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A CLASS ACT

Ryan Landry and the Politics of Booger Drag

Karen C. Krahulik

I always like to work on leftovers. . . . Things that were discarded and that everybody knew were no good, I always thought had a great potential to be funny. It was like recycling work. . . . I'm not saying that popular taste is bad so that what's left over is probably bad, but if you can take it and make it good or at least interesting, then you're not wasting as much as you would otherwise. You're recycling work and you're recycling people, and you're running your business as a byproduct of other businesses. Of *other directly competitive* businesses, as a matter of fact. So that's very economical operating procedure. It's also the funniest operating procedure because, as I said, leftovers are inherently funny.
—Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications.
—José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*

What we did is we'd go through like garbage cans and stuff or through old lockers . . . and we'd find anything that kind of looked like who we wanted to be, maybe just a scarf or something. . . . we were all doing shows for like fifteen bucks max and maybe a free beer. Yet when we walked on stage we'd get this huge round of applause from the room, but you're not rich, not a celebrity. That's how it started.
—Ryan Landry, unpublished interview, 2002

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Ryan Landry and I have more in common than meets the eye (fig. 1).¹ To start, we both work on leftovers (his more “inherently funny” than mine): as a “booger drag” or “white trash” performer, Landry recycles scripts, costumes, and props; as a historian, I recycle narratives, events, and people.² We both chose our vocations based on political rather than financial priorities, and each of us brings to our work critiques of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Landry performs onstage, a self-identified “heavy queen.” I perform in academic venues, a self-identified butch dean. Our shared commitment to queer politics has left us both ambivalent, profoundly, about a place that has become central to our lives and to our work: Provincetown, Massachusetts. I published a community history of the town; Landry has performed there for over a dozen years. In many ways, Provincetown has sustained us artistically as well as financially; we both market ideas about a place called “Land’s End.”

My ambivalence toward Provincetown has been evolving for over a decade, beginning with my first visit in 1994. As part of my coming-out process friends and lovers informed me that I *had* to visit “P-town” because it was a gay town (meaning, it catered to a gay clientele and was affirming of gay people) as well as a “quaint” Portuguese fishing port and New England village. They described Provincetown as a “real” town and compared it favorably with other gay enclaves like Cherry Grove (a seasonal island resort rather than a year-round town) and the Castro (an urban neighborhood, not stereotypically “quaint”). It was, they seemed to indicate, the perfect home-away-from-home, a rural outpost with metrosexual tendencies.³ They also advised me to make haste in getting there via Cape Air airline, which advertised itself as “the fastest way to come out.” I was inaugurated, finally, into Provincetown’s easy exchange of gay fantasies and dollars in January 1994, when my girlfriend gave me a weekend in P-town as a gift.

Provincetown’s unique blend of small town charm and big city attitude was immensely seductive and convinced me, as it had others, to spend as much time there as possible. After working summers in Provincetown from 1994 to 1996, I lived there full-time for three years, earning my stripes as a “year-rounder” after my second winter season. Like most workers, I held three jobs during the summer, but during the winter I focused exclusively on fieldwork for my community history, *Provincetown: From Pilgrim Landing to Gay Resort*. Rather than simply trace the development of a gay enclave, my book asked how economic, racial, and cultural factors—in both local and transnational contexts—contributed to Provincetown’s evolution into a gay resort. It also investigated the impact this evolution had on Provincetown’s native and “wash-ashore” populations.⁴ This latter line of inquiry, new at the time to the field of lesbian and gay history, allowed me to conclude that



Figure 1. Ryan Landry re-creates the monstrous figure of Medusa in his popular play *Medea*.
Photograph by Peter Urban. © Peter Urban

residents and visitors had queered Provincetown during the first half of the twentieth century. It also revealed, however, that the queering process was short lived, enjoying a heyday of sorts in the postwar era but withering rapidly as the millennium approached. By the 1990s, Provincetown had devolved into a lucrative gay resort whose class and race politics—its business of importing black, foreign-born, seasonal laborers to sustain the recreational habits of white, wealthy tourists—were anything *but* queer.

I found a place for Ryan Landry, a performance artist rattling the bars of rampant gentrification, in the conclusion of my book. Situating Landry as its subject, this essay accomplishes what my community history could not: it provides a more in-depth analysis of transgression in Provincetown by assessing how one artist disrupted, and continues to interrogate, Provincetown's recent and seemingly facile slide toward assimilation and exclusion. In other words, Landry's efforts to challenge Provincetown's neoliberal tendencies have inspired me to take another intellectual trip to Land's End. This time, however, my journey moves away from thinking about how people identify with Provincetown and toward the methods involved in what José Esteban Muñoz calls "the worldmaking power of disidentificatory performances."⁵

Asking how people disidentify with the emergence of a gay enclave takes me beyond the important set of gay and lesbian histories that have been published in the past fifteen years, most of which trace community development.⁶ Incorporating the insights of both performance studies and queer theory, I analyze Landry's "disidentificatory performances" in the context of his oral history and the history of Provincetown. This interdisciplinary approach allows me to demonstrate that transgression, in this case within the realm of camp, is time and space specific and is measured effectively, if not most accurately, at the intersection of personal and political histories. Analyzing an oral history text to see how its stories inform those played out onstage illuminates how the circumstances of one's past supply the tools to build a politically barbed future. Analyzing this future, or these drag performances, alongside the history of the community in which they occur reveals their queer potential as well as their compromises. In uncovering the grassroots tactics Landry deploys to upset the status quo, the goal of this essay is twofold: to chart the development and articulation of an alternative vision of Provincetown and to question scholarly exercises, both within and beyond the field of history, that uncritically celebrate gentrified "metro-satellites" with, to use Lisa Duggan's term, "homonormative" priorities.⁷

While a number of scholars interpret drag performances by examining

both the private and the public lives of specific artists, two stand out as especially instructive to a project such as this one: Muñoz and Martin F. Manalansan IV.⁸ I look to Muñoz, and especially to his explorations of the performance artists Jack Smith and Dr. Vaginal Cream Davis, to conceptualize particular forms of political or “terrorist drag.” Like Muñoz, I am less interested in “corporate-sponsored” drag, and what Romy Sara Shiller calls cross-dressing that “represents a sanitized and desexualized queer subject for mass consumption,” and more interested in performances that, in Shiller’s words, “constitute a critique of [a] community’s whiteness” and “heteronormative protocols.”⁹ I agree that drag performers like Davis and Landry serve radical pedagogical functions by creating, in Muñoz’s words, “an uneasiness in desire, which works to confound and subvert the social fabric.”¹⁰ In focusing on Landry’s pedagogical interventions, this essay positions him as an artist who addresses social inequities by reconfiguring normative narratives. It does so in part to answer Rosemary Hennessy’s compelling inquiry: “Is the subversiveness of a self-consciously performative identity of drag at risk if we inquire into certain of the other social relations—the relations of labor, for instance—that help enable it?”¹¹

Manalansan uses an ethnographic approach to analyze the diasporic relationships of Filipino gay male “transmigrants” in New York City. Focusing on the drag rendition of a Filipino tradition known as the *Santacruzán*, Manalansan interprets this re-created ritual as a “perverse,” “dissident,” “transgressive performance of identities” that “mirrors the experience of displacement, dislocation, and discrimination felt by some Filipino” gay men.¹² Manalansan analyzed the *Santacruzán* alongside fifty life history interviews with Filipino gay men. These interviews allowed him to demonstrate that “cross-dressing” was more than a localized, celebratory form of entertainment. It was also a “vehicle for nostalgia,” a way to “resurrect time and place.”¹³ Manalansan concludes that “multiply transplanted” Filipino gay men used an “invisible baggage or gunny sack of dreams and cultural practices . . . [to] refigure their lives and selves within existing constraints.”¹⁴

In visible as opposed to invisible ways, Landry quite literally turned the conditions of his past into accoutrements for a ritualistic present. Moving within, rather than across, national borders, he reworks narratives and forms of drag less as a function of nostalgia and more as a result of actively disidentifying with past and present politics. Examining Landry’s oral history text and staged performances in the context of Provincetown shows how, by refusing to engage politely with polite society, Landry deliberately upset hegemonic norms. Ultimately, however, this essay is concerned not only with performance but also with how performance interacts with the histories, politics, and visions of its host community.

The Oral History Performance

In 2002 Landry described himself to me as “a human horse [that] keeps plowing through and hoping for the best.”¹⁵ “A human horse?” I repeated with a quizzical but encouraging tone. “Yeah, like a horse, you know? Like a horse gauges and then who knows what’s at the end like a cliff, or, I don’t know, a shady spot. I just keep galloping and hoping for the best. Meaning, like, just do my work, do my work, do my work [Landry’s hands thump the table as he lets out a horselike whinny]—to a rhythm. You know what I mean?” Seizing the opportunity to perform, Landry turned the trope of the majestic centaur into that of a cross-dressed workhorse. “Because if I break the rhythm,” he explained, “then I think it’s probably a running away from something, you know? Like a running away from reality or running away from who I think I am or who I don’t want to be.” Within the first few moments of our time together, Landry set the stage by insisting on a relationship to labor, a reliance on mimicry, and a fearlessness of an unknown and unknowable future.

After queering the centaur, Landry deployed a more traditional coming-out narrative. He confessed to being a heavy queen who produces a working-class, antibourgeois, anti-“glam” form of female impersonation called “booger drag.” Landry, who first practiced booger drag “professionally” in the late 1970s alongside other white, working-class hustlers in New York City’s East Village, used squalid imagery to describe the basics: “You’d wear something someone blew their nose on just because it was like the right color or dress. You’d just throw it on, so boogery. And then glam drag is all about the nails stuff. Booger drag, you know, rather than doing your nails, it’s pick your nose drag.” Using one’s nails for utilitarian rather than cosmetic purposes exposes one of Landry’s main investments in booger drag: its function as a clawing method of economic survival. His signature acts continue today to utilize and caricature “things that were discarded and that everybody knew were no good.” Often he performs and accessorizes with clothing plucked from thrift stores, dusty attics, or trash bins, playing out Warhol’s “great potential to be funny.”¹⁶ In addition to recycling leftover belongings, Landry recycles leftover narratives both in the telling of his life story and in his staged productions. He then “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded messages” of these artifacts to empower and preserve marginalized positions.¹⁷ His oral history, as I shall show, approximates a mythic tale in which the Dukes of Hazzard land unexpectedly on the set of *Saturday Night Fever*. From a combination of John Travolta plus Daisy Duke, Landry emerges as a brilliant and queer Don Quixote character.

Born in Wallingford, Connecticut, in 1961, Landry painted a grim picture of what he characterized as a “white trash” childhood that waffled between the realities of living in a northeastern trailer park and the humor on *Second City Television* (*SCTV*), a show that, Landry insisted, “was everything to me when I was growing up.” In this way he mobilized a familiar tale that posits rural, working-class life as character building yet oppressive.¹⁸ This allows him to authenticate himself immediately as both heroic and worthy of adoration, if not stardom. Landry framed his early years in the context of a story within a story, thus positioning himself as the courageous protagonist not once but twice. Assuming the role of a young, working-class version of Truman Burbank in *The Truman Show*, Landry believed that television cameras were filming his every move, a fantasy stemming from profound feelings of rejection and loneliness. Landry confessed to the prepubescent knowledge that his sexuality and his gender orientation did not match the norm and that it was best to conceal queer tendencies from his parents and peers.

After deploying a heroic tale about the constraints of a working-class childhood, Landry described the creative outlets he mobilized to escape heterosexism and to gain control of his life or at least his fantasies. His closet was an important, fanciful destination. “All I did was draw panda bears all day, holding flowers, trying to stay a child as long as I could,” he professed, on the one hand, while on the other he elaborated on his preoccupation with dolls: “[I did] not play with them because I felt like a little girl. I played with them because I think it was the beginning of my wanting to be a playwright, to be able to manipulate human beings without hurting them, you know what I mean? To make them live out and play out the story as I’d like it to happen.” Even as Landry reminisced about “trying to stay a child as long as I could,” the main theme of the oral history pivoted on notions of survival. Suggesting an early inclination to alter the norm by altering the narrative, Landry interrupted a homophobic situation with a fantasy/theater life that suited his desires. It was a process of survival that evolved erratically during his childhood. And it was a reaction to the absurdity of his circumstances—what Esther Newton refers to as “incongruities”—that led to the emergence of his own camp sensibility.¹⁹

Landry also hinted at subversive sexual and gender behaviors when he described a typical tussle between closeted children and their parents: the scene in which a parent interrogates a child about aberrant sexual or gender behavior while the offspring in question acts on and, simultaneously, denies nonnormative inclinations. “My mother would say ‘how come all these guys are calling you and no girls?’ . . . I don’t know, I’m 14 or 15, going out to the fag bar, and I’m ironing

my, like, lycra disco shirt—this totally faggy shirt. And I have my hair feathered, a Daisy Duke tank top on, a necklace and mascara in my mustache. . . . And I tell my mother, ‘I’m not gaaayyy!’” Here Landry alters his parents’ version of a heterosexual teen drama by primping for and pursuing men. At the same time, he changes the “real” story by saying he is *not* gay. In retrospect, this may have been closer to the truth than it at first appears. Landry did not necessarily identify as gay, and perhaps his mother would have received a different answer had she asked if he was “a heavy queen.”

In Landry’s version, going out to gay bars, dressing like a “fag,” and playing with dolls were all part of his trailer park survival plan: “I guess it must have been that I felt like I had absolutely no control over my life because of the way my parents were and stuff. . . . this was my only way to control something.” These preoccupations suggest that Landry engaged in alternative genders and sexualities within and despite growing up in a world circumscribed by class, location, and prejudice. In other words, before Landry left for New York City, he invented ways to negotiate queer desires and aesthetics while still living at home.

At this juncture, the standard rural-to-urban coming-out narrative often follows one of two trajectories: the less tragic path leads to immediate or eventual parental acceptance, parent-child reconciliation, and opportunities, if not desires, to return home. The bittersweet one ends with sexual freedom and urban relocation at the cost of long-standing, if not permanent, parental rejection. Landry’s story fits the latter pattern. When he was still a teenager, his parents evicted him from the family trailer. When I asked him why, he shrilled one word into the recorder: “Gaaayyy!”

The eviction story fits well with Landry’s heroic survival narrative. In fact, his parents’ rejection resulted in two forms of theatrical success: drag performing and street hustling. He spoke of his decision to move to Manhattan and attend the School of Visual Arts. Yet he complicated this middle-class narrative of ascendancy and improvement by admitting that he lived in his car while working the streets and doing booger drag to make money. Although Landry felt the need to defend his sex work, he put himself in the role of naive opportunist or innocent hooker rather than victimized sex worker. With a sense of achievement, he recounted how he learned “you could make twenty bucks if you sleep with Joe or whatever tonight. And I was like, ‘really? Twenty bucks? That’s good. Yeah, I’ll do it.’ But it wasn’t like I’d feel a wave of guilt, like, you know, I don’t want to sell my body or anything. I didn’t see it like that.”

Landry brought the same entrepreneurial spirit to his drag performances,

which he pioneered in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s at the Pyramid Club on Avenue A in Manhattan's East Village. Turning the material realities of what he described as an impoverished past into entertaining props, Landry admitted, despite childhood fantasies, that it was "new to me that people who were poor could be stars." He then elaborated nostalgically about booger drag's nightly routine of picking through trash bins and performing for a few dollars "and maybe a free beer." Caught up in fast-paced hustling and performance gigs—one week with a sugar daddy in the Hamptons, the next week scavenging for costumes on the streets of the East Village—Landry, quite literally, inverted his ancestral closet by utilizing its meager contents as a means to success. Throughout the 1980s, his main objective, he remembered, was "to survive." Booger drag queens may have "walked onstage" to a healthy "round of applause," but they were not neoliberal sellouts, they were not glamorous, and they were not getting "rich."

After outlining his urban adventures, Landry moved chronologically to discuss how he discovered Provincetown in 1990 and found that it, too, offered many stages on which to perform. To introduce his performative interventions in Provincetown, Landry deployed another illustrative tale that spotlighted him as the star of the show within the oral history. The scene of his initial moment of triumph took place in the town's then only lesbian bar, the Pied Piper, which sponsored a weekly variety show called "Puttin' on the Hits." Despite, or perhaps because of, the predominance of an erotic lesbian currency, Landry bragged about stealing the show and handily winning the \$100 prize week after week. Grinning, he recalled that the lesbians running the Pied banned him from competing but not before he taught glam drag queens a lesson about the value of booger drag. In his words, "The old school queens could not understand why I was winning by coming dressed down as bag girl." Matthew Tinkcom suggests that this is exactly where a drag performer's power resides, in the "ability to offend virtually everyone, including other drag queens."²⁰ Landry's experience at the Pied was pivotal because it demonstrated to him immediately that booger drag would do more than succeed; it would thrive at Land's End. During "Puttin' on the Hits," Landry became Provincetown's favorite "antistar," a performer who put forth "calculated ugliness" to throw the idea of "what it means to be a star"—good looks, polished appearance, mainstream following—into question.²¹

Landry continued his story of "discovering" Provincetown by elaborating on his other stage personae and productions. Starting in the mid-1990s, he fronted an alternative rock band called Space Pussy. What started out as drag queen karaoke took off in nightclubs up and down Cape Cod as the gender-bending perform-

ers in Space Pussy cultivated a dedicated following of punks, queers, queens, and straights of all ages. Complementing Landry, Space Pussy included a transsexual drummer (Rikki Bates), a mop-top butch lesbian bass player (Sue Goldberg), and a smartly outfitted eurotrash guitarist (Eric Short). As Space Pussy declined, Show-girls, an “amateur” drag night that Landry still hosts weekly during the summer season, gained steam, as did his annual (drag) play adaptations. Crowd-pleasing favorites have included “Scarrie” (based on Stephen King’s *Carrie*), “Pussy on the House” (based on Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), “How Mrs. Grinchley Swiped Christmas” (based on the holiday classic *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*), “Who’s Afraid of the Virgin Mary?” (based on Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*), and “Cinderella: A Rock Musical.” With no small amount of working-class, entrepreneurial pride, Landry explained how turning out provocative shows every year is “part of my business . . . to keep myself alive and to continue to thrive. And people continue to respect me for what I do, which also means money in my pocket.” In Provincetown Landry created new coalitions by reworking familiar narratives.

Landry’s oral history combines variations of three classic tropes—the “fallen woman” morality tale, the gay coming-out story, and the quixotic class struggle—to tell a story that is ultimately about survival. For instance, his narrative contains all the trappings of the “fallen woman,” or *Johnny Go Home*, morality tale.²² The country novice, lured by fantasies of city life, finds himself homeless and dependent on prostitution. Yet Landry alters the outcome. His “fall” leads to theatrical success based on his own past and other people’s trash. Recycling these items represents more than a thrifty way to compete with limited means: it is part of Landry’s enduring struggle with issues of access and the redistribution of resources. The new moral affirms urban opportunities, including sex work, even as it warns against the full-scale disposal of one’s working-class origins and politics.

Landry’s rural-to-urban adventures are mapped onto a fairly typical coming-out narrative. Casting working-class, rural life as repressive, if not oppressive, Landry describes his escape with conviction and passion. The metropolis known as New York City, an urban “landfall of freedom,” liberates Landry and supports his alternative modes of survival. In this way Landry “pins the narrative of [homophobia] . . . firmly to the landscape of white trash America,” as Judith Halberstam puts it.²³ Yet, again, Landry complicates an easy reading of this typical narrative in two ways. First, although the audiences for his oral history and his staged performances can luxuriate, if they so choose, in the racialization and rejection of “white trash America,” closer readings of his performances, and the

locations in which his performances take place, reflect a certain ambivalence about rural upbringings. His oral history, for instance, rejects trailer park life, but it also describes outlets Landry created for making the most of an alternative sensibility—his mother may have interrogated him about calls from boys, but still, while living at home, he donned Daisy Duke attire and dated boys. Similarly, his attraction to Provincetown, albeit something of a metro-satellite, suggests he is conflicted about full-time urban life and chooses instead, at least for several months each year, to reside in the quaint confines of a New England village. In other words, we find Landry returning not to *his* hometown but to *a* hometown.

Finally, Landry invokes a kind of Don Quixote character throughout his narrative, yet the fearless romantic in this version is, more often than not, a cross-dressed, gender-bending, award-winning bag girl. As a child, Landry was drawn to the mythical, playing out panda bear scenes in a television world to which he alone was privy. To make sense of familial and societal detachment, he invokes a centaurian hero, and he stays his course with the clop-clop rhythm and whinny of progress and frustration. His narrative and performative trajectories—hustling his way out of a Connecticut trailer park while reinventing rather than negating his class position—position him as a heroic and likeable white trash queen rather than a bitter working-class boy. And in the guise of a heavy queen whose relationship to commercialized glamour is one of sustained disidentification, Landry, like Don Quixote, suits up for heroic class struggles. As I show in the next section, he goes to battle for the oppressed, the disenfranchised, and the queer; he does drag “because people told me I couldn’t.”

Setting the Stage

Landry’s ability to occupy the quixotic position vis-à-vis his audience pivots on when, where, and how he performs: his drag is time and place specific. Its political currency is rooted in the location and timing of its execution, and thus I turn, shortly, to a snapshot of Provincetown’s history and politics. But first I locate Landry’s particular style of camp historically within two related artistic movements: sloppy drag and a white trash aesthetic.

In terms of the former, as Landry came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, performers in Scotland, England, and Australia were already delighting audiences with “bizarre concoctions of barbed social commentary and over-the-top drag.”²⁴ Julian Clary, Reg Livermore, Leigh Bowery, and Lyndsay Kemp, who once stated, “If you are going to be crude, you might as well be really filthy,” were prominent forerunners of this genre.²⁵ Excessive and grotesque drag entertainers also (dis)

graced stages in the United States. In Newton's mapping of drag culture during the 1960s in Chicago, New York, Kansas City, and San Francisco, one finds a number of "deviations from the glamour ideal." These included "tacky" (meaning cheap) and "transy" (meaning deviant) drag as well as "slapstick" comedic drag.²⁶ Also in the 1960s one might have happened upon the performer and filmmaker Jack Smith, who initiated an underground theater of alternative acts, what Stefan Brecht refers to as a "defiant aesthetic lower-depthism."²⁷

Other antiglam performers enjoyed a more "popular" following and basked in the spotlight at places like the Play-House of the Ridiculous in New York City, which opened in 1966. Charles Ludlam helped launch the Ridiculous Theatrical Company in Boston one year later, while eclectic performers like Charles Busch repulsed and amused audiences in metropolitan nightclubs and theaters including the Provincetown Playhouse in New York City and the Pyramid Club.²⁸ In 1970 the Cockettes opened a show in San Francisco that featured "forty-five men, three women and two babies draped with thrift-shop drag . . . rejecting all the totems of beauty, wholesomeness and patriotism."²⁹ Landry, too, rebelled against obligatory patriotism and honed his skills as an outrageous antistar just a few years later in places like the Pyramid Club and in Provincetown, successfully tapping into a rich and lengthy tradition of dirty drag.³⁰

The white trash aesthetic championed during the 1960s and 1970s by such artists as Warhol and John Waters also included "over-the-top" camp and influenced Landry's work immensely. Waters in particular provided direct inspiration to Landry. Regarding both concept and place, Waters made central the figure of the tragic trash queen through Divine and spent a fair amount of time in Provincetown. From 1966 to 1980, Waters spent what are now legendary summer seasons at Land's End working at the Provincetown Bookstore, taking drugs, having sex, and writing the screenplays for *Eat Your Makeup* (1968), *Mondo Trasho* (1969), *Multiple Maniacs* (1970), *Pink Flamingos* (1972), *Female Trouble* (1974), and *Desperate Living* (1977). Although Waters's full-time residence is and has always been in Baltimore, like countless other queers he has treated Provincetown as a second home and has enjoyed there a sizable cult following for decades.

In short, Landry was not the first performer to showcase excessive and grotesque white trash drag, nor was he alone during the 1980s and 1990s in capitalizing on a trailer park past. Landry's booger drag followed in the high-heeled footsteps of characters like Divine, who, in the words of Michael Moon, perfected an "unsanitized drag [that] disgust[ed] and infuriat[ed] many people."³¹ And it coincided within gay male culture with what the late historian Allan Bérubé called "a pop culture, retro-fifties nostalgia [that] resurrected and then commodified the

artifacts of trailer park life, reworking their meanings into a campy ‘trash’ style.”³² With this backdrop, Landry combined sloppy drag with a white trash aesthetic to revive a queer agenda in Provincetown.³³

During the 1990s, while Landry was busy popularizing white trash performances at the Pied Piper, Provincetown was, not coincidentally, experiencing for some the boom and for others the bust of gentrification and the swelling of a lucrative gay market. Also called “Gay Town” and “Queersville, U.S.A.,” Provincetown sits at the farthest end of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and boasts of its historic if tenuous fame as home, for five weeks, to the *Mayflower* Pilgrims before they departed for the more fertile terrain of Plymouth Plantation. During the mid-nineteenth century Provincetown thrived as a Yankee whaling port that depended on the skill and labor of Portuguese crewmen from the Azores. By the turn of the twentieth century, after the discovery of petroleum oil sank the whaling economy, Provincetown recognized that a replacement industry was essential. Sixty miles from the mainland and surrounded on three sides by water, it proved untenable as an industrial center. Instead, it focused on becoming a resort town.

Sizing up the competition, Land’s End used a three-pronged approach to market itself as an ideal destination for American tourists. First, it called out to the patriotic and persecuted by branding itself as a historically significant landfall of freedom; second, it seduced those fancying mystical experiences by broadcasting its popularity as a colony of artists; and, third, it tempted members of the leisure class, who were interested in their own measures of whiteness, to “tour” Provincetown’s “bands” of “dark-skinned” and “swarthy” Portuguese immigrants. This strategy worked. From the 1910s to the 1940s, Provincetown became known more for its crops of tourists than for its hauls of fish. And during the last half of the twentieth century, it blossomed even more brilliantly, to the delight of some and the horror of others, into an internationally renowned gay resort mecca.³⁴

Because of both local and national trends, by the 1990s, what was once an affordable and “eclectic” working-class fishing village and art colony had become an exclusive seaside destination catering to white, wealthy gay and lesbian consumers. Provincetown’s queering process, in other words, was followed by widespread gentrification. During the 1980s and 1990s, gay men and lesbians with ample capital moved to Land’s End, purchased guesthouses, and opened boutique gift shops along Provincetown’s main and only commercial promenade, aptly named Commercial Street. Gay men and lesbians with successful careers in urban areas like Boston, New York, and Atlanta bought or built second homes at exorbitant prices, driving the value of real estate to astounding heights for a remote vil-

lage three miles long and just more than two streets wide. By 2004, single-family homes were selling for an average of \$650,000, thus pricing out entire classes of residents and visitors.

Indeed, the migration of white, middle- and upper-class gays and lesbians to Provincetown with their demands to citizenship via consumerism ushered in widespread class and ethnic displacement. Straight, gay, and queer working-class residents, most but not all of whom were of Portuguese descent, felt forced or chose to relocate to more affordable shores elsewhere. To fill the new void in menial laborers, entrepreneurs — also of varying backgrounds — began importing seasonal workers from Jamaica and Eastern Europe under the H-2B and J-1 Visa programs. As working-class gay and straight individuals and families emigrated, Provincetown wondered aloud at town hall meetings and in the local newspapers what it would become as a town without children, a town without enough full-time residents to manage its volunteer fire stations, a town without stores that sold household staples or moderately priced clothing, a town lacking adequate affordable housing, and a town dependent on two sets of outsiders: mostly white, middle- and upper-class gay tourists and mostly black, foreign-born seasonal laborers.

How did Provincetown residents negotiate this turn from fishing village to resort town? Not surprisingly, in the 1930s, shortly after Provincetown began focusing on tourism and attracting visitors, townspeople (both full-time and part-time) started to question the kinds of tourists infiltrating Land's End. In other words, residents reacted to Provincetown's socioeconomic changes by attempting to control the flow not of goods but of (in their minds) good people in and out of Land's End. The first set of visitors that some residents deemed "undesirable" were from the "wrong" socioeconomic class. They were working-class day-trippers who arrived and departed daily on the ferry from Boston. In the late 1930s, local officials and others referred to these guests as "poorer tourists of the boat crowd variety" and attempted to discourage them from visiting by passing ordinances prohibiting revealing shorts and halter tops.

The next set of undesirables, referred to at the time as "queers," arrived in unprecedented numbers during the 1940s and 1950s and represented the right class but the wrong gender and sexual inclinations. This time frame also represented Provincetown's most concentrated efforts to suppress queer cultures. Townspeople who were dissatisfied with Provincetown's change into a notable resort for gay men and lesbians used a variety of tactics to quell the queering of Land's End. First, they utilized formal channels and attempted to legislate against

men in drag and clubs that catered to “homo-sexuals of either sex.”³⁵ In 1955 local officials successfully shut down one of Provincetown’s most popular drag clubs, the Weathering Heights Club. It was a time when many postwar Americans subscribed to the conservative, familial ideals associated iconically with television shows like *Leave It to Beaver*, when cross-dressing was illegal, and when glam drag queens served risky and subversive functions.

By the 1970s local authorities had abandoned their attempts to outlaw cross-dressing and instead turned their attention to “gay” uses of public space, particularly to gay male public sex. In 1970 the police entrapped gay men who were having sex at the local gay beach, Herring Cove. In 1971 the Provincetown selectmen ordered workers to remove the benches in front of town hall in order to prevent gay men from cruising there. In 1974 they installed floodlights at the base of the Pilgrim Monument with the goal of discouraging the gay male sex that took place there. When official outlets failed to “clean house,” as one newspaper put it, residents of all ages turned to less formal policing tactics, harassing gay men verbally and physically.³⁶ During the 1980s, Provincetown residents of all orientations continued to negotiate “P-town’s” emergence as one of the world’s most renowned gay and lesbian resort destinations. Its reputation as such escalated, as did its popularity and its rental and real estate prices.

By the time Landry “washed-ashore” in Provincetown in the early 1990s, the political climate regarding gay life had changed. Residents of all orientations found that their acceptance of gay male and lesbian consumers had morphed into their economic dependence on them. Most attempts to police gay men and lesbians were aborted altogether as gay townspeople won seats in town hall and prompted the police department to begin punishing residents and visitors who were homophobic rather than those who were homosexual. The policing of homophobic residents and visitors fell under the town’s official “Community Oriented Public Safety” (COPS) program, a novel collaboration between the police department, the judiciary, local officials, and local residents that prompted Governor William Weld’s Task Force on Hate Crimes to give the Massachusetts Association Innovation Award to Provincetown in 1993. Under the COPS regime, glam drag evolved from being dangerous and illegal to being altogether common and even expected, both on the streets and within nightclubs.

The economic and demographic shift resulted in a profound political shift as well. Few residents dared to question Provincetown’s progression into a prohibitively expensive gay resort, dependent as they were on the “pink dollar,” especially during the lucrative summer season. With few exceptions, disgruntled townspeople

swallowed their resentments and allowed their economic base to enjoy Land's End with minimal political encumbrances. In other words, if they spoke out at all, they did so during the "off-season," away from the tourists and in the appropriate political locations of the public sphere, in annual town meetings or in the local media.

Staged Performances

How does Landry fit into Provincetown's political past, present, and future? Unlike residents who articulated their concerns in the shadows of the tourist economy and within the parameters of the annual town meeting, when Landry took the stage at town hall in 2002 it was during a summer charity event meant to celebrate Provincetown and those who can afford to visit or live there. On a sultry August night, Landry donned his best childhood suit—a "vintage" baby blue tuxedo with a ruffled blouse, pinching pants, and a too tight black bowtie. Seemingly by mistake, he was invited along with a team of local favorites to entertain a crowd of residents and tourists in a town hall extravaganza benefiting the local library. The lesbian singer and songwriter Suede serenaded swaying rows of sing-along fans; the lesbian comedian Kate Clinton tickled the crowd with witty political humor; the glam drag queen Jimmy James lip-synched to Marilyn Monroe, his signature act; and a local resident, Michael Cunningham, read from his enchanting book *Land's End: A Walk through Provincetown*.

Landry followed with a clownlike performance, strolling awkwardly across the stage dressed down in "cheap" male drag for the fun to be had. He introduced himself as the ambiguously feminine Stanley Petunia, the new mayor of Provincetown. "Oh sure, you're all scratching your heads and saying, 'Mayor? Provincetown doesn't have a Mayor,'" Landry chuckled as he addressed the audience, immediately suggesting the absurdity of Provincetown's current political order.³⁷ (Instead of a mayor, Provincetown has a town manager form of government.) He went on to tell a tale, which he insisted was both the absolute truth and just a joke, about the corrupt way in which the "jolly new sheriff, you know him . . . he's the one in the brand new solid white Ford Explorer your tax dollars paid for" and town administrators commandeer power and finances. To solve the problem, Landry explained, local politicians decided to increase the quaint factor in town by hiring a new mayor because, "every other li'l quaint town has one. At least in the movies they do." Petunia volunteers: "I put down my chili dog, picked up my lemonade, made a kind of statue of liberty torch like this with the cup and I shouted, 'Me! I wanna be mayor.' . . . within seconds I went from a humble little nobody to mayor of the greatest little town in America."

Ridiculing elected officials, Landry explained how he realized that once in office power breeds the desire for even more power. Landry continued the tale:

What the hell am I complaining for?! We should be counting our blessings! Like the brochure says, “In Provincetown, men are free to walk down the street hand in hand!” (We’d prefer that they’d walk down Bradford Street, but we’ll get to that eventually. Baby steps. Baby steps.) Now many of you might be saying, “Now hold on here just a Jamaican minute!” (I say Jamaican minute because I’ve been told that “cotton pickin’ minute” is a racist statement. And if there’s one thing you folks are gonna learn about me REAL QUICK it’s I will not tolerate hate of any kind.) Besides, as my dear friend Ruth McNuttle always says (and she should know, she owns the biggest guest house in town!) “Celebrate diversity whenever possible. It means cheaper labor!” But enough about minorities. Let’s talk about what affects us! You and me! O.K.? Let’s.

Landry eventually assured the crowd that local officials will be creating additional “affordable housing for artists.” But there is a catch: “By that I mean the artists that WE choose, not some hot shot performance ‘artist’ from New York City coming in here showin’ her snapper and expecting an annual summer vacation!” Yet, he continued with a pained expression, “since we don’t seem to see any artists nowadays we think worthy of such accommodations (as the good ones have an annoying tendency to bite the hand that feeds them!) . . . I’m sorry to say it looks as if we’re forced to turn all units into luxury condos.”

Using scathing irony to nip at audience members, not to mention local authorities, Landry stunned a town hall full of residents and tourists who had expected to celebrate Provincetown, just “like the brochure says.” In a snappy five-minute rant, he refused the hegemonic conventions of polite performance by rolling out a rude and excessive white trash routine that shored up national and local hypocrisies. Regarding the United States, he ridiculed American ideals and electoral processes by reenacting a swearing in of sorts, posing as “Lady Liberty” and invoking the fast food staples of so-called Independence Day.³⁸ Regarding local politics, he dismantled several popular narratives about Provincetown, including the myth that “Provincetown is for everyone,” the notion that local officials are in place to protect and promote social justice, the idea that Provincetown nurtures its artistic and working-class communities, and the suggestion that local entrepreneurs are benevolent community providers rather than capitalist and racist exploiters.³⁹

By mobilizing a counternarrative, Landry performed a critical pedagogical function: he gave audience members the opportunity to consider how tourists' annual pilgrimages and residents' economic successes are based on class exclusivity and the importation of racialized labor. Acting as a bridge to the audience, as the clown who "points baldly, sometimes opportunistically, to the prickly issues of everyday life," Landry interrogated his own and the audience's whiteness.⁴⁰ During Landry's performance I noticed a handful of spectators beaming with delight, yet most seemed confused and some even outraged. "Tsk tsk," I heard New England ladies politely purse, and "what a shame," gay elders whispered for days afterward, disappointed that one of their flock had wandered so decidedly off course. In his oral history interview, Landry scoffed at gays and lesbians who assimilate and maintain the status quo, and explained his role as the quixotic hero of the working class. "I think . . . they know that I speak for them," Landry explained, "and that's why when the thing with town hall happened, I could have easily just done ten minutes of da dum, da dum, ta dah. You know? . . . Yeah, I'm the uninvited mayor. But of a batch of the people who work hard here in the summer and a lot of the townies—the people who aren't heard because of the class rift, and that's becoming real obvious now—they depend on me to do that."⁴¹ Ironically, on the one hand, Landry criticized corrupt political systems and identified himself as the "uninvited mayor" of a mainstream celebration. Yet, on the other, he took for granted that the workers and "townies" in Provincetown elected him to speak for them. Still, Landry's intervention at town hall fits well the figure of the disruptive comic or the clown, who, in Gary Harris's words, "represents the disenfranchised, the insignificant and the powerless. . . . his function is frequently to be [the] bearer of new and profound insight."⁴²

Landry used the power relations activated by camp to intervene in a political, labor, and racial order that was both time and space specific. By revealing the biases of Provincetown's white, bourgeois economy and by disrupting the seemingly apolitical merriment in town hall, Landry accomplished a radical queer politics that, to use Hennessy's words, "acknowledges both the local situations in which sexuality is made intelligible as well as the ties that bind knowledge and power to commodity production, consumption, and exchange."⁴³ In this particular performance the stakes were even higher because of the unexpected makeup of the audience, spectators who did not plan on being exposed to Provincetown's antistar—in all his glory. The scene brings to mind Jill Dolan's comments in *The Queerest Art*: "Money makes access easy. And access, to queer theater, and not just for queers, is key."⁴⁴ Financial stability meant access to Land's End, and

Landry's performance meant homonormative tourists and residents gained entry, despite their intentions or politics, to a queer performance.

Indeed, rather than play down a racialized and global capitalist system of consumption and labor exploitation, and rather than use camp unproblematically to support the cultural logic of late capitalist exploitation, as Fredric Jameson argues, Landry used a dressed-down version of camp to expose inequities and oppressions that contradict Provincetown narratives of liberation and success at Land's End.⁴⁵ Landry's performance demonstrates how, as Constance Penley puts it, "white trash can be deployed up as a form of populist cultural criticism."⁴⁶ More specifically, Penley argues, performances of white trash can be "particularly unseemly when they appear to shamelessly flaunt their trashiness, which, after all, is nothing but an aggressively in-your-face reminder of stark class differences, a fierce fuck-you to anyone trying to maintain a belief in an America whose only class demarcations are seemingly obvious ones of race."⁴⁷ Through his sloppy, unkempt appearance and unabashedly rude presentation, Landry "shamelessly" disidentified with Provincetown's political present.

In addition to cameo appearances, Landry produces feature-length play adaptations that queer traditional narratives. In these popular renditions, he utilizes booger drag and political satire to challenge Provincetown's socioeconomic direction. The spectators attending Landry's full-scale productions self-select and, thus, expect and enjoy his excessive and grotesque protestations. To shock an already (potentially) queer crowd, Landry works more intensely and consistently to titillate and to disturb. One year following his Petunia intervention, Landry wrote and produced *The Gulls*, a queer adaptation of Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Birds*.⁴⁸ Landry's characters and plot in *The Gulls* bear striking resemblance to the original screenplay, with the exception that rather than meet in San Francisco and rendezvous in Bodega Bay, our "love birds" (Melanie Daniels and Mitch Brenner) meet in "Beantown" (Boston) and play out their ill-fated desire in the nearby coastal village of Provincetown.

Landry complicates identity categories by using wealth and exploitation to distinguish the good birds from the bad ones. On an allegorical level, according to the film critic Tim Dirks, the birds in Hitchcock's film are "the physical embodiment and exteriorization of unleashed, disturbing, shattering forces that threaten all of humanity when relationships have become insubstantial, unsupportive or hurtful."⁴⁹ So, too, the gulls disturb Provincetown and threaten the economic relationships that Landry deems "unsupportive or hurtful." In Landry's play, the gulls

are not the “gay birds” that Police Chief Oscar Meyer (named after the Provincetown police chief, Ted Meyer, and alluding to a well-known brand of hot dog in the United States, the Oscar Meyer “weiner”) simultaneously desires and detests because they have infiltrated Land’s End. Instead, the dangerous gulls are the artists, the Portuguese residents, and the working-class queers and natives who are fighting back fiercely to regain control of their hometown from the real estate agents, business owners, wealthy wash-ashores, and extravagant tourists—of all sexual and gender orientations—driving gentrification and class-artistic-ethnic displacement. In Landry’s rendition the “good” gulls are heroic, working-class creatures battling the evils of rampant capitalist consumption. Indeed, Mitch defends Land’s End early on by informing the audience that “they’re not all queer, the birds”—an eerie foreshadowing of the neoliberal politics to which some gay “birds” adhere. The gulls represent Landry’s vision for an alternative politics and community in Provincetown; they are his new coalition of the willing and the queer.

Landry’s project also destabilizes sexuality and attains what David Savran calls “the queerest art” by obscuring the desires and the gender of nearly every character. “It is precisely this confusion of identification with desire,” as Savran argues, “that renders theater the queerest art, the one most liable to disturb the illusion the spectator is likely to harbor that his or her sexual identity is stable and unambiguous.”⁵⁰ In Landry’s rendition of queer theater, Mitch, a biological male in male drag, pursues Melanie, a drag queen, while fondling and being fondled by his sister and his mother (both drag queens). Melanie partakes in these incestuous relationships throughout the drama, often with Mitch’s sex-starved sister who refuses to keep her hands to herself. Chief Meyer, portrayed as a pot-bellied, hypermasculine “real man” (a bio male in male police drag), can’t escape his own sadomasochistic desires for the “gay birds” as he simultaneously polices and cruises them. Landry’s Portuguese fisherman (a bio male in male fisherman drag), held up by any number of Provincetown’s historical narratives to represent the town’s only “true men,” admits to unexplained homoerotic encounters at sea, suffering a “gaping hole that is a wound” on his buttocks after apparently being attacked by an aggressive set of waves. Even Lydia Brenner, Mitch’s mother, refuses normality as she proudly displays a painting in her home that appears to be a portrait of a woman but is revealed instead to be her late, transgender husband, Frank.

Ultimately, however, Landry’s critique of Provincetown’s turn into an exclusive, gentrified resort moves beyond a dismantling of sexual and gender normality and toward additional political questions. Instead of celebrating Provincetown and



Figure 2. Partial cast photo for *The Gulls*, summer 2003. Photograph by Peter Urban.
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all that it promises—“First things first: It’s Provincetown, it’s P-town, it’s Paradise. And ever since the Pilgrims first landed here, this fishing village on the tip of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, has been providing the perfect oasis for people in need of an escape,” a 1997 gay and lesbian tourist brochure proclaims—Landry’s gulls expose the underbelly of Provincetown’s changes over time.⁵¹ They decry a hypocritical police presence, they speak out against unaffordable housing, they scream at environmental and ecological damage, they shrill at the price of a meal in local restaurants, and they poke fun at high-powered executives who make frustrated attempts to get cell phone reception at Land’s End, a destination notoriously known for receiving “no signal.” “It is Commercial Street, after all,” one real estate mogul wailed in support of homogenizing capitalist consumption.

At the end of the play, after the working-class birds have decimated the quaint streets of Land’s End, Landry makes a grand appearance as a dark-feathered gull, the reincarnation of the ravaged Annie Hayward, the grotesque, working-class antistar who has conquered all, the leader of downward redistribution (fig. 2). Capitalizing on an ideal camp moment, Landry sneers with smug

indignation: “There is a time and a place where we do all the killing—sort of like the Bush Administration.” Extending beyond provincial agendas, Landry concludes the play by stating in no uncertain terms that he is redeploying drag (as booger rather than glam) and putting it to new uses. Landry and his drag troupe, the Gold Dust Orphans, are a new coalition, “sort of like” those in political power. His final comment in *The Gulls* can be interpreted not only as a critique of right-wing practices and politics but also as a direct challenge to Provincetown’s neoliberal tendencies—“there is a time and a place when we [Landry and company] do all the killing.”

Provincetown: A Queer Place and Time?

One effect of Provincetown’s socioeconomic transformations—from fishing village to queer outpost to homonormative resort—was the mainstreaming of previously risky and illegal actions like cross-dressing. The subversive carnival of the 1940s and 1950s transitioned toward normality as working-class coalitions emigrated and glam drag eventually became commonplace and far from nonnormative in Provincetown’s sea of wealthy, neoliberal consumers. As a result, Provincetown lost a good deal of the illicitness or edginess that once bolstered its claim to fame as a risqué landfall of freedom. These are the conditions that allowed booger drag to emerge as the new transgressive carnival, the new queer time and place that was constituted, even as it contested, Provincetown’s new homonormativity. In other words, booger drag, a subcultural form of camp with a long-standing history, capitalized on the recent past of a particular place. The past involved working-class residents’ loss of power, neoliberal consumers’ gain in power, and glam drag queens’ failure to remain transgressive.⁵²

Landry’s ability to mobilize this kind of queer time and space was a function, as I mentioned earlier, of when, where, and how he performed and was strengthened by his decision to disidentify with heteronormative and homonormative priorities. In her well-received book *In a Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam argues that “queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction.”⁵³ Halberstam looks at people who carve out queer temporalities and geographies and “will and do opt to live outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production.”⁵⁴ Landry falls clearly within the parameters of Halberstam’s “queer subjects,” who include “the transgendered person who risks his life by passing in a small town, the subcultural musicians who risk their livelihoods by immersing themselves in nonlucrative practices, [and] the queer per-

formers who destabilize the normative values that make everyone else feel safe and secure.”⁵⁵ But his performances also complicate any easy or simple reading of queer practices, queer times, and queer places. Indeed, just as I started this essay with confessional statements about the love-hate relationship Landry and I share with Provincetown—a place neither one of us is willing to quit—I end with a similarly vexed analysis of booger drag’s abilities and limitations, particularly as they pertain to class and gender politics.

Landry talks often about class. He described himself as the quixotic hero who survives a trailer park upbringing, hustles his way onstage in New York City’s East Village, and becomes Provincetown’s cherished antistar, not despite but because of his relationship to the working class. Landry’s disidentificatory performances stem from class and labor disagreements. Stanley Petunia spoke openly about Provincetown’s class rift, as did Annie Hayward in *The Gulls*. In Landry’s mind, the lack of attention the press pays to him and the lack of funding he receives from institutions that support the arts are determined primarily by issues of class. “It’s a very classist thing,” he asserted with frustration, noting that the people who promote Provincetown and the arts in Provincetown “don’t want the white trash being around.”

Two important elements contributed to Landry’s success in making statements about class: first his white trash origins, and second his reliance on humor. Julian Sandell argues that it is the pairing of a white trash past with a queer politics in the present that allows writers like Dorothy Allison and, I would add, performers like Landry, “to see life differently and tell stories about it.”⁵⁶ Although one is not required to have a white trash past in order to talk about class, “early training” appears to “benefit . . . one’s theoretical formation,” according to Penley.⁵⁷ Similarly, how stories are told also matters. Telling stories about class, Sandell and others contend, often requires those doing the telling to exhibit appropriate amounts of shame and humor (rather than anger and bitterness) about experiences that contradict the American dream. “To put it another way,” writes Sandell, “issues of economic marginality can be tolerated and articulated within the logic of liberal pluralism, so long as they can then be circulated as cultural, rather than economic, issues.”⁵⁸

Claims to authenticity and camp presentations do not neatly, in other words, translate into radical queer agendas. Indeed, white trash stories, even those embedded with queer intentions, can be transgressive *and* complicit with homonormative priorities. One might ask, for instance, how Landry’s racialization of working-class life as “white trash” reinforces audience members’ preju-

dices about rural and poor populations. Or one might question Landry's successful assimilation into Provincetown's economy of gay dollars and fantasies. Landry participates in Provincetown's gay marketplace by selling his ideas about class during the summer season, which is to say, he—and I—profit from the same exclusive economy that we criticize. As Sandell puts it, "By turning the experience of class-based oppression into stories that are circulated in the marketplace, the act of articulation (rather than the issue itself) becomes the object of cultural consumption." In this way, he notes, "capitalism has proved to be notoriously efficient in its ability to recuperate radical ideas and turn them into commodities to be consumed within the market economy."⁵⁹ Nonetheless, I argue that booger drag, with all of its limitations, can still, in Tinkcom's words, "produce critique in unforeseen quarters."⁶⁰ Although hard to imagine fifty years ago, Provincetown is now, with its wealthy, white, jet-setting population, the seat of "unforeseen quarters" susceptible to queer critique.

Landry's gender politics are similarly compromised. One narrative that circulated throughout Land's End during the 1980s and 1990s charged lesbians with "taking over" Provincetown.⁶¹ Lesbians gained financial, political, and cultural ground at Land's End during this time, as they did elsewhere in the United States, but in no way did they surpass or even match gay men's economic power and cultural privilege. Still, Landry reinforces the greedy lesbian narrative by making obvious references to specific women in his performances. During his Mayor Petunia routine, for instance, he invoked a character bearing a strong resemblance to a local resident, Joy McNulty, a prominent restaurant owner, and Ruth Heibert, a wealthy (straight) woman. In *The Gulls*, Landry lampoons two other successful Provincetown women, Lorraine Najar, a restaurant owner, and Pat Shultz, the owner of a real estate firm. One character asks, "Have you seen what Lorraine is charging for a taco these days?" Later in the show, a drag queen playing a real estate agent walks onstage with one of Pat Shultz Real Estate's "for sale" signs while exclaiming, "I just sell this town. There's no law that says I have to protect it!" Admittedly, these statements are meant to focus primarily on class, yet Landry questions successful women without interrogating as explicitly the politics of Provincetown's wealthiest gay men, thus laying the blame for the trappings of gentrification at the feet of women while men uncritically celebrate Landry's caricatures.

At the same time, Landry's booger drag disrupts masculinity (but not misogyny) by intervening in normative phallic economies. Landry, who performs male drag, female drag, and trans drag from the position of a destabilized, decocked male body, illustrates how performers can layer, combine, and blur gen-

der norms.⁶² In Landry's words: "Our drag is not about being a man or a woman. . . . it isn't about aren't I feminine or aren't I masculine, or how well can I do it."⁶³ Instead, as Landry explained, it's about "taking off the cock. It's chopping the cock off and going there now. Now deal with me not so much as a woman but deal with me without the cock. . . . I just know once the wig goes on I don't feel like aren't I a pretty woman. . . . I take my wiener out, wave it, flap it against the wall, pick it up, put a bow on it." Although serious about his gender and drag politics, Landry also insisted on the centrality of humor to camp's success. For Landry, "It's the clown. It's not that the woman is a clown, it's taking the seriousness or what's expected of you as a man away. It's really the taking away of it."

Landry's relationship to masculinity suggests a phallic economy—signified in part by the quirky appearances of his flaccid penis—that approximates well Homi K. Bhabha's call to "disturb masculinity" by "draw[ing] attention to it as a prosthetic reality—a 'prefixing' of the rules of gender and sexuality; an appendix or addition that willy-nilly supplements and suspends a 'lack of being.'"⁶⁴ In the same text on masculinity, Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, Simon Watney, and Carrie Mae Weems ask if masculinity can "be rehearsed in a way that alters its ideological boundaries. In other words, can masculinity be performed so as to render it less repressive, less tyrannical?"⁶⁵ Landry disarms masculinity in appropriating fully neither masculinity nor femininity. And in abandoning some of what it means to "be a man" by circulating a nonnormative phallic economy, by embracing loss rather than gain, he moves closer to a less repressive performance.

Rather than glossing over the complications of Landry's performances, interrogating his intentions and their effects results in a multisided analysis. On the one hand, Landry's drag destabilizes economies of masculinity, economies of celebratory drag, and economies of class and race privilege in Provincetown. On the other hand, it reproduces narratives that demonize successful women while leaving equally or more successful men unscathed. In Landry's work, the complex place of misogyny alongside critiques of prevailing social hierarchies confirms Peggy Phelan's argument that "the appropriation of women at the heart of male cross-dressing cannot be simply declared 'celebratory' or 'misogynistic' without accounting for the role of race, class, sexuality, economics or history which determine that appropriation."⁶⁶

Taking Phelan's call one step farther, Landry's work, inextricably bound as it is to his history and the history of Provincetown, illuminates why scholars must dig deeper into the past in order to see how socioeconomic circumstances affect performance politics. Both in the moment and residually, Landry deploys politically brazen narratives to rouse middle-class gay men and lesbians from

their cozy corners of assimilation. Savran argues that “white men—whether gay or straight—are quite capable of producing a theater that is not only queer, but also feminist, antiracist, antihomophobic, and anticapitalist. The problem is, they haven’t.”⁶⁷ I agree, and I value artists like Landry who are heading in the right direction.

Notes

1. Images of Ryan Landry appear on YouTube as well as on his Web site, www.golddustorphans.com (accessed May 15, 2008). Images of me in professional drag appear at brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/people/Karen_Krahulik.php (accessed May 15, 2008) and in female drag (with black hat) on page 179 of my book *Provincetown: From Pilgrim Landing to Gay Resort* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
2. On “leftovers” as “inherently funny,” see Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 93.
3. On the relationship between tourism and constructions of “home,” see Jasbir Kaur Puar, “Circuits of Queer Mobility: Tourism, Travel, and Globalization,” *GLQ* 8 (2002): 114. On Provincetown’s function as a hometown for gay men and lesbians, see Krahulik, *Provincetown*, 9.
4. “Wash-ashore” refers to nonnative residents of Provincetown, often people who intended to just visit but then never leave (Krahulik, *Provincetown*, 14).
5. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), ix.
6. Marc Stein provides a solid historiographical review of gay and lesbian community histories in “Theoretical Politics, Local Communities: The Making of U.S. LGBT Historiography,” *GLQ* 11 (2005): 605–25.
7. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2003), 50. Duggan defines “the new homonormativity” as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (50).
8. Anthropology, perhaps more so than any other field, has supported the kind of methodology I aim to deploy. Esther Newton’s pathbreaking study, *Mother Camp*, published first in 1972, stands out still as a model ethnographic study of drag performers and drag performances. Newton immersed herself in the world of what at the time were called social “deviants” (*Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], 30). She “spent evenings ‘hanging around’ Chicago drag bars, seeing shows, and getting to know the performers and audiences”

(43). In the end, she interviewed ten “female impersonators” and delivered a comprehensive account of drag queen culture (52). Although she did not examine these interviews or this culture in the context of history or queer theory, as I intend to do, her analysis of the different kinds of drag—from “glamour” to “slapstick”—resonates with today’s hierarchies (133). See also Coco Fusco, ed., *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Jeff Friedman, “Muscle Memory: Performing Embodied Knowledge,” in *Art and the Performance of Memory: Sounds and Gestures of Recollection*, ed. Richard Cándida Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 156–80; Alisa Solomon and Framji Minwalla, eds., *The Queerest Art: Essays on Gay and Lesbian Theater* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); and Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Friedman’s work as director of the San Francisco oral history project LEGACY has been instructive and inspiring. For an edited collection that examines performances and plays based on oral history projects, see Della Pollock, ed., *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (New York: Palgrave, 2005).

9. See Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 99; Romy Sara Shiller, “A Critical Exploration of Cross-Dressing and Drag in Gender Performance and Camp in Contemporary North American Drama and Film” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1999).
10. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 100, 102.
11. Rosemary Hennessy, “Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture,” *Cultural Critique* (Winter 1994–95): 44.
12. Martin F. Manalansan IV, “Diasporic Deviants/Divas: How Filipino Gay Transmigrants ‘Play with the World,’” in *Queer Diasporas*, ed. Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 192–95.
13. Manalansan, “Diasporic Deviants/Divas,” 195. “Resurrecting time and place” and “vehicle for nostalgia” originally quoted in Kathleen Stewart, “Nostalgia: A Polemic,” in *Rereading Cultural Anthropology*, ed. George E. Marcus (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 252.
14. Manalansan, “Diasporic Deviants/Divas,” 199.
15. Ryan Landry, interview by author, Provincetown, Massachusetts, August 8, 2002. All quotes by Landry are from this interview unless noted otherwise.
16. Warhol, *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 93.
17. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 31.
18. An extensive literature exists on “rural studies” and the construction of working-class life. For arguments that address queer sensibilities, see Kath Weston, “Get Thee to a Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration,” *GLQ* 3 (1995): 253–78; John Howard, *Men Like That* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Richard Phillips, Diane Watt, and David Shuttleton, eds., *De-centering Sexualities: Politics and Representations beyond the Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

19. Newton, *Mother Camp*, 109.
20. Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, and Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 167.
21. Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual*, 181.
22. For an analysis of the 1975 television documentary *Johnny Go Home*, which charts a young gay man's ill-fated journey to London, see Richard Phillip, "Imagined Geographies and Sexuality Politics: The City, the Country, and the Age of Consent," in Phillips, Watt, and Shuttleton, *De-centering Sexualities*, 103.
23. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 26.
24. Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag, Theater* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 418.
25. Senelick, *Changing Room*, 410.
26. See Newton, *Mother Camp*, 49–55, on "trashy" and "dirty" drag compared with glam drag. In some, but not all ways, Landry's life story resembles that of Newton's "street fairy" (38).
27. See Stefan Brecht, *Queer Theatre*, vol. 2 of *Original Theatre of the City of New York, from the Mid-60s to the Mid-70s* (New York: Suhrkamp, 1978), 10–26, 27, 157.
28. See Brecht, *Queer Theatre*, 28, 56, 76; Senelick, *Changing Room*, 423–34.
29. Senelick, *Changing Room*, 419. For an entertaining history of the Cockettes, see Bill Weber and David Weissman's feature-length documentary *The Cockettes* (2002).
30. I do not here mention the equally rich and lengthy tradition of drag performers who are women (such as Ana Maria Simo, Doric Wilson, Peggy Shaw, and Lois Weaver) because, although similarly disruptive and queer, lesbian performance artists and their work followed a different political and aesthetic trajectory. As Simo commented in *The Queerest Art*, their work "had nothing to do with the gay male aesthetic." See in particular "From the Invisible to the Ridiculous: The Emergence of an Out Theater Aesthetic — a Conversation among Moe Angelos, Susan Finque, Lola Pashalinski, Everett Quinton, Ana Maria Simo, and Doric Wilson moderated by Don Shewey," in Solomon and Minwalla, *Queerest Art*, 148. See also Don Shewey, "Notes on the Pioneers of Queer Theater," in Solomon and Minwalla, *Queerest Art*, 133.
31. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Michael Moon, "Divinity: A Dossier, a Performance Piece, a Little-Understood Emotion," in *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 220, quoted in Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual*, 175.
32. Allan Bérubé with Florence Bérubé, "Sunset Trailer Park," in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, ed. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York: Routledge, 1997), 36.
33. Landry was also not the only artist in Provincetown putting forth an aggressive class critique. Jay Critchley, for instance, hosted a number of installations, including his septic tank apartment studio (in "gayted" Provincetown). Yet Landry is certainly the most infamous of the group.

34. All references to Provincetown's historical and contemporary demographics, economics, and politics are based on Krahulik, *Provincetown*.
35. "Selectman Clamps Down on Gay Spots with New Regulations to Curb Evils," *Provincetown Advocate*, June 5, 1952.
36. "Traveler Applauds Cape End Stand," *Provincetown Advocate*, June 19, 1952.
37. Ryan Landry, "Stanley Petunia, Mayor of Provincetown," Provincetown town hall, August 7, 2002. Transcript courtesy of Landry.
38. For a critique of the Statue of Liberty as a butch dyke, see Erica Rand, "The Traffic in My Fantasy Bunch," in *The Ellis Island Snow Globe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 107–29.
39. For the quote, "Provincetown is for everyone," see Michael Cunningham, "The Secret of Provincetown: Cape Cod's Rainbow Colony," *Our World*, July–August 1991, 24.
40. William Mitchell, "Introduction: Mother Folly in the Islands," in *Clowning as Critical Practice: Performance Humor in the South Pacific*, ed. William Mitchell (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 19.
41. Landry, interview.
42. Garry Harris, "Beckett, Godot, and the Tramp: The Prophetic Function of the Tramp or Clown Figure in Absurdist Drama," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 33 (August 1999): 103.
43. Hennessy, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," 71.
44. Jill Dolan, introduction to Solomon and Minwalla, *Queerest Art*, 3.
45. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July–August 1984): 76–77. See also Fabio Cleto, introduction to section 5 of *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 356.
46. Constance Penley, "Crackers and Whackers: The White Trashing of Porn," in Wray and Newitz, *White Trash*, 92.
47. Penley, "Crackers and Whackers," 90.
48. Ryan Landry, *The Gulls*, performed by Ryan Landry and the Gold Dust Orphans in Provincetown, Massachusetts, 2003. Video recording courtesy of Landry.
49. Tim Dirks, review of *The Birds* (1963), www.filmsite.org/bird.html (accessed April 9, 2005).
50. David Savran, "Queer Theater and the Disarticulation of Identity," in Solomon and Minwalla, *Queerest Art*, 163.
51. Provincetown Business Guild, *The Gay and Lesbian Guide Book to Provincetown* (Provincetown, MA: Provincetown Business Guild, 1999), 1.
52. Andrew Ross argues that the camp moment becomes recognizable only when the objects or people onstage take on new meanings "precisely because of their historical association with a power that was now spent." This clearly pertains to Provincetown, a place where working-class residents and artists are in a moment of lost power while

- glam queens and wealthy tourists enjoy unfettered coalitions. See Andrew Ross, "Uses of Camp," in Cleto, *Camp*, 312.
53. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 1.
 54. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 10.
 55. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 10.
 56. Julian Sandell, "Telling Stories of 'Queer White Trash,'" in Wray and Newitz, *White Trash*, 225. See also Laura Kipnis with Jennifer Reeder, "White Trash Girl," in Wray and Newitz, *White Trash*, 114.
 57. Penley, "Crackers and Whackers," 89, 102.
 58. Sandell, "Telling Stories of 'Queer White Trash,'" 213.
 59. Sandell, "Telling Stories of 'Queer White Trash,'" 213.
 60. Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual*, 188.
 61. Krahulik, *Provincetown*, 182–86.
 62. Shiller, "Critical Exploration of Cross-Dressing and Drag," 10.
 63. Landry, interview.
 64. Homi Bhabha, "Are You a Man or a Mouse?" in *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, Simon Watson, and Carrie Mae Weems (New York: Routledge, 1995), 57.
 65. Berger et al., introduction to *Constructing Masculinity*, 10.
 66. Peggy Phelan, "Crisscrossing Cultures," in *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, ed. Lesley Ferris (New York: Routledge, 1993), 159.
 67. Savran, "Queer Theater and the Disarticulation of Identity," 166.