

# INTRODUCTION

To out your text creates the illusion that queer texts can be written, that an author's relationship with a text is simply a matter of interplay between two points on a rhetorical triangle. Such a relationship is, however, a multifaceted intersection of shifting bodies, fingers, tongues that speak, not-so-silent emotions, a series of conflicts not to be (re)solved but to be exploded into language.

**Jacqueline Rhodes, “Homo Origo: The Queertext Manifesto”**

We understand queer *composing* as a queer rhetorical practice aimed at disrupting how we understand ourselves to ourselves. As such, it is a composing that is not a composing, a call in many ways to acts of de- and un- and re-composition.

**Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander,  
from *Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self***

*Elementary school—when it was time to get in line to walk from the primary classroom to gym class or to music class. There were, without question, the girls' line and the boys' line—the two linear formations in which we were to walk from one room to another. And there was me, always lingering at the end of those lines, floating between them like a small balloon. The narrative begins this way because it continues in this way as I stand now still in this androgynous, passing body, a body that cannot align itself even disciplinarily.*

In a 1995 issue of *Educational Theory*, Deborah Britzman asks the question, *Is there a queer pedagogy?* She asked this question at a time when scholars in English and in education were beginning to raise questions about what queer studies brings to teaching, about what conversations would emerge if we imagined queerness in relation to teaching and to the teaching of English. We can mark this time period in the mid-1990s as a moment when scholars began to put the terms “queer” and “pedagogy” side by side, though we might say at this moment that what this pairing of notions means or what it makes possible is still developing. The mid-1990s also marks the appearance of texts such as George Haggerty and Bonnie Zimmerman’s *Professions of Desire: Lesbian and Gay Studies in Literature* (1995), Linda Garber’s *Tilting the Tower: Lesbians/Teaching/Queer Subjects* (1994), and Harriet Malinowitz’s *Textual Orientations: Lesbian and Gay Students and the Making of Discourse Communities* (1995). Malinowitz’s book marks a moment when English’s queer lens begins to sway toward composition more particularly. Several years later, both *College English* and *JAC* published special issues on queer pedagogies and lesbian and gay studies. In 2008, the publication of Jonathan Alexander’s *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy: Theory and Practice for Composition Studies* illuminates the ways the merging of these two fields is still providing active and interesting sites for discussions about the teaching of writing.

Composition, thankfully, has often welcomed the illuminations that have come from outside the confines of its own area of study. In “Feminism and Methodology in Composition Studies” (1992), Patricia Sullivan called for feminism to become a “more fully realized voice within composition studies,” urging that if our field did not “understand issues of gender difference and sexual politics, we [could] never hope to achieve the full understanding of composing that has been the goal of composition studies from its inception” (38). Nearly two decades later, in 2009, Jonathan Alexander and David Wallace articulate a call to action about the “critical power of queerness,” which, they argue, “remains an under-explored and under-utilized modality in composition studies” (301). They ask questions about “what it means to take the queer turn in composition” (302). I consider it a pedagogical imperative to invest in what this queer turn *could* mean—not only for composition’s long-standing commitment to social justice but also for students (and for scholars in the field) *as writers*.

When I examine the ways queer pedagogies are represented in scholarship about teaching, and in particular about the teaching of composition, I notice some interesting patterns. First, oftentimes (as in Malinowitz's book or in Garber's anthology) notions of queer pedagogies seem bound to LGBTQ subjects—queer teachers or queer students. Second, I notice that queer pedagogies are frequently equated with queer texts or the reading of LGBTQ literature. Finally, I notice very few references to student writing *as writing*, meaning that discussions of student writing are bound to discussions of content (how to respond to homophobic papers or how to teach students to respect and honor differences in their writing, for example). I value and make use of all of these kinds of inquiry in my teaching and in my writing about teaching, and I think the work and patterns I refer to here take up very important questions about reading and writing *practices*. However, I understand my exploration of queer pedagogies as more explicitly connected to methodologies or approaches to teaching *and* to writing. In this book and with permission from my students, as collaborators and generators of scholarship, I explore the terrain where queer theory, writing, and pedagogy overlap, intersect, and move into one another. Working through transcripts of class discussions, student writing, teaching notes, and journals, I want to raise questions about the act of writing and the teaching of writing; I want to consider queer possibilities for the teaching of writing with particular attention to college writing courses. I want to continually develop queer methodologies, thinking of queer pedagogies as sets of theorized practices that any student or teacher might engage, sets of theorized practices that as practices were, or could be, queer. I see this work as an extension of what Karen Kopelson describes as a performative or “ambiguous” pedagogy when she writes, “We know, for example, that advocating particular political positions in the classroom becomes much more highly charged and fraught with risks when we are going to be read as occupying somehow ‘corresponding’ identity positions, and thus as advancing political/pedagogical ‘agendas’ based on or arising from those identity positions. The question then, the dilemma, is how to advocate those political positions to which we are committed anyway” (“Of Ambiguity” 564). I think a good part of the solution to the dilemma is not about content, not about teaching *about* one particular “issue” over another, but more about the approaches we take to

any subject we teach and, more specifically, the approach we take to the teaching of *writing*. Rather than positioning queerness as connected only to queer texts or queer teachers/students, I offer writing and teaching as already queer practices, and I contend that if we honor the overlaps between queer theory and composition, we encounter complex and evolving possibilities for teaching writing. I argue for and employ what I call “queer forms”—non-normative and category-resistant forms of writing that move between the critical and the creative, the theoretical and the practical, the rhetorical and the poetic, the queer and the often invisible normative functions of classrooms. I ask myself, What would happen if the teaching of composition were queerer? What would that look like? What kind of writing would students do? What would happen in that queerer classroom? How would *I* write about that classroom?

In their 2011 article, “Queer: An Impossible Subject for Composition,” Alexander and Rhodes arrive at the following conclusion: “[We] have now come to believe that queerness is not simply one of composition’s difficult subjects. Queerness is one of composition’s *impossible subjects*” (179). They explain that “queerness is essentially about impossibility and excess . . . queerness is the gesture of the unrepresentable, the call for a space of impossibility, the insistence that not everything be composed” (180). Here, Alexander and Rhodes contend with the multiple meanings of “composure”—something perhaps always imbued with normativity. When we “compose” ourselves, we reduce ourselves to available and understandable forms, we get it together, we clean up our messy identities, our emotions, our grammar, and we “produce shapely texts” (194). Here, we can begin to think about whether it is possible to compose queerly, to write queer, to teach writing queer. Alexander and Rhodes suggest that “it seems more important to see how queerness challenges the very subject of composition, of what it means to compose, of what it means to *be composed*” (182). This book, in its composition and its content, seeks to be “de- and un- and re-” composed, to explore the impossible landscape of queer composition, to consider the possibility of teaching queer.

In “The Failure of Queer Pedagogy,” a video essay from *The Writing Instructor’s* 2015 special issue entitled *Queer and Now*, Jacqueline Rhodes reveals,

I struggle with the melding of queer and pedagogy. Can such a thing as queer pedagogy even exist? For pedagogy is about disciplining the subject. Pedagogy is a heterosexed political indoctrination in service of a heterosexed institutional imperative. The queer challenges such disciplining, such assimilation, and resists the demarcation of acceptable and unacceptable, appropriate and inappropriate. There can be and are queer teachers. There can be and is queer teaching, but queer teachers teaching queerly still struggle against the confines of capital “P” pedagogy, which is informed by a logic of mastery, of individual attainment, and of institutional assessment of that attainment.

Rhodes invites us to recall that the teaching of composition in the university is teaching that happens within the norms of institutional, departmental, and programmatic constraints. And, of course, there is no denying the fact of the “institutional imperative.” I wonder, though, what locations or positions *can* or *do* exist outside these kinds of constraints? Even when I imagine the most radical places I can bring to mind, not one of them is innocent of the charge of “disciplining the subject.” There is, in the end, no outside of institutional constraints even if and when one imagines oneself as outside an actual institution. For Rhodes, then, there is no queer pedagogy; there is only the possibility of “queer teachers teaching queerly” or, as I might put it, teaching queer. The question remains, How might teachers of composition, even from our various institutional locations and fields of constraint, mobilize queer as an act of resistance?

### **Queer Methodologies**

To consider questions about queering composition, I needed to consider myself as a writer first. I needed to consider how I would go about representing the materials I gather, the students I teach, and the questions I want to ask. In considering these questions of representation and methodology, I became invested in writing that enacts its central inquiries formally, and I turned to scholars in queer theory to think about methodology. *Teaching Queer’s subjects of inquiry and its form* are informed by my own understandings of what constitutes *queer*. Jack Halberstam, in the introduction to *Female Masculinity*, writes that a “queer methodology is [...] a scavenger methodology, that uses different meth-

ods to collect and produce information” (13). Halberstam argues that “queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (13). I take to heart Halberstam’s call for a “scavenger methodology,” and in this book I try to push on notions of disciplinary, bodily, pedagogical, writerly, and scholarly coherence. I do not think scholarship in teaching can pretend to separate itself from the teachers and students who are its subjects; I cannot convince myself (and have no wish to convince readers) that there is some objective distance between the stories of the lives of teachers and the narratives of their teaching. And because I believe, as Halberstam does, that methods “that are often cast as being at odds with each other” can be put in dynamic, productive combination, I try to compose as this scavenger. I collect my work and my students’ work alongside one another; I try to move toward the layers of understanding that might emerge. I blur the lines of authorship. I make use of literature, science, personal narrative, and individual experience. I recall my own education; I describe the fragments and fissures of my own life alongside ruminations on the loon, my martial arts practice, the body, dolphins, comets, and my third-grade teacher—all become narrative threads with and against which my students and I can be read and interpreted. In this sense, this project is about writing, and this project is writing. Teaching writing queer and writing queer. Or, at least, as queer as it is possible to teach and write.

In Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham’s gathering of writers’ voices in *Critical Intellectuals on Writing*, Judith Butler responds to a question about her statement that “difficult language can change a tough world.” Butler writes, “I believe it is important that intellectuals with a sense of social responsibility be able to shift registers and to work at various levels, to communicate what they’re communicating in various ways” (Olson and Worsham 45). In many ways, this book communicates in various ways, in several registers, and in multiplying forms. Because I believe, as Vershawn Ashanti Young puts it, “[r]eally, theoretical discussion cannot be put to better use—I think—than for someone to wrap his life in it and disclose just how closely or loosely the cover fits, just how much warmth the blanket provides or how much cold it still lets in” (13).

*Instead of a science project, I wrote what I called “a science book” entitled “The Monarch,” and I remember drawing pictures of my family, giving them butterflies as faces. Alongside my father and mother, my siblings and their butterfly heads, I composed narratives that made use of all the science projects I could see in the room. I remember writing down the names of planets, which I used as the names for the characters with the butterfly heads, who were also my family. I remember there were volcanoes, and I remember trying to describe the anatomy of a fly—something Joey Lavarco, who had to repeat third grade twice and whom I loved for his irreverence, was working on in the back row. This is the first time I remember writing queerly and having a teacher who celebrated that sensibility in me.*

Johnnie Hart, a student in one of the first-year writing courses I examine in this project, writes in his midterm course evaluation form,

It's like I keep going to write something down, but I feel lost. I feel like there is not much I can say for sure in this class. So I guess my biggest question is how do I write if I can't say anything for sure about anything? In high school I was supposed to pretend to be sure when I wasn't in my writing and lots of other things come to think of it, but now, now being sure is a sign of weakness when before it was a sign of strength. My thinking feels all watery. It's hard to fight the urge to freeze it back up.

It is easy to note Johnnie Hart's narrative gift of metaphor—how he is able to imagine his way through the literal circumstances of his experience with the readings and with the course. I am interested in his sense of liquid, of his thinking being “watery.” I am interested in that water as a kind of alternative epistemology, a way of thinking and writing. I am curious about how I might more explicitly encourage student work that functions as liquid, as fluid. For me, this means I must contend with fluidity in terms of reading, writing, thinking, and interpretation, as all of these kinds of literacy practices overlap and move into another when students engage the practice of writing, or when anyone does.

One of the things I notice, again and again, about the work of queer theorists (and really, the work of many writers I love) is the fierceness with which they are willing to interrogate the self, identity, and language. We need not reach very far into the pockets of queer studies to find this interrogation: Foucault's interrogation of discourse and the repressive hypothesis in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, Butler's interrogation of the category of “woman” in *Gender Trouble*, or Eve Kosofsky

Sedgwick's interrogation of "coming out" in *Epistemology of the Closet*. Sedgwick writes, "But, again, the extent, construction and meaning, and especially the history of any such theoretical continuity—not to mention its consequences for practical politics—must be open to every interrogation" (88). In fact, even to think of Butler's move to imagine drag as a kind of potentially subversive "trying on" of gender is also a way to imagine the courses I teach as a potentially subversive "trying on" of queer teaching—a kind of inductive experiment. Queer pedagogy is not liberatory pedagogy, not critical or feminist pedagogy, but something else. And as Sedgwick additionally asserts, "[a]ntihomophobic inquiry is not co-extensive with feminist inquiry, but we can't know in advance how they will be different" (83). The same holds true for queer pedagogical inquiry and other types of pedagogical inquiry. I teach writing courses with interrogation in mind—interrogation that would inevitably involve interrogations of language, identity, and self. I try to begin my courses with an interrogation into perhaps one of the most sacred culminations of language, identity, and self: gender. After all, male/female "functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many, many other binarisms" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 84). I have the idea that if students do work in thinking through this powerful system of meaning, it would not only help them to understand how selves are made and how systems of domination operate, but it would also help them to write more interesting and more complicated work, writing that proceeds without the assumption that meaning can be contained. Just as Sedgwick characterizes her project as a writer, I, too, would characterize my project as a teacher of writing: "[r]epeatedly to ask how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially *mean*, has been my principal strategy" (Sedgwick, *Epistemology* 83). How categorizations "work" is a question of theoretical function and construction as opposed to what categorizations "mean," which would suggest first that we could even know what they mean and second that they have inherent or fixed meaning. While queer pedagogy would not be the first radical pedagogy to aim to disrupt binarisms, it does seem that a queer pedagogy might ask that students and teachers disrupt binaries in some very specific, embodied, sexed, and gendered ways—ways that cut right to the heart of who we think we are, or who we think others are. These categorizations, of

course, have something to do with gender and bodies (*kinds of people*), but they also have everything to do with form (*kinds of writing*).

*It seems to have started quite early—the idea that some things that I found so strange and terrifying were, to others, quite obvious and comforting. There was, however, some consensus, like the idea that I should accept the invitation to join the third-grade “Gifted and Talented Reading Group” at Forest Brook Elementary School. I don’t remember any of the books we read in that group except one. It was a book titled Call It Courage, by Armstrong Sperry, and it was about a young boy whose mother was killed by the sea in a hurricane; of course, the young boy, Mafatu, was terrified of the sea and felt cast out by his community, which valued courage above all things. As narrative would have it, Mafatu goes out to sea alone to face his fears. Mrs. Sullivan, the beautiful librarian who painted on her eyebrows and drove a gleaming red car, chose me for the reading group. I had been a “library aide” for two years, and I suspect while my grades weren’t always strong, she chose me because of the sheer number of books she had watched me check out. To this day, I am not exactly certain if I read any of them. But Call It Courage I did read. I read it on the school bus, on the way to Little League practice, late at night when just enough hall light (which I insisted be left on) shone through the bedroom door. I was obsessed with Mafatu’s fear, and with the idea that there seemed to be no one else in his entire community who feared the sea. I had a hard time believing this, and when I told Mrs. Sullivan that there was no way no other kid was afraid of the sea except Mafatu, she said that even though we lived on Long Island we had no concept of how close Mafatu lived to the sea. And living so close, she explained, the sea was just part of everyone’s life, so it is believable that no one living that close to the sea and looking out to the sea each day would be afraid of it in the way that Mafatu was.*

### The Question of Narrative

*I had asked my students to read a chapter from Judith Butler’s Undoing Gender. Danielle says Butler is impossible. Maria jokes, “Doesn’t she have anything better to do than be completely impenetrable?” Johnnie says, “This woman does talk in circles, I’ll give ‘em that.” I fear this is the start of the coup—the moment when my students forge an ever-strengthening uprising to overthrow the queer text they have been given. And by extension they seem to threaten to overthrow me, their queer teacher, and also to leave little room for the possibility of value in queer and difficult texts. I feel simultaneously angry and guilty. But I need to hurry, to decide what approach to take. There is, of course, the “eat your vegetables, they are good for you approach,” which I have to say usually ends with my students rightfully feeding my metaphorical vegetables to the metaphorical dog. There is the “therapeutic” approach; this is when I say, “Are you frustrated by this text?” and perhaps I make the ever-predictable move of “take us*

*to a place in the chapter you found so difficult or frustrating to understand.” There is also the “I hate ‘the man’ too” approach, in which I validate their revolution. I say things like, “Yes, Judith Butler is impossible.” I say, “Yeah, I don’t know why this theory stuff has to be so dense on purpose.” I say, “We want theory for the people!”*

I can’t say that I like the teacher (me) in this narrative very much. I can’t say I find the students that compelling either—how could they be compelling when they are so erased by my own inner neuroses? What my students are saying to me is quite interesting, though because I categorize their response to Butler as “resistance” or, even more problematically, as a “coup,” it can be difficult to see how their responses are interesting. However, I suppose my anxiety, which is what causes me to see their responses as a kind of “coup,” does interest me. The anxiety speaks to some of the complicated questions of power present in all classroom scenarios. And as queer theory’s interventions in pedagogy can tell us, power is not fixed; it is ever shifting, even in moments when we are reaching for its fixity. Knowing this, I need to find ways to work with the moments I can feel the power shifting between myself and my students, who can also feel power shift. My internal monologue both amuses and disturbs me at once because if a shift in power is happening in this moment, none of the “approaches” I consider above seems to be conscious of that power shift. Each move is an attempt at taking power back, or asserting its fixity, rather than moving with the shift of power in the direction of my students. So, perhaps I can tell the same story another way.

*When my students say Judith Butler is impenetrable, I laugh. I say, “Don’t you think it’s kinda ironic that we’re calling a butch lesbian queer theorist ‘impenetrable’?” They look stumped. Finally, Johnnie says enthusiastically from the back, “Oh, I get it. Impenetrable, like won’t be penetrated. Like by a man.” The students shift uncomfortably in their seats. “Something like that,” I say. I’m a little worried I’ve said something “wrong” but hope I’m hiding it well. I hope I am teaching my students that penetration is a something we can collectively consider as an intellectual term. When my students then say Butler is impossible, I feel sad, defensive even. So I read from Butler page 29: “Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread.” Interesting, I say, that we are accusing a person who says possibility is as crucial as bread of being impossible. Does anyone else find this interesting? From the back again: “It just proves her point,” Johnnie says. I am sweating. I know in my mind that I have my clothes on, but my body feels naked. And Johnnie, the other “visible” queer in the classroom, is wearing his compassion on his sleeve. I*

*can tell he wants to help me. We are of the same impossible body, after all. Him with his purple beret, skinny-girl jeans, and beautiful queer lisp. Me with my unruly chin hair and a voice that I can only describe as my father's. How will Johnnie and I lead the students out of impossibility? "This woman does talk in circles," Johnnie says, "I'll give 'em that."*

I don't know about this teacher either. And clearly the representation of students is just as problematic as their erasure. I don't know if I should or how I should write about my students' bodies or if their bodies and fashion choices move the narrative in another theoretical direction. I don't know if I have the right to say what Johnnie's cooperation means. I do know there is always something different about a classroom in which there is a queer body, a queer sensibility. This narrative is about trying to make Butler *possible*—not accessible, or easy, or even pleasurable but possible. There is much at stake in recognizing her possibility because if she is *impossible*, I also am *impossible*. Johnnie is *impossible*. Queer pedagogies, *impossible*. Queer bodies have certainly the potential for pushing up against what is possible, and this potential can cause us to be deemed *impossible*. This is not necessarily a problem; in fact, it is sometimes desirable to be *impossible*, illegible—to become the difficult text. Can this teacher, who is me, really make an ironic joke about penetration with first-year students? Is that even possible or ethical or "appropriate"? What context would a narrative need that says this? What teacher would we allow to say it? Narrative exposes our vulnerability as teachers (and often the vulnerability of our students) endlessly. Sometimes I wonder if it is the vulnerability itself that gives classroom story a bad rap or turns classroom narrative into the little brother some like to bully. But narrative almost always raises complicated questions about representation. And as queer theory also tells us, representation is already *impossible* before we even begin—identity itself is moving beneath our feet as we teach, as we write about teaching.

*Much of my teaching is waiting. I try to be patient—I try to wait the way I wait for the train. Confident it will arrive. Not exactly sure of the precise moment, but soon. Each class a series of waitings. On this particular day, I am waiting for one of my students to make a comment I am able to see as possibility—the piece of a discussion that we will all remember because without it, the conversation might have fallen to pieces. They have read Judith Butler for the first time. There is the sense of struggling, maybe even of suffering in the room. Comments are made about*

*difficulty, about big words, about density. One student even heckles Butler a bit. I am waiting still. This woman does talk in circles, Johnnie says, I'll give 'em that. By "them," he means the other students. He means he agrees with them about the denseness and difficulty of the text. But what I am interested in most are the circles—what it means for a writer to approach her task "in circles." What shapes do people usually talk in? I ask. At first, they seem to think a little that I am teasing. Then Danielle sees that I am not and says, "I think of essays more like boxes that connect." On the board, I draw a picture of circles spiraling into one another and then boxes that connect. We end up drawing a geometrical diagram for every essay that follows (both the course readings and the students' essays); we try to graph their shapes as a way of understanding the content. Some students grow to like the talking in circles—the way ideas slip back into one another again and again—and each time they are changed. This won't be the last time a queer text moves us to draw essays, to talk about structure and shape in new ways.*

It's hard, even for me, to see these three narratives as speaking about or telling the story of the same classroom moment. But each one does describe the same period of time. I move them *in time*. I begin at a different moment. I skip over time. Narrative time becomes as fluid and movable as power and identity. I offer these narratives not because I see them (or any narrative) as instructions for writing pedagogies but because the questions narrative produces for me are distinct and essential to teaching practice and to queer pedagogy as a theoretical field of inquiry. I thought to begin this introduction by finding a teaching narrative in which someone attempted to record or describe queer pedagogies in composition. And each time, I noticed the way I treated the narrative more like an object, like an opportunity for critique. I noticed myself pointing to the limits of narrative *first*, before thinking about its possibilities. So I decided that I might raise some questions about my own teaching story—it might be important or illuminating for me to risk my own narratives to start—to offer a moment when both narrative possibilities and pedagogical possibilities intersect. Every one of these narratives is problematic—narratives are never *not* problematic. But I am also interested in asking questions about what narratives make visible. And as someone who is interested in the intersections between queer theory and composition studies, I am curious about the ways teaching stories shape understandings of what queer teaching might mean or make possible. I do, after all, agree with Butler that "[p]ossibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread" (*Undoing* 28).

This exploration of where queer pedagogies might be or begin, like my own body, refuses linear formations, refuses the category of discipline. The investigations are narrative, theoretical, fluid, a series of constant movements between gender studies, queer theory, pedagogy, and composition theory. I both argue for an approach to teaching and try to invite my reader to embody that approach—self-conscious, weblike, and fragmentary. I do not believe the story of my scholarship is separate from the story of my life or the body I live. And while narrative has certainly played a role in composition studies thus far, I want to offer a particularly queer understanding of what narrative might mean to theory and, dialectically, what theory might mean to narrative. I most closely link my own understanding of the scholarly use of narrative to Nancy K. Miller's understanding in *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*. She writes, "By the risks of its writing, personal criticism embodies a pact . . . binding writer to reader in the fabulation of self-truth, that what is at stake matters also to others: somewhere in the self-fiction of the personal voice is the belief that the writing is worth the risk. In this sense, by turning its authorial voice into spectacle, personal writing theorizes the stakes of its own performance. . . . Personal writing opens an inquiry on the cost of writing—critical writing or Theory—and its effects" (24). While I have no intention of glorifying or romanticizing the "personal," I do intend for the narrative to become spectacle inasmuch as it "theorizes the stakes of its own performance." The word *spectacle* can, of course, imply a certain kind of regrettably public moment, a disaster of sorts. But I want to read this term as carrying, at once, all its meanings and connotations—spectacle as public, open, in plain sight, and even the possible disaster of putting into view that which should be kept out of view, behind the scenes. As this project is simultaneously about writing, about teaching and about my own selfhood, it aims not only to articulate queer pedagogy's possibilities for teaching composition but also to enact, in its very writing, a kind of queer pedagogy—one that tries to both expose and complicate the life that leads to the study of writing and queer pedagogy in the first place.

*My mother went to great lengths to convince me, as a child, to wear shirts, to wear the tops to my bathing suits in the swimming pool. I tore the First Communion dress and rubbed my hair violently against the velvet couch to dismantle the "body wave" the hairdresser constructed for*

*the special day. The body of Christ. And I learned how to hold my hands to receive it, how to stand in line with the others. Mostly, in the late afternoons, when I'd ride my bike into the woods, I'd pull off my shirt and ride the dirt pathways with the sun lighting up my small back. No one was there to see me.*

I am working, in some sense, in a tradition in composition of using the personal narrative or the materials of experience in or for scholarship. And I hope to stretch and push on that tradition, opening up new possibilities for what counts as scholarship—blurring the creative and the critical, the linear and the nonlinear, the personal and the public, the theoretical and the “practical.” I hope the ways in which this project is, ultimately, about me offer productive sites of inquiry—expanding the project and exposing its vulnerabilities (even as a kind of spectacle) as I try learn about and to put into view my own teaching practices. I might contend, even, that every book you have ever read is about its author. I have kept, in my mind, William E. Coles’s book *The Plural I: The Teaching of Writing*, which he referred to as a kind of “novel of the classroom.” I have read with great interest not only scholars writing about queer pedagogies but also scholars who have disrupted notions of the academic and the personal, scholars like Richard Miller in his book *Writing at the End of the World*, or Frankie Condon in her book *I Hope I Join the Band: Narrative, Affiliation, and Antiracist Rhetoric*. I have also kept close Paul Kameen’s important and groundbreaking book *Writing/Teaching: Essays toward a Rhetoric of Pedagogy*, in which he takes his students and his experiences to be some of the central research materials of his project. He writes,

One could argue, for example, that what I offer here is either too practical or too local to be legitimately scholarly, that these are, after all, *only* teaching materials or *merely* autobiography or *simply* personal reflections. And they are, of course, all of those things. I present them, though, not specifically for what they say about the context out of which they emerged—my personal experience—but for the things that they attempt to *do* with the kinds of change, especially for the teacher, that are part of the stakes, tacitly if not expressly, in any pedagogical enterprise, most especially one that has an overt political component, as this course clearly did. (6)

Like Kameen’s characterization of his course, it is easy to see the writing courses I draw from in this project as “overtly political.” However, I also

want to raise questions “that are part of the stakes . . . in any pedagogical enterprise.” And I want to raise these questions through means that are quite “legitimately scholarly,” but perhaps not quite obviously, at times. I present the theory, autobiography, teaching materials, and personal reflections as scholarship, as a kind of research—a looking again—into the teaching of writing. And while the particular courses I examine are primarily first-year writing courses, I expect the possibilities for queer pedagogies would be relevant to most courses and teachers of classes within the humanities. I am aware, as I begin, of the way in which my body, my identity, the events of the story of my life and education inform the way I construct this writing, my thinking, and the stories of my classrooms. I cannot read without my body. I cannot read without the presence of a fleeting masculinity, androgyny, contradiction, and movement. And because I have come to see this position as a kind of blessing, I try to find ways to offer contradiction and movement to my students—especially those students who have come to understand themselves as solid, as fixed and named forms who can make fixed and named assumptions about reading and writing. I seek to (as tenderly as I can and with acute awareness of the responsibilities) disrupt this kind of learning, as I believe it limits our capabilities and places us (without our consent) into a state of unconsciousness. It leads us, unfairly and without self-implication, to walk the boys’ line or the girls’ line, endlessly, through each door of our lives.

*Before I knew the names of identities, before I had traveled the long years of “mistaken for a boy,” before I knew the word “butch,” before I stumbled upon the XY chromosome in my “female” body, I am no older than six or seven. And each month the Highlights Magazine arrives at the house. And I am giddy with excitement to complete my favorite task. It’s a game called “What does not belong?” in which the child (in this case me) is meant to identify in a picture the object or subject that does not belong and then use scissors to rid the picture of its not belonging piece. I can remember cutting out what appeared to be a bird from inside what appeared to be a body of water of some kind. The bird appeared to be swimming, so my mother happily hands me the red-handled kid scissors. She watches me and is proud of how smart I have always been. “Careful,” she says, “don’t accidentally cut out a fish.” And here I am remembering back. Here I am a writer who knows, of course, there is such a bird called a loon—in the air a bird, flying, but in the water a winged fish, swimming.*

### Body of Knowledge

The phrase “body of knowledge” is most familiar to us as institutional, a set of sanctioned practices—this body of knowledge is understood to be located outside the self. It is something we can grasp toward, something we can know, something we can teach, but it is not, however, something that we are. In this model, I *have* the body of knowledge; my students do not. However, even as I have this body, this does not mean I *am* this body or can ever be it. Our bodies are forbidden to *be* this body of knowledge; our bodies are meant to be outside, separate from the body of knowledge. What we know, then, is not supposed to be at all about embodiment. The body of knowledge replaces the body, substitutes institutional sanctions in its place, intending to forever codify and compartmentalize what we know from what we do, from what we are, from the lived experience of our bodies. The political stakes of this “body of knowledge” are then quite high. It evens paves the way for us to dismiss or disregard what the body knows in favor of what the institution knows.

It is no accident, then, that the idiom *body of knowledge* takes the metaphor of body—steals it *from* the body in order to *disembodiment* education. But in the echoes of the idiom’s erasure of the body, we can still hear that somehow what we know, or what we come to know, is part of bodily expression and bodily composition. What happens when we ourselves become bodies of knowledge? Most of us do not want to talk about our bodies, at least not here in the brainy mindspace of academic discourse, and especially when it comes to teaching and students. Part shame, part fear, part binary of body and mind, this hesitancy can be particularly amplified for queer bodies, or bodies like mine. The queer body always calls attention to what the body knows. Institutions must put students with appropriate (read: composed) straight folks who won’t have sex with them (read: make them gay), nice straight folks who will erase themselves as bodies (read: straight people have invisible bodies unless they are queered in some other way), or who have the luxury of seeming to do so. At sixteen, when my close friend says to me, *if you want to be a teacher you better take off those freedom rings and stay in the closet. You can't be queer around kids; people don't like that.* And later in college, the education professor who taught my educational psychology course saying, *especially for you, Stacey, it's important you keep your classroom door open, and that you do not touch your students for any reason.*

*I used to teach tai chi to a group of women from a church in the suburbs of Pittsburgh. Some of them referred to me as “he,” some as “she.” They don’t seem to notice the disparity between their pronouns. Once, I was showing Evelyn, a seventy-six-year-old two-time cancer survivor, how to stand. I pressed my hands gently atop her shoulders and pressed down. Her back and shoulders relaxed. I placed my hand at the small of her back and pushed softly forward. Her knees bend as she falls into a stance known as “wu ji,” the most balanced and relaxed a person can be—perhaps another way to think about a body of knowledge.*

In teaching tai chi, the physical relation is obvious, necessary. Even when I am not touching my students, they watch my physical movements intently, looking for when to step, when to circle their hands, how to use their waists to lead the rest of their bodies. In the college classroom, the body’s force is less obvious, or perhaps less admitted. In his essay “A ‘Sisterly Camaraderie’ and Other Queer Friendships,” from the anthology *The Teacher’s Body*, Jonathan Alexander writes about the ways his particular “embodied queerness had intense effects on his teaching and relationship with his students” (163). Most students, and most people who meet me for the first time, watch for clues for what might be underneath my clothes, what body of knowledge my body conveys. What does it mean for my queer and uncertain body to teach students to write? What does it mean for my queer ambiguous hand to write words *about* my students’ work? And do I also, in writing about their work, write about their bodies?

Bodies do matter. A body of knowledge has everything to do with bodies. As a person whose scholarship draws most often on students and student writing, I have to contend with their bodies—or at the very least, acknowledge the body. I have to raise questions over and over again about how, if, and when to represent students’ bodies as part of their writing or their classroom presence. I have to make decisions about what representations are ethical or necessary. I have to consider my own fears about being a queer scholar who pays attention to bodies. I am supposed to be one of those good queers, if I am to be a teacher, one who says “appropriate” things, unerotic, eunuch. I am supposed to ignore my students’ bodies. Of course, the question arises, *Can I really do this when so many of my courses ask students to think about gender, sexuality, and embodiment, when I ask my students at times to write about themselves, their bodily experiences?* Take, for

example, the following passage, written by a student in one of my first-year writing classes. I had asked students to spend the five days between two class meetings keeping a gender journal, one in which they were to take notice of anything they saw that they thought might be connected to gendered bodily expression. Kelsey Fagan writes,

When I am walking down the street alone, I rarely make eye contact with other people who are passing me. I never thought of this attribute as a female one. But I think maybe it might be. When I walked down the street, I tried to make eye contact with people I passed. I noticed it was much harder to make eye contact with other women than it was for me to make eye contact with men. I think if it's because women evaluate each other in secret. Like we look at each other's clothes and stomachs and stuff to see how we compare. With guys, who cares.

Does it help in trying to read her writing to know that Kelsey's body is a white body, a conventionally attractive normatively gendered young woman, that she looks me in the eyes all the time? Do I say I am uncomfortable saying that? Do I say she wears rings on every finger, that she closes her eyes when something is hard to think about in class, that she rolls her eyes whenever a particular classmate speaks, that she crosses her legs always when she sits and has a habit of biting her nails? I learn, in Kelsey's passage, that I am easier for her to look at, that our bodies are not in competition, that Kelsey and I are not "women" to each other. This is Kelsey's body of knowledge as I read it, as I am not supposed to be reading it. We know our students' bodies; we sometimes know the emotional terrain that is expressed through them. We are, by the very notion of an institutional "body of knowledge," encouraged to erase this embodied knowledge, to find it irrelevant to our classroom practices. To acknowledge Kelsey's body would be, in part, to explode the myth of my own objectivity as her teacher, to admit there is more to my comments, more to my scholarship that cites Kelsey, more to the grades I give Kelsey inside the institution, the grades that mark her position with respect to writing's ambiguous, shifting body of knowledge.

The truth is, this is what I am reading when I read Kelsey's papers, when she raises her hand to speak in class—her body always part of my interpretation. I can hear Kelsey's voice in her response because I know the sound, because I recognize the sound, because I have watched and

listened to the sound of her voice, because I even know the sound she makes the instant before she speaks—the quick taking of breath, the tight shift of the eyebrows. Reading student writing in the context of physical classroom means always to read a body alongside or behind a text. Reading student papers is quite distinct from reading a novel, from reading a book of scholarship by someone whose body you have never seen, whose body you do not know, whose body might intentionally erase itself—something I am trying to work against. Reading student writing and representing that writing in our scholarship is always a representation of body.

*It's 1986. I'm nine. All I can think about is Don Mattingly. Mattingly was a no frills hitter. There was something endlessly compelling about how relaxed he was—his hands loose around the grip of the bat, his eyes clear and meditative. It would be easy to hit like Dave Winfield, who had a distinctive high stance, who waved the bat above his shoulder like a flag. But it was Don Mattingly I wanted to be. I recognized a certain evenness in him. Mattingly never stood still after hitting a home run to admire it; he never strutted. But people still called him "Donnie Baseball" or sometimes "The Hit Man." So I'd watch the Yankees games holding my peewee Louisville Slugger. I'd stand in the living room and mirror him. My mother yelling from the kitchen, "If you swing that bat in the house, I swear to Holy Lord." I was careful. I'd wait until my mother was a safe distance from the room. I'd make sure there was no chance of hitting anything in the room. Sometimes, if I needed to, I would use the new camcorder held up to the television to tape Mattingly's at bats, so later I could play them in slow motion. Being Don Mattingly, I felt more like myself, though, of course, I was not Don Mattingly. At least not until one glorious day in Little League when Brian Poulos's dad says to my dad—loud enough for me to hear, after I had hit a single to right center, rounded first base, and put my hands together for one single clap, just like Mattingly—he says, your kid hits like Donnie. My dad chuckled, I remember. But my body lit up inside.*

Here is an excerpt from Kelsey Fagan's essay "A Journey to Womanhood." The first passage is from the beginning, and the second from the closing to her essay. She writes,

I was six or seven, and I was playing in the yard with all of my neighbors, all of whom happened to be boys. We were playing Star Wars and since I was the only girl I of course was Princess Leia. We set up the rules for the game and started to play. Only I wasn't running around with light sabers

saving the galaxy. I was sitting in the tree house waiting to be rescued. Since I was the princess, I needed to be rescued.

...

If I could go back and have a conversation with little Kelsey, while she was waiting to be rescued by the boys, I would give her a few pointers. I would tell her that she should do what she wants. If she wanted to be Luke Skywalker, she should go be Luke Skywalker and if she wanted to be Princess Leia waiting for the boys to come rescue her then she should be Princess Leia. Either way, she rescues herself in the end by making a conscious choice.

Composition, of course, as a field, has known for a long time that the idea of some official “body of knowledge” in our discipline is contradictory, even impossible. Consider how much time we spend reaching into other disciplines, blurring and contesting the boundaries of what counts as composition. Consider the ways we tell and retell histories of composition, knowing all along that the “body of knowledge” that counts as composition is not a stable, predetermined body. Consider the work compositionists do in thinking about identity, knowing that this body of knowledge is connected to, rather than outside of, some notion of self. But what recent turns in queer theory—turns in which the field of transgender studies makes a tremendous impact—can tell us is that the idea of a “body of knowledge” is not only linked to identity as a concept but also linked to actual material bodies, that, in fact, identity is inextricably linked to actual material bodies. This is the pressure transgender theorists are putting on some areas of queer theory—a pressure I want to put on our practices of pedagogy and on our writing about our students and their work. In the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* inaugural keywords issue, Francisco J. Galarte provides an extensive flushing out of “transpedagogies,” a term coined by Vic Muñoz and Ednie Kaeh Garrison in *Women’s Studies Quarterly*. Galarte writes,

In a transpedagogical approach, processes of learning become political mechanisms through which identities can be shaped and desires mobilized and through which the experience of bodily materiality and everyday life can take form and acquire meaning. Transpedagogies supply a discursive mode of critique for challenging the production of social

hierarchies, identities, and ideologies across local and national boundaries. They represent both a mode of cultural production and a type of cultural criticism for questioning the conditions under which knowledge of gendered embodiment is produced. They provide a space for affective engagement, for the affirmation or rejection of values, and for the inhabitation, negotiation, or refusal of culturally prescribed gendered subject positions. Understanding pedagogy as a mode of cultural production in this way underscores its performative nature. It is how theory becomes practice. (146)

I want to bring the body back to knowledge, to acknowledge all the material realities of our classrooms—the student who shakes my hand firmly and introduces himself on the first day of class, the student whose hung-over and vodka-seeping body slumps in the back row, me (their teacher), whose voice rings of her father’s voice, whose broad shoulders curb her fears of earning no authority. There is no bodiless pedagogy, no disembodied scholarship to represent disembodied students and teaching. I wonder what would happen if we stopped pretending there were, if we considered the meaning our bodies make, if we showed up (mortal, subjective, messy, and vulnerable as bodies are) to, as Kelsey says, “rescue ourselves in the end by making a conscious choice.”

### **Teaching Queer**

What follows is both my attempt (which also involves my inevitable and deeply necessary failure) to teach queer, to develop and cultivate queer methodologies in my classroom and in my writing, to experiment with what happens when I invite my students to take queerer approaches as well. The first chapter here takes up questions of the teaching body—this body that shows up vulnerable in a first day of class. A teaching body will always be waited for, looked at, put on its front-of-the-room stage as the first kind of student knowledge, the first body of knowledge. In chapter one, “Becoming the Loon: Queer Masculinities, Queer Pedagogies,” I offer a hybrid-genre, theoretical meditation with the hope of inviting teachers to see their bodies, to confront the fear, defensiveness, and erasure that constitute what it means to *be* a teaching body. In this chapter, teaching queer means quite literally teaching *as a queer body*. And while I link this theoretical meditation on the body to my own

experience and lived material existence, I also think this chapter calls on the figure of the teacher to consider their queerness, whether that queerness is linked to gender-specific instantiations or not. The body is queered by all sorts of non-normative markers, and those markers become perhaps more visible as the body stands as a spectacle on stage for the eyes of other bodies: the body queered by disability, the body queered by race, the body queered by beauty, the body queered by pregnancy, and so on. Some might argue that a pregnant body, for example, is not queer, perhaps because of a presumed connection to reproduction. But the way I want to understand *queer* in this particular context is as a kind of deviant mark, an excess, a bodily expression that exists outside a normative construction of the body. In this sense, we can imagine the pregnant body marked with *queerness*, how the body moves around the stomach, how the presence of another body is imagined within it, how the practices that may (or may not have) produced this pregnant body become part of the body's interpretative possibility. Chapter one takes the loon as its central metaphor. The loon's body, like my own, is a blurring body—attributes of fish and bird.

In chapter two, “Courting Failure,” I draw heavily from Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* to consider how teaching queer means always, in some sense, to court failure, to bring failure into view as a necessary, illuminating, and imperative part of any attempt to teach (or to write) queer. I ask students to think about structural failures—terms like “structure” and “organization”—that circulate frequently in their discussions of one another’s writing. In this chapter, I wonder if, or how, notions of order can survive in a queer context. What does queer structure look like? Is that an oxymoron? The notion of “writing queer” is one I both relish and problematize in the chapter, trying to understand if there might even be such a thing and why I would ask my students to try it. I consider how teachers of writing conceptualize failure with students through an examination of my own failing class participation policies and my own complicated understandings of silence.

In chapter three, “Alternative Orientations,” I consider the documents informing and circulating around one in the composition courses I draw from in this book. These documents include: the University of Pittsburgh first-year composition mission statement, my own course description and instructor’s statement, and the sequence of as-

signments themselves. I consider this chapter an inquiry into the course documents that reflect and contribute to course logics and ideas. I offer some glimpses of the writing students composed in response. This chapter introduces the dolphin as another site of interpretative possibility. As a child, I was not exactly a reader. I always wanted to be, but I just could not seem to stay interested for long. That is, until a class trip to an aquarium, where I saw a dolphin for the first time. Because of its curled body and what seemed at the time like joyous dives, I read. I read anything about dolphins I could. Sign posts, encyclopedia entries, children's stories. It became a kind of marker of my expertise: relatives brought dolphin T-shirts to my birthday instead of "girl" presents I would refuse to engage with. I posted dolphin photos in my room. I had a dolphin key chain—its mouth lit up if you pushed on its fin. It is likely no accident that, as a child, I was drawn to creatures that could do amazing things from, in, and because of water. Like many scholars of queer theory over the past twenty years, I am drawn to notions of fluidity, though I am also interested in the notion as it is connected to water itself. Consequently, in chapter four, "Becoming Liquid: Queer Interpretations," I consider what it might mean to *queer* literacy and to consider interpretation as an integral aspect of that queering. Drawing from the work of my students, I want to ask questions about their interpretations, about moments their writing seems more like water. As I think about this water, I am brought back to Johnnie Hart's words: "My thinking feels all watery. It's hard to fight the urge to freeze it back up." I read Johnnie's notion of freezing as a kind of permanence, a turning from water to stone. Chapter four considers ways of moving students, or helping them to move themselves, away from dualistic constructions of body, of argument, and of categorical placement. The chapter takes my own martial arts practice of tai chi as part of its own movement. It is through my own body—both through its shifting gendered position and its daily martial practice—that I try to understand what it means to *become water*, moving water, which, in the end, resists its own freezing up. In the final chapter, "Queer (Re)Visions of Composition," I develop three threads of composition that I believe are crucial not only to the work of this book but also to the work of queer compositionists as we continue to develop the relationship between queerness and composition. I consider narration, naming, and "scavenging" (a term I pull from Halberstam's

*Female Masculinity* but also stretch for my own teaching goals) as imperative and paradoxical aspects of what it might mean to teach queer.

*What I loved most about Mrs. Sullivan was after school hours, when I'd stay to laminate book covers in the back room—a job given to only the most careful and efficient library aide. Mrs. Sullivan had taken to using a nickname she called me only in private. She'd come to the back room and say, “How many books covered, Sir?” She'd say it in this military way as though we were performing some wartime version of book covering. Or sometimes she'd walk me out to the late bus and say, “See you tomorrow, Sir.” And we'd both smile. Something seemed fitting about it. I liked it. It didn't feel judgmental in the way it did when rude old ladies asked my mother if I was a boy or a girl or the way it felt when the other kids teased me. It felt right. I didn't feel as though I needed to defend myself, or my “womanhood,” against this claim. Sometimes I had dreams I married Mrs. Sullivan next to the ocean. And I was a man, and I was dressed in that perfect black-suit way I had seen my father dressed a few times. And I was wearing a tie, the blackest, shiniest tie, though I wasn't flashy. I was Donnie. I was the Hit Man, the kind of man for whom being a man was nothing special, nothing imitated, nothing forbidden.*