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## Composing Media Composing Embodiment

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Published by Utah State University Press

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*Composing Media Composing Embodiment.*

Logan: Utah State University Press, 2012.

*Project MUSE.* Web. 30 Mar. 2015.<http://muse.jhu.edu/>.



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# 11 QUEERNESS, MULTIMODALITY, AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF RE/ORIENTATION

Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes

*There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. . . . But, then, what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?*

—Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure*

Ultimately, throughout, and before we even begin, we log on, we ask: How might I represent my own queerness? How might I figure queerness multimodally? More specifically, how might multimodality embody the queer in dynamic and productive dimensions? What is a multimodal queerness? What are its possibilities, and what are its limitations? We can read, see, hear, perhaps even touch the queer—and have it touch us through multiple senses, potentially even interactively. But what does such touch mean, particularly for those who may not be queer?

The internet and the emergence of a variety of collateral multimedia composing and publishing tools have given us a nearly unprecedented capacity to represent ourselves, our interests, our communities, and our investments—personal, political, and otherwise. With such a capacity has come the possibility that our views, beliefs, and ideas may themselves be challenged by others, putting out there their own multimediated visions. Such is certainly true for the multimediated representation of queerness, which has been represented in richly multimodal ways—to foster community and awareness, particularly among those struggling with their sexual orientation, to mobilize queer activists as they reach out for political change, and (indeed) to foster hatred and intolerance through sites such as *God Hates Fags*. Such sites aside, we believe that exploring queerness through multimodality—that is, taking advantage of increasingly rich ways of figuring and composing—may help us develop productive insights into the experiences of the queer, the possibilities of multimodal composing, and the possibilities (and limits) of figuring the queer.

In this chapter, we want to forward a theoretical approach to the multimodal composition of queerness that situates such figuring as a challenging possibility for queering sexuality, for queering our understanding of the queer and the heteronormative, and for queering our interaction with multimedia and multimodal texts. To undertake this queering, we want to construct a set of queer genealogies—from Jean Cocteau to *Craigslist*, from *Gay.com* to lesbian cut-ups—that sees in the multimodal composition of queerness possibilities for reorienting our understanding of sexuality and how it moves in the world, and for how it orients us along certain paths, particular trajectories on which we may, or may not, wish to travel. Most audaciously, perhaps, we want to suggest that multimodal composing offers us rich resources for representing a complex queerness—and that such resources have a history, however unexplored, that may be illuminating, even inspiring. With this view in mind, we attempt to perform in this chapter our own encounters—as sexed and sexual beings—with a variety of texts. Combining scholarly discussion, theoretical explorations, and autoethnography, this essay fleshes out our understanding of how sexually engaged interactions with new media problematize sex/sexuality/gender as it creates a space for producing new sexual positionings.

#### MULTIMEDIATED QUEERNESS: SOME THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

To offer a framework for our exploration of queer multimodality, we set two narratives against one another:

1. the narrative of scholarly exploration of queerness online and through mediated texts\*
2. an homage extolling the unacknowledged work of Jean Cocteau as both queer artist and multimedia artist

These two narratives, not contradictory but rather in tension, offer us a way to conceive of the possibilities of queer multimodality as a function of both a recovered and an emerging history of queer multimedia.

\* Jonathan is grateful to his colleague Elizabeth Losh, with whom he explored some of this thinking about queer representation online in “A YouTube of One’s Own: Coming Out as Rhetorical Action,” in *LGBT Identity and New Online Media*, ed. Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper. New York: Routledge, 2010.

## 1

# THE NARRATIVE OF SCHOLARLY EXPLORATION OF QUEERNESS ONLINE AND THROUGH MULTIMEDIATED TEXTS

With both its capacity to disseminate a variety of complex new media texts and its proliferation of sex, erotica, porn, and fetish sites detailing a seemingly infinite diversity of sexual pleasures and possibilities, the internet has arguably done more to “queer” sex than any other medium. For some queers, internet sex offers not only a way to safely approach desires and pleasures deemed illicit by larger cultures, but it also serves pedagogically to introduce people to the range, possibilities, and even techniques of queer sexual pleasures. Of course, porn and erotic sites are often banned by ISPs in a variety of locales, with some entire nations (such as Iran and China) forbidding access to internet pornography. Still we should not underestimate its potential value for queer people. As Irmi Karl points out, “It is important to recognize that online media themselves are not consumed in isolation. Rather, they constitute part of a broader set of everyday techno-practices and information and communication technologies” (46). With this in mind, we can think of queer multimedia and even online erotica as ushering queer sexualities and sexual practices out of isolation. Bridging virtual and real worlds, the internet helps some queers connect with their desires and with one another in the pursuit of pleasure.

Indeed, the Web offers us one of the richest realms in which we find a varied and diverse sampling of queer multimodal representation, so we must necessarily begin our exploration of queer multimodality by understanding online queer representation and how it has been theorized and understood, particularly as a form of multimodal composition.

Much scholarship about queers online has figured the problem of queerness as one of representation. How and to what effect do queers represent themselves online? What kinds of representational practices are used by queers (and by nonqueers) to figure queerness? What kinds of work—socially, culturally, personally, and politically—do such representations do? What are their possibilities—and limitations? Summarizing some of the very small body of research on queer practices and representations online, Kate O’Riordan and David J. Phillips write in their introduction to *Queer Online: Media, Technology, and Sexuality* that two previous collections, the anthology “*Mobile Cultures[: New Media in Queer Asia]*” and [Alexander’s] *Queer Webs* [for the *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies*], highlight the ongoing importance of place, space, embodiment, and everyday life in the construction and production of queer techno-practices” (4). For many queers, particularly those in rural or isolated areas, the internet has been an important, even vital venue for connecting with others

## 2

# AN HOMAGE EXTOLLING THE UNACKNOWLEDGED WORK OF JEAN COCTEAU AS BOTH QUEER ARTIST AND MULTIMEDIA ARTIST

As we have experimented with different figurings of queerness, we have searched for models and theoretical orientations to guide the trajectory of my own online, multimodal queer becoming. Curiously, Jean Cocteau has provided for us a rich tradition of queer multimodality that has informed some of our work in multimodal composition, and we have chosen to work with Cocteau primarily because he has been among the most important artists of the last one hundred years to approach queerness, even if glancingly, through his many multimodal projects. Unabashedly, we acknowledge that this project is in some part homage to Cocteau. But it is also a critical homage, in that the analyses query Cocteau's multimodal figuring of the queer.

Cocteau was among the most influential mid-twentieth-century French artists. A poet, novelist, playwright, artist, and filmmaker, Cocteau also wrote scenarios for some of the most famous ballets of the twentieth century (*Parade*, music by Erik Satie) and libretti for works by famous composers (*Oedipus Rex*, music by Stravinsky). Cocteau worked throughout his life in multiple media, exploring and experimenting ceaselessly, seeing everything he did as "composing," or making art. This embrace of what we would today call multimodal composing is perhaps best seen in his films, some of which are considered among the most important in early French film, such as *La Belle et la Bête*, *Orphée*, and *La Sang d'un Poète*. While pre-dating contemporary work in the "new media," his multimedia experiments and innovations have much to teach us, we believe, about composing multimedia. His views can seem quixotic, as revealed in the collection of Cocteau's wide and varied writing on film, *The Art of Cinema* (translated and edited by Robin Buss), but I find his approach, even if seemingly naïve at points, refreshing in its optimism about the possibilities of media and suggestive in its potential connection to his queerness.

Cocteau argues, for instance, that "[a] film is not the telling of a dream, but a dream in which we all participate together through a kind of hypnosis, and the slightest breakdown in the mechanics of the dream awakens the dreamer, who loses interest in a sleep that is no longer his own. / By dream, I mean a succession of real events that follow on from one another with the magnificent absurdity of dreams, since the spectators would not have linked them together in the same way or have imagined them for themselves, but experience them in their seats as they might experience, in their beds, strange adventures for which they are not responsible" (*The Art of Cinema* 40). While members of the relatively contemporaneous Frankfurt school worried that the new medium, film, might be merely distracting if not stultifying to imagination, thus limiting the ability of individuals and collectives to think (and imagine) critically, Cocteau saw film as actually creating a vibrant space in which the imagination can "remix" reality, and in which "the film-maker can make 'real' the unreal figments of the imagination" (9). Such realization of the unreal is



and for establishing a sense of identity and community, particularly in a queer diaspora where notions of community, even identity, must often be constructed through information steadily gleaned, sometimes at great personal and political cost, from places outside one's home of origin. Writing about the impact of the internet on Asian queer identities, the editors of *Mobile Cultures* maintain that "in spite of and alongside the commercialization of sex from Net-order brides to online Asian gay and lesbian pornography, new media have become a crucial site for constituting new Asian sexual identities and communities" (13).

In addition to acknowledging its benefits for community building, some early scholars (myself included) also saw in cyberspace the potential to create fluid and challenging representations of queerness—representations that, like cyberspace itself, figured sexuality as complex, changing, dynamic. Cyberspace as a domain of identity play seemed to complement, if not parallel, similar dimensions of queer theory that gestured toward the fluidity and performative play of sexualities and identities. O'Riordan summarizes such a position by suggesting that "the cybersubject, assumed as a fluid performative freed from embodied constraints. . . intersects with the ideal queer subject as trans, bisexual" (26). One could, for instance, adopt a variety of online identities to "play" at different subject positions, experimenting, experiencing, even if virtually, what the "other" is like, perhaps even engaging in virtual sexual practices that challenge one's own sense of sexual orientation as fixed, immutable, and essential.

While both access to information about queerness and the possibility of sexual play certainly constitute important dimensions of many people's experience of the internet, some scholars point out limitations, even dangers, in thinking about what happens when queers go online. Echoing the work of cyberscholars (such as Lisa Nakamura) writing about race and online identity, queer cyberscholars like O'Riordan argue that "although the ideal cybersubject as fluid and the ideal queer subject as fluid converge in fictions [about cyberspace] and critiques such as [Sherry] Turkle's, there is more evidence to suggest that online queer communities are stratified into fixed identity hierarchies, and anxiety about bodily identity is a strong determinant in online queer formations" (26). O'Riordan, citing the work of Joshua Gamson, connects the substantial commercial dimensions of the internet to the formation and reification of marketable categories of identity: "The successful formation of online queer communities has also fragmented into prescriptive identity menus, which serve commercial marketing purposes as much as they are expressive" (27). *Gay.com*. *Planetout*. *AfterEllen*. *AfterElton*. *365Gay*. We note the generally commercial nature of such sites, and that, after all, commerce concerns itself (largely) with the circulation of commodities.

part not only of Cocteau's filmic project but of his approach to art in general. Indeed, calling all of his artistic endeavors "poetry," thus creating an aesthetic space in which he could mix media freely (some would say with at times reckless abandon), Cocteau sought experiences of art works that were highly emotionally evocative; he writes, "Since Arthur Rimbaud, poets have ceased to operate merely by charm. They operate by charms, using the word in its most dangerous sense. Instead of seducing, the poet terrifies: this explains the battle that is being waged against him. At the moment of waking, he unleashes the forces that govern our dreams and that people quickly try to forget" (39).

For Cocteau, these terrifying "charms" are not just evocative but also critically productive. He asserts that a "craving to understand (when the world that people inhabit and acts of God are apparently incoherent, contradictory and incomprehensible), this craving to understand, I say, shuts them off from all the great and exquisite impressions that art deploys in the solitudes where men no longer try to understand, but to feel" (*The Art of Cinema* 42). By accessing and calling forth feelings that short-circuit understanding, through this evocation of poetry, Cocteau hopes that the people he speaks to will experience a world more capaciously full of possibility, more full of the mixing and matching of dreams, and a bit less stymied by convention. He oddly parallels Walter Benjamin in this regard, even if his formulation is less directly political. Benjamin maintains in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that "for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual"—with "ritual" being, for Benjamin, the old formulas of artistic patronage or the commodity prestige accruing around works of art only accessible in museums.

Art loses its "aura" of inaccessibility and becomes usable by the masses. Cocteau's formulation manages to maintain a ritual aspect—the ritual of dreams—while holding on to both Benjamin's desire that art have meaning and usefulness for people and his belief that mass art has political uses. For we cannot help but see in Cocteau's poetical dreamscapes less a lulling to sleep and much more of a desire to trouble received categories of thought. In the hallucinations that bring many different perspectives together, old modes of thinking are questioned and challenged. They are, in a word, queered. And, given Cocteau's own queerness, we are tempted to read his aesthetic approach, however loosely conceived, as at least in part a desire to make a space for that (such as the homosexual) that had previously been excluded from consideration, even from thinking—such as a love that "dare not speak its name."

More to the point of this project, we are fascinated by how Cocteau's view of art as well as his queerness may have informed his interest in multimodality. In two works, the short multigenre book *The White Paper* and the film *La Belle et la Bête*, Cocteau addresses issues of "queerness" and offers us rich multimodal figurations of nonnormative attraction, intimacy, and love. Cocteau's work thus raises for us some critical questions of how queerness may be represented or figured multimodally. Perhaps another way to put this is to sift queerness, Cocteau, and multimodality



Such commercialization and “prescriptive identity menus” have potentially global implications as queer activism goes online, with activists using the internet to disseminate information and organize for political action. While the information sharing and organizing possibilities of the internet seem unparalleled in human history, some scholars wonder what is being disseminated. Writing for the *Mobile Cultures* collection, Sandip Roy asks,

Will countries with fledgling GLBT movements risk losing the process of building a movement that is about them

and their needs and end up assimilating into Western models because they are more accessible? . . . Is there a danger that the internet will not only pull together people across oceans but at the same time offer them ready packaged visions of the GLBT movement that does not account for cultural differences? Or will cultural difference cease to matter in a well-homogenized “gay world.” (181)

Ultimately, O’Riordan concludes that “the productive coupling of these two discourses, of the terms cyber and queer, may be as much a stumbling block as a facilitator in helping to investigate and theorize this nexus” (13).

Other scholars have critiqued more directly the move to collapse queer theory and cyberspace into a mutually affirming realm of identity play. Nina Wakeford writes that

the impression is that cyberspace is the postmodern space par excellence . . . . Perhaps the closeness of fit is a bit too convincing? What is lost if cyberqueer research becomes merely a celebration of parody and performance, or the simplistic application of an author’s reading of *Gender Trouble* or *The Epistemology of the Closet*?” (412)

The editors of *Mobile Cultures* echo Wakeford’s questions when they point out, accurately, that “beyond a small but growing number of fieldwork-based studies, most writing on sexuality and new media has been theoretical and/





through a question: How might multimodality complicate narratives of queerness and provide richer ways of representing, figuring, thinking the queer? How might multimodality offer richer ways of being queer?

*The White Paper* is a brief genre-defying text that Cocteau presents as (1) authored by someone else but (2) with his own illustrations. The text frankly explores the difficulty of living as a homosexual in mid-century Europe, but, unlike other pulp fictions of the period, Cocteau identifies a homophobic society as the source of the difficulty of living and loving queerly, as opposed to anything intrinsic in queerness itself. The book recounts several “scenes,” like case studies, in which the narrator attempts to come to terms with his queer desires as a young man, and several scenes of great pathos describe failed intimate encounters and unrequited longings. Throughout, though, as Rictor Norton points out, “The point of [such passages] is not to analyze homosexuality or to provide a sensational personal account of how a young man may become homosexual due to his father’s latent homosexuality, but to expose the subtle workings of homophobia in the lives of people” (“Cocteau’s White Paper”).

In this regard, *The White Paper*’s multigenre approach sets it apart from other contemporaneous accounts of homosexuality. The dominant mode of narrating the queer in the early part of the twentieth century borrowed from sexological case studies that traced the etiology of homosexuality as a wrong turning, a sickness in the development of healthy (hetero)sexual functioning. Cocteau sets the “case study” approach, however, alongside a variety of other kinds of texts—the confession, a manifesto, a love story, and even erotic drawings—to complicate our understanding of the queer, picking up on cultural products—the case study, the confession, erotic art—to figure the queer multimodally. As such, the text functions, to borrow from Foucault, as a “reverse discourse,” countering the pathologizing narratives of homosexuality circulating prominently at the time of Cocteau’s writing.

Certainly, we could read the disavowal of authorship not only as a rhetorical move toward “objectivity” but also as a response to homophobia; the author has too much to risk in being too openly queer. At the same time, Cocteau’s rather graphic illustrations move the text from a rather pathos-driven account of the psychological terrors of homophobia to an invitation to gaze on the eroticized male body. The reader is thus invited to become implicated—and perhaps just by lingering over the pictures becomes implicated—in the homoerotic. The two dimensions of the text—the narrative and the illustrated—work multimodally to create a tension between erotic interest and homophobic denial. Just as the text describes the intense social difficulty of homoerotic loving, the images invite you to experience the homoerotic.

But what is the experience of the homoerotic, and who can experience it? The text itself problematizes such questions. Early on, as the narrator realizes that he desires some of his male classmates, he notes,

My sentiments were vague. I could not manage to specify them. They caused me either extreme discomfort or extreme delight. The only thing I was sure of was





or speculative, sometimes flirting with more sensational possibilities such as virtual transvestism and cyber-rape” (10). For Wakeford and others, what is “lost” in blithely celebrating the free play of the cyber and the queer is a critical understanding of what kinds of work—personally, socially, politically—sexual and sexual identity play might actually accomplish. What happens in the move or gesture toward sexual play, identity fluidity, and what is brought back into the “real world” after logging out of such play? Such questions remain tantalizingly open.

Certainly, the dissemination of recognizable identities has been important for queers to connect online and form community and even engage in political activism. Just as important have been the possibilities opened up for people to explore different sexual positions and subjectivities online before trying them out “in real life.” At the very least the latter possibility has potentially enabled an extension of the erotic palette and imaginations of those with access and time to engage in virtual sexual play.

But I wonder what other kinds of queer work could be done (and perhaps is already being done) by the multimediated representations of queer-ness? Within the queer we find not only a move toward community or a desire for play, but also a gesture of critique—a critique of the normalizing categorizations of people into gay and straight. It is a critique, in short, of the heteronormative, of the proliferation of sexual subjectivities coupled with regimes of power that reproduce certain kinds of families, certain kind of acceptable intimacies, certain kinds of authorized lives. How might the multimediated queer perform the critical gesture of questioning, even challenging, the heteronormative?

that they were in no way comparable to those my comrades experienced. (*The White Paper* 19)

Already, the narrator feels marked off as different, as other. By the end of the short book, he is quoting Rimbaud's famous phrase—"Love is to be reinvented"—and thinking that such should be adopted as his (among others') rather queer "motto" (87). Difference and the call for reinvention—these are recognitions that the narrator's affectional and libidinal interests are not the same as those of others, and that they are potentially unknown—perhaps unknowable—to those who do not share them.

Interestingly, the very "genre" of the text raises questions of knowability. Is *The White Paper* a novel? An autobiography? A confession? A case study? A white paper? A political tract? An illustrated erotic primer? Or all of the above? The mixing of genres itself gestures simultaneously toward the reinvention of genre (paralleling the reinvention of love) and the confusion of clear knowability. It is as though Cocteau wants to carve out a multimodally rich space in which to think the queer, to enact a textual encounter that highlights the failure to grasp the queer. After all, if the sexological and psychological case studies of the turn of the century had attempted to codify and categorize a wide variety of sexual "perversions," homosexuality prominent among them, then Cocteau's *The White Paper* offers a very different experience of the queer. In mixing genres and potentially disturbing categories, we are offered not only a rich portrait of what the queer might be but a just as clear sense that the queer is perhaps not as easily knowable (as "evil," as "sinful," as "sick") as we thought. In the richness of the figuring of queerness lies a complication that itself is both part of the content of the book and the multimodal experience of the text.

While *The White Paper* is one of Cocteau's few works directly addressing homosexuality, we find traces of his queerness in others of his works, such as *La Belle et la Bête*, Cocteau's most famous and beloved film. Based on the well-known fairy tale, and the inspiration in large part for the commercially successful Disney film, *Beauty and the Beast*, Cocteau's film is a rich ménage of crisp narrative, special effects, penetrating psychological characterization, and delicious romance. We can read *La Belle et la Bête* in a number of ways, and in a number of sexual ways. A little bit of Freudian imagination might figure the Beast as the id who needs the social taming of the Beauty to restore ego balance. Along these lines, the rampant materialism of the boyfriend and other family members itself is disciplined as potentially destructive id energy. Pushing further, the story seems to valorize a particularly Freudian solution to unwieldy desire. The beast must be loved by the beauty, having left her father (to whom she seemed overly attached) to usher both of them into mature intimacy and sexuality. And indeed, they both "ascend" from the natural world at the end of the film, overcoming their potentially baser desires and connections.

Such readings are not necessarily wrong, but we believe such a glossing of the filmic text misses a key dimension of the film. Specifically, Belle, the Beauty, must come to love the Beast, even as she does not know him. Indeed, she cannot know





Surveying this past work and these critiques suggests that we should explore and develop the potentially fruitful ground between critiquing the emergence of marketable and fixed identity categories, on one hand, and lauding the internet as a space of unrestrained sexual play, on the other hand. In between identity and freeplay, we believe, lies the potential for understanding the representation of queerness on the internet as a complex endeavor with many different ramifications for identity, community, and even politics. Put another way, what we would like to do is begin to situate our own work between the critique of identity categories and the celebration of freeplay. In multimodal, even multimedia representations of queerness we see the possibility not just for fixing identities nor for ushering in untrammelled identity fluidity, but for understanding how the figuring of queerness may work identity and its construction in very specific ways—both personally and politically.

him. But the Bête can only be freed if she comes to love him without knowing who—or what—he really is. As such, the film offers its viewers what I would call a queer fantasy. At a brute level, the beast is a queer figure in the sense that he is not only not normal, but most decidedly abnormal, monstrous, frightening, and ultimately unknowable. His scenes are all set in rooms augmented with special effects designed continually to prompt us to question what we are seeing. Is that a hand holding that candelabra? We are never fully sure of what we are seeing in this powerful dreamscape. Further, despite the seeming heterosexuality of its love story (Belle is a woman and the Beast seems male), *La Belle et la Bête* shows us how someone must come to love a completely alien being—What being is this? What kind of beast is it?—in order to make a space for ascendent liberation. Put another way, the film seems to argue that liberation is only possible when we accept that which is unknowable; we do not have to know—to categorize everything in its place—in order to love. Rather, for Cocteau, love must often precede knowledge. In fact, love must exist in the absence of knowledge for it to be liberatory.



We call such a queer fantasy—even over and beyond a homosexual fantasy—because it so beautifully resists categories of knowability and suggests that our richest, most liberating experiences exist when we refuse the impulse to know and open ourselves to acceptance of the not known, maybe even of the ultimately unknowable. In both *The White Paper* and *La Belle et la Bête*, Cocteau offers us rich multimodal representations that continually invite us to question what we know about love, and about how we categorize it and attempt to “tame” it, like an unwieldy beast that must be put in its proper place. We cannot help but think of

such questioning as the work of the queer, which invites us not only to consider tolerating that which is “not like us,” “not like the normal,” but to understand critically the moves and gestures to categorize and make knowable things as complex as intimacy, desire, affection, and love.

**With these different histories in mind, these different narrations of queerness and multimodal multimedia, we ask:**

- What kinds of representational acts figured multimodally and through multimedia contribute substantively and materially to understanding queerness in rich, varied, capacious, and (perhaps most importantly) challenging ways?
- What kinds of representations break the spell of static, flat (and flattening) tropes of identity, reprocessing digital cardboard copies of one-dimensional queer subjects?
- At the same time, what kinds of representations challenge identity while refusing fluidity (itself an ultimately untenable position—is fluidity a subject position?) either online or off?
- Finally, what are politically interventive queer acts online? And how might such acts reorient our understanding of the queer and of its efficacy as a challenge to heteronormative dominance and its orientation of our thinking about intimacy, affiliation, and identity?

Perhaps our ultimate questions about queerness and representation might be, In what is the queer invested? And in what might the cyberqueer invest its figural acts?

#### **FROM REPRESENTATION TO ORIENTATION: QUEERNESS, AFFECT, AND IDEOLOGY**

What we see in Cocteau's work is a sense, simultaneously, of queerness's unknowability and of the invitation to connect, however possible, with the unknowable queer. In both *The White Paper* and *La Belle et la Bête*, Cocteau's multimodality gestures toward a queerness that cannot quite be captured and must remain ungraspable in its queerness while also putting into motion multiple texts, genres, and sense experiences that nonetheless invite connectivity with that unknowable queerness—even as we must acknowledge that those moves to connect may be unsettling, discomfiting, uncomfortable. Indeed, what might be most critically productive about Cocteau's queer representations is that they do not represent queerness as much as they reorient our thinking about love. The reorientations, as Cocteau admits, evoke powerful feelings, calling forth "the forces that govern our dreams and that people quickly try to forget." Cocteau invites us not just to see the queer, but to simultaneously identify with it (as some identify with the story of *La Belle et la Bête*) and to be troubled by it (as some find the various narrative moves and line drawings of *The White Paper* unsettling). Such works are as much about challenging affect as they are about representing the queer.

Along these lines, the work of cultural critic Sara Ahmed and her compelling explorations of affect and ideology can illuminate what we believe to be Cocteau's aesthetic (and perhaps even political) practice—as well as what our own multimodal queer aesthetic might be. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed works the trope of orientation specifically in terms of sexual orientation; she argues that “compulsory heterosexuality—defined as the accumulative effect of the repetition of the narrative of heterosexuality as an ideal coupling—shapes what it is possible for bodies to do, even if it does not contain what it is possible to be. Bodies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force” (145). Through that repetition, “Compulsory heterosexuality shapes bodies by the assumption that a body ‘must’ orient itself towards some objects and not others” (145). Of course, at times one experiences disorientation, usually in the face of the queer—either the queer as embodied externally in someone whose life and loves are decidedly not like one's own, or internally in stray thoughts that challenge one's assumed heterosexual orientation. For Ahmed, such moments indicate the close intertwining of affect and ideology, of how we are conditioned to move in the world. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Ahmed asserts that

moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable. Such a feeling of shattering, or of being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or as we return to the ground. The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. (157)

Ahmed then asks a pivotal question: “What do such moments of disorientation tell us? What do they do, and what can we do with them?” (158). For Ahmed, the answer in part lies in paying attention to queer orientations: “Queer orientations are those that put within reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy. Queer orientations might be those that don't line up, which by seeing the world ‘slant-wise’ allow other objects to come into view” (107). Playing with the trope of orientation allows Ahmed to assert that periodic disorientation, usually brought on by the emergence of the queer or that which is not oriented along normative lines, can make us critically aware of how we are all socially, culturally, and even politically oriented to want, to desire, certain things and not others. Disorientation, in other words, reveals the normative and the normalizing in action—the powerful forces that make some lives seem so natural, others seem unthinkable. After all, disorientation is a common



response among many when faced with that which lies outside of, or “slant-wise” to, the heteronormative.

Or as Ahmed puts it, to “feel uncomfortable is precisely to be affected by that which persists in the shaping of bodies and lives [e.g., heteronormativity]” (155).<sup>\*</sup> Feeling such discomfort potentially creates a space for critical reflection on the various trajectories, the orientations, that point us in certain directions, valorizing some lives, disparaging others.

We can see such disorienting powerfully at work in Cocteau’s multimodal compositions. The varied genres of *The White Paper* disturb our sense of how we know the queer, of what the queer is, while the special effects and fantasy narrative of *La Belle et la Bête* invite us into a world in which we must suspend our usual understanding of how the course of true love should proceed. Certainly, Cocteau understood the value of disorientation. The line drawings in *The White Paper* startle us; the Beast’s visage in *La Belle et la Bête* unsettles us. In either case, the disorientation should lead to reflection: Why am I uncomfortable—and need I be? Indeed, both texts invite us to reorient ourselves, to reconsider the larger cultural forces and mandates that orient us along certain paths, calling our lives to tell certain stories. We have the opportunity of reorientation, even as our original “sexual orientation” may be left intact.

Indeed, such discomfort may constitute the pedagogical gesture of Cocteau’s multimodality, of his figuring of queerness multimodally. In the introduction to Cocteau’s collection of autobiographical sketches, *The Difficulty of Being*, composer and Cocteau acquaintance Ned Rorem remembers his first “textual” encounter with Cocteau. Asking for a meeting with the filmmaker, Rorem receives a cryptic note: “You yourself must find a way to meet me—miracles work better than appointments” (vii). With such a coy gesture, Cocteau offers us his understanding of love, perhaps of the queer: *I will not simply reveal myself to you—and perhaps I cannot; but you must nonetheless search for me.* Cocteau offers us then a sense of the queer as the unknown with whom connection must nonetheless be made. The beauty and the beast, that incommensurable pair, must love one another.

#### QUEER MULTIMODALITY

What we would like to do now is explore what a queer multimodality might look like—a queer multimodality less invested in identity and community building, or in the free play of sexual fluidity; instead, we will explore the gestures of queer critique that draw our attention to and challenge normative identity, and that probe the intermingling of sexuality and power in the West. Put another way, we will argue that queer representation involves not just figuring an orientation; queer representation means the experience—and the potentially critical re-experience—of being “oriented.” Multimedia



offer us some powerful (though not exclusive) strategies to invite people to experience an orientation (and perhaps even a bit of productive disorientation) vis-à-vis the sexual. Such work, necessarily personal and emerging from “the private,” draws on our own sense of queerness. Indeed, this chapter serves as much as our own personal exploration of queer multimodality as it does a theoretical probing of queerness and multimedia. Thinking of Ahmed, we inquire after “real-life” meetings with the queer, with the potential disorientation of queerness. We ask, how might a queer multimodality offer a productive disorientation? And a disorientation productive of what, exactly?

**JONATHAN—“PHONESEX : A DIGITAL COLLAGE” AND  
“DIS|ORIENTATION : A STRAIGHT CLOSET”**

I conceived of these pieces specifically as explorations of queerness and multimodality. In one way, my goal was to make manifest, inasmuch as that is possible, the queer multimodally. I was interested in working toward a better sense, perhaps a more personal sense, of how multimodal composing might approach, represent, perhaps even extend a sense of the queer. Of course, there is no one experience of the queer. And there cannot be—and should not be—one way to figure the multiple experiences of the queer. At the same time, this is a queerness with a political edge as well. Monique Wittig claims in *The Straight Mind* that “discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms” (25). My work is an attempt to speak in other terms. And in that sense, it is a manifesto for the necessity of exploring multimodality in the effort to speak in other terms.

The following two pieces, “phonesex : a digital collage” and “dis|orientation : a straight closet,” originally appeared online in *Harlot*, where they can still be viewed and explored. I designed them to explore how we interact with digital media, particularly a web-based interface, to (re)experience differing senses of embodiment and the complex relationships among bodies, embodiment, and identity. I’m drawn in particular to investigating the circulation of identities and digitized bodies—and to understanding how both get picked up in the webbed world, are remixed, and then are redistributed both to normalize identity trajectories and disturb such normative trajectories.

“phonesex” invites touch that viscerally implicates the interactor in what s/he is touching. At the same time, the piece frustrates users’



expectations because “clicking” on the images and “scrolling down” the page take you nowhere. Instead, I intend the piece to provoke reflection on the act of “touching” images and responding to the presence of potential “links.” What motivates our desire to digitally touch, to pursue linkages—particularly when the shadowed images tease and taunt—and potentially disturb? If you continue to touch, to scroll down, what—after a point—are you really looking for? And what does that say about our desires, and the role of desire in interacting with digital technologies that represent and mediate bodies?

“dis|orientation” probes how we construct online identity and represent bodily desire by linking our haptic expectations as we touch—and push—the fantasy images of advertising to realities of the sexual underground. As with “phonesex,” the lingering mouse touch reveals sexualized images from the advertising world, specifically the overly sexualized images of Abercrombie & Fitch poster boys. But pushing the images takes us to postings inspired



#### JACKIE: LESBIAN SPECTACLE



I'll start simply: *I put this picture and the one on 208 on my door and the reactions to them fascinated me.* The reactions: laughter; jokes about how Pilates was really working for me; a number of comments about how hot I was. However, a number of people—good friends, even—were disturbed: “I can’t even *look* at that—it’s too creepy!” The queer reading is, perhaps, obvious; in both pictures, there is a slipperiness of gender and representation, a layering of possibility and dissonance, gaps and excesses of meaning; as each reader approaches the text, she or he has different (and contradictory) interpretations of *that* body and what technology has done with it. In that mesh of possibility is a great deal of discomfort,

a discomfiture courted by queer readings; for like other texts, these pictures explode the possibility of a sexuality—revealing “definitional center” for *either* the material body reading *or* the representation read. Indeed, as Eve Sedgwick writes, “A lot of the most exciting recent work around ‘queer’ spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, post-colonial nationality criss-cross with these and other identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses, for example” (8–9).

So given the ease of such a queer reading, why do I propose *lesbian* sexuality as a *techné* of self? The choice is quite deliberate. In *Tendencies*, Sedgwick claims that the terms *gay* and *lesbian* still (in 1993) present themselves (however delusively) as objective, empirical categories governed by empirical rules of evidence (however contested). *Queer* seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation. A hypothesis worth making explicit: that there are important senses in which *queer* can signify only *when attached to the first person*. One possible corollary: that what it takes—all it takes—to make the description “queer” a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person. (9) □

by *Craigslist* advertisements from men who are self-identified as straight but who are seeking man-to-man bodily contact. In this piece, I invite meditation on the nature of the “closet” vis-à-vis multiple identificatory practices and positions. The closet, in this case, is simultaneously the repository of A&F clothing, the perennial favorite of frat-boys and straight college kids; the homoeroticized advertising used to appeal to such kids; the pervasiveness of homoerotic behavior masked under the label “straight;” and the continued larger cultural failure to honor the homoerotic while still using it to sell merchandise. Dominant culture constructs the homoerotic as the secret, tempting desire that must still be hidden behind the façade of the “straight.” I find it curious how the digital world provides access to linking different pieces of our fractured sexual landscape.

That linkage exists for me in two dimensions. First, it is an attempt to resist, in Wittig’s words, “the oppressive character that the straight mind” often foists on us in “its tendency to immediately universalize its reproduction of concepts into general laws which claim to hold true for all societies, all epochs, all individuals” (27). In linking homoerotic advertising with the vast underground of acknowledged, even repudiated homoerotic activity, I want to disrupt the reproduction of a certain kind of straightness that rests necessarily on the constant reproduction of the repudiation of the homoerotic. At the same time, the piece invites your disruption through reading such reproduction in its ceaseless replication of the same, again and again, picture after picture, ad after ad.

The piece is designed to engender a bit of discomfort, and in this way I follow the theoretical lead of Sarah Ahmed, who argues that “to feel uncomfortable is precisely to be affected by that which persists in the shaping of bodies and lives [e.g., heteronormativity]. Discomfort is hence not about assimilation or resistance, but about inhabiting norms differently” (155). Such discomfort can be as simple as encountering the erotic where one didn’t expect to encounter it. My colleague, Karen, a social psychologist, wrote to me the following after seeing “phonesex” for the first time: “Kewl J. I’ll have to find a moment to take a closer look at them, though I must say there’s a boundary there of not wanting to engage with you too sexually that seemed to pop up upon first glance.” This sudden, discomfiting engagement with the sexual may inaugurate a critical engagement, and “dis|orientation” is designed to play with that engagement by asking us to think about where the erotic is allowed, and where it is perhaps allowed but simultaneously disavowed. Indeed, what persists in the representation of straightness in our culture is the reproduction of the homodenied identity, that which, even as it may partake in the homoerotic, must deny the labeling of such, must repudiate homosexual affiliation. “disorientation” invites some discomfort by making explicit the repudiated, thus prompting you, I hope, to “inhabit norms differently,” to see the contours of repudiation in the maintenance and reproduction of certain kinds of identities.

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As queer theory has played out in academia (for that is its only home), it has rather ironically taken on the objectivist stance that Sedgwick saw as a gay and lesbian fault. In its domesticated state, it no longer derives its critical weight—if ever it did—from first-person iteration. Rather, “queer,” with its explosion of categories, signifies a particular approach to text that is necessarily discrete from the writer’s body; it affords us radically disembodied bodies and desexualized sexualities to analyze. It is, perhaps, more accurately positioned as a *techné* or even an *episteme* of analysis—but not of self. As such—given the relative worth(s) of analysis and self in the academy—it has become “safe,” or at least *legitimate*, institutionally.

In 1994, Judith Butler wrote presciently that “normalizing the queer would be, after all, its sad finish” (“Against” 21). I do not believe the queer has quite met its “sad finish”; in fact, it takes only a quick look through the CFP-L archives or MLA/CCCC programs to see that *queer* is doing at least as well as *feminist* in terms of critical legitimacy. The term still has the power to disturb, to evoke reaction, and indeed to describe a particular sense of discursive work. In using the term *lesbian*, however, I follow Terry Castle deliberately: “Indeed, I still maintain, if in ordinary speech I say, ‘I am a lesbian,’ the meaning is instantly (even dangerously) clear: I am a woman whose primary emotional and erotic allegiance is to my own sex” (15). It

is this sense of first-person signification (to which Sedgwick alludes) that must inform any embodied feminist praxis, particularly if we keep in mind bell hooks' admonition to value the "radical possibility" that is part of living on the margin (149).

To perform lesbian first person is indeed a radical, disruptive, even *abnormalized* invocation of body, gender, desire, fear, and sensation. It is a *spectacular* act, in which we might make use of our converging alienations, our mesh of desire and want, in order to position ourselves to be—if only for a particular rhetorical moment. Even more, because of the constant exchange/deferral of need, lesbian first person increases and sustains itself through its desire, serving as the engine of its own perpetual visibility. It is, simply, one act in a generative *techné* of self.

*Techné* has no precise equivalent in English; it has been variously translated as "art" or "craft," "technical knowledge," or "skill." In this paper, I use *techné* as a sort of praxis middle ground, more than the "clever, bold strokes" of *phronesis* (Lyotard) or the knowledge-making systematicity of *episteme*. Rather, I pose the *techné* of lesbian sexuality as a sort of generative lived knowledge; it is a view of *techné* that points less to the prescriptive how-to sense of the term and more to the ethical, civic dimension. This *techné* has two broad parameters: (1) the acknowledgment/embrace of the idea of "spectacle," the alienating distance between bodily self and representation; and (2) the importance of lived experience to the formation of an ethical stance. The life of the body is not to be ignored.

*Lesbian first person, act 1:* I put the picture on my door. It raised these questions: What body? What gender? What desire? What fear? In its displacement of a "real" or even *unitary* body, it made my own fleshly, material self *present*; in its displacement of "real" or even *unitary* gender and the concomitant expectations of desire, it created an always-already exchange of image, desire, representation; in short, through technology, *I made a spectacle of myself*.

In my particular case, the absent was made present; it rather jarringly reminded viewers that "the supplement is always the supplement of a supplement. One wishes to go back *from the supplement to the source*: one must recognize that there is a *supplement at the source*" (Derrida 304). The chain of deferred meanings crafted into the Photoshop-mediated simultaneous text of [lesbian face] and [male body] lays bare the multiple disjunctures of the "seen self." In so doing—as readers tumble frantically into this rollercoaster of multiple deferrals—it makes visible the strange brew of fear, guilt, and desire with which we approach the **lesbian body**.

Any *techné* of lesbian sexuality will do well to embrace the spectacular as a force that makes fleshly bodies temporarily readable through its sustained jumbling of representation and desire. I won't rehearse

decades of psychoanalytic and/or French feminist and/or poststructuralist thought here, but instead offer one proposition upon which we might agree: the body—the fleshly thing that carries us around, this ugly bag of mostly water, as Gollum would have it—is never really our own, never in existence apart from representation and desire. Perhaps we can express this relationship thusly: our self at its most simply speakable or readable is comprised of ratios between the nodes of body, representation, and desire, much like the classic rhetorical triangle of speaker, audience, and subject. And again: any *techné* of lesbian sexuality, any performance of this spectacular, must honor lived experience. As bell hooks and others have noted, experience provides a particular insight—not because of essential traits, but because of unique experience that “cannot be acquired through books or even distanced observation and study of a particular reality” (90). The “passion of experience” (90) animates this *techné*, makes it more than a relic of 1970s cultural feminism. However, it is important to remember that embodiment and experience, too, work within the ratios mentioned before. For, ironically, the spectacular lesbian is a necessarily visual *techné*: it is in the reroutings of expectation within the disjuncture between seen(s) that the yawning maw of spectacle horrifies (*Zero at the bone. You can’t believe your eyes!*). In this way, the fixed seen and the fluid reading jam together in a move that invokes a radical feminist textuality, as I have argued before.



*We have a world of pleasure to win, and nothing to lose but boredom. (Vaneigem 10)*

After seven years of office-hour art on my door, my department knows of my Photoshop habit. Everyone also knows that I am a lesbian. I’m one of the LGBT faculty advisors on campus. I pilot-

ed one of the university’s first courses in LGBT studies. My lover comes with me to department functions, and when we were married during the San Francisco wed-in of 2004, the event was announced in the department newsletter. The vast majority of my department showed up for a party celebrating us, and, in fact, the president of the university congratulated us. In short, everybody knows. Or so everybody thought. But these two specific pictures enfolded my sexuality in a spectacular way, reminding viewers that even though they faced me directly, I am still there, “gender fucking and fucking gender,” as Stephen Whittle would say.

How does one make sense and feeling of a radically expansive world of images, given the DIY incursion into public authoring? How do we make ourselves understood and felt? As more of us engage our classes in constructing new media texts, writing blogs, or just participating in listserv or Blackboard discussions, we are discovering the heady intersections of text and identity that we knew were there but had not been able to (quite) (always) make visible. These networked technologies make it easier to do such things; at the same time, I resist the idea that the technologies are all that have made it possible. In any number of my classes—graduate and undergraduate—because of inspiration, exploration, and sometimes natural disaster (flooding in the computer classroom), I use representational technologies that are nonnetworked/low end (colored markers, collage) and nonnetworked/high end (Photoshop). At other times, the network is very much our aesthetic friend; the point is facilitating access to the means of representation and distribution. To explain: in “Box Logic,” Geoffrey Sirc writes about new media approaches to text and memory, writing that his primary goal is “to show my students how their compositional future is assured if they can take an art stance to the everyday, suffusing the materiality of daily life with an aesthetic” (117). Like Sirc, I want my students (and my fellow teachers) to take an “art stance to the everyday,” and like Sirc, who embeds his discussion of new media within an exploration of Walter Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, I want to encourage a critical understanding of that stance. It is for this reason that I offer a “lesbian twist” on situationist aesthetics and the critique of the capitalist exchange of representation.

*Lesbian first person, act 2:* I am a spectacular lesbian. My visual enactment of, shall I say, “giving head” jolted the colonized lesbian body from its moorings. Its “gender confession” disrupted, ever so slightly, the ideology of heterosexism and opened a gap from which to question (if never resolve) that ideology. And it is through technology—not just the sexy stuff of cyberspace, but low-network technologies like Photoshop manipulation—that we can make readable the sustained desire of lesbian spectacle, the trembling need for knowledge we can never have, the terror of the unbidden Other, or, more succinctly, as my lover puts it, “the ‘ick’ factor.” Can we enact, can we en flesh, a rhetoric of sexuality that embraces spectacle? Can we struggle at that point of fear? It’s incumbent upon us in feminist studies, I believe, to revisit the dismissal of *lesbian* as a useful critical term; further, we should court those moments of spectacle to look bravely at flesh and desire, and to wonder, even in our horror, even if it makes us flinch—What price have we paid for hiding our bodies?





Both pieces are also experiments in “touch,” in that you have to digitally, as it were, finger with your mouse the images, some of which are fairly eroticized, in order to experience the pieces. In this way, I am hoping to queer the machine, to invite active eroticization of the computer as communication technology—or, perhaps, to sense the erotic potential in the computer, in the network. Amazingly, but truthfully, we encounter new technologies and inevitably ask of them, “How can I use you to fuck better?” My question of the technology perhaps has more to do with asking questions about how we can know sexuality better, in all of its erotic, intimate, and disciplinary modalities and movements, but it also imbricates questions about how we experience the new communications technologies and new media—erotically. Again, Ahmed is useful here in helping theorize how we might understand digital touch in terms of the erotic, even as her discussion is not specifically about technology and new media. She writes that our understanding of touch generally “shows how bodies reach other bodies, and how this “reaching” is already felt on the surface of the skin. And yet. . .not all bodies are within reach. Touch also involves an economy: a differentiation between those who can and cannot be reached. Touch then opens bodies to some bodies and not others. Queer orientations are those that put within reach bodies that have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy. Queer orientations might be those that don’t line up, which by seeing the world ‘slantwise’ allow other objects to come into view” (107). My goal in developing these media texts has been to open up a space, a touching space for a “queer orientation” that shows how certain “conventional genealogies” separate out permissible and impermissible touching—the permissible clasp of male touch in camaraderie versus the impermissible sexual contact that must be kept hidden and secret. Curiously, *Craigslist*, an internet-enabled communications platform, facilitates the illicit touching, putting “within reach bodies” otherwise “made unreachable” by the “straight mind.” So, “dis|orientation” points to what “doesn’t line [link?] up” so that we might see straightness, and even queerness, a bit “slantwise,” or differently.



### QUEER MULTIMODAL (IM)POSSIBILITY



That moment of instantiation—of the flesh made real—seems ripe for rhetorical and embodied action, one that encourages an attention to the moments of uncertainty between desire and hope, bodily self and representation, lived experience and ethical stance. It also encourages a sense of material connection to text, and a certain sacrifice of the aesthetic to the material, as writers, artists, and designers offer their work as a physical interruption of alienated representation. Finally, it encourages us to put our bodies on the line, to “risk” spectacle. Linder writes, of situationist cultural studies, that “yes, we can act in the world, and let me speak of bodies, pleasures, and paradises lost to suggest that it happens all the time. The real trick, it seems, is not in reaching Paradise, but staying there” (370).

Just as new media texts and practices prompt us to reconsider what “literacy” means, so too do they enable us to reconsider what sexuality and sexual identity (always already discursive) mean. In this chapter, we have attempted to understand the multiple layerings of sex, text, and technology as sites from which to perform queer identities. Specifically, we explored the radical, disruptive invocation of body, gender, desire, fear, and sensation that is the (new-)mediated queer self. We make use of our converging alienations, our mesh of desire and want, in order to position ourselves to be—if only for a particular, rhetorical moment—and, more to the point of this particular work, to be sexual. Through the constant exchange/deferral of need, this self-positioning increases and sustains itself through its desire, serving as the engine of its own perpetual visibility. It is thus a generative, multimodal *techné* of self, with both somatic and representational consequence.

Our view of *techné*—a sort of generative lived knowledge—points less to the prescriptive how-to sense of the term and more to its ethical, civic

dimension. Our view demands that we embrace the incommensurability of bodily self and representation at the same time as we acknowledge the importance of lived experience to the formation of an ethical stance. It's important to clarify, however, that our sense of sexuality and ethics does not cover "appropriate" sexual behavior or sexual manners, but instead draws from a close examination of the discourses surrounding the sexual self. What behaviors, what subjectivities, what possibilities, and what impossibilities are created through the intersections of sex and text? It is with this view in mind that we attempt to perform in this book our own encounters—as sexed and sexual beings—with a variety of texts.

We contend that what is most attractive about queerness—theoretical, personally, and politically—is its potential illegibility, its inability to be reductively represented, its disruptive potential—in a word, its impossibility. At many different moments, queerness appears (or emerges or erupts) to trouble normalcy, legitimacy, signification. It's what doesn't fit. It's what skews, bends, or queers the realities we construct around ourselves, and that have been constructed for us to induce a heteronormative sense of stability and progress through the replication of particular kinds of people in particular kinds of families.

Queerness disrupts such stability, such progress. And as a movement of disruption, it is often difficult to track, to catch, to identify. Gays and lesbians are often positioned in relation to the normative, often as those seeking a place at the table—and many gays and lesbians are seeking that place. But in our lives as a gay man and as a lesbian, we have encountered numerous instances in which our queerness most certainly does not fit in, where it marks us as separate, as possessing and possessed by a subjectivity that is often incommensurably Other.

Those are often our most delicious moments. And the most critically insightful and revealing, for that moment of instantiation—of the flesh made real—seems ripe for rhetorical and embodied action, one that encourages an attention to the moments of uncertainty between desire and hope, bodily self and representation, lived experience and ethical stance.

#### NOTE

\* Ahmed, to be sure, offers some interesting caveats: "I want to think about how a queer politics might involve disorientation, without legislating disorientation as a politics. . . . The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do), but how such experiences can impact on the orientation of bodies and spaces, which is after all about how the things are 'directed' and how they are shaped by the lines they follow" (158). Also, "In calling for a politics that involves disorientation, which registers that disorientation shatters our involvement in a world, it is important not to make disorientation an obligation or a responsibility for those who identify as queer" (177). We note such caveats, and concur.