

Chance Operations in History and Hierarchy

Stella Douglass + Lydia see

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Chance Operations in History and Hierarchy

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“The visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength.”

— Audre Lorde

What is it about the legacy and history of Black Mountain College that draws so many queer people to take up the task of writing about it?

This visual essay meanders along the research tributaries of Stella Douglass, an undergraduate Art History student interested in queer theory and registration¹ as their research intersects with their faculty mentor, lydia see, a curator and artist for whom Black Mountain College has been a permanent fixture in their practice.

What follows is a co-creative and ongoing documentation focused on the complication and liberation of addressing archival silences relating to queer identity—within Black Mountain College history, in museum registration methods and archival description, and in intangible and intersecting histories.

Martin Duberman

→ openly homosexual author

→ unnamed student and Robert Wunsch → teacher of creative writing (1933-1945)

→ JC + MC → pg. 290 "potential undercurrents of 'sexual freedom'"

Judd Woldin: → (SS pg. 148)

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slight nervous breakdown and thought it best to resign from the College in order to take a much-needed rest.¹⁴⁴
The students, like their elders, apparently made no protest about the fact or the manner of Wunsch's departure, though some had been fond of him. But in later years, again like a few of their elders, several students did express deep remorse at having compromised North Carolina's legal barbarisms with a callousness of their own. One of them, Judd Woldin, described his belated anguish to me: "... why didn't we all come and embrace Bob Wunsch and tell him to stay? Why was it so difficult for a man to even face his colleagues when all he had done was to go down on salutes? It's terrible to me. Everybody was acting, you know, like an Old Testament group ... we were a community ... And if some individual state inspectors had done that to Bob ... he was one of our boys and we should have done something about it."¹⁴⁵
But they didn't. Wunsch climbed into that same little modest in the early hours of the morning and drove away forever—without an embrace or a word—from the place he had been the titular head of the day before. He first went home to Louisiana where he was said to several months with (alas, for Nature's metaphor) "a bad jaw infection." Once recovered, he drove his roadster to California—where he literally disappeared. Letters to him went unanswered, efforts to see him rebuffed—not, it seems, out of anger at Black Mountain's anger which would have been justified, but rather out of a fear that he had at last got what he deserved: punishment and anonymity. The only person about Wunsch anyone from Black Mountain has heard from this day to this is that he went to work as a mail clerk in a post office.¹⁴⁶
It's hard to think well of a place that could cooperate as fully as Black Mountain did in an individual's self-destruction—school as have assumed it as foreclosed. But perhaps I exaggerate—because of my own indignation as a homosexual; a personal view. It may well be that Wunsch would have had it no other way. And it may well be that communities, no less than individuals, are entitled to their aberrations.

Wunsch was ousted in 1945

M.C. Richards was hired in 1944

JC + MC to BMC in 1948

to what extent does the absence of Wunsch in Duberman's writing impact your ability to consider the many possible parts of your personal and social world?

Silence = resistance
or
silence = anonymity / punishment

How did the culture of BMC for queer people change from the 1930's - 1950's?

John Cage never did quite come out of the closet. Nonetheless, nearly everybody in the art world who knew him knew of his lifelong relationship with Merce Cunningham, and some even knew about the other men in his life. His sexuality was an open secret within the avant-garde, and as his fame spread, so too did knowledge of his personal life. Still, direct public acknowledgment of Cage's sexuality has been, until quite recently, hard to find; consigned to the realm of gossip, it has been understood as tangential to his historical importance and achievements. Cage himself, while never denying his sexuality, preferred to duck the question. When asked to characterize his relationship with Cunningham, he would say, "I cook, and Merce does the dishes."⁴² As I hope to show in this essay, such avoidance was not only coy but constituted a form of active resistance within the homophobic culture of postwar America.

Katz John Cage's Queer Silence

II. Silent Lives

A new generation of scholars has tried to break through Cage's silence by describing his reticence with regard to his sexuality as coy and ascribing it to his membership in the pre-Stonewall, preliberationist generation of gay men. As to why a person of Cage's unconventional lifestyle, disdain for public opinion, and anarchist leanings would uphold the highly restrictive social compact of the closet, one longtime acquaintance (who wishes to remain anonymous) has remarked, "Well, he's a fifties queen, you know." Surely according to our contemporary modeling of gay and lesbian identity, which holds being out of the closet as perhaps the central measure of freedom and psychic health, Cage was a fifties queen; his conspicuous silence regarding his sexuality is an index of a time thankfully receding into the past.⁴³

That Cage's increasingly unexpressive mien was at least partly strategic is clear from the composer Morton Feldman's account of the culture in which Cage traveled throughout the 1940s: *the macho, often homophobic community of abstract expressionism*.⁴⁴ Feldman, a friend of his, underscored the degree to which Cage's unexpressiveness may have done double duty as a shield. As if fearful of violating a confidence, Feldman once told an interviewer, "I don't want to exaggerate this point, because John was very sensitive to it. I remember there was a little gathering in a Chinese restaurant, and Jackson Pollock was taunting John." For his part, Cage has remarked of Pollock: "I ... tried to avoid him. I did this because he was generally so drunk, and he was actually an unpleasant person for me to encounter. I remember seeing him on the same side of the street I was, and I would always cross over to the other side."⁴⁵

if one's own community (BMC for Wunsch / ABEX peers for Cage) can't be trusted, why bother "coming out" anyway?

Did he really feel this way? What did Duberman miss?

Cage's copy among its merchandise. A handwritten inscription from Cage explains the book's \$650 price-tag. Along with his name, Cage noted on the front flyleaf: "This is a book I haven't read."⁴²

Who knows in what spirit (or for whom) Cage made this note in Duberman's book, but it is certainly a coup for both Royal Books and those of us interested in the historiography of Black Mountain College. Cage's flippant note, pictured below, implies that Duberman's Black Mountain narrative left something to be desired and raises the question: what kind of Black Mountain history would John Cage actually have read?

Even those in Richards's milieu who were clearly queer (and there were many) identified their sexual and romantic practices in ways that may appear inscrutable to us now. Look, for example, at John Cage. As Jonathan D. Katz notes in his essay "John Cage's Queer Silence; Or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse," "John Cage never did quite come out of the closet."³⁸ Katz draws a parallel between Cage's aesthetic innovations and his sexual identity, suggesting that silence was not only his artistic inspiration, but also his form of resistance to both a hostile heterosexual culture and the restricting logics of the closet.³⁹ Katz makes it clear that even the most recognizably queer figures of Richards's generation (and intimate social circle) resisted categorization and expressed their sexual identities in subtle and varied ways. It is with this historical context in mind that I both acknowledge Richards's apparent straightness and tender my interpretation of Richards's historical work as queer.



Figure 2. (from left) Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, M.C. Richards, and Jasper Johns, 1958. The New York Times, February 4, 2001: "Cage Was Not Only All

MC. Richards, who provided a great amount of information to Duberman for his book was consistently surrounded by gay men. Per Dawson. (also gay)

Black Mountain would be no place for M.C. Richards to live. She was as much as anyone, far more than most, accused to identity-shedding, no matter where she was or in and in spite of her denial — even here — standing or walking, the lived-in walk (and much) vertical women, much like in the heart of the crowd, with Wallace Stevens in her hand, she thereby becomes an essential image and leading character of the school.
Wallace Stevens in the background.

this is a heartbreaking question.

Was Wunsch's silence a resistance?
Or a punishment?
can fear, self-punishment, and resistance all be true at once!

leadership changes, global context, BMC's reputation all coordinated

Could this mentalism have impacted Ann Albers' response to M.C. about not endorsing/supporting M.C.'s book?

Stella

My dive into the process of data collection and database input started with a small query: I inserted the term 'queer' into the search bar for the University of Arizona's Museum of Art (UAMA) collections. I was hoping for some ease of access into a plethora of new and familiar queer artists and artworks. I had expected John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg to be no-brainers on this list.

Of the six works which populate under the search term "queer" within the UAMA database, four belong to Patrick Hughes' *The Domestic Life of a Rainbow* series. Per Hughes' website biography, "for Hughes the rainbow represented a solid experience." There has been no categorical differentiation between the rainbow as a queer symbol from the artist's intention of using the rainbow as a spatial motif. In my research, there is no indication that Patrick Hughes identifies as queer or within the LGBTQIA spectrum, or that he intended the series as any homage or symbolic support for queer/gay pride. The remaining two works which populated the search were Andy Warhol's *Ladies and Gentlemen (Wilhelmina Ross)* and Nahum Zenil's *De La Serpiente (Triptych)*. The subject of Warhol's portrait, Wilhelmina Ross, is a transgender woman, and Zenil has a long history of using self-portraiture to contemplate his own homosexuality. Here, the content is explicitly "queer" irrespective of artist identity. My confusion at the results, as well as in the lack of results, spurred me to further research some of the ethical questions associated with the inclusion/erasure of queerness within archival spaces. If a rainbow is flagged as queer/gay/homosexual subject matter, why can't the work of queer artists be? Must queer art have an explicit representation of queer identity to be considered queer subject matter?

I find this whole passage particularly jarring and challenging.

Fielding Dawson 12-13

Black Mountain Defined

— the air — of Black Mountain, was the form of its containment, and we learning that once inside the crystal, there were many places, and inside as we related to these places, moving from one to another, we moved in a feeling of being within something already within, and as the vast wilds with lake, and mountains and animals are dreamlike, evoking similar images, Black Mountain veiled on a dream-state. Within the crystal.

Not by way of its unreality or dreamlike ephe-meral, but because of the people and places that come into focus, its memory, in the way they are together, or not, and mirror the contours and character of dreams.

Unimaginative, literal-minded folks not inspired or drawn to dreams will miss all of this, write me off as a nut. Inside the crystal, Humbag. Well, there were people who went to Black Mountain to get an education. It was a college, after all. So there are those. They got educated and left. But it is even there not a simple, for so often even they got involved, this involvement with something you can't see, knowing it's there. All around you. That would be in my mind, so far as I've thought on it, one of the two central approaches to use in writing a novel or writing a screen play for film, not about Black Mountain, but to define it.

But both approaches form as one. No one has gone into the detail it deserves, of the homosexual period at the school which lasted from spring 1950 to its ending in 1951. A year, a small story. There were very few girls. Not all that many boys, either, but more than girls. We called ourselves boys, and girls. But women today who were there in that period remember those long, isolating nights. The often painful parties. Too many of us alone, frustrated. Young people immersed in total creativity, what to do?

In the spring of 1950, a student — he'd been Moderator before Dan — told a group of us, sitting outside the Lodge, that a new member of the faculty would come in the fall, was gay. The student who told us was gay, yet we asked him how he knew. He pretended shock, said he would show us. Well, he did. He was

right. And, that fall, a new student, in poetry, showed up who was also gay. His name was Kitty, and after that Paul Goodman summer, several of the boys, and as if overnight, or on cue — the girls, too, became interested. So the school, adjusting to itself, went on as usual with new distinctions made. We teamed up according to compatibility, not so much as lovers, although true in a couple of cases, more in terms of communication. Who you could talk with. In that wonderful way of Black Mountain, most people understood what had happened, not because they were good people, and they were, but because they were interested, say what you will, it was an interesting situation. All those macho guys.

It was a character of Black Mountain — a trademark — if things didn't work they did somehow, so an across-the-board switch to a gay boy and girl element in the student population (what, forty, fifty, then?) rather than being the exception, became another part of the pattern, arrangement, composition, in and of the school. On the surface nothing changed.

It was always of its own process. Always. The summer of 1951 was legendary yes for the future big names that showed up. But for those of us who had tested ourselves, at summer's end we knew that perhaps in secret, a phase had ended, and Black Mountain moved toward new changes, continuing to define itself. In July, Jack Tworok and his wife, Wally, in particular their daughter, na Horamine, and Helen, brought new vitality into the crystal. The next month, August, Franz Kline was there, himself a crystal. M.C. Richards wrote the lyrics for *A French Face Based on a Wagnerian Opera* in which the entire school, save just a few, participated. Saying goodbye at end of that month was sad. It was true, but the school was poised for its future, that fall, as a new batch of students arrived, including some girls.

is M.A. the only one who uses the word "queer?"

Rumaker 13

Charles Olson, who was the writing teacher. My ears pricked up. It sounded like the place for me. The only person my friend and I knew in Philly who might know something about this Black Mountain was a young woman named Mary Reed, who taught painting at Moore Institute of Art up on North Broad Street. She said: "Oh, yes, Black Mountain, I hear it's a hotbed of communists and homosexuals."

Hearing that, in the oppressive McCarthyite years, my young, queer ears really pricked up. It definitely sounded like the place for me.

I wrote a letter of inquiry to the college, noting my poverty, and received an invitation from the then-registrar Connie Olson, wife of the above-mentioned "giant." She said there were "work scholarships" available and invited me down for a three-day visit.

Three others who also wanted to look the place over went down with me: two other gays (we always managed to find, and cling to, each other in those dangerous days), Roger and Marge, who were students at Rider, and Mary Ann Fretz, who was a student of Reed's at Moore Institute. Fortunately, Marge had a new green Chevy and loved to drive.

Early in June 1952 we set out on our 600-mile journey south.

Once Marge got behind the wheel there was no stopping her. Ever silent, her eyes stared straight out the dusty windshield, spattered, after several hundred miles, with smashed corpses of moths and other insects, ignoring our incessant chatter in her fierce concentration (particularly Roger's dry acerbic comments on the passing scene). Her left arm, resting crooked on the sill leaning out the driver's window, was black from the sun, the other arm inside the car negligently holding the wheel was snow white because Marge took a lot of long drives—What was a lesbian to do at Rider College in Trenton, NJ, USA in

Duberman Pg. 366-7

Painter Crowd

Don Rice
Joe Fiore
Franz Kline
Jack Tworok
+
Charles Olson

John Cage
Merce Cunningham
Robert Rauschenberg
↑ with ↑
Lou Harrison

all known to be gay

This group associated

Preferred Stefan Wolke to Lou Harrison

"men who shared a stereotypic, almost truck-driver view of 'masculinity' 29

→ Not only did they cling or "group" together, they were also grouped by outside parties, maybe not necessarily with the label of gay-homosexual-queer but within a tendency to assign certain traits to them, i.e. soft, sensitive

The queer relationships are incredibly complicated... as is trying to establish who was known to be gay vs. perceived as gay

seems to have? M.A. has a very different way of unpacking internalized homophobia than M.D. perhaps Or "deviant disruptive"

532 12: A NEW BLACK MOUNTAIN: Pages 366-368
sidian"). Hunt to McCandless, July 5, 1951; Hunt to Stinson, July 12, 1951; Raleigh Archives. Mark Hadden, "Notes on Theater at Black Mountain College (1948-1952)," *Form*, No. 9, April 1965.
27. Olson to Leach, March 19, 1952, Raleigh Archives.
28. Interviews with Guernsey and Lisa and Boris Aronson (June 12, 1977), Droll (April 16, 1967), Weinberger (June 4, 1968), Francis du Plessis Gray (March 24, 1967), Bulotowsky (June 14, 1971), Dan Rice (July 9, 1968), Farber and Chaslin (January 25, 1968), Walt Park with Carroll Williams (June 11, 1968), Kalon (June 20, 1968), Hadden (March 22, 1967), and MacKenzie (February 9, 1967); also letters to me from Kelly, January 31, March 1, 1967.
In an interview with Richard Kostelanetz (*Paritan Review*, Winter 1968), Rauschenberg said that "Albers told me I couldn't draw, and had intimidated him so much that his 'whole focus was simply to try to do something that would please him.' The interview has been (mostly) reprinted in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *The Fluxus of Alfred Meier*. See also Tomkins, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 198-206. These conclusions are drawn from the same interview materials cited in footnote 28.
30. Interview with Stefan Wolke, January 6, 1968.
31. Telephone interview with Cage, April 26, 1969.
32. Telephone interview with Cage (April 26, 1967); interview with Gray (March 24, 1967). Cunningham shares Cage's view that Albers was superior to Olson as an administrator—but he said that to me without those overtones of unease that would suggest he, like Cage, somehow felt personally threatened. "Albers had a way of carrying things out," Cunningham said (interview of December 18, 1967). "You know, like saying, 'Well, the garbage must be removed and you have to go and do it. . . . Whereas later on, somebody might say, 'Don't you think we should do something about the garbage?' And they'd all say yes; and then they'd all go off and have another beer or they'd go off and work on whatever they were doing. . . . Albers is an extremely organized man. I don't think Olson is organized in those ways. Charles is organized in his way, that is, he gets his poetry done. . . . but that's not the same thing as, say, running a school."
David Weinreb commented to me (interview of January 15, 1968) that he thought Olson felt much closer to Cunningham—because of his physicality and his distaste for intellectualizing—than to Cage.
33. Interview with Wolke, January 6, 1968; interview with Weinberger, June 4, 1968.
34. Telephone interview with Cage, April 26, 1969. Calvin Tomkins

As for Black Mountain's reactions to homosexuality, let me quote from an entry I made in my own journal, July 27, 1970:

"John Doe" came by again today for another taped session on BMC. After we'd talked for a while, he suddenly said he'd like me to turn the recorder off because he wanted to tell me something personal. Namely, that his sexual tastes "have always been more homosexual than heterosexual." Because of that, he went on, Black Mountain had often been hell for him—and he was there nine years. Periodically he'd be physically attracted to and/or emotionally involved with some guy, but never once, he says, (and I believe him) did he feel able to act on that attraction. The stigma would have been too great. Apparently lots of people at BMC knew his proclivities—and he knew they knew. Rice once had a private talk with John, telling him in essence that he'd be allowed to stay on despite his sexual preferences—but on the tacit agreement that he'd never act on them. Rice wasn't so postulated as to send the unsolicited penis forthwith from Rice, but he did make it clear that only certain kinds of feeling could be considered worthy of expression by and in the community. (Later, especially during the 60s, homosexuality was less distasteful and more indulged—which is one reason the thirties crowd viewed their betis with distaste.) John must have known he had a sympathetic ear. Anyway, I'm touched that he trusted me enough to reveal what to his generation (and to some extent, mine) has always been a desperate secret."

Duberman 169

Lou wasn't ever very friendly to me, although I tried, since I'd liked him so much that first meeting in June at Saturday night supper on the dining porch. Maybe he smelled the threat his own openness was to me. Or maybe smelling one of his own kind, and still tarred, as most all of us were in those days, with internalized homophobia, kept his distance. And of course I was no musician. But more than likely he simply considered me too callow and hidden to be of interest—or of use. Rumaker 85

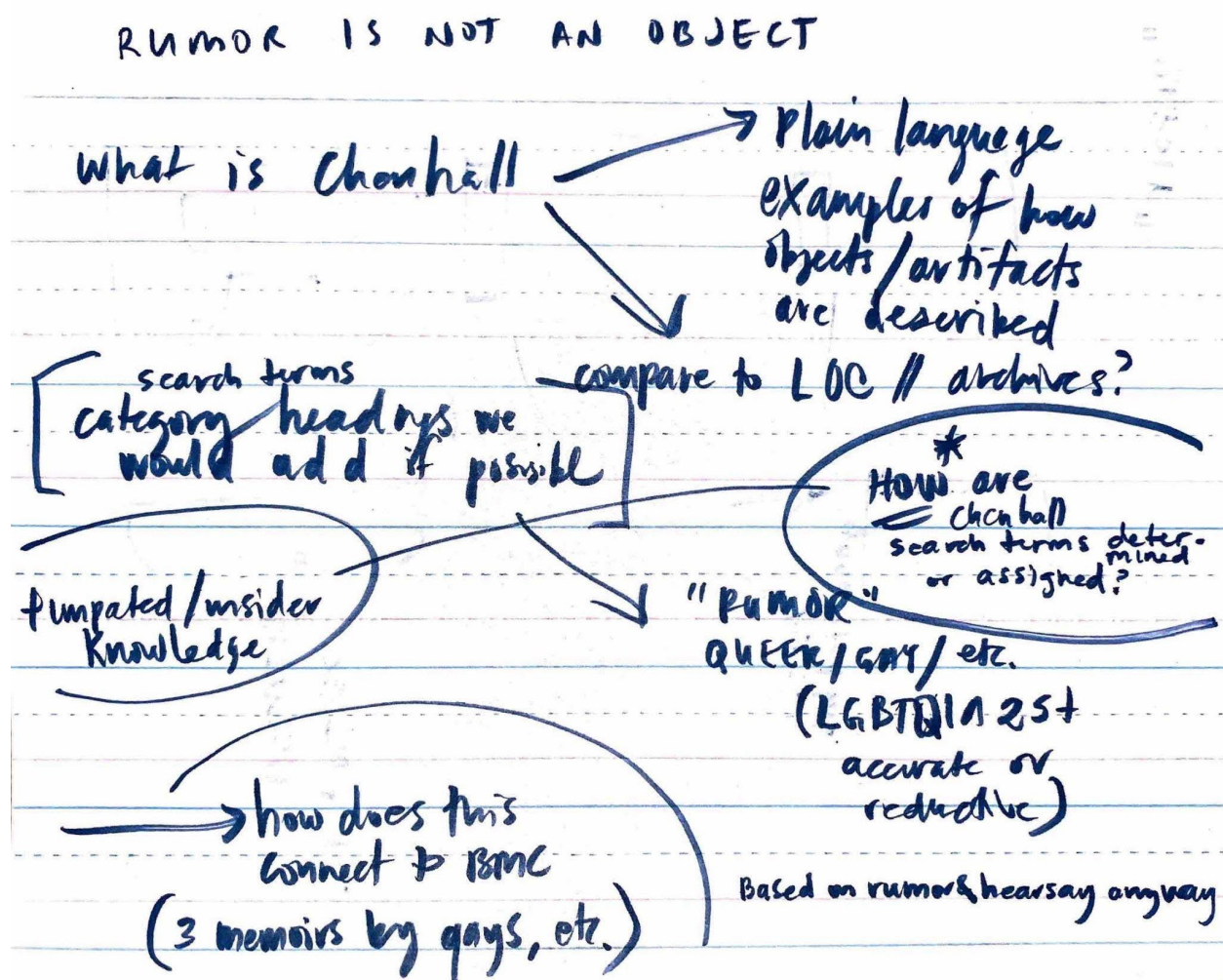
Rumaker 237

Sombody got some ales to go and we left and went back to the college to drink together and be reasonably safe in our own enclave, my own queer self reminded again of my gratitude for that haven, a haven for the Indian woman, for myself, for all such outcasts in that dreadful time, a time, tragically, in many ways still with us.

Apropos of the above, on another evening in class, Charles saying, "The tragedy of blacks is they just can't play it across the board," meaning they were not allowed to. And: "Between whites and blacks there needs to be a coalescence."

Duberman 532

This research is important to me as a young queer person. While my musings may present as naive compared to the Black Mountain College experts, this process highlighted to me that an exploration into queer life must be approached using queer methodologies and historiographies, rather than frameworks which uphold hetero-patriarchal structures.



The UAMA uses Chenhall's Nomenclature as a basis for the classification of objects in the database. The terms included in the nomenclature refer entirely to human-made artifacts and do not include or make reference to style, geographic origins, or identifying information about the creator. This makes the nomenclature lacking when it comes to a collection of artwork, whose keyword and search terminology needs additional identification of style and subject matter to be relevant and accessible to database users.

Like a Who's Who of the avant-garde

Professor Duberman has grave doubts about the legitimacy or at least the worth of writing history today. Trained at Yale and Harvard as a traditional historian in the "skills at information-retrieval, organization and analysis," winner of the Bancroft Prize for his biography of Charles Francis Adams (a man of impeccable balance!), he comes close to repudiating them. Duberman contends that the archival mentality with its sifting of documents and its apparatus of footnotes and source materials, hides behind its avoid of objectivity and misses the reality it should describe.

To avoid this dodge and to "intersect with the historical data" by risking himself more, Duberman inserts his own running commentary into a faculty debate of 1936. He takes sides.

Discussing the college's curious puritanism toward homosexuality until the last five years, he includes his own feelings as a homosexual. He introduces pages from his journal in which he frets about how hard it is to get the libertarian atmosphere of Black Mountain classes in his Princeton seminary. He frankly admits his admiration of the young for rejecting the ethic of getting and spending and for living hedonistically without guilt, and he links the Olson years to the anarchic life styles of the counter-culture. And so on.

But including his "feelings, fantasies and needs," however sincere, ends up much ado about very little: Duberman has knocked down a methodological straw man. Ironically, "Black Mountain" is most valuable as documentary history. One is grateful to Duberman for having rummaged in the State Archives and taped interviews with most of the people, famous and obscure alike, who were at the college. The book is disappointing—and alarming—because Duberman turns his back on the historical imagination itself. One wishes that in place of his humorless, cross and self-involved journal entries, he had speculated boldly on Black Mountain's affinities with Brook Farm, Oneida and other 19th-century social experiments. It's as if he had unwittingly adopted Black Mountain's ingrown outlook. His Black Mountain exists in a historical vacuum. How were other writers and artists managing to survive the Depression? Was American education during the lifetime of Black Mountain only conservative and timid?

"Black Mountain" does not exploit its rich materials and possibilities for interpretation and comparison. The writing is so academic and lacking in verve that one must ruefully wait for the Black Mountain artists themselves to write its interior history. Duberman might well have heeded Albert's warning that clear thinking is not the enemy of genuine feeling.

a persistent question: if "queer" was used then as it is now, would confirmed heterosexuals (Olson for ex) who grappled with homosexual impulses have self-identified as such?

still as pressing as when I underlined this over a decade ago. ♥

Finally, though, there's no certain way of separating the memory distortions from the actual variations in perspective—and that probably would please Cage. As he and his Zen masters know, events are too full of multiple sensory inputs and momentary variables ever to be reproduced with descriptive exactness; it's an insight historians, more than most people perhaps, need to incorporate. Yet as a historian I hold (tenuously) to the rationalist hope that when all variables are discounted, there will remain a residue of agreed-upon evidence that can thereby appropriately be called a "true," albeit partial, reconstruction of "what happened."

Let's try it both ways: first, five descriptions, partly contradictory, by those who actually attended that "first happening"; then, my own "objective" attempt to synthesize, to resolve or discard the material, and to salvage a version that, however unsatisfyingly skeletal, at least consists of data which all parties affirm. "All," of course, itself involves a major deception; it means, in fact, some eight to ten accounts. I have no list of everyone who attended the event, no way of getting one, no desire if I had such a list to spend another five years interviewing everyone on it, and no hope, even if I had the desire, of successfully contacting all those on the list who are still alive. And indeed, what should we do about those who have died? Their versions, were they but here to reveal them, might add exactly the material needed to confirm or deny critical elements in the composite picture presented by the living. I'm not being merely elfin—but trying to indicate why I believe historians should be more chary in their pretensions to objectivity. Most historians, of course, are fortunate in dealing with events long since past—events, that is, about which only limited evidence survives, and no live witnesses eager and willing to say "You've got it all wrong."

NOPE! This seems like a trick!

The school was slump! - Fielding Dawson (Spoked seeds, pg 275)

Black Mountain College is best told through a queer lens

Queer Life or Queer Afterlife?

Jason Ezell

"gay conference"?

a "mate" Duberman never really "met" though?

Taylor

The [difficult] heuristics of the Queering Effect

THIS

Molesworth's citation of Rogoff and Butt sets precedence for my own framing of Richards as a queer historian, despite the fact that she did not publicly identify as anything other than straight and, for much of her life, engaged in heterosexual relationships. Both Rogoff and Butt advocate for the critical embrace of scattered, seeing in this much disparaged mode of communication "a radical model of postmodern knowledge." They work operates from the belief that inferred and overheard knowledge is not only valuable to the history of art, but that it is challenges a rebuff to and a subversion of traditional historical narratives and their evidentiary bases.

Butt's work, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York World, 1948-1963*, is especially useful for its characterization of queer identity in the historical moment in which Richards was working on her book. The periodization of *Between You and Me* aligns with Richards's Black Mountain timeline: she lived and worked at the college from 1945 to 1951 and toyed with writing its history until the early 1960s. Butt characterizes this pre-Stonewall, Cold War moment in American history as one in which the enforcement of heterosexuality was at a fever pitch and the politics of gay liberation had yet to enter the public discourse. In this moment, gossip and rumor offered an important refuge, especially for artists, from the strictures of cold war American culture and nurtured the development of queer subjectivities that are often rendered invisible today because of the dominance of the "closer" binary structure of signification.

[37] When Richards was engaging with Black Mountain history, queer sexuality was something diffuse, surreptitious, and radically expansive. Therefore, there is something backwards about demanding that Richards fit neatly into a category of sexual identity—lesbian, gay, queer, what have you—in order to interpret her work as queer, given how these categories were neither well-defined nor safely a part of public discourses at the time.

Overwhelmingly, critical reception of the book indicates just how inseparable the intimate and the textual were for readers and educators anyway. Not surprisingly, gay readers recognized this immediately and overtly. Allen Young, reviewing the book in *The Advocate* in February 1975, wrote, "Duberman's personal approach to his storytelling, his sharing of his feelings and experiences with the reader, is doubtless related to his gay consciousness as much as are the discussions of homosexuality." [32]. Even if other reviewers didn't name the gay perspective as overtly as did Young, they did regularly characterize the book in terms that foregrounded the affectional, when characterizing the material or the text as a lover. For example, Judson Jerome, in the November 1972 *Saturday Review*, commented that *Black Mountain was* "...perhaps the most intimate, tender history an institution... has ever inspired" (70) and continues to say that

it resembles more than anything else a biography of a mate of twenty-three years, one who was often hated, often only dimly understood, often nearly divorced, who finally died under ambiguous and vaguely embarrassing circumstances, and who is now poignantly remembered and painstakingly reconstructed with all the delicate flesh tones and psychic shades of gray. (70)

confronted her with an unwieldy mass of rumors, hints, and gossip that she says "cast a queer light on 'official' documents" and destabilized the narrative she strove to consolidate. [32] In time, "the line between a historical document and gossip began to blur." [33]

Molesworth's designation of this methodological challenge as queer suggests that there is something intrinsic to the study of Black Mountain College that evokes queerness. After all, her reference to queerness comes not in a description of the college's gay students or teachers, but in a reflection on the nature of the archive (she recalls experience at the Western Regional Archives as well as at the Getty Research Institute, working in M.C. Richards's papers). In this way, Molesworth serves to relocate queerness from the bounds of personal sexual identification into a realm of theoretical and political analysis.

She underscores this rethinking of queerness—and gestures towards Richards's place in the arena of queer politics and theory—in her description of the sources she employed to grapple with her work's formal uncertainty. First, she expresses gratitude for scholars like Irit Rogoff and Gavin Butt, whose feminist and queer theoretical work on the topic of gossip helped her understand that any history of Black Mountain would inevitably be "structured by polyphony, fragments, and a narrative strategy of loveriness." [34] Second, she quotes Karen Karnes—a Black Mountain potter and a friend of Richards's—who, when interviewed by Molesworth, exasperatedly declared: "You contemporary people have so many questions, because you think there are answers." [35] Drawing upon her wisdom as a lifelong potter and a participant in the college, Karnes advises Molesworth to embrace uncertainty and unknowability—phenomena she recognizes as fundamental.

Molesworth's citation of Rogoff and Butt sets precedence for my own framing of Richards as a queer historian, despite the fact that she did not publicly identify as anything other than straight and, for much of her life, engaged in heterosexual relationships.

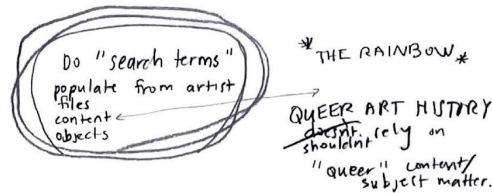
what do you mean here? ie - how would this polyphonic methodology be articulated within a "Chenhallian" structure? Would that structure be identifiable?

How do you 'legitimize' this methodology? Would its inclusion in Chenhall mean anything? Does it need legitimizing?

It is also important to note that the UAMA does not lack queer art in its collection, *it lacks the framework for users and researchers to discover the (queer?) art*. Among the UAMA collection are three pieces of work by John Cage including *9 Stones*, *Score Without Parts (40 Drawings by Thoreau)*, *Twelve Haiku*, and *Where There is Where There—Urban Landscape*; nine pieces by Robert Rauschenberg, and another three from Jasper Johns. None of these descriptions reference the fact that these artists were queer (either self-identified as such or posthumously). While the UAMA is far from a vast source of Black Mountain College material and ephemera, it reveals the silences and concealments that exist in our database, keeping us a step removed from finding queer artists within the collection, as well as establishing them within a legacy and canon of queer art.

IF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS
USE CHENHALL FOR OBJECTS,
ARE ARTIST FILES/RECORDS
SUBJECT TO THE SAME
FRAMEWORKS?

Manuscript
Note



Chenhall's Nomenclature

Category: Communication artifacts // Classification: Documentary artifacts //

PRIMARY OBJECT TERM

sub-class:

LITERARY WORKS (intended to be read or performed)

* other related - sub-class "OTHER DOCUMENTS"

PRIM - BOOK
Second - JOURNAL
Tertiary - Diary
Commonplace book

Anthology
Article
Biography
Essay
Memoir
Monograph
Narrative
Play
Poem
Prayer
Reminiscence
Thesis
Transcript

SPROUTED SEEDS
RUMAKER
DAWSON
DUBERMAN

? "PRIMARY SOURCE"

HARRIS
DUBERMAN
MOLESWORTH et al

Secondary source?

Tertiary source?

if we consider only
people & object artifacts
FROM/OF the College "PRIMARY"

what do we do with
rumor and opinion
(in memoir & reminiscence?)

HOW IS THAT DIFFERENT THAN
ANY OTHER HISTORICAL ACCOUNT.

is identity (LGBTQIN2S+) historically malleable?
who gets to speculate on identity?

A question I got from Lydia was: "Who are you to say that? Well, who are any of us to name anything?" Are art historians granted naming rights by a higher power. I didn't think so. Our want to classify is not ordained by a higher authority but by our own, and perhaps, generalized desire for categorization. I should also point out that I am not the one doing the queering; the queering has already been done.

It was difficult in a small community to hide personality quirks for long, and under the abrasion of constant contact the quirks easily became magnified in the minds of others. Black Mountain was a pressure cooker. The pressure could help the merely neurotic to face anxieties and even work them out; but for those more deeply disturbed, the needling of a John Rice, the continual exposure, the difficulty of finding privacy and respite could be enough to upset—and without reconstituting—a delicate balance.

lines in the Asheville *Citizen* next day: STUDENT KILLED BY AMOROUS TEACHER or VICTIM CRUSHED BY FALLING LOVENEST. "In a freak accident . . ." the story would begin.

I also envisioned, cringing a little in misplaced empathy, Betty, skinnier even than myself, her slight body being flattened under the venusian steamroller energy of Charles' girly: a single rosebud supporting the burden of the entire bush, so to speak.

Silly, fanciful concerns to while away the time, till the pounding stopped, usually as abruptly as it began, with no warning or preliminaries.

That thumping, loud, insistent, long, would keep me awake—I would look up at the darkened ceiling listening, my mind a confusion—like it was my father fucking my sister (since Betty was like a sister to me and Charles my spirit father), while Connie, who I loved as a friend, I saw as "betrayed." The almost nightly racket above was like listening to that father's betrayal. I was slow in coming to the old, hard wisdom in realizing that the one living god in my life had the proverbial feet of clay, Olson-Zeus thundering through the ceiling above me in yet another awakening; not ready yet, as with my own father, to recognize Charles as flesh and blood, something I hadn't quite yet accepted even about myself, so buried still in Judeo-Christian erotophobia.

Also wandering into my reveries, overhearing those nightly upstairs trysts, was like hearing as a child my father and mother, their furtive, whispered fumbblings through the paper-thin walls in the crowded, two-bedroom upstairs of our cramped, shabby house in New Jersey, where there was no privacy except in the dead hours of the night, nights when I lay awake listening for hours, fearing to sleep, listening for the crackle of flame up the stairs, sniffing for the smell of smoke that I was sure would come, the self-appointed watcher in the night listening to my father's beer-besotted snorings, occasionally hearing instead

316 Rumsaker

a special occasion. Then, too, I'd never seen him carrying a suitcase before. My first thought was it must be some kind of emergency, Charles off on a quick trip to try to scrounge up more funds for the school. Otherwise, the entire college would have known in advance he'd actually planned a trip somewhere.

But that speculation evaporated in a feeling of vague unease. That Connie and Charles were having trouble since Charles had started seeing Betty Kaiser were persistent rumors among us, and Connie's own ever more tight-lipped, pained-eye silence gave credence to them. I myself was quietly troubled by such rumors, along with Charles' past stealthy night-time visits to upstairs Meadows Inn, the concerns of a still-egoistic child, really, whose mother and father may be on the point of breaking up. Still, in that curiously symbolic but also very real way, the Olsons, mainly because of Charles' patrimonial hugeness, were very much like the unacknowledged "father" and "mother" of Black Mountain, the rest of us more or less siblings, or, as with Wes and Bea Huss, say, aunts and uncles, Joe and Mary Fiore, big brother and big sister, the familial structure of the college unconsciously but inescapably patterned, in my own head anyhow, on the ancient extended tribal family. Charles was to many of us, particularly the young writers, the "father," a hierarchical denomination he would have resented and bitterly denied, but there was no escaping it. He became, whether he liked it or not, the spiritual and caring father so many of us had missed in our own lives, just as Melville and Pound had been writer "fathers" adopted by Olson in his own earlier years. Only Wes Huss fiercely resisted the appellation, saying once in his acting class: "I don't want to be anybody's surrogate father."

My uneasiness increased when I saw Connie now emerge rapidly through the front door and follow closely behind Charles down the path to the car. Both, not seeing me yet, were silent, except that pinched, strained look in Connie's eyes spoke worlds.

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Duberman pg. 75

Characteristics
of the
Homosexual:
- Mothering
- Controlling
- Self-doubting
- Deviant

Mom

Mary Olson would summon her son from play with a whistle she kept on the back porch. She was overprotective of her only child, showing a motherly solicitude which sometimes made the boy uncomfortable. She "pushed" him, with a "tough emotional insistence" which he began to resent as a teenager and eventually felt driven to resist, developing a strong emotional block against her. Yet through his adult life he was drawn to a series of female "protectors," her incarnations. "What did my mother do," he once asked the most protective of them all, his first wife, "or not do, that left her such a fixed image of woman in me? My hunch is that she didn't give me enough love to slake the appetite of a son, especially an only son. Or was it too much—too close, that Trinity!—and so smothering . . . and why I fight any attachment?"

Olson's course as a writer always obeyed inner currents. Upon his return to Washington he turned away from the West book to wrestle with old ghosts. The spring of 1948 was taken up with the psychic turmoil of renewed struggle with a specter of paternal authority which he felt he'd been shadowing for as long as he could remember. Blocking his full emergence into manhood, throwing him into moments of depression and self-doubt, this imaginary adversary would have him no peace. His combat with it now became the main theme of a secret confessional journal aptly titled "Faust Buch."

Aggravating his problems were difficulties in his sex life, always an area of particular sensitivity. The slightest signal of impotence with him on Connie's part could precipitate a terrifying sense of "shame or humiliation." In such low moments he grew fearful of everything, "of women, of flesh, of even." He was having doubts about his effectiveness as a lover, and it didn't help that Connie diagnosed his own sexual problems as "impotence."

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those hurried creakings that enflamed my childish imagination, and fearing for my mother, knowing her own fear of having another baby when she could barely feed and care for the brood she already had.

The "god" Olson was not only betraying the "goddess-wife-mother" Connie, in my own shaky—and fanciful—mind he was endangering the structure of their life together, and by extension threatening the already threatened cohesion and continued existence of the college itself by his amorous and sexual shenanigans, he who, by the force of his own will and vision, stepped inside a church for years (no matter, I still carried my own around with me, like a shell—a hell, really), my Catholic attitudes of purgatory, and, despite my youthful rebel's progressive belief in divorce, of a deeply embedded sense of marriage till death, no matter the death in it (no matter that then, like so many of us, I didn't know Connie and Charles weren't legally married), there was that deeper childish part of me that envisioned the household of Black Mountain imperiled by this marital rift between figurative mother and father.

In the spring of 1954, Betty abruptly left the college, returning to New York, ostensibly, she told some, to resume her music career, but in actuality, as it turned out, to have Charles' baby. Not long after, late one afternoon, I left Meadows Inn on

It's interesting for me to try to piece together these characteristics because figures like Charles Olson almost seem larger than life. It also felt important to point out the similarities within the characteristics of Olson and Wunsch (on paper) and highlight the importance of sex, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships to each BMC work

Duberman 91-92

over. It was back on the old basis . . . he knew I had a very deep affection for him."⁵⁰ In the upshot, Wunsch was to hurt himself far more than anyone else. He was another of the community's hidden homosexuals, enormously discreet in that as in everything. But doubtless some deduced his sexual preference, for it must have seemed the logical extension of a mothering, controlled, self-doubting personality (logical, that is,

92 BLACK MOUNTAIN

in terms of the homosexual stereotype then current). In any case, in a few terrible days in 1945, at a time when he was rector of the college, Wunsch's homosexuality was to be explosively exposed. In the aftermath his own life was ruined—the terms are not overly dramatic—and the community's claim to unusual humanity, seriously compromised.⁵¹

Tom Clark pg. 7

THE BROKEN STEP 131

product of the cerebral, internalizing habits of the writing, but their cause. It was a vicious circle: he feared that his anxiety about his unmet needs unconsciously creating a state of tension that in turn rendered him incapable of performing as a natural, relaxed man; rather in his unperceived conduct or on paper. The self-doubt which was so essential an element of his character was ironically the self-doubt of both his prodigious energies and his crippling inhibitions. In his "Faust Buch," he warned himself over and over against "hoping it up," storying to manufacture an artificial strength: "Don't try to talk and behave bigger than you are." And that spring he made a self-conscious decision to change his approach to writing, to stop reading his deepest concerns and instead confront them at their source. The first step would be a small book of true stories about his father, cast in simple, direct remembrance form—not elliptical "faust" prose but a plain "meditative humanistic" style, intelligible to any common reader. The book would be a kind of limas test. If he was not cut out to be "an artist, genius or clever," the unadorned prose would once and for all reveal it. If, on the other hand, he really had something important and universal to say, that too would be allowed to come through unimpeded. Further, the effort would not be psychic therapy alone. Mastering the more accessible narrative form would, he hoped, bring him into range of a large mainstream audience so far closed off to him by his exclusively critical and intellectual concentration.

The weather grew warmer, Washington's trees broke into blossom, Olson had foundation cash to bank on. Yet his restlessness only increased. He went alone to New York for a session with Caghi. They discussed a new idea for a set of "American Tarot" playing cards with poetic text and graphics, but Olson was distracted by his qualms over potential homosexual signals in the relationship with his artist friend. Similar danger signs appeared to crop up everywhere he turned. In the course of a casual luncheon conversation during the same New York visit, Jungian psychologist and Melville expert Henry Murray brought him up short with a gentle but meaningful comment about figurative archetypes in *Call Me Ishmael*. The Father was obviously a dominant presence in the book, observed Murray, but there was a curious vacancy where the Mother should have been. Olson worried that his friend was correct. The feminine principle was eternally eluding him, leaving his sexual circuits sadly incomplete. Looking into the faces of women he passed in the crowded city, he imagined a carnival of missed sexual opportunities. On the train back to Washington, his eye was caught by a pretty and stylish young woman who reminded him of Connie in the early days of their courtship. Interpreting the woman's glances as a signal of invitation, he was thrown into a terrible quandary about whether to approach her. She suddenly got off the train at the 30th Street station in Philadelphia. After some moments of indecisiveness, he tried to follow her, but the imagined temptress had disap-

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MY FATHER

My Father 17

My father was my father
but my mother was the one
I loved best
he died too soon

So I must be my father
—double up—
and search all things
in one silver cup

He used to sing
he used to play
he used to hum
and walk all day

He made me young
he made me gay
he made me run
he made me cry

He used to whisper
he used to laugh
he used to do both
—he did me cry—
he was a call
and every day

I liked his heart
I liked his eye
I liked his sense
of the other guy

He had a smell
he had a breath
he was sweet
death, you cheat

I had a father
he died too soon
I am lonely
me and my moon

CHARLES OLSON
March 6, 1945

Dowson 96-97

This is the difficulty with attempting to heuristically approach the questions surrounding the Queer Effect: there is no answer, let alone a quick, efficient, or simple answer. For the purposes of investigating this queer life of BMC, all we can do is restate the necessity of subjective, non-academic sources in reanimating this history. Gossip, rumor, hearsay, scuttlebutt, whichever form you prefer, perform as the basis for an outsider understanding of what it meant to be queer at BMC. It is also necessary to reconcile the gathered body of reminiscence and collateral information as formative to our process of categorization and recognition. For members of the queer community who were relegated to silence—either as a means of survival or as a means of resistance—utilizing gossip in an archival context allows for a history that is “open to indefinite suggestion” and therefore speculative.²

Constructing a picture of queer life at Black Mountain College requires imagination and speculation, not only because we know that queerness was not entirely accepted as much as it was tolerated, but also because ideas about BMC itself can be contradictory; seen by some to have operated as atemporal, insular, and non-normative—a premise rejected by others. This is why I believe that so many of the defining works written about BMC are done so by queer writers, whose framework and writing styles lean into the use of gossip, imagination, narrative, and contradiction to give a picture of that place and time.

Her presence, however slight in comparison to her prominent companions, asks new questions about Black Mountain's queer history and postwar American art more broadly. What did it mean to be a woman and a woman artist among all these queer men? How did working with clay, teaching, and writing history resolve or evoke the tensions of nascent sexual and political identities? How can we, to quote Butt, "bring about a queer turn in the writing of art history" that recognizes and accommodates more than just white creativity?

Taylor

As historians and theorists of sexuality have refined a notion of the late nineteenth-century "invention" of the homosexual, their discussions have drawn primarily upon theories and histories of gender. George Chauncey, in particular, has provided an invaluable discussion of the ways in which paradigms of sexuality shifted according to changing ideologies of gender during this period.² He notes a gradual change in medical models of sexual deviance, from a notion of sexual inversion, understood as a reversal of one's sex role, to a model of homosexuality, defined as deviant sexual object choice. These categories and their transformations, argues Chauncey, reflected concurrent shifts in the cultural organization of sex/gender roles and participated in prescribing acceptable behavior, especially within a context of white middle-class gender ideologies.

While gender insubordination offers a powerful explanatory model for the "invention" of homosexuality, ideologies of gender also, of course, shaped and were shaped by dominant constructions of race. Indeed, although it has received little acknowledgment, it is striking that the "invention" of the homosexual occurred at roughly the same time that racial questions were being reformulated, particularly in the United States. This was the moment, for instance, of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that insisted that "black" and "white" races were "separate but equal." Both a product of and a stimulus to a nationwide and brutal era of racial segregation, this ruling had profound and lasting effects in legitimating an apartheid structure that remained legally sanctioned for over half of the twentieth century. The *Plessy* case distilled in legal form many widespread contemporary fears about race and racial difference at the time. A deluge of "Jim Crow" and antisegregation

² Chauncey.

Snorton

Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body 245

laws, combined with unprecedented levels of racial violence, most visibly manifested in widespread lynching, reflected an aggressive attempt to classify and separate bodies as either "black" or "white".

Is it merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either "homosexual" or "heterosexual" emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively policing the imaginary boundary between "black" and "white" bodies? Although some historians of sexuality have included brief acknowledgment of nineteenth-century discourses of racial difference, the particular relationship and potentially mutual effects of discourses of homosexuality and race remain unexplored.³ This silence around race may be due in part to the relative lack of explicit attention to race in medical and sexological literature of the period. These writers did not self-consciously interrogate race, nor were those whose gender insubordination and sexual transgression brought them under the medical gaze generally identified by race in these accounts.⁴ Yet the lack of explicit attention to race in these texts does not mean that it was irrelevant to sexologists' endeavors. Given the upheavals surrounding racial definition during this period, it is reasonable to imagine that these texts were as embedded within contemporary racial ideologies as they were within ideologies of gender.

Take, for instance, the words of Havelock Ellis, whose massive *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* was one of the most important texts of the late nineteenth-century medical and scientific discourse on sexuality. "I regard sex as the central problem of life," began the general preface to the

³ the investigation or attribution of the cause or reason for something, often expressed in terms of historical or mythical explanation.

⁴ David Halperin has briefly and provocatively suggested that "all scientific inquiries into

sion against private property. In this view, "disturbed behavior" is the enemy of the person exhibiting the symptom. Thus, instead of identifying the person as his disturbance, Neill tries to join with him in exorcising elements destructive to growth.²⁶

Neill, in my view, is a saint. Those are rare enough to come upon anywhere and it would be foolish to hope for a community of them. Black Mountain did at least try—spasmodic though the effort was—to be a therapeutic community, to help its members (as does Neill at Summerhill) discard whatever behavior seemed injurious to them and to those around them—be it drink, hostility, shyness, whatever. But there were boundaries to Black Mountain's tolerance of "deviant" symptoms. It can be argued that some boundaries had to be set if the community was to remain functional. But in fact "functional" tended to be defined at Black Mountain in the thirties as "orderly," with certain kinds of deviation, like homosexuality, considered by its nature, disruptive.

So although there were few rules—legislated procedures—freedom was circumscribed by a strong sense of what was or was not acceptable form. One of Wunsch's favorite comments, widely and approvingly quoted in the community, was that Black Mountain stressed "informality within a form." (Wunsch, as one student said, "loved oxymorons and other forms of the rhetoric of paradox and dialectic.") Unspoken canons proved as strongly regulative in some areas of community life as any formal set of rules would have. It was understood (though never formally agreed to in a community or student meeting), that on Saturday evening everyone would dress up for dinner; that one would regularly attend classes unless actually sick; that one would not leave the college while it was in session for more than an afternoon or an evening; and that one would not indulge sexual appetites promiscuously, homosexually or bisexually.²⁷

The decision as to which students should be allowed back was discussed in faculty meetings at the end of each year—with student officers in attendance. A sample discussion from the year 1937:²⁸

↳ sidebar: would be useful/interesting to tie in the experience of integration

How much does collections management come about feeling? About fragments? If they don't, how do we get them to come?

is collections management a monolith?

an intersectional lens certainly—and the timeline of Brown vs. BOE as compared to LGBTQ equality rights?

lydia

A question that comes up often in my praxis is: “who gets to ____.” Meaning, who has the right—access, privilege, agency, power—to claim knowledge or assign meaning? And then, “on whose authority?” When we look to readily available narratives and historical accounts without questioning the positionality of their creator, and see those in power as the only source of rhetorical authority, we unconsciously absorb bias, or at the very least, an incomplete account.

Lane, pg. 5 (Intro)

The contributions are not preoccupied with misfortunes, miscalculations, frailties, wounds, and weaknesses. For some this will seem an unnatural kind of omission since there is obviously a dark side to any community of people living, learning, and working together. But for an enterprise that accounts success in terms of human development, growth, and the generating of energies, notes from underground are not necessarily enlightening. And people who are moved to write about others' shortcomings are not so candid when it comes to their own. *gossip = bad*

In this regard, the editor himself came to an early decision with respect to a few pieces that 'named names' and sometimes cast aspersions. Where I judged that what was written would be gratuitously hurtful to someone, I proposed that the author omit that portion of the writing. Sometimes it was necessary to omit only a last name. I have tried, however, to keep the experience intact while omitting any malicious animus. With more ambivalence, I chose to downplay sex. It may be that sexuality—especially during youthful college years—is crucial to the working out of a sense of identity. But it is, after all, only one aspect of what occurred at BMC (and what indeed occurs on every college campus) in the questioning and working out of "Who and what am I?" Some sexual accounts might have raised the entertainment quotient. But I was more interested in the form our aspirations took, how we gave ourselves to the life lying before and beyond us, and to the common work and hours at hand.

Dawson/Duberman/Romaker discuss sex and sexuality at length in their respective writings.

Clearly, gossip functions in myriad ways. It empowers one person while disempowering another; it shores up the organization and disables individuals; it also can shore up individuals and discomfort organizations. How that enabling/disabling process occurs is through the framing and communicating of information as legitimate or as illicit gossip.

Hafen

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sip, a "gossip-information revolving door" that converts information to gossip and gossip to information, depending upon political exigencies and whether the gossip is viewed as an OCB or WDB. Gossip used to regulate by organizational authority was done through the use of "HR investigations" or through the dissemination of stories of (anti)heroes and cautionary tales. Gossip used to resist organizational efficacy was done through humor, nostalgia for the "good ol' times," and interpersonal maneuvers and *stunts*. Gossip as a revolving door marks the intersections of power, which Foucault (1980) noted must be studied "at the level of subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors, etc." (p. 35). Those processes subject not only the human body, but the organizational body.

Duberman

I see in this excerpt yet another example of Richards's radical historicism being misunderstood and dismissed. Herlitzky introduced his friends in the hope that Richards could convince Duberman to write a Black Mountain history. Their meeting was indeed fruitful. Richards, the "enchanting human being" and "visionary," charmed Duberman with her Black Mountain stories. Once she had successfully piqued his interest, however, Herlitzky, the "honorable man," intervened so as to protect Duberman from Richards's apparent tendency to exaggerate. In the estimation of Herlitzky and Duberman, Richards's perspective on Black Mountain was inaccurate and outside the purview of the "real" historian.

Taylor

I believe that Richards clashed with her supporters on two levels. At first glance, this was a methodological, historiographic conflict. Richards was idiosyncratic in what she considered to be appropriate to include, or exclude, in a historical study. As a writer and thinker, Richards gravitated towards intuitive and creative forms of knowledge. Though she spent years ensconced in the academy as an undergraduate, a doctorate student, and a professor of English, she was a profound and unconventional thinker, so much so that the Dominican priest Matthew Fox, a friend and supporter, often compared her to Jesus Christ.^[59] Richards eschewed messianic comparisons and put it thusly: "I am an odd bird in both academic and craft worlds."^[60] It comes as no surprise that this odd bird found herself at loggerheads with her institutional colleagues.

In another light, this was a debate about Black Mountain's very legacy. Richards's book, with its multiple, conflicting viewpoints and prioritization of the felt over the factual, would have gained a controversial portrait of Black Mountain College. Rather than sanctify the college, Richards sought to tear it open. Her book would have been *part-code, part-expose*. Richards's truth—that Black Mountain was an inspiring yet fractious "antitehr" that left her and others emotionally wrecked and creatively soiled—would have been primary to the story she told. Her book's thesis was undoubtedly tied to an unfortunate aspect of Richards's post-Black Mountain life, which is that, having taken the collapse of the college very personally, she was unable to teach or write "anything of [her] own for several years."^[61] Though subsequent Black Mountain scholars have been open about the college's problems, Richards, and her book that "wouldn't have been like a history," struck a distressing chord.^[62] When her former colleagues refused her interview requests and her publishers attempted to quash her adventurous historicism, they made clear their disinterest in (or fear of) what her book would do to the college.

queer methodology / framework

VanHouttsma, 136-7

Schantz's mention of the "good" and the "bad" may call to mind commonplace associations of gossip with the "bad" and understandings of gossip as an *inherently destructive force*. As I underscore how crucial speculation is to the rhetorical methodology of gossip, then, it is also important to consider how gossip may be reclaimed as positive and valued for its potential to work in-tangent with "good" scholarly methodologies. Spacks confronts negative associations with gossip head on, distinguishing malicious gossip from what she terms "serious" gossip—marked by its place within contexts of intimacy—and reclaiming this serious form as a positive hermeneutic resource (5). Schantz also seeks to "soften the stigma of gossip," though she wants at the same time to "wield this stigma" (10). Similarly, Royster addresses the potentially negative associations with critical imagination as a rhetorical methodology for feminist historiography, especially in terms of standards for scholarly work. She cautions that her advocacy of critical imagination does not allay "researchers of the responsibility to demonstrate . . . a commitment to accuracy, adequacy, and precision" (83). Scholars still need, Royster insists, "to do the hard work" of theory and research, being "careful about 'claims' to truth" (84). They still need, as she writes with Kirsch in my epigraph for this section, to gather and order "whatever evidence" is available, and to do so "in a configuration that is reasonable and justifiable in accord with basic scholarly methodologies" (71). Following feminist scholars, gossip may thus be understood, on the one hand, as a positive rhetorical methodology: as another form of speculation or imagination that is practiced in ways consistent with traditional standards for scholarly rigor, reason and order, and truth claims.

representations and classification systems" (97). Working with this understanding of gossip as illicit evidence, scholars of queer rhetoric may treat speculation about the past, much like more traditional archival materials, as grounds on which to develop narratives about non-normative sexual, romantic, and/or erotic practices—while simultaneously underscoring the impossibilities and uncertainties inherent in attempts to know the "truth" of sexuality, identity, and history.

In a second sense, queer scholars of rhetoric may enact gossip, understanding its illicitness not only as evidence, but as *narrative*. In Butt's terms "gossip's narrative might operate as history" (9). Here the historian becomes the gossipier, the one who does the gossiping. This move is of course linked to the treatment of gossip as evidence. As in social gossip, the historian is likely to gossip precisely when she is intrigued by encounters with others' gossip, and the narratives she develops through doing gossip may be picked up and twisted by still other gossips. This construction of historical narratives via gossip is queer because of its methodological moves. As Butt writes, the move to gossip "deconstructs the bases of authoritative constructs of truth," "displac[ing] so-called verifiable truths from their more positivistic frames of reference and . . . render[ing] them instead, like gossip's narratives, as projections of interpretive desire and curiosity" (7). Here, then, queer gossip as rhetorical methodology involves precisely those kinds of queer "navigation" that Morris calls for and frames as "queer movement" (147). The moves of the queer gossip also include exactly the kind of methodological speculation and critical imagination that Royster and Kirsch suggest (71).

What distinguishes queer gossip from feminist critical imagination as a rhetorical methodology, however, is not simply the speculation about sexual, romantic, and/or erotic life. Rather, this gossip is methodologically queer insofar as at least some of its moves are illicit, non-normative, and not fully "in accord with basic scholarly methodologies" (71). Whereas Royster and Kirsch emphasize such accordance, and Spacks reclaims gossip as positive, Butt instead wants to "bring about a queer

Throughout the research for this piece, and in our conversations with the editors of *JBMCS*, Stella and I have been introduced to additional ways of thinking, knowing, and being in relationship with queerness as it pertains to archival and museum collections, such as The Homosaurus, and Emily Drabinski's *Queering the Catalog*. What this brings forward for me, then, is how difficult it can be to find and engage with materials which support active interrogation of dominant information infrastructures, even for those who have institutional access and general research fluency. If it's this hard to find ourselves and our community within these structures, how do we expect those from outside of higher ed/academia/the institution to do so?

And yet, perhaps any history, but certainly a history of Black Mountain College, will always be incomplete for the same reasons Josef Albers taught color theory by focusing on perception. The thing changes depending on its proximity to another thing. The context is always changing, so perhaps queering a history is merely a subversion of our perception of it—both/and, rather than either/or.

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¹ Registration is the process by which records relating to objects held in a collection are described for the purposes of context, preservation, organization, and location. There are many digital and analog tools for registration and collections management.

² VanHaitsma, Pamela. *Gossip as Rhetorical Methodology for Queer and Feminist Historiography*, *Rhetoric Review*, 35:2, 136.