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RHETORIC(S) OF RUPTURE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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*****

The Ohio State University
1999

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ABSTRACT

Make the text tremble, make it speak. I pit things against each other, I juxtapose. He sits to write but the words won’t emerge. You want to avoid thinking of queer desire as a variation on the theme of universal love. In the spillages of the text is an argument perhaps against the progression of arguments. His heaving tongue cannot dislodge the burden of history, of memory, desire, of language. She tells him, you do not have to destroy your bhoots, respect the demons that haunt you. Texting bodies, I witness, I describe, I testify, I translate. Risks excite him. I am four maybe. I watch a man undress. I long to reach out and touch his pubic hair. She wants her acts of writing to rupture, to break the logic of dominance. You must teach so that fear and anger, rage and love may emerge. A fantasy. Effeminates of the world unite. The question of rights is distinct from feeling a sense of belonging. Whose blood is on my tongue? Can I rid my tongue of imperialism, my language of its bloodied history, its bloodied past? Risky writing enacts its own rhetoric. The risk shapes the rhetoric. They imagine the productive liberation that comes with writing for a blatant disregard for—or, even
a scathing memory of—those who disagree with them. I want you
to write words on my body. Resist institutional authority and
institutional modes of structuring, of logic. Who is the you
who writes? You ask your lover to strip and paddle your
already stripped body. You are having an affair with language.
Your body obsesses on language, is addicted to language. You
desire the love of language. Institutions of learning model
the state. They are built on inequities and the insatiability
of those who have the power to hang on to it. Disrupt language
that excludes, rupture language that oppresses. You process
life through written language. Interrogate language, question
its limits, its screens. A writer should dare to imagine. We
are going to make you tremble, "hetero" and "homo" swine.
For

Those Who Find

Pleasure in Resistance
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A dissertation is rarely the work of a single author, and this dissertation certainly isn’t. Many people contributed (in a variety of different ways) to its writing. I am indebted to them.

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vi
My mother Perviz, my aunt Bachu (also a mother to me), my sister Amita, and my grandmothers Mani and Sheila (neither of whom lived to see the completion of this dissertation) never once asked me when I would finish or pushed me to pursue a more lucrative profession.

Without them, I know I would not have finished.
VITA

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FIELDS OF STUDY

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epigraph</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Prologue / Eyes Wide Open</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Texting Bodies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dreads and Open Mouths, Part I</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. (Im)migrant Crossings</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dreads and Open Mouths, Part II</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Queer Pleasures</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Writing Home</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Epilogue / Twenty Questions</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meena Alexander: In our writing, we need to evoke a chaos coequal to the injustices that surround us.
Endings reproduce, and in the beginning there is already the ending.

How to begin, having already ended, without reproducing these notes on language, writing, desire? These fragments, these rhetorics of rupture, my unruly, disorderly, text?

A conclusion, resolution would be counterproductive, reductive, ineffectual, impossible, no?

Let me then leave you with some interjections that too are inconclusive, indeterminate, but that may offer some clues to the meanderings of my text.

Interpolate my words with your own echoes.

I fracture. I pit things against each other, I juxtapose.

I write across. Writing across, I attempt to productively shift the ground, bring various and varying issues into context with one another and also into confrontation with one another.

Such fracturing accommodates my discordant desires, opens up tensions and conflicts, interrupts.
The interruptions allow me to interrogate my multiple positionings.

The interruptions may also allow me and my words to resist being coopted by institutions, the academy, even the strictures of the dissertation.

Resisting the strictures of the dissertation that require the proving of an original hypothesis, I imagine instead a series of interventions/interruptions that may transgress and transform the processes of writing a dissertation.

This is a text written for the moment.

This fracturing, these interruptions, refuse(s) to separate my various experiences, my political commitments, my different identifications from my life as an academic.

My political sensibilities, my love, my work are permeated by one another.

In the spillages of this text is an argument perhaps against the progression of arguments. In resisting that notion of argument is perhaps a different model for arguing, a circular rhetoric, one that constantly goes back and forth, in circles, in spirals, always in between.

I want my spillages to blur the boundaries between theory and experience. I want to demonstrate that the creation and maintenance of boundaries is always arbitrary, always reflective of power imbalances, unevenings.
I want to write the texts on bodies, of bodies, from bodies, to bodies, that most people want, or are persuaded they want, to turn away from.

Texting bodies, I witness, I describe, I testify, I translate. I slip back and forth among all of these actions.

I want to maintain this ambiguity, this slipperiness.

Rupture encourages and demands reading and writing practices that are slippery, autobiographical, perverse, risky.

Writing as rupture allows me to locate and relocate, constantly reframing my body, my text in different geographies and spaces.

The ruptured text actively and self-reflexively seeks to engage in negotiating with its own production, its positionality, its politics of location.

My rhetoric, my text attempts to repair the ruptures that have been imposed by the law, the nation, global geopolitics, educational institutions, the family, religions.

Ruptured by rhetoric/language, my text ruptures back.

In fragments may lie the possibility of constructing an imaginary that decolonizes space and language and allows for the emergence of other(ed) subjectivities.

This form that my text is written in creates meaning, impacts what can be written, and how it can be written.
This form that resists the conventions of traditional scholarship, affects my (dis)course. (Dis)course is affected by the inescapable contours imposed by structures, and only certain visions, insights, desires are possible within hegemonic languages, forms, and structures.

I privilege transgressive forms. I assume that language that resists conventions is more likely to be revolutionary, radical.

I know that discourse that doesn't fuck with form may also be radical, revolutionary, capable of resisting.

I resist even though I question whether resistance should always be the desirable goal.

In my articulations of bodies, I sometimes essentialize even as I attempt to resist theorizing on the basis of identity. I sometimes assume essential identities.

I use the self as a theoretical maneuvering.

I contradict myself.

In and through contradiction, my fractured text makes meaning out of suspension.

I suspend, I interrupt, I seize the current.

This is a text written for the moment.
CHAPTER 2

TEXTING BODIES

Indian women in saris and other colored women are cleaning the floors. African Caribbean men and women are pushing wheel-chairs. This is still the scene I survey arriving at London's Heathrow Airport in September of 1994. Back and forth, they go.

All the immigration officers are white.

I am traveling with my grandmother. My grandmother is a Canadian citizen. She is waived through immigration. No questions are asked of her. Her passport is stamped.

But I who am traveling with an Indian passport must first answer questions satisfactorily. "Why are you visiting Britain?" "How long do you plan on staying?" "Do you have enough funds to maintain yourself in Britain?" "Do you have any marriage plans?"

How to answer that last question? For a fleeting moment I consider the pleasure of saying, no, I am gay. But I am only too aware that my pleasure could turn swiftly into
displeasure, into danger. In the end, I merely say no, I have no intentions of marrying.

My passport is stamped. I am given leave to enter for six months. Employment prohibited.

The body is the locus of crisis, of instability. Since the body has become central to the articulation of political, legal, medical, and social claims, it is imperative to think about and through the body and its location in culture. In these times, our desires are inevitably, inextricably, also, and in addition, always bound with diagnosis, prognosis. It becomes the responsibility of the socially conscious writer to write as witness, to record how our bodies, our daily lives are bound with diagnosis, prognosis, are impacted by the conditions of transnational capital and globalism, by the dying and the dead, by loneliness and by grief.

While cultural and queer theorists have begun in recent years to theorize "the" body rather obsessively, rarely have they done so through queer, colored bodies. In fact, most contemporary North American discourses about queer bodies still revolve round metropolitan, middle class, gay, white male sexualities; in most contemporary postcolonial discourses of colored bodies, discussions of sexuality are either absent or heterosexuality is assumed; and discourses of exile focus on geographical relocations and migrations but do not consider
estrangement from one's own body as a form of exile as well. This implies the critical and urgent need to extend existing commentaries on "the" body by texting other(ed) bodies.

Rodney Sappington suggests that "acts of witness are often expressed through confession and testimony, outrage and analysis. The 'uncontrollable' turns out after all to be a point of collapse, discarded and overlooked discourses on the body" (13). Making a distinction between confession and testimony, Gregg Bordowitz writes that "through testimony one bears witness to one's own experiences to one's self. Through confession one relinquishes responsibility for bearing witness to and for one's self with the hope that some force greater than one's self will bear the responsibilities for one's actions" (25). Testimony therefore is "a means of gaining sovereignty of the self." In other words, testimony is not only enabling and empowering but also a way to intervene into one's own history and historicization.

Reflecting on her own subject position, Gayatri Spivak has said that "the space I occupy might be explained by my history. It is a position into which I have been written. I am not privileging it, but I do want to use it. I can't fully construct a position that is different from the one I am in" (68). Following Spivak, I want to exploit my position within the academy in the U.S.A., simultaneously located here and elsewhere, to witness the history and historicization of my
own marked body and of bodies like mine. But because I do not have language that is adequate at my disposal, because language disposes me, texting the body, reclaiming our bodies and participating in our descriptions as subjects, is complex and laden with tensions and contestations. It is some of these tensions that I attempt to evoke and discuss. My goal, in the tradition of the Canadian lesbian collective Kiss and Tell, is to mingle "lust, intellect, and personal history" (3).

Leeds Postcard: Asians are 50 times and African Carribeans 36 times more likely to be the victims of racially motivated crimes than whites.

Talking with Akhtar, who has lived in Birmingham for thirty years, I learn that walking home from work this summer she was followed by a group of white men screaming at her. Quickening her pace to avoid trouble, she fell and broke her wrist. She attempted to file a report with the local police but was told that since the men had not attacked her physically she did not have a case for complaint.

My friend Vivek, now twenty, was born and raised with some privilege in Britain. One of his parents is from India, a country he has never been to. Five years ago, at the age of fifteen, he was beaten up by a group of seven boys. He had had the audacity to tell them to "fuck off" for calling him names.
His nose was broken. His watch and wallet were stolen. Even today, he clearly remembers being asked by the policemen who answered his call if he had done "anything to provoke the assault."

The ways in which their subject positions were constituted as suspect and their voices (un)heard by the State made both Akhtar and Vivek feel disempowered and disenfranchised. They both confess to having felt shame and humiliation at being attacked; only after they began to witness the traumas inflicted on their bodies/memories by texting their bodies in public forums did they feel empowered again. There is a need for us—for Akhtar, for Vivek—to text our bodies. Texting our bodies, we may create fissures in the master narrative, may reorder histories, geographies, space.

Marion Molteno works as an educator with women from South Asia at the Croydon English Language Scheme in Britain. Her collection, *A Language in Common*, based on her experiences at the center at Croydon, reenforces the urgency of revisioning and expanding notions of literacy. The aim of literacy education should not merely involve teaching people to read and write so that they can be co-opted into the system in the interests of the hegemony but rather to raise social consciousness about the workings of power in a society that is hostile to them. At Croydon, this goal is achieved not only by providing South Asian women access to learning the language of
currency in Britain but also by providing a space for them to
discuss and to articulate counternarratives to hegemonic
history. Locating and narrativizing silences asserts knowledge
outside the realm of dominant discourses and challenges
hegemonic history. Storytelling and witnessing, thus, respond
to Gloria Anzaldúa's call for "teorías that enable us to
interpret what happens in the world" (xxv).

Feminists and/or writers of color, of course, have long
recognized the primacy of stories for radical change and in
moving from silence to speech. In her Nobel Lecture Toni
Morrison argued that narrative is "one of the principal ways
in which we absorb knowledge" (81). In a recent collection
Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words, Lynn Worsham
argues that "narrative is radical, especially when
commonplace, for it is in the interstices of the everyday that
identity and experience are produced" (345). Texting bodies,
telling stories are attempts to make spaces, to create new
rooms, new cities, new imaginaries to wonder in, struggles to
find ways to make abstraction less abstract, to move from the
realm of the abstract to the reality of political action and
activism. Dissident stories, narratives have the potential to
affect lives, to create new positions, new subjectivities for
people to inhabit, to move us toward new definitions. They
allow for possibilities that other more academically/state
sanctioned forms do not allow. Dissident stories, stories that
remember against the grain of public history, insert narratives, experiences of bodies not otherwise admitted, into dominant knowledge paradigms. The proliferation of dissident stories/narratives, inscriptions of other(ed) bodies may disturb, disrupt, and suspend the master narrative, may bring it to crisis.

But the stories, too, can be co-opted. Dominant knowledge paradigms can themselves be stories. You write to narrate, to tell a story. How do your stories get read? Who will control the stories? To what uses will our stories be put? How do we write so that our subjectivity, our stories do not get co-opted, do not get inscribed within the space assigned, allowed by the hegemony as a way to contain and manage difference? How do we resist becoming subjects/agents for, resist collusion with, interests alien to ourselves? Stories may thus be of our making, our unmaking.

Trinh Minh-ha: My story, no doubt, is me, but it is also, no doubt, other than me. (source forgotten)

Writing, telling my story, I create, I make, unmake, remake history, memory, imagination. Writing my story, I insert an identity, I call upon, reconstruct memory and desire. I create a space to insert my narrative, to speak, to be heard. But how will you hear me and what will you hear?
Like all narratives, my story is partial too, is elliptical, fragmented. My narrative is thus part of my making and my unmaking for it reveals gaps, discourages closure, exposes my terministic screens. I offer no certainties. I tell my story to engage with my histories, my displacements, the lacunae in between.

Memory travels, is affected by place, by (dis)location. This is a narrative written for the moment.

Displacement scars memory, creates the desire to rememory, but one can be displaced, dislocated even within and bound by location. Displacement is not only about distance and proximity.

The making and unmaking of identity is shaped, is bound by memory and history, (dis)placement and desire. As I look, I (re)memory. (Re)memory casts my subjectivity, shapes my agency.

Language empowers, provides access, but can also fracture. In the entanglements of language acquisition, difference gets domesticated, trained.

I was born of parents who did not speak each others' native languages. This is the accident of my birth. I was birthed into English. I learnt it before I learnt any other language. But it was/is also the language of Empire. It carries with it the ideology of Western humanism.
You speak / You do not speak. You speak in the Master's tongue / You may as well not speak.

English, many critics argue, is the master's discourse and by writing/speaking in the master's discourse, one writes for the master, one is always already colonized, always native informant. For many postcolonial intellectuals, the process of decolonization is linked to language, and, as Ngugi has argued there is a need to "escape from the implicit body of assumptions to which English was attached, its aesthetic and social values, the formal and historically limited constraints of genre, and the oppressive political and cultural assertion of metropolitan dominance, of center over margin" (10-11). However, Kamala Das, like Chinua Achebe and Nurrudin Farah, counterargues that there is the possibility not only of adapting English to suit differing and different contexts but also of owning it—"Don't write in English, they said, / English is not your mother-tongue. Why not leave / Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins, / Every one of you? Why not let me speak in / Any language I like? The language I speak / Become mine, mine alone, its distortions, its queernesses / All mine, mine alone" (76).

Writing (or not writing) in English is not always a matter of choice. Often the call to write in the existing precolonial languages is linked to increasing nationalisms. This fact presents another set of dangers, but the call to
write in languages other than English is an important one for the postcolonial intellectual, especially in these times of global communication, and cannot be simply dismissed. In India, the rise of English as the language of currency, as the lingua franca, has taken place at the expense of other languages. Unlike other languages, English as the language of internationalism carries with it the privilege of dominance.

In the Bombay of today, most television viewers get their news from CNN and/or BBC. Television viewers in Bombay can even follow the scores of American college football, a sport that is/was largely unknown and is not played anywhere in India.

Television is training people for emigration. We are here because you are there.

Myung Mi Kim asks, "One gives over to a language and then / what is given, given over?" (19).

I am trying to think this through, this issue of language, this accident of my history. Is the mind that thinks in English always colonized? Does thinking in Hindi in these times mean to imbibe the rhetoric of nationalism, of Hindu fundamentalism?

Language shapes, gives perspective to reality. It is language which determines the limits, which constructs reality. To be caught, to be trapped in a language that is
alien, that is not your own means your thinking is not your own, can never be your own.

Any language that is the language of power can kill, can colonize. In India, increasing attempts by the powerful northern lobby to displace English as one of the national languages has led to Hindi being propagated by the government. Salman Rushdie writes of meeting the Gujarati novelist Suresh Joshi, who tells him "that he could write in Hindi but felt obliged to write in Gujarati because it was a language under threat. Not from English, or the West: from Hindi" (69).

But doesn't the language I speak "become mine, mine alone"? Does language produce me or do I produce language?

The narrative voice stumbles, questions its limits, reveals its seams. Interpellated within the dominant discourse, I write to reveal the gaps, undo the seamless language of Empire, to question the arbitrary distinctions between the oral and literate. Unable to separate the oral and the literary form from one another, to separate truth from lie, fiction from reality, I seek to text the body through imagination. Texting the body, I may provisionally come into being, may become.

Though autobiography offers privileged access to experience, it is mediated, translated; it cannot escape the critique of that access. Story/narrative is not only autobiography, it is also imagination.
Trinh Minh-ha writes, "A form of mediation, the story and the teller are always adaptive. A narration is never a passive reflection of reality" (328).

The issue of English in India is a complex one not only in terms of economics and access but also in terms of privileges and rights conferred by language. Because language determines how we think and act, it is no coincidence that Western culture has always insisted on its importance.

I resist the language into which I have been written to write. But it is, also, the language in which I came to voice, come into writing. At the same time as language displaces, creates fractures, it invents.

If language can colonize then it can also decolonize.

Writing these words, these notes, I am searching for ways to decolonize my mind. The wound made by language, left by it, is deep. I cleanse it, it heals, it opens again. With this wound that heals but does not heal I travel on different journeys. This then is a search but it is not an ending.

And you, what will you do with my words, what can you make of these fragments? What histories, what incursions, what memories, what upheavals, what desires, what stories do you bring to my text? How will your desires (re)frame my questions, interrupt my words, suspend this narrative?
Sexuality is constructed through linguistic and cultural formations. Sexual difference is central to identity and the regulation of sexuality by the State in most parts of the world is oppressive. In this country, many states still have anti-sodomy laws. In India, all "homosexual relationships" are punishable by law. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code worded by Thomas Macaulay in 1833 states, "Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life or imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years and shall be liable to fine." Shrikant Bhat points out that the offence of homosexuality is cognisable and that the police can arrest anyone without a warrant from the Magistrate (5).

In her essay, "Funny Boys and Girls: Notes on a Queer South Asian Planet," Gayatri Gopinath raises an interesting question: "How do we allow for the fact that same-sex eroticism exists very differently in different diasporic contexts, while simultaneously recognizing the common forms of violence that we face everyday because of our sexuality?" (122). Any analysis of same-sex desire(s) must therefore consider how those desires are impacted by the conditions of our daily lives—AIDS, violence, legal discrimination—and by consumerism, globalism, and transnationalism.
Writing about South Asian men who have sex with other men, Shivananda Khan points out that most of them do not have the time or the space to express their sexuality except through furtive sex. The report of the first conference in Bombay in December of 1994 for gay men and men who have sex with other men states, "Because of shame and stigmatisation, many men who practice homosexual behaviours will quietly submit to police harassment which often includes physical violence, bribery, and sexual abuse. The police who practice these behaviours use Section 377 and various other city ordinances to harass men who have sex with men" (Emergent). Khan's research reveals that a majority of South Asian men practicing homosexuality are married to women. Few identify with the word "gay" or even "homosexual." Thus, though many practice homosexual behaviors, few identify as homosexual. Those with HIV would rarely admit that their modes of HIV transmission are through same-sex sexual encounters. The World Health Organization has therefore claimed that modes of HIV transmission in India are exclusively heterosexual, disregarding the behaviors of South Asian men who have sex with other men because these behaviors do not fit in with the existing western frameworks of sexual behavior.

However, due to rapid globalization, there is increasingly an emerging transnational gay identity being formed in metropolitan centers like Bombay, as a result of
which many younger men and some women are beginning to identify and to testify as being gay or lesbian. Gopinath points out that such identifications and testimonies get read as yet another form of cultural imperialism and notes that "this time around the cultural imperialists [are seen as] gay people in the west exporting and imposing their particular brand of queer identity upon unsuspecting non-western subjects" (122). Such reasoning recognizes the import of imperialistic capitalism and of the ways in which gay Indians are being co-opted by the forces of transnational capital and consumption. Similar arguments play themselves out in recurrent debates in India and in the diaspora about what to name ourselves and the language we should use to write in. While it is important, as Gopinath argues, to give native subjects agency and not see them always as unsuspecting and naive and pure, it is equally important to acknowledge the history and realities of transnationalism and to consider a point made by Susan Heald that "dominant discourses make available [new] forms of identity which are tightly circumscribed and which exclude many people" (129). She points out that dominant discourses create new subject positions for us to occupy that "actually constitute who we are and how we know to be" (130).

Gopinath's purpose is to "explore the possibilities--as well as the limits--of conceptualizing a diasporic or
transnational South Asian queer sexuality" (120). Not wanting to draw any easy conclusions, and aware that little more is possible than a "rigorous interrogation of the frameworks within which we attempt to speak of queerness transnationally," she nonetheless ends up privileging a certain queer South Asian subject produced by the forces and histories of transnationalism and globalism. The queer South Asian transnational that Gopinath privileges is middle class and has access to pleasure. But in her formulation, pleasure is defined only in terms of aesthetics and consumption derived from recent Western trends and styles. Because her assumption is that natives should not be denied pleasure, Gopinath seems to want to extend and export those pleasures to the native spaces. Based on this model where consumerist pleasure is identified with commodified identity, Gopinath seems to argue in favor of increased consumerism that leads to the formation of a more assertive identity. While I agree with her that "consumption can be a productive, imaginative act, where what is consumed is not simply and passively digested but more often than not reworked and forced to resignify" (124), my difference with Gopinath is that she ultimately sees no other way to understand South Asian queer sexualities but by formulating gay identity and resistance in this age of globalization in aesthetic and consumerist terms rather than also as antinormative and anticapitalist.
When bodies get translated, the dominant discourses translating the bodies generate either purely other(ed) bodies or generally recognizable bodies but rarely complex and contradictory bodies. The necessity of changing frameworks with/through which to view behaviors and practices depending on different and differing contexts is thus vital. Shivananda Khan rightly recognizes that it is problematic to assume that the names, words, and concepts used in one language reflect a commonality in all languages, that what we describe and experience through our own language has direct correlations in other languages, other cultures. Despite colonialism and transnational transfers from the West to the East, Shivananda Khan points out that "within the context of South Asian cultures, the terminological use of heterosexual and homosexual frameworks do not [always] exist in the sense they are understood in the West. The diametric oppositional frameworks of this terminology create artificial understanding that has no specific relevance to the actuality of people's lives" (76). Among other things, such frameworks and discourses of desire do not take into account sexual invisibility, gender seclusion, and religious segregation in South Asia, the fluidity of South Asian male sexual experiences, South Asian homosociality, and South Asian cultures of shame, and are therefore not always useful or applicable to sexual behaviours and practices in South Asia.
As a strategy within the hegemonic structures that we work from, texting bodies may be one way to create productive disturbances, countersites, ruptures, and eventually a space for a different imaginary to emerge. Texting the body is my metaphor for constructing identity/ies, of marking (in)visibility, of offering testimony, of writing as witness, of rupturing language to accommodate disparate desires, to open up tensions and conflicts, to interrupt. Nuzhat Abbas suggests that "we can write to learn, but also learn to create dissent, to break down the structures we inhabit, the languages we write in, the powers we are given. Creating ruptures, we may create openings—spaces for others to enter and speak or act" (59).

To start with the body, to use the body as a starting point from which to redefine language in order to allow for new mappings of the landscape of the body. To start with the body, the transgressive body, the body that cannot be articulated, that refuses to be contained within the binaries of dominant language, is to move language beyond the narrow confines of the discursive space in which it operates to admit other and other(ed) bodies. Redefining language by using the body redefines possibilities of the body within the language.

Since the body's experiences are layered, contradictory, registered in multiple locations even if geographically bound
by limited space, to write from the body is to create
dissonant, temporal histories because as the body shifts so do
the texts it produces and creates. Texting the body that is
not supposed to be written subverts the production of the
self, resists the role that has been written for the body.
Texting the body, the transgressive body, writing from the
dissident body, the outrageous body, the excessive body, the
other(ed) body may allow for the emergence of discrepant and
divergent histories and identities and for the emergence of
bodies/texts that would be compromised in grand narratives.
Thus, not only is the potential of texting the body evident
for decolonizations and for de(hetero)normativizing and for
queer postcolonial projects, but texting the body also poses
new challenges for writing studies and for teaching.

Part of the civilizing mission of the academy and of many
compositionists today, especially in response to the corporate
pressures of our times, is to think of writing only in terms
of problem solving and not in terms of critical thinking, and
as a result to restrict imagination and creativity, stifle
language, police desire, and control possibility. In her
essay, "Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only," Linda
Brodkey writes about the importance of taking "a stand against
others in the field, in the academy, and in the media who
refuse to consider even the possibility that prescriptions
that seem to regulate only the 'correct' use of language
threaten to extinguish altogether the desire to write—in middle class and working class students alike" (149). She suggests that "unless regulating that desire is the point....we begin again and try to teach writing--for a change" (149).

Texting the body is one way to take a stand against the corporatization of the classroom and one way to bring back desire and pleasure and possibility for students and for teachers into the classroom and into writing. I imagine writing classes in which students would be invited to read and write by texting bodies, their own and other bodies. Speaking/writing from there, would offer a way to claim the messy spaces of the interstices of hybridity and difference, and, even more significantly, I imagine it might be a way to reread and to rewrite the hegemonic vision of sexuality, of gender, of human history. To write from there, the elsewhere, may be to risk circularity, to risk incoherence. But contingent on such risks may be new rhetorical and discursive paradigms, strategies, boundaries--rhetorics more reflective of and ethically responsive to the social and political dynamics of the world.
Pamela Annas: Some of [our writing blocks and what underlies them] are: perfectionism, fear of criticism or judgment, depression, numbness or blankness, fear of taking risks, fear of success, coping with an alien subject matter, fear of one's own power or anger, worry that one has nothing to say, writing for an audience indifferent or hostile to what one wants, fear of knowing oneself, getting stuck between objectivity and subjectivity, fear of being trivialized or conforming to what's expected, private versus public writing, talking versus writing, having the right to one's opinions, discomforts with the mechanics of writing and organizing a paper, fear of being boring, dumb, insignificant, or ridiculous. (366)

Keith Gilyard: Writing is not an activity that features social responsibility as an option. Writing is social responsibility. When you write, you are being responsible to some social entity even if that entity is yourself. You can be irresponsible as a writer but you cannot be non-responsible. (21)
CHAPTER 3

DREADS AND OPEN MOUTHS, PART I

rupture—(v)
1 A. break
   B. burst
   C. crack
   D. split

rupture—(n)
2 E. breakage
   F. fracture
   G. rip

rupture—(ant)
3 H. mend

Trinh T. Minh-ha: To use the language well, says the voice of literacy, cherish its classic form. Do not choose the offbeat at the cost of clarity. Obscurity is an imposition on the reader. True, but beware when you cross the railroad
tracks for one train may hide another train. Clarity is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of course writing, two old mates of power: together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose and order. Let us forget the writers who advocate the instrumentality of language are often those who cannot or choose not to see the suchness of such things—a language as language—and therefore, continue to preach conformity to the norms of well-behaved writing: principles of composition, style, genre, correction, and improvement. To write "clearly," one must, incessantly prune, eliminate, forbid, purge, purify; in other words, practice what may be called an "ablution of language" (Roland Barthes). (16-17)
Write, his lover says. Why don't you sit down and just start writing?

He sits to write but the words won't emerge. He wants to write. Every time, he begins to write, he chokes. He wants to write but he feels paralyzed by words lodged in his throat.

His heaving tongue cannot dislodge the burden of history, of memory, desire, of language.

She writes, schedule yourself for a few hours every day without distraction.

He is easily and quickly distracted. Memories and daily happenings intrude constantly, incessantly on his concentration.

She writes, I think you need to take a deep breath and try and shed the old stuff—renew yourself and start as if from a different tack.

He starts again. He tries to make sense of his need to write and of his resistance to writing.

What silences you, she asks. What are you afraid of?

He is afraid that he will lose himself in language, afraid that he doesn't have adequate language at his disposal, afraid that the language he has disposes him. He is afraid that in writing he will become absorbed in the manipulations of language, afraid that language will begin to speak him.

He is anxious about resisting the pressures to speak/think/write correctly, anxious that his fears of how he
will be read will police his desires to write in forms that do not conform to hegemony-making ways. But he is also anxious about how his resistances and his writing will be read. He wonders if all language is simultaneously a rupturing and a silencing.

Meena Alexander: There is a violence in the very language, American English, that we have to face, even as we work to make it ours, decolonize it so that it will express the truth of our bodies beaten and banned. After all, for such as we are the territories are not free. The world is not open. That endless space, the emptiness of the American sublime is worse than a lie. It does ceaseless damage to the imagination. (199)
He begins to write in fits and starts. He begins to write tentatively, hesitantly.

The room he writes in is small and cluttered with his belongings. A bed, a desk and chair, a dresser, two bookcases, another chair, a mirror. Piles of books and papers cover the tops of things. There is a window that looks out onto the alley but the building across blocks the light. It is always dark in this room.

He likes the darkness. He finds it comforting and compelling but he imagines writing in an uncluttered room.

He begins to write against the landscape of dis-ease. A story in the *Los Angeles Times*. One in four children born in Los Angeles county will not have health insurance. This is the state of the richest nation in the world, the land of wealth and opportunity.

He begins to think of the clutter as symptomatic of these times.

The KKK come to march in the city in which he lives—they are sanctioned the right to proclaim their hatred from the steps of the State Capitol. But the homeless are routinely evicted from public spaces. Queers are beaten up for being in the wrong place at the right time.

Our daily lives are bound with diagnosis, prognosis.

Memories and daily occurrences trespass. He collects and recollects memories, desires, trespasses.
How can he write but in fits and starts? How can a writer write without the encroachment of memories, desires, trespasses?

Stuart Hall: In a permanently transitional age we must expect unevenness, contradictory outcomes, disjunctures, delays, contingencies, uncompleted projects, overlapping emergent ones. (source forgotten)
His dreams turn violent. He dreams his body is being hurled toward a bright blinding light. He has no control over his movements. He loses consciousness. When he comes to, his body is dismembered. All the body parts are labelled "paragraph." A voice instructs, "you have five minutes to put the paragraphs together in logical order. Make sure to have an introduction and conclusion." He scrambles to assemble the body parts but he is paralyzed. He is looking at his own dismembered body and he cannot move the parts. A clock appears. Time is slipping away. He keeps telling himself there is only one way to put a body together but the parts won't move. He cannot make the parts move. He wakes up to find his arms coagulated, stiff. He lies without moving for hours.

Cherrie Moraga: Fundamentally, I started writing to save my life. Yes, my own life first. I see the same impulse in my students--the dark, the queer, the mixed-blood, the violated--turning to the written page with a relentless passion, a drive to avenge their own silence, invisibility, erasure as living, innately expressive human beings. (58)
He is afraid that if he doesn't write in the master tongue, he will not be taken seriously, will not be heard. But he is more afraid of losing himself in the master tongue even if it only a socially constructed self (and what other kind of self is there?).

What silences you? What are you afraid of? It is language that he fears, the language of the fathers. He fears that in writing he will swallow the language of the fathers.

Why should he claim this language, write in the voice of the fathers?

This language of the fathers bestows credibility, authority, integrity, honor, but what does it make him lose? This language of the fathers offers privileges but what sacrifices must he make to speak in it? This language of the fathers grants respectability, morality, esteem, but what violences must he be complicit with to write it?

Why should he uphold the tradition of the fathers? Why should he pledge allegiance to the fatherland, to the language of men when that language dishonors him, shames him, lies to him?

A writer should disrupt language that excludes, rupture language that oppresses. A writer should attempt to interrogate language, question its limits, its screens. A writer should dare to imagine.
He wants his writing to echo, to repeat, to revisit, to reverberate. He wants to destabilize the speaking/writing subject and expose the fiction of rationalization and rationality.

He recalls often Rachel Blau DuPlessis's words, "the struggle on the page is not decorative."

Nicole Brossard: I exist in written language because it is there that I decide the thoughts that settle the questions and answers that I give to reality. It is there that I signal assent in approving ecstasies and their configurations in the universe. I do not want to repeat what I already know of language. (source forgotten)
His students are disapproving. They cannot identify with any of the readings. They tell him this. He tells them identification is not the sole purpose for reading.

One student writes, I don't see why I am forced to read Michelle Cliff. I didn't go to Jamaica to learn about the natives. I went on a vacation that I paid for with my own hard-earned money. I have a right not to think about some things if I don't want to. I think Michelle Cliff is biased and angry.

He thinks if the student has a right to not think about some things then surely he has a right to not think about the student. He tells the student this. The student is offended. The student tells him that he is misusing his power as teacher. The student tells him he is going to complain. The student tells him he is going to drop his class. He tells the student he is relieved to hear this.

His student evaluations are terrible.

Meanwhile, his colleague who tells his students exactly what they want to hear gets a perfect score on his evaluations.

Lauren Berlant: Only one plot counts as "life" (first comes love, then...) Those who don't or can't find their way in that story--the queers, the single, the something else--can become so easily unimaginable, even often to themselves. Yet
it is hard not to see lying about everywhere the detritus and
the amputations that come from attempts to fit into the fold.

(286)
He is struggling to write.

His lover ask, why are you suspicious of language? Why do you distrust it so much?

Language does not come easily to him. He struggles with words. He loves words but his relationship to words is uneasy, troubled, tentative. He wants to both do and undo language at once.

Dreams of a common language, a universal language, confound him. What is at stake in the dream for a common language, a familiar tongue? What issues of power are imbedded in this dream for a common language? What yearnings? What desires? What ambitions?

Writing leads him into a web of discourses. He struggles with writing and with the language that he has. He feels both estranged from and united with the language he has.

The language that he has is the language of the law, of the colonizers, of the fatherland. Where is he in this language, the language of law, the language of the colonizers, the language of the fatherland? Where are queers in the language? The sexually transgressive? Language is the enemy and yet he needs this language to speak. This is the old dilemma.

He struggles with language, trying to open language to accommodate disparate desires, tensions, but sometimes he feels strangled by language.
Lynn Tillman: I must wrest this language and its forms away from or out of "the majority" (of which I am a part, in some ways at some times, to others), to un-man it, to un-American it, even to un-white it, to inconvenience it, even to shame it, in an odd sort of way, to question privilege, my own, too, of course. (99)
He is looking for writing that doesn't merely (re)produce and reduce. He is looking for writing that doesn't merely render difference in familiar terms so that the difference is merely in terms of subject matter but not in terms of form. He is looking for writing that breathes, writing that is alive, writing that shifts as it sifts through tired forms to illuminate. He is looking for writing that surprises. But how often can writing surprise if it is expected to follow tired and tested formulas? Do this, don't do that. Do not experiment. Satisfy all your readers. Explain everything. Be clear. Don't use unexpected metaphors. Prepare your readers for your ideas. Start always with a thesis.

Overwhelmed by notions of right and wrong, of earning a passing grade, students learn not to experiment. They may not have learnt all or any of the rules but they have been trained to believe that if they want to do well they must follow the rules. And the rules that they think they must follow are the usual ones. Start with a thesis. Be objective. Anticipate the objections that opponents of your position will make and try and respond to their objections. Do not use personal experiences. Oh, okay, use personal experiences but try and make your experiences universal. Write for the general reader. Be universal. Appeal to everybody. Of course, students don't always follow these rules but most of them learn to recognize that these are the rules and that they will be punished if
they don't follow the rules. But good writing rarely emerges from following all the rules. Good writing emerges when writers take risks and are encouraged to take risks. Good writing seldom emerges without risks.

He wants to teach in ways that will let his students take risks. He wants to encourage them to take risks. He knows this is risky for them and for him. Risks excite him and he wants to dispel the myth used to making people conform that only those with privilege can afford to take risks.

Margaret Randall: We must work on every front to undo the damage that's been done. Analysis, scholarship, standing up for what we believe; changing society; writing poetry; painting pictures; parenting; healing humans, animals, earth; farming; producing heavy machinery; learning and teaching; scrubbing floors; safely recycling or disposing of waste; making music; restoring to language the meaning that will help us all live: all are necessary tasks. (ix-x)
It is the middle of a hot humid night and he cannot sleep. He is replaying an argument with a friend. The friend had said, I want queer theory to gain respectability. He had said that he fears respectability even though he sometimes desires it. He had said that he fears in our quest for respectability, our desires for transgression, for trespass, get domesticated. He had said that what he desires most is a theory that is wildly transgressive, that exceeds respectability and deference, that refuses to be tamed. The friend had said, desire consumes you. It is sometimes important to think with your head.

Desire consumes him. It marks him. He is often accused of not wanting to give up desire. Desire brings him pleasure. Pleasure is not spurious. He understands why it is seen as dangerous to the social and moral order but he does not want to, cannot, imagine a theory without desire and pleasure. He does not want to imagine a theory that does not interrogate the social and moral order. He wants to think with both his head and his heart, at once.

Victor Vitanza: I would unleash desire on the grand narrative; I would especially unleash it on the structures that enable the narrative, namely discipline and punishment and metadisciplines and fascism. (3)
We refuse to be contained.
We refuse to be domesticated.
We refuse to be broken.
We will not do queer-writing on your terms.
This is our writing and we will do with it as we please.
We are not interested in pleasing you.
You are used to everything being for your pleasure.
But we are going to deny you that pleasure.
We are interested in our pleasure.
And what pleases us seems to displease you.
Fuck your pleasure.
We will please ourselves.
We will persist.
We have survived this long without your permission.
Or your protection.
We need neither.
We refuse to ask for your permission.
We don't need your endorsement or sanction.
We refuse to be polite.
We refuse to be considerate.
We reject dialogue and conversation.
We reject pluralism.
We are going to make you tremble, “hetero” and “homo” swine.
He is in his grandmother's room, a small room in which she carefully arranged her possessions. He is here to dismantle her arrangements.

Her will is simple. The pieces of furniture given her by friends should be returned to them. Anything else my grandson wants should go to him.

He sits in the room immobilized. He wants the room to be imprinted on his memory. This is the room in which she spent the last five years of her life, the first room that she ever had that she could call her own.

He remembers asking her, after all those years of living with others, don't you get lonely staying by yourself? She tells him she loves the comfort of seclusion. She tells him it is a relief, a joy. She likes the reliability of her own companionship.

A year before she died, she visited him. They are drinking tea. He tells her she should write about her life, about moving from Pakistan to India to Canada. She says, my life is not important. She asks about his writing. He tells her he is struggling to write. She tells him, you do not have to destroy your bhoots, respect the demons that haunt him.

Among her things are several notebooks. In them, detailed inventories of things to do and buy.
Gloria Anzaldúa: Who gave us permission to perform the act of writing? Why does writing seem so unnatural for me?...The voice recurs in me: Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think I could write? How dared I even consider becoming a writer as I stooped over the tomato fields bending, bending under the hot sun...How hard it is for us to think we can choose to become writers, much less feel and believe we can. ("Haciendo")
In class, the teacher asks all the students to list the one thing they are most afraid of. The list includes death, the loss of parents, fear of drowning, fear of being killed in car crashes, in airplane accidents. He offers language. Some students laugh. The teacher asks, language? Yes, he says, he is afraid of language. The teacher says, well, if you learn the language well enough, there will be no need to fear it. He doesn't tell her that is what he fears the most, that he will learn the language of the state, the language of the oppressor, the language of the patriarch, the powerful, too well. He doesn't tell her that he fears he will forget how to hear and read and write the hesitations in his mother's speech, the vacillations in his grandmother's speech, the furtive doubts in his lover's speech. This, too, is language.

Susan Heald: If students and professors completely identify themselves with the subject positions available within dominant educational discourses, they have all the reason to hang onto them. (139)
A missive from the director of composition. The director wants to see him. The director asks is it our responsibility as teachers of composition to make our writers take risks? Or is our responsibility as teachers of composition to prepare our students for the classes in which they will in fact be punished for taking risks? Isn't it our responsibility to prepare them for classes where they are expected to conform to the rules and churn out dull but flawless essays in Standard American English?

What is our responsibility? What is our responsibility? The question resounds.

Is he being irresponsible in refusing the responsibility of preparing students to write across the curriculum? What does it mean for teachers of composition to take on the task of preparing students to write across disciplines? Can we in fact prepare students for all disciplines? And what if the ways in which we are expected to prepare them for different disciplines goes against our convictions of liberal education, of critical thinking? Should we, as teachers of composition, be expected to teach our students to unabashedly delight in capitalism and global corporatism because the mandate of business schools is to exult in capitalism and corporate greed? Should we, as teachers of composition, be expected to teach our students writing without pointing out sexist,
racist, homophobic, classist, practices that many disciplines (including our own) are built on?

Isn't it our responsibility as teachers of writing who are also cultural theorists and critics to make our students critical of the writing that expects them to become agents for the hegemony, to become nothing but good, compliant, middle-class consumers? Is that not our responsibility?

Brooke Jacobson: What is the responsibility of the artist if not to make meaning out of the material they find?

Jill Godmillow: I think that it's to reformulate language--not just verbal language but visual language as well. To poke holes in the existing language, to make spaces, so that there is a possibility for imagination and action to work through it. (181)
He is afraid of the language that he has but he is also aware that it is only in and through language that he comes into being.

He is moving in language.

What are you most afraid of, an old lover asks him? He tells the lover that he is afraid of language. The lover says language can kill.

"Official language kills, resist standardization"—words on a poster in a used bookstore in London.

He is in Britain visiting his relatives.

His aunt teaches his cousin to speak English only. She is scared he may corrupt her speech. His sister and he are only allowed to visit in the presence of their aunt. In England now, no need to speak Hindi.

Enunciate your vowels carefully or what will people think?

His cousin changes her name, from Sunita to Sandi, but her brown skin disqualifies.

She becomes silent.

"Official language kills, resist standardization."

June Jordan: White power uses white English as a calculated, political display of power to control and eliminate the powerless. (unable to locate page number)
He spends several hours in the university bookstore looking at readers and handbooks that are currently available on the market for teaching writing in college composition courses. He is not surprised to find that even a progressive reader like *Negotiating Difference* falls in the trap of liberal pluralism.

He notes that in their "Introduction for Students," Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg write, "writers must, for example, consider what order of ideas will be clearest for readers, even if it's not the order that immediately presents itself. Writers ought also to think about what kinds of cultural allusions will be most persuasive, even if they are not the ones most familiar to readers. What kind of person does the person wish to be: Cool and analytical? Warm and caring? Which self-presentation will be most credible with readers? Effective writers attempt to anticipate readers' needs and expectations in these ways in order to attempt to inform readers, to influence them, to change their minds."

Few, if any, articles in our academic journals follow these guidelines, and yet notions of good writing in most handbooks and readers are predicated on considering what your opposition will think and on pleasing your opposition.

He wonders, if we have to always think of our opposition, would anyone be able to write?
Ian Barnard: While those of us who teach writing routinely remind our students of the cliche that they must have an audience in mind when they write their papers, in practice we often make the impossible liberal pluralist demand that their work be amenable to all and that every reader should be potentially persuaded by it. (90)
MANIFESTO # 2

You must teach as if your life depended on it.
You must teach as if some of your students' lives may depend on it.
You must teach to empower, yourself and some of your students.
You must teach so that your students take risks, feel like they may experiment.
You must teach yourself to take risks, to experiment.
You must teach yourself to admit confusion.
You must teach yourself to admit failure.
You must teach to make connections.
You must teach that if this discussion is taking place in a clean, well-lit place it is dependent upon others getting their education in poor, dimly-lit with naked bulb places.
You must teach that those of us who live in comfort are able to live the way we do in this North American world because somewhere, elsewhere, within and outside the U.S.A. people must live in struggle to survive.
You must teach so that lives will not be destroyed, female lives, poor lives, disabled lives, old lives, queer lives, brown lives, black lives, yellow lives, even white lives.
You must teach that not everyone is heterosexual.
You must teach that sexual choices and practices are varied and diverse.

You must teach assuming that not everyone you are teaching is heterosexual.

You must teach that more people in the world are colored than white.

You must teach that more people in the world are female than male.

You must teach that everything is possible.

You must teach that everything is not possible.

You must teach that not everyone has the same access to privilege.

You must teach to transform.

You must teach to ask questions.

You yourself must ask questions.

You must teach so that the lies will no longer be told, be passed on.

You must teach the responsibility of listening to those who are disenfranchised and disempowered.

You must take the responsibility to listen to those who are disenfranchised and disempowered.

You must teach that we, in this United States of America world, are not the center of the world.

You must teach that the U.S.A. is one nation among many.
You must teach that English is not the world's most widely spoken native language.

You must teach that instead of waiting for, relying on translations into English, we must learn to speak and to write other languages.

You must teach that language is not neutral, not unbiased.

You must teach students to recognize the uneven power relations within and among languages.

You must teach students and yourself to question language.

You must teach yourself and students to question the uses of writing.

You must teach that writing may have the power to widen our imaginations.

You must teach that therefore our lives may be changed.

You must teach that writing should lead to action.

You must teach that writing could be action.

You must teach that writing should be a place of, a site for resistance to the hegemony.

You must teach that writing may save lives.

But writing can also kill. That, too, you must teach.

You must teach that writing can be collaborative, need not be a solitary, suicidal act.
You must teach that writing can help build coalitions, alliances, national and transnational.

You must teach so that fear and anger, rage and love may emerge.

You must take seriously the expression of anger and fear, love and rage.

You must teach in a way that doesn't make you the only authority in the classroom.

You must teach so that your students feel that they, too, can be authorities.

You must not give up, undermine your power, but you must learn to give power to others as well.

You must learn to value what your students can teach you and each other.

You must believe that writing can transform ourselves and others.
Michelle Cliff: I did not choose the note form consciously; a combination of things drew me to it. An urgency for one thing. I also felt incompetent to construct an essay in which I would describe the intimacies, fears, and lies I wrote of in "Speechlessness." I felt my thoughts, things that I had held within for a lifetime, traversed so wide a terrain, had so many stops and starts, apparent non sequiturs, that an essay—with its cold-blooded dependence on logical construction, which I had mastered practically against my will—could not work. My subject could not respond to that form, which would have contradicted the idea of speechlessness. This tender approach to myself within the confines and interruptions of a forty-hour-a-week job and against a history of forced fluency was the beginning of a journey into speech. (58)
I am writing these words in San Diego, on the border between Mexico and the United States of America, the border that Gloria Anzaldúa calls the "1,950-mile-long open wound."

What are the stories behind the body? What is the text that the body would write? The ruptures do not always leave visible marks. The wounds heal, then rupture again. The wounds do not heal completely.

I am four maybe. I watch a man undress. He is beautiful. I long to reach out and touch his pubic hair.

I don't. I know even then that that desire is transgressive, is dangerous.

The students in my ESL classes are hesitant, nervous, reluctant to speak. They fear that I will read their indecision with the English language, their pauses, as signs of their ignorance. I have to work very hard to convince them that I insist on asking them to speak not to mock their English speaking abilities but because I believe they have valuable insights to share.

In a public lynching of students, the trustees of the City University of New York approve a measure relegating "remedial" courses to the community colleges. Students who are unable to pass an entrance exam are deemed not to be adequately prepared for the university and must be refused access. Students who have limited reading and writing skills as determined by a single test are not seen as having any
potential or promise and must be denied entrance to the university.

I do not know how to, cannot, will not erase myself when I walk into the classroom. As someone who is from the Third World and queer, I am particularly aware of the dangers of keeping silent. As a teacher I have to constantly ask myself not only who my primary responsibility is to but also what my primary allegiance is to. My instinct dictates that my primary allegiance in any classroom is to my colored students, my queer students, my working class students, the disenfranchised students, but then I immediately think of the colored Republican students and caution myself against assuming this essentialist position. As a teacher, my main goal is to radicalize my students.

The working conditions of part-time faculty across universities in these United States are very different from the working conditions of tenured and tenure-track faculty. Many part-time faculty are not even given one-year contracts and are made to work without health benefits. Universities can try to give all their employees benefits regardless of how many courses they teach or what kind of contract they have but choose not to. They argue that it would cost the university a great deal to give all employees health benefits. But even if the cost if a great deal, shouldn't the university have an ethical obligation to give all employees health benefits in a
country where the right to health care is not given to all people?

In this city where I am often (mis)taken for Mexican, Spanish speaking women and men who don't speak English ask me if I speak Spanish, ask me for directions, ask me for help. I look at the people who speak to me in Spanish in embarrassment (they seem embarrassed, I am embarrassed) and say, "no hablo espanol." I feel ashamed, feel like I betray them by not speaking the language of this city whose soul has been crippled, mutilated by the English only legislation of California. It is in this divided city that I am trying to write. I am here on a visit. Because I speak English I can navigate my way through the city by reading the signs which are exclusively in English. But people who live here and speak only Spanish cannot.

The professionalization of gayness requires certain performances and productions of the self.

At the queers of color meeting the talk invariably turns to how we must be authentic to our people.

I sought the note form consciously. Constant migrations and relocations have made me realize that the narratives I construct have to do with images and dispatches. The images and dispatches are signifiers of place, of location. I think of history as experiential. I construct my narratives round
these clues to center myself. My marginal experiences are central to my existence.

Locating myself in the classroom, re/presenting myself as having a traveling history, a world view, a personality, collides in many ways with my training, which encouraged me to erase myself when I walk into the classroom.

The soul of the university, the site of public education is being crippled, mutilated by writing assessment which is used as a gate-keeping device to limit student access to higher education. Writing assessment is used to deny students the rights to enter the university, the site of education to which they belong. Is there any doubt about who the students who will be turned away will be? The decree of the university is to punish and to exclude, to separate those who are prepared from those who are not. Those whose English language skills are inadequate, those whose racial and ethnic backgrounds are not white and/or middle class, those who are second language users of English, those who have not mastered standard English discursive practices will be denied entrance.

This is not a coincidence, or a side-effect of an otherwise benign system but a direct and calculated result. The economic order and the US system of governance depend on keeping a large number of people barred from entering the gates of the state, the city, the university.
Manage, oversee, regulate, supervise, command, govern, rule, dominate, domineer, master, overpower, contain, rein, repress, restrict, subdue, authority, charge, command, dominion, jurisdiction, power, check, curb, suppressant, corner, monopolize, aplomb, composure, self-control.

In an effort to distract myself momentarily from my apprehensions about certain powers of the state, I go to get my hair cut. The person who usually cuts my hair is away and the person who cuts my hair instead asks where are you from? I tell him what part of the city I live in but he is not satisfied with my response for he has already assumed that I am not really from here. He tries again. He asks where I lived before living there. I tell him I lived in Ohio. But you are not from Ohio he asks. I tell him I am from there as much as anywhere else. He says, you are teasing me. Where are you really from? I tell him having lived in many different parts of the world I am not sure how to answer his question. He says where you are born is where you are from. I don't argue with the simplicity of his logic and tell him that I spent the formative years of my childhood in Bombay. My foreignness established in the first five minutes of our meeting, he is satisfied and proceeds to tell me how lucky we are to be living in the United States where people don't have to struggle to survive.
I don't have the energy to argue with his assumption that all people in the third world struggle to survive, but I can't stop myself from pointing out that the homeless who have been stripped of their rights to claim public space in the city are not lucky.

In writing, it is crucial to negotiate with the question raised by Jacqueline Royster: "How do we translate listening into language and action, into the creation of an appropriate response?" (38). Listening involves moving from seeing and observing and hearing to witnessing and testifying and acting.

The homeless who are routinely charged by the police for endangering public safety are not lucky. No, the homeless are certainly not fortunate to be living in these United States of America.

Radical teachers not only process received knowledge but they actively transform knowledge.

The dualism of self and other reinstates dominant racist ideologies and preserves the arrangements of the white hegemony.

The institution of learning models the state. It is built on inequities and on the insatiability of those who hold the power to hang on to it. The university is not the kind, just, egalitarian space that many of its citizens believe it to be. Even members of the institution who are committed to the rights of all peoples in their intellectual pursuits are not
committed to granting the same rights to all the people who inhabit the university.

An item on the evening news is presented without comment and doesn't lead to public outrage. The state of California awards one billion dollars to the Border Patrol to make "our" borders safer. A week later the LA Times reports that as many as seven million people in California do not have health insurance.

Every semester, I invariably overhear conversations among Composition teachers in the hallways. The teachers complain about their ESL students. They don't believe they should have to teach students who are unable to speak and write standard American English fluently. They don't believe ESL students belong in their classes.

I wonder who among us hasn't fumbled with language? I also wonder why they believe that the ability of students to speak a language fluently is a warranty that their writing will be articulate, will not be a struggle. I speak fluently but I grapple with language, with words every time I write.

A paragraph from Gayatri Spivak leaps out at me: "May I not forget to question: what is it to assume that one already knows the meaning of words; something is taught by others and something is learned by me--seems to point at three different generalizations for this resistant reader's subject position: ethnic in the US, racial in Britain, negotiating for
decolonized space. These are generalizations that now seem good for teaching and learning in classes, lecture hall. They will not travel, directly, of course, to all situations of struggle in all the three arenas, as some of us, impatient with the grounding uncertainty of teaching, talking, writing, seem to quickly presume" (144).

An edict that takes effect in Philadelphia on the first day of the new year forbids the homeless from the streets of Center City, the city's recently gentrified commercial and cultural nucleus. The injunction establishes into law the city's agenda to push the homeless out of sight, outside the borders of the city's limits. In this city that calls itself "the city of brotherly love," the homeless are prohibited (perhaps appropriately since there is no place for sisterly love here) from claiming even public spaces as their own.

Gayness gets conflated with whiteness and dominant formulations of gay are both white and middle-class in this consumerist society where revolution has come to signify a new deodorant or household appliance. The predominant struggle of gay and lesbian activists is for gay men and lesbians to be allowed to serve in the military and for institutional space in racist, sexist, classist, ablist institutions. My white friend, the activist, wants to know why I refuse to support the March on Washington. I wonder why I am supposed to support a movement that is uncritical of the armed forces and the
police, who are accountable for the deaths of thousands of colored and poor bodies? As a queer, I am expected to focus exclusively on "queer" issues, and to make separations between sexual oppression and race and economic exploitation even though the majority of queers are working class women of color.

On the evening news, an upper middle class white woman is being interviewed after having alerted the INS to the presence of suspected illegal immigrants. She says she saw shadows running across her backyard and immediately knew that the suspects must be illegal immigrants because they were running. She is asked if she felt threatened or if she felt she was in any danger. She says she didn't but claims it was her duty to call the police and report the fleeings. She is commended by the news reporter for being a good citizen, for having acted bravely and responsibly.

In thinking about the responsibilities of teachers, I find myself returning to a question Adrienne Rich asks: "How can we connect the process of learning to write well with the student's own reality and not teach her/him how to write acceptable lies in standard English?" (239).

For me, that is still the central question, one of my main concerns in charting a pedagogy that is anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic, anti-nationalistic. The emphasis on the "student's own reality" invokes many possibilities.
Students and teachers have a responsibility to think about and through our own most immediate location, our selves. However, thinking only about one's self can lead to paralysis, insensibility, immobility, solipsism. The "student's own reality" could easily become an excuse for students and teachers not to engage with anything that they are not familiar or comfortable with. But, the phrase is useful in a wider sense—starting with but moving beyond local worlds, making connections, and constantly negotiating with the global in terms of accountability, responsibility, action. Learning does not take place in a vacuum. It is situated within specific histories and geographies.

The summer of 1998 has already seen over a hundred border crossers die of heat and exhaustion.

The wounded earth, starved for reconciliation, is enraged and furious. The earth has split open and is crying for appeasement.

In this city bruised and partitioned, I sit surrounded by my notes. I write in fragments, in little bits at a time. I write on scraps of colored paper (the backs of discarded fliers), bits torn from newspapers and magazines, train tickets, movie stubs, paper napkins from cafes. I sit surrounded by my many writings on this assorted collection of papers. These fragments on these bits of paper represent a trajectory of sorts. I must confess that I am not always
interested in thoughts that connect perfectly. My mind disconnects. It makes sense in strange and idiosyncratic ways. I like that strangeness and the idiosyncrasies of my mind, of other people's minds. I am trying to push my words together, my notes, my fragments. I am trying to weave them together and in weaving make some sense of the moment of these writings. These notes are my effort at making sense. In and through these notes, I am attempting to pit ideas and thoughts against each other to question what it means to be an academic and a "citizen" in this country.

The academy and the State Legislature depend upon creating divisions between the different ranks of people who teach in the university. The private academy is not interested in breaking these distinctions either. There are different pay-scales for the same classes. A part-timer typically earns between $1800 and $3000 for a first year composition class while a tenured faculty member earns at least twice as much. Why aren't part-time faculty offered equitable wages? And why haven't all tenured and tenure-track faculty made this issue of inequitable wages their struggle? How can part-time and tenured or tenure-track faculty be equal colleagues when part-time faculty make so much less in terms of renumeration that tenured or tenure-track faculty? Part-time faculty are hired to teach the same classes as tenure and tenure-track faculty but are clearly not deemed worthy of receiving equal wages.
Who makes these decisions? Are only the management and administration to be implicated for this tiered state of affairs? What about the role of tenured and tenure-track faculty in perpetuating and maintaining such an unjust state of affairs?

I find on a notecard an excerpt I have jotted down from Marlene Nourbese Philip: "The imagination...is both free and unfree. Free in that it can wander wheresoever it wishes, unfree in that it is profoundly affected and shaped by the societies in which we live" (278).

While desire itself may transcend place, the enactment of desire/s is certainly, constantly bound to, connected with space. Place constructs desire/s and may therefore inhibit the performativity of certain/other desires.

If part-time workers are the migrant laborers of the academy, the janitors and cleaners are the invisible laborers who toil at all odd hours to disinfect and deodorize the physical space of the academy so that those of us who teach and do research can do the mental work, the real work, of the academy. But even among academic workers, the hierarchies flourish and the borders grow wider.

The side of the border that I am on offers me some privileges at the same time as it constructs me as "other," as "alien."
But who are my people? Learning that I am from Bombay, a queer colored colleague tells me he is pleased that the renaming of Bombay has finally returned the city to its people. He does not seem to be concerned that imbricated in this renaming are the desires of Hindu fundamentalists who would mark all that is not Hindu as other, as foreign.

I am a visitor. I am given the designation of Visiting Assistant Professor. My position is full-time as opposed to part-time, and I am given some of the benefits awarded tenured and tenure-line faculty. I am somewhere in between the part-time faculty and the tenured and tenure-track faculty. Like the part-time faculty, I have been hired to teach what are increasingly coming to be known as the service courses—courses that prepare students for other supposedly more rigorous courses, the real courses taught by tenured and tenure-track faculty. The Director of the program I am hired to teach in tells me that they are only interested in my teaching and my teaching evaluations, not in my scholarship. He tells me the main criteria used to determine who the program will rehire are the teaching evaluations. The teaching evaluations are standardized forms devised by those in charge of the program. They include questions like "did the class meet regularly?" "how many papers were you asked to write?" "how many papers were you asked to revise?" "how many conferences did you have with your instructor?" The questions
are not designed to provide teachers with feedback that will be useful to them but to monitor the classes, to check to see if we, those who are transient workers in the academy and the graduate students who provide cheap labor, are doing what we are supposed to be doing in our classes. We are not trusted to teach our own classes satisfactorily and must be regulated.

Where is the evidence that students whose language skills, whose reading and writing abilities do not measure up to certain standards that in any case reflect biases against students of certain racial and ethnic backgrounds, are incapable of analysis, of innovation, of promise in the university? The gates of the university are being closed to students who cannot pass a test. Their potential is unrecognized, their merit disregarded.

I am visiting the bruised city from across the country. I am allowed to do so (no questions asked, no official procedures to follow, no papers to file) despite my status as an "alien," a designation given to me by the INS, but people who live a few miles away on the other side of the border cannot even enter without papers, without legal documents that are hard to acquire, specially if one lives on the wrong side of the border.

Viewpoints, perspectives from various locations around the globe abet in de-centering, re-centering, negotiating, re-negotiating the borders, boundaries.
Zoe Wicomb: "Setting an agenda that bans certain subjects and prescribes others seems foolish, since it can generate only two categories of writers: the obedient, who will slavishly follow the agenda, and the disobedient, who will avoid it as a matter of principle" (15).

Returning to Philadelphia, I mull over what responsibility means for someone like me, an "alien," who has lived in the US for ten years and who has been given the charge of educating its citizenry but who has been conferred none of the rights that citizens of the state are usually granted.

Universities and departments see fit to divide people on the basis of their rank.

A white lesbian colleague of mine tells me she is sick and tired of her students not making gay issues the center of their lives. I tell her I am sick and tired of white queers not making race a central issue of their lives.

Regulate writing. Regulate desire. Regulate taste. Regulate the boundaries. If there are no regulations there will be chaos.

Transnational economics structures and politics affect us all in different ways. Looking at global energy consumption rates per person I find that in the US it is $23,150 per head, in Mexico $1,500 per head.
I like the struggles that come with belonging in the margins and do not want to become assimilated into the center.

Elspeth Probyn: "In creating our own centers and our own locals, we tend to forget that our center displaces others into peripheries of our making" (n.p.).

Othering is a national and international pastime. For the moment, I forget the pleasures of othering, of being othered. See? It's a complicated business.

At San Diego State University, the largest university within the California State University system, the largest public university system in North America, there are 900 tenured or tenure-track faculty and 1100 part-time faculty. Tenured or tenure-track faculty are responsible for teaching only 40% of all classes taught. These numbers are not entirely unusual at universities across these United States.

The politics of everyday life are very different for those who are entitled space from those who have to struggle for it on a daily basis.

At this same San Diego State University, there are different pay scales for teachers teaching the same classes. This, too, is not unusual at universities across these United States. Part-timers earn a fraction of what the tenured or tenure-track faculty earn and receive few, if any, benefits. At most universities, part-timers teach a large percentage of the classes taught and yet are among the lowest paid
employees. I can't help wonder who such an iniquitous business arrangement benefits?

I tell another queer, white friend who is a US citizen that he will never have to face what I have to face at airports around the world. He doesn't understand. He wants to know what connections I am trying to make.

Colonialism robs not only the psyche of the colonized but also robs people of basic human rights. Basic human rights are tied to constructs like political territory. In the US territory, the responsibility of the state is to its citizens. But even here, not all citizens are seen as worthy of the charge and responsibility of the state.

Chandra Mohanty: "Teaching practices must combat the pressures of professionalization, normalization, and standardization, the very pressures of expectation that implicitly aim to manage and discipline pedagogies so that teacher behaviors are predictable (and perhaps controllable) across the board" (153).

Since I am an "alien," my right to teach is dependent on the INS granting me the authorization to accept employment with a specific employer within these United States for a specific period of time. I am required to attain permission from the INS to change employers. My movements are thus controlled by the INS who may at any point deny my application for re/employment for any reason.
But he says, "we have to have rules and regulations. Otherwise, our classes will be out of control." Ah, control.

The response of the responsible United States government to the cries of the divided earth is to issue a series of warnings on television beseeching border crossers to be wary of the heat and the fury of the earth. Do they think the people crossing the borders daily do not know the risks involved? Do they think the people crossing the borders do not know that maintaining the border is a billion dollar industry?

The people were running; therefore, the good citizen assumes they must be dark-skinned and illegal.

The senate agrees to spend 50 million dollars to hire an additional 500 US Customs Service Inspectors for the US-Mexican border next year. This is not a luxury but a necessity due to increased traffic along the entire Mexican border says the senator who introduces the measure.

Notions of authenticity are used as traps. I fail all tests of authenticity and refuse to be trapped, colonized by authenticity. I do not want to engage with this obsessive notion, but disengaging is not easy. Colonial and postcolonial fantasies rest on this concept of the "other." They want you/me/us to neatly fit in.

In California, a state that is projected to be the first in the union that will have more people of color than white people, Proposition 187, an initiative making illegal
immigrants ineligible for medical care and high school education, and backed by Governor Pete Wilson was approved by 59 percent of voters in the November 1994 elections.

My department has a meeting to discuss domestic partnership policy in a university that doesn't approve of granting domestic partners benefits. Though several faculty members—notably junior faculty members without tenure—argue passionately for institutionalizing domestic partnership policies, there is much resistance and the faculty as a whole vote against the measure. Many of them argue that though they are in favor of such a policy they don't think it is appropriate for the department to go against the wishes of the university we work for. The message is clear—even if we don't believe in the discriminatory mandate set by the university we should not try to alter the mandate, to resist it.

Implicit in this decision not to go against the wishes of the university is the yearning to seek the approval of those who are in power.

Deborah Davis: "Of all the aspects of American life that have ever concerned me, it is this craving for the respect of people who have sold their own souls that I find most disturbing" (72).

We are told borders are maintained for the sake of order and efficient administration. Without borders there would be
chaos. But the desire to maintain the borders reveals our respect for power.

In writing classes boundaries and borders are erected to maintain so-called standards. And writing teachers who are disproportionately part-time workers are the ones expected to regulate the borders and the boundaries. Those who are not given full citizenship rights are the ones entrusted with and expected to maintain the borders.

Linda Brodkey: "Composition teachers are not paid to teach writing but to patrol the borders of language and literature" (xii).

If they disobey they can be sent away, banished from ever returning. Part-time faculty must live with the constant trauma of being subject to getting fired.

The note form offers no certainly, only uncertainty. It offers no predetermined resolution, no unequivocal results except a questioning of the uses of language, the possibilities of linguistic and intellectual pleasures, the axes of power, and the politics of nation states and institutions.

I present these notes together to create the effect of synchronicity, not equivalence.

The necessity of disturbing, of disrupting borders and boundaries is an attempt to escape not only from the fixidity of European rhetorics of modernism which places you/me/us as
"the others" of Western cultures but also to make room to inhabit multiple positionings.

To rephrase Sunil Gupta, the fixidity of European rhetorics does not take into account the wide variety of constituencies for the production and consumption of knowledge on a world-wide scale. It does not explore the reciprocity of language and culture. Writing is not tolerated as a questioning but only as an answer, as something fixed and not as something that is uncertain in its movement, in its ambitions, something that is unfinished.
Jasbir Puar: The academy as a policing mechanism maintains investments in certain ways of reading theory, of establishing and retaining credibility and validity. When we become merely academic by-products and not academic producers—that is, when we simply reflect The Academy as opposed to projecting it and challenging it, we reproduce the policing mechanism for our peers, for our students, and for the institution itself. ("Writing" 79)

Richard Ohmann: I don't want to hold English teachers specifically to blame for [our] failure of vision. Certainly, economists and political scientists have more to answer for. And the whole university has tacitly and understandably adopted and acted upon an ideology that aligns professors' interests with those of governing groups outside the university. (170)
CHAPTER 5

DREADS AND OPEN MOUTHS, PART II

A dream at dusk in an old almost forgotten white-washed courtyard a fountain spouting deep blue water a tree bearing tamarind a long table clothed in yards of crisp pale purple fabric arranged beautifully with food and yellow flowers. The sky is a flamboyant orange with streaks of black and grey. He is sitting at the center with a queer activist. They are flanked by several queers. They are having a wonderful time, being transgressive, being merry. Suddenly, big, burly men dressed in suits appear and surround them on all sides. There is nothing gay about them. They begin to come closer and closer. He wakes up in fright.

Keith Fort: To insist on the standard form of the essay is to condition students to think in terms of authority and hierarchy. Form reflects an attitude and the formal patterning of the mind carries over from discipline to discipline and among elements in society. In our society forms are
interlocked and complementary. In the form of the critical essay is found the same manifestation of the "proper" attitude towards authority that would be found in almost any of the institutions of our society. (178)
Her acts of writing are pieces, fragments that are written against the violences of global corporatism, of colonialism, of wars. She wants her acts of writing to rupture, to break the logic of dominance. But she is frightened that her acts of writing might be colluding with dominance.

What does it mean to write as rupture?

The ruptured tongue is coherent, incoherent, rational, irrational, consistent, inconsistent.

The ruptured tongue is wild. It is unsightly, ungainly, repulsive, bent.

But the ruptured tongue is not broken. It doesn't need to be fixed. It cannot be claimed by the State, or in the name of the fathers or the oppressors.

The ruptured tongue cannot be contained or recuperated in the name of the nation.

The ruptured tongue seeks the edge and crosses over.

Dionne Brand: There is never room, though there is always risk. There is never the room that white writers have in never speaking for their whole race, yet in speaking the most secret and cowardly language of normalcy and affirmation, speaking for the whole race. There is only writing that is significant, honest, necessary--making bread out of stone--so that stone becomes pliant under the hands. (23)
They are only words, a lover tells me, they spell the shapes of things, they are not the things themselves. You take words too seriously.

I do take words seriously. Words are all I have to work with.

With words, I will seize the demons that haunt me. With words, I can resist destruction, annihilation.

At the same time as they bring me pain and agony, words give me pleasure. With words, I can reconfigure imagination, desire, community. In and through writing, I process and recast my version of reality, I possess the ability to transform reality.

Judith McDaniel: I became a serious writer when the risks I was taking in my life began to have "real" consequences in both my life and art, and when the risks I was taking in my art began to have "real" consequences in my life...I am convinced we need [to remind] ourselves now and then that the original meaning of risk was "danger and loss." The risks that I refer to are risks that lead to a profound change in our landscape, both the personal emotional landscape of our lives and the physical present landscape.(102)
What are you looking for, her colleague asks. I am looking for writing that is daring, she says.

She wants her students to confront the easy formulas, to think outside the structuring logic of heteropatriarchy. Surely we can agree that all good writing is clear, another colleague states. She asks what is meant by clarity. Her colleague tells her writing that is generally intelligible. But intelligible to whom? And why should good writing only be writing that is intelligible to most people? What if the goal of the writer is not to be intelligible to most people? She tells her colleague that she is not sure that she would agree that all good writing is clear and that clarity should be the only criteria for good writing. She tells her colleague that clarity is not an "objective" criterion. Her colleague tells her that students need to be taught to write clearly and that it is our obligation to teach them to write clearly. If we don't teach them the basic skills of writing clearly, then we fail them.

She is tired of this argument. She tries to explain how writing clearly becomes an excuse to squash students' linguistic peculiarities, to mold their distinctive voices into the voice of standard discourse. Writing clearly becomes a way of reducing, simplifying, and is often an excuse for anti-intellectualism. She tells her colleagues this but they are not convinced.
She screams there is strength in undisciplined thinking, in emotional thinking, that it is possible and necessary to reimagine new ways. She feels hysterical.

Ana Castillo: Many of us, too many of us, do suffer the anxiety induced by the pressure to speak "correctly," and therefore we come to doubt our writing skills. And, whatever our relationship to language, all mestizas are products of the hegemony that has instilled in us contempt for our cultural identity. (168)
She is back in the city that she grew up in and loves and once feared leaving. The city has changed its name. And in that naming is a violence which betrays her, marks her as intruder, as foreigner. When people in the United States ask her where she is from she sometimes says that city which is no more. Of course, this is not entirely true for the city that is no more in fact exists but at the same time it doesn't exist. The city seems to have left her forever in her absence. When she left she expected to be able to return to it but the city was transformed.

Long before she returned, she had been thinking of departure and rupture, of betrayal and loss. Return is sometimes accompanied by gain but always by loss. Having lived away for ten years, each time she returns, the city she grew up in and loves is less like the city in which as a person of some privilege she came of age, in which she explored her desires, lost her innocence.

So much has changed.

Not only has she had to rethink her faith, undoubtedly a false faith afforded only to some by the luxury of privilege, that no matter what happens elsewhere in India, in Bombay it is always business as usual—the atrocities of 1992 and 1993 have made certain of that—but more significantly, the secular India in which she grew up seems to be quickly eroding.
The city has been taken over by a Hindu nationalist party whose goal is to claim Maharastra, the great land, for Maharastrians only.

The many inhabitants of the city (the mongrel, hybridized city that is the capital of Maharastra) who have lived here for decades, who were born here, are suddenly marked as intruders, as outsiders.

In the daily newspaper, she reads an interview with Salman Rushdie who says that "the country that came into being in 1947 is being transformed into something else"--what it is being transformed into seems intolerant, insular, and frightening.

Perhaps it is nostalgia and the privileges afforded by class that make her think of the city's history as more secular than it ever was.

She doesn't want to idealize the city. It is built on terrible inequalities that have always divided its inhabitants. More people still sleep on the streets and in the slums than in secure houses and apartments.

A sign above one of the three elevators in the building her mother lives in reads: "For Domestics Only."

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Luce Irigaray: If we go on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again. Don't you think so? Listen:
all round us, men and women sound just the same. The same
discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes. The same
attractions and separations. The same difficulties, the same
impossibility of making connections. The same...Same...Always
the same. (205)
Picking through your grandmother's belongings, you find a photograph of yourself as you were at fifteen.

An effeminate boy, you were constantly teased and harassed by your peers.

But you learnt to suppress your effeminate tendencies. You learnt to adapt. You learnt to belong but who did you learn to belong to?

You are sitting on the parapet overlooking the sea. The boy says, you know, you have beautiful legs. You are embarrassed at the pleasure these words bring. The boy says, you know, I am gay. You say you do not know. The boy asks, are you gay? You lie. You say, no, I am not gay.

You shut yourself off from the boy. You have learnt to kill part of your self. You do not want to claim what you have come to see as connected with your effeminacy, your weakness.

You are struggling to remember.

You wish you could tell a different narrative of your life at fifteen but it is this memory that returns to stalk you. You know how your life would have been different then had you been able to say the words, yes, I am gay.

A fantasy.

Effeminates of the world unite.

Roland Barthes: I know what the present, that difficult tense, is: a pure portion of anxiety. Absence persists--I must
endure it. Hence I will manipulate it: transform the distortion of time into oscillation, produce rhythm, make an entrance onto the stage of the language. (source forgotten)
Her memories are tangled with wide expanses of water. Did she, in crossing the water, relinquish her right to claim an identity she never felt comfortable claiming anyway?

Who are we? What are we doing in this alien landscape, you ask. She says nothing. You say you long to belong. You ask, don't you feel a sense of loss? Don't you feel you gave up all claims to belonging when you left, when you decided to come to these shores? She says she gave up all illusions of belonging long before then. She says she never felt like she belonged, that she doesn't understand what it means to belong, that she is not sure she wants to belong because belonging always seems to involve compromising, that not everyone can compromise even if they want to.

Long ago, she gave up the need and desire to belong. She knew that as a queer and as a half-breed she didn't belong in the articulations of India and Indian. She doesn't want to belong and she doesn't want to be accepted but she does want to have rights. For her the question of rights is distinct from feeling a sense of belonging.

To belong. To fit, to conform, to suit. This desire to belong always predicated on the desire to conform. But can everyone even conform if they want to? What about the poor, the queer, the undesirable? Will they be allowed to conform? Can they conform? Why is there such a premium on belonging? What about the pleasures of not belonging? The pleasures of
being different? The pleasures of not conforming? Of resisting.

At a talk, a well known composition theorist says in response to a question about the margins that, of course, all people at the margins want ultimately to be a part of the center. But there can be strength in being at the margins. There can be power. There can be pleasure. She wonders if she is being idealistic but she knows for those with privilege, the margins may be a place to unlearn privilege.

She resists being swallowed by the center. She resists being shaped entirely by the form of the center. The power of the center to consume and to subsume is enormous.

Implicit in this need to belong is the need for approval. Most of us seek approval. We want our students to seek our approval and we want to be in a position to give them our approval. For many people teaching and learning are about approval. But what kind of teaching and learning takes place when it is only about approval? Approval suggests that someone is in a position to approve and someone needs to be approved. She wants to rethink this model that seems to be inherently flawed. She wants to overturn it.

Winston Weathers: I write for many reasons, to communicate many things. And yet, much of what I wish to communicate does not seem to be expressible within the
ordinary conventions of composition as I have learned them and mastered them in the long years of my education. As I grow older, more experienced, perhaps even more mature, I sense that many of the things I want to say do not always "fit" into the communication vehicles I have been taught to construct.

(1)
Your mother calls from Rome while you are in London. She is visiting her brother who lives there. Her visit is unexpected, was not planned. She wonders if you could come see her in Rome. You have not seen your mother in some years or been to Rome since you briefly lived there several years ago. You quickly agree to visit.

But before you can make plans to go see your mother, you have to acquire a visa. You spend the afternoon getting photographs.

At the Italian Embassy the following day you are made to wait for three hours before you can see a consular officer. The officer examines your papers laboriously, and then tells you that visas can only be issued from the country in which one's passport is issued. You tell the consular officer that the country you live in is not the country that issued your passport. The consular officer tells you in that case visas can also be issued from the country in which one lives. Rules, however, do not permit the consular officer to grant you a visa for Italy at the present time.

You are in London. Your mother is in Rome. You are both in Europe. But to see your mother in Rome (less than two hours away by plane from London, where you are) you must first take a flight east to India (nine hours away) or west to the US (six hours away) to obtain authorization.
You are in London. Your mother is in Rome. Your uncle lives in Rome. A cousin lives in Rome. An ex-lover is from Rome. But you cannot go to Rome. Meanwhile, citizens of some countries who may have no relation with a place can come and go as they please.

Hélène Cixous: So when I write, in the writingness [ecrivance] itself, in the material, in the course of writing, I am already in the process of shaking this all up. So that what is at the top stops being at the top by believing itself to be at the top; not so as to make the top fall towards the bottom, but so that the bottom has the same prestige, that it can be restored to us with its treasures, with its beauties. And the top also. That the top not only be opposed to the bottom. That it be on an initial, augural level where we would discover, in a new way, all that it can bring us. I am saying the top and the bottom: I could obviously change the terms infinitely. (11)
My language is bloodied. It carries with it the interventions of colonialism, of imperialism.

Whose blood is on my language? Can I rid my tongue of imperialism, my language of its bloodied history, its bloodied past?

Whose blood does my language carry, contain? How can I write in it and respect the blood of the dead?

What would the dead say to me if I said to them that it is language, this language that carries with it the stains of the dead, that frees me as much as it contains and constrains me? The dead are on my tongue.

The history of my bloodied language, the imperialism on my tongue, is riddled with torture and destruction. In using this language, I must rememory this. I cannot use the language of the oppressors, of the interventionists without negotiating with this burden that language brings.

Erica Hunt: In an expanded sense of poetics, a more fluid typology would favor plural strategies to remove the distance between writing and experience, at least as it is socially maintained by the binarism of fact and fiction, of identity and nonidentity. So that plots are or can be historical or hysterical, revised or translated, manufactured plausibly or incredibly, ludicrous or cold eyed, bewildering or conspiratorial. Or character might be singular, plural,
inexplicable, composite, evolving, non-human or found. And theme might consist of a surface, a tone, a didacticism; be latent or disjunct. All this is to suggest that narrative invention stems from multiple levels of perception and experience which literary standards conceived of as ceiling tend to raze. (199)
She attends a meeting on multiculturalism organized by the Dean's office at the institution in which she studies and teaches.

She asks a question about form. She asks a question about the problem of using one framework for all cultures. One panelist who responds to her question says that certain conventions and standards have to be upheld, that students need to master standard forms before they learn about other forms. She is tired and screams, if multiculturalism doesn't involve questioning forms and changing frameworks then that's the point at which we should say fuck multiculturalism. Before the other panelists can respond, the moderator intervenes and calls the discussion to a close. Her loudness and anger are seen as a disruption of the proceedings which are expected to conform to standard conventions of behavior. Emotion is disallowed.

Later, a well meaning well known professor approaches her and asks why she, as a person of color, seems intent on sabotaging efforts to bring difference and ethnic variety into the academy. The well meaning well known professor tells her that she should be delighted that the Dean's office is taking an interest in multiculturalism.

Toni Morrison: The systematic looting of language can be recognized by the tendency of its users to forgo its nuanced,
complex, mid-wifery properties, replacing them with menace and subjugation. Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. (82-83)
You are struggling to write.

Your mother's letter lies on your desk. She writes, your cousin in Rome has had a baby. She writes, your aunt (her sister) is sending a maid to her from Bombay to take care of the baby.

You don't know what to do with this messy exchange.

Homi Bhabha: There are other logics of signification to which we should be open, and the sentence can sometimes sentence us, in the imprisoning sense, to the kind of prison house of a particular language form. (8)
They dwell on what it means to take risks in writing.

Instead of a disagreeable opponent who must be persuaded by one's argument/s in accordance with the political, social, and related pedagogical dictates of liberal pluralism, they imagine writing in tones contemptuous of polite give-and-take, and of writing with rage and with contempt.

They imagine the productive liberation that comes with writing for a blatant disregard for—or, even a scathing memory of--those who disagree with them.

Taking risks in writing is not a cliche.

They imagine contesting the fundamental assumptions of many contemporary composition theories and pedagogical practices that privilege moderation, rationality, unity, consistency, and decorum over pleasure and excess.

Risky writing enacts its own rhetoric. The risk shapes the rhetoric.

They imagine taking risks and confronting the consequences.

Edward Said: Our characteristic mode, then, is not a narrative, in which scenes take place seriatim, but rather broken narrative, fragmentary compositions, and self-consciously staged testimonials, in which the narrative voice keeps stumbling over itself, its obligations, and its limitations. (unable to locate page number)
She wonders how it happened that the writing we have come to value is writing as closure, writing that comes to an easy close, an uncomplicated conclusion.

Who proclaimed that language should be stripped of imagination and desire?

Who proclaimed that language should only be used to record not to re-order?

Who proclaimed language should be used devoid of emotion?

Who proclaimed language should be used to persuade, to argue, but not to explore and to imagine?

Who proclaimed language should be firm, sure, not tentative, uncertain, provisional?

Who proclaimed language could be free of politics?

Who proclaimed language could be free of ideological biases?

Who proclaimed language was not living and evolving and shifting?

She wonders who proclaimed writing should follow the cultural script, should obey the rules?

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Nancy Gray: Assimilation operates to preserve boundaries between superior and inferior while seeming to transform them into something else. Whatever the norm cannot displace through assimilation, it destroys. (124)
Writing is traumatic for her. She sometimes spends hours over a sentence.

Writing is traumatic but there is pleasure in the trauma of writing. Make the text tremble, make it speak. Mold it to your vision, hurl it across the seas, across time, space, across geographies.

The pleasures of writing, of (re)creating, (re)visioning.

She says to her lover, I want you to write words on my body. Her lover asks what should I write? She says write a secret. She turns over and offers her back, her shoulders, her buttocks, her thighs. Write, she urges, write me a secret. The lover writes. She writhes under her lover's words. The lover finishes. She lies still. Shall I, the lover asks, read my secret, reveal it to you? No, she says, it's your secret and goes to take a shower.

Lynda Hart: I am a writer only when I surrender. For her, it is, I think, the other way around. She tops when she writes, she surrenders only for love. The writing does not heal, it merely smears balm on the savage wounds. (205)
Some days, she feels incapacitated by rage, by her inability to intervene in crises. Some days she feels the inadequacy of words even more than on other days.

A black man dragged to his death. A gay boy tortured and tied to a post and left to die. More women smeared and disfigured and tortured on a daily basis than even she can keep track of.

US bombs continue to pound Iraq and any other target in the Third World that they fancy, but life in these United States of America goes on undisturbed, unperturbed, as usual.

In the face of such crises, how should a writer write? How should a writer be able to continue to believe in writing, in the power of writing to affect?

And how can any writer make the separation between the academic and the non-academic? How can any writer in the academy claim that the academic is not punctured by the non-academic?

How can a writer fail to recognize that in the university specially, we are imbricated intimately in the fabric of global economics and power.

For an academic to pretend that we are outside the history and forces of global politics and that we are not members of this billion dollar enterprise called the academy is a crime.
In the face of this reality, writing is particularly contentious. But in the face of such materiality, she knows now more than ever before that writing is not a luxury, that writing, that art, that poetry are as intrinsic and necessary as the air we breathe.

Sometimes it is hard to be convinced because writing in fact changes little but it has potency. It can affect, inspire, move one to action. She needs to believe this in order to write.

Toni Cade Bambara: One's got to see what the factory worker sees, what the prisoner sees, what the welfare children sees, what the scholar sees, got to see what the ruling-class mythmakers see as well, in order to tell the truth and not get trapped. Got to see more and dare more. (14)
In writing, we will dare.
In writing, we will be fearless and fierce.
In writing, we will defy.
In writing, we will be apprehensive and questioning.
In writing, we will be contradictory.
In writing, we will claim what the white fathers denied our ancestors.
In writing, we will claim what the colored fathers denied our mother, our grandmothers, our sisters.
In writing, we will claim what the white and colored fathers denied men.
In writing, we will be emotional.
In writing, we will explore our desires.
In writing, we will overthrow the tyranny of standard forms.
In writing, we will chart new courses.
In writing, we will resist institutional authority and institutional modes of structuring, of logic.
In writing, we will think outside of the structuring logic of periodicity.
In writing, we will decenter and trouble accepted modes of structuring and thinking.
In writing, we will create undisciplined thinking.
In writing, we will reimagine ways of thinking.
In writing, we will resist the notion of expertise.
In writing, we will focus on pleasure and desire.
In writing, we will attempt to change how we relate to one another.
In writing, we will attempt to create upheavals in the dominant systems of language and thought.
In writing, we will attempt new ways of thinking.
Urvashi Vaid: Capitalism has convinced us that producing and consuming are more important than doing neither, and the worst is doing nothing. What, after all, is the work and activity that most of us engage in? Producing junk that is sold for money that we use to buy more junk that someone else has produced. Consuming products, replacing products one has already consumed, obsessing about what one would consume if only one has more money. Hours spent producing beauty, muscles, sequined gowns, producing the right state of mind to experience the next high or recover from the last one; to bed the next fuck, to see the next dance bar; to seek the next thrill. Manic activity without meaning and without end. What happened to sloth? (43)

The boy sits across from you. Sometimes the boy will slip the rings off your fingers and slip them on his fingers. The
boy's fingers are slender. The gesture, simple and erotic, delights you.

You are sitting at your desk wondering where and how to propel this narrative, this text.

The memory of the boy comes to you, suddenly, unexpectedly. You haven't invoked this memory but it arrives nonetheless.

You wonder why this memory comes to you now. Why do memories come as and when they do? But you smile as you contemplate its pleasures.

You have been thinking about queer pleasures, about what queer pleasures mean.

In skimming through a collection of articles on "intimacy" that you are carrying with you, you come across a question from Laura Kipnis that makes you pause. "What would it take to expect more forms of gratification and pleasure in the present, in other spheres than intimacy alone--even without the hand-me-down utopia of sex?" (326).

The space is large and angular. It is mostly unfurnished. There is a desk, a chair, a bed (on it is one pillow), and an old bookcase made of dark wood. There are no books on the shelves. The room has only one window but it is bright. From it, you can see a slice of the ocean. You are here to write and to recover, to mend.
The sharp angles of the room delight you. Your mind wanders.

You think about the contingencies of your desires, the impossibilities, the ruptures.

Where do you want your desire to go?

You started with pleasure and you are now thinking of desire. Are pleasure and desire the same thing?

Your body is one site of your desire. You want to write out of that desire but you want to write out of other desires as well.

You want your desires to be unfixed. You want to write against fixing desire.

Your desires are not bound by your body.

You want to avoid thinking of queer desire as a variation on the theme of universal love.

You roam the city for hours, looking looking.

You find your pleasures in the unlikeliest of places.

You learn early that pleasure comes in strange places and in unexpected ways. You learn to revere, to treasure the strangenesses of love, of lust, of desire, of pleasure.

In your journal, you have jotted down a quotation from Gayle Rubin: "Most people find it difficult to grasp that whatever they like to do sexually will be thoroughly repulsive to somebody else, and that whatever repels them sexually will be the most treasured delight of someone, somewhere. One need
not like or perform a particular sex act in order to recognize that someone else will, and that the difference does not indicate a lack of good taste, mental health, or intelligence in either party. Most people mistake their sexual preferences for a universal system that will or should work for everyone" (15).

How does the body circulate? How is the body received?

Where is the mark of the queer on your body? How is the queer marked?

You feel uneasy. You are tired. You tire easily. You are genetically anemic. How does your anemia affect and disaffect your desires?

You become a queer not only in relation to heterosexuals but also along the multiple axes of your race, ethnicity, class, nationality, citizenship, age, ability.

You become a queer in transgressing against the norms of desire.

Michael Warner: "'Queer gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual" (xxvi).

You are thinking about the force of desire, of passion, of pleasure.

You are trying to map your erotic energies. You write energized by desire, by longing.
Where does your desire for questioning everything lead you? What pleasures does it bring?

How do you write as a queer? Whose gaze is on you? What is the gaze of the queer?

You, who write of longing and pleasure and desire, how do you read the borders, the contours of other bodies and their longings and pleasures and desires?

Who is the you who writes? Is it me/I? Is the me/I a fiction? Is your body a fiction? Are all bodies fictions? And the abrasions on bodies, marks that you can and cannot see?

You want to write with the knowledge of your body's rapture, delirium.

Your body, which is governed by laws, by injunctions, by social pressures, wants to break out of those restraints and speak. Your body wants to write the text that is disallowed, unencouraged. It seeks to know its own power, its own ecstasy.

Is your desire permanent? What is the permanence of your desire?

How do you intercede, intercept space for your body's desires?

You think of your body as text. The body/text can be transformed by experimentation. Experimentation is a strategy inherently intent on disrupting.

Where is your desire derived from?
You want to claim the body that pursues its own ideas. This is something you have read somewhere but you cannot remember where.

You make notes. You read voraciously. Reading brings you pleasure but it is a pleasure you have had to pursue vigorously. You were not meant to read.

You stare at the angles of the room.

Your desires are impure, uncertain. But what is certain is your need to break out of constraints imposed on your desire.

What does your body remember?

Your body is the site of transgression, of subversion. Your body is the site of exploration and intervention.

You cannot separate your different desires. You want your desires to come together, to mend the splits imposed on you, your body.

You are sitting on the floor drinking tea with the girl whose friendship you treasure and count among your most cherished queer pleasures. She senses your stresses, your tenseness, and massages your shoulders, your back. The pressures of her touch bring pleasure.

You move between your varying desires.

You cook a mixture of collard greens, mustard greens, and turnip greens.
You wash the collard greens, the mustard greens, and the turnip greens carefully. You remove the stems and cut the leaves. You boil a large pot of water. You add the greens and cook for ten minutes. You rinse the greens in cold water and heat some oil in pan. You add a finely chopped onion and a serrano pepper and cook for five minutes. You add two chopped tomatoes and cook for one minute. You add the greens, some salt, pepper, and ground cumin, and cook for five minutes. You add some lemon juice and cook for another minute.

Are bodies only the surfaces of our skins? Are bodies beyond and behind the skins? Do the skins demarcate the lines of bodies? If not skins what are the demarcations of the body?

Gayatri Spivak: "If one really thinks about the body as such, there is no possible outline of the body as such. There are thinkings of the systematicity of the body, there are value codings of the body. The body, as such, cannot be thought, and I certainly cannot approach it" (source forgotten).

Pain and pleasure bring knowledge to your body.

You are in a different room, a rectangular room. The walls are stark. There is a small bed in one corner and a dresser. The only window is close to the ceiling. It lets in light but doesn't let you look out. There is no desk, no chair. You undress and arrange your clothes neatly on the bare floor. You sit on the bed and write.
You have come here to think, to ponder, to repair. Reflecting brings you pleasure. You contemplate the queer pleasures of your body as text.

You contemplate the contours of your body? Where does your body end and begin?

You take a head of cauliflower and cut it in half. You break it into small pieces with your hands and wash the pieces. You heat some oil in a pan and throw in some mustard seeds, some cumin seeds, some fennel seeds, and finely chopped pieces of ginger. You fry that for a minute before adding the cauliflower to the pot. You stir-fry the cauliflower for a few minutes on a high flame. You add some turmeric powder, some ground cumin powder, and salt. You lower the heat and cover the pot. You let cook for twenty minutes and add chopped cilantro just before eating.

Desire and pleasure come in a multitude of forms and cannot be categorized simply, easily, at will. What do you lose in trying to bind desire, to regulate and contain pleasure?

You ask your lover to strip and to paddle your already stripped body. You want him to hurt you, to cause you pain.

Your desire for pain marks you. Pain transforms.

Is this desire sexual? You know the pleasures it brings are erotic.

You are moving in time, in space.
The maps you know are of little use to you. You are seeking for ways to live that go beyond the cartographies already mapped. You are the cartographer of your own desires.

Your desire is adrift. It travels, it subverts its conscious self. Your desire is unstable, unstoppable.

You try to trace you desire, track it down. You stare at the window that lets in the light but doesn't let you see the outside from the inside.

You take a long nap.

You love sleeping.

Your desire is impossible to locate on a single point or location. You don't want to forget the imbrication of your desire with various histories and geopolitical spaces.

Another memory arrives. You are driving with the boy to Iowa. The monotony of the flat, flat land pleases you. The boy asks, what about this land moves you? You say, the infinite possibilities of repetition.

You stare at the blank wall for hours. Its blankness, its tedium is reassuring, brings pleasure.

You are thinking about desires, about the construction of desires, about desiring what we aren't supposed to desire. This leads you to think also about the construction of transgression.

Michel Foucault: "The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit
could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows" (unable to locate page number).

The erotic satisfactions and pleasures you desire are not only sexual.

But what constitutes erotic satisfactions and pleasures? Can solitude constitute erotic satisfactions and pleasures? Can sloth constitute erotic satisfactions and pleasures?

Even within descriptions and depictions of deviance, of same-sex object-choice, there is the desire to normatize. Some pleasures, some satisfactions are seen as healthier, more natural than others.

From such depictions and descriptions you wonder what desires can arise, what words, what language, what actions?

You learn how to map your desires the same way that you learn your way round a new city. You read something in a paper or overhear someone talking about a place. You follow leads or you follow someone who moves you. Your knowledge is arbitrary.

You move from clue to clue, from name to name, from lead to lead.

You find disjunctures.
You are your own cartographer of desire. You find cartographies mapped out for you but these cartographies may strangle too, may stifle, as much as they liberate.

Your desire is to reinvent the cartographies that have been mapped.

Your desire is to break out of the forms that have been created. In order to exist, you have to make your own maps.

Miss Rant: "I want to be different, odd, strange, independent. That's why I breathe the clear, free air of BEING QUEER" (15).

Your desire encompasses your way of living.

Your desire is a method of living, of doing.

Your desires are not what make you queer. What you do with your desires is what makes you queer.

You live in this body. It is this certain body that dictates your circulation in this economy.

What is inscribed on your body? What are the texts that your body would tell if it could?

How are you burdened by your body?

You go for a swim in the ocean. You talk to no one. You dive into the water, then surface, then dive again. The water embraces you. You lose yourself in its warmth, its encompassing movement.

The water's erotic force energizes you.
You are having an affair with language. Your body obsesses on language, is addicted to language. You desire the love of language.

You love in language and for language. You suffer in language and for language.

A line from Roland Barthes comes to you. "Either woe or well-being, sometimes I have a craving to be engulfed" (10).

Your body, constructed, has its own sociology.

Your body provides truths, untruths, is partly responsible for dispensing your desires, your fears.

Your experiences of your body contain contradictions of the desires of your body.

Your body comes into being in relationality. It comes into being in relation to other bodies, to power structures and inequalities.

Your body/mind resists the fixed splits of fiction/truth, reason/emotion, subject/object.

You clean the fish, fresh mackerel that you have bought at the market. You chop an onion, some hot chili peppers, and ginger. You mince some garlic. You heat some oil in a skillet. You fry cumin seeds for a minute. You add the onions and fry till they are golden brown. You add some cayenne pepper, some paprika, some turmeric, ginger, and the minced garlic, and fry for a minute. You add the fish and two cups of water. You bring to a boil and simmer till the fish is flaky, about ten
minutes. You squeeze some fresh lime and garnish with chopped cilantro. You eat the mackerel over rice.

You process life through written language.

What about your body's affair with silence?

How does the erotic energy of silence move your body?

Is silence the absence of utterance?

Silence is a noun and a verb.

Silence is rarely silent. In silence, you see, you hear, you feel, you taste, you smell, you desire.

Your desire for silence, the erotic space of solitude brings pleasure.

From the room from which you can see a slice of the ocean, you contemplate the buoyant waters.

Your desires are like the ebb and flow of the tide.

Cliche of the day. Neither here nor there.

Language does not consist only of sound but also of silence.

Your body heaves uncontrollably. You cry for hours. The boy holds you tenderly. The boy's tenderness pleases you, turns you on.

Away from distractions, in solitude, your body finds pleasure in being idle.

You want to claim the desires and pleasures of your body.

Your body desires perverse moments.

Your body desires idleness and inertness.
Idleness and inertness are perverse moments that bring your body pleasure.

You want to feel the ruptures of your desires, to profess your desires in their myriad forms.

Trivial things bring you pleasure. Repetition, the monotony of silence, insignificant details.

You want to sketch your erotic body and eroticism.

Your pleasures are eccentric and ever changing. You often surprise even yourself.

There are slippages between your desires. Your desire is both grounded and groundless.

Desire is somewhere other than in language and of language.

You deflect the telos of normative pleasure by seeking pleasures that are intangible, not material.

You desire sleep and sloth.

The boy is in your room with the angular walls. The visit is unexpected. You both stand at the window and contemplate the movements of the ocean. You say little to each other. This intimacy brings you pleasure.

You want to make invisible possibilities and your queer desires and queer pleasures visible.

You ponder the infinite possibilities of queer.
Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: "Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, troublant....'across' formations: across genders, across sexualities, across genres, across 'perversions'" (xii).

You listen for echoes in the ocean. You let your mind wander through the echoes. This brings you pleasure.

Your queer desires are not fixated on sex.

Dreams bring you pleasure. You spend at least a third of your life in the dream world and wonder why dreams are seen as less real than "real" life.

Being mothered and mothering bring you pleasure.

This desire to write you have had to seek. You were not meant to write. Writing brings you pleasure.

Your body comes into being in a web of discourses, of exchanges.

You are feeling nostalgic, melancholic. You revel in the feelings of melancholia that are sweeping through your body.

You are sitting with the boy on the steps of an empty house. You are having a wonderful time, rememorbing desire/s, rethinking erasures. A car slows down in front of you and the driver yells "queers," "faggots" and drives off.

You are furious, irate, but also pleased at having been recognized.

There is no accounting for your queer pleasures.
Pat Elliot and Susan Heald: In the discourse of the university, knowledge is in the place of agency. Knowledge "speaks" and the professor is there to serve knowledge. Students who will reproduce this knowledge are the others or objects of this discourse: they are there to devour the knowledge served up by the professor. The end product or aim of the university is to reproduce the status quo, including "educated" citizens who are disciplined and who submit to the rules and norms of society. (qtd. in Heald 138)

C. Mark Hurlbert and Michael Blitz: It is a struggle to open the discourse of the academy. It is a struggle to resist assimilation into a machinery of subordination to Knowledge brokers and managers. It is a struggle to resist conforming to the Knowledge machinery's systemic requirements/desires for newly-skilled bearers of the instruments of cultural knowledge--workers who will disseminate, if not the Knowledge, at least the idea that the Knowledge is available--but only at our universities and only in the forms of academic discourse. (73)
Columbus, OH
January 1997

Nuzhat jaan:

January has brought freezing temperatures and the return of the KKK and Aryan Nation. Each year, the same thoughts return to my mind when members of the KKK and Aryan Nation come to this city and stand on the steps of the State Capitol protected by the police, and several prominent city leaders urge people to stay away, to not give the KKK and Aryan Nation the pleasure of an audience, even if it is a hostile audience. And the people stay away. But I keep wondering what would happen if instead of staying away all the progressive people in the city and all the self-proclaimed anti-racist people in the city turned out to protest the hatred of the KKK and Aryan Nation. I keep wondering what would happen if the KKK and the Aryan Nation were met not with 300 protesters but with 300,000
protesters, for instance. I keep wondering how that would affect their future plans, how a massive protest might make the KKK and Aryan Nation have second thoughts about visiting Columbus ever again?

And I keep wondering why all the people I expect to find at such occasions are never present. I keep wondering why prominent members of our queer and non-queer communities are always absent? I keep wondering where are representatives of Stonewall Union? Where are my colleagues from Ohio State University, many of whom espouse anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic sentiments and yet never show up for any rallies? Where is the President of the University? Where is the Mayor, the Governor? Where are the Senators? What stops them from showing up at a rally to protest racism, homophobia, anti-semitism? If the KKK and Aryan Nation have the right to advocate hatred and discrimination from the State Capitol then shouldn't the purveyors of civil rights all get together not to protest the rights of the KKK and Aryan Nation to hate and hatred but to rally against hate and hatred?

And I keep wondering what it means for prominent leaders to ask people to stay away, to say that such protests are a waste of time? When and where and under what circumstances have civil rights for oppressed peoples been achieved and sustained
by just ignoring the practices and policies of discrimination and bigotry? And I keep wondering why so many of "our" leaders are interested in saving institutions that have always oppressed us and are invested in trying to make these oppressive institutions work for us instead of attempting to get rid of these institutions altogether. What does wanting oppressive institutions to work for us reveal about us, our desires, our imaginations? Have our imaginations become so impaired that we want to be complicit with racist, sexist, homophobic, imperialistic institutions? When the institutions supposed to protect us seem to collude with racism, sexism, homophobia--consider the recent welfare bill, new immigration policies, abolition of affirmative actions policies in many places including the University of California--then how can we sit back and just allow events like the assembly of the KKK and Aryan Nation at the State Capitol?

And we are encouraged to sit back and let things happen, to not realize our own power and the extent of our power, to not take responsibility. I kept wondering during the recent park arrests when men were targeted by the local police for having consensual sex with each other in the parks, what would happen if instead of sitting back, all of us, in solidarity, took to the parks to find our pleasures? What would happen if all of us queers decided to flood the parks with sex? And I kept
wondering who are these self-appointed gay spokespeople proclaiming in the gay media that public sex shows our addiction to sex and is dangerous. What and where is the danger even if some of us or all of us are, in fact, addicted to sex? Indisputably, there are dangerous addictions that we should target and attempt to curtail like the addiction of the State to cut off welfare funding, the addiction of the State to military spending, the addiction of the State to deny all peoples basic human rights, the addiction of corporations to exploitation and profit making, but public sex?

And I keep wondering why more people aren't annoyed, enraged, and incensed. And I keep thinking that one of our major goals toward the end of the century should be to create a place for rage, to use our rage productively, to try and move beyond the frameworks of resistance that are allowed by the State. If we believe in pleasure on terms not offered by dominant paradigms and not condoned by the State then why are we so reluctant to resisting in ways that are not sanctioned by the State?

My thoughts these days turn to finding ways to make more people take part in active resistance and visible opposition to the infringement of human rights, to hate and hatred. I know participating in demonstrations and protests is only one way of signaling our stance, of acknowledging our
responsibility and moving toward accountability, but I wish more people recognized that it is a significant gesture that may disturb and disrupt the hegemony and can actually be fun and sexy too. I hope that when the KKK and Aryan Nation make their annual reappearance at the State Capitol next year I can report that they were greeted not in the hundreds but in the thousands.

Yours in struggle and pleasure,

Amel
San Francisco
June 1995

Ciao Riad:

Greetings from San Francisco. This is my first visit to the city and I am overwhelmed by its beauty. I must confess though that I had expected to find Asians and Latina/os integrated into the fabric of the city and am dismayed at how segregated the city really is. I am also dismayed at the plight of the homeless who are present in large numbers and even more distressed that many people and businesses (among them gay and lesbian businesses) are battling to evict them from claiming the streets. I am here for Pride Utsav, the first gathering of its kind in the US for South Asian gays and lesbians. Does that astound you? I was persuaded into thinking it would be interesting to connect with other South Asian gays and lesbians and there are more South Asian gays and lesbians assembled here in one place than I have ever seen before. There is a great deal of camaraderie but something in me resists the fellowship. I can't help wondering about what brings us all together and whether what brings us all together is only a connection to South Asia, and whether that connection is enough for us to bond. I also can't help wondering about the different ways in which we are all
connected to South Asia and how a gathering such as this one overlooks the specific histories of our connections with South Asia.

With these thoughts in my mind, I admit I was somewhat ambivalent about attending the workshop I went to this morning on the family. At the workshop, the facilitators start by asking all participants to conceptualize our ideal families. Most participants respond by saying if their families weren't homophobic and were more understanding, they would be their ideal families. Nobody mentions the sexism or classism or racism prevalent in many middle-class South Asian families in this country. Nobody mentions the Hindu fundamentalism that is prevalent in many South Asian families in this country who support and fund right-wing Hindu nationalist movements in India. When it is my turn, I point out these oversights and say it bothers me that no one is willing to scrutinize their families with critical eyes and wonder what that says about us. I also point out that it is interesting that most people are not resisting the model offered by conventional family structures and that it might be useful for us to attempt to get away from the paradigm of the family because families are inherently sites of abuse—they are the primary institutions that perpetuate the patriarchy, and often the site of unequal power relations and abuse. Like capitalism, the family is
discriminatory and oppressive by nature. This is damaging to both men and women, albeit in different ways. Families are also the principal sites in which sexual violence and coercion take place. Families are fucked up and fuck us up—we learn to replicate, consciously or unconsciously, the unequal power structures inherent in families no matter how loving and how supportive.

There is much hostility after I finish. I am accused of underestimating the significance of our families given the racist society in which we live and am told that as South Asians often our only support systems and recourse from a racist world are our families. I am told that most of our families love us unconditionally and that it is our duty to support our families. I am made to feel that my fucked up family is an aberration and am told that the love in South Asian families is stronger than anything we can find anywhere else. I am reluctant to point out the obvious. If our families loved us unconditionally then surely an entire workshop earlier in the day (one of the most popular I might add) would not have been devoted to the difficulties of coming out to our families as South Asian gays and lesbians, and to fearing the rejection of our families subsequently.
All this talk of unconditional love and family values shatters my nerves and alienates me. I leave quickly and find myself a quiet cafe in the Mission—sufficiently removed from both the conference and the white gaze of the Castro—and read for a few hours. I pick up the novel, Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child*, that you lent me. I open the book at random and the first words that leap out at me read, "The family, as it exists in our countries, with the all-powerful father and the women relegated to domesticity, with a portion of authority left them by the male, that family I reject, wrap up in the mist, and no longer recognize." I, too, want to wrap up such families in the San Francisco fog and mist, and reject them. In fact, most families are built on and contribute to the inequities that prevail in societies.

Jay, an Indian boy I meet tells me that he is under a lot of pressure to get married and that he has seen over a hundred girls that his parents have arranged for him to see. They are seeking a bride for him. I ask him if he plans to get married. He says he does not. I ask him why if he is gay and has no desire or inclination to marry he persists in agreeing to see the girls his family arranges for him to see. He says, to satisfy his family. Ultimately, they will get tired, he says. But what about the girls, I ask. Is it fair to them, I wonder. He agrees that it is not but says the system is not fair to
him either and he feels he owes at least this much to his family after all that they have done for him. And they have done a great deal for him. As the only male heir, Jay stands to take over the successful family business. As for his sisters, plans are already being made to marry them off after Jay chooses a bride. They will certainly not be given as many choices but Jay, as the first-born male must marry first before they can be married. This is the tradition in the family, and he feels obliged to uphold it.

Jay's situation bothers me. I can somewhat understand and empathize with the immense pressures he must feel as the first born male son. But I am more bothered by the situation of his sisters. Nuzhat points out that the condition of straight women (let alone lesbians) in South Asian families is often far worse than the condition of gay men. Many gay men like Jay have a huge investment in maintaining the status quo. Because we have so much to gain from our families, we are rarely willing to rock the boat. While we are quite certain about our own oppression in society, we are less willing to acknowledge and to see or question the oppression of our fellow sisters or of our mothers and grandmothers within our own family structures. Given the sharp gender inequalities in South Asian families in particular, women continue by and large to be "relegated to domesticity" while men, even gay men, are
allowed a much wider range of roles. Jay, for instance, has the freedom to fuck around while he decides to not marry the hundred girls he has seen. His sisters and the hundred girls he has seen are probably watched much closer than he is and not allowed the same freedoms as him.

Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* is playing at a theater three blocks from where I am staying. Since it has been several years since I have seen it, I decide to go see it again. The first time I saw it back in 1984, I was amazed and intensely moved by the immense odds against which the beautiful story of Omar and Johnnie was played out. Watching it again, I am still struck by their narrative, but now I am more struck by the situation of Tania and of her mother Bilquis. Theirs are the veiled narratives, the silent and silenced voices. The scenes that stay with me this time are the quick shot of Tania, alone and without any support, with a suitcase at the railway station (her gay cousin Omar whom she desperately needs at that point is too busy with his life—with making money and with getting back with Johnnie), and shots of Bilquis, exiled in her own home, hovering round doors. As women, they are denied even participation within their family beyond restricted prescribed roles.
In this city, surrounded by "my" people, I am feeling very alone. I have decided that my people are the people who share my politics and my style. I miss you, companero.

Love,

Anelú
April 1998
New York

Riad, love:

I am in New York, the city you love so much. I must confess I am less enamored of it than I used to be. Manifestations of extreme parochialism that emerge as snobbery and arrogance are everywhere. I am tired of all the smug people who seem unable to imagine the possibility of living outside of the narrow confines and networks of this city and leading interesting lives and doing interesting work. I am attending a conference on Queer Globalization/Local Homosexualities organized by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies. When Norma Alarcon remarked in her keynote address that she hadn't been in New York for nearly twenty years, the people in the audience (most of them from New York) gasped and tittered, incapable of believing than an intellectual of her standing had not even visited in so many years. A telling moment, eh?

I have mixed feelings about being at the conference for other reasons as well. When I saw a call for papers for a conference on Queer Globalization/Local Homosexualities at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, I was extremely excited and imagined that this would be a conference that would break boundaries
and offer the potential for new and radical ways of producing knowledge.

Ian, Anjali, and I put together a panel envisioned as a "intertextual bricolage." We envisaged that we would not only engage with the audience but also with each other in an attempt to challenge traditional conventions in the humanities and disturb and disrupt the way knowledge is conventionally produced and passed on at academic conferences. We visualized and submitted our presentation as a collaborative and cooperative venture and not as individual presentations. But the organizers not only saw it fit to break up our panel but also failed to inform us that they had done so--another story that I will not embark upon in this letter. They read our proposal through what Kenneth Burke would call their terministic screens, reflecting their ideological assumptions about collaboration and about the production of knowledge. I have been teaching Lisa Ede's and Andrea Lunsford's book Singular Texts/Plural Authors in my Rhetoric and Writing class this week. They point out that there is a long history in the Western philosophical tradition of defining the autonomous individual as the source or foundation of all knowledge. Even though this view has been contested rather vigorously in recent years as a result of poststructuralist thought, shifting conceptions of authorship and of the production of
knowledge rarely if ever inform our practices and presentations and/or lead to an interrogation of academic form.

This became clearly evident from looking over the program put together for this conference. Instead of breaking with old frameworks, it was quite clear that the goal of this conference was to reproduce conventional academic conferences and what goes with conventional academic conferences—the privileging of academic stars and stardom. I decided to raise some questions about the production of the conference at my panel. I asked, what does it mean for the organizers of a conference on Queer Globalization/Local Homosexualities to posit queer and postcolonial as binaries and to invite postcolonial theorists to dialogue with queer theorists? What does it mean for the organizers to invite as keynote speakers at a conference on "Queer Globalization/Local Homosexualities" academics who have done little or no work at all in queer studies? And what arrogance motivates academics who have done little or no work in queer studies to accept the invitation to speak as keynote speaker?

The people who have worked, often tirelessly, to raise queer issues in discussions of postcoloniality and bring postcolonial concerns to queer discussions often work on the
margins and little attempt seems to have been made to bring them into this discussion. What does it mean for the organizers of a conference on "Queer Globalization/Local Homosexualities" to send a letter to participants and potential participants saying "as you probably know, accommodations in New York City can be both difficult to find as well as afford" but make no effort to find university housing or community housing to include those--graduate students, part-timers, and others not afforded institutional support and privileges--whose participation in such conferences is vital but depends on reasonable and inexpensive housing?

I am fully aware that centers such as the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies are typically underfunded and understaffed, but what does it mean for the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies to not afford callers the courtesy of acknowledgment, the courtesy of getting a response to our phone and email messages? I specially wanted to make this point not only because this was my experience but also because it has been the experience of several people I know and several people I don't know, many of whom were not at the conference as a result.
Michelle Duncan's open e-mail letter of 6 April 1998 (have you seen it?) sent to the QStudy Listserv after repeated attempts to contact the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies is succinct and poignant, and her ordeal of dealing with the Center is typical of the experiences of numerous people. She testifies, "once upon a time, I submitted a proposal for this conference. After numerous attempts to reach someone (anyone!) who might be able to tell me if the proposal was ever received, I finally gave up on communicating with anyone at CUNY. It can be that 1) the proposal got lost somewhere —or— 2) the proposal was late, sent to the wrong place, uninteresting, or just plain *bad*, but I would appreciate some kind acknowledgment from your organizing committee about what happened. Because I both e-mailed and telephoned several different individuals regarding this matter, I find it quite curious not to have received a reply to this date. I cannot boast that I am either famous or brilliant, but I would nevertheless appreciate being afforded the common courtesy of having my e-mails/telephone calls returned. In fact, it might have occurred to someone that this conference is of keen academic and personal interest to those who took the time and effort to submit proposals, even if they are only invited to participate on the receiving end."
So I asked what arrogance is it that leads the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies to assume that those of us who are not famous, are not stars, are undeserving of acknowledgment? How does it make us—specially those of us who are queer and of color—feel about participating in an institution with which many of us have contested histories and relationships given the generally eurocentric and male focus of gay and lesbian centers nationwide?

I raised these questions and concerns in my talk as a way to read the production of this conference, to think through the terministic screens that produced this conference, and to initiate a discussion. There were two responses, both as you can no doubt imagine, typical. Immediately after my talk, one of the organizers who was present launched into a defensive and lengthy explanation of the goals of the conference without engaging with any of the issues or questions I had raised. The second response came after the panel had ended and I was gathering my belongings to leave. One of the white audience members came up to me and asked if I needed a place to stay given what I had said about accommodations. Okay, I admit the offer was indeed kind, but the issues and questions that I had raised as intellectual concerns had once again been personalized.
Needless to say, I was pleased to leave New York on this occasion. I hope your travels are providing you with more engaging encounters.

Write to me about what it is like to be back in Palestine.

Besos, Aniel
February 1999
Philadelphia

Ian, love:

I've had a long, tiring day, and have just finished doing the dishes in the bright orange gloves you sent me. They are fabulous. I am exhausted but can't stop thinking about a note a colleague left in my mailbox. He is teaching a course in queer theory and wants me to recommend "a non-American, queer ethnic text." He also wants to know "how do you say queer in South Asian?" His questions lead me to a crisis. I want to tell him that given the history of Western imperialism and the pattern of assimilating and containing other cultures within the US, resistance to commodifying cultures for US consumption is critical. How to avoid readings that exoticize sexually transgressive other(ed) bodies or decode them always as authentic or interpret them in familiar and formulaic terms that distort or have little relevance to actual histories and lives? My thoughts rotate round this question.

I have been rereading Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations*. I find his evocation of Rudolf Panwitz useful in attempting to avoid reading through the terministic screens of the dominant culture and dominating ideology of nation and/or imperialism.
that enable and motivate certain inscriptions. Pannwitz writes, "our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of language than for the spirit of foreign words." In other words, it becomes extremely significant in teaching across cultures to circumvent transposing the lenses and dominant discourses of globalization-cultural imperialism and those of the nation state onto inscriptions of other(ed) subjects and cultures.

The peculiarly US phenomenon of elucidating everything in simple terms for easy digestion leads to reductive and faulty formulations and totalizing conceptualizations. Trinh T. Minh-ha warns us to guard against such an approach and prompts us to avoid monolithic and classifiable representations of other(ed) cultures and subjects and to view them as complex and contradictory. She reminds us that "what we 'look for' is un/fortunately what we shall find. The anthropologist, as we already know, does not find things; s/he makes them. And makes them up. The structure is therefore not something given, entirely external to the person who structures, but a projection of that person's way of handling realities." I find that teachers and students in the US often fail to recognize the singular phenomena that give rise to specific identity
formulations in the US and should be aware that universalizing their limited understanding leads to colonizing other(ed) subjects. Unwilling to interrogate their own nationalistic indoctrination that leads them to believe in the cultural supremacy of the US, teachers and students in the US are often convinced that the US is the most progressive nation in the world and measure gay rights and progress in other cultures in the singularly US terms of post Stonewall gay liberation movements and identity formations. Increasingly, this leads to formulating gay identity and resistance in transnational terms and/or aesthetic and consumerist terms, and failing to recognize that sexuality as the primordial category of identity is a phenomenon particular to a certain time and place.

In addition, I find that not only do teachers and students in the US often assume that they have right of access to other cultures but they also assume that other cultures are readily available for their consumption and gratification, and that knowledge is confinable, stable, and transferable. I like Gayatri Spivak's insistence that it is important to ask, "what do you think is the inscription that allows you to think the world without any preparation? What sort of coding has produced this subject?" She suggests that "responsibility means proceeding from an awareness of the limits of one's
power." This is not meant to lead to paralysis or to discourage people from studying other cultures but rather to understand the necessary and inevitable limitations of cross-cultural forays and to understand that one of the difficulties of doing cross-cultural work may be the impossibility of illuminating everything to the satisfaction of US readers.

Furthermore, it seems to me that questioning how sexuality, along the lines of class, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and gender figure into constructions of national identity, and interrogating how the sexually transgressive body gets used in the name of the nation or across nations is significant. It is imperative to address how the sexually transgressive body is normalized in national and ethnic terms so the difference remains simply sexual and not something that is split along multiple lines.

Unsure of how to respond to my colleague's queries simply, I leave him a note saying that the question, "how do you say queer in South Asian?" should be interrogated not only because there is no such language but also because it carries with it shades of a "new orientalism." I tell him it attempts to bring the world "home" to the US, into the terms of a specific US centered debate, and should be resisted and reframed. In suggesting that he reformulate his question, I assure him that
I do not want him to think that I am arguing for purely indigenous theories and frameworks, for these carry with them a different set of equally problematic burdens, but for an awareness of how globalized spaces and transnational identities are generated by capitalism in complex and contradictory ways. I tell him it is important to recognize that (re)producing the categories gay, lesbian, queer without acknowledging and accounting for the (post)colonial histories of these categories does not challenge their hegemonic function and in fact produces a totalizing effect.

Afterwards, I wonder if perhaps my colleague knows all this and does not need to be reminded. Perhaps my reaction is overblown. Perhaps my anxieties about what my colleague will teach and how my colleague will teach are unnecessary. Perhaps my anxieties reveal more about myself than about my colleague but I worry, given the history of how non-US American texts and bodies are taught and read in the US academy.

What do you worry about these days, partner in protest and pleasure? I miss you.

Kisses,

Aned
June 1997
Columbus, OH

Ian, dearest:

As gay pride day approaches, there is a frenzy in the gay media. We are urged to be proud and to celebrate all things gay unequivocally. This unabashed delight in everything gay leads me to make a list of my gay pride—celebrating some, not others.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians with staunch middle class values, liberal, pluralistic condescension towards people of color, the sorts of gays and lesbians that heterosexuals feel comfortable with.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who want to be accepted by everyone.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who are worried about the discomfort their sexuality is causing heterosexuals.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who are anti-sex, anti-SM, anti-pleasure.
I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who believe in the monarchy of sex, who marginalize those who don't have sex or don't like sex.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who marginalize drag queens, transsexuals, and leather dykes.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who work to ban pornography and prostitution.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who tow the party line, who manifest group thought that is parochial, limited, and provincial.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who are moralistic, who believe in the superiority and the purity of their positions.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who want to get married.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who want domestic partnership rights for themselves but are uninterested and unwilling to fight for universal health care for all the peoples on this planet.
I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who celebrate the armed forces and the police.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who are uncritical of the armed forces and the police, the armed forces and the police that are responsible for the deaths of thousands of colored and poor bodies.

I do not celebrate gay and lesbian US Americans who are insular, who believe that America is the greatest country in the world, and that if you don't love it you should leave it.

I do not celebrate gay and lesbian US Americans who believe they have nothing to learn from peoples outside of the United States of America.

I do not celebrate gay and lesbian US Americans who are not interested in the world, who believe that the United States of America is the world.

I do not celebrate white gays and lesbians who believe in a homogenous and unified "gay community."
I do not celebrate white gays and lesbians who are not interested in people of color, in our lives, our work, unless it is completely non-threatening.

I do not celebrate white gays and lesbians who are afraid of people of color.

I do not celebrate white gays and lesbians who exoticise people of color unless the people of color wish to be exoticized.

I do not celebrate white gays and lesbians who are unable to eroticize people of color.

I do not celebrate white gays and lesbians who believe communities of color are more homophobic than white communities, who conveniently forget that the homophobic laws in this country were established by white people.

I do not celebrate white gays and lesbians who believe communities of color are less homophobic than white communities.

I do not celebrate white gays and lesbians who believe that sexuality is more important than race.
I do not celebrate gays and lesbians of color who believe that race is more important than sexuality.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who think racism is a thing of the past, who believe affirmative action is reverse discrimination.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who believe that this is a free and just and emancipated country.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who do not believe in the necessity and pleasure of resistance.

I do not celebrate gays and lesbians who are apolitical.

I do not celebrate Andrew Sullivan, John Stoltenberg, Keith Boykin, the Log Cabin Republican Club, Chastity Bono, the Human Rights Campaign, Bruce Bawer, Love, Valor, Compassion, Perry Watkins, Frank Buttino, Dusty Pruft.

Pat Parker, Alan Ginsberg, Jocelyn Elders, Melinda Paras, Cherrie Moraga, Isaac Julien, Annie Sprinkle, Homocult.

I celebrate queers who are kinky, weird, perverted, awkward, eccentric, unwanted, redundant, weak, out of place.

I celebrate queers who take risks, who are in your face.

I celebrate queers who are rebellious and believe in sinning and transgressing.

I celebrate queers who refuse to be ashamed, abashed, embarrassed, who refuse to feel guilty.

I celebrate queers who don't always want to be insiders, who recognize that there is strength in being on the margins.

I celebrate queers who will not be silent, who insist on letting out shrill, hysterical voices being heard.

I celebrate queers who reject the socially acceptable, tightly circumscribed roles assigned to us.

I celebrate queers who are angry, who refuse to apologize for our actions and our sexual choices.
I celebrate queers who celebrate sex and sexuality, queers who believe in sexual freedom for everyone.

I celebrate queers who don't try and legislate sexual tastes.

I celebrate queers who believe in public sex.

I celebrate queers who get off on porn.

I celebrate queers who realize the majority of queers are working class and/or of color and/or women.

I celebrate queers who want to put the institution of marriage out of business.

I celebrate queers who refuse to commit to monogamous arrangements, queers who are committed to promiscuity.

I celebrate queers who refuse to censor their fantasies, who realize that fantasy is a rich and necessary playground for our desires.

I celebrate queers who recognize that the government is waging a war on us and that instead of changing the government we have to change the system of governance.
I celebrate queers who recognize that those of us in these United States are living in the belly of imperialism.

I celebrate queers who make alliances with the poor, the dispossessed, the weak, welfare queens, and the needy.

I celebrate queers who may ourselves be poor, dispossessed, weak, welfare queens, and needy.

I celebrate queers who are committed to a socialist vision of the world.

I celebrate queers whose imagination is not constricted by practicality, patriarchal logic and reason.

I celebrate you for resisting and for finding pleasure in resisting.

Love,

Amel
August 1998
Philadelphia

Dear, dear Nuzhat:

In between grading stacks of papers (that never seem to diminish), I've been thinking about Pratibha Parmar's film Khush and your wonderful essay on it (thanks for sending it), and the ways in which movements from the US enable and facilitate certain identity formations. Khush was screened on campus predictably and yet again last night as part of the program for this year's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered week. Presumably it was part of an effort to make the program "diverse" and "multicultural." An easy fix. Boring. Not only am I tired of the film but it also makes me anxious about the reactionary ways in which the purity of ethnic identities are summoned and gathered in the interest and formation of sexually transgressive desires, and the reductive ways in which the ethnic identities summoned and gathered in the film are received in the US and get read as authentic and accurate representations.

Have you seen the recently published collection Q & A: Queers in Asian America? Jasbir has an essay in it on "transnational sexualities." I like the point she makes about how "Parmar
forgets that India for some, is a place of ethnic (as well as class and caste) belonging. This privileging of being out sets forth sexual identity as separate from other identities, or at least as primary and uninflected by other subject positions. This narrative posits a domestic perspective as a global perspective that becomes a globalizing tendency."

The question I, too, return to over and over is in the interests of recuperating "gay," "lesbian," and "South Asian" as transnational terms, what other identities are suppressed and made insignificant? The first gay male interviewed in India in the film says, "my experience is like any other gay in India" suggesting that the only signifier separating Indians is sexual object-choice. In another segment of the film, a woman interviewed in India talks about how she "came out" in the context of university life in the U.S. but it was only after she met other South Asian lesbians and gays that her two worlds came together. She rejoices in her return to the native land, saying "it's wonderful to be back. Wonderful to be among Indians. Though I wish India didn't have so many men." She feels at home in her nation and is easily able to overcome all differences--class, caste, religion, national identity--except for gender.
The terministic screens through which "home" get envisioned and articulated bother me. As you note, in the film, all the Indians in India encourage diasporic gays and lesbians to return "home" to India and their hidden gay heritage. They all speak of feeling at "home," of belonging in their nation. Like you, I am unnerved by the collisions between the ways in which the transnational South Asian gay and lesbian identity the film invokes and the ways in which the transnational heterosexist Hindu Right (re)represent India, and scared by their analogous attempts to reorganize representations of South Asia (in US universities among other venues) along India-centered, Hinducentric lines scare me.

I also agonize about the ways in which "South Asian" is used interchangeably with Indian. India is invoked by some interviewees as the home of the diaspora and all the differences and distinctions within South Asian culture begin to answer under the rubric of Indian culture. It is no consolation that the India represented, even in some of the research being done by some of the gay and lesbian interviewees in India, is irrefutably Hinducentric. Pratibha Parmar herself seems to be caught in the "we didn't get it from the west" argument. In "That Moment of Emergence," she writes, "there is an ancient history of homosexuality in India predating the Western history of homosexuality. This history
is only now being recovered by Indian lesbian and gay historians."

But whose histories I want to ask? And histories of whose desires? Under what rubrics? And through what terministic screens? Giti Thadani (who I understand is currently on a speaking tour of the US) sees paintings and carvings of same-sex couplings in sites all over India as evidence that Indian/Hindu sexuality was once free and liberal and tolerant before it became repressed, contaminated, and enslaved by colonial encounters. This idea is amazingly similar to the anti-Muslim diatribes of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Shiv Sena who denote all that is non-Hindu as non-Indian. Ashok Row Kavi (who I once had coffee with in Bombay), preeminent gay activist in India and one of the founders of Bombay Dost, a gay men's group in Bombay and the name of its publication, is a fervent believer in the idea of homosexuality as something available within classical Hindu scriptures and in the notion that only the rise of Hinduism in India could lead to the retrieval of an emancipated and liberating space for gays and lesbians.

One woman interviewed in the film who has recently returned from the West to live in Delhi talks about recent discoveries of lesbianism and homosexuality in "scriptures, in sculpture,
and in temple art"; she says "we need that history to define who we are." In her vision, Indianess gets defined as Hindu and the retrieval of Hindu history is necessary for the liberation of gays and lesbians in India. If India was ever Hindu (and that is a matter of contention), its long history of intrusions has ensured the presence of other religious and cultural practices for centuries. What then does it mean for gays and lesbians in India and in diaspora to insist on a history that is resolutely Hindu as "our" history, as Indian history, as South Asian history?

I picked up a copy of Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's recent book, *Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian Diaspora: Decolonizing the Gaze* a couple of days ago. Her reading of *Khush* is instructive for its partial reconstruction of history. Though the goal of her project is to decolonize the eurocentric gaze, her reading of the film neither questions the transnational invocations in the film nor critiques the dominant discourse of nation/Hinduism through which the film is framed but in fact reaffirms and reproduces it. She writes: "Before colonialism forced the (re)construction of heterosexuality from a European Christian perspective, sexual iconographic displays of same-sex unions and multiple sexual configurations were commonly revered as deities alongside representations of shakti, active feminine strength. As noted
in the film, British colonizing soldiers destroyed such images in temples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, much of this iconographic testimony is being uncovered by lesbian feminist historians. Homosexuality, pansexuality, and bisexuality are embedded in Indian culture in music and in a culturally rich tradition of the celebration of erotic energies that prevail in modern South Asian cultures."

That Khush insinuates and enables a reading along these lines—grand old benevolent once accepting Hindu Mother India unites us all, and the salvation of gays and lesbians in the South Asian subcontinent rests in decontaminating and restoring her—is especially troubling considering the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India, and among Indians in the US.

And where does that leave us, dear? You, born in Zanzibar, raised in Daar es Salaam and Karachi, educated in Toronto and the US. Me, born of mixed parentage, and raised to reproduce the pure vowels of the English language. Both always already unpure, contaminated, where shall we find home? Only in imaginings, I fear.

Send me postcards from your travels. Pyaar,  

мед
CHAPTER 8

EPILLOGUE / TWENTY QUESTIONS

Instructions:
You will be allowed no more than ten minutes to complete the following quiz. Circle the correct response to each question with an #2 pencil (points will be deducted if you do not use a #2 pencil). Each question has only one correct response and is worth 2.5 points for a possible overall total of 50 points.

1. Scholarly work should
   a. never be written in the first person
   b. be consistent with conventional forms and styles
   c. be focused
   d. be clear
   e. be defended with evidence
   f. take into consideration all the previous research on a subject
   g. be unemotional

2. Scholarly work should never be written in the first person because
a. it should be objective and unbiased
b. it should not be about authors' personal opinions
c. the Graduate Division guidelines say so

3. The first person "I" should never be used because
   a. scholarly work is not written in the first person
   b. the first person assumes a false familiarity with your readers
   c. it minimizes your credibility as a writer
   d. it could lead you to become too passionate about your writing

4. The first person "we" should never be used because
   a. you fall into the trap of homogenizing subjects
   b. you cannot presume to speak for others
   c. it assumes a universality that is usually white and male

5. The first person "we" may be used
   a. if you are in a seventies feminist consciousness raising group
   b. if you are a racist, white feminist
   c. when you are talking about the American people
d. as a way to say fuck-you to politically correct postcolonial theorists who assume you can never speak for others
e. to avoid the solipsism of always saying "I"
f. since we are not all individuals but constituted socially

6. The "he's" in this dissertation
   a. gender this work as obtrusively male
   b. resist gender stereotypes that associate only women with fragmented writing styles
   c. cannot be assumed to suggest a normative masculinity, given the effeminacy of the writer
d. are gay and therefore not oppressive
e. are gay and therefore complicit with patriarchy
   f. reflect the conventional use of language by referring to a generic "he"
g. are merely subjects/objects produced by language
   h. queer the writing of this scholarly text
   i. are radically unqueer in their falling back on traditional gender binaries
   j. all of the above
   k. none of the above
7. Pronoun shifts should be avoided because
   a. selves are stable and unified
   b. they make the text hard to follow
   c. this is supposed to be a scholarly work, not creative writing
   d. when you say "I" you should mean your real self and not lie

8. You should not use personal experiences and anecdotes because
   a. personal experiences and anecdotes are not scholarly
   b. your life has nothing to do with your scholarship
   c. scholarship should be about research, not your life or the lives of people you know
   d. readers are not interested in your personal experiences and anecdotes

9. Different genres should not be used in the same piece of writing because
   a. different forms interrupt thought and flow
   b. the use of different genres makes the work hard to categorize
   c. the different forms may not mix successfully
   d. there are no rules to follow
   e. how do we know which discipline you are in?
f. the use of different forms might spark pleasure with its strangeness

10. This dissertation uses juxtapositions because juxtapositions
   a. deny specificity
   b. flatten out differences
   c. generate jarring texts
   d. may ignite unusual insights
   e. may chart new trajectories

11. This dissertation
   a. assumes history is an open field
   b. assumes history is a closed book
   c. assumes history is something one should not mess with
   d. assumes history is something that one is involved with
   e. assumes history should serve the ruling classes
   f. assumes history is a narration that one can impact and shape
   g. is ahistorical because it’s presentist
   h. is ahistorical because it traverses boundaries of space and time
   i. is profoundly historical because of its specific references to local politics

166
j. doesn’t assume that ahistoricism is necessarily a bad thing
k. is sick of theory terrorism in the name of being “historical”
i. questions what it means to be “historical”

12. This dissertation resists standard academic conventions because the writer
   a. is frightened of being co-opted
   b. assumes a politically holier than thou attitude
   c. esteems the values ascribed to being on the margins
   d. believes resisting these conventions is a noble endeavor
   e. is an unreconstructed idealist
   f. is naive

13. The writer of this dissertation believes that the responsibility of the intellectual/writer/teacher is
   a. to produce model citizens who will serve the needs of the state
   b. to produce model citizens who will disrupt the status quo
   c. to socialize students to become queer
   d. to dutifully carry out the mandate of the academic institution

167
e. to radicalize students
f. to dutifully carry out the mandate of the radical teacher
f. to incite a revolution
g. to resist the current work ethic
h. to learn the pleasures of laziness
i. to reject cultural stereotypes

14. This dissertation uses ambiguity and contradiction to
   a. complicate simple issues
   b. make language hard to follow (a bad thing)
   c. make language hard to follow (a good thing)
   d. be fashionably obscure
   e. all of the above

15. This dissertation uses sources
   a. to attack, criticize, and censure other writers
   b. to fill up space
   c. as a form of parody
   d. to demonstrate the superior intellect and brilliance of its writer
   e. because the writer doesn't have anything as interesting to say
   f. as a way of collaborating with other writers
g. to critique assumptions about “plagiarism” based on Western notions of intellectual property

h. poorly

i. unthinkingly

16. A dissertation that has taken six years to write should be
   a. better than other dissertations
   b. written at the last minute
   c. passed to get the person out of graduate school

17. The goal of a dissertation defense is
   a. to make your committee certain that they were not wrong in letting you get this far
   b. to make your committee certain that they were wrong in letting you get this far

18. A dissertation in composition studies should
   a. endorse the notion that people’s positions can only be changed by rational persuasion
   b. contend that logical arguments influence and change people
   c. have an ethnographic component
   d. offer practical tips for teaching
e. offer suggestions for how students can be taught to write clearly and succinctly
f. not use jargon and be easy to understand
g. play with language

19. A dissertation should
   a. be at least 250 pages
   b. have an explicit introduction that prepares readers for all the points it makes
   c. have a controlling idea
   d. build a progressive and linear argument
   e. be an academic commodity
   f. be the work of a single author
   g. fulfill the university's demands of what constitutes an academic and scholarly text
   h. follow MLA guidelines

20. This dissertation
   a. disrupts capitalist production
   b. has already been co-opted
   c. is pretentious
   d. is vague
   e. makes absurd connections
   f. reveals the writer as a bitter person
g. reveals that the writer is angry for no justifiable reason and doesn't have a sense of humor
h. demonstrates that most people of color have chips on their shoulders
i. is ample proof that if you don’t like it in America you should go back to where you came from
j. is fun to read
k. brings me pleasure
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