

Rethinking Conquergood: Toward an Unstated Cultural Politics

Shane T. Moreman

“One must forever thwart the lure of becoming the sovereign subject whose positionality hegemonically hovers on high from the safe nest of solipsism.”

E. Patrick Johnson¹

“[I]n many of Plato’s dialogues, it is often the Foreigner (*xenos*) who questions.”

Jacques Derrida²

By publishing this essay, I’m starting and believing an Internet rumor: Dwight Conquergood was gay.

At one of the many Chicago NCA conferences (www.natcom.org), I made the comment to a senior scholar that I found it ironic that a straight White male was “so influential to scholars who consider themselves to be voices of the marginalized: persons of color, feminists, queers... You can find Conquergood cited by all these individuals without so much as a wince at his privileged subject positionality... In fact, he’s often utilized to help scholars demonstrate a methodology of voice or an ethic of dialogism. The straight, white guy is teaching the ‘Other’ how to research and theorize.”

The senior scholar (whose identity will remain closeted) said, “Shane, well, Conquergood *was* gay.”

Then he fretted a bit and said, “Well, I always thought he was gay. I mean, I thought it was well known. You didn’t know?” I watched him squirm. I wondered about his caution to label someone gay. Was this scholar’s discomfort a sign of a continuing stigmatization or was he just being careful not to mischaracterize someone?

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¹ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 255.

² Jacques Derrida. *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5.

I didn't know about the senior scholar's intent nor Conquergood's gayness; and I was excited by both.

Soon I began to ask my peer scholars who were at similar places in their careers, in their academic self-definition, and in their own intellectual insecurities: "Did you ever hear that Dwight Conquergood was gay?" The reactions I received were shaking heads, verbalized no's and looks of confusion or suspicion.

Finally, I stopped asking the question and I just believed.

I have decided to believe the rumor as a truth, knowing that truth has its limitations. In pondering truthful limitations, Jacques Derrida suggests that meaningful possibilities occur when we decide to think beyond our given truths. "In sum, the truth is not everything, one would then say, for there is more, something else or something better: truth is finite [finie]."³ Therefore, an infinity of meanings is beyond the truth; and one way that we get beyond given and established truth is with chisme or rumor.⁴ Chisme allows for an infinity of other truths, whether or not these counter truths are substantiated.

Not truly looking for substantiation, I write this chisme de Conquergood in the tone of rasquachismo. Rasquache is irreverence with a playful attitude that is intent on critiquing the truth of your surroundings while also adding your own meaningful spin. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto explains it best when he says: "Rasquachismo is a vernacular system of taste that is intuitive and sincere, not thought out and self-conscious." It is an irreverence to style that pulls from all around it to create something more than what has already been accepted. "While things might be created al troche y moche, slapdash, using whatever is at hand, attention is always given to nuances and details."⁵ Following Elizabeth Bell, I am tapping into my own power to resignify meanings through my own self-accountable joto reading.^{6,7} Thus, I re-read Conquergood to be a gay man and concurrently re-read myself as a joto. I braid my understandings of the gay Conquergood with my own self-understandings moving towards joto. In the end, I offer an understanding of how the ambiguity of Conquergood is double-edged just as my own ambiguous jotería is doubly recognized and ignored in the academy.

To accomplish this essay's goal, I first provide the theoretical backdrop to joto; then I chronicle my own coming into queerness with my coming to know

³ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 1.

⁴ *Chisme* translates to gossip or rumor.

⁵ Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: An Aesthetic of the Underclass," in *Puro Border: Dispatches, Snapshots & Graffiti from La Frontera*, ed. Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, John William Byrd, Bobby Byrd and Jessica Powers (El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press, 2003), 191-93.

⁶ Elizabeth E. Bell, "Accessing the Power to Signify: Learning to Read in Performance Studies," in *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*, ed. Sheron J. Dailey (Annandale, VA: National Communication Association, 1998), 57-59.

⁷ While non-English (foreign!?) words are usually italicized, I reject the italicization to also reject a division between my Spanish and English bilingualism that represent my Latino identity. Joto probably best translates to "fag."

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Conquergood. Finally, I reassess my own queer identity as I reassess Conquergood's closeted identity. In the end I offer how the joto can read Conquergood's queerness as part of creating homespace for Latino queers. And it is because of the way in which Conquergood etched out a homespace for marginalized voices, although closeted himself, that I can begin a rumor about him. Concurrently, this rumor creates a possibility for expanding a truth about Conquergood that possibly becomes a means of building a hospitable academy for all.

From Queer to Joto

This essay is written within a rumor that Dwight Conquergood was a closeted gay man. Haunted by his closeted identity, I offer my own story of trying to make a home in the academy as a queer scholar and teacher. In and out of the academy, both voice and silence have tugged at my queerness. Finally I have rejected my queerness in lieu of a more culturally-driven joto identification. For me, joto addresses the intersectional inseparability of who I am at home with who I am in the academy.

Kimberlé Crenshaw argues that we must accept and better accommodate the overlapping aspects of our multiple selves. The benefit of the acceptance and accommodation is that we are better able to find commonality across one another and more fully facilitate the escape from our various oppressions. "Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics."⁸ Anzaldúa, protecting herself by embracing her own and others marginalized differences, constructed a home with a community of queers of color as a method of survival.⁹ Moreover, Anzaldúa's concept of the new *mestiza* offered a theory of intersectionality in which non-dominant identities overlapped to inspire critiques of hegemonic identity discourses.¹⁰ Inspired by Crenshaw and Anzaldúa I offer this essay as an attempt at constructing a group politics that provides a home to escape from discursive oppression that results in material deprivation. Trying to be ever-aware of the potential audiences of my work, I hope to provide a

⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1241-99.

In speaking of intersectionality, Crenshaw argues that our differing positionalities within one body (e.g., gender or race) complicate and enhance how each positionality is avowed and ascribed (e.g., a black woman's positionality in contrast to the positionality of a white woman).

⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 3rd edition, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: La Frontera*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999).

perspective that intersects with your own positionality while also demonstrating the complexities of being an out queer Latino, a joto, in the academy.¹¹

I first became aware of the power of self-labeling with joto when a good friend and colleague provided a candid and caring reaction to my usage of joto on the Latina/o Communication Studies Division listserv. Carlos Aleman, who once described himself to me as “one of those Chicanos from California who can’t speak Spanish,” posted an honest and, frankly, an inspiring reaction, and I have included his response at length:

“Wow! The power of the word!

I obviously must be bored of talking about derogatory terms and hate speech. ‘Blah blah...the N-word...blah blah ‘er’ is different than ‘az’...blah blah...’spic’ derives from ‘spickin’ espanol’...blah blah....I’ve played out these conversations so many times that I sometimes have to fake my enthusiasm about students’ questions.

But to see ‘joto’ in print...what a flood of emotions!! Back in the day ‘dem be fightin’ words’ in Selma, CA. It was reserved for the queerest of queer, if not the most vile of gays. On occasion it was used between straight hermanos to see how far another could take an insult. But messing around with that word was like playing with a loaded gun! (This was literally true in too many conflicts.)

Sadly, this is the FIRST TIME I have ever seen the word in print. Can you imagine how embarrassed I am? I had to actually read the call for papers twice. ‘Joe-toe Caucus? What the heck is Joe-toe? Oooohhhh.....it’s joto!’ I know that doesn’t say much for the scope of my adult reading habits, but I think it says much about its significance as a code, at least in the small agricultural town of Selma, CA.

Thanks for waking me up, Shane!

--Carlos¹²

When I read Carlos’ response, I was reminded of how deeply distressing the term joto can be. So many other Spanish terms do not carry the negative (e.g., *desgraciada*) or the positive (e.g., *educación*) weight of their English equivalent. Carlos demonstrated how this word, in particular, reached a visceral emotional depth, so as to function as code for Latino masculinity, regardless of linguistic competence. What Carlos also poignantly expresses is that joto culture has not been well-theorized or commonly researched in Communication and arguably most other fields. While Latino masculinity has been analyzed by rhetoricians, critical and qualitative Communication scholars have not yet attempted to unravel the political

¹¹ Bernadette Marie Calafell and Shane T. Moreman, "Envisioning an Academic Readership: Latina/o Performativities Per the Form of Publication," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (April 2009), 1-14.

¹² Carlos G. Aleman, "Message #363," (Latina/o Communication Studies Division: Yahoo Groups, 2008).

underpinnings or offerings of the joto.¹³ Indeed, although the Latina lesbian identity has theoretically influenced, and continues to theoretically influence identity work across the academy, jotos are not theorized as heavily, nor with a similar academy-changing effect.¹⁴ While the queer Latino has been researched in the Communication field, the work carries a heterosexual overtone in its analysis.¹⁵

More than just the “shock value” of the term, joto carries with it the displacing elements of Latinidad as it is experienced by the Latino. The Latina has been argued to be the radical hybrid in which she is able to assume many visual and symbolic positionalities.¹⁶ However, the Latino has been, time and again, limited to the stereotype of the irrepressible Latin Lover with a Spanish accent. This stereotype serves to displace his citizenship and his rightful belonging in U.S. culture.¹⁷ As a Latino male, the joto is displaced of a rightful home in the United States while he is also displaced of his rightful belonging to Latino culture. He betrays both US culture

¹³ Fernando Delgado and Bernadette Marie Calafell, "From 'Rico Suave' to Livin' 'La Vida Loca': A Decade of Evolution for Latino Pop Star Images," in *Race/Gender/Media: Considering Diversity across Audiences, Content, and Producers*, ed. Rebecca Ann Lind (San Francisco: Pearson, 2004), 235-42.

Fernando P. Delgado, "All Along the Border: Kid Frost and the Performance of Brown Masculinity," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (October 2000): 388-401.

Michelle A. Holling, "Él Simpativo Boxer: Underpinning Chicano Masculinity with a Rhetoric of Familia in *Resurrection Blvd.*" *Western Journal of Communication* 70, no. 2 (April 2006): 91-114.

¹⁴ While the work of queer Latinos exists in the field, it is the interdisciplinary work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's that has impacted the Latina/o identity work in the Communication discipline the strongest. Note that neither Anzaldúa nor Moraga are Communication scholars.

Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Paso Por Sus Labios* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. 3rd edition (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002).

The following is an incomplete list of scholarship of queer Latino identity. Again, note that none of the scholars are in the Communication departments nor exclusively in the Communication discipline: José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, "Choreographies of Resistance: Latina/o Queer Dance and the Utopian Performative," *Modern Drama* 47, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 269-89; Richard T. Rodríguez, "Queering the Homeboy Aesthetic," *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 127-37.

¹⁵ Bernadette Marie Calafell, *Latina/o Communication Studies: Theorizing Performance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

¹⁶ Angharad N. Valdivia, "Latinas as Radical Hybrid: Transnationally Gendered Traces in Mainstream Media." *Global Media Journal* 2, no. 4 (Spring 2004): <http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/refereed.htm>.

¹⁷ Shane T. Moreman and Bernadette Marie Calafell, "Buscando Para Nuestra Latinidad: Utilizing La Llorona for Cultural Critique," *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 1, no. 4 (November 2008): 309-26.

and Latino culture with his enactment of same-sex desire and becomes homeless within the discourse of US citizenship, Latina/o culture and even Communication academic writing.

As a joto, I write the word down in connection with my self-identification. Soy joto. Unlike the adjective-riddled labels of English-worded identities (woman, black + woman, straight + black + woman), joto radiates an intersectionally-complicated being with just four letters. While some scholars find ways to divide out gay or lesbian from race, the joto maintains that the race, sexuality and gender are not isolatable from one another.¹⁸ My Latino + gay + male positionalities cannot be exclusively isolated; however, for the majority of the academy the impossible isolations of joto are unrecognizable. Additionally, joto's inseparabilities are not well-recognized in an academy that still tries to cleanly isolate out gender and race and sexuality from one another. For example, we are still printing research projects that are queer but never mention anything of the rhetorician's or researcher's whiteness and/or gender. However, with this essay I seek to overcome my joto's unintelligible compression by exploring an unprovable and most likely false rumor that Dwight Conquergood is gay; I therefore consider his sexuality to be worthy of mention and worthy of meaningfulness in relation to his work.

Never Come Out of the Closet

When I first came out and into my queer identity, I was an undergraduate student in San Antonio, Texas. As the ninth largest city in the nation, San Antonio also held and still holds one of the nation's largest LGBT communities. I attended midnight Latina drag shows at The Saint on Main Avenue on Thursday nights and would marvel at these performers' verve. (<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?Fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=74579144>) The drag show's emcee would call out to the crowd, "So, where is everyone from tonight? ¿De donde están ustedes?" Of course, "San Antonio" was called out from the audience. Also, I would hear small towns called out, like the one I was from... "Cuero," "Falls City," Floresville." I always wanted to scream out, "Skidmore!!!" But I could never overcome my fear of someone recognizing me and then telling my family and friends back home.

Just hearing that people were from no-name places like my own hometown made me feel at home in that crowd. Almost twenty-years later I would co-publish a performance ethnography with a former graduate student on Latina drag queens in Fresno, California.¹⁹ As a straight, white female researcher, she brought perspectives

¹⁸ For examples of works that choose not to address the relationship of race to sexuality, see the first footnote of:

Dustin B. Goltz, "Laughing at Absence: Instinct Magazine and the Hyper-Masculine Gay Future?" *Western Journal of Communication* 71, no. 2 (April 2007): 93-113.

¹⁹ Shane T. Moreman and Dawn Marie D. McIntosh, "Brown Scriptings and Rescriptings: A Critical Performance Ethnography of Latina Drag Queens," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* (in press for 2010).

to the study that I could not easily recognize as a joto. My co-author and I shared thoughts on theory, method and, of course, our participants. Yet, even though she was willing to hear me, I could never articulately verbalize to her how that study and that essay were part of a larger effort by me to pay homage to a group of Latina drag queens in San Antonio, Texas, that helped me define my early queer self.

Two doors down from The Saint was a bar called Pegasus. This was a cruise bar and it was generally packed from about 1:00am until 2:00am. This is where I met Old Man Tom. He was a white, wealthy home-construction contractor and also an insider to the San Antonio queer community. At least thirty years my senior, he knew where all the after-parties were and where all the after-hours bars were. He never liked to call me Shane but preferred my childhood nickname, Chango. I, therefore, playfully gave him a nickname too: Old Man Tom.

One night, drinking at an after-hours gay bar, he gave me some advice in a very serious tone: “Never come out of the closet. Never.”

I learned that in the past few years he had lost both his wife and his son. Neither of them knew that he had been gay. He had hidden his orientation from them, he said, to protect them and to protect himself.

“Some people will try to talk you into coming out, but you should never come out,” he insisted. “It’s not worth it.”

Old Man Tom did not offer specifics of what would come from being an out gay man and I did not ask. Instead, I nodded, looking around at his four friends who were all in agreement with him.

That night I walked home, refusing to ride with him in his drunken state. I stumbled home on a street where male and cross-dressing prostitutes worked. Men pulled up to me at intersections and tried to lock eye contact. Combining slight and overt nonverbal signals, they tried to get me to come into their cars. Under the glow of traffic signals and street lamps many of them played with their wedding bands as a symbol that they were looking for a trick and that there would be no further obligations than sex.

After that night, I never saw Old Man Tom out “in the scene” ever again. Although I continued to pursue gay relationships in the San Antonio club scene, I remained closeted to most of my friends and professors throughout the duration of my undergraduate education.

The advice given to remain closeted was underexplained; nevertheless, the reasons for following it were understood at that point in my life. As a young man, I could still tell my family I was single because I was focusing on my studies and trying to craft a career. They accepted my lack of girlfriends as proof that I was working hard to become a good provider for a future wife. So staying in the closet to my family was easy. The closet—framed by Old Man Tom—seemed to be a hospitable place to take refuge. The personal comforts offered by the closet overrode the discomforts endured by out queers. I never had to worry about suffering an HIV/AIDS stigma; and I never had to worry about people thinking I was sexually depraved. Probably most importantly, I never had to worry about doing the emotional

work of seeking, defining and securing a healthy relationship with another man and, in turn, myself.

The Straight and Gay Dwight Conquergood

Rejecting the warnings of Old Man Tom, I came out in my MA program. With an emerging interest in Performance Studies, I had found a welcome home for the expression of my gayness and my Latinidad. Also, in my MA program I was first introduced to Dwight Conquergood via his essay “Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance.”²⁰ I did not hate it, nor did I love it. I found the essay to be a straightforward offering of the research themes of non-Communication scholars and how these themes should be central to the work of communication scholars. After the Conquergood rumor, I re-read “Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance”—and I loved it.

As a queer Latino, I was reading for the first time another queer who cleverly left clues about his identity. Like Case’s queer deconstructions of historical canonical texts, I sought to find messages from Conquergood about my joto present.²¹ Although queers are often conceived of as longing for a future of social justice, Muñoz reminds us that queers also have a presence that is generative of a future.²² While heterosexuality is rooted in its biological reproduction that continues its material and discursive lineage, queers are also generative with performative acts that offer possibilities for future queers. In our right-here-right-now projects, we are providing possibilities for what and for who may come. Picking up the essay, I nervously began to read for Conquergood’s queer insights that could only be informed by living the life of a gay man. I looked for messages that he left for future queers to find within his words. I wondered if he ever learned the word joto from his Latino homeboys when he was learning their street literacy.²³

As my eyes scanned Conquergood’s text, I mouthed his words, and I did an oral reading of his words. “Contemporary ethnography features the affinities between rhetoric and performance, casting ‘*homo rhetoricus*’ and ‘*homo performans*’ as players within a cultural ensemble who exchange roles and share a repertoire of invention” (p. 80). Out loud, the line had a sensuality to it. Homo rhetoricus. Homo performans. Homos.

²⁰ Dwight Conquergood, “Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (February 1992): 80-123.

²¹ Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminist and Queer Performance: Critical Strategies* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

²² José Esteban Muñoz, “The Future in the Present: Sexual Avant-Gardes and the Performance of Utopia.” in *The Futures of American Studies*, eds. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 93-110.

²³ Dwight Conquergood, “Street Literacy,” in *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through Communicative and Visual Arts*, eds. James Flood, Shirley Brice Heath and Diane Lapp (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 354-75.

I put the essay down and shook my head. “You’re trying too hard,” I told myself. However, knowing the rumor of his identity re-shaped my understanding of his word choices. I could not help but be influenced by my new knowledge of his gayness. Suddenly I saw campy double entendres that had been latent within a closet of gay secrecy but were now manifest through my joto reading.

As I continued the essay I was struck by what he found striking. I understood him anew as an individual who went out to collect knowledge only to return with it so that he could share it with others. He celebrated the deviance of ethnographers when he said we/they “resemble trickster performers and wily sophists especially when they return from foreign worlds with Other knowledge and use it to disconcert established premises and play with reality at home” (p. 81). He brought it all back home so as not to challenge or subvert home realities but rather to play with them. In the rest of the essay I read a queer Conquergood teaching me valuable lessons. He was interested in resistance both inside and outside of the establishment; he was interested in the ethical obligations we have to the researched Other; and he was interested in ethnographic representations that are empowering and not degrading.

Then, I felt him speaking to me and through me. The queer Conquergood whispered a lesson in a serious tone: “Refugees, undocumented migrants, street youth—the subordinate people with whom I have done fieldwork—typically do not speak in public, they are spoken about and for. They and other people enter the public sphere not as active agents but as objectivized problems to be surveyed, solved, and administered through public policy, police, and the law. And yet these people do speak, often eloquently, full of consciousness, within subaltern public space” (p. 92). I heard him. I understood him too well. Conquergood’s work was all about creating hospitable space in our communication research for the voices and performances of marginalized communities. And he wanted us to understand that those voices and performances happened—even if the academy never recognized them.

Out of the Closet and Into the Class

In my PhD program, a student colleague of mine decided to do an identity study. As a white straight male, he was seeking to understand marginalization and his own privilege; thus he decided to go online as a lesbian and meet other lesbians. For the semester, he formed an online romantic relationship with another lesbian. They talked about activities they both enjoyed, like hiking. He pretended he was interpersonally interested in her but kept putting off her requests to meet in person. He continued the relationship until the semester was coming to an end. Then he abruptly ended it with no closure, no explanation and no confession to the lesbian to whom he lied.

As the sole gay or lesbian student in the class, I was enraged and horrified when he presented his “research” in class. Sheepishly he talked about his project and confessed how badly he felt.

He did say that a good friend of his (a straight white woman) consoled him by saying, “Well, you never know. She could have been deceiving you too. She might not have been a lesbian herself.”

Other students in the class laughed.

I looked to my professor to scold him, to make him an example for everyone else about how horrible this project was and how unethical he was. Uncomfortably and shamefully the professor commented on his presentation but not his content: “That was very brave of you.” It was brave of him to come out to the class about what he had done? It was brave of him to attempt such a cruel project? It was brave of him to temporarily enact the Other so that he could experience a false sacrifice of his privilege? It became obvious to me that the academy was more hospitable to some than to others.²⁴

The next semester I was teaching the class “Gender and Communication.” At the back of the class, straight white and Latino male students had formed a coalition against me. They were angry at the material I was presenting on feminism. They were angry that I had come out as a gay male to them.

On a day that we talked about gay and lesbian issues, I reminded them that I was gay and that they were to be mindful of how they framed what they wanted to say about gay culture. One Caribbean black male student raised his hand and said, “I was taught to hate the sin, but love the sinner.”

I took a deep breath. I was a young teacher and was trying to hide my anger with the student and my anger with myself for outing myself. I internally questioned why I had made my gayness the center of attention.

A pregnant Southern black female student raised her hand and stated, “Being gay is wrong not just for religious reasons but for natural reasons too.”

I question her, “Natural reasons?”

She continues, “Yes, naturally nothing is supposed to go in that hole. It will tear and bleed.”

I scan the room and watch students snicker and wiggle. Embarrassed, I cancel the rest of class.

During the next class, I change the conversational direction and show a Jean Kilbourne film.²⁵ I am hoping to take the focus off of the horrible last class. After the film is finished, I ask the question, “Well, what do you think?”

From the back of the room, a student yells, “That you’re a fag.”

I instantly ask, “Who said that? Tell me who said that?”

No one fesses up. I cancel the rest of class again. I know that I have no recourse. I had already looked up the discrimination code at my university and learned that, at that time, they did not and would not protect gays and lesbians from discriminatory

²⁴ To this professor’s credit, I never asked and was never told what was said to this student behind closed office doors.

²⁵ Jean Kilbourne, *Still Killing Us Softly*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Documentary Films, 1987).

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acts. (www.usf.edu) Out of the top twelve largest public universities at that time, only two did not, and refused to include sexual orientation in their anti-discrimination code: University of Florida and University of South Florida.

After those class experiences and while in my PhD program, I only mentioned my sexual orientation if I was asked or if I accidentally let it slip out.

The Reproductive Queer Qualities

After I became an Assistant Professor at California State University, Fresno, Dwight Conquergood passed away. At this point in my career, I was well out of the closet and well into enhancing white-washed and heterosexually-riddled queer theory. As a tribute to Conquergood, Della Pollock put together a special issue of short essays written by past students and fellow colleagues. I read through the pdf files available through my digital library, looking for comments on his gayness. I read about his modesty, his rigor, and his commitment to disenfranchised groups. I was inspired by what a truly great man he was. Then, in reading Shannon Jackson's tribute to Dwight Conquergood, she uses the word "queer" in relation to Dwight Conquergood. "It is unbelievable, telling, and inspiring to think that my male, queer, activist, foster-parent dissertation advisor is my role model for academic care-giving. If you are (like many at a panel this morning) looking for 'a non-reproductive model of human attachment that exceeds biological ties,' here you have it."²⁶ Mixing in reproduction with queerness, she celebrates the non-biologically reproductive Conquergood for his insight into care-giving in the academy. Jackson finds a way to see a generative quality to Conquergood's queerness. However, her naming of his queerness never admits to anything romantically or sexually relational.

I put down the article and think about all the ways that queer has been defined. While the word queer carries strong political value for me, it lacks representational value. For me (and not speaking for Shannon Jackson) queer has become a catch-all for sexually deviant behavior. Many straight scholars have self-identified with the term for no other reason than they are not completely following heterosexual norms. Indeed, many of the queer writings in our field carry heterosexually-laden analyses written by heterosexual, often married, scholars.

Turning on the TV, a celebrity news story flashes about Hugh Hefner. I think to myself that queer has become large enough to include even Hugh Hefner into it. Perhaps he is the most queer celebrity to date. He is having sex with three women. All of his female lovers must be under 26, despite his age being 83. He lives with all of them despite being concurrently married (just recently divorced). He remained in his marriage for the sake of his two teenage sons, whom he did not want to grow up with divorced parents. His wife and two kids did not live with him but rather lived next door to the Playboy mansion.

²⁶ Shannon Jackson, "Caravans Continued: In Memory of Dwight Conquergood," *TDR* 50, no. 1 (2006): 28-32.

For many scholars, he could be celebrated as queer.

Rather than fight the queer scholars, I have chosen to walk away. Like Gloria Anzaldúa and E. Patrick Johnson, I have had to embrace other terms for my “queer” identity.²⁷ I prefer *joto*. Queer has become too heterosexually useful and falls out away from my own understandings of my queer identity as it intersects with my cultural identity.

Maricón Seguro

In Spanish, we Latinas/os have a saying: Soltero maduro, maricón seguro.²⁸ If a man is single at an older age, then people often assume he must be gay. This is true in most cultures, including Latino cultures. Online I read Dwight Conquergood’s obituary: “His intense work ethic left little time for a wife and family, his brother said.” (<http://gangresearch.net/GangResearch/Media/dwight.htm>)

At the point of reading Conquergood’s obituary I am sad. I remember the senior scholar’s squirming and wonder if I should put *mi chisme* in print, online, and out in the world. Next I reminisce about how hard it was for me to be a *joto* in the academy. Then I predict how harsh the reactions will be to this essay in which I claim Conquergood as a queer. Conquergood demonstrated how Latino gang members created homes through their words, rituals and ways.²⁹ And as he reminds us, the word is a powerful constituent of the communication practice of marginalized cultures. In pushing for an ethics of voice in our own work, he argued that each voice has its own integrity.³⁰ And as he reminds us, the voice is a powerful constituent of the communication practice of marginalized cultures. In all of his work he troubled how to go about revealing the lives of others. And as he reminds us, “Secrecy is a powerful constituent of the communication practices of . . . marginalized cultures.”³¹

²⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, "To(o) Queer the Writer," in *Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujillo. (Berkeley, CA: Third Woman Press, 1998).

E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (January 2001): 1-25.

²⁸ Single and mature (old), gay for sure.

²⁹ Dwight Conquergood, "Homeboys and Hoods: Gang Communication and Cultural Space." in *Group Communication in Context: Studies in Natural Context*, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1994), 23-55.

³⁰ Dwight Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance," *Literature in Performance* 5, no. 2 (1982): 1-13.

³¹ Dwight Conquergood, "For the Nation!: How Street Gangs Problematize Patriotism," in *After Postmodernism: Reconstructing Ideology Critique*, eds. H. Simons and M. Billig, (London: Sage, 1994), 200-21.

Shane Moreman

As a joto, I know that there is a time to be silent and a time to not be silent; and I know that visibility does not always yield power. However I also understand that I cannot divide out my identifications and footnote some while I comment on others. In my home life I am a joto and in the academy I am a joto. Therefore, in my research about myself and about others, I am joto. To embrace such an identity is to claim the inhospitableness of (white) (straight) queer space. No longer is it a home for myself as it has spun into usage for so many people fighting their own heteronormativity or seeking ways to claim marginalization while they hold onto white privilege. Conquergood never seems to have claimed being gay and he never claimed being queer. Perhaps he too saw the finite truth of what queer holds. From here on out, I will claim Conquergood for his queerness, whether or not this identity was truly his. This joto reads him for the gay man he was and the queer wisdom a joto-reading generatively provides.

No need to squirm. The rumor is a compliment.



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