

REVIEW

Disruptive Queer Narratives in Composition and Literacy Studies

Jason Palmeri

Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy. Eric Darnell Pritchard. Southern Illinois University Press, 2017. 320 pp. ISBN 978-0-8093-3554-1

Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self. Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander. Computers and Composition Digital Press / Utah State University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1-60732-506-2

Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowing. Stacey Waite. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017. 216 pp. ISBN 978-0-8229-6457-5.

Eric Darnell Pritchard's *Fashioning Lives* begins with an epigraph from Malea Powell's 2012 CCCC address:

This is a story. When I say "story," I don't mean for you to think "easy" . . . When I say "story," I mean an event in which I try to hold some of the complex shimmering strands of a constellative, epistemological space long enough to share them with you. When I say "story," I mean "theory." (Powell qtd in Pritchard, 1)

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This is a fitting epigraph not only for *Fashioning Lives*, but for all the recent queer composition and literacy studies books I review here. Each one of these texts demonstrates the power of storytelling as a queer methodology of disruption. The authors tell stories that disrupt academic writing conventions, stories that challenge the normative frames for studying and teaching literacy, stories that fracture singular models of LGBTQ identities, stories that revel in queer impossibility and unknowability, stories that model what queer intersectional consciousness and resistance look like in practice. They tell stories our field desperately needs to hear—stories that can radically change how we study and teach composing if we listen deeply, repeatedly, and openly to what they have to teach us.

In many ways, our field has already been changed by disruptive queer stories told in past decades by resistant scholars who have made space for the kind of books reviewed here. I'm reminded particularly of how Harriet Malinowitz's classic 1995 book, *Textual Orientations*, powerfully centered the stories of lesbian and gay students—showing how these stories have often been silenced in school settings and revealing what liberatory possibilities gay and lesbian students could enact if given a space to explore the politics of the personal in their writing. Disrupting the straightness of composition, Malinowitz's work helped inspire a generation of queer scholars (including those I review here) to tell their own stories of what it might mean to teach and study writing in ways that challenge heteronormative structures.

The books I take up in this review all queerly trouble genre boundaries, and they all also insist on demonstrating how the authors' embodied queer experiences have shaped their theorizing. Accordingly, I have chosen to include a few of my own fragmented queer stories in this review essay as a way to contextualize where I'm coming from as a reader. I worry that doing so might be seen as self-indulgent, and I'm certain that my own reflective insight and craft as a storyteller pales in comparison to the authors I discuss. And yet, I've decided to "put my queer shoulder to the wheel" (Ginsberg 43) in an attempt show you how these books have inspired me to try to compose otherwise.

"This is a story": *I was a nerdy kid in the late 80s who read the paper every day and watched the TV news every night. I vividly remember a few fleeting moments when images of ACT UP activists came bursting into my suburban home—images of radical queers lying down in the street, splashing fake blood, fighting for their lives, not taking shit from anybody. I remember feeling exhilarated, inspired, and (at the same time) terribly afraid, of dying.*

I begin this review with Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander's *Techne: Queer Meditations on the Writing Self*—a multimodal, born-digital book published by the Computers and Composition Digital Press. Rhodes and Alexander deftly weave nuanced theoretical reflection and multimodal personal storytelling to analyze, critique, and perform the digital mediation of queer subjectivities, affects, and histories. Not only do Rhodes and Alexander call for enacting radical queer forms of multimodal composing that resist normative technological orientations, they actually show us these forms of composing in action—providing a compelling example of how multimodal auto-ethnography can be enacted in ways that disorient normative constructions of self and make space for more complex renderings of the diverse networks of forces through which queer selves are (un)composed.

Synthesizing feminist, queer, and posthumanist approaches to theorizing technological embodiment, Rhodes and Alexander's introduction and first chapter offer a compelling rationale for how their book works to “theorize—and enact—how composing practices arise out of the complex interplay among discursive formations, embodiment, and mediating technologies“ (/intro3b.html).¹ The authors acknowledge a debt to Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* for how it reveals technological and embodied “orientations as lines of force that direct us, that map out paths, but that also need their own queering, their own disruption.” In addition to challenging the normative linear orientations of the print monograph, *Techne* also disrupts normative templates of digital composition such as Facebook and self-tracking applications “that seek to lay down tracks for us to travel on, to narrate our stories in particular and predetermined ways.” Considering alternative models for composing multimodal texts queerly, *Techne* turns to an analysis of Jean Cocteau's collaborative multimedia ballet, *Parade*, which was quite explicitly designed to “disorient, to mix up received categories of perception” (/parade5.html). Challenging a common tendency in the field to conflate the digital and the multimodal, Rhodes and Alexander's reclamation of the queer multimodality of Cocteau's work suggests that we might better be able to reimagine contemporary digital composing queerly if we work to recover disruptive multimodal practices from analog eras.

After establishing *Techne*'s guiding theoretical framework, Rhodes and Alexander then present two robustly multimodal chapters in which they demonstrate disruptive queer composing in action while also making complex theoretical arguments about queer identity formations, power relations, and epistemologies. Rhodes's chapter, “Rhizomes,” draws on rhizomatic theory (Deleuze and

1. In-text citations for *Techne* provide a locator for specific pages found at ccdigitalpress.org/techine.

Guattari) and feminist epistemology (Anzaldúa and Keating) to both theorize and demonstrate what it would mean to compose queerly in ways that resist coherence and instead foreground “the multiple and conflicting standpoints we contain *even within ourselves*” (/rhizome6b.html). While strongly affirming the political value of personal storytelling, Rhodes also, importantly, resists the tendency of dominant modes of self-narration to stabilize identities and epistemologies, arguing compellingly that “*we are at times unknowable to ourselves*—and that it is within this incommensurability and unknowability that we find fruitful places to resist” (/rhizome5.html). Seeking to demonstrate what it might mean to compose rhizomatically about the “unknowability” of “lives lived queerly” (/intro2b.html), Rhodes includes numerous short video narratives about her own queer experiences, focusing especially on her youth in Montana. In one of the first videos, we see dirt slowly flowing through Rhodes’s fingers as she reads a brief imagistic poem that gestures toward moments of queer trauma, pain, and silence—a poem whose compressed language evokes deep affective responses and yet also calls attention to all that is left unsaid. The accompanying image of dirt flowing through Rhodes’s hand is compelling and multilayered, suggesting perhaps the instability of memory and identity while also calling attention to how Rhodes’s understanding of rhizomes has been shaped by her experiences with gardening. In another aesthetically complex and affectively moving video, Rhodes combines text, music, voice, and image to dramatize how the Christian church functioned both as place of refuge and a place of violence in her youth.

Rhodes tells her story mostly in the form of carefully timed poetic text on screen accompanied by a haunting audio track featuring a droning pipe organ chord, a persistent heartbeat, and a whispering male voice repeating a violent bible verse that begins “if thy hand offend thee, cut it off” (/rhizome5b.html). This video dramatically shows queer multimodal composing at work as the various layers of text, image, and sound refuse conventional narrative structures, disorienting viewers and compelling them to watch and listen repeatedly without coming to resolution.

In the next chapter, “Genealogies,” Alexander offers an innovative refiguring of Foucauldian genealogy as a methodology for queer multimodal composing. Although Foucault’s elucidation of genealogy is most often applied to make sense of larger historical shifts, Alexander draws on the work of Didier Eribon to refigure genealogy as a useful approach for queer memoir—an approach that can enable him to “trace how I have become thinkable to myself” (/gene8.html). Throughout the chapter, Alexander tells and retells the story of his relationship with his gay uncle, who died during Alexander’s adolescence, paying particular attention to how the intersections and contradictions of working-class and queer identities influenced both of their life experiences. Resisting linear coherent

narrative, Alexander instead offers “the assemblage of an archive, a stash of stuff out of which new lines of force and meaning can be made” (*/gene8.html*). This robustly multimodal archive includes family photographs, a haunting piano elegy that Alexander dedicated to his uncle, and poems that Alexander has written reimagining his uncle’s and his own queer lives.

While all the photos and poems Alexander includes are compelling, I find myself most remembering the moments in which he complexly layers image, voice, and sound in ways that disrupt conventional conceptions of time and memory queerly. For example, Alexander includes a video in which he performs a poem he wrote about homophobic family violence while the visual track features Alexander’s contemporary performing body blurring into a boyhood photo of him. The text of the poem itself is deeply moving, but the addition of the voice and the complexly layered images adds emotional depth and also inspires critical questions about the instability of memory and queer performance. As Alexander tells and retells the story of his gay uncle, he consciously calls self-reflexive attention both to how his storytelling has been shaped by oppressive social structures and to how he has engaged in conscious acts of resistance and reimagination. In the end, Alexander brilliantly sums up the chapter with the aphorism: “We do not create ourselves, even as we often re-create ourselves” (*/gene7g.html*).

In the final collaborative chapter, “Mobilities,” Rhodes and Alexander demonstrate the embodied nature of rhetorical delivery through sharing reflexive documentation of their own composing processes as well as their explorations of graffiti art. While conventional print texts usually mask the quotidian embodied acts that lead to their creation, this multimodal chapter shows us the complex assemblage of human and nonhuman agents that influence Rhodes and Alexander’s composing as they walk, ride trains, converse, eat Indian food, drink coffee, and amble through a graffiti-covered alley. Theorizing graffiti art as a kind of queer multimodal composing, *Techne* articulates how graffiti resists the “seamless flow of corporate colonization of public spaces” (*/mob6.html*) and also how “in its often unknown authorship, it performs a rhizomatic scattering of the self, an ecology of subjectivity that narrates otherwise” (*/mob6a.html*). Visually drawing connections between works of graffiti art and embodied processes of composing, Rhodes and Alexander present a graffiti video wall of thirteen short videos that superimpose embodied movements with images of graffiti they have taken. Fittingly, Rhodes and Alexander assert that *Techne* itself is a kind of “academic graffiti” that resists the norms of academic discourse and that remains open to new interpretations and circulations that cannot be foreseen.

In many ways, I worry that my choice to summarize *Techne* in a linear chapter-by-chapter manner has failed to do justice to the radical openness and disorientation of this text. Each time I re-experience it, I notice new connections,

new possibilities, new layers. It is a text that demands reading and re-reading—that invites you to wander and get lost. I encourage you to navigate it not by clicking the linear arrows on the bottom of each page, but rather by searching for keywords or by checking out the video playlist. And as you wander through the various paths of *Techne*, I urge you to turn off your critical reader lens for just a bit and strive to experience it first and foremost as a living, breathing, feeling body. As I recall my experiences reading *Techne*, I see myself holding back tears, feeling rushes of joy, throwing up my hands with confusion about what it all means. But most of all, what *Techne* leaves me with is an unquenchable queer desire to say “fuck that shit” to all the normative academic structures that continue to make our field so boring and so exclusionary and so goddamned straight.

Another story: *When I was a student in middle school, I got thrown in a trash can and called “faggot.” When I later went on to try my hand at teaching seventh grade, I got called “Mr. Fagmary” nearly every day. When I complained to administrators and parents, they advised “just tell the students you aren’t gay and they’ll stop.” I refused. “My sexuality is none of their business,” I said. That refusal was disruptive in its own way, but I still couldn’t even imagine what it would mean to teach queer (much less even to be queer). Although I now live and teach as an out queer person, I still self-censor quite a bit, still worry that if I act too queer I might find myself back in the trash can.*

Although *Techne* offers compelling inspiration for considering what kinds of disruptive queer multimodal texts we might ask students to read and compose, it mostly avoids discussing the scene of the classroom. As a teacher of writing, I’m left wanting for visions of what a disruptive queer pedagogy of composing might look like and feel like in practice. To this end, I turn to Stacey Waite’s *Teaching Queer: Radical Possibilities for Writing and Knowing*, a text that dares to tell complex stories of the joys, confusions, and “failures” that permeate one teacher’s attempt to teach writing queerly. While previous books on queer composition pedagogy have focused on teaching LGBTQ students (Malinowitz) or on teaching all students to develop critical literacies of sexuality (Alexander), Waite’s book focuses more on how we might teach students to *write* queerly—on how engaging more deeply with queer theories and experiences might cause us to radically rethink how we study and teach writing itself.

Challenging conventional norms of academic writing, *Teaching Queer* both argues for and demonstrates the value of queer, “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” (6). Accordingly,

Teaching Queer unfolds much like a lyric essay, braiding together critical analyses of queer theory, stories of classroom practice, close readings of student writing, stories of Waite's experiences of gender, and poetic images of liquidity. While organized into chapters, *Teaching Queer* might best be understood as an associative collage—a looping and braiding of fragments that encourages and rewards nonlinear reading. As just one example of how this looping works, consider the recurring images of liquidity. In the introduction, Waite quotes a reflection by a composition student, Johnnie Hart, who exclaimed that after engaging with queer perspectives, “my thinking feels all watery. It’s hard to fight the urge to freeze it back up” (9). Waite keeps returning to images of moving water, flowing bodies, and frozen ice throughout the book in creative nonfiction fragments as well as in theoretical reflections about queer classroom moments in which both students’ and instructor’s thinking became more liquid, less frozen. The choice to introduce a key theoretical metaphor through the named voice of a composition student is itself a queering of conventions of pedagogical writing in the field. In *Teaching Queer*, student writing is most definitely not anonymized data used to support the efficacy of a pedagogical approach; rather, student writing and student voices are woven through the book, themselves a source of theory.

Arguing powerfully that “there is no bodiless pedagogy” (23), Waite places the embodied positionalities of both students and teachers at the center of any attempt to enact a queer pedagogy.¹ To this end, *Teaching Queer* tells powerful stories of Waite’s experiences enacting a queer pedagogy while inhabiting a “female masculine body” (40) that resists categorization. Synthesizing feminist and queer theories of abjection (Kristeva; Halperin), Waite argues that abjection offers “a viable way to describe what happens when students encounter an unreadable body in a pedagogical context” (40). While the framework of pedagogical abjection calls attention to the normative violence to which teachers with “unreadable” bodies are subjected, Waite also reclaims the abjected teacher’s body as a site of productive disorientation, noting for example that “while my masculine body is sometimes troubling or resisted [by students], it can also be an opportunity for confusion of the productive kind, the kind that produces complicated ways of knowing” (41). For Waite, teaching students more complicated ways of knowing reflects a “pedagogy . . . at its heart, about my own survival, or the survival of *my kind*, those of us living outside” (35) norms and stable categories. In other words, a queer pedagogy of disorientation is not simply a matter of making teaching and learning more engaging; it’s literally a matter of survival, of life and death.

Demonstrating queer pedagogy in action, *Teaching Queer* presents numerous compelling stories of how Waite has employed queer methodologies to engage students in questioning, and at times resisting, normative academic writing

conventions. Challenging the tendency for students to do research to prove a thesis, Waite shows the value of asking students to begin a research writing project by writing lists of what they “do not know” and more challengingly what they “cannot know” about a given topic (69). Instead of framing research writing as a process of amassing evidence to prove what one already knows, *Teaching Queer* reframes research as a process of students coming to recognize that “all knowledge is partial knowledge” (69). In addition to asking students to reflect on what they “cannot know,” Waite also articulates a queer pedagogical methodology of asking students to generate new, non-normative kinds of metaphorical language for discussing writing.

For example, *Teaching Queer* tells the story of one class in which students worked to collaboratively generate new metaphors for structuring essays. The students ended up unpacking a metaphor of the essay as a human body with a “real beating heart” (62) that pumps blood throughout it. They then began to think of essays themselves as having desires, with one student saying that “*if you think of the whole essay as a body . . . [then] it’s sexual, like it wants something*” (63). After placing all the students’ bodily metaphors for writing on the board, Waite asked them to use these embodied metaphors as inspiration to revise the essays they were writing at the time. In the revised drafts, Waite found that students grounded their claims more in their own embodied experiences and that they also were more willing to pursue associative connections rather than stick with a narrow thesis. Importantly, *Teaching Queer* does not suggest that asking students to think of essays as bodies will have such queer results in other classrooms. What’s queer about this pedagogical approach is not so much the metaphor itself but the collective “process of generating new names, new language . . . *new ways of knowing*” (67). In other words, a queer pedagogy necessitates not just teaching students about queer theory, but more radically engaging students in the collaborative process of remaking queer theories and practices of writing.

In elucidating strategies for queering the process of writing, Waite has been particularly influenced by Jack Halberstam’s articulation of a queer “scavenger methodology” that asks writers to draw on contradictory materials and theoretical frameworks to “write in ways that go against each other, write in ways that purposefully create tension and friction” (Waite 181). Accordingly, *Teaching Queer* suggests that writing instructors should encourage students to bring “contradiction *into* their essays” by composing from a diverse assortment of “scavenged parts, styles, areas of their lives, voices, and so on” (186). To demonstrate what this scavenger methodology might look like in action, Waite tells the story of a writing conference with a student who had written a “tidy and logical” essay that was “well, boring, full of stuff we (the members of his writing community in class) had heard for years” (183). Waite talks with the student

about the value of going on a scavenger hunt to look for more contradictory material to bring into the essay—what the student comes to understand as a process of “finding something that goes against what it’s supposed to be” (184). The resulting revision was a “glorious mess and wonderfully strange” (184). In praising the messiness of the revision, Waite acknowledges that many teachers might not value it, and even the student who wrote it expressed reservations. Nevertheless, *Teaching Queer* challenges writing instructors to let go of our drive for logic and coherence and come to value the making of a mess for its own glorious queer sake. And, to that, I say amen.

Although *Teaching Queer* includes many inspirational pedagogical stories of queer disruption, Waite also writes reflectively about moments in which queer pedagogies fail—about how even *queer* pedagogies are constrained by “institutional norms” (87). For example, the author notes how the discussion-based pedagogy foregrounded in *Teaching Queer* risks reinforcing normative visions of classroom participation that marginalize the contributions of quiet students. Waite came to rethink norms of participation by reading the work of a composition student, Andy Dekja, who wrote a challenging essay about how the academy over-privileges speaking in class and thereby excludes students who learn in other ways (79). Taking a piece of student writing as an occasion to rethink queer pedagogy, *Teaching Queer* speculates about how instructors might make more room for listening and other silent learning acts in their classrooms. I appreciate how Andy Dekja’s essay is not cited as example of an outcome produced by Waite’s pedagogy; rather, *Teaching Queer* treats the writing of students as works of theory that can inspire us to radically rethink the often unstated normative assumptions on which our pedagogies are based.

I can attest to the power of *Teaching Queer* to open up transformative conversations, because I saw it do just that in a recent graduate seminar on composition theory that I taught. As we unpacked Waite’s complex analyses of teaching as an embodied activity, we had a robust conversation about how our own embodied positionalities—gender, sexuality, age, race, class—influenced our pedagogical experiences. As we considered what it might mean to take up Waite’s work as a textual mentor for our scholarly writing, we started to collectively come to value writing that is grounded in embodied experience, writing that places theory in dialogue with everyday teaching practice, writing that blurs genres and takes risks, writing that values complexity and possibility over closure and clarity. I know too that each one of us in that seminar is not the same teacher we were before we read Waite’s work. Not only did *Teaching Queer* give us numerous practical ideas for how we might reframe the “public argument” essay in our first-year composition curriculum, but, more importantly, it gave us a methodological lens to help us value the complex messiness of working collaboratively with students to imagine new, queerer possibilities for composition.²

One more story: *I remember going to a NOW protest of a Jeb Bush event when he was candidate for governor of Florida in 1994. When Jeb showed up and got out of his car, I joined a group of (mostly) older White lesbians who rushed across the street to surround him, shouting “Racist! Sexist! Anti-Gay! Jeb Bush, Go Away!” Jeb looked terrified at this queer mob yelling in his face, and I felt joyful, felt powerful, felt like a different world just might be possible. I remember next a White cop came up to me. “Please go back behind that line,” he said. “I wouldn’t want to have to tell your parents you were in jail,” he said. I walked behind the line.... Looking back now, I realize how much my Whiteness protected me that day—how this story reveals much less about the power of queer resistance than it does about machinations of unrecognized privilege.*

While both *Techne* and *Teaching Queer* tell important stories of the complex intersections of sexuality, gender, class, and geographic location, they do not robustly interrogate how structures of race and sexuality interanimate one another. Too often, the ways in which White privilege influences the authors’ experiences and stories go unacknowledged—with the notable exception of Rhodes’s “Rhizomes” chapter in *Techne*. As much as *Techne* and *Teaching Queer* tell powerful stories that disrupt the field in crucial ways, they do little to challenge the institutionalized racism of composition and literacy studies. In contrast, Eric Darnell Pritchard’s *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy* draws on extensive person-based research to tell a series of truly disruptive “stories by Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people” (1) that complexly reveal the ways in which literacy practices are shaped by but can also be employed tactically to resist structures of racism, heteronormativity, sexism, cisnormativity, and sizeism. Throughout the book, Pritchard tells and analyzes stories of literacy drawn from sixty multi-hour interviews with Black LGBTQ people occupying a diverse range of standpoints. Pritchard also draws on participation-observation in Black LGBTQ digital spaces as well as on close readings of Black LGBTQ literary and activist texts. Furthermore, Pritchard’s prologue includes his own literacy narrative, and he compellingly returns to his story throughout the book to note moments when his experiences resonate with or depart from those of his participants, adding a crucial element of self-reflexivity to the research.

Offering a groundbreaking extension and critical reimagining of Deborah Brandt’s theory of literacy sponsorship, Pritchard’s work forwards a theory of “literacy normativity” that articulates how hegemonic institutions employ “literacy to create and impose normative standards and beliefs onto people whom are labeled alien or other through textscapes that are experienced as painful because

they do damage or inflict harm” (28). This framework is vital for literacy studies because it can attune us more sharply to the ways in which literacy institutions participate in the construction of norms that enact real material harm to marginalized people. In addition to articulating the power of literacy normativity, Pritchard introduces a countervailing framework of “restorative literacies” that names a “form of cultural labor through which individuals tactically counter acts of literacy normativity through the applications of literacies for self- and communal love . . . towards the ends of making a life on one’s own terms” (33). In unpacking his theory of restorative literacies, Pritchard draws on Black feminist theories of love (Cox, hooks) to articulate how Black LGBTQ people demonstrate the “power of literacy for social change that emerges from and evidences love as a radical praxis of freedom and care for self and community” (39). Although restorative literacies might initially seem to serve as the binary opposite of literacy normativity, Pritchard resists such simplistic categorizations by unpacking throughout the book how restorative literacies can at times be sponsored by normative institutions as well as how seemingly restorative literacy acts can at times contain traces of normative literacy practices.

In the first chapter, Pritchard demonstrates how structures of literacy normativity can work to make it dangerous for Black LGBTQ people to pursue reading and writing—especially reading and writing that engages LGBTQ themes. While some participants engaged in acts of literacy “self-suppression” (73) in which they circumscribed their uses of literacy to fit racialized heteronormative norms, others engaged in complex acts of “literacy concealment” through which they worked to “navigate from fear and danger towards feelings of safety around literacy practices” (60) that transgress norms. In articulating why so many of his participants feared surveillance of their reading and writing of LGBTQ texts, Pritchard demonstrates that interlocking structures of racialized sexuality make many Black LGBTQ people uniquely vulnerable to surveillance of their literacy practices, noting that

for some Black people the association of bookishness with queerness, and literacy with Whiteness, means that race places a heightened level of visibility and scrutiny on Black readers of texts of any kind, and especially Black queer texts” (71).

Throughout the chapter, Pritchard analyzes the complex position of the public library as a space that paradoxically enabled participants’ access to Black LGBTQ texts while also making them vulnerable to surveillance of what they were reading. While one participant encountered a sympathetic Black lesbian librarian who discretely helped her access classic Black lesbian texts (82), other participants worried that the library institution would disclose the content of their queer reading to family members who might be hostile. To resist this kind

of surveillance, one participant engaged in stealing library books (and later surreptitiously replacing them) as a tactic of literacy concealment that helped him “feel safer in reading queer-themed books while avoiding the literacy normativity of the written or digitized library record he would leave behind if he checked the books out” (86).

In analyzing the fear that many of his participants felt that their families might discover the LGBTQ content of their reading, Pritchard argues that this fear must be contextualized in relation to both racism and heterosexism, noting that while fear of losing family support is common among all LGBTQ people

what is unique for . . . Black LGBTQ people is that losing the family unit means losing an important tool in resisting racist oppression, another dimension of social injustice that non-people of color do not share. (76–7)

Importantly, Pritchard also notes that some of his participants received positive reactions from family members when they were discovered reading queer texts; for example, one participant found that his inadvertent sharing of a Black gay novel with a family member opened up possibilities for dialogue and support (84). It’s in these moments when Pritchard shows how much his participants’ experiences differ from one another that we see the power of his large data set as well as the crucial necessity of theorizing “Black Queer Literacies” in the plural form.

In addition to elucidating the strategies participants used to gain access to Black LGBTQ texts, Pritchard also details the powerful roles these texts played in participants’ lives. Reading texts written by Black LGBTQ people was one way that participants resisted the “historical erasure” of literacy normativity through which “institutions and individuals use print and other materials to construct historical narratives that exclude Black queer life and contributions” (103). In the face of the erasure of Black queer histories within dominant institutions, Black LGBTQ people engage in a process of locating and identifying “ancestors” that can enable them to gain a sense of “historical rootedness” (151) that they have been denied. While Pritchard uses the term *ancestor* to refer to any dead person that participants identified as “inspirational for Black and LGBTQ people” (106), he notes that the majority of participants identified ancestors who were “published writers, for reading and writing are the primary means by which individuals form intimate ties across space, time, and circumstance” (113). When participants read the works of Black LGBTQ writers such as Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, Bayard Rustin, and James Baldwin (to name but a few), they see their reading not just as a simple decoding of text but as a “dialogue across generations . . . to derive the community building benefits of call and response: an expression of shared knowledge and purpose” (116). As participants engaged in dialogue with the writings of their ancestors, many of them came to develop

a way of understanding their own identities “as multiple, simultaneous, and intersectional alongside an analysis of oppression, discrimination, and social inequalities, which are also viewed as multiple, co-constitutive, and intersecting” (117). This development of intersectional consciousness (gained in part from ancestors) was crucial for participants to resist the dominant singular narratives of Blackness and queerness that they often encountered in normative literacy institutions.

Along with learning from the texts of ancestors, participants also developed restorative literacies through interacting with “elders,” or “living people that research participants regarded as wiser than themselves by virtue of being older in age or experience” (106–7). At times, elders functioned as conventional literacy sponsors as they introduced participants to “book clubs, poetry readings, theater performances, and other arts events where texts focused on Black queer life and culture” (148). Yet, the concept of elders also expands our understanding of literate activity to account for how Black LGBTQ people “are reading and drawing from the elder’s life some aspect of Black queer ways of knowing and being. As such, the elder’s life itself is a text” (139). For example, Pritchard tells the story of a Black transgender woman participant who drew on her reading of the life of an elder to “display a range of transgender identity making and affirmation that she did not previously consider” (144). In this way, Pritchard makes clear that literacy scholars must move beyond studying conventional print reading and writing to account for the knowledge-making that takes place in the embodied interactions through which people read and write their lives.

As Pritchard continues unpacking literacy normativity, he elucidates the problem of “spiritual violence” through which religious people employ hostile interpretations of religious and spiritual texts” and other forms of abusive behavior in an attempt to “speak Black queers out of existence in religion, faith traditions, and spiritualities” (154). Pritchard demonstrates numerous restorative literacies that Black LGBTQ people use to counter this spiritual violence, showing how participants use reading, writing, and speaking to challenge heterosexist and transphobic interpretations of sacred texts in order to make space for their own affirming spiritual knowledges. In many cases, participants employ these restorative literacies in an effort to retain their Christian faith in the face of spiritual violence, while in some cases they turn toward other religions or spiritual practices. Once again, Pritchard demonstrates that the literacy normativity of spiritual violence must be approached through an intersectional lens as he relates stories of numerous participants who faced racism in predominantly White LGBTQ churches (163–4); he also documents the persistent presence of transphobia in LGBTQ churches that are dominated by cisgender people (165). Emphasizing the importance of alternative institutions for the development of restorative

literacies, Pritchard details the power of Black LGBTQ religious groups, such as the Unity Fellowship Church Movement, as spaces in which Black LGBTQ people can come to “use religion and spirituality toward the liberation of those who are oppressed on any basis” (170).

In the final body chapter of the book, Pritchard turns attention to the complex interplay of normative and restorative literacies in digital spaces, drawing both on interviews and on participant observations of Black LGBTQ digital networks. On the one hand, Pritchard shows how Black LGBTQ online spaces function as important literacy sponsors for the development and enactment of restorative literacies for Black queer people—spaces in which participants can powerfully resist structures of racialized heteronormativity. And, yet, Pritchard also demonstrates how Black LGBTQ online spaces can enact their own kinds of normativity through at times playing host to fatphobic, transphobic, and femme-phobic rhetorics. By carefully unpacking the complex interplay of restorative and normative literacies on the Black queer web, Pritchard reminds us of the danger of simplistic, single-identity constructions of “safe spaces” and demonstrates the immense and important rhetorical labor that many participants employ in their attempts to make Black LGBTQ spaces more inclusive for people of all sizes and gender identities.

As Pritchard concludes the book, he issues a powerful call for the field to pursue scholarship in “queer of color literacies” that engages “the reality of queerness within racialized gender and sexual formations” in relation to critical resistance to “colonialism/settler colonialism, White supremacy, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and other genocidal and oppressive forces (243).”

I can think of no other research agenda that is more timely in this political moment. In calling for composition and literacy studies to embrace a “queer of color literacies” framework, he asserts that scholars must be

vigilant about identifying and engaging the slippages around identity, power, and privilege . . . such slippages cannot be corrected through silence, present-absence, guilt, or overlooking the calls and models for intervention. Rather, redress means action. (47)

And, Pritchard’s book itself, along with the rich body of intersectional scholarship he engages, brilliantly show us exactly what this kind of action can and must look like in composition and literacy scholarship. It is up to all who read this book to heed Pritchard’s call and work to disrupt the structures of racism, sexism, heteronormativity, cishnormativity, settler colonialism, and ableism that continue to straighten out the lines that composition scholarship and pedagogy travels. Pritchard concludes *Fashioning Lives* by proclaiming, “Black Queer Literacies is what I would call a revolution” (252). I couldn’t agree more.

At this point, I suppose I should offer some kind of summation and evaluation of the books under consideration, but these books challenge me (and all readers) to resist such simplistic attempts to reach closure. These are books that value generative, disruptive questions over established, settled knowledges. So it seems most fitting to conclude with a list of questions I'm left pondering as I read these texts together: What might it look like to combine the disruptive multimodal storytelling of *Techne* with the intersectional, person-based research of *Fashioning Lives*? How might Waite's queer pedagogy be extended to critically engage students in composing disruptive digital multimodal texts? What kinds of structural changes are necessary in our discipline and in our institutions to make more space for these kinds of disruptive queer narratives? How might our field look and feel and act different if we all responded to the transformative calls that these books make?

A final story: *I attended my first CCCC in New York in 2003, right at the start of the second Iraq War. I remember watching Harriet Malinowitz present on a panel as the bombs were dropping. Malinowitz rushed through her pointedly activist talk and then invited the audience to join her in leaving the panel early to go to an unauthorized, traffic-blocking protest in Midtown. After a long, awkward pause, a few of us walked out of the panel and headed to the streets. I made it to the protest, but (once again) I dodged the cops and faithfully presented my paper the next day. The conference continued as usual. It still does.*

NOTES

1. In the bio for *Teaching Queer* (as well as on Waite's professional website), Waite avoids using personal pronouns. Accordingly, I follow that practice here.

2. I'd like to acknowledge all of the graduate students whose astute insights about *Teaching Queer* have influenced my thinking here: Shatha Alhubail, Maryana Boatenreiter, Jeff Carr, Laura Edwards, Jax Kinniburgh, Alan Knowles, Anita Long, Yebing Zhao, and Hua Zhu. I'd also like to thank my doctoral advisee, Caleb Pendencygraft, for insightful conversation about *Fashioning Lives* as well as for teaching me much about the disruptive practice of queer storytelling.

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