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My Body as a Writing Pad of Social Definition and a Battlefield of Political Demarcation

SEXUALITY, IDENTITY, AND IDENTITY POLICY IN
THE ACT OF WRITING IN THE CLOSET

Once upon a time there was a Greek philosopher named Diogenes who, according to the story, went to the marketplace to masturbate whenever he felt sexual pressure in his groin. Public masturbation was not common in Athens in the fourth century BC. Therefore, Diogenes provoked disgust.¹ In 1977 I was 12 years old and saw a dream about my physical education teacher which caused a new kind of itch in my crotch. Contrary to Diogenes, in that dream I stepped into the closet and when I woke up, there was no way out.

The metaphorical closet is restrictive and repressive circumstance. It is erected in many different places such as legislation, medicine, and culture where its function is to maintain social structures, tradition, and segregation. But it is also productive. Not only does it produce the division between normal and abnormal, accepted and forbidden it

¹ Warner 2005, 21.

also produces an own grammar and speech. In this article I try to elucidate the circumstances and the act of writing in the closet. In my research, writing gravitates to boundaries where the definitions of sexuality and sexual identity are politicized and in constant combat. I approach writing as a social and political function that constructs and deconstructs the distinction between accepted and forbidden. Borders in this article are not only metaphorical but real, as I am a Finnish gay man writing in the Arabian Peninsula. The essential premise is that writing in the closet – as a physical act – means writing in another reality, and therefore reading the texts written in the closet is always a transgression and politically charged.

I begin with illustrating and materializing the metaphorical closet and its effects of to the sexuality, identity, and identity politics, public and private; and vice versa. I rely on the Butlerian understanding of sexuality and subjectivity. At the end, I examine the recursive structure of narration, metalepsis, and paradox from the perspective of boundary politics and their confluences of annihilation of the subject.

The article is based on my master's thesis i.e. self-contemplative autobiographical memoirs *In Search of the Lost Voice, Shaky Boundaries, Unreliable Memories, and False True Stories*² and my *Back to the Closet*³ blog published in Voima.fi web page.

It was Sunday morning. I was alone at home, barefoot, wearing a white t-shirt and boxers, a full cup of coffee in

2 Silvola 2020.

3 Silvola 2018–2019.

my hand when the doorbell rang.

At the door stood three skinny Indian men wearing grey overalls. One of them spoke pidgin English I hardly understood: “Air condition check, sir.” “Sorry, what?” “Air condition, sir!” I let the men in. One of them dragged a high ladder. They headed to the kitchen, I rushed to the bedroom. I glanced over my shoulder to make sure they were not following me. Through the kitchen door I saw two mechanics, but where was the third man? In the bedroom was he not. There were photos on the nightstands on both side of the bed. I leaped to the nearest side table and slid the picture into its drawer and crawled over the bed, grabbed another photo and hid it too.

At first, I will make an overview of queer and gay research and introduce the closet-related factors that have been articulated by other researchers. By the metaphor of the closet, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick means the unarticulated and silenced area where sexual otherness and unconventional identity are confined. The epistemology of the closet is based on the closet as a symbol of the demarcation between visible and hidden, public, and secret in Western cultures.⁴

I did not have time to think about the closets nor if the men were looking inside them. While rushing to the living room, I glanced at them and through the doorway I saw a pair of grey legs hanging from the ceiling.

In my house, there was no need to look inside the closets; a sight of the living room interior design would be

4 Sedgwick 1990, 2–3, 11.

enough. Stylish designer furniture, decorative pillows, roses on an ornamental coffee table. Neither was in this shining white and spotless home living any children for sure. And all the telltale portraits on the bookshelf! I piled them hastily in my hands and took them to the bedside table's drawer. Before I shut it, I made sure the photos were face down.

All of a sudden, I heard the frightening sound of the ladder when the men started to the guest room. I was terrified. I had not had time to check the guest bedroom and the bathroom nor decorate them to look inhabited. They looked exactly as they really were, untouched and empty.

In his book *Narrating the Closet* (2011), Tony E. Adams lists the etymology of the closet as follows⁵: “The closet is a ‘private room’; a ‘place of private devotion’ and ‘secluded speculation’; a ‘private repository’ of ‘curiosities’; as suggested by the phrase ‘skeleton in the closet’: a ‘private or concealed trouble in one’s house or circumstances, ever present, and ever liable to come into view’; a ‘hidden or secret place, retreat, recess’; a ‘den or lair of a wild beast’⁶; a ‘life-shaping condition’⁷; a ‘place for what is very much routinely useful (a broom, a favorite coat, the umbrella that still works) but not all-the-time enough to warrant regular display’; a ‘site of interior exclusion for that which has been deemed dirty’.” Adams divides the epistemology of the closet into three phases: coming in, being closeted, or

5 Adams 2011, 39–40.

6 Sedgwick 1990, 65.

7 Seidman 2002, 8.

living in the closet and coming out⁸.

The metaphorical closet, the core concept of my research, is based on Sedgwick's theory introduced in her *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). At the heart of the epistemic identity-political crisis that began the last century, concerning the epistemic position of the subject, is the definition of male sexuality and the division of men into homosexuals or heterosexuals⁹. Sedgwick writes in his book "that many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured – indeed, fractured – by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century. [-] an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition."¹⁰

It was not odd that we lived together; cohabitation among friends is common here. We did not raise any suspicions at first because our apartment was big enough and we both had our own bedrooms, in theory. Not merely did we share the apartment, we shared the bed. But the building had ears like they often do. And the cleaners', gardeners' and janitors' eyes were lurking at us behind every corner. They all lived in a small apartment on the ground floor, with five men in the same room.

8 Adams 2011, 39–40.

9 Sedgwick 1990, 1–3, 9–12.

10 Sedgwick 1990, 1.

I never thought the men wanted anything bad for us. I was never afraid that they would blackmail us, even it happens here. I never believed they would report us to the police, even the police encourage people to do that. I was afraid of their speech, the gossips. Two men sharing a bed is at least a juicy detail if not a subject of the harshest judgment and the deepest disgust, precisely what it is for most. I was afraid that the gossip would end up to the ears of the house manager and that he would pass it on to the Conservative Islamic Bank that owned the building and was our landlord.

The concept of cultural “normality” could not be produced without the concept of the closet. It is built on secrecy and manifests itself in concealment, avoidance, and silence. Paradoxically, they are all gestures that draw our attention to them and reveal that there is something to be concealed.¹¹

I was laying on the living room couch reading a book, trying to look carefree. The third man had appeared out of the blue when they moved into our bedroom. The horrific noise of the aluminium ladder told me exactly where they were going, and I could imagine what they were doing. What if they go to the bathroom? I collected aftershaves and perfumes. I brought scents from my journeys and bought them from locals. Arabian scents are sweet and strong, patchouli, cardamom, smoke, and tobacco; “French”, as they call them here, are lemon fresh and sporty. In the bathroom, a long marble shelf was loaded with colourful crystal

11 Sedgwick 1990, 67–90.

bottles like the musk and myrrh in Sultan's treasure chamber. Anyone would have figured out that there was a gay man living in the apartment, I thought.

Except I was thinking like a Finn.

Modern masculinity is built on and in relation to rejected or abhorrent femininity¹². Hegemonic masculinity is still produced on a pedestal supported by a manhood deviating from heteronorm, which in turn is equated with male homosexuality¹³. The secret being localized in the realm of sexuality is the result of the discourses in which we have formed our conceptions of subjectivity, embodiment, and the boundaries between the private and the public¹⁴. The control of the relation between sex and gender and the monitoring of the "normality" are formed as an essential part of the terminology to perceive subjectivity, knowledge, and the legitimacy of cultural visibility.¹⁵

Normality is constructed only in relation to those phenomena and modes of being that are confined from normal or defined as deviating from it, says Sedgwick. A homosexual man, deviant from the norm, becomes a culturally central image (and threat) if and when hegemonic, "normal," heterosexual masculinity is understood and recognized as constructed and seen as a process at the boundary surfaces of anomalies and perversions. At the same time, the ongo-

12 Sinfield 1994, Bristow 1995.

13 Silverman 1992, Sedgwick 1995.

14 Foucault 1998, 14–25, 37–42, Helén 1998, 495–512.

15 Hekanaho 2006, 22.

ing cultural demarcation between fragile hegemonic hetero-masculinity and non-hegemonic genders and sexualities becomes visible and meaningful. The demarcation is manifested in the metaphor of the closet depicting the formation of sexual knowledge and secrecy.¹⁶

The knowledge and understanding of our gender and sexuality is built on productive discourses and their various categories, such as medical, legal, psychological, and literary representations, and that these categories are historically contextual and classifying and play a central and crucial role in cultural perceptions of identity, and the ways we produce knowledge and truth.¹⁷

In Finland in 2020s, it is possible to go to the closet, live there and come out – or not step in at all, but there are no closets in Oman, at least not yet. Here it is nothing but a matter of pure sex and sexual behaviour, sex act. Here is no homosexuality in the sense of gay or lesbian identity. Gay men are not visible, and they have no voice in the society and the community do not recognize them. They simply do not exist. “Sexuality is not literally true or real, not even a socially constructed reality, but a literary reality”, says Patricia Clough. She quotes Judith Butler: “A new way of understanding the social that makes the distinction collapse between fantasy and reality, fiction and history, polemical and academic discourse, social sciences and literary research are understandable through the opposition positions of homosexuals and heterosexuals”.¹⁸ On a theoretic-

16 Sedgwick 1990, 34.

17 Sedgwick 1990, 1–3, 11.

18 Clough 1994, 155.

cal level, it is easy for me to agree with Clough and Butler about sexuality as a phenomena in literary sphere, but in practice my body and skin are still a battlefield of political definition and in a constant combat with society. Through my own experiencing body, I understand that the collapse of binaries means the collapse of the boundary between subjectivity and sociality, but not their disappearance. Although borders are collapsing in some parts of the world, subjects still form societies. And those who have been rejected by the society, who have not had socially eligible identity, who have banned themselves while internalising environment's phobia, have internalized the *self-rejection* and the *self-discrimination*, which is the most destructive form of *otherizing*, writes Harri Kalha in his book *Sukupuo- len sotkijat*¹⁹. I research writing in the closet as a social act. Certainly, any writing can be examined as a social act, but the closet makes writing double socially dimensional. The closet is a social and cultural layer hidden inside a Russian doll that intersects the writer.

The rich world of scents was the only thing that made me feel that I belonged here. In Finland, the note "avoid using strong perfumes, some may be allergic to them" on the door of the dressing room in the university's sports facilities pushed me away. Arabic culture is not odourless, tasteless, or vapid, it scents strongly. Incense is burned everywhere, even in malls shopkeepers spray fragrances in the doorways of their stores and men smell of perfume meters away. After washing your hands, you oil your hands with rose water.

19 Kalha 2019, 12. Sievers & Stålström 1984, 42.

Some interpret Diogenes masturbation performance as a philosophy, some see it as just filthy. Similarly, the sexuality of homosexual men and its public manifestations are rarely identified and acknowledged as such but are typically slandered as dirty and criminal. Sanna Karkulehto writes that homosexuality and its prohibition have become a significant, if not the most significant, means of producing identity and subjectivity in our society. In this identity work and information production, the closet is an essential factor and influencer, especially as a symbol that delimits homosexual men and other marginalized sexualities out of the public sphere into privacy.²⁰

Homosexuality is defined as an *open secret* by literary scholar D. A. Miller. He refers to the mechanism of cultural “semi-knowing”, in which what is essential is not the concealment of information but the concealment of what is actually known, that “[t]he subjective practice in which the oppositions of private / public, inside / outside, subject / object are established, and the sanctity of the first terms are kept inviolate. He also points that the phenomenon of the ‘open secret’ does not, as one might think, bring the collapse of their binarism and their ideological effects, but rather attest to their fantasmatic recovery.”²¹

Homosexuality as an open secret creates an “alternative that is unthinkable” as well as a form of cultural otherness that must be kept private, Miller notes. Paradoxically, controlling the border and keeping homosexuality on the private side require some degree of publicity for the phe-

20 Karkulehto 2007, 60.

21 Miller 1988, 207.

nomenon.²² The purpose of homosexuality in society is to represent the shaky boundary between the private and the public and to give a body and face to the threats that transgress that boundary.²³ "The secret keeps a topic like homosexuality in the private sphere, but under surveillance, allowing it to hover on the edge of public visibility. If it gets fully into open, it attains public status; yet it must not disappear altogether, for then it would be beyond control and would no longer have an effect for the general surveillance of aberrant desire."²⁴

Michael Warner sees the metaphorical closet as a phenomenon that distorts the opportunities for gay men and lesbians to use public or private voice. The closet is, in his view, a misleading metaphor. It refers to "self-evident" and axiomatic assumptions that do not need to say out loud. It refers to those silences when we do not want to brake against good manners. It applies to those we feel obliged to come out in public. But what can we really know about the true nature of a man based on the information conveyed by a telltale? What is the value of information given about a person without his or her knowledge and without hearing him or herself? And who bears the consequences of our gossiping and silences? Warner writes how speech is controlled and censored unequally everywhere. He shows the irony that, according to general mythology, we understand the closet as an individual's lie to himself. We blame individuals for staying in the closet and not coming out

22 Miller 1988, 194–195, 207.

23 Sinfield 1994, 8–9.

24 Sinfield 1994, 9.

to us. However, the closet is rather a problem of a society than of an individual. No man creates a closet for himself. People find themselves in its repressive conditions before they even realize what happened to them. Lesbians and gay men perceive it as private and individual, subjective shame and deception. However, it is produced by the heteronormative assumptions and settings of everyday speech. It feels private but is built in public.²⁵

At last, I heard the men leaving the bathroom on their way out of the apartment.

In a system that controls and manipulates sexuality, publicity feels like revelation and privacy feels like a closet. The closet is full of fear and shame and so is the sphere surrounding it. The matter of being publicly known as homosexual is never the same as being publicly known as heterosexual; the latter is self-evident and does not disturb anyone, while the former carries echoes of pathologized visibility. It is completely irrelevant to “come out” as a heterosexual. Therefore, it is not true, as is often claimed, that homosexuals live a private life without a secure public identity. They have no privacy or publicity in the normative meaning of the terms at all. It is this imbalance between the public and the private – and that performative ritual known as “coming out” – that is what identity politics seeks to change.²⁶

Warner argues that the content of gender and sexuality

25 Warner 2005, 51–52.

26 Warner 2005, 52–53.

is defined only partially in homes or families. They are also constantly shaped by a wide range of social relations, and especially in the mass media's visual language of incorporation and desire. While we may feel that gender and sexuality are confined to our private lives, the public sphere is the most important instance in which our embodiment and social relations are shaped.²⁷

The doorbell rang on Saturday morning.

Three men stood at the door. One of them was the house manager.

My heart stopped. Suddenly, my mouth was dry as camel's tongue in the desert.

"Pest control, sir."

I had forgotten all about it. The house manager smiled unctuously.

"Not now", I said.

"When, sir?"

"Come back in two hours." I slammed the door. Probably unnecessarily harsh. A bad conscience knocked the door next. But for once I had caught it on quickly enough. The air condition mechanics may not open the doors of the closets, but the pest controllers will do for sure.

I call my writing space, using the terms invented by feminist and queer theorists, *a queer standpoint*. Feminist and afrocentric standpoint theories emphasize the everyday life experiences of marginalized minorities as the material base on which the theories are built. Strategies of individual's stories bring to light the spectrum of past and present lives

²⁷ Warner 2005, 54.

of gays and lesbians. The theory is still a relevant basis for writing, as the experiences of outsiders, marginalized individuals, provide a unique perspective on social and political life that is accustomed to be seen and presented as objective, but that actually is presented in the heteronormative perspective. The same logic applies to claims of sexuality presented as objective truths. The fundamental finding of standpoint theory was that all knowledge and knowing are socially localized.²⁸

“Leave the boots on”, the man says and licks my ear.

I am already naked, but I pull my new, genuine fake snakeskin boots back on my feet before I lay down on the thick plastic mattress. The second I smell a sour sweat of countless children I begin to feel qualm. Does this man have a boot fetish? I do not like fetish guys. I am not a fetish I say to myself laying on the mattress my boots towards the ceiling of the gymnasium’s storage.

Diogenes’s behaviour was “performative critique”, “a way of calling attention to the visceral force behind the moral ideas of public and private”²⁹. He tried to erase the distinction, which he regarded as artificial, contrary to nature, and the false morality of a corruption that mistook itself for civilization, writes Warner in his book *Publics and Counterpublics*³⁰.

28 Gamson 2000, 351.

29 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, quoted in Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley, 1985, 54.

30 Warner 2005, 21.

The man takes off his clothes and throws them on the horse. He is handsome, in a very masculine way. Tall and beefy, by no means a pretty boy like me. He is the type that “pass” everywhere. And probably firmly in the closet. At the bar, he said he had seen me before. I had stopped next to his car by bike at the traffic lights. Cycling tights on. He had recognized me as the model posing in all magazine ads and campaign posters. Don’t say he has a sports gear fetish too?

If I went to *Matrah Souq* and imitated Diogenes, it would cause far more serious consequences than mere public disapproval or loathing. I would be jailed. My testosterone production would be disconnected chemically³¹. In Finland, too, masturbation in public is a crime; more innocent acts and expressions of sexuality, such as kisses, hugs, and holding hands, would not lead to jail like here, but are condemned. People do not want to *see* them. Such behaviour is appropriate to engage only behind the bedroom door and the curtains closed. But my sexuality, which is strictly considered as a matter of privacy, can at least be the subject of public debate. In Arabian Peninsula not.

I have had this dream since I was in seventh grade in middle school. Have sex in the school gymnasium. I guess it started when I saw a dream where I was in the locker room’s shower with my PE teacher. When I woke up, I understood

31 All inmates are given a drug that prevents the formation of testosterone. It drives prisoners’ testosterone production and at the same time libido down aiming to prevent sexual intercourse between prisoners.

that something had profoundly changed. I was gay. From that moment on, I desired to make love with my teacher on the bulky mattress in the equipment storage. I fantasized how he put me in detention in the middle of the class and commanded me to the storage (to wait for him). After the class, when the other boys had gone to the shower, he came to the dim room where I was waiting my heart pumping faster than in push ups and squats and line-touch-running. He told me to undress myself as a part of the punishment. I pulled my t-shirt slowly higher, even I wanted to tear it off with one yank. He undressed himself, came to me and started to grope me, strongly and harshly. Ten years I have been dreaming about it.

The man lands on the mattress and crawls towards me. I swing on the bad-smelling plastic like in a bouncing castle. The plastic pinches my bare skin. He kisses me. The lips are too wet and slippery. I turn my head away and look over his shoulder at the ceiling. My boots look ridiculous.

Gender and sexuality have been, and still are, in a transition that has fundamentally changed our understanding of our embodiment, identity, and social relations. That includes our subconscious manifestations and ways we understand ourselves and our bodies as public or private.³² I engage the “Butlerian” understanding of sexuality and gender, meaning so called radical or performative gender theory. According to Butler’s theory, bodily performances are built on the basis and on top of the previous performances; thus, the body is not completely free for any kind of performances but is trapped in its own history. Cultural

32 Warner 2005, 51.

products are caught in a similar trap as genders are saturated by *always-already* representations, mostly defined according to the prevailing, stereotypically constructed system³³. However, the rational-critical debate we have on the subject is not neutral or detached from our bodies, even if we would like to see our embodied lives separate, private, local, or merely affective and expressive. The ways in which we embrace our public significance are controversial and contradictory. To be able to bracket our embodiment and status, we need a strategy of distinction, fundamentally linked to education and to dominant forms of masculinity.³⁴ Livia Hekanaho writes that the closet itself is at the same time a restrictive and productive concept. The epistemology of the closet includes the grammar of the closet as a productive factor. The closet is erected with linguistic and textual gestures and strategies for producing, shaping, and renewing cultural secrecy. The closet grammar refers to those linguistic and narrative means by which information about an unspoken secret is constructed and deconstructed.³⁵

At the bar, the idea had felt super good. I saw a man who looked handsome in the dark. He was exactly what I call “my type”. Pretty quickly he came to hit me. It didn’t take many lines than he was ready to be dragged to the school. I guess I had subconsciously planned something like this to happen because I had the school keys with me. A heavy

33 Kekki 2010, 17; Koivunen 2004, 247–248.

34 Warner 2005, 51.

35 Hekanaho 2006, 24.

bundle with a blue-yellow football and a referee's whistle. We took a taxi in front of the bar and drove to Eastern Helsinki. I knew our way to the gymnasium in the dark and not until in the windowless storage I felt safe enough to turn the lights on. Now I regret and just want to take a shower, yet I let his hands travel all over me, on my naked body he desires so. It does not hurt nor feel too bad, even though my lust for him disappeared before he even touched me. I would love to write that "I let him caress my body" but, how could I? He cannot do that. At least not another man. Caressing means doing good to another, and to do that, one must accept oneself. This man can only take, not give. And the lights on, he is not that handsome either.

The homosexual transgression occurs in the bedroom or gymnasium equipment storage, but it manifests itself outside them in society and challenges society's ability to accept it. The battle is fought for public visibility and public voice and the definition of what must be locked in the private sphere. As I cited Warner earlier, the intention of identity politics is to effect to the imbalance between the public and the private. I argue that when it is concerning the homosexuality and the closet moving the border between public and private is not enough. The borderline must be completely erased. The closet must be destroyed and dismantled so that it no longer exists. I suggest that in literature and by writing metalepsis, paradox, and the recursive structure of narrative are means by which the focus can be transferred from the subject to the structures. They are narrative means which make the boundaries visible. When a text makes the subject meaningless and unimport-

ant, we can concentrate our attention to the discriminatory structures to tear them down.

In a story-within-the-story the stories are separate from each other, there is a boundary between them. One story is embedding, the other embedded. This recursive structure is described in many terms. Jean Ricardou uses the term a-story-within-the-story. Brian McHale compares the recursive structure of narrative to Chinese box and Russian doll in his article *Chinese-Box Worlds* (1987). He also uses the term nesting as a synonym for the concept of embedding. The dictionary definition is embedding. Viveca Füredy bundles phenomena - plays with a play-within-the-play, novels with novels-within-the-novel, paintings with paintings-within-the-painting, films with films-within-the-film, paintings or plays -within-the-film, Chinese boxes, Russian Dolls, paradoxes, quotations, free indirect speech, *mise en abyme* - into one category of narrative structure from which she uses the general level term of *embedding-embedded-objects*. All these terms refer to a multifaceted and heterogeneous set of strategies and structures in which another story is embedded within a story, as well as a recursive structure in which the former creates the latter.

Notable literary scholar Tzvetan Todorov (1939–2017) defines embedding in its simplest form as the interruption that the emergence of a new character inevitably causes in the text and results a new story. Embedded story introduces a new character to us: “*I’m* here now”. The reader may interpret “now *he* is here”, whereas I suggest: “*now* he is *there*”. I italicize time and place and leave He as it is. Contrary to Todorov, who argues that occupying nested stories with the same, unchanging characters makes the structure

meaningless, I suggest that the characters are unimportant and meaningless. This is essential for transferring the focus from the subject to the structure by “destroying” the character, that is, making him or her irrelevant.

I write inside the closet, but most of my readers have never been there. One cannot visit the closet. A person either is there, has come out, or has never been there. How well and truthfully can one describe space and write about the life there? Can we overall understand, truthfully and profoundly, something we have never experienced? According to Todorov, the ultimate meaning of embedding becomes apparent in the recursive structure of narration, when the embedding story is always a story not only about the narrative but also about narrating. He points out that the narrative fulfils its fundamental mission, that is, telling a story by telling another story, and at the same time reflecting the image of itself. The embedded story gives us a sight of that vast, abstract narrative of which all other narratives are parts³⁶ “To be the narrative of a narrative is the fate of all narratives which realizes itself through embedding.”³⁷ My proposition for writing in the closet occurs right here: a collapsing metalepsis or unresolved paradox tells more truthfully and describes writing in the closet more sharply than the words one tries to use to describe the phenomenon itself. The boundaries separating the logical levels of narrative can be made visible and they can be transgressed, the boundaries of the structures of society can be overthrown, but the gap between narrative and real

36 Todorov 1977, 70, 72.

37 Todorov 1977, 73.

life cannot be crossed in real life – artificially in literary it is possible.

“Let’s go to the shower”, I say and slide away under him. He does not object. I get up and pull him up too. We stay standing skin on skin for a while. He is taller than I and the boots. Once more I kiss the mouth too wet.

The corridors are dark and the locker room door bangs behind our backs. Too loud, but I don’t care. The lightning is dim in the shower. I barely see him. The reality does not live up the dream. He does not wrap his arms tightly around me. I do not lean my back on him, against his sturdy body like an oak. His arms are not squeezing me harder and harder as mine when I hug a tree yearning for the dream come true. I do not feel safe and secure, unspeakably happy now. This is not my dream.

When writing in the closet about life in the close, it is about writing *self-contemplative autobiographical memoirs*. The longing for logical and a clear conclusion still applies to majority of life-writing and volumes of story type called *My Story*. When structuring our own internal story or telling about our life to someone else, when writing the memoirs of the autobiographical self, we still often present the story as logical and coherent, where one thing leads to another and in the end from rags to riches or the other way around. Whatever happens in our lives, the causal relationship of the story is usually obvious to both the narrator and the reader. Usually, we also take it for granted that it is a true story. However, in this article I confess that I lie, but can one really put a finger on top of the difference between the truth and the lies?

Every Monday we have a long and tedious meeting. Too many of us love their own voice and their life mission is to sit in the meetings for as long as they possibly can, especially on Mondays.

“One more thing.”

Metalepsis, like embedding in general, makes boundaries visible and at the same time is part of the narrative itself. In Gérard Genette’s narratological theory, the term refers to the merging of two separate logical levels of narration. Narratology Viveca Fűredy describes the definition of Genette’s metalepsis as “[...] boundary transgression in narrative [...] as any form of transition between narrative levels other than that ‘achieved’... by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation”³⁸. Fűredy also presents the division defined by McHale into three different categories of metalepsis: 1) from the inner level outwards, 2) from the outer level inwards, and 3) temporal metalepsis.

In the first case, for example, a character reading an autobiographical novel reads a novel whose character tells his opinion of the author and accuses him for embellishing or even lying – whereby the narration jumps completely over one logical level and problematizes the credibility of the author and his or hers autobiographical writing as whole. The narration thus makes leap from the embedded level to the embedding level, from the inner level outwards, mixing the narrative levels with each other and confusing the boundary between them. In the second type, a character

38 Fűredy 1989, 760.

might address the reader and asks him to participate in the activities of the novel, such as telling his opinion on one character's fetishes. The third, temporal metalepsis, presents some past or future event as a "magic trick": It transfers to the logical level of the embedded story, even though it is "really" happening in the embedding story, or other way around. It is therefore a question of erecting an intact boundary where it does not really exist or where it does not belong.³⁹

"One more thing!"

Suddenly, the room is quiet. The papers and notebooks which were rushing into the bags and briefcases stop and remain floating in the air.

"A resident of the janitor's apartment heard voices from the gymnasium last Saturday night."

It hits me. It sucks all oxygen out of my lungs. I feel like a football kicked to the horizon. I sit in the back row, right at the other end of it. The film begins to run in my head, and I watch the principal telling next how that resident went after the voices to investigate and saw the PE teacher on the bulky blue mattress, naked. The only accessory, the boots, briskly towards the sky.

I did not even know someone was living in the building. The apartment must be located on the backside I never go. Trapped between the wall and the rest of the row I could not escape even if I wanted. The principal keeps on spilling tea. I will get fired. I do not care about losing my job, but about the shame. No. It is not about the shame, but about the boots! I stay paralyzed on my seat. I squeeze the

39 Füredy 1989, 761.

blue-yellow football in my fist as hard as I can.

“Didn’t he go after the noise?” Someone in the front row wants the principal to spill more tea.

“He is no guard nor obliged to go after the sounds that come from here in the middle of the night. After all, there are no traces of burglary anywhere. Apparently, someone in the neighbourhood has the school keys. Maybe the drug gang that broke in last year and got into the office got them.”

“When the levels distinguished by this type [the intact but reified] of boundary are incomplete, constantly referring to the other level for completion, and when there is simultaneously a conflict between them, we have the structure of paradox”, defines Füredy⁴⁰. The paradox is characterized by the fact that it has no meta-level. In other words, there is no stable level outside the paradox from which the paradox could be resolved. I tried to apply G. E. Moore’s (1873-1958) paradox of analysis to writing in the closet. Moore’s idea was that no analysis can be both true and informative. If we take as a starting point “ $a = b$ ”, where a is what is analysed and b is what is offered for analysis, a and b can have 1) the same meaning, in which case the analysis expresses a triviality or 2) they have a different meaning, in which case the analysis is untrue. Based on this it can be concluded that no analysis can be both true and informative at the same time. The paradox of analysis helps us understand that a scale cannot weigh itself.

For Moore, utilizing the distinctiveness of language precedes analysis. The analysis focuses on the notions and

40 Füredy 1989, 755.

propositions defined verbally. However, verbal expressions often have more than one meaning, which is why different meanings must be distinguished as precisely as possible before analysis. Precise separation of meanings is necessary to show which meaning is being talked about.⁴¹ Thus, Moore was unsure of the way in which the analysis involved verbal expressions, which is why he prescribed three conditions for the analysis: 1) *a* and *b* should be notions and if the analysis is true, *a* and *b* should be in some sense the same notion. 2) The expression describing *a* must differ from the expression describing *b*. In addition, the concepts describing *b* must explicitly mention concepts that are not used when describing *a*. 3) The concepts used in the analysis must explicitly mention the method of aggregation.⁴²

I try to apply Moore's paradox of analysis in the context of the closet and sexual orientation to the self-contemplative memoirs of the autobiographical self, which I condense into the form "autobiography". For the analysis, I have to create three different versions of the clause "autobiography = true story": 1) autobiography (of a heterosexual) = true story 2) autobiography (of a homosexual) = true story 3) autobiography (written in the closet) = true story. As both a reader and a writer, our basic premise for the autobiographical self-contemplative memoirs, or autobiographies, is that we read or write a "true story", that is, it is always a certain kind of documentary, even a belletristic one. When an author of an autobiography is a person identified as heterosexual and alleged to be heterosexual,

41 Fratantaro 1998, 111.

42 Moore 1968, 666.

he or she has no need to “come of the closet”, according to Warner, he or she has no need to conceal his or her sexual orientation. Therefore, the equation “autobiography = true story” would be true. Also, if an author is a homosexual who is both identified and alleged to be homosexual, i.e., he or she has “come out” or never “went in”, we can assume that he or she no longer needs to conceal his or her sexual orientation, hence he or she is trustworthy as a narrator. On the other hand in the third case, where an author writes his or her autobiographical memoirs in the closet, i.e., he or she conceals a significant part of his or her personality and identity, we can no longer fully trust him or her as a narrator. Referring to Hekanaho, we must keep in mind that he or she is likely to use euphemisms and allusions, often hinting instead of saying things straight out as they are or saying nothing and keeping silence, or even telling lies. Thus, the first two versions of the paradox of analysis “autobiography = true story” would be true, but the third version would be false, even though they all have the same verbal expression of a . Writing in the closet questions Moore’s paradox of analysis and reveals its weakness in defining the meaning of notions and their verbal and linguistic expression, concepts, – which are not mathematical, biological or natural scientific but social and political. When we examine subjects or phenomena in perspective of an insider in the society, we approximately share the same understanding about the meanings of words, concepts and notions, and a common understanding that $a = a$ and what we mean with b . But if we are positioned as an outsider and marginalized, we grow up realizing that in the equation $a = a$ both a can have different meaning re-

garding who, when, where and what is it used for. When I apply Moore's theory to my own writing in the closet, my self-contemplative memoirs of the autobiographical self, there are two options: 1) I may speak the truth or I may lie, or 2) the realities and therefore the meanings of the notions are different. In the end, the reader creates his or her own story, independent and separate from the realities of *a* and *b*, by jumping out of the paradox. Neither Moore had a clear solution to his paradox of analysis, and attempts made to solve it have failed for many different reasons, e.g. because, paradoxically, key ethical concepts such as "what is goodness" have been impossible to define. The paradox can only be escaped by "jumping out" of its system⁴³.

"Single beds, sir?"

I stand at the reception of a luxury hotel in Dubai. My spouse fills out the passenger cards. The receptionist looks at me straight in the eyes and repeats louder: "Single beds, sir?"

Should we drag the single beds together and separate them again before checking out? Suddenly, I remember the blue mattress, the man I dragged from the bar to the school gymnasium, and my PE teacher that I for so long dreamed of. Always the same dream. Always in the shower with him, unspeakably happy. In real life, he often threw me out of the class. Maybe I did not make enough effort in the push-ups, squats and line-touch-running. Maybe I was trying to attract his attention the wrong way. He used to yell at me: "Get out of here! We don't need a sissy like you here!" I always escaped to the equipment storage. The other guys

43 Füredy 1989, 755–756.

never said anything. I would rather be dead than talked about it. It was easier to be like nothing ever happened. And every night he came with me to the shower. Do you think there is a fitted carpet in the room or a slippery marble floor that makes the heavy beds slide lightly? I hate the gap between the beds; especially if they tend to slide apart during the night.

*Drawing Hands*⁴⁴, M.C. Escher's lithograph from 1948, is a famous paradox in which two hands draw each other's cuffs. From the picture, we cannot deduce which one of the hands started drawing first or which one gets the job done. We must "jump out" from its sloping level to either the pure white part of the paper or go further from it and take the viewer's perspective. The leap we make out of the paradox is as inexplicable as the paradox itself.

I may be trapped in a paradox, but you cannot know it for sure; after all, it is possible that the narrators' voices are mixed only in my head and not on the different logical levels of diegesis.⁴⁵

Had I courage to ask for a double bed? The rights of sexual minorities are severely curtailed in the UAE. A gay man has little if any rights here. Sodomy is strictly forbidden under the threat of punishment. If I got caught having sex with another man, it would be anything between fines and death. Arrest, prison sentence, flogging, torture, finally deportation.

44 Escher 2016, 88.

45 Silvola 2020a, 69–72.

There are no homosexuals here. Here are only men who have sex with other men. Afterwards, they go home to their wives and children to have dinner. "Single beds, sir?"

When in Robbe-Grillet's *Topologie d'une Cité fantôme* (1976) one of the actors hits the tarot card "tower" on the table on the stage, we already have slipped two levels below the reality of diegesis when an illicit transgression occurs. A prop tower erected on the stage is thus double embedded - the first embedding is the play itself the second is the world of tarot cards. On top of the prop a mother is exploring the landscape with her two children. Illicit transgression occurs when the trio begins to descend a spiral staircase down to the stage; to the level where the tarot card was hit on the table.⁴⁶ "Thus, we are literally back where we started from, but at the wrong narrative level! This is precisely the sort of violation of the hierarchy of narrative levels [-] What makes this instance from *Topologie d'une cite fantôme* particularly exemplary, even emblematic, is the literally spiral shape of the characters' descent to their starting-place."⁴⁷

Once upon a time in Dubai, a 34-year-old man from Europe met a Pakistani man through a dating app. After six months of chatting the guy invited the Pakistani over. He came, with his friend, but not with loving intentions. They stripped the host naked, beaten him up and tied him to the bed. Then they robbed the flat from valuables. The European guy went to the police station and reported a crime.

46 McHale 1987, 119.

47 McHale 1987, 119.

The robbers were caught. When the other one of them told to the police that he had met the guy through a gay dating app, the criminal investigation was directed at the victim; the victim became a suspect. Here, the maximum penalty for sodomy is 10 years in prison, but in practice, sentences have varied between one month and one year, followed by deportation. Ambushes set up for gay men are common. Traps are set up by the police as well as predatory robbers and blackmailers.

“Single beds, sir?” On the reception wall hang portraits of the rulers of the Emirates. In golden and bulky frames. They look fierce like Ali Baba with his gang in *One Thousand and One Nights* and they all nail their wild eyes on me.

Would I dare openly ask for a double bed in a country where our relationship is a crime? If I were caught but lucky, the least damage would be fines, a short arrest, and deportation. And staggering attorney fees and litigation costs, of course. And my partner would lose his job and at the same time his work and residence permit. Oh, I almost forgot, we would lose our home.

In Pirandello’s play *Tonight We Improvise* the Actors are on their way to the theatre at the end of the first act and at the same time they are afraid that they will be badly late and will miss the first act. They rush off the stage and arrive at the foyer, walk in the grandstand chatting loudly, and settle on their seats to watch themselves going to the theatre to watch themselves going to the theatre and so on. The play chews and swallows itself like it would be a gum. The loop can be imagined to start at the same point, from the end

of the first act – the first act has indeed just ended – and it is the first act of an outer play in which the “spectators” of the inner play appear as characters. In the self-gulfing structure, the work inevitably leaves an opening, a hole, or a space that cannot be reached, that cannot even be seen, but that we can imagine. Actors in Pirandello’s play are not able to physically see themselves stepping out of or into the play. There is an opening, space, and time in between as the Actors rush through the back of the stage out into the foyer and back to the auditorium. The logical levels of a structure are “atypical” or undefined, as “swallowing” can occur at any level. And unlike recursive structures based on the repetition of analogies, self-referring and self-gulfing structures are all about identity. As with all transgressive structures, we are in fact dealing with “mistranslation” and, at the same time, “mispunctuation”. “Orthodox” punctuation creates a spiral that takes one up or down, like a girl on the side of a Droste’s cocoa jar. In a “false” punctuation structure, on the other hand, different logical levels are represented through one and the same unrepeated object, with the spiral effect collapsing into an empty circle.⁴⁸

“Single beds, sir?” The receptionist is intolerable. The marble lobby, decorated with gold, also resembles a palace in the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Although the hotel is air-conditioned and cold as a morgue, the shirt sticks to my sweaty back. I still cannot get a word out of my mouth. Confronting an army of riveting eyes, I hope to become invisible.

My partner is still bent over the passenger card. Really,

48 Füredy 1989, 763.

how long can it take to complete it? Outside the walls of home, I am afraid that for a moment I will forget where I am. I am afraid that I accidentally touch my partner inappropriately. Walking hand in hand would not be inappropriate if we were Indian and could hold our hands in correct way. That would just be a sign of good friendship. But we are not Indians and we do not know how to hold the hands in the right way. The line between acceptable and inappropriate is blurred, like a line drawn on the desert sand. The sand runs under your feet and suddenly you find yourself falling into a deep pit.

“Be the hero of your story!” exhorts the personal growth trade and social media industry suggesting that the self is constituted in the act of narration or endless representation through which we emerge as more realised beings. “Such a view is underpinned by faith in individual choice and agency, propping up the myth that we are free to choose our reality by focusing on the facts we most value. This premise steers you to believe that the same level of creativity is required to invent yourself as when you write fiction”⁴⁹ – or upload a beauty filtered selfie or a video to your social media account. I argue that the skills of an author alone are no longer enough, but the abilities of a skilled marketing professional to create our true self, to be at our best and a personal brand, are needed in virtual reality. Narrative tools of virtual reality and digital filters make the Moore’s paradox of analysis even more complex and challenge the narrator’s reliability in autobiography even more.

49 Park 2016, 476.

“Single beds, sir?” The receptionist is relentless, she has no intention of releasing me from her torment. I think my head will explode. Finally, my partner raises his head, stand up straight, smiles as widely and confidently as only a North American can, and asks, “Don’t you have a king-size?”

The myth of a hero is hard to fit in the closet. However, it brings out one essential boundary of writing: outside the closet one can make the readers believe on one’s own “heroic story” based on subjectivity, but inside the closet it is most obvious that writing is more of a social action than an individual’s self-expression. A prisoner bound in handcuffs may imagine himself free, but the shackles still do not disappear. They will not disappear, even if we changed the perspective of the story or told it differently. To free the prisoner, we must change or at least rewrite the story. I mean the objective reality of social structures and historical, political, social and cultural circumstances, not interpretative, and which Paulo Freire, for example, referred to as structures of oppression that do not go away by claiming that they do not exist⁵⁰.

I grew up straight jacket on. I learned to write my hands tied up. I found the recursive structure as a mean to make the social boundary and my resistance against it visible. And not only visible, but more; Recursive structure destroys an individual by fading him or her irrelevant and meaningless. It does not allow us to turn our eyes away from the boundary but make choose our side.

50 Suoranta & Rynnänen 2016, 119.

We X-generation⁵¹ gay men will arguably never be called “ordinary decent men” nor “real men”. For most of us, it is too late to become “a family man, a father” either. We remain odd, “those” or “such” men who are “known”, and “tolerated”. We continue controlling ourselves relentlessly, pulling different social roles for several different “audiences,” and guarding, observing, and regulating our speech, emotional expressions, and behaviour for fear of revelation. In addition to self-regulation and self-control, we tell every day small and big lies to protect our secret.⁵²

The closeted sexual identity also produces a new perspective. According to John Dewey understanding new information or embracing a new perspective requires an immediate experience of the existence or quality of the matter. He argues that experience is a living, constantly evolving way of being and a form of perceiving and understanding it.⁵³ S. Kvaløy, for his part, states that the most important thing in deepening understanding is the experience that are generated in battles of truth or life-guiding values^{54, 55}. Nevertheless, my experiences in the closet give me a per-

51 Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*: born 1964–1979.

52 Adams 2011, 72–83.

53 Dewey 1933, 132, 156.

54 Kvaløy 1993, 150.

55 Suoranta & Rynnänen write “that experience itself teaches nothing until its examined and put to a context, connected to a theory, or other frameworks that guide understanding and action (2016, 343).

spective, an outsider's gaze, a kind of otherness that may be difficult to achieve with the strategy of ordinariness, growing up and living inside the circles of normality and safety and acceptance. According to the feminist theorists, the social status of the discriminated allows for a more holistic and nuanced view not only of their own lives but of the social reality as whole⁵⁶. As Warner argued earlier, the goal of identity policy is to make the "coming out" unnecessary, that is, to destroy the closet once and for all. It is a matter of destroying one existing concept of a boundary in the society. Similarly, Moore's paradox of analysis is about a boundary: $a = a$ is an infinite equation, in the case of $a = b$ the equation is crossed by a boundary, a difference. With an identity policy – when succeed – we may be able to dispose of the closet and eliminate one boundary, but the real borderline, the border between normal and abnormal, accepted and forbidden, does not disappear, the boundary only moves to another place. The boundaries do not disappear from language nor writing. Without differences between letters, words, meanings, we cannot express anything. Therefore, I argue that the battles of identity politics must take place in the real world, in real life. Literature and writing can only be a pale and faint reflection that is paradoxical and prone to exclusive interpretations. Therefore, the most significant boundary we must guard and monitor lays between the reality and fiction.

Last year, I taught academic writing at the university in Muscat. My colleague was born in Turkey. She had studied engineering and done her dissertation in the UK. She

56 Harding 2007, 46; Hesse-Biber 2007, 10.

had stayed in Manchester teaching at the university. There she had also found her husband to come, another Turkish engineer. They have two children. The daughter is studying medicine, the boy is playing football and planning to study sports science. She teaches logistics here. Her husband has got a very lucrative job in an oil company and moved to Saudi Arabia.

In my *Back to the Closet* blog posts, I did not describe violence or the brutal interference of the society in such matters that we Westerns consider to be within the sphere of individual decision-making and free choice. Nothing like that happened to me. Instead, I tried to describe those little, seemingly insignificant events of everyday life, mostly small white lies that are like water drops hitting a speleothem. They grow the core lie so slowly and so little at a time that you barely notice it, and in the end, an enormous muting stone covers everything else.

She is going to meet her husband. She has been waiting for the documents for her visa for about a month. They are late and she is furious. The oil company is having a personnel event, a big party that she absolutely must attend. “Saudi Arabia, you know. My husband has just moved there and is living alone. It is crucial for him to introduce his wife to his superiors and colleagues.”

As a critique of an overly literary view, Kenneth Plummer warns against “the overtaxation of lesbian and gay experiences,” by which he means that discursive analysis captures dominance in research at the expense of real-world

events. He sees the importance of doing research in the empirical world as well, and the obsession to texts alone is dangerous. Plummer says it is time to move beyond the texts, to the real world. While the world of poetry, novels, and their fictional juries and imaginary witnesses play an increasing role in gay and lesbian research, relatively little research is done what is really going on in the real world of gay people right now.⁵⁷

“Single man, impossible there, you know...”

Without saying, I know what she means. In Arabian Peninsula, the social pressure, heteronormativity, and familynormativity are all so compelling that they force people to marry, even against their own will. I do not know if anyone is strong enough to resist the pressure. Except by escaping. A single man is an outcast that is excluded from the community. Here, the family and the tribe are not only the basic unit but the only unit of the society. Therefore, I fully understand what she is not saying. I know, what she means by her quick glimpse she did not managed to hide and her uneasy laugh. The blink of her eye and the laugh are textbook examples of the grammar of the closet. Insinuation. She let me understand that she knows my “secret”, understands my situation, and maybe is sorry for me. In English, she means that there would be nothing for a man like me in Saudi Arabia. People like me are not hired and we are not wanted. She knows that I am unmarried and childless. I told her that. No, that is not quite true. She asked me about my family situation when I first met her.

57 Plummer 1998, 611.

My Story is not true but is it false either? It is not a story at all, it has no beginning, no middle, no end. Now, I am exhausted to tell more true lies and false truths. Even the coming out do not stop the lies. Pretending, acting, self-control, and self-regulation do not stop; pretty much everything stays the same. In social encounters, I have two options: tell the truth or lie. I usually choose the latter. I defend myself by saying that they are half-lies. I tell that I am a single and have no kids. The latter is true.

In the end, I realize that the lies are not mine. I did not steal anybody else's voice, but I borrowed the lies. They are social, lines written by society, by the community and previous generations, and I am just expected to repeat them. I am not the only liar here. Not only gay men lie. We all weave a collective web of lies and are trapped in it. We all play this game and perform, repeating lines screen-written by culture, belief-systems, ideologies, religions, myths, customs, and traditions. Like, for example, the prescription the psychiatrist wrote for me after one barely failed suicide attempts in 2010. If I had refused to take that antidepressant, the Finnish social security agency would have refused to grant me the health allowance. When I went to pick up the medicine, the pharmacist repeated her line: "Do you know that this medicine may increase the risk of suicide?" I rewrite Moore's paradox of analysis " $a = b$ " in form of " $a =$ we are all lying" or " $b =$ we are all crazy". We do not use words, words use us. The most diabolical thing is that the lies that I considered my own for so long lie not only one but in two dimensions: first, in the structures of society and culture and second, in the structures of language and narration, and we have little power to oppose their

coercion. Boaventura de Sousa Santos warns of the danger of culturalism, that is, of forgetting the structures behind the production of knowledge; the use of language is always connected with the materialities of social, political, and ideological relations⁵⁸. I see words, endlessly repeated words, there where Butler sees performances. Words also form the Butlerian trap, from which we must try to free ourselves by resisting and revolting, even if we knew we would not succeed.

Her eyes reveal my secret. “She knows” but it would be inappropriate to say it out loud. The blink of an eye and the words “you know”, and especially the following three dots, a pause, slip from her lips before she gets them back. They are followed by nervous laughter. I want to think it includes a warm thought, compassion.

She is lovely. I like her a lot.

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58 Santos 2010, 38.

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