Composing Bodies; or, De-Composition: Queer Theory, Disability Studies, and Alternative Corporealities

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compose vb composed; composing [MF composer, fr. L compôner (perf. indic. composui)—more at COMPOUND] vt (15c)
1 a : to form by putting together : FASHION <a committee composed of three representatives—Current Biog.> b : to form the substance of : CONSTITUTE <composed of many ingredients> c : to produce (as columns or pages of type) by composition
2 a : to create by mental or artistic labor : PRODUCE <a sonnet sequence> b (1) : to formulate and write (a piece of music) (2) : to compose music for 3 : to deal with or act on so as to reduce to a minimum <her differences> 4 : to arrange in proper or orderly form <her clothing> 5 : to free from agitation : CALM, SETTLE <a patient> —vt : to practice composition

Writing is the making of an order and the blank surface is that space or servant that bears the order. Typically, writing catches the eye, but the surface that receives the writing does not. In this sense, writing contains the stronger presence, and the surface that receives the writing is defined by that presence. The surface, then, is an ordered, limited space cleared of obstacles and ready to be acted upon by an ordering agent wielding a highly routinized tool.

—Ralph Cintron

Resistance to normativity is not purely negative or reactive or destructive; it is also positive and dynamic and creative. It is by resisting the discursive and institutional practices which, in their scattered and diffuse functioning, contribute to the operation of heteronormativity that queer identities can open a social space

for the construction of different identities, for the elaboration of various types of relationships, for the development of new cultural forms.

—David Halperin

It may seem to you
That I'm acting confused
When you're close to me.
If I tend to look dazed,
I read it someplace
I got cause to be.

—Tina Turner

Most teachers and students of writing experience the cultural practice of composition as a difficult, messy, disorienting affair—the encounter between a writer and the blank page or computer screen, like any encounter between two bodies, can leave one, as Tina Turner suggests, dazed and confused. Turner's claim to have "read someplace" about the disconcerting effects of the more general encounter between self and other, moreover, is amply borne out by anti-identitarian theories of the past few decades that document the impossibility—given the ways all identities are continually shaped and reshaped in and through multiple communities and discourses—of composing, or writing into existence, a coherent and individual self.

As my first two epigraphs suggest, however, and as Kenneth Burke argued more than fifty years ago, composition is a cultural practice that would seem to be inescapably—even inevitably—connected to order.1 Webster's Dictionary authoritatively defines "composition" as a process that reduces difference, forms many ingredients into one substance, or even calms, settles, or frees from agitation. Ralph Cintron, in his study of the uses of language and strategies of resistance in an urban Chicano/a community, describes composition or writing as a "discourse of measurement" that is, especially in the exclusionary institutional forms it usually takes within the academy, "highly routinized" and controlled by an "ordering agent" (210, 229).

How, then, do we acknowledge and affirm the experiences we draw from multiple academic and nonacademic communities where composing (in all senses of the word) is clearly an unruly, disorderly, cultural practice? Can composition theory work against the simplistic formulation of that which is proper, orderly, and harmonious? If composing is, as the dictionary definition suggests, somehow connected to labor, is it
possible to resist the impulse to focus on finished products (the highly routinized, "well-made" essay; the sonnet sequence; the supposedly secure masculine or heterosexual identity) and to keep that labor in mind as we inquire into what composition means and into what it might mean in the future? What would happen if, true to our experiences in and out of the classroom, we continually attempted to reconceive composing as that which produced agitation? In what ways might that agitation be productive?²

Although it is by no means universally acknowledged (to judge by how little or how slowly pedagogical or institutional practices have changed), there is nonetheless widespread critical recognition at this point that composition, as it is currently conceptualized and taught in most U.S. colleges and universities, serves a corporate model of flexibility and efficiency.³ What we might call the current "corpo-reality" of composition guarantees that instruction is often streamlined across dozens of classes at a given institution, with standardized texts (handbooks, guides to the writing and research process, essay collections) required or strongly encouraged (either by campus or departmental administrators or by publishing houses). Inside and outside the university, corporate elites demand that composition courses focus on demonstrable professional-managerial skills rather than critical thought—or, more insidiously, "critical thought" is reconceptualized through a skills-based model ultimately grounded in measurement and marketability, or measurement for marketability. The most troubling feature of our current corpo-reality is that composition at most institutions is routinely taught by adjunct or graduate student employees who receive low pay and few (if any) benefits: the composition work force, at the corporate university, is highly contingent and replaceable, and instructors are thus often forced to piece together multiple appointments at various schools in a region.

I find these arguments that composition serves a corporate model of efficiency convincing, and it is vitally important for teachers and scholars of composition and composition theory to remain attentive to the ways we are positioned to serve professional-managerial interests. In many ways, however, despite the material base of these critiques, they remain strangely incorporeal—in other words, these critiques are not yet especially concerned with theorizing embodiment and/in the corporate university. Perhaps this is because corporate processes privilege and imagine only one kind of body on either side of the desk: on one side, the docile body of the contingent, replaceable instructor; on the other, the docile body of
the student dutifully mastering marketable skills and producing clear, orderly, efficient prose.

In this essay, I extend the critical dialogue on composition and the contemporary university by arguing for alternative, and multiple, corporealities. I contend that recentering our attention on the composing bodies in our classrooms can inaugurate a productive process of “de-composition”—that is, a process that provides an ongoing critique of both the corporate processes into which we, as students and teachers of composition, are interpellated and the concomitant disciplinary compulsion to produce only disembodied, efficient writers. Most importantly, I make the somewhat polemical claim that bringing back in composing bodies means, inevitably, placing queer theory and disability studies at the center of composition theory.

Interrogating but not resolving one of the paradoxes at the heart of composition (whereby composing is defined as the production of order and experienced as the opposite), I argue for the desirability of a loss of composure, since it is only in such a state that heteronormativity might be questioned or resisted and that new (queer/disabled) identities and communities might be imagined. In the sections that follow, then, I first sketch out more thoroughly the paradox in which composing bodies find themselves, locating specifically the ways in which composition undergirds heteronormativity and heteronormativity undergirds composition. Next, in order to challenge such understandings of composition, I argue for what I call the “contingent universalization” of queerness and disability. Finally, I briefly consider two composition courses at George Washington University, along with the institutional context that both enabled and endangers them, in order to materialize the processes of de-composition that I advocate. Composition can, as David Halperin writes about queerness, “open a social space for the construction of different identities, for the elaboration of various types of relationships, for the development of new cultural forms” (66–67). This essay sketches some of the ways in which that queer process proceeds.

Composing Straightness/Straight Composition
Feminists and queer theorists have demonstrated for more than three decades that heterosexuality, particularly for women, is not a choice but rather a compulsory identity that secures a dominant patriarchal system. Compulsory femininity (for women), masculinity (for men), and heterosexuality are (re)produced in and through a wide variety of cultural institutions; as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has famously (and wryly) ob-
served, "Advice on how to help your kids turn out gay, not to mention your students, your parishioners, your therapy clients, or your military subordinates, is less ubiquitous than you might think: On the other hand, the scope of institutions whose programmatic undertaking is to prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large" (161). The finished product that emerges from this "unimaginably large" institutional matrix is the supposedly secure masculine or feminine heterosexual identity; the institutions that Sedgwick nods toward here are highly invested in a process we might describe as "composing straightness"—compulsory heterosexuality, with its correctly-gendered and embodied participants, is continually produced from the disorderly array of possible human desires and embodiments.

Of course, the same queer theorists and feminists who have theorized compulsory heterosexuality have also stressed repeatedly just how fraught this process of composition is; composing straightness, it would seem, is no easy affair. Most famously, Judith Butler insists that "heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy" (Gender 122). According to Butler, the compulsory nature of positions that are "intrinsically impossible to embody" ensures that those subjected to the system (all of us) are catapulted into endless attempts to get it right—into repetitions (of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality) that, in their proliferation, ironically threaten to destabilize the very identifications that any given performance would purport to fix.

Butler acknowledges, however, that the repeated "failure to approximate the norm . . . is not the same as the subversion of the norm" ("Critically" 22). And, indeed, the fact that heterosexuality is destined to fail and always in process, does not change the fact that most people understand it as wholly natural. Although heterosexuality is without question a product of complex cultural, economic, and historical processes, it is by no means experienced as such. The finished heterosexual product is so fetishized that the composition process cannot be acknowledged; the institutions that compose straightness thus simultaneously produce ideologies that render the process itself virtually unthinkable.

As I discuss elsewhere, compulsory heterosexuality is thoroughly interwoven with what I call "compulsory able-bodiedness" (88). The institutions in our culture that produce and secure a heterosexual identity also work to secure an able-bodied identity. Fundamentally structured in
ways that limit access for people with disabilities, such institutions perpetuate able-bodied hegemony, figuratively and literally constructing a world that always and everywhere privileges very narrow (and ever-narrowing) conceptions of ability. Advice on how to help your kids turn out disabled—not to mention your students, your parishioners, your therapy clients, or your military subordinates—is less ubiquitous than you might think. Certainly there are innumerable institutions devoted to a medical model of disability; indeed, the scope of institutions designed to secure a medical model of disability (that is, designed to proffer advice on how to help your kids turn out pathologized) is unimaginably large. The disability rights movement and disability studies, however, are the only forces shaping locations where the cultural model of how to turn out disabled is available, and the scope of these cultural and political movements currently pales in comparison to the scope of institutions that (re)produce dominant understandings of ability.

Moreover, able-bodiedness, in many ways even more than heterosexuality, is experienced by most able-bodied people as simply natural. Despite (or because of) the vast institutional network that exists to compose a viable finished product, the production process that would demonstrate that able-bodiedness is a cultural and historical construct cannot be acknowledged: all the world may be an inaccessible stage that able-bodiedness has constructed for its own performance, but the performance has been so naturalized that the actors do not realize that they are working with costumes and props. Without question, the performance is comedic; I would certainly argue, in other words, that the Butlerian point holds here as well—like heterosexuality, able-bodied identity is simultaneously a compulsory identity and one that is impossible to embody fully, permanently, or without incoherence. Again, however, just as incoherence alone cannot subvert heteronormativity, so too is it insufficient, in and of itself, to subvert able-bodied norms. In fact, ultimately, both heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are empowered in and through their incoherences. What David Halperin writes of heterosexuality applies equally to able-bodiedness:

The crucial, empowering incoherence at the core of heterosexuality and its definition never becomes visible because heterosexuality itself is never an object of knowledge, a target of scrutiny in its own right, so much as it is a condition for the supposedly objective, disinterested knowledge of other objects, especially homosexuality, which it constantly produces as a manipulably and spectacularly contradictory figure of transgression.
so as to deflect attention—by means of accusation—from its own incoherence. (47)

Despite the focus here on heterosexuality, the figure that Halperin conjures strikes me as a sort of able-bodied action hero: fundamentally mobile and flexible, constantly deflecting attack, the dominant category dances and skips around its own contradictions and incoherences and thereby perpetually escapes being a target of scrutiny.

I will talk more about queer/disabled responses to this state of affairs in the next two sections of this essay. The main reason I stress the ways in which a disavowed composing process undergirds compulsory able-bodiedness and heterosexuality, however, is to consider how similar normative processes are at work in our current understandings of composition. My contention is that "straight composition"—that is, common sense or currently-hegemonic understandings of composition—requires similar compulsory identifications and engages in similar disavowals. Despite the best efforts of many individual composition theorists and instructors, and despite a decades-long conversation about process and revision, composition in the corporate university remains a practice that is focused on a fetishized final product, whether it be the final paper, the final grade, or the student body with measurable skills. If this emphasis is not necessarily (or even often) pronounced in a given individual classroom, it is nonetheless pronounced at the level of administrative (or governmental, or corporate) surveillance of those classrooms. Individual instructors—and even institutions—may focus on process, in other words, but corporate elites nonetheless want to see a return on their investment. Contemporary composition is a highly monitored cultural practice, and those doing the monitoring (on some level, all of us involved) are intent on producing order and efficiency where there was none and, ultimately, on forgetting the messy composing process and the composing bodies that experience it.

The contemporary cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which composition studies is located are what most concern me in this essay. In order to understand these contemporary circumstances better, however, it's worth pointing out briefly that the more general linkages I am making here are not entirely new, even if the particular convergence of composition, heterosexuality, and able-bodied identity has not been detailed. Over the past few centuries, the composition of a coherent and disciplined self has, in fact, often been linked to the composition of orderly written texts. In 1690, for instance, in his Essay Concerning Human Understand-
ing, John Locke wrote, “Let us suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper void of all characters.” Tamar Plakins Thornton begins her study *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History* with this dictum, describing it as Locke’s “now-famous notion of the human being as a tabula rasa, who acquires reason and knowledge through experience” (3). Although *Handwriting in America* is not focused on the history of composition in the United States per se, Thornton similarly links the formation of subjectivities to the ways in which writing has been conceptualized; “how could the development of the human self and the acquisition of writing skills,” she asks, “have anything to do with each other?” (3). With Locke’s dictum as a backdrop, Thornton proceeds to answer her own question by tracing ideas about handwriting that emerged and developed in the eighteenth century alongside opposing ideas about print. Thornton contends that the filling of the blank page—the composition of a handwritten text—simultaneously composed a self with a recognizable location in a social order hierarchically arranged according to class, gender, and occupation. The self written into existence by men of commerce, for instance, was meant to be distinguishable from that written into existence by gentlemen and ladies, who in turn composed selves that could be properly distinguished from each other.

Thornton’s history could be understood as diametrically opposed to the points I am making about contemporary composition and subjectivity, especially since the (printed) finished products of most composition courses have very little to do with handwriting. As Thornton demonstrates, in the eighteenth century, the perceived close link between handwriting and subjectivity contrasted to the perceived distance between print and subjectivity: “As men and women exploited the impersonality of print to its fullest, they came to understand handwriting in contradistinction to print and to make handwriting function in contradistinction to the press, as the medium of the self” (30). I would argue, however, that contemporary ideas about composition more properly descend from the ideas about handwriting that Thornton excavates than from the ideas about print that were dominant in the early days of a print culture. Certainly in the nineteenth century when composition became compulsory in American universities, handwriting would have been the medium of choice, but this is not the only reason I would place composition in such a line of descent. As Michel Foucault and others have demonstrated, the bourgeois culture of the past few centuries has only become more obsessed with the composed, self-possessed, “normal” subject, properly located in a hierarchical social order.
disciplinary practices shaping such a self can be clearly tied to handwriting in the eighteenth century, when a normalized, bourgeois culture was still emergent, they have undoubtedly become unmoored from such a specific location in the centuries since then. Even though Thornton tucks Foucault away in only one endnote in her study (204–05, n.16), some of his general insights in *Discipline and Punish* could more thoroughly extend her own. *Discipline and Punish* purports to examine “the birth of the prison,” but it of course ends up demonstrating that docile bodies are produced in a range of cultural locations: the schoolroom, the clinic, the asylum, the workplace. ⁸ Similarly, the composed self that emerges in Thornton’s history of handwriting has ultimately come to be produced in other locations centrally concerned with the acquisition of writing skills.

Although we could thus be said to inherit in contemporary composition studies the legacy Thornton traces, that legacy is now compounded by the corporate urgency that characterizes this particular moment in the history of capitalism and the history of the university. For those administering composition inside and outside the university, it often seems that there is perpetual panic about students’ perceived lack of the basic (professional-managerial) skills they supposedly need. We may inherit an Enlightenment legacy where the production of writing and production of the self converge, but the corporate university also extends that legacy in its eagerness to intervene in, and thereby vouchsafe, the kinds of selves produced. The call to produce orderly and efficient writing/docile subjects thus takes on a heightened urgency in our particular moment.

Through my linkage of two varieties of composition in this section, however, my desire in the end is to keep in play the critical possibilities that are inherent in Butler’s theory of gender trouble. If, in other words, composing straightness and able-bodiedness is always on some level impossible, then perhaps the same could be said about straight composition. The perpetual panic over what is supposedly *not* happening in composition classrooms and what supposedly *needs* to be happening there guarantees that our identities are indeed compulsory, even if—or precisely because—we are not getting those identities exactly right. If we are thus catapulted into cycles of repetition as students and scholars of composition, following Butler we could argue that the repetition ensures that straight composition too is inevitably comedic, impossible to perform dutifully and without incoherence. De-composition and disorder always haunt the composition classroom intent on the production of order and efficiency.
Again, however, not approximating the norm does not automatically equate to subverting it, and I certainly find nothing comedic about certain material cycles of repetition that are part of the scenario I describe—the cycle of repetition, for example, whereby a given instructor, year after year, pieces together numerous teaching positions in composition but receives neither a living wage nor security in return. If all of our classrooms are virtually de-composed, they are not necessarily “critically de-composed”—that is, actively involved in resisting the corporate university and disordering straight composition. And, indeed, critical de-composition is impossible on an individual level, impossible without what Butler labels “collective disidentifications” with the efficient identities we are compelled to corporealize (Bodies 4).

Cintron, in the conclusion to his ethnography of the Chicano/a community he calls “Angelstown,” reflects on the composing process, which encourages students “to shape language in school-appropriate ways... reinforcing what is standard and conventional and sloughing off the dialectical and disruptive” (231). Cintron finds a “saving grace” even within such rigidity, a saving grace that he describes as “the sweetness of critique that always finds the remainder, the forgotten, the hidden, and thereby, exposes as illusion that sense of control, that sense of a ruling self in control” (231). There is a certain pathos in Cintron’s conclusion, however, that would be less pronounced if “the saving grace of critique” were not so seemingly individual and if it could be more clearly articulated to collective political projects specifically concerned with embracing the dialectical and disruptive. For Cintron, a certain kind of order is inevitable: “Call it a vicious pleasure: written language seems to offer a ruling self, whether author or reader, the special opportunity of reducing language and experience to something manageable and, thus, to create an order. Even if the order sought is that of disorder, as in certain kinds of poetry, what gets created is a domesticated version of disorder, in short, the appearance of disorder, rather than the being of disorder” (229). We might perpetually lament this conservative impulse at the center of composition, but—for Cintron—we cannot eradicate it. We can, instead, simply take solace in the sweetness of critique that finds the remainder, the forgotten, the hidden.

The sweetness of critique, however, seems to me less infused with pathos when imagined through collective disidentifications. All writing, even writing committed to disorder, may reduce language and experience to something manageable, but surely there is a difference between the “school-appropriate” writing Cintron cites—writing that helps to main-
tain a hegemonic social and economic system—and the collective writing practices that would speak back to the particular institutional circumstances in which we find ourselves, even if, without question, the resistant writing in turn can and should still be subject to the sweetness of critique.

Butler writes, “It is important to resist that theoretical gesture of pathos in which exclusions are simply affirmed as sad necessities of signification. The task is to refigure this necessary ‘outside’ as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome” (Bodies 53). Queer theory and disability studies, if conceptualized as indissolubly linked to collective queer/disabled movements outside the university, are sites for continually imagining the collective disidentifications that make possible the refiguring Butler describes. Positioned to critique the finished products heteronormativity demands, queer/disabled perspectives can help to keep our attention on disruptive, inappropriate, composing bodies—bodies that invoke the future horizon beyond straight composition.

**Speaking Back to Straight Composition**

If the fetishized finished product in the composition classroom has affinities with the composed heterosexual or able-bodied self, I would argue that the composing body, in contrast, is in some ways inevitably queer/disabled. Sedgwick, after considering the features that characterize the composed heterosexual self, particularly listing (for more than a page) “the number and difference of the dimensions that ‘sexual identity’ is supposed to organize into a seamless and univocal whole,” contends that queerness refers to “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (8). Able-bodied identity, similarly, emerges from disparate features that are supposed to be organized into a seamless and univocal whole: a standard (and “working”) number of limbs and digits that are used in appropriate ways (for example, feet are not used for eating or performing other tasks besides walking; hands are not used as the primary vehicle for language); eyes that see and ears that hear (both consistently and “accurately”); proper dimensions of height and weight (generally determined according to Euro-American standards of beauty); genitalia and other bodily features that are deemed gender-appropriate (that is, aligned with one of only two possible sexes, and in such a way that sex and gender correspond); an HIV negative serostatus; high energy and freedom from chronic
conditions that might in fact impact energy, mobility, and the potential to 
be awake and “functional!” for a standard number of hours each day; 
freedom from illness or infection (ideally, freedom from the likelihood of 
either illness or infection, particularly HIV infection or STDs); accept-
able and measurable mental functioning; behaviors that are not disrup-
tive, unfocused, or “addictive”; thoughts that are not unusual or distur-
ing. Optimally these features are not only aligned but are consistent over 
time—regeneration is privileged over degeneration (read: the effects of 
aging, which should be resisted, particularly for women). If the alignment 
of all these features guarantee the composed able-bodied self, then—
following Sedgwick on queerness—we might say that disability refers to 
the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and reso-
nances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of 
bodily, mental, or behavioral functioning aren’t made (or can’t be made) 
to signify monolithically.

One could easily conclude from these circumstances that we are all 
disabled/queer, since all of us (at some point and to some degree—or to 
some degree at most points) inhabit composing bodies that exist prior to 
the successful alignment of all of these features. I want to both resist and 
advance this conclusion. Obviously, definitional issues have been central 
to both queer and disability rights movements—who counts as queer, 
who counts as disabled? As Simi Linton points out, following Carol Gill, 
“The problem gets stickier when the distinction between disabled and 
nondisabled is challenged by people who say, ‘Actually, we’re all 
disabled in some way, aren’t we?’” (12–13). Similar complacent asser-
tions are made about queerness—“actually, we’re all queer in some way, 
aren’t we?”—and I believe it is important to resist such assertions, 
recognizing them as able-bodied/heterosexual containments: an able-
bodied/heterosexual society doesn’t have to take seriously disabled/ 
queer claims to rights and recognition if it can diffuse or universalize what 
activists and scholars are saying as really nothing new, and as really about 
all of us. In other words, the question “aren’t we all queer/disabled?” can 
be an indirect way of saying, “you don’t need to be taken seriously, do 
you?”

In some very important ways, we are in fact not all queer/disabled. 
The fact that some of us get beaten and left for dead tied to deer fences 
or that others of us die virtually unnoticed in underfunded and unsanitary 
group homes should be enough to highlight that the heterosexual/queer 
and able-bodied/disabled binaries produce real and material distinc-
tions. However, recognizing that the question “aren’t we all queer/
disabled?" can be an attempt at containment and affirming that I resist that containment, I nonetheless argue that there are moments when we are all queer/disabled, and that those disabled/queer moments are desirable. In particular, a queer/disabled theory of composition argues for the desirability of those moments when we are all queer/disabled, since it is those moments that provide us with a means of speaking back to straight composition in all its guises. Instead of a banal, humanistic universalization of queerness/disability, a queer/disabled theory of composition advocates for the temporary or contingent universalization of queerness/disability.11

The flip side of the fact that there are moments when all of us are queer/disabled is the fact that no one (unfortunately) is queer/disabled all of the time—that would be impossible to sustain in a cultural order that privileges heterosexuality/able-bodied identity and that compels all of us, no matter how distant we might be from the ideal, into repetitions that approximate those norms.12 Critical de-composition, however, results from re-orienting ourselves away from those compulsory ideals and onto the composing process and the composing bodies—the alternative, and multiple, corporealities—that continually ensure that things can turn out otherwise. If we are all virtually queer and disabled, critical queerness/disability and critical de-composition result from actively and collectively desiring disability and queerness. Instead of solely and repeatedly asking the questions Cintron rightly cites as central to "school-appropriate" writing instruction—"'Have you chosen the right word?' 'Can this be made clearer?' 'Your argument here is inconsistent.' 'Are you being contradictory?'" (231)—we might ask questions designed to dismantle our current corpo-reality: How can we queer this? How can we crip it? What ideologies or norms that are at work in this text need to be criped? How can this system be de-composed?13

I recognize that the general point I am making here is one that has been central to a certain mode of composition theory for some time. Although I want to complicate the project, I in fact believe that one of the conditions of possibility for my own analysis here is precisely the collective and ongoing project within composition theory of arguing for the difficult but necessary work of continually resisting a pedagogy focused on finished products.14 To cite just one example, William Covino writes,

In even the most enlightened composition class, a class blown by the winds of change through a "paradigm shift" into a student-centered, process-oriented environment replete with heuristics, sentence combin-
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ing, workshopping, conferencing, and recursive revising, speculation and exploration remain subordinate to finishing.... While writing is identified exclusively with a product and purpose that contain and abbreviate it, writers let the conclusion dictate their tasks and necessarily censor whatever imagined possibilities seem irrelevant or inappropriate; they develop a trained incapacity to speculate and raise questions, to try stylistic and formal alternatives. They become unwilling and unable to fully elaborate the process of composing. (316–17)

As I asserted at the beginning of this essay, however, such critiques remain decidedly incorporeal—composition theory has not yet recognized (or perhaps has censored the "imagined possibility") that the demand for certain kinds of finished projects in the writing classroom is congruent with the demand for certain kinds of bodies. Not recognizing this congruence, in turn, can bring us to a point where the imagined solution is the sort of disembodied postmodernism Covino calls for. I'm suggesting that queer theory and disability studies should figure centrally into the work that we do in composition and composition theory—that, in fact, they already do in some ways figure centrally into that work, since the critical project of resisting closure that we have been imagining is a queer/disabled project. In other words, a subtext of the decades-long project in composition theory focusing on the composing process and away from the finished product is that disability and queerness are desirable.

De-Composition in Practice
Desiring queerness/disability means not assuming in advance that the finished state is the one worth striving for, especially the finished state demanded by the corporate university and the broader oppressive cultural and economic circumstances in which we are currently located. It means striving instead for what Donna Haraway has called "permanently partial identities" (154). Indeed, through Haraway, we might understand disability/queerness as "not the products of escape and transcendence of limits, i.e., the view from above, but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions, i.e., of views from somewhere" (196). I invoke Haraway here briefly to underscore (although my earlier invocation of theorists such as Butler and Sedgwick should of course also affirm this) that desiring disability/queerness is a feminist project (ultimately, I think disability studies and queer theory should be unimaginable without feminism), and
I would add that it is an antiracist and postcolonial project as well. Critical de-composition, in other words, entails recognizing and participating in the multiple and intersecting critical movements—what Haraway calls “an earth-wide network of connections” (187)—that would resist, or stare back at, the corporate “view from above.” Haraway writes, “We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for the future” (187).

A more limited but crucial (or, perhaps more positively, precisely such a local/located) “network of connections” characterized the Writing Program at the George Washington University for most of the past decade. This program was responsible for English 10 and 11, the two-semester composition sequence that fulfilled a literacy requirement for almost all first-year students. In contrast to more streamlined, “efficient” writing programs, the courses taught at GWU did not employ standardized texts, nor did they necessarily share, across sections, a conception of the kinds of writing projects students should be working on (although we discussed our varying conceptions continually). The courses were organized as writing-intensive seminars, and many or most were semester-long explorations of specific cultural studies topics such as international feminisms, rhetoric and technology, or contemporary youth cultures. Over time, faculty in the program instituted movement of the discussions in our classroom out in public: the second semester concluded with an annual “Composition and Cultural Studies Conference” involving close to 1000 students presenting their work, or listening to and debating others’ work, in disability studies, queer studies, postcolonial studies, rhetoric and democracy, and a host of other topics.

In this section, I describe some of the courses I was able to shape within this critically de-composing context. These descriptions, however, should not be read merely as the culmination of the theories I developed in previous sections, if culmination (or even a simple example), by bringing the discussion to a particular, fixed point, generates a manageable order, reduces difference, calms, settles, or frees from agitation. Indeed, at least some of those observing the Writing Program at GWU—described variously by the English Department and others as “stakeholders”—perceived it to be unmanageable, and composed a less unruly alternative. In May 2002, at an “Academic Excellence” management forum, the English Department at GWU learned that our Writing Program was being dismantled, that a new program would be instituted outside the department, that it would be staffed entirely by nontenure-
track professors, and that it would more directly focus on skills acquisition and measurable achievement. This proposal had been in development for almost a year, although neither faculty teaching in the Writing Program nor the English Department more broadly was consulted. Thus, after describing in this section some of the classes I taught in GWU's Writing Program, I will insist in a brief coda that de-composition is a process that is always commencing; the fact that specters of queerness and disability are conjured away suggests, in fact, that the struggle never culminates but rather is and must be ongoing.

The English 10 and 11 courses I shaped were centered on disability studies and/or queer studies and had titles such as “Reading and Writing a Crisis: Rhetoric, AIDS, and the Media” or “Critical Bodies: Disability Studies and American Culture.” I taught the “Critical Bodies” course, a composition course organized as an introduction to disability studies, for the first time in the fall of 1999 (I repeated the course in the fall of 2000). I followed that course, in the spring of 2000, with a composition course organized around lesbian, gay, and bisexual studies and called “Out in Public: Contemporary Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Movements.”

As the “Critical Bodies” course began, many students expected its structure to fit the structure they were coming to recognize from most college classes, with a body of material to be mastered, and writing assignments that would be successful if they competently reflected that mastery back to the instructor. This general structure in fact dovetailed with many students’ preconceived notions of disability, which tends to be understood in Western cultures according to a subject/object model—that is, what can “we” (a group assumed to be able-bodied) do for or about “them” (the disabled or “handicapped”)? Several things quickly helped to shift this professional-managerial ethos, not the least a classroom atmosphere where students felt comfortable about “coming out” in relation to disability. Since disability studies in the humanities specifically rejects the objectifying/pathologizing model that would position people with disabilities as always talked about by others and instead, through the disability rights movement, provides a space where people with disabilities speak in their own voices, the material we were reading encouraged students with disabilities to position themselves as subjects. In fact, coming-out stories (stories students were telling about themselves or their families) proliferated more in and around this particular course than in any of the numerous gay/lesbian studies courses I have taught. Most disabilities, arguably, are not readily apparent, so able-bodied
students in the class could initially proceed with the efficient model intent on mastery of an already-composed body of material. The material we were actually reading, however (especially theoretical pieces early in the semester that located disability within a larger history of “normaley”), as well as the alternative corporealities that were being claimed or cited by other students (around, for instance, diabetes, or learning disabilities, or hard-of-hearing identities), quickly challenged this mindset.

Ironically, alternative corporealities often emerged in what would seem at first to be an entirely “disembodied” medium. Students were required to participate all semester in a discussion on a listserv that linked all three of the sections I was teaching. This was certainly one of the kinds of writing that students were required to “produce” in the course, but it encouraged de-composition and directed attention to (individual and non-individual) composing bodies in that the important feature of this writing assignment was not the product, but rather the ongoing critical conversation that would never be completely finished or orderly (especially since students reported that it spilled over into other venues, into conversations they were having with friends or in other classes). At various points in the semester, some of the authors we were reading—Abby Wilkerson, Michael Bérubé, and Ralph Cintron—either joined the listserv briefly or responded to questions students had written (after distributing the questions to the authors, I later posted their answers to the listserv). Certainly the texts we were reading by these authors initially appeared to students as finished products, but the class eventually had good reasons for questioning such an appearance, as the seemingly authoritative voices that had composed those texts were called back to rethink them.

In the spring, although I had taught the course on lesbian, gay, and bisexual movements before, the issues I have been discussing throughout this essay were particularly pronounced, given that the semester was going to end right after the controversial Millennium March on Washington (MMOW) for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered rights. In fact, the MMOW, which was held on April 30, 2000, strikes me as a quintessentially “composed” event that was nonetheless haunted from the beginning by disorder and de-composition, by queerness and disability. In 1998, leaders of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) called for the march. From the beginning, the leadership of the march was top-down, with the leaders alone defining which issues were to be central
to the event. Grassroots organizers around the country were critical of the fact that they were not consulted, of the consistent lack of attention to anything more than token diversity throughout the planning process, and of the monolithic focus by march leaders (and HRC more generally) on "normalizing" issues such as marriage rights as opposed to more sweeping calls for social justice and for a critique of the multiple systems of power (including corporate capitalism) that sustain injustice. Far from critiquing corporate capitalism, HRC was and is understood by many critics as craving corporate sponsorship (and, in fact, corporate logos were so ubiquitous at the march, alongside HRC symbols, that one was left with the sense that the march represented something like "the gay movement, brought to you by AT&T and other sponsors"). Earlier marches had been organized at a grassroots level and had in fact centrally included a larger, systemic critique, and many activists in communities around the country, as well as most queer theorists working in the academy, felt that this march had thus been organized without an adequate awareness of either queer politics or history. By the time of the march, even mainstream media such as the *Washington Post* and the *Nation* had covered the controversy.

As an openly gay professor teaching both queer cultural studies and disability studies in Washington, D.C., it was important to me to take advantage of this highly charged moment. From the beginning of the class, students had been reading about historical splits within the gay movement, particularly the ongoing tension in twentieth-century lesbian and gay history between radical liberationist and liberal reformist politics. Students had read extensive selections from the work of John D'Emilio (and, as in the disability studies class, had in fact been in conversation, via our class listserv, with D'Emilio), who traces these historical tensions from the 1950s through the 1980s in his *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* and *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University*. A radical liberationist tradition places an emphasis on difference and distinction—not necessarily on essential difference, but rather on how queers are made different by an oppressive society and how a minority identity emerges precisely because of the positions gay men and lesbians occupy within a larger, dominant structure (similar analyses have emerged within the disability rights movement over the last few decades). Since oppression according to this tradition is structural and not just a matter of individual prejudice, collective action is needed: sexual minorities need to speak in their own
voices and alongside multiple others; a radical liberationist tradition believes that different minorities have something in common and should work together for change. In contrast, a liberal reformist tradition emphasizes sameness; the catch phrase of this tradition is the perennial "gays and lesbians are just like everyone else." Individuality and individual prejudice are stressed more than structural oppression or collective action, and—over the past fifty years—liberal reformists have often appealed or even deferred to "experts" (doctors, ministers, and—more recently—celebrities).

This tension was being played out, during the spring of 2000, just beyond the walls of my composition class. We had also read Michael Warner and Sarah Schulman on the contemporary commodification and normalization of the movement, and I had examined with students a series of ads directed at gay consumers. The ads that evoked the most discussion were intended to work as a set: a colorful ad for "Equality Rocks," HRC's April 29 concert to celebrate the MMOW (the ad featured corporate logos and pictures of Ellen DeGeneres, Melissa Etheridge, and other celebrities who had become overnight "leaders" of the movement simply by coming out) and a flyer from "Freaks Are Family," a local group that had been formed by members of the D.C. Radical Faeries and Bi Insurgence to protest the homogenization of the movement generally and the MMOW particularly. HRC's message that gays and lesbians are "just like everyone else," had definite appeal for many, and some students resisted, even angrily, both my own and other students' critique of HRC and the suggestion that the construction of gays and lesbians as a "niche market" might be problematic. Other students, however, found themselves completely compelled by the alternative corporealities offered by the Freaks Are Family contingent, and sought the group out on April 30 in order to demonstrate their support.

My use of "alternative corporealities" to describe what Freaks Are Family offered is meant quite literally: without question, the small group of about fifty protesters was more diverse than the MMOW more generally. The Freaks Are Family contingent included a range of body types, as well as clearly-identifiable members of trans, leather, bear, bi, and faerie communities. Diverse and perverse erotic proclivities (decidedly not the homogenous and domesticated married identity sought after by the MMOW), multiple genders, and various disabilities were also represented—and these could be read both on protesters' bodies and through the signs that we carried (which differed sharply from the mass-produced signs displaying HRC's ever-cryptic blue and gold equals sign).
In contrast to this proliferation of corporealities, HRC and the MMOW—like the straight composition I have been critiquing throughout this essay—offered only an orderly and singular corpo-reality.

Coda: Freakin’ Composition

co-da n [It, lit., tail, fr. L cauda] (ca. 1753) 1 a : a concluding musical section that is formally distinct from the main structure b : a concluding part of a literary or dramatic work 2 : something that serves to round out, conclude, or summarize and that has an interest of its own

With the image of my students searching for the freaks, I intend to put my students’ work and the (queer/disabled) composing bodies that were at the center of our composition class in conversation with at least part of the “earth-wide network of [de-composing] connections” outside the walls of our classroom. In the end, this essay is not offered, however, as a specific “nuts and bolts” way to conceptualize the kinds of classroom practices that will compose queerness or disability (that is, the classroom practices that will participate in critical de-composition), and not only because most composition instructors aren’t likely to have the MMOW on hand when they construct their syllabus. De-composition ultimately is inimical to “nuts and bolts” approaches that somehow streamline the process of composition instruction through manuals, teaching “strategies” exchanged like recipes, and the like. Such streamlining removes composition and composition theory from the realm of critical thought and secures its place in the well-run corporate university. De-composition does result, however, from ongoing attentiveness to how a given composition class will intersect with local or national issues such as the MMOW.

Although many in the English Department objected, the May 2002 management forum that reconceptualized writing instruction at GWU eventually led to the formation of a new program, the University Writing Program. The literacy requirement for students was also revised—students must now take University Writing 20 (UW20), a one-semester composition course, during their first year, and then must follow this with three Writing in the Disciplines (WID) courses. Instructors in the new program are required to order one handbook from among five or six possibilities, and they must address in the classroom issues of grammar and punctuation (though faculty members continue to insist that they will
make the determination as to how this requirement is met). Certain requirements are now attached to the first-year writing course, regarding both the number of pages of student writing that will be generated over the course of the semester (twenty-five to thirty pages of finished writing spread over three papers, at least one of which must involve research) and—with a little more leeway—what will count as effective "outcomes" of the course (there was no agreement but rather continual debate on these particular issues in the old program, though students in the old program generally wrote well over thirty pages each semester). Although initially the administration insisted that the new program would be staffed solely by (nontenure-track) full-time assistant professors, there has recently been acknowledgement that part-time faculty will be hired to staff many of the sections, perhaps beginning as early as Fall 2004 (part-time faculty teaching composition at GWU are currently paid $2700 a course and receive no benefits).

The University Writing Program is being phased in over three years, and incoming students are currently randomly tracked into either the new program or the old program. By the 2005–2006 school year, all incoming students will be in the new program. Especially during the current period, when the program is in its infancy, faculty members are evaluated repeatedly over the course of the semester; "oversight" and "assessment" are among the keywords of the new program. Part of this assessment includes the collection of sample student essays (for every student in UW20) from the beginning and the end of the semester (though as of this writing it is not entirely clear who will read the hundreds of essays collected, nor is it yet clear what will exactly mark improvement).

Finally, after initially informing faculty that they could no longer hold a public conference focused on student writing, the administration relented and said that the conference could be held, with three provisions: the words "cultural studies" could not be used to describe the conference, the event could not include both students tracked into the new program and students tracked into the old program, and no funding would be made available for an autonomous event that involved students in the old program. The Composition and Cultural Studies Conference has consequently folded, and, instead, as a recent article advertising the new program in the Association of American Colleges and Universities newsletter explains, GWU will now hold each spring a "University Writing and Research Symposium." The AAC & U News article says nothing about the fact that students randomly tracked into the old Writing Program are forbidden to participate in the symposium, nor does it
mention that the symposium replaces a vibrant interdisciplinary—even antidisciplinary—writing event with a six-year history. The article instead celebrates the fact that students, in a public forum, will demonstrate mastery of the forms of writing specific to their disciplines: "students in the sciences might present poster sessions... students in business classes might use Power Point presentations." In line with the administration’s requirement, the words "cultural studies" do not appear in the piece.23

Although clearly the will to a finished—and marketable—product is strong, the future of writing instruction nonetheless remains contested at GWU. Many of the faculty hired for the new program formerly held positions in the old, and although they have been shut out of many key decisions (approximately one-third of hiring committees will consist of University Writing Program faculty, for instance, with the other two-thirds composed of representatives from the administration and other locations around the university), they have managed to secure some victories, most notably a small class size (fifteen students) and courses that largely remain focused on cultural studies topics, even if the language of cultural studies has been conjured away by some who are heavily invested in the new program.24 Specters of disability and queerness have appeared at the margins of the new program, and how those specters will impact its current corpo-reality remains to be seen. The faculty in the new program includes at least one nationally-recognized scholar in disability studies, whose current work, notably, centers on disability movements resisting conceptions of “diagnosis.” Courses on tap for the new program include one focused on freak shows and another on sexuality, identity, and anxiety.25

Certainly, in this article I intend to position queer theory and disability studies at the center of composition theory, and in the interests of such a project, my highlighting of the ways in which disabled/queer questions and issues, or de-composing processes, haunt the newly-composed program is intended to affirm, in the face of dangerous transitions, what Paulo Freire called “a pedagogy of hope.” I do not, however, centralize disability studies and queer theory in order to offer them, somehow, as the “solution” for either a localized or more general crisis in composition; queer theory and disability studies in and of themselves will not magically revitalize a sometimes-tendentious and often-beleaguered field. I am nonetheless hopeful that disability studies and queer theory will remain locations from which we might speak back to straight composition, with its demand for composed/docile texts, skills, and bodies. Despite that hope, and with the transitions at my own institution in mind, I recognize
that composition programs are currently heavily-policied locations and that the demand for order and efficiency remains pronounced—mainly because that demand and the practices that result from it serve very specific material interests. Disability studies and queer theory, however, do provide us with ways of comprehending how our very bodies are caught up in, or even produced by, straight composition. More importantly, however, with their connection to embodied movements both outside and inside the academy, they simultaneously continue to imagine or envision a future horizon beyond straight composition, in all its forms. And that horizon is populated by multiple and de-composing bodies.

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Notes

1. Burke develops the following thesis throughout the final section of his *A Rhetoric of Motives*: "Order, the Secret, and the Kill. To study the nature of rhetoric, the relation between rhetoric and dialectic, and the application of both to human relations in general, is to circulate about these three motives" (265). Despite Burke's emphasis on relations among the various elements, order remains the privileged term, and is in fact the title of the section.

2. Of course, a significant body of work in composition theory, focused in various and contestatory ways on "process," has taken up some of the questions I introduce here; I locate myself in relation to that work in a later section. Although I have revised them slightly, I draw the preceding paragraphs and the epigraphs to this essay from my introduction to the second edition of *Composing a Writing Program: An Alternative Handbook for the Program in Rhetoric and Composition at The George Washington University*. The second edition of this document, which was printed in August 1999, was collectively authored by twenty members of GWU's Expository Writing Program and was edited by Angela Hewett and myself. *Composing a Writing Program* included, among many other topics, discussion of the wide range of composition theories that were in circulation at the university. At the time, faculty in the program intended to revise this document continually, although there was debate about whether it should take a temporarily final form annually or whether it should appear online, allowing for the more obvious deferment of any "final" form. A great deal of agitation, however, attended the second edition: although the final copying bill was relatively small, there was concern that the university, via the English Department, had paid for the document, which included a section openly discussing efforts on the part of graduate students and part-time faculty around the country to unionize (in actuality, the document was collectively paid for by members of the Writing Program). In my conclusion, I return to localized
agitation and consider very briefly some of the ways in which GWU has
designed initiatives that in effect work to contain what I call in this essay de­
composition.

3. One could certainly argue that this truth is far from universally acknowl­
edged because, as the work of Paulo Freire has repeatedly suggested, knowledge
requires praxis to be genuine: “The oppressed must confront reality critically,
simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality. A mere perception of
reality not followed by this critical intervention will not lead to a transformation
of objective reality—precisely because it is not a true perception” (Pedagogy
34). For a thorough discussion of what they call “the corporate university,” see
Nelson and Watt 84–98. According to Nelson and Watt, corporate universities
include “universities that adopt profit-oriented corporate values,” “universities
that adopt corporate-style management and accounting techniques,” and “uni­
versities that instill corporate culture in their students and staff” (89–90). A
March 21, 2003 Chronicle of Higher Education article succinctly details the
ways in which composition programs are particularly invested in (or, con­
versely, are serving as investments for) the corporate university; in a paragraph
nodding directly towards GWU, the writer of the piece suggests, “Scholarship
in the humanities has always kept its distance from the business school. But in
some recent work in composition studies, ideas about discourse mingle with
concepts from the corporate world” (McLemee A16). For recent work in and
around composition studies that addresses the issues I take up in this introd­
uction, see the articles included in Marc Bousquet, Tony Scott and Leo
Parascondola’s Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers: Writing Instruction
in the Managed University and in Scott, Parascondola, and Tony Baker’s
Composition as Management Science, which was published as a special issue of
Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor. See also Connors; Horner; Johnson,
Kavanagh, and Mattson; Schell and Stock; Slaughter; Watkins. On “flexibility”
as a keyword of our time, see Harvey, Martin.

4. My advocacy for a certain loss of composure in sites committed to
composition has affinities with what Jacques Derrida, reflecting on the nature
of justice, describes as a necessary “experience of the impossible” (“Force”
947). De-composition is an experience of the impossible, and as such cannot
simply be implemented by a writing program, except perhaps—to continue
drawing out the Derridean implications of my argument—the democratic
writing program to come. Justice, for Derrida, “is yet, to come,” though it is also,
“however unpresentable it may be . . . that which must not wait” (969, 967). The
present essay is indebted to the work of Derrida, perhaps especially, as I hope
my coda suggests, Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of
Mourning, and the New International. For work in composition theory attentive
to deconstruction, see Covino, Jarratt, Neel.

5. “Disability studies” describes a diverse array of projects, located prima­
arily in the humanities but speaking to and with the social sciences, that challenge
the ways in which “normalcy” and “abnormalcy” have been deployed to
conceptualize—and, indeed, to materialize—physical and mental difference. Disability studies is premised on the idea that our current division of the world into able-bodied/disabled is historical and contingent, and seeks to determine how power is secured and contested around that binary opposition. Speaking back to medical models of disability that would position people with disabilities as only objects of knowledge, disability studies considers not only how disability functions symbolically in Western cultures but also how people with disabilities have themselves been shapers of culture. Disability studies and the disability rights movement, like the gay liberation movement before them, have advanced a "minority thesis," whereby disability is not a pathologized state of being but a minority identity.

6. My point is perhaps best exemplified by certain forms of expressivism that explicitly move from (handwritten) freewriting to a printed text. Neither freewriting nor the linkage between the composed self and an orderly written text, however, are confined solely to expressivist classrooms.

7. In the field of disability studies, Lennard Davis's *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* provides the most thorough development of these ideas on the history of normalcy.

8. I would argue that the "indiscipline" Foucault theorizes near the end of *Discipline and Punish*, whereby the "useful delinquency" required and produced by the prison system refuses pathologization and insolently speaks back to bourgeois discourses of law and order, also floats free of its initial location in and around the legal system and has affinities with what I am calling "de-composition" (280, 290-92).

9. Rosalyn Deutsche's work on art, public space, and democracy, with its analysis of a range of political and artistic movements intent on challenging those who "presume that the task of democracy is to settle, rather than sustain, conflict," has strongly influenced my thinking about these issues (270).

10. I am referring here first to Matthew Shepard, the gay University of Wyoming student who was murdered by Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney in 1998. Henderson and McKinney beat Shepard and left him for dead tied to a deer fence; the murder gained unprecedented nationwide media coverage. My second reference is to the deaths, from 1993 to the present, of more than 100 residents of the District of Columbia who were living in group homes for the mentally disabled that were overseen by the mismanaged and negligent Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Administration (a division of the Department of Human Services). The deaths were due to unsafe, unsanitary, and abusive conditions.

11. Abby L. Wilkerson and I further develop the notion of queerness and disability as desirable in our introduction to *Desiring Disability: Queer Theory Meets Disability Studies*.

12. In Roland Barthes's terms, the virtually orgasmic and identity-disintegrating "text of bliss" is impossible to sustain in the context of a culture that privileges the text of pleasure: "the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the
text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a **comfortable** practice of reading” (14).

13. For related discussions of *virtual* and *critical* disability, see my “Compulsory” and “Good.” At this point, “crip theory” is still in its infancy, though I am tempted to predict that it may ultimately have the same kind of generative yet contestatory relationship with disability studies that queer theory has with lesbian and gay studies. Carrie Sandahl’s “Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance” puts forward one of the first attempts to delineate how crip theory might function.

14. Given the commitment to cultural studies content in the composition classroom that I detail in the next section, there are ways in which I am aligned with what has been called the “postprocess” movement in composition theory rather than with expressivist attempts to “discover” the processes individual writers’ employ or some attempts, by cognitivists and others, to delineate the components of “the” writing process. For overviews of debates about process in composition, see Lad Tobin and Newkirk, as well as Tobin, which provides a snapshot of the emergence of the postprocess movement (13–16). For more on postprocess theory, see Kent.

15. For work that explicitly links queerness, bodily difference, and race, see Lorde and Fisher. For theoretical explorations of these particular intersections, see Muñoz; Harper; and McRuer *Queer*, especially chapters 1–3.


17. Since programs for the Composition and Cultural Studies Conference for Student Writers are available online, at http://www.gwu.edu/%7Eenglish/ccssc/, and since these programs include links to actual presentations and e-mail addresses for the authors, some students report being contacted years later for information on their topics. In 2002, one student was contacted by Hollywood producers putting together a website for the film *The Hours*. At its height, the conference involved not only GWU students, faculty, and staff, but students and faculty from American and Georgetown Universities, and some leaders from local Washington, D.C., activist groups such as Homes Not Jails. The involvement of American and Georgetown Universities was largely due to the fact that some part-time GWU composition instructors were also teaching sections of composition at those universities. Angela Hewett and I discuss the emergence of the Composition and Cultural Studies Conference in “Composing Student Activists.”


19. Although, as Lennard Davis points out, “reading/writing has been unproblematically thought of as a process that involves hearing and vocalizing” (101), the process is more properly understood through what Davis calls
“deafness as a critical modality” (100), since reading/writing in fact do not involve hearing and vocalizing (no one reading these words is actually hearing me speak them). The listserv that I discuss in this paragraph similarly highlights the ways in which deafness as a critical modality organizes many of our communicative processes.

20. Although Wilkerson and Bérubé are both known as disability studies scholars, Cintron had not at the time considered his work in that context. The chapter from Angels' Town which I had students read, however, "A Boy and His Wall," is concerned among other things with the ways in which some members of the Latino/a community Cintron studied were tracked—as "learning disabled"—through the education system. Cintron's critique of this tracking and attention to the social construction of learning disability resonate with a great deal of scholarship in disability studies. I am grateful to Cintron, Bérubé, and Wilkerson for their virtual participation in my class.

21. Some neoconservative gay critics would undoubtedly say, as Andrew Sullivan and Bruce Bawer have indeed been saying for some time, that such a critique is out of touch with the times and that the gay movement has developed beyond such radicalism. I would counter that the success of the "A16" protests against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)—protests that brought together thousands of participants from around the country and that were held a week before the MMOW—suggest that in actuality the normalizing MMOW (held one week after the anti-World Bank/IMF protests) was out of touch with the times. The A16 protests, endorsed by the National Lesbian and Gay Task Force, various ACT UP chapters, and many other groups, were much queerer (in the critical sense) than the MMOW. For an overview of the A16 protests, along with other "dispatches from the front lines of the globalization debate," see Klein.

22. For coverage of the controversies, see Gamson and Solheim. See also Chasin 214–19.

23. Information on GWU's new University Writing Program is available online at http://www.gwu.edu/~uwp/. For comparison, an internal report generated by the old Writing Program is available at http://www.gwu.edu/~english. For the AAC & U News article, see "George."

24. In my interpretation, the reasons why the very language of "cultural studies" has been proscribed include both the historical association of cultural studies with politically-engaged and left-leaning scholarship and the administrative need to generate knowledge about the new program, for audiences such as readers of AAC & U News, that clearly marks it as different from, and indeed unconnected to, the old.

25. Abby Wilkerson was hired in 2002 with a joint appointment in the University Writing Program and the Department of English. The courses I am noting here are from the Spring 2004 semester: Gustavo Guerra's "Sexuality, Identity, and Other Contemporary Anxieties: Latin American Thought and Culture" and Christy Zink's "A Congress of Freaks: Cultural Oddities, Strange
Folks, and Proud Outsiders.” Although we both remain committed to composing bodies and de-composition, both Daniel Moshenberg (the former director of the Writing Program, and founder of the D.C. Area Marxist Feminist Study Group) and I, among the few tenured or tenure-track members of the old Writing Program, were folded back into the English Department, where—for the time being—we teach critical theory and special topics in cultural studies.

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