Introduction

I Hate New York

country, country bumpkin, rube, hayseed, Hoosier, hillbilly, clay eater, redneck, yokel, yooper, hick, Hicksville, backwater, boondocks, trailer trash, the middle of nowhere, the midwaste, flyover country, the sticks, the backwoods, the hinterlands, the outskirts, Sticksville, Shitsville, shitkicker, jerkwater, Podunk, Bumfuck, East Bumfuck, East Bumblefuck, East Butt-Fuck, BFE, Butt-Fuck Egypt

Urban Legends

I hate New York. It’s not just the oppressive summer heat, or the dearth of affordable housing, or the lack of decent water pressure. It’s not simply the city’s awesome capacity to imagine itself as the be-all and the end-all of modern queer life (no small feat, mind you). What I really hate is the casualness with which this move is dispatched, the taken-for-granted assumption that you want to be on that tiny island (but not some of those outer boroughs) and be there soon. That you want to get there someday, somehow, and get out of this godforsaken town. That the promised land awaits just a hub or two or three away. I hate that no queer in New York has ever had to apologize to other queers for wanting to live there, unlike those of us who did not wash up on its shores. And I hate that the more I hate what New York stands for, the more I feel like the kind of shitkicker its queer denizens have too often defined themselves against.

Here are two small examples of what I am trying to describe, a hazy sense of having missed out on something that turns into an acute feeling of being left out of everything, a feeling I’ve often experienced as a queer form of social death. One is an old club listing from Chelsea, the other a single-line quotation from a prominent queer theorist. Though separated by nearly two decades, they converse in aspiration and intent. My first example is a full-page ad taken from the inside front cover of a 1982 HONCHO, a Sixth Avenue–based glossy whose subtitle once informed
Figure 1.1. “HONCHO Hangouts: New York.” HONCHO (1982). HONCHO™ is a registered trademark of and published monthly by Mavety Media Group Ltd. Courtesy of Mavety Media Group Ltd. and the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction.
readers that it was *The Magazine for the Macho Male*, and that, at its height, reached many across the nation (fig. I.1).

I could critique this image for its phallic aggrandizement, and I could critique its unquestioned masculinity, its handy racial normativity, and its conflation of one particular white gay male subculture with an iconic emblem of New York—the Empire State Building—that it packs between a pair of button-fly jeans. But mainly I want to critique the ad's fine print. As the copyright at the bottom of the advertisement implies, the visual culture of this metropolitan dick was disseminated as a print culture across the nation during the early 1980s. The photo, *HONCHO* tells readers, is “available as a card through Nice and Sleazy, NYC.” Stripped of its numerous Chelsea addresses on the left side of the ad (many now closed, a few like Rawhide still in operation), the erect skyscraper offers itself as a calling card for a certain urbanized vision of queer (male) readership throughout the post-Stonewall United States. One horizon of possibility among the many—the beacon of an enriching clone aesthetic for some—magnifies into the horizon of fantastic possibility for all. What starts off as an open invitation to select *HONCHO* Hangouts potentially becomes a standardizing guidebook for late modern U.S. queer life.

My second example is from the tail end of a chapter from Michael Warner’s *The Trouble with Normal*, a book that translated some trends of queer theory for non-academic audiences in 1999. It follows a powerful discussion of Manhattan’s waning queer public spaces in the wake of the city’s draconian zoning laws. Raising the stakes of his local critique to global proportions, Warner surmises that “the sexual culture of New York City serves people around the world, even if only as the distant reference point of queer kids growing up in North Carolina or Idaho, who know that somewhere things are different.”1 Like the *HONCHO* ad, this conclusion too is a calling card of sorts, one that captures the lure of “New York City” as an ideal of possibility, pleasure, plenitude, and escape. Yet this line still haunts me since I first read it a decade ago. I remind myself that queer kids in North Carolina have, at last count, over thirty-five listed gay bars (the tip of any social iceberg) in cities and towns such as Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Asheville, Greensboro, Charlotte, Wilmington, and Rocky Mount. I google “Idaho gay clubs” and I am relieved to find two bars in Pocatello, one in Coeur d’Alene, a few in Boise, plus (this may be wish fulfillment) enriching sexual cultures in Idaho Falls, Lewiston, and Twin Falls.

When I marvel at how the sweep of a sentence writes over these regional spaces for queers past, present, and future, I start to wonder if “New
York City” has become something of a pyrrhic victory for queer sexual cultures. That this city is framed—naturalized—as the epicenter of contemporary queer life “around the world” smarts as much as the implicit assumption that the metropolis is the final destination point for queer kids of any gender, class, race, or region. As much as his necessary work critiques the normalization of queer life in the 1990s, and despite what “New York City” may signal for those raised, like Warner, in “the bosom of Jesus,” his quotation nevertheless contributes to one of the dominant themes of a lesbian and gay normalization that he and many other critics elsewhere resist.² Like the HONCHO ad, the possibility inherent in any urban trajectory slides into a limited compulsion to urbanism. Alongside countless other queer productions, it codifies the metropolitan as the terminus of queer world making as many have come to know it.

Another Country takes this urbanism as a starting point, not as an end-game. It agrees that the sexual cultures of global metropoles have always served people around the world, but it contends that cities like New York (or San Francisco or Los Angeles or Chicago or London or Berlin or Paris or Mexico City) have too often been the distant reference point for non-urban-identified queers. Such being the case, it insists that queer folks in places such as North Carolina and Idaho do know—have known for some time—that somewhere things are different than the Big Apple, and it charts how these individuals have coped with, navigated, mourned, sidestepped, muddled through, menaced, and rearticulated the onslaught of queer urbanisms throughout the twentieth century, and beyond.

I know it may seem easy to harp on the urban legends of a single quotation or an ad from HONCHO, and I also know that the boroughs that make up New York City (Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island) brim with queers who work hard to fail an urbanist creed. But as this book progresses it will become clear that these two examples are just symptoms of a much larger dynamic, one that often crosses genders, classes, and races distinct from any white gay male metropolitan public sex culture. While I could have cherry-picked other instances with which to begin this introduction, I emphasize these two because they present an entwined urbanism that bridges the givens of everyday lesbian and gay metropolitan life in the United States and the shared assumptions of U.S.-based queer studies that have been produced since the 1980s. I could just as easily have started with a few lines from a 1990 Queer Nation manifesto, “An Army of Lovers Cannot Lose”: “Let’s make every space a Lesbian and Gay space. Every street a part of our sexual geography. A city
of yearning and then total satisfaction.” Close read these words and you find that “every space” and “every street” collapse into “a city” for “our” sexual geographies. I could have begun with a translated line from Didier Eribon, one of France’s leading gay public intellectuals: “Cities have always been the refuge of gay people. At the end of the 1960s, a gay activist described San Francisco as a ‘refugee camp’ that had attracted gay people from all over the country—people who were running from the impossibility of living out gay lives in the hostile, hate-filled atmosphere of small-town America.”

Historicize this line (as my second chapter does) and you discover that this gay activist, Carl Wittman, edited one of the first anti-urbanist queer journals as a refuge from the hostile, hate-filled gay atmosphere of the Bay Area at the beginning of the 1970s. I also could have introduced a snippet from a lesbian oral history, such as one informant who, after discovering the Buffalo bar scene in the 1930s, tells her interviewers that “I was standing there with my mouth wide open, like a hick, I was so excited.” Why, I have to ask, does the regional smear “hick” become a shared marker for signaling queer ignorance regarding pre-Stonewall urban lesbian subcultures? Why does “hick” conjure a shameful rusticity that someone like queer disability activist Eli Clare will interrogate in a chapter on late modern lesbian chic?

It almost goes without saying that these urbanist elisions have become endemic to what Warner has elsewhere termed the “subcultural style,” as well as to the “self-understanding of a metropolitan sexual subculture” that informed political organizations such as Queer Nation. It also almost goes without saying that ivory tower theorizations and high-profile essays by authors such as Eribon have only added fuel to this fire. And it is disheartening for me to see that urban-oriented queer politics and metro-based queer academics often agree with populist forms of anti-ruralism such as the oral history I quoted from above. In each of these cases, the rural (take your pick: Idaho, North Carolina, small-town America, hick) is shelved, disavowed, denied, and discarded in favor of metropolitan sexual cultures such as New York City, San Francisco, or Buffalo. In each rural becomes a slur, one that has proliferated into an admittedly rich idiom. Suffice it to say that if recent strains of queer theory and recent forms of LGBTQ politics (latent and manifest) share common ground, it’s usually a dismissal of rurality as such, a dismissal not only commonplace but, let’s bet the farm on it, chronic. Much of queer studies wants desperately to be urban planning, even as so much of its theoretical architecture is already urban planned.
While anti-rural episodes such as the *HONCHO* ad were this book’s inspiration, they are not its main preoccupation. As I soon detail, others have ably demonstrated the gaps and the silences that accompany the perpetual urbanization of LGBTQ politics and queer studies. Extending their findings and pressurizing the urban/rural binary that informs these analyses, *Another Country* contends that queer artists—across decades, media, and idioms—have creatively used rural stylistics to fashion critiques against lesbian and gay metropolitan norms. Though dismissals of the rural are routine in urbanized lesbian, gay, and queer studies, rurality can be and has been redeployed to promote a critical form of queer anti-urbanism. To support these two theses, I gathered together an eclectic archive that includes novels, paintings, do-it-yourself journals, newspapers, memoirs, photographs, comic strips, fashion studies, a performance, a graphic memoir, and some ethnographic interviews. I treat these disparate objects like a coalition that reveals how queer life beyond the city is as vibrant, diverse, and plentiful as any urban-based sexual culture. Of course it is, and this should be obvious enough by now (it still isn’t). I use these materials to go beyond this preliminary thesis and contend that the “non-metropolitan” or the “rural”—broadly defined—in visual and print culture, in performance, and in fashion studies is a premier site of queer critique against compulsory forms of urbanization.

Hence my title, an echo of a call made by critics as diverse as James Baldwin and Raymond Williams. If queers way out there—broadly conceived—have too often been stamped with scarlet letters that spell out backwater, rube, hillbilly, hayseed, redneck, shitkicker, and bumfuck, then what happens when this terminology turns against itself? What happens when countrified queers challenge the representational systems that underlie the perpetual citification of modern LGBTQ life? In some cases these questions are matters of ideological life-and-death, and we’ll see how answers to them fail and succeed in whole and in part. I’ll also show that they were always ripe for the taking when it came to visualizing non-urbanist sexual geographies, and I’ll detail how ruralized queers have negotiated the urbane metropolitan stylistics that govern—and normalize—them with counter-stylistics of their own. Along the way I track some social constructions of U.S. metronormativity from the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. Throughout these readings, my archive will be largely rural-identified, yet I want to stress in advance that the concerns, problems, and potential solutions regarding lesbian and gay urbanism that *Another Country* faces are germane to many U.S.-based queers,
irrespective of their geographic particulars. But before I punch your ticket to this proverbial Hicksville—and before I refine what I mean by “queer anti-urbanism” or “metronormativity” or “rural stylistics”—I want to cover my basics and discuss what others have meant by “the urban” and its often maligned converse, “the rural.”

From Non-Metro to Anti-Urbanism

What do we mean by “rural” or “urban”? How do we best define these terms? More important, who best defines these terms? At first glance, a quick definitional grasp on “rural” and “urban” seems self-evident. Webster’s defines “urban” as an adjective: “in the U.S. census use, designating or of an incorporated or unincorporated place with at least 50,000 inhabitants.” In comparison, the most recent citation in the Oxford English Dictionary defines “rural” as “of, pertaining to or characteristic of the country or country life as opposed to the town.” We can contrast this definition with the OED’s take on “urban”: “pertaining to or characteristic of, occurring or taking place in, a city or town.”

Here we see that the pat definition of “rural” is analogous to “country” as much as “urban” is analogous to the “city” or “town.” But what, exactly, constitutes a “city” or a “country” when it is “opposed to the town”? Who, exactly, puts them in opposition? We could take a cue from Webster’s and turn to the U.S. Census Bureau’s most recent guidelines, where the bureau’s definition of “population density” may help clarify our understanding of “rural/country” and “urban/city.” While we should rightly be suspicious of such bio-political number games, the census nevertheless serves as a material and epistemological technology for enumerating and spatializing the geography of the U.S. nation-state. In a formulation that complements the one provided by the OED, “Census 2000 Rural and Urban Classification” defines an “urbanized area” as a space that consists of “core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile.”

But something weird happens when we detail the Census Bureau’s examples of these statistical “urbanized areas.” The definitional certainties of what constitutes an “urban” or a “rural” population begin to undermine themselves. In an extended online listing of over seven hundred of these “urbanized” areas, the 2000 census cites my current residence of Bloomington, IN, alongside what the Web site curiously hyphenates as “New
York—Newark, NJ—NJ—CT” and “Los Angeles—Long Beach—Santa Ana, CA.” These listings together appear on a lengthy window with sites such as Appleton, Wisconsin, Dothan, Alabama, Altoona, Pennsylvania, and Macon, Georgia, four cities that also fall under the bureau’s “urbanized area” file. Given these loose examples of the static term “urban,” the geographic pratfalls of numerically defining what counts as a “rural” or an “urban” space should become less transparent. This is especially so when we consider the logistics of “core census blocks” that have, say, a population density of 999 people per square mile and are deemed “rural” by technicality. Or when we question who, exactly, decided to hyphenate “areas” like New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut as a singular “urbanized” population chain. Some folks in the Jersey Pinelands might disagree.

As we make our way through the numerical quagmire that is the 2000 census, its categorical data illuminates just how precarious any proper definition of “rural” or “urban”—along with their counterparts “metropolitan” and “non-metropolitan”—can often be. The more examples that the bureau gives, the more it obscures denotative guidelines that might demarcate “pertaining to country” or “pertaining to town.” Designating any area, population, locale, or, by proxy, person as ruralized while defining any area, population, locale, or person as urbanized starts to seem less like a descriptive act and much more like a prescriptive project. When their semantic surfaces are scratched, the terms “rural” and “urban” become a definitional roundabout. Rather than evidence an actual geographic location (does anyone know offhand the ZIP code for “New York—Newark, NJ—NJ—CT”?), they appear to function more like language games, a term philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein uses to connote context-specific word usage that can be validated as well as overruled by an individual or by a collective. You don’t always know the rural when you see it, and it often takes a shared recognition to identify a particular space or place as “non-metropolitan.” This suggests that something in excess of empirical geographic specificities or the faulty logic of population density governs the urban/rural divide that informs U.S.-based queer studies. Since definitions of “rural” and “urban” must participate in a rigged language game, any “urban/rural” distinction is as much context-specific, phantasmatic, performative, subjective, and—I’ll stress—standardizing as it is geographically verifiable.

This axiom will allow us to advance a practical theory of how queer urbanities and their counterpart, queer anti-urbanisms, work in tandem and in opposition. I’ll return to this tension directly. For now, I note that
while “rural” and “urban” are often difficult to define, scholars in queer studies have detailed how the historical fictions of these two terms nevertheless sustain a variety of ruralized and urbanized populations across U.S. sexual history. In numerous disciplines, a magpie consortium of social historians, cultural critics, anthropologists, and literary critics such as Lisa Duggan, Michael Moon, John Howard, Kath Weston, E. Patrick Johnson, Elizabeth Povinelli, Robert Reid-Pharr, Judith Halberstam, Jasbir K. Puar, Mary Pat Brady, Robert McRuer, and others have tackled what McRuer terms the “regional elision in queer theory,” and all these critics have emphasized, with varying italics, what Weston describes as “the part played by urban/rural contrasts in constituting lesbian and gay subjects.”

Thanks to this critical mass, scholars now have a reservoir of theoretical and historical knowledge that addresses queer life in the Deep South; negotiations of sexual separatism and assimilation in non-urban indigenous populations; the regional and international rise of white lesbian identity in the early twentieth-century United States; and the advocacy of queer rural African American literary and religious cultures in the North Carolina backwoods.

This incomplete list will remain a work in progress. It has been joined by anthologies such as Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South, Reclaiming the Heartland, and De-Centring Sexualities; memoirs and fictions by Baldwin, Randall Kenan, Cherrie Moraga, Dorothy Allison, Toni Morrison, Eli Clare, Alison Bechdel, and Gloria Anzaldúa; and documentary shorts, video installations, and feature films such as Small Town Gay Bar (2006), The Long Road to Mazatlán (1999), Southern Comfort (2001), Lavender (1971), and Boys Don’t Cry (1999). Together these works have raised a string of questions and concerns regarding “non-metropolitan” sexual non-conformity over the last three and a half decades. Rather than reinforce stereotypes of the “rural” as a cultural Podunk, these artists and authors pay heed to the “non-metropolitan” as a dynamic space of inquiry and sexual vitality. Complicating geophobic claims that ruralized spaces are always and only hotbeds of hostility, cultural and socioeconomic poverty, religious fundamentalism, homophobia, racism, urbanoia, and social conservatism, their works question knee-jerk assumptions that the “rural” is a hate-filled space for queers as they archive the complex desires that contribute to any non-metropolitan identification. Howard, for one, has tracked how black and white queer males forged sustainable communities across ruralized areas of Mississippi from the Depression era onward. Duggan has excavated how the working-class female “farmer or laborer”
of the nineteenth century contributed to the crystallization of a normalizing U.S. lesbian identity in turn-of-the-twentieth-century Memphis and beyond. Povinelli, a participant-observer in radical faerie communes, has theorized the anarchic sexual politics of central Tennessee gatherings as they connect to (and sometimes disconnect with) the flows of aboriginal expressive cultures in Australia. And Reid-Pharr has poetically charted his own regional desires as they orbited around “ugly, poor, white trash,” Kentucky-identified males throughout his sexual history.

These writings defamiliarize the master narratives of lesbian and gay U.S. urbanism. They offer variations on anti-rural twice-told tales such as the compulsory metropolitan migration from wicked little towns; the city as the sole locus for queer community, refuge, and security; and the non-metropolitan as a perpetual site of isolation and exclusion—so much so that one scholar offers that “urban/rural contrasts have structured the very subjectivity that allows people [in the United States] to think of themselves or others as gay.” And, as Reid-Pharr mentions in passing, the “image” of the rural-based queers that he documents are oftentimes “infinitely disruptive” to the metro inclinations of lesbian and gay studies across racial, national, and socio-economic divides.

Reid-Pharr makes this comment in reference to one of his lovers, Rick, a working-class white male he finds “so ugly and country” that Rick’s rusticity—heightened by his “scandalously thick Kentucky accent”—implicitly disrupts the smooth operations of an idealizing middle-class black and white gay male urbanism. Reid-Pharr’s claim for Rick’s “white trash” stylistics is suggestive for our developing theory of queer ruralism. It invites us to consider how representations of non-metropolitan-identified queers are not only complementary, supplementary, ancillary, or, on their worst days, fetishized as out-and-out marginal to the historical development of metropolitan-based sexual cultures in the modern United States, but also how their “image” can be antagonistic to such normalizing urbanism. Building on Reid-Pharr’s key insight, I join these recent discussions surrounding queer U.S. ruralism by putting pressure on the “non-metropolitan” as an “infinitely disruptive” formula in the social fantasies that produce idealizations such as “New York.” Stated otherwise, Another Country’s archive relays a queer-based non-metropolitanism into a queer-laden anti-urbanism.

Such a shift brings unforeseen advantages to anti-urbanism’s frequently scandalous—as in frequently outrageous—usage. Anti-urbanism is, without any doubt, a word with an embarrassing social history. In the
eighteenth century it connoted a Jeffersonian ideal of non-urban agrarianism, a point of view suspicious of the metropolis and well documented in a letter Jefferson wrote to friend and physician Benjamin Rush in 1800: “I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man. True, they nourish some of the elegant arts, but the useful ones can thrive elsewhere, and less perfection in the others, with more health, virtue & freedom, would be my choice.”26 The term was often used in the later nineteenth century to describe a politically bankrupt regionalism that functioned as nostalgic code speak for Anglo-Saxon supremacy and antiurbanization, or what Southern Renaissance writer and fervid Ku Klux Klan apologist Thomas Dixon Jr. referred to as the “horrors of city life” in a 1902 article praising “Old Tidewater Virginia” over the new brownstones of New York City.27 Further down the historical pipeline, others would merge Jeffersonian pestilence with Dixonian supremacy when they used anti-urbanism to refer to conservative, urbanoid, and heteronormative “white flights” from the “urban blights” and the supposed “disorder” of the U.S. metropolis, ones that continue to mark many post–World War II middle-class white migrations to the suburbs.28

But what’s just as nefarious is how queers have also promoted another version of American anti-urbanism. Warner’s Trouble with Normal was quick to diagnose this problem: “Phone sex, the Internet, and sitcoms cannot take the place of this urban space [New York’s Christopher Street] and its often unrecognized practices of sexual citizenship. That is what has been urged by columnists in the gay lifestyle magazines, chiefly Michelangelo Signorile. In his Life Outside, a jeremiad driven by resentment toward the social network he ambiguously refers to both as ‘the party circuit’ and as ‘gay culture,’ Signorile fuses that resentment with a common rhetoric of antiurbanism.”29 Warner uses the term “antiurbanism” in response to Signorile’s best-selling call for the “the ‘deghettoization’ and ‘deurbanization’ of gay life in America.”30 Accompanying Signorile’s two demands is a plea for queers—actually, just gay men—to ex-urbanize themselves into suburbs, small towns, and unnamed rural areas, to proselytize “small-town values,” and to bask in the “quieter life.”31 Such recent anti-urbanism, Warner correctly diagnoses, functions as a synonym for the privatization of modern (middle-class) gay males in particular and as a symptom of the gentrification of U.S. queer life in general. It contributes to what Lisa Duggan has termed “homonormativity,” a post-Fordist sexual quietism that binds U.S. queers to global consumption, neoliberal ideals of free market capitalism, and political assimilation.32
Citing this common rhetoric, I want to differentiate between a reactionary anti-urbanism and a critical anti-urbanism. My frequent use of the term in Another Country counters Michelangelo Signorile’s urbanoid intentions—and, for that matter, Thomas Jefferson’s. I have no desire to take the place of urban space; I have no issue with a circuit party; and I have no faith in Old Tidewater Virginia. I also have no clue what the “quieter life” means (then again, friends in my “small town” call me gabby). This book wrenches anti-urbanism away from the word’s conservative inclinations to torque it into a tactic that has been wielded by non-urbanist-identified queers of varying races and ethnicities, queers with disabilities, working-class queers, and queers inside and outside any metropolitan area proper. When I cite the term “anti-urbanism” in the following pages, I thus mean to follow American Studies scholar Leo Marx who, in a discussion of anti-urbanism’s ubiquity in modern American literatures, finds that the term is less of an anti-urban stance per se (like the kind we saw in Jefferson’s letter) and actually “a far more inclusive if indirect and often equivocal attitude toward the transformation of society and of culture, of which the emerging industrial city is but one manifestation.” Like the non-metropolitan/metropolitan binary on which it depends, Marx’s definition of anti-urbanism too is a language game. As an “equivocal attitude” toward a symptomatic “transformation” in U.S. sexual cultures, a queer use of Marx’s anti-urbanism may trouble lesbian and gay urbanisms and function as an “inclusive” mode of critique.

Given that the pernicious etymologies and the current usages of anti-urbanism aren’t going away anytime soon, I know that I’m threading a delicate needle. But as a transformational mode of social and aesthetic critique that questions certain transformations in U.S. sexual cultures, a queer anti-urbanism—grounded in the geographic configurations of the non-metropolitan—gets at what Kath Weston means when she writes that rural-identified bodies and stylistics can potentially, though not inevitably, disrupt any standardizing lesbian and gay urbanism. “Significantly,” she writes, “the same narratives that use urban/rural contrasts to set up the gay imaginary may also contain elements that disrupt the characterization of rural-urban migration as a move from surveillance into freedom and isolation into community.” A queer usage of anti-urbanism also gets at what Reid-Pharr indirectly refers to when he states that Rick’s rural stylistics are “infinitely disruptive.” Such critically queer anti-urbanism is precisely what I’m aiming for when I highlight that rurality—at once a geographic entity and a performative space that has often been shunned, mocked, and
discarded by the metropolitan-minded—can be a supreme site of queer critique given that stereotypical images of the region or the rural can be used for unexpected ends.

I emphasize that Another Country is not a book about the anti-urban (I advocate the “de-ghettoization” and de-politicization of no one). It is a book about queer anti-urbanism. The former is a phobic response to fill-in-the-blank “pestilential” elements that fall under the rubric of “the city” (elegant arts for Jefferson, noisy neighbors for Signorile, non-whites for Dixon). The latter is a means to critically negotiate the relentless urbanisms that often characterize any U.S.-based “gay imaginary,” an imaginary “in which the city represents a beacon of tolerance and gay community, the country a locus of persecution and gay absence.”

To better understand how non-metropolitan-identified artists have produced this queer anti-urbanism across the spectrum of U.S. sexual history, we now explore these “urban” and “rural” sites not as geographic spaces but as social spaces beyond the Census Bureau population count.

City Subversions, Rural Stylistics, Paper Cut Politics

Having worked through a definition of queer anti-urbanism, I return to my earlier claim that any urbanism as well as any ruralism is as much phantasmatic as it is factual—perhaps more so, since the urban/rural divide that guides many U.S.-based queer studies and queer cultures is oftentimes not a geographic but a social space. Even if the “rural” or the “urban” cannot be verified by Census Bureau fact checking, these terms nevertheless subsist as structures of intense feeling that help materialize the geo-representations of urban or rural queerness. Space and place are as much act and experience as they are dirt and rock, concrete and steel. This formulation allows for more flexible readings of how ruralism and urbanism—mutually constitutive—can inform our readings of U.S. sexual cultures. Recognizing that the term “rural” is historically co-dependent on its binary opposition, “urban,” we should theorize “rural” or “non-metropolitan” locales as performative geographic positions that have often enabled individuals and group subjects to experience themselves as distinct from dominant spatial performatives of the “urban” or the “metropolitan.” Even when this binary appears outmoded (in, for example, recent studies of ex-urban sprawl), it still has residual effects. Thus the binarism “rural/urban” should be seen not only as a geographic marker wedded to an arbitrary population count;
it should also be seen as a social fantasy whose cartographies are as much psychic, emotive, stylistic, and relational as they are geographically or spatially realized without and within any identifiable U.S. metropolis.

This may sound like a paradox, since so many of the sites that Another Country visits—a daydream about Solomon Valley, Kansas; a quarterly conceived in Grinnell, Iowa; some soft-core photographs from Eastaboga, Alabama; a threnody for the town of Port Orford, Oregon; and a graphic narrative based in Beech Creek, Pennsylvania—seem non-metropolitan. Others that I present—an oil-on-Masonite painting made in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; a gathering of male inverts around a piano in early twentieth-century Berlin; some fashion magazines from Paris; a bittersweet recollection of a pre-Stonewall Greenwich Village lesbian bar; a pair of leather boots worn by an Oakland lesbian—may not. Nevertheless, when queers use these sites to disrupt rural/urban hierarchies and to launch critiques of queer anti-urbanism, they demonstrate that the language games of lesbian and gay urbanism may traverse any designated city, country, or town. They also use these locales to unsettle queer urbanities not only in the Castro in San Francisco or in Andersonville or Boy’s Town in Chicago (or in queer U.S. metro satellites like Fire Island, Saugatuck, Palm Beach, Provincetown, Cape May, Cherry Grove, Rehoboth Beach, Northampton, and Key West), but also, at times, in Macon, Georgia, and Appleton, Wisconsin.36 They grant that a flight to the city has to start from somewhere. They acknowledge that “rural” spots can be urbanized as much as “urban” environments can be ruralized. They recognize, much like Judith Halberstam does, that “‘urban/rural’ is not a ‘real’ binary; it is rather a locational rubric that supports and sustains the conventional depiction of queer life as urban.”37

Halberstam adds this line as a footnote to what she terms “metronormativity,” and Another Country uses the rubric of queer anti-urbanism to take up her neologism. By stating this term, Halberstam references a dominant “story of migration from ‘country’ to ‘town,’” “a spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy,” and that imagines the metropolis as the only sustainable space for queers.38 In this heightened version of hegemonic lesbian and gay urbanism—one that we have seen in manifestoes, gay male porn magazines, and French histories of the Castro—metronormativity imagines “the city” as an urban mecca to which rural-identified queers must assimilate. Halberstam then adds that this normalizing “physical journey from small town to big city” stereotypically engenders a “psychological journey from closet case to out and proud.”39
Overlaying the physical with the psychological, these flights of U.S. metronormativity again reveal any lesbian and gay urbanism to be cartographic and performative, psychic and social, imaginary and all-too-materialized.

Such being the case, we can amplify metronormativity’s “physical” and “psychological” makeup to sketch how its multitasking must balance six analytic axes:

1. **Narratological**: Metronormativity often appears as a travel narrative that demands a predetermined flight to the city; a mythological plot that imagines urbanized queer identity as a one-way trip to sexual freedom, to communal visibility, and to a gay village (or at least a studio apartment) whose streets are paved with rainbow pride. This narrative usually takes the form of a bildungsroman to imagine queers as young adults or adults-in-the-making, thus depriving queer children growing up in an identifiable city of a recognizable identity. It also presents non-urbanized areas as hinterlands best viewed from the window seat of your plane. This is not to imply, however, that migrations great or small, individual or collective, enforced or self-initiated, have not been essential to queers of various races and ethnicities across sexual history, or that any queer migration is inherently circumspect, or that flights aren’t often dictated by socioeconomic demands.

2. **Racial**: On the one hand, a complement to narratological norms, given that the racial logistics of metronormativity frequently traffic in what José Esteban Muñoz terms a “normative ideal” of whiteness, “an image of ideality and normativity that structures gay male [and female] desires and communities” and what Marlon Riggs, in his cinematic critique of the Castro, terms “the absence of black images” in “this great gay mecca” that “was no longer my home, my mecca (never was, in fact).” On the other hand, an unfortunate corollary to narratological norms, given the unfounded assumption that urbanized areas are more racially diverse and racially inclusive than ruralized ones.

3. **Socioeconomic**: Not simply the gas tank for that flight or the down payment for the brownstone thereafter. Rather, a cross-gender, cross-racial per diem (an Atlantis vacation package here, a pair of Prada glasses there, a Dinah Shore Weekend for some much-needed R and R, a late summer Tuscany rental, that Paul Smith tie you couldn’t say no to, bamboo everything for the Crate and Barrel registry) that enables prosperous queers to announce, to feel, to mold, and to capitalize on their leisure-oriented urbanism as bourgeois privilege and as niche market. Their
padded wallets fashion what anthropologist Eric Michaels, in a 1982
takedown of “Nautilus, EST, and Coors Beer,” deemed “a Dewar’s Pro-
file image of the gay capitalist” that stifles “critical, political sensibility.”42

4. **Temporal**: Exemplified by the oral history simile “like a hick;” the hier-
archized assumption that a metropolitan-identified queer will always be
more dynamic, more cutting-edge, more progressive, and more forward-
looking than a rural-identified queer, who will always be more static,
more backward, and more culturally backwater.

5. **Epistemological**: Also exemplified by the oral history simile “like a hick”; the hier-
archized assumption that the closer proximity you have to a sky-
scraper, the more in-the-know, in-the-loop, and up-to-the-minute you
must be, irrespective of your weekly alternative’s actual entertainment
listings.

6. **Aesthetic**: Substantiated by epistemological, temporal, and socioeco-
nomic norms, an aesthetic norm occurs when the lesbian and gay urban-
ism that informs metronormativity consolidates itself as queer urbanity.
Such urbanity functions primarily as a psychic, material, and affective
mesh of stylistics informed by a *knowingness* that polices and validates
what counts for any queer cultural production; a *sophistication* that de-
marcates worldliness, refinement, and whatever may count as “the lat-
est”; a *fashionability* that establishes what counts as the most up-to-date
forms of apparel, accessory, and design; and a *cosmopolitanism* that dis-
 criminates anybody or any cultural object that does not take urbanity as
its point of origin, its point of departure, or its point of arrival.43 These
four aesthetic components are most often referenced as “trendy fashion,”
“chic,” “style,” and sometimes even “lifestyle,” and they are best exempli-
fied by what one queer glossy alphabetizes (this list is already démodé)
as “Production Promotion Proenza Schouler Project Runway Protest
Chic Puma Quotes Raf Simons Ralph Lauren Ray-Ban Rehab Roberto
Cavalli Samsonite Black Label Sexiest Designers Shoes Shopping Sports
Street Styles Icon Sunglasses.”44 I sometimes refer to such dominant
queer worlding as a cosmo-urbanism.

Together these six axes of metronormativity—the narratological, the
racial, the socioeconomic, the temporal, the epistemological, and the aes-
thetic—help support, sustain, and standardize the idealizing geographies
of post-Stonewall lesbian and gay urbanism, an urbanism that facilitates the
ongoing commodification, corporatization, and de-politicization of U.S.-
based queer cultures in many locales. Yet while such metronormativity
may be a supreme component of post-Stonewall homonormativity—a movement that crystallized alongside the rise of “lifestyle” ideologies in the 1970s—I will insist that its roots shoot back to the early twentieth century with the historical emergence of urbanized lesbian and gay group identities.45 Thus when my first chapter details how three queer artists responded to the sophistications of Anglo-sapphism and the urbanities of New York City’s bohemian cultures in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, it shows U.S. metronormativity to be much more than a sign of our times. It may be best, then, to see any particular instance of metronormativity as a historically conditioned social field whose components try desperately to exceed and even more desperately to naturalize this historical specificity. Such moments occur when a queer like Susan Sontag states in 1964 that gay men “constitute themselves as aristocrats of taste.”46 And such moments have been questioned by queers such as Alfred Kinsey and his cohorts, who informed readers two decades before the Stonewall riots that “it is this city group which exhibits all the affectations, the mannerisms, the dress, and the other displays which the rest of the population take to be distinctive of all homosexual persons, even though it is only a small fraction of the males with homosexual histories who ever display such characteristics.”47

In this quote, Kinsey and his fellow researchers gender racially unspecific 1940s metronormativity as male. Borrowing a page from their sexology, I stress that the analytic axes of U.S. metronormativity do not always intersect in harmony. Sometimes one takes the lead and subordinates the others. Sometimes one axis becomes a metonym for another. Sometimes you don’t need a flight to the city to fashion-police in the sticks. The devil’s in the details. It’s precisely how non-metronormative queers across the decades negotiate these interwoven compulsions as they do or do not align that piques my interest. A quick example to which I later return: while metronormativity is often racially normalizing, its aesthetic norms have not always been the sole property of middle-class urban-identified white gay men. Queer of color men have been just as normalizing when it comes to policing urbane stylistics, and, as Audre Lorde laments in my fourth chapter, so too were queer of color women in pre-Stonewall Village bars. Taken as story, as style, or both, the evolving historical complexities of metronormativity’s permutations thus buttress the narratives, customs, and presumptions of many urbane-identified lesbians and gays in the modern United States. Simultaneously, such permutations enable these gays and lesbians to govern the aesthetic, erotic, material, and affective
imaginaries of many modern queers—irrespective of “country,” “town,” or somewhere in between—since at least the first third of the twentieth century.

Another case in point: despite their differences both Sontag and Kinsey remind us that the aesthetic variables of metronormativity—the subcultural styles of cosmopolitanism, sophistication, affectation, knowingness, urbanity, fashion, mannerisms and other displays—often function as an aristocratic guidebook both to what counts for and as queer taste and often to queer group identity at any given historical moment. Independent of any actualized flight to the city, these stylistics frequently naturalize the “urban” not only as an identifiable geographic entity but also as a desired typology and as a commodified fetish, a “city group” thought to be “distinctive of all homosexual persons.” Such urbanities tend to coalesce around seemingly supra-historicist matters of “style” that inform something like the epigraph by Edmund White—self-described “urbane, knowing, sophisticated” author, novelist, “grand arbiter of taste,” and “cultural critic”—that opens Another Country:

Whatever our sensibility may be, New York gays are justifiably proud of their status as taste-makers for the rest of the country, at least the young and up-to-date segment of the population. Our clothes and haircuts and records and dance steps and decor—our restlessly evolving style—soon enough become theirs. . . . All over the country I saw a replication of quite recent if not current New York styles. . . . In return for the costliness and inconvenience, the squalor and discomfort of our lives, we get to participate in whatever is the latest. We are never left out of anything; we know what’s happening. (259–60)

Really? How come? Published in 1980 at a peak in U.S. lesbian and gay urbanization and included in his travel narrative States of Desire: Travels in Gay America, what White describes here is an urbanized and urbane stylistics that intersects temporal (“up-to-date”, “the latest”, “soon enough”), racial, socioeconomic, narratological, and, adamantly, aesthetic norms. It’s “style” as invasive species and it’s really impressive. In just a few sentences White manages to encapsulate these stylistics not only for “proud New York gays” and their enclaves but—in what we’ll come to see as an all-too-familiar elision—for the “rest of the country” as well. Think of it as circum-Manhattan performance where the remainder of the United States becomes Greater New York City. While his snarky words may aim at the
sexual assimilation of gay males across the lower forty-eight, they expand this minoritization into a universalizing model that believes itself “distinctive of all homosexual persons.” A small fraction replicates itself as a nationalized aristocracy whereby “New York gays” standardize their stylistics into an Americanized city group.

Despite the squalor and the inconvenience when they sweep the country, these boys don’t get to have all the fun. White’s panorama finds Los Angeles to be “the national center of glamour” (26); San Francisco “the capital of gay life” (32) and “a refugee culture” “from all those damaging years in Podunk” (37); Boston and Washington DC, “intimate and sophisticated” (297); and Kansas City, by contrast, “the Fifties in deep freeze” (156). I could continue to list his taxonomic hierarchies (White does go on even as he eventually acknowledges his own “snobbism” and his neglect of “lesbians as well as small-town or rural life,” “gay Asians or gay Jews,” and “gay working-class men”), but you no doubt get the point (334, 336). Metronormative task forces like the one *States of Desire* presents are not static. They are instead dynamic forces whose classificatory efforts demand enormous reserves of material and psychic labor, and such labors reproduce an urbanism whose interpellations have always preceded *States of Desire* and which continue to “restlessly” evolve well into the present.

As a recent header for the Atlanta-based *Southern Voice* newspaper—a metropolis White deems “the New York of the South” because “both cities are dynamic, both are fashion and convention centers, both are sophisticated” (249)—proclaims: “All the News for Your Life. And Your Style.”51

White emphasizes that these “styles of life that are unique to a city” have been a subcultural boon for U.S. queers (69). I’ll insist that potentially nourishing metronormative projects can sometimes amount to cultural and subcultural damage. There is, a philosopher once said, no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism. Besides the “costliness” and the “inconvenience” of classifying these “styles of life” and reifying them across the nation, something else is happening when White tells readers that “we know what’s happening.” When the memoirist privileges New York gays’ “status as taste-makers,” he unwittingly confirms a claim made by his contemporary, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which this book takes as an axiom: “Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent” (56).52

Published in French a year before White’s *States of Desire*, Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* takes classificatory practices like White’s to task as it investigates the operations of what the
sociologist calls “the space of life-styles” (208). To distill Distinction’s complex arguments and ethnographies, a social class establishes hegemony when its stylistics—particular affectations, manners, foodways, dress, comportments, and other displays—substantiate themselves as natural, “legitimate,” supra-historical, and superior (56). In so doing it renders intolerable other aesthetic possibilities relevant to other social classes (56). For Bourdieu, you either have it or you’ve had it as your aesthetic choices make you worth more—or worthless—in the symbolic hierarchies of stylization. “At stake in every struggle over art,” he writes, “there is also the imposition of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness” (57). In States of Desire-speak, “we are never left out of anything” as “the rest of the country” tries in vain to catch up.

The offspring of petit bourgeois parents from a village in the Béarn region of southwestern France, Bourdieu may have meant his critique of status and taste primarily for de Gaulle–era bourgeoisie, but it’s clear to me that the urbane stylistics of metronormativity also consolidate cultural capital for queers then and now. When White informs readers that New York gays “know what’s happening,” he betrays how early-eighties Big Apple urbanity functioned as a specific classificatory scheme in what Bourdieu terms “habitus,” one with which queers still grapple (170). Habitus encompasses the productive positions of a “social space” whereby the stylistics of any particular class are confirmed, upheld, discarded, and, with a little luck, manipulated (169). “It is an incorporated principle of classification,” he argues, “which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically. It follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste, which it manifests in several ways” (190). This process of tastemaking—of incorporating or refusing or disputing the dominant stylistics of a social space that establishes the boundaries of a particular social class—is both a conscious and an unconscious effort that plays itself out on anybody’s affects and effects, and queer bodies have been no exception to this rule.53 Hence we can see how a normalizing habitus of “clothes and haircuts and records and dance steps and decor” too often excels at embodying what counts for queer urbanity since “taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, embodied, helps to shape the class body” (190). Likewise, such habitus (with a big boost from global
capitalism) too often succeeds at incorporating queers into an assimilated “stylistic affinity” of urbanism that promises: “All the News for Your Life. And Your Style” (173).

With this social practice of urbanized queer space behind us, we can now complicate my original thesis. We should envision the urban/rural divide that often guides U.S.-based queer studies and U.S.-based queer cultures to be less an identifiable geographic space and more a materialized “social space”—a habitus—governed by dominant metropolitan stylistics (169). Halberstam, Sontag, Kinsey, White, and Bourdieu enable us to see that any lesbian and gay U.S. imagined community is regulated not only by the spatial categorizations of geography, but also by the complementary and frequently damaging classificatory practices of urbanized stylistics. While queer critics have long considered “styles of life that are unique to a city” to be subversive strategies for negotiating the physiological and psychological abuses of heteronormativity—and I don’t deny anyone these life rafts—we can also see how dominant versions of metropolitan queer stylistics often work internally to intimidate, to normalize, and to box queers into urbane habitus formations. This may be one reason why lesbian and gay urbanism is so often etymologically and materially linked to lesbian and gay urbanity, and it may also account for why representations of urbane queer “style”—in print culture, in moving image, in fashion, in comportment, in music—can so easily reproduce geographic idealizations of U.S. urbanism. But if you don’t want to take my word on this matter, try Esther Newton’s: “To talk about homosexual style, it is necessary to bear in mind the broad distinctions among lower-, middle-, and upper-status homosexuals.”54 “Low-status homosexuals,” she goes on to note, are “socially avoided and morally despised” by “the sophisticated” members of “the gay world.”55

Far too many have taken Newton’s description as a prescription. Though aimed at queers in New York City, Chicago, and Kansas City, her comments from 1972 justify why some “low-status” ruralized queers might still consider elite urbanized queer stylistics an acquired taste. When framed in this manner, we can better understand how some hold a far more inclusive if indirect and often equivocal attitude toward the dynamic metronormative transformations of U.S. queer cultures. To tweak my thesis again, a habitus of metropolitan stylistics can be and has been manipulated, sidestepped, confounded, and superseded by queers resistant to normalizing lesbian and gay urbanities. Building on Bourdieu, I note that any “space of life-styles” is also a restlessly evolving “field of
struggles” (244), “the struggles between agents over the representation of their position in the social world and, consequently, of that world” (253). And thankfully, “the order of words never exactly reproduces the order of things” (481). For our present concerns, this means that metronormative stylistics have long inspired metro-subversions, and there have been countless strategies for countering cosmopolitan lesbian and gay habitus within and without, betwixt and between, any identifiable U.S. metropolis. The radical urban-based politics of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), to take but one example, were integral rejoinders to the racial, gendered, and class-based codes of homonormativity that emerged in the early 1970s, even as the GLF oftentimes promoted one aspect of metronormativity—rural-to-urban migration—in its frequent emphasis on an urban-based politics of “coming out.”

I have more to say about this when I turn to the rise of the radical faeries and commune-based lesbian separatism in chapter 2. For now, I note that the primary modes of metro-subversion that Another Country considers are what I term “rural stylistics.” If cosmopolitanism, sophistication, knowingness, refinement, wordliness, and trendy fashion—all under the umbrella term “queer urbanity”—inform idealizations of U.S. metronormativity, then I turn the tables to chart how stereotypically ruralizing stylistics of rusticity, stylelessness, unfashionability, anti-urbanity, backwardness, anti-sophistication, and crudity try to undercut the metronormative demands made on modern queer life. Taken in part or in sum, these low-rent stylistics put little faith in innocuous images of the “non-urban” as an idyllic pastoral or as a romanticized plain and simple place (though these conservative tableaus, chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, do have their own resistant potential). Rather, counter-stylistics beholden to queer anti-urbanism negate ideals of queer urbanity in the homogenizing wake of U.S. metronormativity. Such stylistics could—like some working-class aesthetics—be considered what Bourdieu terms a “dominated ‘aesthetic’ which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics,” but they will always attempt to make you feel more like (not less than) that proverbial hick, and we should pay close attention to the felt experiences of their non-urbanized embodiments across “the rest of the country” (41). To return to Robert Reid-Pharr’s earlier comment, at opportune moments the rural stylistics of a queer anti-urbanism can be “so ugly” and “country” that they become “infinitely disruptive” or, even better, aesthetically intolerable. They are the potentially unincorporated (and
often positively disavowed) queer spaces in any spatialized story that lesbian and gay urbanity likes to tell itself, and, according to Bourdieu, these stylistics may thus have “the evocative power of an utterance which put things in a new light” (479).58

Remember that a “stylistic” or a “style” is not just a “mode of deportment,” or a “literary feature,” or “a fashionable air,” or a “particular method of display,” or a “particular manner of life or behavior” that legitimates itself between the pages of HONCHO or in the oral histories of upstate New York lesbian bars or in the rhetoric of Queer Nation or through the header of a Southern Voice.59 Just as the word “queer” can be and has been pried from its homophobic use for new ends, so too does the OED remind us that stylistic or a style is also a “weapon of offence”—as in “to pierce with a stylet” or “to execute with a stylus”—and this book argues that non-urbanized queer stylistics can and have been used to disarm the standardizing functions of metronormative habitus.60 These are scrappy tactics fostered and shared by lesbians, gays, and queers of disparate colors and classes and regions, sometimes across racial lines, sometimes between socioeconomic divides, and sometimes under the national radar—sometimes not. We’ll see, in fact, that these queers did not always succeed in their struggles with assimilating social spaces, but their fraught negotiations and their refusals to comply with the iconic geographics of compulsory U.S. metronormativity nevertheless set precedent. They teach us how to grapple with—how to sometimes discredit—the contemporary incorporations of an evolving queer taste, and their stylets always tried to antagonize the phantasmatic urban/rural divide.

We could call this paper cut politics. By itself, a paper cut rarely does significant damage since it never punctures the body’s deep tissue. It does, however, cause a considerable amount of discomfort, often more annoying than dire. But an aggregate of paper cuts is another country. They may interfere, prod, agitate, and pester from a point of distraction to a point of disruption, and the political aims of the queer anti-urbanisms that I am about to put on display may do likewise. At their most successful, they are constant nuisances to the idealizations of any urbanized lesbian and gay imaginary, “capillary interventions” aggravating a queer body politic that insists, “We know what’s happening.”61 At their most engaged, they become cultural remainders that, no matter how costly or inconvenient, thrive in the so-called boondocks of aesthetic intolerance.
Outsider Artifacts

Moving back and forth among VHS and canvas and pixels and the printed page, Another Country adopts a battery of these ruralized counter-stylistics and offers up an eclectic archive (inventory sounds more apt) that spans almost one hundred years of metronormativity. Many of the items soon to be featured are not always conversant with one another, but they all share a fierce commitment to queer anti-urbanism. Some, such as the neo-Confederate portraits of working-class white males that the third chapter introduces, would be hard-pressed to find commonality with the “Down Home” African American bulldagga performances by Sharon Bridgforth that I discuss in chapter 4. Others, such as Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir Fun Home, stage a cross-generational conversation with urbane, pre-Stonewall stylistics that the radical fairies and the rural-identified lesbian separatists of my second chapter sought to disavow. I recognize that these subjects may sometimes seem strange bedfellows, but one of my main goals is to introduce an assortment of queer counter-stylistics that readers can make later use of, and, if they like, remodel for further ends. I mean this book to be expansive rather than definitive and by no means exhaustive or even comprehensive. The database of anti-urbanisms I have compiled is diverse enough so that you can take what you need and flexible enough so that you can leave what you don’t.

In tandem with the multi-mediated nature of these objects of study, Another Country also draws on a range of disciplines. I bring together a variety of fields and methodologies—studies in print culture, literary close reading, performance studies, fashion studies, modernist studies, new media studies, and studies in the visual culture of photography and painting—to present an interdisciplinary reading of how the urban/rural divide still haunts U.S.-based queer studies and doesn’t seem to be going away anytime soon. These portable modes of critical inquiry are, without doubt, all over the place, but that’s precisely the point given that many of my objects have been forgotten or discarded or, in one egregious case, forcibly incorporated into the social fantasy of what now counts for a metronormative habitus. When I began this project I found myself confronted with what anthropologist Gerald W. Creed and cultural critic Barbara Ching once described as “the lack of a conceptual vocabulary for articulating the blend of psychic, cultural, and ‘real’ geography” regarding any critically queer anti-urbanism, and so this book creates the argot that it needed.62 Over the course of five chapters, I
introduce keywords and phrases—critical rusticity, bicoastality, modernist metronormativity, cosmo-urbanism, regional shame, anti-cosmopolitanism, unfashionability, and queer infrastructure—that I develop alongside previously elaborated terms such as queer anti-urbanism, metro-subversion, and compulsory urbanity to facilitate later forays into the backcountry of critique.

With this terminology in tow, I map the metro-subversions offered by rural stylistics from their quickening in the early twentieth century to the present day. Loose in its chronology, my chapters gravitate toward a few key instances in the as-yet unwritten history of U.S. metronormativity. The first two chapters tackle critical moments in metronormativity’s emergence—what one historian terms the making of the “gay world” and what another scholar deems the “Great Gay Migration.” Each focuses, respectively, on a cluster of artists (Willa Cather, Charles Demuth, and James Weldon Johnson in chapter 1) and a cluster of journals (RFD and Country Women in chapter 2) that countered the demands of lesbian and gay metronormativity during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s as well as its configurations in the decades immediately preceding and immediately following Stonewall. The following three chapters approach later forms of queer urbanity from the 1980s to the present. These chapters rattle U.S. metronormativity’s cultural dissemination by turning to the photography of Michael Meads in the late 1980s and early 1990s; a performance piece by Sharon Bridgforth staged in the mid-nineties; and a graphic memoir by Alison Bechdel published in 2006.

Taken separately, each chapter responds to specific pressures of a dominant queer urbanism: a millennial vogue of “lesbian chic” that winds its way back to the “dyke chic” of the 1950s in chapter 4; the historical emergence of nationalizing newspapers and glossies such as the Advocate in chapter 2; the aesthetic peer pressures of queer modernist sophistication in chapter 1; the rise of mid-1990s LGBTQ Internet chat rooms in chapter 3; and the mythology of Interstate 80 as the road that propelled post–World War II flights in chapter 5. Taken together, the chapters try to rile the veneration of the U.S. metropolis as the epicenter of any queer community. Writ large, they puncture this fantasy. They ask that we learn to live without metropolitan idealization, and their critical takes on so-called remote locations reveal urbanism to often be a geographic desire full of diminishing returns.

I know that this is much to ask of a few choice sites, and I don’t expect the scenes I discuss or the images I reproduced in these pages to halt
the onslaught of cosmo-urbanisms once and for all. When I compiled this book’s thirty-seven images, they seemed paltry when compared to the visual overloads of any monthly feature in any contemporary queer glossy. To be honest, I really don’t mind since we often neglect the small differences that counter-stylistics do manage to accomplish, and these outsider artifacts are no less vital for failing to infiltrate any totalizing metronormative imaginary. Situating themselves beyond this charmed circle, their anti-urbanisms instead dented the idealized imaginaries of something like “New York” when they insisted on stylistic alternatives to “the cultural ascendance of urbanity.”

Indeed, we’re going to find that metronormativity is not always easily punctured or displaced, so before we turn to the pages ahead, let’s momentarily review a few epistemological traps and intellectual fallacies, lest we inadvertently re-instantiate the very norms we seek to weaken:

First, there is a danger of vulgar ruralism, of reinforcing the fluid urban/rural binary and presenting the rural as more authentic. By no means are ruralized identifications more original or genuine than urbanized ones, as if the country ever came before the city or as if any queer gemeinschaft ever antedates any urban gesellschaft. The ruralized stylistics that this book details are as much historically situated as any singular or collective performance of queer cosmopolitanism or sophistication. Likewise, these chapters have no desire to substitute a dominant lesbian and gay urbanism with a dominant ruralism (suffice it to say that across these pages the rural is not the new urban). But Another Country is invested in tracking how non-metronormative subjects negotiated and upset this binary as it continues to inform queer social spaces, even if the binary does not always announce itself as such, and even as rednexuals have been spotted across the land.

Second, there is a danger of conflating the rural with the regional or the intra-regional. Regionalism, like ruralism, has a specific social and aesthetic history. It too is a contested term within modern political, cultural, or social group formations inside or outside the urbanized geographies of the United States. And like ruralism’s hierarchized relationship to urbanism, discourses of regionalism have also been used to shore up a nationalizing identity as they too function as spatialized language games. Yet while I try to respect the integrity of these two concepts, I am nevertheless concerned with frequent slippages between the “regional” and the “rural,” how, for instance, the queer regionality of an imagined Deep South in chapter 4 intersects with the ruralized bodies that Sharon Bridgforth
introduces in her performance piece *no mo blues*. I’m concerned, that is to say, with how the deep localities of queer regionality, queer ruralism, and queer rural stylistics often share a critically anti-urbanist orientation.

Third, there is a danger of homogenizing any city (or, for that matter, any ruralized or regionalized locale). I cannot emphasize enough that the sexual cultures of identifiable metropolitan areas are never uniform, never uncomplicated, and always ripe with non-normativity across and between socioeconomic and racial lines. There’s a world of difference between living in a city and living in a world of metronormativity, and the two need not go hand in hand. I also stated at my start that cities are often testaments to possibility, plentitude, miscellaneity, and pleasure (and, it needs to be said, hostility, cultural and socioeconomic poverty, religious fundamentalism, homophobia, racism, urbanoia, and social conservatism). But when a dominant facet of any urban-identified queer population attempts to homogenize itself as legitimate, its arbitrary citified styles can often become compulsory. Thus as much as this book is not about the anti-urban but rather about critical anti-urbanism, it is also not about metropolitan-identified sexual cultures but rather about queer non-metronormativity. Many of the aesthetic and social strategies that this book offers can be—and have been—introduced across any urbanized or ruralized population.

Fourth, there is a danger of allowing the definitional contours of metronormativity to grow static. I earlier suggested that U.S. metronormativity consists of six structural attributes, but we must attend to their historical specificities as well as their historical dynamism as we pluralize this term. Though these norms may want to appear supra-historical, we might envision their labor as akin to the “dominant-residual-emergent” framework introduced by Raymond Williams to characterize the “internal dynamic relations” of many cultural forms.67 We might then agree with Williams and see, as he does in *The Country and the City*, that these ideas “are changing historical realities, both in themselves and in their interrelations.”68 Concomitantly, we need to attend to the specificities of lesbian and gay ruralities as they align together and as they depart from one another. It was to my surprise that, when I completed this book, most of these chapters managed to pair up across gender: Willa Cather alongside James Weldon Johnson alongside Charles Demuth; *RFD* alongside *Country Women*; Roland Barthes alongside Audre Lorde and Sharon Bridgforth; and Alison Bechdel alongside her father, to name but four examples. In hindsight I see that this move was a calculated wish to trace a continuum of urbane stylistics in the wake of gender-segregated critique, but, to riff on a line
from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “there can’t be an a priori decision about how far it will make sense to conceptualize lesbian and gay [metronormativities] together. Or separately.”

Fifth, there is a danger of neglecting transnational movements as well as the urbanities of other nation-states. Given convincing arguments that “the metropolitan gay model will be found in Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro and Delhi, as well as New York and London, in interaction with traditional local, non-metropolitan models,” and given recent critiques in queer transnational studies against the “globalization of a ‘gay’ identity that replicates a colonial narrative of development and progress that judges all ‘other’ sexual cultures, communities, and practices against a model of Euro-American sexual identity,” we should not assume that the critical models introduced in these pages will apply beyond any U.S.-based study, even as an uncritical model of metronormativity likes to think that it applies beyond every U.S.-based study. Hence one of our goals will be to fulfill Halberstam’s challenge to “complicate our understanding of sexualities within the ‘West.’”

Sixth, I am open to the charge that I cannot see the splinter in my own eye. Like many forays into U.S.-based queer studies, these analyses were written from a space of professional assimilation, one that I see went hand in hand with an acculturation into certain facets of metronormative habitus. Though I now find myself at the peak of what linguistics terms the Hoosier apex, I no longer have much of a southern accent and I can’t turn back that clock. A scholarship boy made good, I cannot recapture the outrageous personal losses that these moves entailed. Many of them I was not—still am not—consciously aware of when I consider my own psycho-geography. Lest I forget my station, please take this sometimes infuriated book as an irrecoverable record of their high cost. Its pages mark geographic and psychological breaks with my own complex identifications as a lower-middle-class queer white male from a town that will never ever get a Zagat rating. This announces itself primarily through the self-reflexive
stylistics of a southern-based vernacular that seeps into the cadence of my prose, one I hope against hope might diminish the homogenizing idioms of our scholarly communications. I wish that these brief moments of regionalized discourse—a word here, some sass there—complement the ruralized counter-stylistics I detail. I wish that they succeed as speed bumps in any urbane reader’s assimilation of Another Country’s case studies. But despite my own privileges of knowingness, I’m nobody’s fool.

Nor were any of the artifacts or enactments I’m about to trace in this book. I again stress that the hardearned protests of queer anti-urbanism I feature may not overhaul the ossifications of any macro-scene. This is more than okay (we ask way too much of our objects). The following studies, you’ll find, accomplished a lot by accomplishing little. Each held a mirror up to the smooth operations of a blistering queer habitus. Each recorded the violence of aesthetic intolerance. Each recognized queer urbanity to be an incomplete, uneven project. Each vexed social spaces that are nothing more than small factions of the queer population. And each found (sometimes founded) expressive cultures that realized their supposedly backwater productions. For those of us caught in the undertow, they recorded the difference between what one ex-urbanized queer—himself no stranger to hating New York and imagining another country of critique—once termed “deep water and drowning.”73