within the script, which follows.

Performative writing as Denzin (2003) states, is writing that refuses “the impossibility of maintaining the distinction between temporal tenses [...] between beginning and ending, between living and dying”. This paper has been my attempt at doing exactly this, to distort time, to blur the lines between audience and performer, and to utilize dramatic structures as a tool for the telling of truths, to foster healing and begin to recover myself. It is without further adieu that I present to you OUT:

Movement I: The Ending is the Beginning

Audience enters

<Cue Sound: GWS 418 Clip 1: Montage (XemVanAdams and Billy Porter)>

<As clip fades, fade audience lights to black>

<Fade Stage Lights to Black>

<Cue Sound: GWS 418 Clip 2: I’m Coming Out Instrumental (Diana Ross)>

<Cue Lights: Light Show >

Enter all Characters (V4 from closet upstage center, V1 downstage right, V2 downstage left, V3 upstage left door) frolicking, skipping, clapping, doing the bump, introducing themselves, giving out high fives, lots of energy and as the music fades go into lines

< Fade Music >

<Stop Light Show >

<Cue Lights>

All voices: Are you out, what does that mean (*not in sync*), to various characters, even to

audience members like a murmur V1 breaks the line of questioning

V1: Are you out?

V2: Are you out?

V3: Are you? (*to audience*)

V4: What does that mean?

V2: Who really knows?

V3: I'm trapped in the closet (*said like R. Kelley's Closet*)

V4: What closet? Whose closet?

V1: Hey are you out (*to V4*)

V2: Uh uh, oh no he didn't

V3: Girl I know, don't he know that's private

V4: What you mean out?

V1: I mean like out? Like out of the closet out?

V4: Well if you mean have I come to an awareness of who I am, ya damn skippy, and if you mean do I feel the need to tell everyone I meet Hi my name is (*state name*) and I am your flaming homosexual, I vogue on weekends, wear heels for fun, and can be called upon in times of a fashion crisis than HELLZ NO that ain't me!

(V2 and V3 snap fingers and exchange a high five, stating I heard that)

V4: My sexuality is not everybody and they momma's business but I don't think I run around hiding it either.

V1: So your gay and not out?

V2: (*clears throat*) Scuse me, ummm sir, well I like women and men so what does that make me

V1: *(with sass and attitude)* Bi honey, please get with the program

V4: And I suppose she should be introducing herself as the greedy bitch, the girl you better hide your man and yo girl from....cause if you don't watch she'll have em both?

V3: Well, scuse me sir but are you out?

V1: Yes OUT and PROUD

V3: And so what does that mean

V1: That I don't hide who I am, that unlike mister over there I have no problem introducing myself as your "flaming homosexual, who vogues on weekends, wears heels for fun AND can be called upon in times of a fashion crisis" Yes I know all of Beyonce's moves, and I do offer classes on how to keep yo man satisfied. My momma and allllllll dem know.

V4: So because you flaunt it and I don't does that mean I am any less proud, any less out, any less gay or QUEER as I'd like to call it than you?
(pauses and shakes head)

(All characters move to downstage assemble horizontal line V1-V4)

V4: Well this is my coming out story

V2: my coming

V3: coming

V1: MINE *(pointing to self with both hands)*

V1: No great fanfare

V2: No long soliloquies of

V3: recanting

V4: How I've always felt like this

V1: always been

V2, V3, V4: different

V1: No great discovery of

V2: hidden secrets

V4: of love unrequited

V2: (*reminiscent of school girl crush, flirtatious*) crushes on the high
school jock

V1, V2, V3: No national coming out day for

V4: me

V2, V3, V4: No ritualistic

V3: closet

V1, V2, V3: from which all

V4: my

V2, V3, V4: rainbow glory sprung out to

V1: GLORY OUT

V1: (*loud*) yell and declare

V4: that I'm

V3: (*with sass and snap fingers afterwards*) here and I'm queer

V4: But yes, it was in that

space

V2: right between existence and declaration

V3: between the spoken word

V1: and the

acknowledgement

V4: of who I was

V2: in the moment

V4: who I loved

V3: and enjoyed making love to

V4: somewhere between acceptance

V1: and the rejection

V2: of the lies

V4: I

V3: had learned

V4: the limitations placed upon

Following done in steady (slow) rapid succession

V2: my

V4: being

V1: somehow

V1: to denial and
V3: dishonesty

Continue steady (slow) rapid succession

V1, V2, V3, V4: NO

V4: This story
V3: this life
V4: my identity
V1: my queerness
V2: my understanding

Continue steady (slow) rapid succession

V2, V3, V4: my truly

V1: living
V2, V4: breathing
V2, V3: loving
V1, V4: embracing
V2: acknowledging

Continue steady (slow) rapid succession

V1, V2, V3, V4: accepting

V1: Never occurred in a miraculous moment
V2: But in moments

Continue steady (slow) rapid succession

V3: Never in an instant

V4: But through instances

V1: have I

V3, V4: climbed my way out

V1: of the
 proverbial closet

Continue steady (slow) rapid succession

V1: and found

V3: self-emancipation

V1,V4: liberation

V2, V3: Have I come to know

V1, V2, V3, V4: Freedom

<Lights fade to Black>

Cue Sound: GWS 418 Clip 3: Coming Out Stories (Trish)>

All characters leave stage

Movement II: Silent No More

<Cue Sound GWS 418 Clip 4: John Coltrane *Psalm* >

<Music plays throughout>

<Lights Fade Up>

V1 enters downstage right holding a bible, V4 enters downstage left holding bible bow at chair to pray (opposite sides)

** Prayed like a prayer in slow and steady succession rhythm can vary from person to person but should be consistent*

V1: Now I Lay

V1, V4: me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep and if I die before I
wake (*V4 voice fades*)

V2 enter upstage right and bow beside chair (hold cross in hand/necklace)

V3 enter upstage left bow beside chair

V1: I pray the Lord my soul be straight

V3: Now I lay me down to sleep

V2: Now I lay me down to sleep

V1: Now I lay me down to sleep

V3: I pray the Lord my soul to keep

V2: I pray the Lord my soul to keep

V1: I pray the Lord my soul to keep

V3: and if I die before I wake

V2: and if I die before I wake

V1: and if I die before I wake

V3: I pray the Lord my soul be straight

V2: I pray the Lord my soul be straight

V1: I pray the Lord my soul be straight

** Repeat prayer*

V4: *(begin after V3 finishes)* Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord...*(rise from chair)* Audre Lorde sho' ain't God
But I think she was right...about this one thing
Your silence to recognize me
To value my experience
To love me freely, embrace me truly, to hear me clearly
See your silence, stifled me
And disconnected me not only from humanity, but from the divine for which you
professed I must come to know
See it was your silence which deafened my ears to hear the voice of your God
Blinded my eyes from seeing the face of your God
And calloused my heart from feeling the warmth of your God's love...
But perhaps it was my silence which was even more egregious than this
See it was my silence which allowed you not to Hear my Truth
Instead of speaking out, I said nothing...
Instead of forcing you to value my experience...
I like, I like a sheep followed...
And you, you unlike your God...unlike your shepherd
You, led me to the slaughter....
No grace, no mercy no salvation have I ever found at your altars, at these altars...
And with each silence of omission, commission and submission,
For each time I laughed at the effeminate choir member,
I joined you and pointed my finger and sneered at the flamboyant choir director
And for everytime I condoned your outward appearances of sanctity and supposed
straightness
While you, while you Man of God fucked me raw at nite but preached damnation to me
from your pulpits during the day!
For each silence inside I died...
You know, Audre Lorde she ain't neva been nobodies God...
But she sure as Hell was right...
My silence it ain't save me...
And your silence won't save you...
And for that reason alone I refuse to be silent any longer...
For my God requires that I as in Matthew 5:16 so let my light shine... that men might see

and praise my father,
Even if my light so happens to be a rainbow reflecting the full spectrum of God's love
But then again Audre she ain't God...but silence ain't saved and it ain't savin nobody

V1, V2, V3 end prayer where they are and say Amen in succession

V3: Amen

V2: Amen

V1: Amen

V4: Now I lay me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep and if
I die before I wake, I pray, I pray MY Lord its ok NOT to be STRAIGHT (*pause*). Amen

V4 place bible on table beside the door and exit stage left

<Music fades down and out>

<Fade lights to black>

Movement III: Affirmation Through Community

<Cue Sound : GWS 418 Clip 5: Gay Black Men Talk (Ramon Boney)>

Characters Enter V1 Upstage Right Center, V2 Upstage Center Left, V3, Upstage Left,

V4 Downstage Center Right

V3 and V4 socialize throughout scene, exchange hugs in beginning between all three

<Fade lights up as sound fades down >

Voice 1: My name is Ramon Boney

Voice 4: Thank you for the hug queer brother

Voice 1: and I am the host for this
evenings gathering.

Voice 1: This is actually

Voice 4: For the love and affirmation

Voice 1: one of the first opportunities I've

Voice 4: we exchange in our
embrace

Voice 1: had to bring together an eclectic

Voice 4: Thank you for the welcome queer brother

Voice 1: collective of gay black men who will discuss tonight
several relevant issues as they pertain to being

Voice 4: With arms outstretched you say it's ok for us to be

Voice 1: Black and Gay in America

Voice 4: to feel this way

Voice 2: First of all I want to thank Raymond

Voice 4: Thank you for the intimacy
queer brother...

Voice 2: very much for allowing us into his home

Voice 4: For this moment shared between two men,

Voice 2: putting
together this wonderful meal and

V3 move to hug V4

V3 exit stage right

Voice 4: For in this simple hug I am able to find and reaffirm me...

Voice 2: ah giving us an opportunity to do
what I think

V3 move to hug V4

Voice 4: To love and cherish this we...

Voice 2: is going to be the first of a very important series

Voice 4: And to be ever
grateful for this freedom

Voice 1: of dialogue

V1 move downstage beside V4

Voice 4: Thank you for the hug queer brother....

V1 and V4 hug

V1 & V4: (*look at audience*) No, thank you for the love...

<Lights fade to black>

**Movement IV: Out Through Text: Coming out to Self, Coming out to Others (It
Has Been A Process)**

<Cue Sound: GWS 418 Clip 6: Good Morning (India Arie)>

V1: Since here in Chambana

V4: how much that would come

to mean to me (*flow as usual*)

V4: Everytime I think of the story

V1: I have been

V4: I cry (even like now). (*pause*)

V4: The bus ride home was a lonely one, and one full of tears, I was surrounded by people who knew me, but nobody saw my tears. (*pause*) I wanted, (*pause*) oh how I wanted someone to ask me what was wrong, but what was I to say (*pause*). I probably would have lied, I certainly couldn't tell them, that someone had finally seen through my façade, and encouraged me. I couldn't admit to them that I was wrestling with my sexuality and my faith...I couldn't admit that I thought there was something wrong with me, that I thought what I was feeling and doing at the time was wrong. I couldn't bare my soul and say, I'm sleeping with men and I enjoy it. Couldn't dare say that I was also dating a girl and say I was a minister. I couldn't let them know how deep the hurt ran, how alone I felt, how confused and how depressed I was becoming. And so I cried alone

V4: I knew it then as much as I know it now I am, I was gay

V3: Where I want this letter to

end is in knowing that I still love you and need you in my life

V1: Since here in Chambana I have been

V3: What I can

V1: doing all sorts of "out" things

V3: only hope for

V1: for me at least (*pause*)

V3: is that you all feel the same

V4: but I wasn't ready to admit it,

V3: Perhaps where we begin

V1:Since here in Chambana I have been doing all sorts of "out" things, for me at least. And perhaps it would be best to not describe them as "out" but liberating. I've stopped attending church...YES the suit wearing, bible toting, hand clapping, foot stomping, sure nuff Baptist bred preacher has not been to nare a service

Read mid paced rapid like internal dialogue speed one line after the other

V3: Perhaps where we begin is that for the past few years

V1: the suit wearing, bible toting, hand clapping,

V3: for the past few years

V1: foot stomping, hand clapping, foot stomping , bible toting sure nuff Baptist

V3: past few years

V1: handclapping, foot stomping, Sure nuff Baptist

V3: past years, YES!

V1: I have been

V3: YES!

V1:I have been less than honest with

V3: YES

V1: you,

V3: YES

V1: myself

V3: and YES

V1: and most people I hold dear to my heart.

V4: and I don't know if I feel any better today than I did then. Thank you Jamie

Washington

From this point on slow down in pace pause 3 seconds where indicated before you begin your line

V1: *(pause)* and it feels good

V4: you have no idea the difference you made in my life

V3: *(pause)* Where to begin

V4: *(pause)* God don't make no mistakes

V1: and it

V4: God don't

V1: *(pause)* feels good

V3: to begin

V4: no mistakes

V1: feels (long pause) good

V1, V3, V4, heads down

< Lights fade to black >

Characters leave stage

Movement V: Don't Box Me In

< Cue Music: GWS 418 Clip 7: U Don't Know Me (Armand Van Helden) >

<Lights fade up as music fade down >

Enter all Characters (V1 from closet upstage center, V4 downstage right, V2 downstage left, V3 upstage left door)

All voices: I am (*not in sync*) V1 to each other and audience break the murmuring with:

V1: I am me?

V2: You are you?

V3: He is what? (*to audience*)

V4: I am not a label

V2: He is

V3, V2: not a mothafuckin label (V2 echo the line)

V2: We are (*hug closest cast member*) queer

V1: You heard

V4: Cause we wanna be

V3: She is is

V2: Cause we can

V4: Just is

Move to form horizontal line after phrase

V4: I am

V2: I am

V3: I am

V1: I am

V2: Just am

V3: My own

V1: identity

V4: So please don't box me in (*with sass*)

All characters leave except V1 go to closet, remove a small box (have difficulty locating it, state oh there you are and place the box on table beside door Exit stage

<Cue Sound: GWS 418 Clip : U Don't Know Me (Armand Van Helden)>

<Lights Up Stage lights , Fade in Audience Lights as cast enter to take bow>

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