

4-18-2018

## Fear of etiolation in the age of professional passion

Kathleen F. McConnell

San Jose State University, [kathleen.mcconnell@sjsu.edu](mailto:kathleen.mcconnell@sjsu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/comm\\_pub](https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/comm_pub)



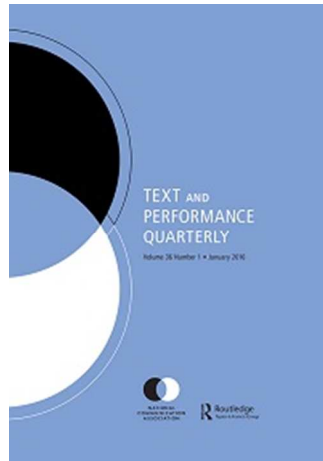
Part of the [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kathleen F. McConnell. "Fear of etiolation in the age of professional passion" *Text and Performance Quarterly* (2018): 153-169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462937.2018.1461918>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Communication Studies at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@sjsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@sjsu.edu).



## Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

Journal:	<i>Text &amp; Performance Quarterly</i>
Manuscript ID	RTPQ-2018-0010
Manuscript Type:	Original Articles
Keywords:	J.L. Austin's Exemption, Academic Professionalism, Passion, Queer Studies, Theatre

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

For Peer Review Only

**Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion**

## 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. Four 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.

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).<sup>1</sup> 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

1  
2  
3 when she suggests that, even while academics acknowledge neoliberalism's influence, it still  
4  
5 ensnares individual faculty in its logics and "even the Marxist, poststructuralist, feminist, or  
6  
7 queer faculty members in the funkier departments [who] often respond to institutional incentives  
8  
9 in compliant rather than defiant modes" (Lim, 130). The concern in either case is that the  
10  
11 fascination with neoliberalism eclipses the conflicted ways in which academics invest  
12  
13 themselves in professional life.<sup>2</sup>  
14  
15

16  
17 In Sedgwick's exegesis, she explains that some attribute the phenomenon of "pointing at  
18  
19 the moon" to the ambiguities in symbolic action, others attribute it to hubris, and a third theory  
20  
21 suggests that the two—the moon and pointing at it—are one and the same. What changes if we  
22  
23 apply option three to the fascination with neoliberalism? That which previously appeared  
24  
25 distracting or compromising now signals an ambivalent attachment to the precarity that has come  
26  
27 to define academic work. Our fascination with neoliberalism proffers higher education's decline  
28  
29 as a requisite condition of academic pursuits, as if its precarity grants that work its value. Stefano  
30  
31 Harney and Fred Moten characterize that attachment as professionalism's "internal antagonism"  
32  
33 and Lauren Berlant describes it as "an ongoing and sustaining relation to the scene and circuit of  
34  
35 optimism and disappointment" (Harney, 32; Berlant, 27). I borrow a popular term and refer to it  
36  
37 as a passion, as in the passion for knowledge and teaching that we credit for our decision to  
38  
39 pursue uncertain careers in academia, and the same passion that we cite to justify paying our own  
40  
41 way to conferences in the hopes of achieving professional success. The passionate see the risks  
42  
43 and plunge ahead anyway into graduate school and the unknowns beyond, acting not out of  
44  
45 ignorance or recklessness, but with love.<sup>3</sup>  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51  
52 Though it sometimes looks like a stabilizing force, professional passion is a source of  
53  
54 anxiety. It is never clear how much passion is needed to achieve career success nor how best to  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59

1  
2  
3 express it. It can be both a virtue and a liability. Its ebbs and flows must be managed carefully,  
4  
5 especially where neoliberalism has relieved academic institutions of responsibility for the people  
6  
7 they employ and the students they attract and left individuals to navigate instability on their own  
8  
9 as “rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for ‘self-  
10  
11 care’” (Brown, n.p.).  
12  
13

14  
15 Among the criticisms that queer theorists have voiced about neoliberalism are concerns  
16  
17 with the normative dimensions of self-care.<sup>4</sup> Those concerns are in keeping with a prominent  
18  
19 theme in queer studies, yet the concerns with self-care rarely extend back to academic  
20  
21 professionalism. As Heather Love explains, queer theory distinguished itself with “a wholesale  
22  
23 refusal of normativity” (93). In *Fear of a Queer Planet*, for instance, Michael Warner describes  
24  
25 queer theory as resisting “normal business in the academy” and as “a way to mess up the  
26  
27 desexualized spaces of the academy” (xxvi). However, in an odd historical twist, Love observes  
28  
29 that queer theory’s “revolt against scholarly expertise...resonated in many ways with academic  
30  
31 norms” (87).  
32  
33

34  
35 Here is another scene that resembles Sedgwick’s situation with her cat: The more  
36  
37 attached we become to queer studies, the more attached we become to the institutional conditions  
38  
39 needed to sustain it. Queer studies is, after all, a job as much as it is an intellectual project and  
40  
41 thus subject to the same precarious terms and conditions as other forms of academic work. It is a  
42  
43 disciplined, time-intensive effort often undertaken without the benefit of tenure or adequate  
44  
45 institutional support. It can be a labor of love subject to the whims and aggravations of personal  
46  
47 circumstance and done in the interstices of other tasks. Individuals working within those terms  
48  
49 and conditions attempt to compensate for institutional lack with sheer willpower, an arrangement  
50  
51 that minorities and women shoulder disproportionately and in ways that deepen disparities.<sup>5</sup>  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

5

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60  
Wherever neoliberal rationalities do not recognize structural discrimination and inequity, individuals have only themselves to blame if they fail to achieve professional success.<sup>6</sup>

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

Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

6

1  
2  
3 that stretches through theatre and performance programs. “To the extent that the discernment and  
4  
5 dissemination of knowledge requires boundness and containment,” Jackson explains,  
6  
7 “performance has faired unevenly in the academy. The imprecise boundaries of the theatrical  
8  
9 event made it difficult to know where the research object ended and its relevant context began”  
10  
11 (6). Discerning those boundaries, Jackson (2011) explains in a different essay, is further  
12  
13 complicated by the fact that the “backstage of [performance studies’] labor and technology is not  
14  
15 the ‘exterior’ real but in irresoluble tension with the interiority of the aesthetic event” (149). In  
16  
17 order to negotiate those divisions and ensure recognition for artistic and scholarly contributions,  
18  
19 performance studies attends closely to the logistics of professionalism. Some have done so  
20  
21 through a form of a dramaturgy known as institutional critique.<sup>7</sup> Institutional critique engages  
22  
23 with the “essentially recursive relationship between institutions and institutionalized selves” and,  
24  
25 as it regards academia, deliberately blurs the line between the doing of inquiry and the research  
26  
27 object (Jackson, 2011, 124). Performance studies’ precarious institutional position, its  
28  
29 contributions to institutional critique, and the particular immateriality of theatrical labor, or what  
30  
31 Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider refer to as the “‘not-not’ work of theatre,” affords it a  
32  
33 unique perspective on professional decline (6). My attempt to make space for decline thus  
34  
35 engages five movements: queer theory’s “revolt,” staged as it were through professional norms;  
36  
37 the scholarly-artist divide within performance studies that transgresses academic norms;  
38  
39 academic forms of the dramaturgy known as institutional critique; the not-not work of theatre;  
40  
41 and the exemption that J.L. Austin imposed on theatre when theorizing the performative  
42  
43 utterance.  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50

51 That last one may seem anachronistic. Austin exempted theatrical forms from the  
52  
53 performative utterance because he believed that such linguistic “etioliations” as he called them  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

7

1  
2  
3 were “hollow or void” and thus lacking in constitutive power (22). His exemption, which denied  
4  
5 theatre’s world-making capacity, is rooted in the belief that theatre merely reflects reality and,  
6  
7 meretricious by nature, degrades it.<sup>8</sup> I return to Austin’s exemption because his fear of etiologating  
8  
9 resembles the fear of decline that crackles through professionalism’s antagonistic circuit.  
10  
11

12 In an effort to manage decline, academics quarantine certain kinds of speech acts much  
13  
14 like Austin exempted theatre, and the kinds of statements that we quarantine resemble those that  
15  
16 Austin exempted. Specifically, we quarantine professional fears and doubts that take the form of  
17  
18 clever asides, parenthetical winks, word play, fictions, and anecdotes—any kind of statement  
19  
20 with a theatrical affect. The quarantine guards against the deterioration, sickness, and other  
21  
22 qualities “infected with queerness” that such statements carry (Parker and Sedgwick 5). It guards  
23  
24 against any threat to serious professionalism, which academics signal with vows to stay  
25  
26 productive, relevant, and upwardly mobile. Take the problem of obscurity, for example. It is not  
27  
28 a problem so long as we confine it to lone essays or other people’s careers. In doing so, we  
29  
30 prevent it from infecting the whole profession as it occasionally threatens to do when it seems  
31  
32 that every publication drowns in a sea of journals and monographs purchased only by libraries  
33  
34 and read by so few that “renowned” and “obscure” bear an uncanny resemblance to one another.  
35  
36 Occasionally such fears about the state of the profession flare up and when they do, obscurity  
37  
38 looks less like an individual failing than a sign of institutional rot. Amidst such outbreaks, we  
39  
40 hear talk of inquiry being more decadent than productive and a perversion of higher education’s  
41  
42 true mission. The hackneyed joke about earning “another line on the vitae” suddenly resonates  
43  
44 and the whole academic project seems diminished. The quarantine protects us from those kinds  
45  
46 of professional existential crises.  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

8

1  
2  
3 To show how the fear of decline harbors a prejudice against both queerness and theatre,  
4 and to demonstrate how the quarantine works, I look to five essays published in *Text &*  
5  
6 *Performance Quarterly (TPQ)* over a span of twenty years. *TPQ* is one of the few journals to  
7  
8 publish institutional critiques of academic life and it has been “singular in its commitment to  
9  
10 LGBT scholarship” as Charles E. Morris III and Catherine Helen Palczewski note in their  
11  
12 retrospective on the field of communication studies (143). It is no mere coincidence that the  
13  
14 accounts of academic life that appear in *TPQ* often share the page with references to queer  
15  
16 sexualities. Both are concerned with passion and perversion. Four of the essays that I discuss—  
17  
18 Elizabeth Whitney’s three-part account of an emergent academic career, Frederick C. Corey and  
19  
20 Thomas K. Nakayama’s “Sextext,” Rob Drew’s essay on academic sloth, and Joshua Gunn’s  
21  
22 “ShitText”—speak about academic professionalism and its aggravations. The direct and indirect  
23  
24 “conversation” between the essays captures the contention surrounding professionalism. None  
25  
26 talk about neoliberalism. Instead, they grapple with how to stay ardent, productive, faithful, and  
27  
28 serious, and each experiments with how to empathize with the dispassionate, the fallow, and the  
29  
30 easy. I explain in my analysis how the professional fears and doubts expressed in them can be  
31  
32 sidelined by the normative images of professional health that accompany them and by the  
33  
34 prejudice against queerness and theatre. The tensions in and across the essays are representative  
35  
36 of the conflicted ways in which we talk about professionalism more generally. Just as it does in  
37  
38 everyday conversations, that “talk” takes the form of personal anecdotes, fictional or semi-  
39  
40 fictional stories, and asides. Some of it generates distance with sexual innuendo and other word  
41  
42 play. Those unscholarly forms make it easier to contain the fears and doubts with which these  
43  
44 essays wrestle.  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 The last essay that I discuss, Terry Galloway's 1997 "Taken," also talks about  
4 professionalism and it provides an especially poignant example of how the quarantine works.  
5  
6 Published alongside "Sextext," Galloway's essay was never referenced in the debates that  
7  
8 ensued. That omission may be due to the fact that Galloway is a performance practitioner and not  
9  
10 an academic. It would have been much easier than it proved to be in the case of "Sextext" to  
11  
12 settle the question of whether hers was a scholarly contribution. Galloway's relationship to the  
13  
14 academy, the historical placement of her essay, and the remarkable immunity to the prejudice  
15  
16 against theatre and queerness that she exhibits in her essay present an unusual challenge to  
17  
18 normative conceptions of passion and decline, a challenge that could change how we relate to  
19  
20 academic work were we to accept the invitation she extends in "Taken" to queer professionalism.  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

### 28 **Signs of decay**

29  
30  
31 It can be difficult to see how the quarantine on decline interacts with the prejudice against  
32  
33 theatre and queerness when their association often seems incidental as it appears to be in  
34  
35 Whitney's three-part project. Published over the span of a year in *TPQ's* Performance Space,  
36  
37 Whitney's is a semi-fictional chronicle of the maddening process by which a "professorial  
38  
39 hopeful" becomes an assistant professor (2015a, 222). Her story affirms the enduring belief that  
40  
41 individual skill plus passion mixed with a little luck leads to professional success. It affirms that  
42  
43 belief despite Whitney's efforts to pervert the standard job narrative. Her efforts illustrate the  
44  
45 risk in voicing professional concerns using a dramatic form and the risk in associating those  
46  
47 concerns with any form of queerness.  
48  
49  
50

51 Whitney's "Coming (Back) to Performance Studies" could be read as an affirming tale of  
52  
53 a vibrant career in a healthy profession. The story's semi-fictional form and its references to  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 queer performance support such a reading even while the essay subverts the conventional job  
4  
5 narrative. At the beginning of the story, Whitney's protagonist, Barbie, still a graduate student,  
6  
7 believes that she will "find a magical tenure-track position" where "her passion for disrupting the  
8  
9 practice/theory divide would be valued" (2014, 385). Once on the job market, however, Barbie  
10  
11 recasts that belief as fantasy and voices reluctance about pursuing an academic career. Her job  
12  
13 prospects look dim and she begins to doubt her love of academia. In the final chapter, after  
14  
15 securing the tenure track position that she desires, her reluctance gives way to relief and  
16  
17 excitement. In that chapter, Whitney switches from third to first person and drops the semblance  
18  
19 of fiction. Her doubts and concerns about the profession are thus largely confined to the fictional  
20  
21 parts of the narrative. In hindsight they seem less concerns with the profession than professional  
22  
23 jitters or "imposter syndrome."  
24  
25  
26  
27

28  
29 Whitney's interest in queer performance also seems at first a personal weakness but in the  
30  
31 end appears a sign of professional health. The first mention of queer performance comes at the  
32  
33 beginning of the story when Barbie is working as a lecturer and applying for jobs. She refuses to  
34  
35 apply for just any job. "Barbie was stubborn. She wanted to teach performance. She wanted to  
36  
37 make performance. And then, she wanted to write about making performance...Her focus was on  
38  
39 queer performance...Surely that would be marketable" (2015a, 222). At the point in the story in  
40  
41 which it appears, Whitney's ironic "surely" reflects the uncertainty she faces. Her job search at  
42  
43 that moment seems equal parts quixotic and savvy. When later she secures a job that indeed  
44  
45 allows her to teach, make, and write about queer performance, her winning gamble seems both a  
46  
47 sign of her own merit and of the health of the profession. Both Whitney and the academy appear  
48  
49  
50  
51 fit.  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3           Along the way to that happy ending, Whitney challenges the standard job narrative with a  
4  
5 number of unorthodox statements that unsettle the picture of health the story otherwise conveys.  
6  
7 In an act of solidarity with all those who do not meet with job success, for instance, she questions  
8  
9 whether merit alone earned her a tenure track position. She questions whether her success was  
10  
11 due entirely to her own strengths and accomplishments. She wonders if it is perhaps due more to  
12  
13 good fortune. In another instance, she breaks from convention to characterize her work as a kind  
14  
15 of decadence, which she assigns more personal than social value. Academia, she writes, is “my  
16  
17 place to indulge in various academic pleasures” (2015b, 407). Where Whitney’s indulgences  
18  
19 combine with her insights into the precarity of academic life, her story threatens to pervert the  
20  
21 standard professional narrative. The apprehension that flashes across the project occasionally  
22  
23 threatens to spill over into full-blown anxiety. However, her success in securing a job in an area  
24  
25 of study that she loves contains that threat. It allows us to shield ourselves from the uncertainty,  
26  
27 doubt, indulgence and odd pleasures that accompany her passion.  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34

### 35 *Gay visibility and academic obscurity*

36  
37           A perverse passage in Corey and Nakayama’s “Sextext,” faces the same quarantine that  
38  
39 Whitney risks in “Coming (Back).” “Sextext” appeared alongside six other essays in a 1997  
40  
41 special issue of *TPQ*. The essay has two footnotes one of which announces itself as an “authorial  
42  
43 comment,” a designation that would be unnecessary in a more conventional essay. It is necessary  
44  
45 in this case because “Sextext” presents as a fictional first person account of a graduate student  
46  
47 who, while working toward his degree, takes a second job starring in porn films under the screen  
48  
49 name Mark Stark. The footnote is written in the third person, suggesting that it comes not from  
50  
51 the graduate student, but from Corey and Nakayama (as much as that distinction makes sense).  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

12

1  
2  
3 The comment corrects a claim made by the graduate student who tells us that he abandoned a  
4 line of argument about desire that he had hoped would become a chapter of his dissertation  
5 because, “my dissertation committee never would have accepted” it (65). The footnote disputes  
6 this account. “His committee would not have objected,” it tells us in a punchy aside. “Hell, one  
7 of his committee members did not even read the dissertation, really” (65).  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13

14 In Whitney’s story, the mundane aspects of academic work, such as job applications and  
15 office space, appear main stage. In “Sextext,” professionalism is the backdrop to a theoretical  
16 discussion of desire and descriptions of gay sex. Corey and Nakayama’s footnote foregrounds  
17 professionalism for a bright moment with this perverse thought: perhaps it is impossible to  
18 theorize desire, not because of the limits of language or fear of the other, but because of faculty  
19 indifference. Were the footnote true—had someone actually not read a dissertation—it would be  
20 shattering. Imagine if dissertations went unread. How would we judge qualifications or confirm  
21 the contributions of new scholarship? How would we trust the validity of new research,  
22 academic transcripts, or letters of recommendation? Imagine if those, too, went unread. It would  
23 undermine the credibility of individual careers and bore through the heart of the profession.  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36

37 The prejudice against theatricality and queerness relieves us of the obligation to engage  
38 those questions. More specifically, the footnote’s fictitiousness and its proximity to gay sex  
39 contain the scandalous statement. It is, first of all, a fictional note to a fictional story. There was  
40 no committee member who did not read the dissertation. Corey and Nakayama do not actually  
41 say that a dissertation went unread. “Sextext” does not really document such a case. The drama  
42 in the claim—its hollow quality as Austin might say—further mitigates its risk. Not only is the  
43 statement a fiction, it is a fictional statement that harbors queerness. It marks the moment in the  
44 story when the graduate student grows disillusioned and falls out of love with academia. His  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 committee member's dispassion mirrors his own feelings and the whole profession looks sickly  
4 and diminished. The graduate student's decline stands in sharp contrast to Mark Stark's success.  
5  
6 While the graduate student's relationship to academia deteriorates, Stark's pornography career  
7  
8 flourishes and he enjoys a sense of accomplishment in his new profession. The fictitious footnote  
9  
10 looks all the more queer set against Stark's positive accounts of gay sex. Just as Whitney leaves  
11  
12 her doubts and fears behind in the fictional part of her essay, "Sextext" relegates its commentary  
13  
14 on academia to the margins and otherwise telegraphs professional health.  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21

### 22 *Slouching toward success*

23  
24 Even though "Sextext" sparked years of scholarly debate, its footnote remained a  
25  
26 theatrical aside. So effective was the quarantine that a decade after "Sextext" was published,  
27  
28 Drew declined to cite Corey and Nakayama's footnote in an essay that appeared in another  
29  
30 special issue of *TPQ*. In a perverse act of his own, Drew argues in defense of what he calls the  
31  
32 academic sloth, or the obscure scholar who bucks academia's "publish or perish" culture by  
33  
34 publishing infrequently. The basis for Drew's defense is his own professional life, which he  
35  
36 relays in a first person narrative. Over the course of the essay, he explains the benefits of being  
37  
38 slovenly, which, he argues, could transform the profession for the better. At a minimum, he  
39  
40 suggests, academics could try valuing quality over quantity, even though, he notes with some  
41  
42 cynicism, it "would require scholars to actually read one another's work, especially when acting  
43  
44 in some formal evaluative capacity" (68).  
45  
46  
47  
48

49 By the time that Drew advocated for the sloth, "Sextext" was well on its way to  
50  
51 becoming a landmark essay with a forum dedicated to it in the *American Communication*  
52  
53 *Journal* and a retrospective in the *Journal of Homosexuality*. Even with that recognition and  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 even though “Sextext’s” scandalous footnote speaks directly to Drew’s comment, Drew did not  
4  
5 cite it, a decision that may be due to simple misrecognition. “Sextext” grew famous as a  
6  
7 contribution to LGBTQ scholarship, and that recognition resolved the many other challenges that  
8  
9 essay posed to academic professionalism. In all likelihood, Drew did not see the essay as  
10  
11 relevant to his own argument, but that oversight makes his indirect reference to “Sextext” all the  
12  
13 more curious.  
14  
15

16  
17 Drew may not have recognized “Sextext” as commentary on professionalism, but he did  
18  
19 recognize the queer dimensions of the stigma against decline. In an attempt to distance the sloth  
20  
21 from any queer association, Drew argues that volume is not a reliable measure of quality, a point  
22  
23 he underscores with this analogy: “It’s often easier to perform one’s labors efficiently,” he  
24  
25 explains, “when they’re of little personal consequence, as porn stars can attest” (70). Drew’s  
26  
27 defense of the sloth rests on an analogy that he draws between scholars who publish at high-  
28  
29 volume and sex workers. His analogy transfers the stigma of decline to those he calls “rate-  
30  
31 busters,” or scholars who publish for the sake of publishing (70). It is the rate-buster, not the  
32  
33 sloth, Drew contends, who cheapens inquiry with publications done by the hour. Scholarship  
34  
35 executed without care or true love is the real threat to productivity, he argues; if care rather than  
36  
37 volume were an indicator of success, sloths would exemplify passion. “The reason sloths don’t  
38  
39 write more, he goes on to say, “is not because they’re unmotivated but precisely because *they*  
40  
41 *care so much...often much more than their rate-buster counterparts”* (70, emphasis in the  
42  
43 original). To support his argument, Drew cites the work of the “less celebrated” (74). Oddly  
44  
45 enough, his representative exemplar is the decidedly unslothful David Marc, author of five books  
46  
47 and a lecturer who drives “around Southern California’s freeways from one adjunct gig to  
48  
49 another supporting his writing habit” (75). Like his “Sextext” counterpart Mark Stark, Marc  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 exhibits real professional passion. He is a model of productivity, albeit an unconventional one,  
4  
5 and a triumph over professional decline. Like Whitney's success and Stark's health, Marc's true  
6  
7 love of academia protects him from the stigma of decline and Drew's porn star analogy shields  
8  
9 him from any association with cheap non-normative sex.  
10  
11  
12  
13

### 14 *Quick and dirty publications*

15  
16  
17 The rejoinder to Drews' defense of the sloth appears alongside it in the same special issue  
18  
19 of *TPQ*. While Drew champions careful, caring scholars over "rate busters," Gunn's "ShitText"  
20  
21 revels in volume. Gunn explains that he rejects the "consumerist hygienics that has infiltrated  
22  
23 every domain of social life, most especially the field of academic publishing" (82). He takes as  
24  
25 his role model Juan Goytisolo's *Metro Defecator* who "resists imperial globalization" by  
26  
27 "celebrating the excesses of his own productive capacity" (82). His essay could read as satire  
28  
29 were it not for the fact that Gunn himself is a prolific publisher. The sheer number of essays that  
30  
31 Gunn has authored is perverse. Having published like a fiend, Gunn can afford the pleasures of  
32  
33 unloading in "ShitText," which he does by admonishing academics for their lack of pride and  
34  
35 tendency to self-denigrate. That shame could be overcome, he suggests, if academics celebrated  
36  
37 their output rather than seeming immodest. After all, he challenges, who does not secretly love  
38  
39 their own research? His argument is seeped in word play and sexual innuendo and it is in those  
40  
41 terms that we are invited to understand our private professional desires.  
42  
43  
44  
45

46  
47 Gunn's personal productivity and his celebration of it would seem to exemplify  
48  
49 professional passion, but, just as "Sextext" employs fictitiousness and associates with queer life,  
50  
51 "ShitText" generates a theatrical gap and flirts with homo desires. Those elements surface  
52  
53 throughout the essay and expressly in the letter to the journal editors that accompanies it. The  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59

Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

16

1  
2  
3 inclusion of the letter at the beginning, itself a breach of convention, affords us a view of what is  
4 typically an invisible process. That visibility folds the reviewers into Gunn's drama implicating  
5 them in a dare that Gunn issues to his readers: don't take the essay seriously; don't take him  
6 seriously as either a scholar of rhetoric or a "performance scholar/practitioner" (80). Those  
7 provocations and his sexual innuendo come together in a pun on his own name. "You know what  
8 really fucking chaps my hide about the review process?," he asks the editors. "Blindfolding. It's  
9 just another excuse to get fucked over. I'm just joshing: actually I kind of like it. I bet you do too.  
10 I bet you like to watch" (80). The joke has all the elements that invite quarantine: it can't be  
11 serious and it's a little too homo.

12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24 Seeped in word play, Gunn's (homo) hyper-productive academic is thus no more  
25 protected from the prejudice against queerness than is Corey and Nakayama's fictional  
26 disillusioned graduate student or Drew's sloth. On the contrary, hyper-productivity has long  
27 attracted disapproval and inspired warnings to young scholars not to exhaust themselves by  
28 following the Gunns of the world down the path to professional burnout. In communication  
29 studies, the warnings against the empty thrills of "prolific publishing" date back to a 1993  
30 rejoinder to M. Hickson, *et al.* (1989) by Keith V. Erickson, *et al.*<sup>9</sup> In a well-known essay,  
31 Hickson proposed using publishing rates as a "yardstick" for measuring scholarly influence.  
32 Erickson objected to Hickson's approach arguing that it would "'glamorize' prolific publishing  
33 at the expense of scholarship" (329). Erickson saw a graver problem than just diminished  
34 quality; prolific publishing threatened the moral fiber of the academy: It "contributes to scholar  
35 *manqué*," and "signals to junior faculty the inappropriate message that teaching and scholarship  
36 are secondary to 'getting one's name in print'" (329). Too often, Erickson laments, "established  
37 faculty...surrender their scholarly sensibilities to the lure of easy scholarship" and junior faculty

1  
2  
3 convince themselves that to “be a ‘player,’” they must follow suit (329). Chasing ““quick and  
4  
5 dirty”” publications and engaging in “hurried writing,” Erickson cautions, can lead to “premature  
6  
7 interpretations,” diminished self-respect, and an empty life of scholarly gamesmanship (334,  
8  
9 331). The advance of disciplinary knowledge should be the only aim of inquiry, not earning “an  
10  
11 additional notch on one’s academic gun,” or Gunn as it were (333).  
12  
13

14  
15 The sexual innuendo in “ShitText” lampoons the kind of chaste warnings against prolific  
16  
17 publishing that Erickson represents, but, like the warnings themselves, Gunn’s response  
18  
19 encourages us to assess our professional behavior in sexual terms and against heteronormative  
20  
21 codes. Erickson casts professionalism as fraught with sexual risk: quick and dirty publications  
22  
23 can wreck careers and earn scholars a reputation for being easy.<sup>10</sup> Gunn encourages us to take  
24  
25 pride in our productivity, but his pride exhibits a streak of narcissism, a disorder long associated  
26  
27 with same-sex desires. Gunn’s histrionics and Erickson’s hyperbole cast their commentary in an  
28  
29 air of perversion. Though each is a counter to the other, they both employ the same exaggerated  
30  
31 style that is easy to quarantine.  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37

### 38 *Not even on the map*

39  
40 Academia’s standard professional narrative pushes any signs of decline to the margins.  
41  
42 We train ourselves to look past ambivalence, doubt, exhaustion, and disillusionment and direct  
43  
44 our gaze toward advancement. And it is easy to ignore decline when it manifests in goofy, sad,  
45  
46 hyperbolic, and semi-fictional forms. The quarantine is effective in part because it so rarely has  
47  
48 to justify itself. Galloway’s essay “Taken” is notable in that regard. Like the essays discussed  
49  
50 above, the form of her essay invites the prejudice against theatre and queerness. Galloway’s own  
51  
52 relationship to academia also makes it easy to quarantine. But in Galloway’s case those forms are  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

18

1  
2  
3 more prominent and central to her story and Galloway herself exhibits a kind of immunity to the  
4  
5 prejudice that affords her a different relationship to professional decline.  
6

7  
8 Galloway's "Taken" appeared alongside "Sextext" in the same 1997 special issue of *TPQ*.  
9  
10 Like Corey and Nakayama, Galloway reflects on desire, speaks to the pleasures of being queer,  
11  
12 and relays gay sex scenes, including a night she spent with a former high-school beauty queen  
13  
14 who "slipped into [Galloway's] bed and spelled out, using her finger against [her] palm, 'I want  
15  
16 you'" (99). Galloway visits those topics while elaborating her thesis: a fear of queerness, she  
17  
18 argues, is compromising theatre's professionalism. Over the course of the essay, Galloway draws  
19  
20 on her own experiences with drag to argue in favor of allowing a queer sensibility to guide the  
21  
22 profession so that theatre might remain a site of world-making.  
23  
24

25  
26 Of all the examples presented here, her essay, by dint of its obscurity, best illustrates the  
27  
28 strength of the quarantine and the prejudice against theatre and queerness. Though they appeared  
29  
30 side by side and spoke to the same topics, not once in the debates, special issues, and  
31  
32 anniversaries dedicated to "Sextext" did Galloway's "Taken" receive mention. That omission  
33  
34 may be due to the essay's professional perversions more than its sexual content. Galloway  
35  
36 exemplifies what Jackson refers to as the scholarly/artist divide. She is an actor who has written  
37  
38 an essay about theatre for an academic journal. Her essay has two citations, one to Shakespeare's  
39  
40 *The Comedy of Errors* and the other to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Those details alone court  
41  
42 the prejudice against theatre. Secondarily, her essay is a raucous first person account of her life  
43  
44 as a gender-queer lesbian who regularly performs drag. It is less surprising that such an account  
45  
46 went unacknowledged than it is curious that "Sextext's" detractors did not think to present it as  
47  
48 further evidence of academia's moral decline. Maybe they felt the essay posed no threat to the  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

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

1  
2  
3 accomplishment in the way that an academic essay counts. She lures out that prejudice in us by  
4  
5 citing all the ways in which her production of *Henry IV Part I* might be considered insignificant:  
6  
7 “It was after all simply a performance by a handful of university students witnessed by a mere  
8  
9 three hundred people in a barn in a Texas town so small it wasn’t even on the state map” (97).  
10  
11 Her description begs some questions. Does student artwork count as real art? Does a play staged  
12  
13 in a barn count as real theatre? Does a town that does not appear on a map really exist? She goes  
14  
15 on to catalog the other ways in which the play and her performance may not count: “it wasn’t  
16  
17 reviewed, no video was made, and there weren’t even any photographs of it” (97). Her  
18  
19 performance of Falstaff fails to register on any standard index of productivity. It would not count  
20  
21 as an accomplishment by any conventional standard used in academia. Neither does Galloway  
22  
23 herself count according to the social conventions that deny the realities of lesbians and people  
24  
25 with disabilities, the conventions that would have us ask whether sex between women counts as  
26  
27 real sex and whether a statement made by a person who cannot hear her own voice counts as a  
28  
29 real statement.  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34

35  
36 Someone bound to those professional standards and social conventions might concede the  
37  
38 insignificance of Galloway’s work or even her existence, but Galloway is bound to neither. To  
39  
40 claim her performance its power, she shifts the terms and describes it as a moment of passion  
41  
42 that manifests as a kind of possession: “I had been swept up in theatre, the epiphanic moment,”  
43  
44 she writes. She goes on to explain its significance as one piece of a larger on-going performance:  
45  
46 “Again, Falstaff had not been defeated. Again. He had been saved through performance. Again.  
47  
48 And the performer (in this case, me) had saved him. Again. I was part of that continuum” (97).  
49  
50 Galloway argues the reality of Falstaff in and through the logic of performance. She  
51  
52 reconstituted Falstaff so that Falstaff could come to life. Her Falstaff disappeared into the night  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 air, but Falstaff would live on, provided theatre continued to do its job. For a brief moment, we  
4  
5 catch a glimpse of both the moon and Galloway pointing at it.  
6

7  
8 The continuous work of playing Falstaff does not square with professional standards and  
9  
10 Galloway further departs from those standards when she suggests that such work never generates  
11  
12 the lasting insights we hope for. She shares another story about her own performance of  
13  
14 masculinity to illustrate. Playing Nick Bottom in a production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*,  
15  
16 she tells us, led her to the realization “so common in Shakespeare, that when we play ourselves  
17  
18 beyond a strict set of roles we are transformed into something else, something infinitely richer,  
19  
20 more complex and fun; but not, in the end, particularly powerful or potent” (100). That insight  
21  
22 might pose a professional crisis for some. It is not a huge leap from it to the academic fear that  
23  
24 our work, especially that which goes unread, is pointless. Galloway does not appear to suffer  
25  
26 from that professional anxiety. On the contrary, she expresses frustration with her fellow actors  
27  
28 who use the impermanence of performance as an excuse not to take their work seriously, a  
29  
30 mindset that Galloway suggests diminishes the whole profession. She elaborates that argument  
31  
32 with a discussion of drag performances. While working with other actors who were performing  
33  
34 drag, she found that her peers did not always commit themselves fully to genders with which  
35  
36 they did not identify. They cultivated a certain distance from the character and opened a gap  
37  
38 between themselves and their performance. In doing so, Galloway suggests, they denied their  
39  
40 own performance and hers its due power. Galloway elaborates in a passage about women playing  
41  
42 men:  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48

49 [Y]ou still got a lot of performances of women playing men but not really playing  
50  
51 men—they'd toss out a little butt or giggle rather than laugh or play pretty rather  
52  
53 than funny in order to remind the audience that they didn't really have a dick, they  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59

1  
2  
3 weren't really a threat, they were 'just pretending'. This was a source of great  
4 humiliation to the performers who played opposite them because those women  
5 were deliberately undermining their own assumed fictions: they were guilty of  
6 deliberately failing to convince (96).  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11

12 These performers, she suggests, shame their work. Their prejudice against queerness is one  
13 problem; their prejudice against theatre another. The two together, Galloway argues, constrains  
14 theatre and inhibits its world-making ambitions. As she explains it, the two prejudices are  
15 interwoven into a single belief that theatre is obligated to reflect "a strict sexual reality" (94). She  
16 voices her concern with this lament: "Theater itself is such a sexy profession that when it refuses  
17 to practice anything but the missionary position it apes a world view it doesn't really share" (94).  
18 In other words, the prejudice against queerness is a prejudice against theatre and the prejudice  
19 against theatre is a prejudice against queerness.  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

30 Galloway's colleagues fail to meet the standard she sets for them. The problem stems  
31 in part from a deep investment in gender normativity. It seems stem, too, from a fear of what  
32 theatre can do. That fear inhibits passion as Galloway defines it: a willingness to take  
33 possibilities seriously; a willingness to get lost in something bigger or to become, along with the  
34 costumes, sets, and props, a part of the theatrical equipment. Such was the sensation Galloway  
35 herself had while playing Falstaff, a sensation she describes as being "hauled up by something  
36 other than myself" (100). A commitment to possibility underwrites Galloway's request of her  
37 fellow actors to take their roles seriously regardless of whether they identify with a character.  
38 She models that commitment when she agrees to play the feminine object of the male gaze ("the  
39 type of role that I hated") in a production of *Bus Stop* (98). The character, like Falstaff, had to be  
40 played, and to do it justice Galloway had to act the quiet vehicle for someone else's desires, a  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 role that felt wholly foreign to her. Though she did not identify with the character's gender, her  
4  
5 sense of responsibility to theatre and her respect for other people's genders guided her  
6  
7 performance. She gave herself up to the role.  
8  
9

### 12 **Professional etiologies**

14  
15 In the scenes that Galloway relays in "Taken," she appears a model of unwavering  
16  
17 passion. Yet, her story is not a refuge from decline. She attends closely to the various forms of  
18  
19 degeneration that accompany accomplishment, and she cautions us against believing that  
20  
21 achievements are true and lasting. Her advice aligns well with academic traditions that recognize  
22  
23 uncertainty and impermanence as integral to teaching and inquiry, but it conflicts with the  
24  
25 demands of academic professionalism.  
26  
27

28  
29 To achieve success in higher education—to "secure" jobs, tenure, and general  
30  
31 advancement—accomplishments cannot simply evaporate into the night air. They must lead  
32  
33 somewhere, to a degree, more funding, or to publications. Whitney, Corey and Nakayama, Drew,  
34  
35 and Gunn are attune to that pressure. Each grapples with how best to manage the passion that led  
36  
37 them into higher education and to comport with the conventions and expectations that govern  
38  
39 academic work. That practice of self-care proves especially challenging where academic ideals  
40  
41 mirror normative romantic values (e.g., commitment, fidelity, monogamy). To borrow a phrase  
42  
43 from Galloway, the terms and conditions of academic employment enforce a "strict sexual  
44  
45 reality;" publish too much and you're easy; publish too slowly and you're fallow. Indulge a little  
46  
47 or even try too hard and you still might not present correctly. When the occasional doubt creeps  
48  
49 in about the authenticity or validity of one's academic contributions, professional passion can  
50  
51 turn downright queer.  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 Galloway turns that professional script back on itself when she voices frustration with  
4 actors who cultivate a gap between themselves and roles with which they do not identify. Their  
5 phobia, she suggests, leads them to conflate queer with make-believe, and that association, she  
6 argues, leads to them to fail in their jobs and denigrate their own profession. Galloway is not  
7 concerned here with enforcing normativity. On the contrary, she challenges the thinking that  
8 queer is make-believe by affirming theatre's world-making potential. Writing in regards to  
9 Austin's exemption, Parker and Sedgwick observe that the constitutive utterance is never an  
10 isolated event, and that reception or uptake of speech acts is sufficiently complex enough "that  
11 the link between performativity and performance in the theatrical sense" becomes "an active  
12 question" (8). Galloway herself notes the importance of context when she characterizes her  
13 colleagues' refusals to play convincing as "a source of great humiliation to the performers who  
14 played opposite" (96). Their speech acts are no less constitutive for being negations. And, at the  
15 same time, their refusal (or failure) to convince *weakens or loosens normative associations*. It  
16 robs performances of their natural vigor, so to speak; it renders them decadent. Such etiologies,  
17 Parker and Sedgwick remind us, are the space of queer fantasy and desire. Those moments of  
18 deterioration are sources of possibility. Galloway herself poaches them for her own  
19 performances, and when she voices frustration with her fellow actors, she does so not in defense  
20 of normativity, but in mourning for lost possibilities.

21  
22 Does that queer sense of decline—one that recognizes possibility in loosened  
23 associations—transfer to academic professionalism where economic and social precarity have  
24 generated a whole different kind of uncertainty and insecurity? Can it be done without simply  
25 reinscribing neoliberal rationalities and romanticizing permanent instability. Embracing decline  
26 must do something other than affirm destabilization. Galloway's complaint against her fellow  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 actors is again instructive: Historically speaking, the more inclusive that academia has become,  
4  
5 the more pointed have become the attacks on its value and the greater the momentum to divest  
6  
7 from it. This gradual abandonment of higher education is analogous to the actors who refuse to  
8  
9 take their roles seriously. Divesting is a way of negating certain forms of academic work, certain  
10  
11 kinds of students, degrees, scholars, careers, and areas of study. It withholds legitimacy from  
12  
13 some at the risk of diminishing the whole profession. It is a deeply cynical perspective. If anyone  
14  
15 can go to college, the thinking goes, if anyone can earn a degree or write a dissertation on  
16  
17 anything, if anyone can publish research (even Galloway!), if academic institutions can just as  
18  
19 well accommodate queer, gender, ethnic, performance and critical/cultural studies as they can  
20  
21 schools of public policy and informatics; if any university can claim research status, then the  
22  
23 whole project must be make-believe.<sup>11</sup> That kind of cynicism is not limited to traditionalists. As  
24  
25 far back as 1995, Berlant and Warner expressed concern that queer studies had become “a vast  
26  
27 labor of metacommentary, a virtual industry [of] special issues, sections of journals, omnibus  
28  
29 reviews, anthologies, and dictionary entries” (343). They wondered if queer studies had become  
30  
31 the sum total of its professional output. Their concerns resemble the criticism leveled at  
32  
33 “Sextext” by those who saw it as the product of an overindulgent and permissive institution that  
34  
35 allowed scholarship for the sake of scholarship.  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41

42         Though frustrated with her fellow actors, Galloway avoids cynicism by recognizing that  
43  
44 while even our most passionate expressions (artistic and otherwise) are subject to deterioration,  
45  
46 the possibility is always present that other attachments may form in the crevices of those  
47  
48 weakened associations. As Galloway configures it, decline works at loosening our attachments,  
49  
50 but it does not predict how they will reform. That active question becomes the space of  
51  
52 possibility. Were we to adopt a similar mindset regarding our relationships to academia and  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> 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*.

<sup>5</sup> See Audrey Williams June, “The Invisible Labor of Minority Professors,” and Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, *et al.*, *Presumed Incompetent*.

<sup>6</sup> See Angela McRobbie’s work on the new culture industries for further discussion of how neoliberal rationalities transfer responsibility to individuals.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald J. Pelias’ “The Critical Life” is representative.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> Erickson’s essay preceded Carol Blair, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter’s well-known rejoinder to Hickson by a year.

<sup>10</sup> Erickson was not alone in couching such warnings in sexual language. Janice Hocking Rushing and Thomas S. Frenzt 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).

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

---

<sup>11</sup> 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.

For Peer Review Only

**Works Cited**

- Allen, Brenda J., Mark P. Orbe, and Margarita Refugia Olivas, "The Complexity of Our Tears: Dis/enchantment and (In)Difference In the Academy," *Communication Theory* 9.4 (November 1999): 402–429. Print.
- Austin, J. L. *How To Do Things With Words*. Oxford University Press, 1975. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 110 (1995): 343–349. Print.
- Blair, Carol, Julie R. Brown, and Leslie A. Baxter. "Disciplining the Feminine." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80.4 (1994): 383–409. Print.
- Brown, Wendy, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory and Event* 7.1 (2003): n.p. Web.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton University Press, 2006. Print.
- Corey, Frederick C. and Thomas K. Nakayama. "Sextext." Spec. issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly* 17.1 (1997): 58–68. Print.
- Crosby, Christina, et al., "Queer Studies, Materialism, and Crisis: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18.1 (2011): 127–147.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Signature Event Context." *Limited Inc*. Trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988, 1–27. Print.
- Drew, Rob. "The Lethargy Begins at Home: The Academic Rate-Buster and the Academic Sloth." Spec. issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26.1 (2006): 65–78. Print.

Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

29

1  
2  
3 Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on*  
4  
5 *Democracy*. Beacon Press, 2003. Print.

6  
7 Erickson, Keith V., Cathy A. Fleuriet, and Lawrence A. Hosman. "Prolific Publishing:  
8  
9 Professional and Administrative Concerns." *The Southern Communication Journal* 58.4  
10  
11 (1993): 328–338. Print.

12  
13  
14 Galloway, Terry. "Taken: The Philosophically Sexy Transformations Engendered in a Woman  
15  
16 Playing Male Roles in Shakespeare." Spec. issue of *Text and Performance Quarterly*  
17  
18 17.1 (1997): 94–100. Print.

19  
20  
21 Gould, Timothy. "The Unhappy Performative." *Performativity and Performance*, Eds. Andrew  
22  
23 Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Routledge, 1995, 20–44. Print.

24  
25  
26 Gunn, Joshua. "ShitText: Toward a New Coprophilic Style." Spec. issue of *Text and*  
27  
28 *Performance Quarterly* 26.1 (2006): 79–97. Print.

29  
30  
31 Gutiérrez y Muhs, Gabriella, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González, and Angela P.  
32  
33 Harris, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in*  
34  
35 *Academia*. Utah State University Press, 2012. Print.

36  
37  
38 Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*.  
39  
40 Minor Compositions, 2013. Web.

41  
42 Hickson, M. III, D. W. Stacks, and J. H. Amsbary. "An Analysis of Prolific Scholarship in  
43  
44 Speech Communication: Toward a Yardstick for Measuring Research Productivity."  
45  
46 *Communication Education* 38.3 (1989): 230–236. Print.

47  
48  
49 Jackson, Shannon. "Just-in-Time: Performance and the Aesthetics of Precarity," *TDR* 56.4  
50  
51 (Winter 2012): 10–31. Print.

52  
53 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to*  
54  
55

Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

30

- 1  
2  
3 *Performativity*. Cambridge University Press, 2004. Print.  
4  
5  
6 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. Routledge, 2001. Print.  
7  
8 June, Audrey Williams. "The Invisible Labor of Minority Professors," *Chronicle of Higher*  
9  
10 *Education* (Nov 8, 2015). Print.  
11  
12 Lim, Eng-Beng, Lisa Duggan, and José Esteban Muñoz, "The Performance and Pedagogy of  
13  
14 Neoliberal Affect," *Theatre Survey* 51.1 (March 2010): 127–133. Print.  
15  
16 Love, Heather. "Compulsory Happiness and Queer Existence." *New Formations* 63 (2007): 52  
17  
18 65. Print.  
19  
20  
21 McRobbie, Angela. *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*. Polity Press,  
22  
23 2016. Print.  
24  
25  
26 Morris III, Charles E. and Catherine Helen Palczewski. "Sexing Communication: Hearing,  
27  
28 Feeling, and Remembering Sex/Gender and Sexuality in the NCA," *A Century of*  
29  
30 *Communication Studies: The Unfinished Conversation*, Eds. Pat J. Gehrke and William  
31  
32 M. Keith. Routledge, 2015, 128–165. Print.  
33  
34  
35 Parker, Andrew and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. "Introduction." *Performativity and Performance*,  
36  
37 Eds. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Routledge, 1995, 1–18. Print.  
38  
39  
40 Pelias, Ronald J. "The Critical Life." *Communication Education* 49.3 (2000): 220–228. Print.  
41  
42  
43 Ridout, Nicholas and Rebecca Schneider, "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction," *TDR*  
44  
45 56.4 (Winter 2012): 5–9. Print.  
46  
47  
48 Rushing, Janice Hocking and Thomas S. Frenz. "The Gods Must be Crazy: The Denial of  
49  
50 Decent in Academic Scholarship." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85.3 (1999): 229–246.  
51  
52 Print.  
53  
54 Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke University  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



Running head: Fear of Etiolation in the Age of Professional Passion

31

1  
2  
3 Press, 2003. Print.

4  
5 Slaughter, Sheila and Gary Rhoades, "The Neo-liberal University," *New Labor Forum* 6  
6  
7 (Spring–Summer 2000): 73.

8  
9  
10 Spade, Dean. "Trans Law & Politics on a Neoliberal Landscape," Keynote Address given at  
11  
12 *Temple Political & Civil Rights Law Review's* 2008 Symposium: Intersections of  
13  
14 Transgender Lives and the Law. Print.

15  
16  
17 Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Duke University Press, 2007. Print.

18  
19 Stryk, Lucien and Takashi Ikemoto, Trans. *Zen Poetry: Let the Spring Breeze Enter*. Grove  
20  
21 Press, 1995. Print.

22  
23  
24 Sutton, David L. "Le plaisir c'est dans le texte." *CRTNET* (Mar 17, 1997). Web.

25  
26 Warner, Michael, Ed. *Fear of Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. University of  
27  
28 Minnesota Press, 1993. Print.

29  
30 \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Trouble With Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. The  
31  
32 Free Press, 1999. Print.

33  
34  
35 Whitney, Elizabeth. "Coming (Back) to Performance Studies: A Slightly Fictionalized  
36  
37 Ethnographic Narrative (in Three Parts)." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 34.4 (2014):  
38  
39 382–385. Print.

40  
41 \_\_\_\_\_ . "Coming (Back) to Performance Studies Part II: Graduate School  
42  
43 Flashback—A Slightly Fictionalized Ethnographic Narrative (in Three Parts)." *Text and*  
44  
45 *Performance Quarterly* 35.2-3 (2015): 221–225. Print.

46  
47 \_\_\_\_\_ . "Coming (Back) to Performance Studies Part III: Be Careful What You Wish  
48  
49 For—A Slightly Fictionalized Ethnographic Narrative (in Three Parts)." *Text and*  
50  
51 *Performance Quarterly* 35.4 (2015): 404–407. Print.