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**Curation: A Multimodal Practice
for Socially-Engaged Action**

Multimodal Un/Composition's Queer Performativity: Curating Queer Zines and a Politics of Im/Possibility

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Abstract

I find myself out of words for an abstract. In lieu of what one might call a “traditional” abstract, I want to ask, “how might it feel to write at the end of a world?” I write “a world” and not “the world” because there was never one world. Worlds end every second. Worlds begin every second. I write this alongside sick and disabled people who are actively resisting state-sanctioned violence and ableist systems of oppression right now. Right now. Right now. Right now. The immediacy of this violence cannot be overestimated. These zines are incomplete. Amid widespread pressure to recuperate the pieces of ourselves that have been torn, I want us to consider spending time and creating spaces of healing out of the scraps and discursive remains. As opposed to a composition that intends to ever be whole or fully elaborated, these zines come undone at the seams. In the words of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, “I remember that we are not the first to remember these connections, why our people were murdered, and fight like hell to end this world that wants us dead.”

Curatorial Statement

Admittedly, this is the first project I have participated in under the name of “curation.” Therefore, I want to first thank Maria Novotny and Ames Hawkins, the co-editors/co-curators of this special issue, for their generous amount of support and guidance throughout this process. Their support has been pivotal and central to the curation process for the zines you will find in this part of our online curated exhibit.

The process of zine-curation that I attempted to embody was one of improvisation. For me, improvisation is central to the composition process; curation as composition embodies the shifting intensities of composing, revising, moving, altering, reading, pasting, cutting, moving again. Curation puts the body front and center in the materiality of the composing process – I’m reminded of the times I would crumble up a piece of paper to then

unfold it and reuse it: from the trash bin to the copy machine...from ephemera to the center and back again...

The first zine is a more personal reflection on the relationships between my body and the places I have inhabited or lived over the years. It asks, citing the work of [Anjali Arondekar](#), “how can we curate from a space of absence?” In this particular zine, I attempted to situate myself as a composer located within a confusing and shape-shifting network of [constellating](#) places, spaces, buildings, people, and relations. For example, the cover page of the zine consists of the Jackson County Courthouse, which, as you read the zine, you’ll find that this particular building is a site of trauma, confusion, and – inevitably – place-making.

The second zine is dedicated to foregrounding the archival, or curatorial, work I’ve performed elsewhere; namely, the zine is shaped by my editorial experience as a queer archivist working with artwork and poetry of [Jim Wheeler](#). It is a storying of my exposure to and work in a personal, familial archive of poems, artworks, and traumas. I hope that the messiness of the zine-curation embodies the messiness of queer archival method in general – messiness, unknowability, and non-linearity are central to any and all queer archival gestures. For instance, there will be times in the zine where readers may find themselves scratching their heads at the confusing quality of the walls of text or crooked image patterns. The focus on text is intentional: text-image-text-image-text-image – sometimes archival and curatorial work is a coming-up-against-walls.

The third zine is a remix of two previous essays I have written on [disability labor justice](#) and [accessibility and/as disability justice](#). I wanted to be intentional about the remix process in a way that (1) values the intensity of the words I wrote and (2) expressed an aesthetic form that attempts to emphasize the [uncollectible](#) excess of text, image, and – to some degree – [disability justice](#) work. Throughout each zine, readers will find that I made various hand-written notes alongside the copy-pasted text and images. This emphasizes the improvisational and incomplete method of curation that I believe embodies a fundamentally queer approach to rhetoric and composition, as well as a queer curatorial praxis that foregrounds the [uncollectible](#) excess of queer-crip life.

Zine 1 – Gesturing Toward Something Like Archival Loss

Cover page description: The title – “Gesturing Toward Something Like Archival Loss” – is written in handwriting at the top of the page. An image of the Jackson County (Arkansas) Courthouse is prominent in the background. An image of a house and an image of a car with “just married” decorations are laid over the courthouse image. “Cody Jackson (2019)” is written in the bottom-left corner of the page.

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“The archive still promises...What if the recuperative gesture returns us to a space of absence? How then does one restore absence? Put simply, can an empty archive also be full?” – Anjali Arondekar

This is a set of confusing stories, whose methodologies are inspired by a number of colleagues, friends, and scholars I hope to give credit to and do justice with as we go along. I’m not sure where my story starts, but here’s a shot:

I think about the flames. About the searing heat of the house fire that consumed my family’s archive of VHS tapes and so many photographs from my childhood – our childhoods. I wasn’t in the home at the time – in fact, to my knowledge, no one was home when it happened thankfully. But it did happen. In what feels like an unspeakable event, this momentary gap and space and time, opens up a space of loss that I will never quite be able to explain, hence why I am telling you these stories through image, text, and shitty hand-writing. That’s a zine is, right? Right?

What I *can* say about this fire, these flames, is that it, however subconsciously, led me to pursue a PhD, a degree through which I can and already do archival theory and practice. The fire wasn’t a stepping stone. Rather, it continues to be a space and time of utter loss and trauma that cannot be overcome. But, out of such a loss I hope to generate more capacious understandings of the rhetorical possibilities of loss. I draw inspiration from Alexandra Hildago’s multimedia essay “Family Archives and the Rhetoric of Loss.” While Hildago questions how “the family archive allows us to use material evidence...to discover stories that shaped us,” I

want to dwell in the unrecoverable gaps of loss that are still generative of rhetorical possibility. That are still generative of lives being lived¹.

“We are worldless without one another.” – Judith Butler

“What does it mean to be-at-home? [...] Can we understand ‘leaving home’ as the breaking apart of this coexistence, such that were one usually lives is no longer where one’s family lives...?” Sara Ahmed

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An image of an empty field where our house used to be is placed in the top left corner of the page with “We had a horse, too” written over the image.

Our bodies are the stuff of historicity...

This is the empty lot in rural Arkansas that used to belong to my mother. A home used to be here. An archive used to be here. But the stories are still here. I can feel them bubbling up from beneath the tension of the surface of the image that I pulled from Google Maps.

The fragile nature of the archives, this provisional stuff we like to call “truth,” haunts the hell out of us – whether we want to recognize this or not. The archives, even when they are “empty” do not wait for our recognition, but they do become tools for the politics of recognizing and mis-recognizing *others*, as Anjali Arondekar’s *For the Record* (2009) details.

“Historicity” is just a fancy way to say “historical authenticity.”

An image of my high school alma mater is pasted into the left side of the page.

This is an image of my high school in Tuckerman, Arkansas. I’m not sure if I miss it. I don’t know. I simply don’t know. I don’t miss most of the people, only a few.

¹ Lee, Jamie A. “Be/longing in the Archival Body: Eros and the ‘Endearing’ Value of Material Lives.” *Archival Science*, vol. 16, 2016, pp. 33-51.

In her 2012 Chair's Address at the *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, the largest conference in the academic field of composition studies, Malea Powell – alongside her relations – encourages us to consider the ways that stories *take place*. Dr. Powell's talk was an embodied archive of movement *and* stillness, moving in-between objects, spaces, places, and bodies. And, although I was merely a senior in high school at the time – and, therefore, oblivious to this kind of work – when I read Dr. Powell's address, I look back on a past-self that isn't squarely in the past. Much like Philip J. Deloria's essay "Thinking About Self in a Family Way," Dr. Powell's address invokes the physicality of the flesh, of bodies-in-alliance, doing the bodily work of performance and writing. Acting up together.

Dr. Powell continues to teach me about the staying power stories have, and how story influences the construction of place. The places we'll drive-by in this zine are an example of this staying power.

Written in hand-writing: Thank you, Malea Powell, for constantly teaching me something new.

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An image of the W.A. Billingsley Memorial Library in Newport, Arkansas is pasted at the top of the page. In handwriting, I have written "A piece of the courthouse. It lingers doesn't it?" and drawn a line to the top of the Jackson County Courthouse that sticks out on top of the image of the Library's building.

The W.A. Billingsley Memorial Library in Newport, Arkansas, serves as the Jackson County Library. Image source: City of Newport, Arkansas.

I've only went to the Jackson County Library a couple times, but this is what I remember of at least one of my visits.

The library and all libraries, like all physical and structural archival spaces, simultaneously *contain* and *distribute* knowledges. But, if one were to ask any librarian or library archivist, they would no-doubt tell you that there is also an immense amount of unraveling, of becoming un-composed through collecting and curating these materials. And oftentimes that labor, their labor, is concealed under an illusory experience of neatly shelved material

and meticulously catalogued databases. But, there are **bodies** doing this work, bodies actively curating the distribution of knowledge.

The point I'm making, or *trying to make*, is that the facades of physical structures of libraries and archives, including the Jackson County Library, conceal the permeability of knowledge circulation. The physicality of the building works to collect the uncollectible, to concretize the fluidity of words, and to contain "the epistemology of the letter."²

I'm not trying to criticize librarians or libraries for that matter, but radically the opposite: I'm suggesting that we, in the words of Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster, "withhold judgement for a time and resist coming to closure too soon in order to make time to invite creativity [and] wonder." I'm suggesting that, in our "exploration" of curatorial politics of queer im/possibility, to take momentary pauses, to linger, to consider the ways that the containment of knowledge works to define various "communities" and how its various forms actively work to constitute the *very stuff of community as such*.

Libraries are spaces and times of literacy (see Hogg 2002).

Our bodies are the stuff of literacies.

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The text on this page is formatted in a chaotic way. My words are mixed in with block quotes from various publications.

When I was a pre-teen, just in middle school at the time, I wandered into the library for the first time. I wasn't an avid reader then (and this is quite the understatement) but even then I had a fascination with and admiration for the work of archives and genealogy. Although I didn't have a word for it then, I was already, in one form or another, become a queer archivist. A becoming still in the making. A becoming still being curated at the level of the body...

² Powell, Malea. "Dreaming Charles Eastman: Cultural Memory, Autobiography, and Geography in Indigenous Rhetorical Histories" in *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2008, pp. 115-127.

One distinct memory I have of our library was stumbling upon a set of books that were marked with a phrase like “mature content” or something like that. Regardless of the wording, patrons under 18 were required to obtain written parental permission to check out these books, most of which contained LGBTQIA or queer content. As a closeted queer at the time, I would pick up these books, hold them, flip through the pages, glance around to make sure no one was watching, and quickly put them back onto the shelves. The library contained knowledge that I so desperately needed and desired but could not grasp. And, in that containment, defined the very limits of participation in the circulation of knowledge. Looking back on *that* self, I felt outside the sphere of queer possibility, even though “queer” was another word, in the way I embody it today, that I had yet to *come-to-know* as liberating. But, even though this particular memory has a staying power, and a negative one, it reminds me that local, rural libraries still contain the possibility of queer life: the operative word being *contain*. Say it again: *contain*.

I may never have checked out those queer texts from the Jackson County Library, but little did I know, they taught me more than I could have ever imagined: about the possibilities and impossibilities of queer literacies of place, movement, and knowledge...about how knowledge both sustains and controls us at the level of the body. Even in my current institution, Texas Christian Universities, finding evidence of queerness’s remains is difficult...but that’s for another *story*, another *time*, another *place*.

“Grrrl Zines in the Library” by Jenna Freedman:

“Through zine collections like the one I curate at Barnard College, young women’s voices find a home on library shelves. Libraries do not typically house works unmediated by publishers and editors or those by authors uncredentialed by educational degrees or professional accomplishments. Libraries also may not be strong on current criticism of their institutions, first-person narratives from young mothers of color, the naughty things red-and-black-clad protestors shout at political demonstrations, or recipes for an herbal abortion. While the peer review process and other checks on the validity of authorship are important, librarians and scholars also need to be mindful of the contributions made by non-traditional publishes and authors.”

Charlotte Hogg:

“The library in the western Nebraska town of Paxton (population approximately 500) is small, and my grandmother was president of the library board for many years. When I was younger, I learned about the history of the library from her research and writing published in the local county newspaper. In write-ups for both the library’s twenty-fifth and fiftieth anniversaries, she described how women ‘were found to be very handy with hammer and saw’ when starting the library.”

A screenshot of a zine catalogue entry on QZAP.org is pasted into the top left corner of the page:

“Zine: Our Library Crushes”

Date: 2012, Date accepted

Languages: English

Format: Mini Zine

Created by Becca Sorgert and Jane Sandberg

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Good ole Merriam-Webster defines the word “compose” in the following ways:

To produce...

To arrange in proper or orderly form...

To form the substance of...

To form by putting together...

To deal with...or reduce to a minimum their differences...

Yeah, fuck that...

As Robert McRuer reminds us in a 2003 article, we (composition studies scholars and classrooms) are *haunted* by disorder and de-composition, by the messiness of ourselves and the messiness of archives and the messiness of stories. This is a story, or a web of stories, about stumbling around in disorder, loss, pain, and trauma, in the spaces of absence that may well ground any and all archival movements. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves just yet. Yet. Writing for me, and undoubtedly for so many others, is less an attempt to compose the amorphous and shape-shifting relations we [carry] and *more* of an attempt to *become uncomposed in the process*. Becoming uncomposed *is* the process. Selves scattered like leaves on the

ground: selves that are uncollectible³ but, maybe – just maybe, recognizable as the bond that keeps us together (and apart) in the bodily work of performance and writing.

Currently, I'm living in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, one of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States – yes, traffic is shit. I'm not from here (or is it *there*?). I'm from a small county in Arkansas – Jackson County – with a population of about 22,000. The county is more-or-less a fabric or stitching-together of small and unincorporated towns: Newport, the county seat; Tuckerman, where I graduated high school; Swifton, where my dad still lives; Campbell Station, where my mom lives. So, in a way, the image of the vacant lot I've shared with you already is, *itself*, not an archive of absence. Rather, archives of absence, or loss, are the everyday mundane spaces that move between us and that very much define who we are and how we perceive our myriad selves. For me, these myriad selves are constellated⁴ through a network of places that might have been “home” at one point or another.

An image of the Jackson County Courthouse is pasted into the bottom-left corner of the page.

This is the Jackson County Courthouse in Newport. A place that, itself, contains multitudes. My last relationship with this place was in my job as an assistant in the County Clerk's office, but before then it was in the half-dozen custody battles that tore me and my sister between two worlds. This is a place that can wreck families, but that's not the full story. It's only one snapshot, one place, one splice in a configuration of loss and recovery.

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An image of an empty lot that used to contain the Newport Middle School is pasted onto the top portion of the page. A screenshot of my diagnostic report is pasted diagonally across the page. An image from Google Maps of the small gas station in Cord, Arkansas, is pasted at the bottom-right corner of the page.

³ Howes, Franny. “Composing the Uncollectible.” *Composition Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2015, pp. 15-17.

⁴ Lane, Liz and Don Unger. “Interview - Malea Powell on Story, Survivance & Constellating as Praxis.” *4C4Equality*, August 2017, http://constell8cr.com/4c4e/interview_malea_powell.

This empty lot, containing only what seems to be sand and gravel, used to contain the middle school where I attended in fourth and fifth grades. Emptiness. Emptiness. Just emptiness.

Thank you, Margaret Price and Melanie Yergeau. This is for all neuroqueers!

Below, I hand over a snippet from a recent diagnostic report I was given by a psychologist. A dose of irony above. Did they know I teach writing? Does my including this make me out to be an impaired teacher? My goodness, I hope so.

This is the gas station in Cord, Arkansas, where my friend Joey's mom used to work.

I wonder how Joey's doing?

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An image of the empty lot that used to contain Newport's Castleberry Elementary School is featured prominently on the page. An image of Susan Sontag, by Juan Fernando Bastos, is pasted in the bottom-right corner of the image.

This empty circular lot used to contain the elementary school I attended from Kindergarten to third grade, with some gaps in-between because we moved around a lot. More emptiness. It was Castleberry Elementary, and it was demolished due to frequent flooding. Probably for the best...

"Precisely by splicing out this moment, and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt." Susan Sontag in *On Photography*, p. 11

Tic. Toc. Tic. Toc.

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Content warning: trauma

Shards of glass. Ambulances. The line of cars backed up. Arkansas Highway 14.

It was on this stretch of road that my life exploded into bits and pieces. My mother and her boyfriend at the time were in an argument. With all the kids, myself and my siblings, in her car, my mother raced him down on the highway at speeds up to 90 and 100mph. She pulled the car over the shoulder, stepped out, stood in the middle of the road. Like a flash of lightning, her boyfriend's car struck her. Her body was flung into the air. It twirled at least six times before slamming onto the concrete. You can't tell this happened by looking at this image curated from Google Maps. But it happened, and my bodymind remembers quite clearly collapsing in the emergency room as I watched my mother lay in the ICU. My mother and I have recovered our relationship, and we're still working through the trauma. Oftentimes archival work isn't relegated to a solitary location or file; rather, it's the bodily work of remembering and forgetting. Of pulling the pieces of our selves back in from oblivion.

An image of myself and my classmates at pre-school is featured in the bottom-left corner of the page, while an image of me, my grandmother, and my sister is featured on the right-bottom corner of the page.

Photography can be a fiction.

That's little me. I bet that shirt was bothering me at the time. I can feel it.

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An image of my dad and mom at their wedding, with my grandpa Austin officiating, is featured at the top of the page. At the bottom of the page is the church building where my dad and his second wife, my legal mother, were married.

This is a very queer image and its complexity turns my stomach with the most potent forms of nostalgia for a past that never was. I am in this photo, in my mother's womb, under her hands cradling her stomach. My father is on the left. My great-grandfather, Austin, is performing the marital ceremony...the exchange of vows. One of my cousins is in the background on the couch. The wedding took place in my grandparents' living room. It's one of the only photographs I have of my biological parents together; their two marriages were chaotic, but those are not my stories to tell. The image is visceral for me to experience. It's the portrait of a nuclear family in-the-making that never was. This is one of the fragments that I do have of a

family archive that has since been scattered, burned, or never formed to begin with. It contains a presence that no longer feels possible. The impossibility of it all overwhelms me.

This is an image of the Cherokee Drive Church of Christ in Newport, where my father would marry his second wife for the first time. A couple years later, they'd divorce then be re-married again until 2017, when they divorced for a second time. My family's archive is full of divorces, custody hearings, traumas, and losses. But in curating the fragments left behind, in collecting images of the places where some of these stories *took place*, it has been my hope to write into being a self that is multiplied beyond the humanistic vision of the liberal subject. More on that soon. Maybe.

"Writing is the means by which I have always theorized my life." E. Patrick Johnson (2011)

[Page eleven]

Three images of former places where I've lived are collaged on the page. Two are now empty fields, and the other is an abandoned apartment complex. Over these images is a text box that contains the following text:

If what I've said so far is confusing, it's supposed to be...None of this is linear or clean. It's a mess. But, one point I'm trying to make about archival and curatorial work is that our methods must necessarily become *messy*. Making a mess of knowledge distribution is a collective process that reframes the power that flows beneath and structures "community."

To conjure up the words of Black queer scholar E. Patrick Johnson, these spaces, places, memories, and people, curated into a remixed zine with you, "help me write my way 'home.'"

We continuously come undone through invention.

The weight of invention is far too heavy for one to carry alone. Writing can only be possible through our embodied relations. Only then can we navigate the violence of language together.

All of these images contained, at one point in time, what could have been called "home." The first still contains a series of trailers where my maternal

grandparents and kinfolks live to this day. When I lived with my mother as a child, our double-wide trailer resided in the empty lot at the top-right of the image. The second image is where another one of our double-wide trailers use to be when my mother had temporary visitation rights of me and my sister, after the first couple custody hearings. It was not long after then that my mother would sign over her rights to us completely. On paper, and in the archives, she was no longer my mother. But, today, she and I are curating another archival record...together...The third image is of an apartment complex where, in one of the tiny units, we were living when I was born. In fact, my mother sent me an image of this building just the other day. Had it not been for that Snap message, I wouldn't have known this was the building. In fact, her Snap led to this zine.

Zine 2 – Loving Jim: Jim Wheeler and the Matter of Queer Archives

[Cover page]

The title – “Loving Jim: Jim Wheeler and the Matter of Queer Archives” – is written by hand in permanent marker. There are four images pasted on the page: first, an image of Jim from high school; second, the cover of the 2003 documentary titled *Jim in Bold*; third, an image by Ryan Conrad (2009) of protesters holding a sign that reads, “We’re queer. Don’t fuck with us. Rights now! ACT UP”; fourth, the logo for *Equality Forum*, a non-profit LGBTQIA organization that sponsored *Jim in Bold*’s documentary production.

At the bottom of the page reads a content warning.

Content warning: this zine contains themes of LGBTQIA self-harm.

[Page one]

There are no images on this page – only text.

I was working in the Dean B. Ellis Library at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas, as a junior English major at the time: scrolling, randomly navigating the internet, not considering my destination in the moment. My body crunched over the keyboard, as it is now elsewhere, amazed by what I find. My gut sinks as I begin to read what would turn out

to be one of the most transformative experiences of my scholarly, professional, and personal lives.

In the age of
the COMPUTER
where the
internet
connects us all.

- excerpt from "Jim in Bold" by Jim Wheeler

i am Jim i am
boy I am tall
i am fairheaded
i am a poet a
painter and if
i dare to call
myself an artist
I will

- excerpt from "Jim in Bold" by Jim Wheeler

It is a poem, now called "Jim in Bold," written by a white gay man named Jim Wheeler. I found the poem on the My City Paper website and have since archived it in the Wayback Machine as well. The poem's aesthetic structure is the profile of a face and the content of the poem echoes the mysterious aesthetic. Jim's work often expresses a struggle to move in-between the transformations of print and digital media. To quote the poem, "in the age of the COMPUTER when the internet CONNECTS us all from the futuristic fact that if your Modem isn't on then you better not expect a fax from your faceless friEnd who lives HALFWay across the industrialized CONTinent and doesn't even Closely resemble the description they gave..." The poem goes on and on, as if to force us, the reader(s), to exhaust ourselves in the long-winded twists and turns that have no punctuation marks. Jim types this poem on a typewriter, and I'm imagining his laboring of building it as I re-read it now.

[Page two]

Jim (Jimmy) Wheeler was born in 1978 in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. If one were to do a quick Google search, they'd probably find a number of news articles related to Jim's death: Jim died by suicide in November 1997 at the age of eighteen. That is not where this story begins, nor where it ends. Here, I'll curate a piece of Jim's archive, explain the importance of this work

in relation to queer archival theory and practice, and speculate about how queer archival work that takes place outside the confines of a structural archive forces us to continuously re-orient our archival methods and theories. Along the way, I'll point out the ways that contemporary mainstream culture continues to foreground hetero-normative representations that have potentially harmful impacts on queer lives and queer possibilities.

An image of "Jim in Bold" by Jim Wheeler is pasted into the bottom-left corner of the page.

Jim in Bold: Analog...Digital...Archive...

Jim Wheeler is a poet, artist, brother, and friend. Jim is my friend, and I know – in archival work – it's not necessarily recommended to get "too close" to our archival "subjects." But archival queers, I argue, must take the risk of getting too close...without confusing ourselves for our queer relations, without losing ourselves in the process. Hence why I am taking the risk of referring to Jim as "Jim." In two words: Jim is. It may sound a bit obvious, but connecting "Jim" and "is" I am doing at least two things. First, I am suggesting that Jim left – and is continuing to leave – an impact on me and those who encounter him through his work. Second, I am coming to understand Jim's archival agency as distributed through both time and space. Jim walked the earth, felt the grooves of its skin, and in more ways than one, his body still has an impact on mine – on ours.

[Page three]

The poster image for *Jim in Bold* (documentary, 2003) is pasted in the bottom-left of the page.

As José Esteban Muñoz writes, with regard to such an affective and bodily distribution of feeling, "Queer acts, like queer performances, and various performances of queerness, stand as evidence of queer lives, powers, and possibilities." Existing and becoming within a web of affectively and historically conditioned axes of identities, Jim's archive is both a way for us to come-to-know Jim and a way to understand the historical, cultural, and political contours in which the archive was formed. Viewing both the body and the archive as entangled sites of materialized knowledge formation has a variety of potential impacts on the ways we interact with, enter, and work

in/through archives. The relationship between the body and the archive is both an embodiment and enactment of dis-identificatory practice.

According to José Muñoz, “Disidentification...is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact a prominent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (1999, 11-12). While I must recognize that both Jim and I are white men, and Muñoz’s *Disidentifications* is primarily focused on queer-of-color critique, I also want to emphasize that Muñoz’s corpus of work teaches us some important lessons about archival method. About getting too close. About zooming in and out. About archival intimacy and labor.

Written in hand-writing: what might archival intimacy feel like?

“and there is always room for a voice from elsewhere, from beyond the space of death.” Halberstam (2014), p. 146

[Page four]

Jim’s poem titled “I saw horses last night” is pasted into the bottom-left of the page.

We see in Jim’s poem – titled “I saw horses last night” – a wide-array of thinking-feeling. But, to me, what scrapes the surfaces of my skin, to echo the work of Sara Ahmed, is the following line: “my Prozac protectors / dulling the knives / and my 9 lives / so I could / Concentrate / on just one / I see horses / every Night / RUNning through / the city / spiraling Me toward / whatever.”

You can see and feel the textual spirality that Jim [utilizes], as a writer whose body is most assuredly present throughout its becoming with and through text. The text entraps you in a swirl of emotion, affect, and Jim’s lived experience in the hetero-normative social structures of the world around him. We see here, through Jim, the intricate ways in which writing and the writer’s body, as well as the body-in-pain, are bound to one another, not only textually but materially. Archives are a material-textual-relational endeavor of bodies-in-alliance.

[Page five]

Screenshots of four academic articles are pasted, three on the right edge of the page and one of them on the top-left of the page. The articles pasted are as follows:

“Wildness, Loss, Death” by Jack Halberstam (*Social Text* 2014), “Be/longing in the Archival Body: Eros and the ‘Endearing’ Value of Material Lives” by Jamie A. Lee (*Archival Science* 2016), “Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse” by Marika Cifor (2016), and “Queering Archives: A Roundtable Discussion” compiled by Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici (*Radical History Review*, 2015).

Another example, “Hand Signals,” shows another aspect of Jim’s everyday bodily, felt experience with the world around him. “Hand signals” shows the way in which Jim placed a heavy emphasis on bodily communication. Perhaps Jim was imagining a world in which our bodies were no longer seen as merely utilities for production but what allows us to feel and reach out to the relations and environments around us. We will never know exact how Jim felt or what Jim meant, exactly, by this drawing. But, one point I’ve tried to make before about queer archival practice is that such a not-knowing is fundamental to our work. Unknowability is what binds us together in queer archival theory and practice.

[Page six]

Images of “Hand Signals” and a handwritten note from Jim Wheeler to his sister, Jennifer, are pasted at the bottom of the page.

For example, this image shows a gift from Jim to his sister, Jennifer, and brother-in-law Billy, and Jim’s newborn nephew. In this small, seemingly mundane act, we see a snapshot into the day-to-day motions and grooves in which Jim lived. The image was sent to me via email from Jennifer, without whom most of my curatorial work with Jim’s archive would not have been possible. Just as Marika Cifor argues in “Stains and Remains,” my experience curating Jim’s work is felt as an affective liveliness. Cifor writes, “Liveliness offers a productive non-linguistic approach to ways that materiality resists language” (2017 9). While I agree that liveliness is an aspect of the materiality of queer archives, I don’t necessarily feel that queer archival materiality resists language as much as it subverts it from within – much like Muñoz’s conceptualization of disidentificatory practice. We cannot transcend language, but we can work with language as that which materializes through and alongside the archival body (see Lee 2016).

[Page seven]

Two articles by Karma Chávez are pasted onto the page. The first is “Embodied Translation: Dominant Discourse and Communication with Migrant Bodies-as-Text” published in a 2009 issue of *The Howard Journal of Communications*. The second is “Counter-Public Enclaves and Understanding the Function of Rhetoric in Social Movement Coalition-Building” published in a 2011 issue of *Communication Quarterly*.

While I am not going to share the entire curated collection in this zine, I would encourage readers to visit jimbold.weebly.com to view the full collection.

I’d like to express my unending gratitude to the Wheeler family – Susan, Glen, Elizabeth, Steven, David, Jennifer, and Geoff. “Thank you” simply is not enough for sharing Jim and his archive with me and the world. This project has been, and continues to be, a labor of love.

Embodiment and the Materiality of Queer Archives: Nothing New Here

I want to begin this section by saying that the connection between materiality, embodiment, and queer archives is nothing new. Queer archivists, before the term “queer archivists” was even imagined, have always been engaged in archival work at the level of the body. That said, I want to explore the active work that materiality, embodiment, and queer archival practice can do, and already does, to contribute to a coalitional world-making project. Specifically, I’ll take a look at the 2003 documentary titled *Jim in Bold*, named after the poem included in this zine, parts of the creation of the documentary, and the feature film *I am Michael* (2017).

[Page eight]

Two poems by Jim, one unnamed and one titled “Looking out,” are pasted at the bottom of the page.

“Looking out” is a hand-written piece written by Jim. We can see the same spiral aesthetic that is present in nearly all of his poems. Here, we can witness his writing process at a glimpse, with him crossing out phrases and replacing them with new ones. One could almost say there is not a template Jim is following, but juxtaposing this poem with Jim’s archive of poems tells a different story. Unknowability was also a method of writing for Jim:

vulnerability as composing method, as a queer mode of style. “Looking out” is, I believe, a poem written about and toward queer futurity. Jim writes: “Looking out / I painted a picture on my windowsill / Looking out for all the world to see / Vibrant colors and golden artistry / A testament to a poor lover’s life / oh my strife was bottled in a bottle / Cast out to sea / On lonely waves / I did a rhythmic dance / From day to day / Soon I reached ashore at paradise / An angel’s wings / A gift to me / JW.”

[Page nine]

Jim in Bold (2003) is a documentary film produced by Glenn Holsten, Executive Director Malcolm Lazin, and Equality Forum. The film also featured members of an organization called *Young Gay America*, Michael Glatze, Benjie Nycum, Scott MacPhee, and Ted McGuire. Although it can, and should, be said that the film primarily reproduces a white-centric view of queerness and queer youth media, I want to fast-forward to 2017 and detail the ways that Jim Wheeler’s story has been overshadowed by Hollywood-style filmic production and celebrity portrayals of “queer” identity. Specifically, I want to explain how a main tenet of queer archival method is not only recovery but action-oriented critique that reveals the ways that heteronormative media misrepresent and narrativize potentially violent notions of “queer” identity. While I could analyze the documentary itself, this is not my main focus. Rather, my primary effort is to illustrate how queer documentary, as a method of queer activism, can be overshadowed by mainstream film enterprises and personalities.

In a 2011 *New York Times* essay titled “My Ex-Gay Friend,” Benoit Denizet-Lewis detailed the ways that “Many young gay men looked up to [Michael Glatze]” and how *Young Gay America*, co-founded by Glatze, influenced 90’s queer media circulation. In Denizet-Lewis’s words,

“he and Ben started a new gay magazine (*Young Gay America*, or *Y.G.A.*); they traveled the country for a documentary about gay teenagers; and Michael was fast becoming the leading voice for gay youth until the day, in July 2007, when he announced that he was no longer gay. [Michael] went on to renounce his work at *XY* and *Y.G.A.* ‘Homosexuality, delivered to young minds, is by its very nature pornographic,’ he claimed.” (2011)

A screenshot of Adela C. Licon’s “(B)orderlands’ Rhetorics and Representations,” published in a 2005 issue of the *NWSA Journal* is pasted at the bottom of the page.

[Page ten]

Two poems and a piece of artwork are pasted onto the page. The poems are “Forbidden love” and “I’m here and queer / So get used to it.” The image is a collaged art piece that features butterfly wings, ocean waves, and cut-and-pasted images of paper clippings.

[Page eleven]

In a *World Net Daily* article that is no longer available on the internet (lossy, indeed!), Michael Glatze writes at-length about his “conversion.” Here are just a handful of snippets from the article (the italicized text below illustrate what is written by the author (Cody) on the zine as a form of commentary on Glatze’s piece):

“Homosexuality came easy to me, because I was already weak.” *I’ve never met a weak bottom...*

“I produced, with the help of PBS-affiliates and Equality Forum, the first major documentary film to tackle gay teen suicide, “Jim in Bold,” which toured the world and received numerous ‘best in festival’ awards.” *The 1st? Hmm...*

“Young Gay America launched *YGA Magazine* in 2004, to pretend to provide a ‘virtuous counterpart’ to the other newsstand media aimed at gay youth. I say ‘pretend’ because the truth was, YGA was as damaging as anything else out there, just not overtly pornographic, so it was more ‘respected.’” *What’s wrong with porn?*

“It became clear to me, as I really thought about it – and really prayed about it – that homosexuality prevents us from finding our true self within. We cannot see the truth when we’re blinded by homosexuality.” *I don’t want to see the truth if it’s not queer.*

“Lust takes us out of our bodies...Normal is normal – and has been called normal for a reason...God gave us truth for a reason.” *Fuck normal!*

I include these quotes, not to keep foregrounding Glatze in this discourse, but to illustrate the ways that this “coming-back-in” or “transformation to religiosity” narrative does harm and has been replicated in mainstream media.

[Page twelve]

The page is formatted using a landscape, or horizontal, orientation. “Filmic erasure has and produces material effects, of course” is written at the top in the author’s handwriting. Two articles are screenshotted and pasted on the left-hand side of the page: “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism” by Lisa Duggan and “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity” by Susan Stryker.

Originally intended to be released in 2015, *I am Michael*, released in 2017, is based largely on Denizet-Lewis’s 2011 *NYT* essay and is a portrayal of Michael Glatze’s “conversion” to heterosexuality. Starring James Franco, Zachary Quinto, and Emma Roberts, the film placed a glowing spotlight on the after-effects of Glatze’s so-called “conversion.” A number of other writers and scholars have pointed this out as well.

Theresa Heath, in reference to *I am Michael* and other feature films, writes that these films “correspond...to a neoliberal desire for mass profit,” “are all by male directors,” and “focus on gay male subjectivities and centre the individual rather than the community” (2018 130). In “Queer Teenagers and the Mediation of Utopian Catastrophe,” Jeffrey A. Bennett recounts for us that “Michael Glatze, editor of *Young Gay Magazine*, assert[ed] ‘I don’t think the gay movement understands the extent to which the next generation just wants to be normal kids’” (2010 264). For a detailed exploration of how *XY Magazine* and *Young Gay America* were not able to maintain an active presence amidst immense technological transformation, Michael Hitchcock’s 2017 “True Art Sells Itself: *XY Magazine* and the Gay Press in Digital-Age America” might be a useful article to consult.

In an interview with *Variety Magazine*, *I am Michael* director, Justin Kelly, stated, “This isn’t just a story about an ‘ex-gay’...It’s actually a very relatable story about the power of belief and the desire to belong” (2014). In a 2017 *NPR* article, Andrew Lapin wrote that “Michael Glatze was a hero to the gay community. And then he was a villain.”

[Page thirteen]

Two pieces of art by Jim are pasted onto the page, along with the back of a painting titled “Andromeda’s Strain.” The following snippets are written in handwriting by the author in a chaotic fashion across the page:

[empty isn’t necessarily nothing]

Seeing Jim's handwriting produces unknowable and visceral reactions. So mundane, so ephemeral, and yet...HERE (arrow drawn to the back of "Andromeda's Strain").

Andromeda's Strain on acrylic (with an arrow pointing to the painting).

White space does something. Let's just linger in it a while.

[Page fourteen]

"Jim is a poet" is written in handwriting at the top of the page. Two of Jim's poems – "this is my only sin" and "you site idle" – are pasted onto the page. Holes from Jim's hole-puncher can still be seen on the page.

From Audre Lorde's Power:

The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.

[Page fifteen]

As others have noted, James Franco, who portrays Glatze in *I am Michael*, has essentially made a career out of representing gay men on the big screen. He's starred in films like *Milk*, *Howl*, *The Broken Tower*, and *I am Michael* to name some. He also directed *Interior. Leather Bar*, a "pseudo-documentary" that explores gay-cruising, BDSM culture, and homophobia. In Franco's words, "I like to think that I'm gay in my art and straight in my life. Although, I'm also gay in my life up to the point of intercourse, and then you could say I'm straight..." In other words, until sex is involved – until the very act that has historically framed queer possibility, though not fully – Franco is a self-described "gay" man.

Hand-written note: *Not to suggest that sex is everything, but...*

At least one fact remains clear: Franco has profited from his illusory representation of "queerness" on the screen and his portrayal of Michael Glatze in *I am Michael* – however unintentionally – dangerously overshadows the work that *Jim in Bold* (2003) did to honor the legacy of Jim Wheeler. Franco utilizes the white cis-het privilege of hyper-mobility to the

extent that he can seemingly float across media and story-lines as if he can accurately, or ethically, represent the complexities of queer life. He cannot. He should not.

Feature films and their erasure of queerness's historical and intersectional contours is not new, either. Only one example of such an erasure can be found in Roland Emmerich's *Stonewall* (2015), which not only erased and diminished the critical roles of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, two queer women of color who did activism work on the ground for years prior to the Stonewall Inn Riots, but also foregrounded a white narrative of rural flight to queer urban space. A petition was circulated at the time of the film's release read,

"Hollywood has a long history of whitewashing and crafting White Savior narratives, but this is one step too far...A historically accurate film about the Stonewall riots would center the stories of queer and gender-nonconforming people of color like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P Johnson. Not relegate them to background characters in the service of a white cis-male fictional protagonist."

[Page sixteen]

The page is a collage of snippets from community-based archives as well as a screenshot of Jasbir K. Puar's 2012 "Coda: The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints" published in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*.

The logo of the Arizona Queer archives is pasted in the top-right corner of the page.

The Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP) was first launched in November 2003 in an effort to preserve queer zines and make them available to other queers, researchers, historians, punks, and anyone else who has an interest in DIY publishing and underground communities (QZAP.org).

Queer Terrains – <https://one.usc.edu/queer-terrains>

Queer Terrains is an ongoing project that places and contextualizes materials from ONE Archives at the USC Libraries on an interactive map. Using the map you can get a glimpse of the breadth and depth of ONE Archives's collections and explore Los Angeles LGBTQ history. Bars, clubs,

shops, and all types of meeting places have been mapped from over 50 different publications and archival sources.

This initial map has over 1,000 different locations that span across Los Angeles history from 1900 to the present. We are actively working on preparing a dataset that researchers can use it to make their own maps, visualizations, and help to contextualize LGBTQ histories.

9/18/2019 – Queer Omaha Archives

The Queer Omaha Archives preserves Omaha's LGBTQIA+ history as part of the UNO Libraries' Archives & Special Collections. Historical materials documenting Omaha's diverse LGBTQIA+ communities are collected and made available to the public by archivists and librarians to more widely share Omaha's stories.

VERMONT QUEER ARCHIVES

Knowledge of the past and an understanding of the events and issues of the present are crucial to promoting community and understanding. The Vermont Queer Archives at Pride Center of Vermont aims to contribute to this knowledge by forming a collection encompassing the experiences of LGBTIQA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexed, Questioning individuals and their Allies) Vermonters, both past and present.

The Archives will collect, preserve and promote the history and cultural of sexually diverse communities, including documents, objects, and ephemera from individuals and organizations. The collections will be accessible to anyone who wishes to use them. The Archives will also actively use these collections to increase visibility, awareness, knowledge, and community-building throughout the state.

The Archives are always planning new exhibits. Check back soon for more information. If you wish to get involves with the Archives project, contact us at 802.860.7812 or email archives@pridecentervt.org.

Written in handwriting: take a feel around.

[Page seventeen]

Similar to the previous page, this page is a collage of both scholarly sources and information found on the websites of community-based queer archives. The scholarly sources collaged include the following: (1) Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism” by Alexandra Juhasz, (2) “Archivist as Activist” by Diana K. Wakimoto, Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge, and (3) K.J. Rawson’s contribution (“Archive”) to the keywords special issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*.

The purpose of the Digital Transgender Archive (DTA) is to increase the accessibility of transgender history by providing an online hub for digitized historical materials, born-digital materials, and information on archival holdings throughout the world. Based in Worcester, Massachusetts at the College of the Holy Cross, the DTA is an international collaboration among more than fifty colleges, universities, nonprofit organizations, public libraries, and private collections. By digitally localizing a wide range of trans-related materials, the DTA expands access to trans history for academics and independent researchers alike in order to foster education and dialogue concerning trans history.

The DTA uses the term ***transgender*** to refer to a broad and inclusive range of non-normative gender practices. We treat ***transgender*** as a practice rather than an identity category to bring together a *trans*-historical and *trans*-cultural collection of materials related to *trans*-ing together. We collect materials from anywhere in the world with a focus on materials created before the year 2000.

Lafayette Queer Archives Project

The Queer Archives Project at Lafayette College is a collaborative, interdisciplinary initiative designed to illuminate Lafayette’s Queer History, advance teaching, learning, and research in the area of Queer Studies, and promote positive institutional transformation.

[Page eighteen]

This page is a small tribute to José Esteban Muñoz. Snippets from various pieces, described below, are included in a collage format. “Thank you, José” and “Mourning as/is political action” are written by the author.

“Our *Chusma*, Ourselves: On the Ghosts of Queerness Past” by Juana María Rodríguez, March 10, 2014

“José was a ghost even before he ever left us. He refused ‘the burden of liveness’ demanded of a young genius, delivering instead a performance haunted by party boy, theorist, punk, hipster, mentor, nerd, sissy, and *chusma par excellence* (*Disidentifications*, 189). (*Chusma*: loud, bitchy, hysterical...)”

“The Beauty of José Esteban Muñoz by Frederick C. Moten, University of California, Riverside, March 10, 2014

“destroy them. Now that José is lost and found, improperly dispersed in us, it’s our job to bear that, to be borne by that, to keep being reborn in that. So let’s play.”

“Ephemera as evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts” by José Esteban Muñoz is pasted, in an excerpted format, in the bottom-left of the page. An image of Muñoz is pasted to the right of this excerpt. Above the image of Muñoz is a screenshot of Douglas Crimp’s “Mourning and Militancy” published in *October* in the Winter of 1989.

[Page nineteen]

At the top of the page reads (in handwriting), “On the Necessity of Queer Archival Work and Archival Queers.” At the bottom of the page is a screenshot from Charles E. Morris, III’s article titled “ACT UP 25: HIV/AIDS, Archival Queers, and Mnemonic World Making.” In between are passages written and pasted into the zine by the author:

The work of queer archival practice and theory is not merely to speak to academics within the confines of the university. It is to, at least in many ways, foreground queer lives and intervene in the mis- and under-representation of queer possibility. This is not to suggest that visibility is the ultimate goal, but it is to suggest that when a version of “queer” is circulated for representation, that queer archivists be foregrounded in our efforts to queer the record. Our goal isn’t to set the record straight but to question whether or not the stories that have been told and circulated are representative of the messy non-linearity that characterizes queer bonds and queer relations.

My work is deeply influenced by the labor of Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Susan Stryker, José Esteban Muñoz, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina Hanhardt, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez, E. Cram, Michel Foucault, J. Jack Halberstam, Malea Powell, Charles E. Morris, III, E. Patrick Johnson, Jamie A. Lee, Adela C. Licona, Marika Cifor, and so many other scholars, queer scholars, and activists. It has also been influenced by community-based projects such as the Arizona Queer Archives, County Queers, and the Digital Transgender Archive.

Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici call on us to view and experience the archive as a life-affirming embodiment:

“While the archives are stages for the appearance of life, this life is always reconstituted, and the efforts of reconstitution that give the archive distinguishable form are always dramatized by the fragility not only of the documented life but of both the materials themselves and the investigative site giving rise to their discovery.” (2015, 1)

I began working alongside Jim Wheeler’s poetry, artistry, and photographs in the Spring 2015 semester while I was at Arkansas State University. In many ways, Jim’s life and my life are intertwined: we are queer and we both come from rural, conservative spaces. Queer archivists resist the erasure of queer breath and life through, in-part, the work of communicating with the dead alongside the living.

Zine 3 – Disability Labor Justice: Re-Imagining a Discipline

[Cover page]

The title – “Disability Labor Justice: Re-Imagining a Discipline” is pasted in all-caps and outlined text. The following hashtags are written by the author on the cover page as well: #AntiAbleistComposition, #AcademicAbleism, and #WhyDisabledPeopleDropOut. The cover to Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* is pasted in the bottom-left corner. A visual graphic by Micah Bazant and Sins Invalid is pasted in the bottom-right corner. Micah Bazant is featured in the graphic with hands open and palms facing up in the air. The graphic reads, “All bodies are caught in the bindings of ability, race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship. We are powerful not despite the complexities of our identities, but because of them. Only universal, collective access can lead to universal, collective liberation. This is disability justice.”

[Page one]

An image of the Lyon Building at Lyon College in Batesville, Arkansas, is featured in the middle of the page. The logos for TRIO: Upward Bound and the APPLE Project at Lyon College are pasted on both sides of the image.

As a high schooler in rural Arkansas, and as a first-generation college student from a low-income family, I was fortunate to be admitted to the Upward Bound program at Lyon College in Batesville, Arkansas, called the APPLE Project.

I participated in the program for four and a half years. It opened an entirely new world for me: higher education. Each time I enter the pristine buildings on TCU's campus, I am reminded of my time at Lyon and in the APPLE Project, a federally-funded program meant to ensure entry into higher education for poor and/or first-generation college students across the country.

I remember the ways my body still inhabits – virtually and materially – the commonplaces of my youth: I smell the burning of the fields, I feel the long grass in the fields, I hear the rumbling of four-wheelers roaming the pasture, and I remember the cold water on the Spring River in Hardy. I remember the trailer parks I grew up in, and how so many literacies are embodied in the space of my dad's newly built workshop in his backyard.

But this little story must end without resolution, as all stories at some point must.

[Page two]

This zine is not an indictment of any individual, organization, or collective. Rather, it is a gesture to possibilities of world-making, of (re)creating the university and discipline *otherwise*. Before we do that, however, we must come-to-terms with at least a few things.

Or maybe it is an indictment? So bet it.

“Why Ugliness Is Vital in the Age of Social Media” by Alok, October 26, 2019:

Alok talks with writer and disability justice organizer Mia Mingus about beauty, body positivity, and ableism.

“What if we took more time to dream accountability? What it could be and the kind of magic it could grow? What we need in order to practice it more and better, both individually and collectively? What if accountability was so normalized, so run-of-the-mill, that it was second nature? We can start with our everyday relationships and those closest to us: our families, our friends, our partners, our coworkers, the earth.” Mia Mingus, “Dreaming Accountability,” May 5, 2019

Alok Vaid-Menon (AVM): I think we are all in a constant state of transformation. The ways that we are able to transform are totally linked to the conversations and people we have access to. Encountering the work of Sins Invalid has been foundational not just to my thinking about these questions, but my embodiment of them. As a gender non-conforming, transfeminine person, I am often told that I am ugly. Sins Invalid has created the space in me and in the world to challenge that, to find power in what they call despicable, and to rally in solidarity with all who are disenfranchised by normative beauty and ability.”

“Beauty Always Recognizes Itself”: A Roundtable on Sins Invalid with Patricia Berne, Jamal T. Lewis, Stacey Milbern, Malcolm Shanks, Alok Vaid, and Alice Wong. *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*, vol. 46, nos. 1-2, 2018, pp. 241-251.

Berne: And I would love to connect with other disabled women of color who are directors, artistic directors, and hear their stories and their process. I’d love to collaborate on making this work happen again. In terms of defiant memory, I think pulling our ancestors into our living work is a practice I’m still developing, and I think it’s key to our work as organizers, to see ourselves as part of a living legacy. We need to invite our ancestors and our animal friends and our plant friends to help us come to our collective sensibilities if we’re going to survive as a species. I think the idea of defiant memory ties very much into what it means to live. That’s why it’s come up time and again how we’re living as a species. Or how we’re going to *leave* as a species. We can go down oppressing each other, or we can go down holding each other. And my hope is that we’re able to find each other and find connections within communities, across communities, across nations and borders.

Access Intimacy: The Missing Link by Mia Mingus (May 5, 2011)

“Access intimacy is not just the action of access or ‘helping’ someone. We have all experienced access that has left us feeling like a burden, violated or just plain shitty. Many of us have experienced obligatory access where there is no intimacy, just a stoic counting down of the seconds until it is over. This is not access intimacy. There have been numerous relationships in my life where I have loved people very deeply, but never fully felt safe with them around my access. So many relationships where I know I could only ask for or share so much, without getting snapped at, chided, or being punished with reluctant passive aggressive access. So many times where I was too afraid, because of the lack of access intimacy, to speak up and voice what I needed or what I couldn’t do, resulting in being isolated or getting very badly physically hurt from pushing myself too hard, in some of the worst cases.”

[Page three]

Written horizontally in the right margin of the page: Hire disabled academics. Retain disabled academics. Pay disabled academics. PAY US.

In “The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain,” disability rhetorics scholar-teacher Margaret Price asks us to consider “the ways pain complicates disability desire, as well as the possibilities for...collective forms of care” (2015, 269). While I promise no fully-developed answers or solutions in this zine, I do hope this is a space of dialogue and transformative discussion toward “collective modes of care.”

Here are two elements of rhetoric-composition’s contemporary landscape that I, admittedly a junior scholar and PhD student, see as location or sites to curate “the possibilities” of “collective forms of care.” Our divergent approaches to these questions may work to transform our discipline and call attention to the ways that minoritized bodyminds are rendered unintelligible or outside the possibility of a future:

1. The widespread lack of guaranteed summer funding for rhetoric-composition graduate student-workers is not merely an effect produced by an increasingly neoliberalized higher education landscape. Rather, such a lack is structural to the very disciplinary foundation of rhetoric and composition.

2. Structural issues have, and always have had, local contexts, possibilities, and solutions. While various structural problems – such as low pay, dismal job security for contingent faculty, and lack of summer funding for graduate students – are, indeed, structural, too often the possibilities for transformative, justice-oriented work are obscured within discourses of “the structural.” We cannot continue to obscure our collective responsibilities at the programmatic, institutional, departmental, and organizational levels.

Cut-and-paste: “Moving Toward Disability Justice” by Octavian E. Robinson in *Disability Studies Quarterly*:

“The haphazard lumping of everything that even touches upon disability or anything related to disability (e.g. language and material culture) into the discipline of Disability Studies calls for the need for a distinct critical Disability Studies. Critical Disability Studies demands the centering of disabled people, while critiquing ones’ own positionality and privileges. The former writes about disability, the latter *engages* with disability and disabled people.”

Cut-and-paste: “Defiant Memory as Disability Justice: An Interview with Patty Berne of Sins Invalid” by Alison Kopit:

Berne: I’m a cofounder of Sins Invalid, along with Leroy Moore. My title is the executive and artistic director of Sins Invalid. I locate myself within a long history of resistance, both as a Haitian Japanese woman and as someone who’s participated in justice movements for over thirty years.

[Page four]

On the left margin of the page:

Written in handwriting: A wall of text, a wall of words spilled.

Cut-and-pasted: “Disability Justice and Beauty as a Liberatory Practice” by Mordecai Cohen Ettinger and “Reclaiming and Honoring: Sins Invalid’s Cultivation of Crip Beauty” by Shayda Kafai.

The entire page consists of cut-and-pastes from a roundtable discussion with Patricia Berne, Jamal T. Lewis, Stacey Milbern, Malcolm Shanks, Alok Vaid-Menon and Alice Wong.

PB: Do you know Don Cherry or Charles Lloyd, both musicians, or the poetry of Aurora Levins Morales? Exquisite artistic work brings me to connect with myself, and also to connect with something greater. That openness and joy is a spiritual experience, a site of love. I think that oppressive forces are not trying to cocreate this experience! I think people feel a deep love, a mirroring experience at a Sins Invalid performance. There's a synergy between the audience and the performers, the backstage crew and performers are casting a love-net out to the audience, envisioning and cocreating this liberated zone, loving the shit out of our crip lives and bodies and trying to hold everyone in that. That's what I can only imagine what liberation is like, so sign me up! It's worth this struggle.

Malcolm Shanks (MS): I came across Sins Invalid's work in 2012, about six years after they were founded. As a political educator, I realized that it is impossible to talk about race and gender without using a disability justice lens, which has since impacted me greatly. Though I come to this conversation from the vantage point of someone with able-bodied privilege, I also feel affirmed by Sins's paradigm. My later interaction with Sins Invalid's brilliance has been through the spiritual elements that Stacey mentioned: ancestors, reproduction, and legacy. While looking for ancestors who reflect me, I was only finding evidence of black, trans ancestors in court records and institutional clinical documents. I realized that colonialism has a logic that ranks people by our usefulness to capitalism. Those who are more easily exploited outside of wage labor are considered useless or monstrous, accusations that are consistently hurled at people with disabilities. Racism, transphobia, and ableism all believe that our bodies aren't shaped correctly or that we aren't using them correctly. This is all part of a body-reasoning that steals our agency to find beauty in our own experiences and in our own bodies; it even takes away a community's abilities to recognize that beauty.

Alice Wong: They see all these people are well-adjusted or people who love themselves. Loving yourself takes so much work and I think that's a real evolution. However, the work and process of coming to love yourself is invisibilized in our communities. We talk about beauty and we talk about self-love and us being unapologetic; those aren't buzzwords. Pride comes out of your identities and getting there takes a lot of work. I think that's what's misunderstood by a lot of people when they're outside looking within our own communities.

AVW: So often work around beauty gets dismissed as superficial, but I think activism at the level of aesthetics is incredibly important. Beauty is part of the way that these foundational systems reproduce themselves. We are taught to desire the very things that destroy us, and we are taught to fear the very things that have the potential to set us free. Finding beauty in that which we have been told is abject and disposable has profound implications. It's about challenging the core logics and hierarchies that underpin, well, everything.

JTL: Sins Invalid's call is linked directly to the everyday ways disabled, queer, and trans people use technology and creative collective power to display their own beauty, which serves as counternarratives to manipulated notions of beauty presented by mainstream media through magazine covers, billboards, television, and infomercials that seek to make people feel bad about themselves in order to buy in to products and enhancements for instant gratification.

Alice Wong (AW): I am the founder of the Disability Visibility Project, an online community that creates, shares, and amplifies disability media and culture. There is power in storytelling. Before I can even tell you a story, you need to really love and praise yourself. You need to say that "I do have a story, that I do matter." These are all intimately linked with the ideas of beauty and liberation and disability justice. It's a lot about giving us space and also reveling in who we are, being open, and sharing that with the world. That to me is part of the labor of creation. Each act of storytelling is not just an individual thing, but it's definitely a collective effort. It's really about bridging out to the world and sharing who we are and our stories with the world. All of these things add up to a larger purpose and I think I see that with Sins Invalid's work.

AVM: Liberalism has confined the demands we are allowed to make. We are granted superficial recognition, and rarely permitted our entirety. When we ambition beyond and have the audacity to assert our full personhood, we are punished for it. Desire is often one of the first aspects of ourselves we are made to give up. Sins Invalid has profoundly shifted the terms of engagement for both disability justice movements and queer and trans movements (and where they intersect). The goal is not just about inclusion, it's about desire.

AW: Yes, I think that when we talk about beauty and art, it's not this superficial thing, right? Creating art can be a struggle and a lot of work to get to that place. It is an unfortunate thing that people think artists...

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On May 20, 2019, a number of disabled disability activists were arrested for protesting cuts to funding for programs that actively benefit disabled people and sustain the lives of disabled bodyminds. Much like on March 12, 1990, during what is now called "The Capitol Crawl," during which disabled bodies descended upon the capital and ascended the steps of the Capitol building to fight for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), disabled people are continuously putting their bodies on the line for justice, budget increases, and the continuation of programs that enable the survival of disabled bodyminds.

Cut-and-paste tweet from Rabbi Ruti Regan (@RutiRegan): We are about to be arrested for demanding our freedom. #DIAToday #ADAPTandRESIST #DisabilityFreedom. Posted at 6:52am on May 20, 2019 on Twitter.

Cut-and-paste from Mordecai Cohen Ettinger: "Sins Invalid reminds us that reclaiming beauty as a liberatory practice and acknowledging liberatory practices as constituting a unique and transformative beauty (re)instills in oppressed people the capacity to know and experience beauty within ourselves and one another freely; that is, to live in beauty unfettered from the obstacles, noise, and false conceptions of beauty foisted upon us to perpetuate settler-colonial capitalism. Excavating from our internal worlds all the space that internalized oppression has occupied—not merely in our psyches, but in our viscera, our veins, our sinew, and our nervous systems—brings with it a new sense of realness, a renewed sense of power to know our bodies as our own. Our shared crip communities are spaces in which we can see our beauty reflected back to us and magnify a spectrum of human ability and potential, all completely and utterly invaluable. Where shame and isolation once were, the beauty of interconnection, interdependency, and mutual recognition takes shape. From this emergent beautiful liberatory space, the grounds of collective justice and its possibility emerge."

Sami Schalk, author of *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*, suggests that disability is a critical methodology for inhabiting the world. In her words, disability-as-

methodology is “a critical perspective, an approach to interpreting the world” (2017). To this, I would add that disability-as-methodology is also a way of creating alternative realities, of reimagining new worlds to inhabit together.

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Written in handwriting across the border of the page: If you are not actively working for the improvement of local contexts and local spaces, you are complicit. White space isn't so silent.

At the top of the page is a graphic that reads “Donate plasma for money” and features an arm with a hand holding a cotton ball against the skin.

In our current moment, one that is not unlike the historical trajectory of our discipline, contingent faculty, graduate student-workers, and marginalized bodyminds in rhetoric and composition are living in pain and despair. That is no secret, and to deny this fact is to defer the work we must engage in together. At this very moment (this portion was written in the Summer of 2019) graduate students are struggling to survive: seeking out blood-plasma donation banks, taking out predatory payday loans, and working additional full-time jobs on top of their summer responsibilities that are uncompensated: preparing Fall syllabi, working on examinations or examination reading lists, fulfilling foreign language requirements, etc. **Rhetoric-composition may well be working toward diversity and equity, but it has largely yet to reimagine structural ways to move beyond inclusion, *beyond the admission of Others into the normative frameworks of whiteness, able-bodied productivity, and inherited wealth.*** Rhetoric-composition is a choreography of bodies that simultaneously inhabit the discipline **and** resist the discipline's ongoing devaluing of our material conditions and material labor.

In “Bodyminds Like Ours: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Graduate School, Disability, and the Politics of Disclosure,” Angela M. Carter, R. Tina Catania, Sam Schmitt, and Amanda Swenson explore the ways that disability justice can, and should, inform higher education's responsibilities toward disabled bodies and equity.

Citing Margaret Price's essay that I began this piece with, and to which I'll return shortly, they write:

“The culture of academia presumes that the bodyminds (Price 2015) best suited for academia are those that demonstrate discipline, restraint, productivity, and autonomy. Too often, disabled, neurodivergent, and chronically ill bodies are framed as unproductive, impaired, dependent, disorderly, and, therefore, of little intellectual or productive value.” (95-96)

Not only are fast-paced temporal frameworks of funding, usually four to five years, structural limitations for disabled bodyminds in the academy, but the day-to-day spatial and temporal structures function in similar ways. In their words, academic “networks are typically built through traveling to conferences, but can be as simple as going out with your cohort or attending dinner events with visiting scholars. For disabled graduate students, it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to keep up with these ‘off the clock’ engagements” (97).

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Carter, Catania, Schmitt, and Swenson continue [by stating] a reality that many graduate programs are simply (or *seemingly*) not ready to admit:

“The expectation that graduate students should engage in multiple physically, spiritually, and psychically demanding academic activities such as teaching, research, professional developing, writing, networking, funding, and job searching is not [a] sustainable way of life for anyone. However, these expectations disproportionately impact students with disabilities...[Disabled] students should not be considered financial burdens on departments because they require more funding...Departments and programs cannot see disabled students as financial burdens if we value critical theory and destabilizing capitalism and other oppressive structures.” (110)

Disability-as-methodology may not be what saves us, but it could be one alternative – among many others – that enables us to cultivate and curate collectivized forms of care that will propel us into transformative dialogue.

Guaranteeing summer funding, extending time-to-degree or completion, reexamining demands in course work, and exploring alternatives to “off-the-clock” labor requirements that are often forms of “hidden curricula” are only some steps to ensuring a disability justice-informed rhetoric-composition graduate education.

Unless any and all conversations about accessibility are led and facilitated by disabled people who are also disability justice activists, then they are not about “accessibility” inasmuch as they are the same reiterations of ableism

that make disability justice a necessity in the first place. The work is already being done by disabled people and disabled activists, and unless our conversations, conference sessions, and events on “accessibility” foreground the embodied and lived realities of disabled people, we will continue to reinstate the ableist trajectories of both society at-large and rhetoric and composition. In the words of disabled disability activist Annie Segarra, “The future is accessible,” but this is a future that is materialized through the active, ongoing struggles of disabled bodies-in-alliance.

If your discussion about accessibility isn’t led by disabled disability activists, I want no part of it.

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In his 2004 article in *JAC*, disability studies teacher-scholar Robert McRuer accurately explains that rhetoric-composition continues to be haunted by disability:

“De-composition and disability always haunt the composition classroom intent on the production of order and efficiency.” (55)

More recently, disability and rhetoric-composition teacher-scholar Caitlin Ray, echoing McRuer and others in her response essay “Disability in Rhetoric and Composition Research,” urges us to keep in mind the ways that such “hauntings” have “material consequences” for disabled people in and out of our discipline. Ray writes:

“Unless we name and claim the ways that disability haunts our research...we will continue to elide these voices and experiences [of disabled people].” (2018)

Written upside down on the page: Indeed, the ways that disability continues to haunt our discipline and research does have material consequences. Some of these consequences are imbued in the very budgets that govern our discipline and programs at the local level. Many disabled people cannot work “just any” job outside the university, cannot apply for dozens of temporary jobs in the summer, and, importantly, oftentimes cannot find **accessible** workplaces outside of the university. The lack of summer funding is not just an economic justice issue; it is most certainly a disability justice issue. For many universities – though, not all – the issue is not as much a matter of having *enough* money, but reimagining budgetary

movements that prioritize the bodyminds that uphold the very foundation of the university.

Cut-and-pasted tweet by Helen Rottier (@helenrottier): Because schools that don't guarantee summer funding for graduate students force disabled students to spend more time and energy on summer job searches and accommodations processes so they can afford basic living, rent, and healthcare costs. #WhyDisabledPeopleDropout. Posted at 2:07pm on April 23, 2019 on Twitter.

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A graphic by Sins Invalid detailing the tenets of disability justice is pasted in the middle of the page. The graphic reads: "Intersectionality. Leadership of the most impacted. Anti-capitalism. Cross-movement organizing. Wholeness. Sustainability. Cross-disability solidarity. Interdependence. Collective access. Collective Liberation."

On the left margin of the page: "I felt I had exhausted my other options and, with a sight of 'I'll try anything at this point,' wrote my deafness into the essay...I had spent so long resisting the notion that I write about being deaf that I had not fully considered how my experiences of continuously navigating environments in which I am almost always the only deaf person enabled my theorizing of difference-in-interaction." Stephanie Kerschbaum (2014 66)

The overwhelming lack of summer funding in rhetoric-composition's commonplaces – approximately 83% of rhetoric-composition graduate programs do not guarantee summer funding for graduate student-workers – is not only a reminder that the discipline is haunted by disability-to-come. By recognizing the fact that an overwhelming number of graduate student-workers who are effectively laid-off in the summer term are, in fact, disabled, we can also safely say that rhetoric-composition is haunted by the disability already "in the room."

Cut-and-pasted tweet by Kairos Journal (@KairosRTP): One thing we are noticing is that many graduate students are relying on family/partners to help fund their graduate work, or have to work a full time summer job while still being expected to take exams or produce scholarship." Posted at 2:15pm on May 24, 2019 on Twitter.

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“To lack privilege is to live with constant bodily and spatial awareness. Because I’m rendered hyperaware of my body within my own entered-into-spatial environments, I think of others’ body-spaces and deliberately aim to create and hold space for Othered others. This intention requires a whole new orientations, a reorientation that foregrounds rather than ignores the everyday realities and physical needs of non-normative bodies.” Christina Cedillo (2018) in “What Does It Mean to Move?”

Writing in-dialogue with Lauren Berlant’s (re)conceptualization of “slow death,” Jasbir Puar contends, following McRuer (2004) that “we might not (only) be haunted by the disability to come but also disavow the debility already here” (2011 152). Puar’s essay theorizes sensation by navigating the space between debility and disability, and is an important text I do not have space or time to adequately engage with. Suffice it to say that rhetoric-composition – through overwhelming lack of disability-focused curriculum, lack of paid health leave and adequate, affordable health benefits – actively repeals the entry of disabled bodyminds into the discipline **and** “disavows” the debility or disability *already here*.

Written in handwriting: Maybe it’s time to see this policy statement fully implemented? The CCCC policy on disability is pasted at the bottom of the page. A full text can be found at <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/disabilitypolicy>.

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A flow chart of the etymology of the word “accessible” is cut-and-pasted onto the page. The full text can be found at <https://www.etymonline.com/word/accessible>.

Written in handwriting on the left margin of the page: How does it mean to move? How are you acting up for disability justice?

“[Disabled] not only explains my body, but it also describes the ramps you refuse to build. It calls out the wages you refuse to pay. It shows the world the inclusion you are slow to produce. I think your discomfort with the word disabled doesn’t merely describe me, but you too. Because every time I make you say it, it holds a mirror to your inaction, and you’re scared to look

yourself in the eye.” Imani Barbarin, “#WhyICallMyselfDisabled (July 11, 2019)

“The power of access intimacy is that it reorients our approach from one where disabled people are expected to squeeze into able bodied people’s worlds, and instead calls upon able bodied people to inhabit our world.” Mia Mingus – “Access Intimacy, Interdependence, and Disability Justice”

“Aristotle’s famous declaration that man is a rational animal gave rise to centuries of insistence that to be named mad was to lose one’s personhood...I believe in learning the terms, listening to others’ voices, and naming myself pragmatically according to what the context requires, I believe that this is language.” Margaret Price, “Defining Mental Disability,” p. 298; p. 305

The history of rhetoric is laden with the bodies of disabled people whose embodied experiences have always been cast out as arhetorical and, as a result, inhuman. And, to be quite honest, the ongoing currents in what some might call “posthuman rhetorics” are oftentimes written by people who’ve seemingly never struggled to inhabit the category of “human” in the first place. This must be a starting point in any conversation about accessibility.