

## The Work Kills the Title

It was audition week—which means I got to see person after person as they attempted to be little pieces of who I am. I'm a playwright, and my play, *Captive Barbies*, which has been in construction over the past two years, was finally gracing the stage in a full production. It was strange watching people audition for it because I feel like the characters within the play were each a fixture in a menagerie of my traits. Even stranger, the play was about identity in many regards, so the experience felt very meta. It seems, however, that this has been the repetition within my work throughout my undergrad career as a writer—the work I produce is never just a reflection of my identity, but is a reflection on the concept of identity as well, and it seems that *Captive Barbies* serves as the focal point for this statement. Through my work, I see that my writing began as a way of me defining my identity, but would then lead to a means of coming to terms with my identity. Such intense interrogation of my identity through the work I produce, however, led to a final stage in which my identity is more destabilized and ambiguous than ever before, which ironically reverses my original quest.

I began the quest of using writing as identity exploration was right before graduating high school. By junior year, identity had already fascinated me. Gazing at my peers as they consumed alcohol and marijuana at parties, I was amazed by the way I could read their interactions as products of social constructions that constituted their identities—man or woman; gay or straight. I was, however, always an observer and never the subject.

I would, however, unwittingly become the subject of my studies at the end of my senior year, when I wrote *The Writer*. In this performance art script, I explored the identity of a writer through the monologues of his characters. Not only did the monologues explain parts of the writer, but they also explained the way in which the characters themselves contributed to the way the writer wrote, demonstrating dialectics between writer and character. Though the monologues were not meant to be autobiographical, they did indeed progress into a reflection of their writer.

The play opens and closes with character of *The Writer*, who comes onto the stage with a framed canvas that says “150” upon it. He states:

“In 150 words, describe yourself,” This application read. What was I supposed to say to this because, you see, I’m a writer. Writers don’t have selves, but internalize outside forces, placing them into fictional characters... So who am I? Let me show you. Let me show you the fragments.”

After this monologue, which introduced identity as the core of the piece, the play continues to observe both identity as a concept and my individual identity through its content and its form. While the written work explained the identity of a writer (me), the form itself was reflexive of identity as performance. Because it was a stage play, it was able to break down the pieces of my identity and place them in a performative arena. The play contains characters that struggle their sexuality, gender, and economic identity. While the play asked, “Who am I,” it also asked, “how do I present myself and why?”

*The Writer* demonstrates an awareness of my identity and my need to explore it, but it stayed within the realm of whimsical play. It did not necessarily interrogate my

identity through inner conflict but instead snipped away at little parts of me that worked in harmony.

A very different form of identity exploration would come my sophomore year of undergrad. At this point in my life, I was coming into serious conflict with my identity for the first time as a cognizant individual. Growing up gay for me had always been easy. My grandpa was gay, and my older sister was gay. There was never any shame behind who I was. It wasn't until college that conflict emerged in regards to my sexuality. It wasn't necessarily my sexuality that came under attack, but my effeminacy. Being exposed to gay populations for the first time revealed the bias against effeminacy within the gay world itself. Masculinity or "straight-acting" qualities were placed on a higher level of both attractiveness and warranted respect. I didn't know if this was the ideological state apparatus controlling the gay population's opinion of the "ideal man" or if it was the community's defensive reaction to attacks from mainstream society over their lack of masculinity. It was probably a mix of both, and I found it disturbing. I had always thought that being gay gave me a free pass to act as I pleased, but now I felt the need to conform—I felt the need to blend. For the first time, I felt both spitefully aware of my performance while still clinging to it for validation.

From this rift in my identity came *Captive Barbies*. It was a dramatic black comedy on notions of maleness and masculinity. It followed the story of Lee, a gay male prostitute as he attempts to escape the law after committing a serious crime. Along the way to freedom, however, his journey clashes with a love triangle between a heteronormative (kind of) married gay couple and the closeted cop that tried to

arrest him. The play used twisted comedy to explore the conflict in which I had found myself.

When I saw the play performed in a staged reading, I didn't just see parts of the world I needed to make sense of but parts of myself. I saw the one who hated his gayness; the one who refused to hate his gayness yet faced erosive insecurity; the one who used his gayness as a weapon in the face of judgment; and the one who needed punishment for not being able to love. The characters seemed to all operate in a way that functioned to serve political messages on the divide that existed between those in the gay population despite their common identity, and it reflected the divide that was forming within me.

The message of existing divides based on masculinity was clear from the first scene of the play, which follows Lee (an effeminate gay prostitute) attempts to seduce his way out of a jail cell. Larry, a closeted cop, is his target. Throughout the scene, arguments erupt over the validity or invalidity of effeminacy within men. For instance, Larry asks Lee, "Why do you have to act like that? Why do you have to let the entire world know you're a little faggot?" To this, Lee replies, "Because, I like to scare real men like you." The action of the play progresses, and a clear anger in Lee is present even while he attempts to manipulate his way out of the jail cell.

In the last scene (in which Lee ends up holding all of the characters hostage in a hotel room after being discovered by the police), the anger of the piece does not resolve, but the conflicts within the play do. Through Lee's provocation during the hostage scene, the torn-apart couple ends up making amends, Larry (forced by Lee), comes out to his father, and Lee, in order to avert facing imprisonment, chooses freedom by going out into

the crowd of policemen with a raised gun therefore inviting them to shoot. The first draft of the play represented a highly divided group of people of the same identity finding resolution together and also represented me as a highly divided individual finding resolution for the many pieces at conflict within me.

One may hear the play's ending and think it seems rather forced, and I would have to agree. Though the play won several awards and received fandom and a staged reading, I was still not satisfied with its condition, specifically that of Lee's character. I was troubled over how little of a human Lee was versus how much of a mouthpiece he was for me as a writer. First of all, why would he need to break out of jail so badly? Second of all, why would he dig himself deeper by holding Mitchell hostage? Lastly, with as tough as his character was, why on earth would he get himself shot in order to avoid prison?

Confusion over questions on the play's validity persisted for a year, and they led me to seek resolution in another project. At the end of my junior year, while taking my Gateway Course for the Writing minor, I was given the challenge to repurpose a work of mine. I chose to repurpose *Captive Barbies*, and I repurposed it by embodying the character of Lee for a night and creating a personal narrative out of my journey. To do this, I had to dress, talk, and act like I would imagine Lee (a highly effeminate, brash, and raunchy individual). The goal of the project was to discover more about Lee to help me rewrite him, but the process ended up focusing much more on my reactions to my surroundings as I played his character.

My reactions revealed more about my own insecurities than they did on Lee's personality traits. The work began to reflect emotional scarring I faced through gayness

or effeminacy. It did not become an outlet for wining, but became an outlet for me to observe past and present pain. A pivotal moment comes when I'm at a party and raw anger begins to erupt:

“Then came anger, the familiar flame that started in my gut and crept through my esophagus into my cranium. It was a defense, freezing me from those around me. An anger that blossomed from the moment I realized my best friend wouldn't talk to me on the playground because I wasn't like the other boys. This anger, internalized, grew and grew until it exploded.”

The project was an interesting example of the way in which, while I tried becoming my character in order to understand them better, I in fact had more realizations about myself. The work demonstrated that the dissections of my identity through my own writing were almost unavoidable. Focus was placed on conflict within myself, bringing me closer to an understanding of my identity but also making me further realize the inner conflicts that categorized my identity. Though Lee started off as a representation of just one piece of my psyche, he then became an outlet for many parts of me. Being Lee did not allow me to understand him more, but allowed me to see the complexities in myself that created him. I realized that if I were to base Lee in anything, this inner conflict and complexity of self should be my inspiration.

After gaining that knowledge, I did not immediately rewrite the play, but delayed that task for quite sometime. Meanwhile, a new passion of mine unfolded. Documentary directing had become my main interest—its ability to capture “the real” fascinated me. After making several projects, I was ready to make a work that explored identity and gender through film rather than theatre. It was at this point that I created the idea of what would become my short documentary, *Rebel*. In this essay documentary, I (as both the

director and the subject of the film), had to learn how to execute the art of drag and perform it within a month.

Originally, I wanted the piece to be about the construction of identity that used a direct mode of identification to make its statements. Unlike other works that observed those that transgressed gender binaries, I wanted to use myself as the narrator of the story to be both the observed and the point of identification for the audience. I hoped that this would make the work more impactful by making the audience themselves feel as if they were part of the portrayed transformation.

I also had a personal stake in the piece, because I wanted to know what the work itself could teach me about my own identity. With my identity coming into conflict under the pressures of breaking gender binaries, I was curious as to what I would learn about myself and which parts of my identity were forced through construction and which were authentic.

The problem I faced, however, was that I did not in fact feel as if I was testing my identity throughout the process. Learning to do drag was, quite simply, fun. As I state in the film when getting dance lessons, “I didn’t feel like I was playing with gender; I just felt like I was learning to dance with sexual grace.” This was the same effect within the make-up tutorial sequence in which I state I “felt like a magician changing my appearance with colorful powders and pastes; it was fun.”

My real crisis of identity, at this point, was a conflict over what it meant to be a documentarian. In the production process, I struggled to find what I should say to make the work impactful. If I didn’t feel like I was in conflict over my gender identity in this piece, then what conflict would be present for my voiceover? Even worse, I was

struggling to feel as if my crew and I were telling the real story, because many of the moments I found most impactful in my journey took place off camera when we couldn't prepare for them to happen—like a first date that went awry due to my drag project or conversations with my friends over my drag name.

I decided to make this the main aim of my story. I would show the visual transformation I did through learning drag, but I would speak through narration about the conflict I felt between telling the “real” story and telling the expected one. The piece concludes, that capturing the total “real” would be impossible. In it, I state, “Capturing reality would have been impossible; it was too big, too elusive.” I conclude, however, that just a drag uses manipulation of reality to reveal the construction of gender, a documentary must manipulate a reality in order to reveal his or her own truth. Also, as drag teaches us, reality itself is highly constructed; therefore, merely capturing reality in an unbiased way does not mean one is capturing “the truth.” The piece used my identity as a platform to experiment with storytelling, displaying the way in which a storyteller must dig through and manipulate a reality laden with its own constructions and inauthenticity in order to reach a story that is truer than reality.

It seemed, at this point then, that I had made a cyclical return to exploring my identity through characters—except this time I was making my very self into a character. The outcome, however, was not just a truth on who I was or a political truth on the divides between people of a similar identity. It was instead an ontological statement on the construction of truth under a monolithic and inauthentic reality.

Only after this project did I feel ready to do my final revision of *Captive Barbies*. The most significant change occurred within the first and last scene—especially in

relation to the character of Lee. While Lee still serves as a mouthpiece to some extent, he becomes less of a political mouthpiece, angry over his oppression, and instead becomes a mouthpiece for the construction of reality itself. While trying to defend why he should be able to execute acts of prostitution, he states, “We all live in our differing realities...and the law, the law tries to fit all of our realities into one.” As the scene escalates, Lee recognizes Larry, and he realizes that Larry is someone with whom he has had history since they were children. The two argue over what their past actually was and Larry minimizes their involvement with each other. Both, however, equally believe the sides of the story that they are telling.

In the last scene, the extent of their relationship is never entirely resolved, but there is now a link between them that deepens Lee’s motivation and internally complicates his character. Also in the last scene, the “married” couple does not reconcile the affair, but the social worker obsessed with normativity reveals that he does not want to continue the relationship. The night has shown him that he only remained in the relationship as an attempt to be “normal.” Now, he states through a nervous rant, he no longer knows what he wants. The last scene and penultimate scene also meditate on the validity of the relationship that is cultivated by the affair in the play. Another relationship’s validity explored is that of Lee and Larry when they were children. Larry states, “We were kids back then—that’s too long ago to even be real.” Lee disagrees, stating, “I liked our reality just as it was.” The work, ultimately, becomes unclear. Its characters are confused over the reality of their own identities, relationships, and lives. They all must ponder whether or not they are being their real selves in real relationships,

or if their forced contexts constructed these identities. Everything within the play becomes unstable, and the work attempts to raise questions rather than make statements.

Looking upon the work now, I feel that my writing aimed to reconcile the divides within my identity, giving me a clearer version of who I am. The end result, however, is a constantly growing division between who I am versus who I think I am. What started as an investigation of self through an array of characters led to an investigation of self through a cast of characters developed from a subset of my identity. From this subset, I had to focus on one character and develop the conflicts in identity within him alone. In order to further test the content of my writing, I situated myself as a character within a story of breaking gender binaries, but found myself invalidating not only gender constructions, but constructions of any type of “reality.” All of this work culminated in a final presentation of self through writing that was more confused and unstable than ever before.

My freshman year, while in advance playwriting, I attempted to make a play that tackled the constructions of identity. It used archetypal characters of different sexualities, races, and genders to make statements on the way the constraints of identity roles detract from people being their true selves. I named the play *The Title Kills the Work*. It’s experimental style led me to utter confusion and I ended up not finishing the play, and with a hundred pages finished, I still needed to write fifty more. When my work became more personal, however, it seemed to have the opposite meaning for me. My work, which became about me dissecting my identity, led to a destruction of my title. It made me unstable in my ability to solidly understand myself both as a person and a storyteller. It was as if writing became like the act of holding a mirror to another mirror, which formed

an endless trail of reflection that had no clear answers in sight. The very notion of identity becomes impossible to capture, and my work becomes a matter of destroying who I think I am rather than building who I must be.

Sitting in the audience of *Captive Barbies* was incredibly bizarre. Not only was I now seeing my characters fully acted out onstage, but I was also able to gage the reactions of audience members that surrounded me. I could criticize or be pleasantly surprised by the director and actors' decisions, and I could monitor the audience's interpretation of the work by listening for their silences, laughs, shifting in chairs, or gasps of surprise. In this moment, my identity felt entirely out of my own control. The dissection of my reality and myself lay in the hands of other people's cognizant and incognizant choices. With my work at its most developed, my identity was at its least stable. It was at this point that I realized that even when my process of writing ended, the breaking apart of my identity would never find a conclusion, but it would continue to fracture exponentially. The work would continue to kill the title. Who I was and how I should perform would never find an answer, but maybe understanding that there was no answer was the answer I was seeking. I could conclude that there was no conclusion. I was liberated from finding answers, and I could celebrate the existence of endless questions.

## Writer's Evolution Essay Annotated Bibliography

Stroud, Levi. *The Writer*. Hartford, 2011. Print.

*The Writer* is a play that could also be called a performance art piece I wrote at the end of my senior year in high school. It explores the interplay between writer and character. Through the monologues of his characters, a writer discloses facets of his identity. The work takes a reflexive approach to stage storytelling and demonstrates that much of a writer's process is determined by his characters rather than himself. It is important to my writing because it was the first time that I used writing as a tool to explore both what it means to write and also what it means to create your own identity. I wrote it at the moment I was transitioning from an adolescent to an adult, and I think that that is reflected in the inquiry of self that takes place in the work. The piece is crucial for my writer's evolution essay because it directly reflects a facet of the essay that explores the dialectic between a writer and his or her work and a writer and his or her characters. It is exemplary of me creating work that demonstrates a questioning of identity, which is the main theme explored in the writing I produced at the University of Michigan.

Stroud, Levi. *August Guilt*. Ann Arbor, 2011. Print.

*August Guilt* is a play that I wrote my freshman year for my freshman writing seminar. The piece follows the story of a Southern Baptist family after the death of their patriarch. At this point in my writing, I was developing through more traditional theatrical narrative construction while also learning how to analyze text for denser thematic material. The father, who was a famous evangelical pastor, was also very abusive behind closed doors. In the play, the family struggles with preserving the father's public identity versus addressing the memory of him for who he really was. The piece was important to my development as a writer because it was the first time I wrote a play in which characters interacted with one another for the entire piece instead of using monologues to communicate their stories. Through their interactions, messages on the rift between public identity and private identity were delivered, which connects to the theme of identity that unites my writing. While the characters were not direct representations of me, they certainly highlighted my interest and frustration with the deceptiveness of identity and its variations.

Stroud, Levi. *The Title Kills the Work*. Ann Arbor, 2012. Print.

*The Title Kills the Work* was a play that I wrote at the end of my freshman year for Advanced Playwriting. At this point, I began to want to write with less narrative impetus and pure thematic impetus. Because of this, I began to experiment with theatre in a way that used more fluid time, character, and place establishment. Overall, the piece was a meditation on identity and the way that society's forced identities limit us as human beings (the title kills the work). It expressed this idea through displaying the story of

several strangers caught within an elevator in a businessman's establishment in Washington DC. The story then alternates between their conflict within the elevator and the narratives of their individual lives. Each of their life stories demonstrate ways in which their archetypal identities reflect limitations and oppressiveness of identity. All of them to some degree have identities that infringe upon their abilities to be themselves or achieve self-actualization. As they each play characters within each other's life narratives, the sense of identity itself begins to dissolve. This work is useful to my evolution essay because it demonstrates my interest in identity not as a subtext but as THE text of my work. It was the first time that I wanted to purely engage with a theme rather than form a story that had thematic subtexts. For this reason, the play served as a declaration for me as a writer and what topic in which I would find myself most invested.

Stroud, Levi. *It's Own Skin Color*. Ann Arbor, 2013. Print.

*It's Own Skin Color* was a piece that I wrote for my race and ethnicity theatre class second semester of my sophomore year. At this point in my life, I felt extreme frustration over the fact that the gay scene itself seemed to worship masculinity and the ability to pass as straight and then discredited men who were more effeminate, or as was often stated, "gay acting." *It's Own Skin Color* explored this frustration by telling the story of two people who were born with a blue skin color. Because their skin was blue, it was obvious that they were homosexual. One embraced the identity by its stereotypical attributes of effeminacy and the other lived in an attempt to debunk such stereotypes. Their monologues tell differing stories that reflect the way that if being gay was its own skin color that everyone had to determine was genetic, it would still have striations. It also discussed the way in which for some being gay itself can be a visual identity—meaning the way they perform connotes homosexuality while others do not bare this burden—and is it a burden? The series of monologues is important to this work because it investigates the first time in which an identity conflict within me began to manifest itself within my work. Not only was I now making meditations on identity, but I was also crafting narratives that reflected my identity in specific, showing a rift between different parts of me that warred with each other rather than complimented each other.

Stroud, Levi. *Captive Barbies*. Ann Arbor, 2013. Print.

*Captive Barbies* was in a way a follow up to *Its Own Skin color*. I expanded on the butch/fem conflict within myself and within gay culture and expanded it into a play in which the characters interacted and had more invested goals and subtexts. It now followed the story of Lee, a gay prostitute that breaks out of jail; Larry, the cop that Lee manipulated into letting him out; and Mitchell and Darrell—two long term partners who's relationship is on the brink of collapse due to Darrell's affair with Larry and Mitchell's unending need for control and an ideal heteronormative life. The piece itself shows the many divides in the gay community, many of which are created by the tension caused by societies ideas of the ideal male versus the gay cultures ideal of the ideal male vs. the actual identity of the individuals within such systems. The play is crucial to this

essay because it displays a very specific division in the parts of myself at war with each other. Rather than merely exploring a binary conflict, the conflict in identity becomes much more dynamic as other parts of identity come into play and more than two characters are incorporated in to the texts that uses dense reflections on identity. Though I was not totally conscious at the time, this was the first work that I would see as highly autobiographical, which is interesting considering that is also one of the most absurd pieces I have ever written.

Stroud, Levi. *Bad Abstraction*. Ann Arbor, 2013. Print.

*Bad Abstraction* was a screenplay I wrote my junior year for introduction to screenwriting—the feature film. At this point in my journey as a writer, I was learning how to combine what inspires me with also learning how to tell a feature-length story through only one protagonist. In order to keep the story engaging, we had to give the protagonist a strong passion and a clear goal. It is not surprising that, in order to relate to the protagonist, I made her a writer in search of a story. At age 28, she was a failed writer that became a high school English teacher in the middle of nowhere. Starved for inspiration, an affair she begins with one of her new, 18 year old students becomes an inspirational fire to which she cannot say no. She must, however, come to terms with the reality of her situation versus the story she wants to tell. This work is important in regards to my evolution essay because it showcases my fascination with the identity that comes behind being a writer and the ways in which writers use their realities to construct their stories while also using their stories to construct their realities. This is a major theme within my work, which focuses on the two way street between identity and story telling. It is imperative in this bibliography because it was the first time that I had to invest a very significant amount of writing to developing only one character to carry an entire story. The way that I explore her as a writer is an important indication of how I can explore myself as a writer due to the investment I had in her and the links that lie between us.

Stroud, Levi. *Removing the Masc to My Thoughts*. Ann Arbor, 2014. Print.

*Removing the Masc to My Thoughts* was a piece that I wrote my junior year of high school as a repurposing project for my gateway course. In it, I created a personal narrative the explored me as I did an embodiment piece. The embodiment piece was based around me becoming Lee, a character from a play I wrote, in order to better understand him. To do this, I bought close to fit the character, did makeup, and also changed my voice and my walk. The work ended up following the developments in my emotional state as I responded to the world around me while I stepped outside of my comfort zone. Not only was I stepping outside of my comfort zone, but I was also stepping into an area of effeminacy in which I was highly uncomfortable. Lee's higher pitched voice, his dramatic hair and makeup, and his skimpy clothes all made me feel over exposed and make me reflect on the scarring that came from growing up an effeminate gay boy in a heteronormative society. The work is very important to my essay because it explores several facets of my identity (writer, homosexual, man), in a way that

dramatize my ability to understand myself and my characters. It explores the dialectic between writer and character while also exploring the inner conflict that occurs within me based on identity transgression. Both of these themes are highly prevalent to my evolution as a writer, and therefore make the piece crucial to my essay.

Stroud, Levi. *The Act of Framing*. Ann Arbor, 2014. Print.

I wrote and shot the act of framing in the beginning of my senior year. At this point in my development, I was learning both to use visual and voice in combination to tell stories in a powerful way. While I was learning creative nonfiction in one class, I was also refining my skills as a documentary maker in another class. This combination of voice and vision led to *The Act of Framing*, a project for an essay documentary assignment in my documentary production class. The essay documentary explores the inner conflict I have with online dating and hookups as I reencounter a gay hookup app, Grindr. It also tells the visual story of all of the frames that surround us and how that is a sign of increasing modernity. In combination, they tell a story that deals with the angst of living in the technology age in which your framed image is everything. The work is important to this essay because it was the first time that I told a highly personal story completely directly, exploring myself and my voice as a person and not through a character's voice. It is also important because it deals with identity and the ways we construct our identities online. Its main question is, "who am I, really?" and "Who are we, really?" This question is very relevant to the themes of identity I explored as a writer, and continue to be important to my writing today.

Stroud, Levi. *Rebel*. Ann Arbor, 2014. Print.

I created *Rebel* in the first semester of my senior year. It was a crucial point in my development in which I had total control over a story idea that I pitched for a group documentary. *Rebel*, a short essay documentary, is both an examination of what it is to do drag and what it is to make nonfiction film. The story begins with the director of the film deciding to make a documentary in which he will learn the art of drag and, within a month, perform it at a club's amateur drag competition. As a documentarian chasing after the pursuit of truth, he believes that by situating himself as both the director and the subject of his film, he will be able to capture a more truthful reality than if the subject was an outside spectacle. As his project unfurls, however, he finds not only challenges to doing drag but also challenges in being able to tell the story he is living versus the story the camera can capture. His project becomes a meditation on gender, performance, filmmaking, and the complications of truth. This essay documentary is very important to my work as a writer because it explores themes of identity, gender, and performance in ways that are very relevant to my development thematically as a writer. Many of my works pursue these same themes. It is also very relevant to my work as a writer because it links storytelling to performance, exploring the ways in which we perform our realities just as we perform the stories that we create. Narrative becomes linked to life and life becomes linked to narrative without a separation to clarify either force as discrete entities.

This commentary is highly present in much of my work and has come to tell the greater narrative that exists between myself and my writing.

Stroud, Levi. *Captive Barbies Draft 2*. Ann Arbor, 2015. Print.

I rewrote *Captive Barbies* during winter break of my senior year. At this point in my writing process, I had learned from others works such as *Removing the Masc to my Thoughts*, *The Act of Framing*, and *Rebel*. These projects both taught me about myself in a way that I could contribute to rewriting *Captive Barbies* and also taught me things about the act of storytelling and reality that could lead to creating more complex themes within the play. The rewrite of the play linked Lee's main drive to a childhood conflict he had with his former good friend, Larry. It also dissolves many of the absolutes that exist in the first draft—such as the idea of the “right way” to be in a relationship or that any of the characters exist within one reality. The play became ambivalent toward what is real and what is definable and instead explores humans as indefinable. In their indefinability, the characters both find freedom and conflict. This work is crucial to my essay because it is the most significant revision of my writing. Not only is the revision pertinent for the sake of it being a major revision, but it also incorporated other writing experience into its makeup. This is very important in documenting the journey I went on as a writer because it displays the way in which my work acted in a stream that continued to dissect reality and identity in very critical ways, which lead to an ambivalence in whether or not I could capture those concepts objectively.