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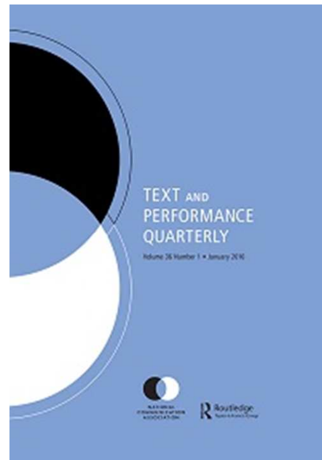

Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

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Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

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Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

Abstract: Recent literature on the growing instability of higher education gives outsized credit to neoliberalism. Neoliberalism explains some of the destabilization, but it does not account fully for academics' conflicted attachments to professional life. Those attachments often form in and through normative conceptions of passion that shun professional decline. The academic quarantine on decline is analogous to the exemption that J.L. Austin imposed on theatre: both deny certain kinds of statements any constitutive power and both harbor a fear of queerness. Fours essays published in *Text & Performance Quarterly* illustrate how the quarantine works to contain professional fears and doubts. A fifth essay finds that the deterioration that accompanies professional accomplishment can loosen normative associations and open space for other, queer relations.

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Barn's burnt down. Now I can see the moon. – Mizuta Masahide

Keywords: Academic Professionalism, J.L. Austin's Exemption, Passion, Queer Studies, Theatre

In the final essay in *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes a common "scene of failed pedagogy" in her household (168). Each time that she wished her cat to see something such as a photograph or a full moon, she would point at the thing and the cat would fix its attention on the tip of Sedgwick's finger. She goes on to share that Buddhists have written at length about this particular pedagogical problematic and even given it a name: "pointing at the moon."

Sedgwick's story offers a way into a different scene: academics' fascination with neoliberalism as an explanation for higher education's woes (i.e., the casualization of the faculty, tenure erosion, and rising educational debt).[1] Like Sedgwick's cat, our fixation with neoliberalism may lead us to miss a fuller picture of how academia works. Neoliberalism might distract, for instance, from the commonplace professional routines that also rationalize inequitable and exploitative practices. Lisa Duggan offers a different explanation of the problem

when she suggests that, even while academics acknowledge neoliberalism's influence, it still ensnares individual faculty in its logics and "even the Marxist, poststructuralist, feminist, or queer faculty members in the funkiest departments [who] often respond to institutional incentives in compliant rather than defiant modes" (Lim, 130). The concern in either case is that the fascination with neoliberalism eclipses the conflicted ways in which academics investment themselves in professional life.[2]

In Sedgwick's exegesis, she explains that some attribute the phenomenon of "pointing at the moon" to the ambiguities in symbolic action, others attribute it to hubris, and a third theory suggests that the two—the moon and pointing at it—are one and the same. What changes if we apply option three to the fascination with neoliberalism? That which previously appeared distracting or compromising now signals an ambivalent attachment to the precarity that has come to define academic work. Our fascination with neoliberalism proffers higher education's decline as a requisite condition of academic pursuits, as if its precarity grants that work its value. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten characterize that attachment as professionalism's "internal antagonism" and Lauren Berlant describes it as "an ongoing and sustaining relation to the scene and circuit of optimism and disappointment" (Harney, 32; Berlant, 27). I borrow a popular term and refer to it as a passion, as in the passion for knowledge and teaching that we credit for our decision to pursue uncertain careers in academia, and the same passion that we cite to justify paying our own way to conferences in the hopes of achieving professional success. The passionate see the risks and plunge ahead anyway into graduate school and the unknowns beyond, acting not out of ignorance or recklessness, but with love.[3]

Though it sometimes looks like a stabilizing force, professional passion is a source of anxiety. It is never clear how much passion is needed to achieve career success nor how best to

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express it. It can be both a virtue and a liability. Its ebbs and flows must be managed carefully, especially where neoliberalism has relieved academic institutions of responsibility for the people they employ and the students they attract and left individuals to navigate instability on their own as "rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care'" (Brown, n.p.).

Among the criticisms that queer theorists have voiced about neoliberalism are concerns with the normative dimensions of self-care.[4] Those concerns are in keeping with a prominent theme in queer studies, yet the concerns with self-care rarely extend back to academic professionalism. As Heather Love explains, queer theory distinguished itself with "a wholesale refusal of normativity" (93). In *Fear of a Queer Planet*, for instance, Michael Warner describes queer theory as resisting "normal business in the academy" and as "a way to mess up the desexualized spaces of the academy" (xxvi). However, in an odd historical twist, Love observes that queer theory's "revolt against scholarly expertise...resonated in many ways with academic norms" (87).

Here is another scene that resembles Sedgwick's situation with her cat: The more attached we become to queer studies, the more attached we become to the institutional conditions needed to sustain it. Queer studies is, after all, a job as much as it is an intellectual project and thus subject to the same precarious terms and conditions as other forms of academic work. It is a disciplined, time-intensive effort often undertaken without the benefit of tenure or adequate institutional support. It can be a labor of love subject to the whims and aggravations of personal circumstance and done in the interstices of other tasks. Individuals working within those terms and conditions attempt to compensate for institutional lack with sheer willpower, an arrangement that minorities and women shoulder disproportionately and in ways that deepen disparities.[5]

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Wherever neoliberal rationalities do not recognize structural discrimination and inequity, individuals have only themselves to blame if they fail to achieve professional success.[6]

How might we account for those messy attachments without either romanticizing the work of queer studies as a "crazy" kind of love and without reinscribing normative conceptions of professional passion? How might we instead affirm what Duggan characterizes as the "promiscuous relational experimentalism" between queer studies, its institutional conditions, and our sometimes composed, often disheveled academic lives (Crosby 146)? Is it possible to recount how professional life "throws" itself together, as Stewart puts it, out of "flows, powers, pleasures, encounters, distractions, drudgery, denials, practical solutions, shape-shifting forms of violence, daydreams, and opportunities lost or found" (29)?

One way to begin such an account is by addressing one of the more pedestrian aspects of academic professionalism: the fear of decline, passion's foe, which is also a fear of queerness. Neoliberalism's influence is evident in our tendency to attribute career decline to individual shortcomings rather than structural deficiencies, but that influence does not fully account for the fear of decline, which has as much to do with avoiding perversion as it does securing professional, financial, or political stability.

To reclaim decline as a worthwhile organizing force, I enlist the help of performance studies, which has been attentive to the "backstage" of academic labor in ways that queer studies has not. The history of theatrical labor, Shannon Jackson (2012) elaborates, "has shadowed the precarious emergence of performance both as an inter disciplinary field of study and as the central scaffolding of a service economy" (12). Like queer studies, performance studies has challenged normal business in the academy, but professional norms have been especially fraught terrain for performance due to what Jackson (2004) characterizes as the scholarly-artist divide

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that stretches through theatre and performance programs. "To the extent that the discernment and dissemination of knowledge requires boundness and containment," Jackson explains, "performance has faired unevenly in the academy. The imprecise boundaries of the theatrical event made it difficult to know where the research object ended and its relevant context began" (6). Discerning those boundaries, Jackson (2011) explains in a different essay, is further complicated by the fact that the "backstage of [performance studies'] labor and technology is not the 'exterior' real but in irresoluble tension with the interiority of the aesthetic event" (149). In order to negotiate those divisions and ensure recognition for artistic and scholarly contributions, performance studies attends closely to the logistics of professionalism. Some have done so through a form of a dramaturgy known as institutional critique.[7] Institutional critique engages with the "essentially recursive relationship between institutions and institutionalized selves" and, as it regards academia, deliberately blurs the line between the doing of inquiry and the research object (Jackson, 2011, 124). Performance studies' precarious institutional position, its contributions to institutional critique, and the particular immateriality of theatrical labor, or what Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider refer to as the "'not-not' work of theatre," affords it a unique perspective on professional decline (6). My attempt to make space for decline thus engages five movements: queer theory's "revolt," staged as it were through professional norms; the scholarly-artist divide within performance studies that transgresses academic norms; academic forms of the dramaturgy known as institutional critique; the not-not work of theatre; and the exemption that J.L. Austin imposed on theatre when theorizing the performative utterance.

That last one may seem anachronistic. Austin exempted theatrical forms from the performative utterance because he believed that such linguistic "etiolations" as he called them

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were "hollow or void" and thus lacking in constitutive power (22). His exemption, which denied theatre's world-making capacity, is rooted in the belief that theatre merely reflects reality and, meretricious by nature, degrades it.[8] I return to Austin's exemption because his fear of etiolating resembles the fear of decline that crackles through professionalism's antagonistic circuit.

In an effort to manage decline, academics quarantine certain kinds of speech acts much like Austin exempted theatre, and the kinds of statements that we quarantine resemble those that Austin exempted. Specifically, we quarantine professional fears and doubts that take the form of clever asides, parenthetical winks, word play, fictions, and anecdotes—any kind of statement with a theatrical affect. The quarantine guards against the deterioration, sickness, and other qualities "infected with queerness" that such statements carry (Parker and Sedgwick 5). It guards against any threat to serious professionalism, which academics signal with vows to stay productive, relevant, and upwardly mobile. Take the problem of obscurity, for example. It is not a problem so long as we confine it to lone essays or other people's careers. In doing so, we prevent it from infecting the whole profession as it occasionally threatens to do when it seems that every publication drowns in a sea of journals and monographs purchased only by libraries and read by so few that "renowned" and "obscure" bear an uncanny resemblance to one another. Occasionally such fears about the state of the profession flare up and when they do, obscurity looks less like an individual failing than a sign of institutional rot. Amidst such outbreaks, we hear talk of inquiry being more decadent than productive and a perversion of higher education's true mission. The hackneyed joke about earning "another line on the vitae" suddenly resonates and the whole academic project seems diminished. The quarantine protects us from those kinds of professional existential crises.

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To show how the fear of decline harbors a prejudice against both queerness and theatre, and to demonstrate how the quarantine works, I look to five essays published in *Text & Performance Quarterly* (*TPQ*) over a span of twenty years. *TPQ* is one of the few journals to publish institutional critiques of academic life and it has been "singular in its commitment to LGBT scholarship" as Charles E. Morris III and Catherine Helen Palczewski note in their retrospective on the field of communication studies (143). It is no mere coincidence that the accounts of academic life that appear in *TPQ* often share the page with references to queer sexualities. Both are concerned with passion and perversion. Four of the essays that I discuss—Elizabeth Whitney's three-part account of an emergent academic career, Frederick C. Corey and Thomas K. Nakayama's "Sextext," Rob Drew's essay on academic sloth, and Joshua Gunn's "ShitText"—speak about academic professionalism and its aggravations. The direct and indirect "conversation" between the essays captures the contention surrounding professionalism. None talk about neoliberalism. Instead, they grapple with how to stay ardent, productive, faithful, and serious, and each experiments with how to empathize with the dispassionate, the fallow, and the easy. I explain in my analysis how the professional fears and doubts expressed in them can be sidelined by the normative images of professional health that accompany them and by the prejudice against queerness and theatre. The tensions in and across the essays are representative of the conflicted ways in which we talk about professionalism more generally. Just as it does in everyday conversations, that "talk" takes the form of personal anecdotes, fictional or semi-fictional stories, and asides. Some of it generates distance with sexual innuendo and other word play. Those unscholarly forms make it easier to contain the fears and doubts with which these essays wrestle.

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The last essay that I discuss, Terry Galloway's 1997 "Taken," also talks about professionalism and it provides an especially poignant example of how the quarantine works. Published alongside "Sextext," Galloway's essay was never referenced in the debates that ensued. That omission may be due to the fact that Galloway is a performance practioner and not an academic. It would have been much easier than it proved to be in the case of "Sextext" to settle the question of whether hers was a scholarly contribution. Galloway's relationship to the academy, the historical placement of her essay, and the remarkable immunity to the prejudice against theatre and queerness that she exhibits in her essay present an unusual challenge to normative conceptions of passion and decline, a challenge that could change how we relate to academic work were we to accept the invitation she extends in "Taken" to queer professionalism.

Signs of decay

It can be difficult to see how the quarantine on decline interacts with the prejudice against theatre and queerness when their association often seems incidental as it appears to be in Whitney's three-part project. Published over the span of a year in *TPQ's* Performance Space, Whitney's is a semi-fictional chronicle of the maddening process by which a "professorial hopeful" becomes an assistant professor (2015a, 222). Her story affirms the enduring belief that individual skill plus passion mixed with a little luck leads to professional success. It affirms that belief despite Whitney's efforts to pervert the standard job narrative. Her efforts illustrate the risk in voicing professional concerns using a dramatic form and the risk in associating those concerns with any form of queerness.

Whitney's "Coming (Back) to Performance Studies" could be read as an affirming tale of a vibrant career in a healthy profession. The story's semi-fictional form and its references to

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queer performance support such a reading even while the essay subverts the conventional job narrative. At the beginning of the story, Whitney's protagonist, Barbie, still a graduate student, believes that she will "find a magical tenure-track position" where "her passion for disrupting the practice/theory divide would be valued" (2014, 385). Once on the job market, however, Barbie recasts that belief as fantasy and voices reluctance about pursuing an academic career. Her job prospects look dim and she begins to doubt her love of academia. In the final chapter, after securing the tenure track position that she desires, her reluctance gives way to relief and excitement. In that chapter, Whitney switches from third to first person and drops the semblance of fiction. Her doubts and concerns about the profession are thus largely confined to the fictional parts of the narrative. In hindsight they seem less concerns with the profession than professional jitters or "imposter syndrome."

Whitney's interest in queer performance also seems at first a personal weakness but in the end appears a sign of professional health. The first mention of queer performance comes at the beginning of the story when Barbie is working as a lecturer and applying for jobs. She refuses to apply for just any job. "Barbie was stubborn. She wanted to teach performance. She wanted to make performance. And then, she wanted to write about making performance...Her focus was on queer performance...Surely that would be marketable" (2015a, 222). At the point in the story in which it appears, Whitney's ironic "surely" reflects the uncertainty she faces. Her job search at that moment seems equal parts quixotic and savvy. When later she secures a job that indeed allows her to teach, make, and write about queer performance, her winning gamble seems both a sign of her own merit and of the health of the profession. Both Whitney and the academy appear fit.

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Along the way to that happy ending, Whitney challenges the standard job narrative with a number of unorthodox statements that unsettle the picture of health the story otherwise conveys. In an act of solidarity with all those who do not meet with job success, for instance, she questions whether merit alone earned her a tenure track position. She questions whether her success was due entirely to her own strengths and accomplishments. She wonders if it is perhaps due more to good fortune. In another instance, she breaks from convention to characterize her work as a kind of decadence, which she assigns more personal than social value. Academia, she writes, is "my place to indulge in various academic pleasures" (2015b, 407). Where Whitney's indulgences combine with her insights into the precarity of academic life, her story threatens to pervert the standard professional narrative. The apprehension that flashes across the project occasionally threatens to spill over into full-blown anxiety. However, her success in securing a job in an area of study that she loves contains that threat. It allows us to shield ourselves from the uncertainty, doubt, indulgence and odd pleasures that accompany her passion.

Gay visibility and academic obscurity

A perverse passage in Corey and Nakayama's "Sextext," faces the same quarantine that Whitney risks in "Coming (Back)." "Sextext" appeared alongside six other essays in a 1997 special issue of *TPQ*. The essay has two footnotes one of which announces itself as an "authorial comment," a designation that would be unnecessary in a more conventional essay. It is necessary in this case because "Sextext" presents as a fictional first person account of a graduate student who, while working toward his degree, takes a second job starring in porn films under the screen name Mark Stark. The footnote is written in the third person, suggesting that it comes not from the graduate student, but from Corey and Nakayama (as much as that distinction makes sense).

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The comment corrects a claim made by the graduate student who tells us that he abandoned a line of argument about desire that he had hoped would become a chapter of his dissertation because, "my dissertation committee never would have accepted" it (65). The footnote disputes this account. "His committee would not have objected," it tells us in a punchy aside. "Hell, one of his committee members did not even read the dissertation, really" (65).

In Whitney's story, the mundane aspects of academic work, such as job applications and office space, appear main stage. In "Sextext," professionalism is the backdrop to a theoretical discussion of desire and descriptions of gay sex. Corey and Nakayama's footnote foregrounds professionalism for a bright moment with this perverse thought: perhaps it is impossible to theorize desire, not because of the limits of language or fear of the other, but because of faculty indifference. Were the footnote true—had someone actually not read a dissertation—it would be shattering. Imagine if dissertations went unread. How would we judge qualifications or confirm the contributions of new scholarship? How would we trust the validity of new research, academic transcripts, or letters of recommendation? Imagine if those, too, went unread. It would undermine the credibility of individual careers and bore through the heart of the profession.

The prejudice against theatricality and queerness relieves us of the obligation to engage those questions. More specifically, the footnote's fictitiousness and its proximity to gay sex contain the scandalous statement. It is, first of all, a fictional note to a fictional story. There was no committee member who did not read the dissertation. Corey and Nakayama do not actually say that a dissertation went unread. "Sextext" does not really document such a case. The drama in the claim—its hollow quality as Austin might say—further mitigates its risk. Not only is the statement a fiction, it is a fictional statement that harbors queerness. It marks the moment in the story when the graduate student grows disillusioned and falls out of love with academia. His

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committee member's dispassion mirrors his own feelings and the whole profession looks sickly and diminished. The graduate student's decline stands in sharp contrast to Mark Stark's success. While the graduate student's relationship to academia deteriorates, Stark's pornography career flourishes and he enjoys a sense of accomplishment in his new profession. The fictitious footnote looks all the more queer set against Stark's positive accounts of gay sex. Just as Whitney leaves her doubts and fears behind in the fictional part of her essay, "Sextext" relegates its commentary on academia to the margins and otherwise telegraphs professional health.

Slouching toward success

Even though "Sextext" sparked years of scholarly debate, its footnote remained a theatrical aside. So effective was the quarantine that a decade after "Sextext" was published, Drew declined to cite Corey and Nakayama's footnote in an essay that appeared in another special issue of *TPQ*. In a perverse act of his own, Drew argues in defense of what he calls the academic sloth, or the obscure scholar who bucks academia's "publish or perish" culture by publishing infrequently. The basis for Drew's defense is his own professional life, which he relays in a first person narrative. Over the course of the essay, he explains the benefits of being slovenly, which, he argues, could transform the profession for the better. At a minimum, he suggests, academics could try valuing quality over quantity, even though, he notes with some cynicism, it "would require scholars to actually read one another's work, especially when acting in some formal evaluative capacity" (68).

By the time that Drew advocated for the sloth, "Sextext" was well on its way to becoming a landmark essay with a forum dedicated to it in the *American Communication Journal* and a retrospective in the *Journal of Homosexuality*. Even with that recognition and

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even though "Sextext's" scandalous footnote speaks directly to Drew's comment, Drew did not cite it, a decision that may be due to simple misrecognition. "Sextext" grew famous as a contribution to LGBTQ scholarship, and that recognition resolved the many other challenges that essay posed to academic professionalism. In all likelihood, Drew did not see the essay as relevant to his own argument, but that oversight makes his indirect reference to "Sextext" all the more curious.

Drew may not have recognized "Sextext" as commentary on professionalism, but he did recognize the queer dimensions of the stigma against decline. In an attempt to distance the sloth from any queer association, Drew argues that volume is not a reliable measure of quality, a point he underscores with this analogy: "It's often easier to perform one's labors efficiently," he explains, "when they're of little personal consequence, as porn stars can attest" (70). Drew's defense of the sloth rests on an analogy that he draws between scholars who publish at high-volume and sex workers. His analogy transfers the stigma of decline to those he calls "rate-busters," or scholars who publish for the sake of publishing (70). It is the rate-buster, not the sloth, Drew contends, who cheapens inquiry with publications done by the hour. Scholarship executed without care or true love is the real threat to productivity, he argues; if care rather than volume were an indicator of success, sloths would exemplify passion. "The reason sloths don't write more, he goes on to say, "is not because they're unmotivated but precisely because *they care so much*...often much more than their rate-buster counterparts" (70, emphasis in the original). To support his argument, Drew cites the work of the "less celebrated" (74). Oddly enough, his representative exemplar is the decidedly unslothful David Marc, author of five books and a lecturer who drives "around Southern California's freeways from one adjunct gig to another supporting his writing habit" (75). Like his "Sextext" counterpart Mark Stark, Marc

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exhibits real professional passion. He is a model of productivity, albeit an unconventional one, and a triumph over professional decline. Like Whitney's success and Stark's health, Marc's true love of academia protects him from the stigma of decline and Drew's porn star analogy shields him from any association with cheap non-normative sex.

Quick and dirty publications

The rejoinder to Drews' defense of the sloth appears alongside it in the same special issue of *TPQ*. While Drew champions careful, caring scholars over "rate busters," Gunn's "ShitText" revels in volume. Gunn explains that he rejects the "consumerist hygienics that has infiltrated every domain of social life, most especially the field of academic publishing" (82). He takes as his role model Juan Goytisolo's Metro Defecator who "resists imperial globalization" by "celebrating the excesses of his own productive capacity" (82). His essay could read as satire were it not for the fact that Gunn himself is a prolific publisher. The sheer number of essays that Gunn has authored is perverse. Having published like a fiend, Gunn can afford the pleasures of unloading in "ShitText," which he does by admonishing academics for their lack of pride and tendency to self-denigrate. That shame could be overcome, he suggests, if academics celebrated their output rather than seeming immodest. After all, he challenges, who does not secretly love their own research? His argument is seeped in word play and sexual innuendo and it is in those terms that we are invited to understand our private professional desires.

Gunn's personal productivity and his celebration of it would seem to exemplify professional passion, but, just as "Sextext" employs fictitiousness and associates with queer life, "ShitText" generates a theatrical gap and flirts with homo desires. Those elements surface throughout the essay and expressly in the letter to the journal editors that accompanies it. The

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inclusion of the letter at the beginning, itself a breach of convention, affords us a view of what is typically an invisible process. That visibility folds the reviewers into Gunn's drama implicating them in a dare that Gunn issues to his readers: don't take the essay seriously; don't take him seriously as either a scholar of rhetoric or a "performance scholar/practitioner" (80). Those provocations and his sexual innuendo come together in a pun on his own name. "You know what really fucking chaps my hide about the review process?," he asks the editors. "Blindfolding. It's just another excuse to get fucked over. I'm just joshing: actually I kind of like it. I bet you do too. I bet you like to watch" (80). The joke has all the elements that invite quarantine: it can't be serious and it's a little too homo.

Seeped in word play, Gunn's (homo) hyper-productive academic is thus no more protected from the prejudice against queerness than is Corey and Nakayama's fictional disillusioned graduate student or Drew's sloth. On the contrary, hyper-productivity has long attracted disapproval and inspired warnings to young scholars not to exhaust themselves by following the Gunns of the world down the path to professional burnout. In communication studies, the warnings against the empty thrills of "prolific publishing" date back to a 1993 rejoinder to M. Hickson, *et al.* (1989) by Keith V. Erickson, *et al*.[9] In a well-known essay, Hickson proposed using publishing rates as a "yardstick" for measuring scholarly influence. Erickson objected to Hickson's approach arguing that it would "'glamorize' prolific publishing at the expense of scholarship" (329). Erickson saw a graver problem than just diminished quality; prolific publishing threatened the moral fiber of the academy: It "contributes to scholar *manqué*," and "signals to junior faculty the inappropriate message that teaching and scholarship are secondary to 'getting one's name in print'" (329). Too often, Erickson laments, "established faculty…surrender their scholarly sensibilities to the lure of easy scholarship" and junior faculty

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convince themselves that to "be a 'player,'" they must follow suit (329). Chasing "'quick and dirty'" publications and engaging in "hurried writing," Erickson cautions, can lead to "premature interpretations," diminished self-respect, and an empty life of scholarly gamesmanship (334, 331). The advance of disciplinary knowledge should be the only aim of inquiry, not earning "an additional notch on one's academic gun," or Gunn as it were (333).

The sexual innuendo in "ShitText" lampoons the kind of chaste warnings against prolific publishing that Erickson represents, but, like the warnings themselves, Gunn's response encourages us to assess our professional behavior in sexual terms and against heteronormative codes. Erickson casts professionalism as fraught with sexual risk: quick and dirty publications can wreck careers and earn scholars a reputation for being easy.[10] Gunn encourages us to take pride in our productivity, but his pride exhibits a streak of narcissism, a disorder long associated with same-sex desires. Gunn's histrionics and Erickson's hyperbole cast their commentary in an air of perversion. Though each is a counter to the other, they both employ the same exaggerated style that is easy to quarantine.

Not even on the map

Academia's standard professional narrative pushes any signs of decline to the margins. We train ourselves to look past ambivalence, doubt, exhaustion, and disillusionment and direct our gaze toward advancement. And it is easy to ignore decline when it manifests in goofy, sad, hyperbolic, and semi-fictional forms. The quarantine is effective in part because it so rarely has to justify itself. Galloway's essay "Taken" is notable in that regard. Like the essays discussed above, the form of her essay invites the prejudice against theatre and queerness. Galloway's own relationship to academia also makes it easy to quarantine. But in Galloway's case those forms are

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more prominent and central to her story and Galloway herself exhibits a kind of immunity to the prejudice that affords her a different relationship to professional decline.

Galloway's "Taken" appeared alongside "Sextext" in the same 1997 special issue of *TPQ*. Like Corey and Nakayama, Galloway reflects on desire, speaks to the pleasures of being queer, and relays gay sex scenes, including a night she spent with a former high-school beauty queen who "slipped into [Galloway's] bed and spelled out, using her finger against [her] palm, 'I want you'" (99). Galloway visits those topics while elaborating her thesis: a fear of queerness, she argues, is compromising theatre's professionalism. Over the course of the essay, Galloway draws on her own experiences with drag to argue in favor of allowing a queer sensibility to guide the profession so that theatre might remain a site of world-making.

Of all the examples presented here, her essay, by dint of its obscurity, best illustrates the strength of the quarantine and the prejudice against theatre and queerness. Though they appeared side by side and spoke to the same topics, not once in the debates, special issues, and anniversaries dedicated to "Sextext" did Galloway's "Taken" receive mention. That omission may be due to the essay's professional perversions more than its sexual content. Galloway exemplifies what Jackson refers to as the scholarly/artist divide. She is an actor who has written an essay about theatre for an academic journal. Her essay has two citations, one to Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* and the other to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Those details alone court the prejudice against theatre. Secondarily, her essay is a raucous first person account of her life as a gender-queer lesbian who regularly performs drag. It is less surprising that such an account went unacknowledged than it is curious that "Sextext's" detractors did not think to present it as further evidence of academia's moral decline. Maybe they felt the essay posed no threat to the

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profession. After all, its author makes her living staging fictional stories. Or perhaps they never read it.

Had the essay garnered more attention, it may have proven more difficult to quarantine. Galloway's enthusiasm for her work is infectious. She seeks out chances to masquerade. She expresses pride in passing. When she played John Falstaff in a production of *Henry IV Part I*, she "wanted the audience to [be] able to relax entirely into the fiction" (96). It is hard to dismiss the essay on the grounds that it is theatrical because the essay is about theatre. Performance is Galloway's passion, but she does not measure passion in terms of productivity nor does she equate productivity with professional success. Drawing on the word's older religious connotations, Galloway speaks of her passion for theatre as a force that consumes and possesses her. She conveys this sense of passion best while reflecting on one particular night that she played Falstaff:

> And being as I was (and am) deaf and a woman, and also at the time, oh just poor as shit, I suddenly fell into the language. *There was no division between what Falstaff had to say and what I was feeling at that moment* (96, emphasis added).

She goes on to describe the moment as exceptional in how it closed the gap between the theatrical and the constitutive, the very gap that Austin cites to justify his exemption. Galloway describes the moment in detail: "my friend Jan who was playing Hal felt the language turn real so he kept turning it...And the audience felt it too...And there we all were, all of us caught in that moment. Everything turned stark still, the temperature dropped, and we were all in that fictitious and real moment together" (97).

While articulating the significance of that night, Galloway acknowledges the ways in which performance elides standard notions of productivity and often fails to count as an

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accomplishment in the way that an academic essay counts. She lures out that prejudice in us by citing all the ways in which her production of *Henry IV Part I* might be considered insignificant: "It was after all simply a performance by a handful of university students witnessed by a mere three hundred people in a barn in a Texas town so small it wasn't even on the state map" (97). Her description begs some questions. Does student artwork count as real art? Does a play staged in a barn count as real theatre? Does a town that does not appear on a map really exist? She goes on to catalog the other ways in which the play and her performance may not count: "it wasn't reviewed, no video was made, and there weren't even any photographs of it" (97). Her performance of Falstaff fails to register on any standard index of productivity. It would not count as an accomplishment by any conventional standard used in academia. Neither does Galloway herself count according to the social conventions that deny the realities of lesbians and people with disabilities, the conventions that would have us ask whether sex between women counts as real sex and whether a statement made by a person who cannot hear her own voice counts as a real statement.

Someone bound to those professional standards and social conventions might concede the insignificance of Galloway's work or even her existence, but Galloway is bound to neither. To claim her performance its power, she shifts the terms and describes it as a moment of passion that manifests as a kind of possession: "I had been swept up in theatre, the epiphanic moment," she writes. She goes on to explain its significance as one piece of a larger on-going performance: "Again, Falstaff had not been defeated. Again. He had been saved through performance. Again. And the performer (in this case, me) had saved him. Again. I was part of that continuum" (97). Galloway argues the reality of Falstaff in and through the logic of performance. She reconstituted Falstaff so that Falstaff could come to life. Her Falstaff disappeared into the night

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air, but Falstaff would live on, provided theatre continued to do its job. For a brief moment, we catch a glimpse of both the moon and Galloway pointing at it.

The continuous work of playing Falstaff does not square with professional standards and Galloway further departs from those standards when she suggests that such work never generates the lasting insights we hope for. She shares another story about her own performance of masculinity to illustrate. Playing Nick Bottom in a production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, she tells us, led her to the realization "so common in Shakespeare, that when we play ourselves beyond a strict set of roles we are transformed into something else, something infinitely richer, more complex and fun; but not, in the end, particularly powerful or potent" (100). That insight might pose a professional crisis for some. It is not a huge leap from it to the academic fear that our work, especially that which goes unread, is pointless. Galloway does not appear to suffer from that professional anxiety. On the contrary, she expresses frustration with her fellow actors who use the impermanence of performance as an excuse not to take their work seriously, a mindset that Galloway suggests diminishes the whole profession. She elaborates that argument with a discussion of drag performances. While working with other actors who were performing drag, she found that her peers did not always commit themselves fully to genders with which they did not identify. They cultivated a certain distance from the character and opened a gap between themselves and their performance. In doing so, Galloway suggests, they denied their own performance and hers its due power. Galloway elaborates in a passage about women playing men:

> [Y]ou still got a lot of performances of women playing men but not really playing men—they'd toss out a little butt or giggle rather than laugh or play pretty rather than funny in order to remind the audience that they didn't really have a dick, they

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> weren't really a threat, they were 'just pretending'. This was a source of great humiliation to the performers who played opposite them because those women were deliberately undermining their own assumed fictions: they were guilty of deliberately failing to convince (96).

These performers, she suggests, shame their work. Their prejudice against queerness is one problem; their prejudice against theatre another. The two together, Galloway argues, constrains theatre and inhibits its world-making ambitions. As she explains it, the two prejudices are interwoven into a single belief that theatre is obligated to reflect "a strict sexual reality" (94). She voices her concern with this lament: "Theater itself is such a sexy profession that when it refuses to practice anything but the missionary position it apes a world view it doesn't really share" (94). In other words, the prejudice against queerness is a prejudice against theatre and the prejudice against theatre is a prejudice against queerness.

Galloway's colleagues fail to the meet the standard she sets for them. The problem stems in part from a deep investment in gender normativity. It seems stem, too, from a fear of what theatre can do. That fear inhibits passion as Galloway defines it: a willingness to take possibilities seriously; a willingness to get lost in something bigger or to become, along with the costumes, sets, and props, a part of the theatrical equipment. Such was the sensation Galloway herself had while playing Falstaff, a sensation she describes as being "hauled up by something other than myself" (100). A commitment to possibility underwrites Galloway's request of her fellow actors to take their roles seriously regardless of whether they identify with a character. She models that commitment when she agrees to play the feminine object of the male gaze ("the type of role that I hated") in a production of *Bus Stop* (98). The character, like Falstaff, had to be played, and to do it justice Galloway had to act the quiet vehicle for someone else's desires, a

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role that felt wholly foreign to her. Though she did not identify with the character's gender, her sense of responsibility to theatre and her respect for other people's genders guided her performance. She gave herself up to the role.

Professional etiolations

In the scenes that Galloway relays in "Taken," she appears a model of unwavering passion. Yet, her story is not a refuge from decline. She attends closely to the various forms of degeneration that accompany accomplishment, and she cautions us against believing that achievements are true and lasting. Her advice aligns well with academic traditions that recognize uncertainty and impermanence as integral to teaching and inquiry, but it conflicts with the demands of academic professionalism.

To achieve success in higher education—to "secure" jobs, tenure, and general advancement—accomplishments cannot simply evaporate into the night air. They must lead somewhere, to a degree, more funding, or to publications. Whitney, Corey and Nakayama, Drew, and Gunn are attune to that pressure. Each grapples with how best to manage the passion that led them into higher education and to comport with the conventions and expectations that govern academic work. That practice of self-care proves especially challenging where academic ideals mirror normative romantic values (e.g., commitment, fidelity, monogamy). To borrow a phrase from Galloway, the terms and conditions of academic employment enforce a "strict sexual reality;" publish too much and you're easy; publish too slowly and you're fallow. Indulge a little or even try too hard and you still might not present correctly. When the occasional doubt creeps in about the authenticity or validity of one's academic contributions, professional passion can turn downright queer.

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Galloway turns that professional script back on itself when she voices frustration with actors who cultivate a gap between themselves and roles with which they do not identify. Their phobia, she suggests, leads them to conflate queer with make-believe, and that association, she argues, leads to them to fail in their jobs and denigrate their own profession. Galloway is not concerned here with enforcing normativity. On the contrary, she challenges the thinking that queer is make-believe by affirming theatre's world-making potential. Writing in regards to Austin's exemption, Parker and Sedgwick observe that the constitutive utterance is never an isolated event, and that reception or uptake of speech acts is sufficiently complex enough "that the link between performativity and performance in the theatrical sense" becomes "an active question" (8). Galloway herself notes the importance of context when she characterizes her colleagues' refusals to play convincing as "a source of great humiliation to the performers who played opposite" (96). Their speech acts are no less constitutive for being negations. And, at the same time, their refusal (or failure) to convince *weakens or loosens normative associations*. It robs performances of their natural vigor, so to speak; it renders them decadent. Such etiolations, Parker and Sedgwick remind us, are the space of queer fantasy and desire. Those moments of deterioration are sources of possibility. Galloway herself poaches them for her own performances, and when she voices frustration with her fellow actors, she does so not in defense of normativity, but in mourning for lost possibilities.

Does that queer sense of decline—one that recognizes possibility in loosened associations—transfer to academic professionalism where economic and social precarity have generated a whole different kind of uncertainty and insecurity? Can it be done without simply reinscribing neoliberal rationalities and romanticizing permanent instability. Embracing decline must do something other than affirm destabilization. Galloway's complaint against her fellow

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actors is again instructive: Historically speaking, the more inclusive that academia has become, the more pointed have become the attacks on its value and the greater the momentum to divest from it. This gradual abandonment of higher education is analogous to the actors who refuse to take their roles seriously. Divesting is a way of negating certain forms of academic work, certain kinds of students, degrees, scholars, careers, and areas of study. It withholds legitimacy from some at the risk of diminishing the whole profession. It is a deeply cynical perspective. If anyone can go to college, the thinking goes, if anyone can earn a degree or write a dissertation on anything, if anyone can publish research (even Galloway!), if academic institutions can just as well accommodate queer, gender, ethnic, performance and critical/cultural studies as they can schools of public policy and informatics; if any university can claim research status, then the whole project must be make-believe.[11] That kind of cynicism is not limited to traditionalists. As far back as 1995, Berlant and Warner expressed concern that queer studies had become "a vast labor of metacommentary, a virtual industry [of] special issues, sections of journals, omnibus reviews, anthologies, and dictionary entries" (343). They wondered if queer studies had become the sum total of its professional output. Their concerns resemble the criticism leveled at "Sextext" by those who saw it as the product of an overindulgent and permissive institution that allowed scholarship for the sake of scholarship.

Though frustrated with her fellow actors, Galloway avoids cynicism by recognizing that while even our most passionate expressions (artistic and otherwise) are subject to deterioration, the possibility is always present that other attachments may form in the crevices of those weakened associations. As Galloway configures it, decline works at loosening our attachments, but it does not predict how they will reform. That active question becomes the space of possibility. Were we to adopt a similar mindset regarding our relationships to academia and

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academic work, we could forego passion-management and maintain instead what Berlant (2011) calls "a sustaining intimate relation" (224). As Gunn, Drew, Corey and Nakayama, and Whitney's essays demonstrate, those relations would be no less compelling were they to manifest as casual, dull, capricious, one-off, or over-wrought. Affirming such queer relationships to academia will not undo neoliberalism's influence on higher education. It will not revive the academy or restore it to some past greatness. It would allow us to acknowledge how our relationships to academia can be marked by ambivalent phases, shades of passion, and multiplicities of commitment, and it might allow for a wider range of relationships to higher education and forms of academic contribution. It may allow us to be other than defined completely by our output or worn down by impossible standards. However they might manifest, those other ways of relating contain possibilities.

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[1] Lisa Duggan (*The Twilight of Equality)* and Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades ("The Neoliberal University") were among the first to warn about neoliberalism's influence.

[2] Kathleen Stewart suggests that "the terms neoliberalism, advanced capitalism, and globalization...do not in themselves begin to describe the situation we find ourselves in" (1).

[3] A special issue of *Communication Theory* that pre-dates the interest in neoliberalism explores academic professional life, which Brenda J. Allen, Mark P. Orbe, and Margarita Refugia Olivas describe as "enchantment with the promise of the academy" (403).

[4] Much of that work focuses on the limits of LGBTQ rights campaigns. See, for instance, Brown's *Regulating Aversion*, Dean Spade's "Trans Law & Politics on a Neoliberal Landscape," and Warner's *The Trouble with Normal*.

[5] See Audrey Williams June, ""The Invisible Labor of Minority Professors," and Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, *et al., Presumed Incompetent.*

[6] See Angela McRobbie's work on the new culture industries for further discussion of how neoliberal rationalities transfer responsibility to individuals.

[7] Ronald J. Pelias' "The Critical Life" is representative.

[8] I am heavily indebted to Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's extended analysis of the queer-phobic dimensions of Austin's exemption. For further discussion see Jacques Derrida and Timothy Gould.

[9] Erickson's essay preceded Carol Blair, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter's well-known rejoinder to Hickson by a year.

[10] Erickson was not alone in couching such warnings in sexual language. Janice Hocking Rushing and Thomas S. Frentz echoed Erickson when they argued that academia values "'up' over 'down,' speed over deliberation, and quantity over quality" (231). The sped-up culture of inquiry, they warn, could cause blindness, sterility, and loneliness, and will come at the expense of true wisdom (231).

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[11] One of "Sextext's" critics made that exact argument and styled it as a fictional story. After posting a number of conventional rejoinders to CR-NET, David L. Sutton's final post is written in the third person and recounts a day at a Speech Communication Association convention filled with boring panels and "cookie-cutter" research. The Sutton in the story returns to his hotel room discouraged after attending a poster session that he describes as "a dumping ground for grossly inferior work" (n.p.). It is notable that, while otherwise critical of "Sextext," he adopts Corey and Nakayama's form to level criticism at academic culture.

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