



Queer/Cuir Pedagogies: Fictions of the Absurd, Writings of the Stagger

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This brief writing¹ is an attempt to humbly reflect on the possible futures of queer/cuir pedagogies from my political, poetic and pedagogical work as a prosex feminist masculine lesbian teacher with no institutional affiliation. I am more inclined toward queer/cuir wandering and to speculative workings of the unexpected and the unforeseen in experimental spaces of intense affective and bodily engagement, than to sticking to the formulae and protocols of educational organizations (flores, 2018a).

The emergence of queerness and a situated sexual dissidence located in the South, a geopolitical and epistemic (re)twisting that is inscribed as *cuir*, takes shape as a way of (un)doing. Its aim is to riddle with questions the field of pedagogy—prone to prescription, definition, stability, formulae, binarisms, models and affective habits produced by these variations—rather than presenting itself as a theory to be applied, or a corpus of renowned quotes to feed the phagocytizing machinery of academia, or as an avant-garde identity to be achieved, or as the imposition of a regulatory ideal of radical activism. Situating the material and theoretical coordinates

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of a line of thought is part of reinscribing the particularity of these spatial, temporal and bodily conditions for a way of thinking that is always carried out together with others, human and non-human.

Rather than a new form of knowledge, a queer/queer pedagogy implies the ability to ask questions about the paths to access knowledge and to build meaning. As Britzman (1995) suggests, it deals primarily with a radical practice of deconstructing normality, and then, instead of presenting (correct) knowledge as an answer or solution, knowledge is built as an endless question (Luhmann, 1998). Therefore, part of the decolonizing work ahead is to take on challenges that tense academic production and educational practice, that do not submit to the implementation of logics of identity pasteurization in order to be smoothly included or assimilated under the prophylactic view of stifling discourses of respect and tolerance.

There is a relatively recent and considerable theoretical corpus on queer/queer pedagogy in Spanish and Portuguese, as is evidenced in this book. Hence, if there is any future for this twisted and strange pedagogy that aims precisely to disarm the heart that pumps its fictional blood, those normalization processes that structure educational knowledge, it will be a matter of institutional, epistemological and bodily frictions. At the institutional level, it will take place by overcoming, tensioning and resisting their own process of normalization and assimilation under academic nomenclatures and their straining policies that moralize certain contents, admitting issues only under certain forms and conditions that leave the logic of their government unaltered. At the epistemological level, its future will arise from the haste and disagreements in the theoretical articulation of queer/queer pedagogies with the ways in which political and artistic activism produces knowledge, creating a materiality of practice that embodies these often-divergent modalities. At the bodily level, it will be achieved by considering antagonisms and discomforts so that the friction between educators' and students' bodies, their multiple identities and forms of sensibility is not buried under the growing cultural pressure of sexual panic and its resulting anti-sex rhetorical trilogy of prevention, risk and danger.

Perhaps because the very idea of future itself is questioned by queer temporalities,² imagining the potentialities of queer/queer pedagogies can be linked to a present time riddled with anachronisms and a range of ways of doing, of bodies, knowledge, affections and national legislations, which talk to and collapse against each other. Accordingly, if sexual deviations articulated queerness as a platform of political and community resistance, the temporal deviations produced by a queer/queer pedagogy in its own

modes of theoretical and erotic fiction will have to be considered as a practical variation, threatening a temporal politics whose normative fiction organizes a naturalized order of corporality in the educational setting.

If all gender technology is in turn a technology of time, temporal normalization has somatic effects, updating the binary matrix that runs across pedagogical thinking. Therefore, thinking a queer/cuir pedagogy means opening up an alteration of time in its ways of organizing bodies and affections and, therefore, producing infringements in educational temporalities, as well as being able to listen to the coexistence of overlapping and non-combined times produced by queerness, dislocated from the tropes of progress and evolution. It is in this context of temporal mismatch that fictions of the absurd and writings of the stagger can take place.

THE DARK SIDE OF QUEER/CUIR PEDAGOGY: AN ABSURD PERVERSION

In my opinion, this dislocated present, called the future of queer/cuir pedagogies, can be found, following an oracular intuition, in the act of sustaining its perverted excess by turning pedagogical action into a fiction of the absurd and a writing of the stagger. Here, body vulnerability, conceptual destabilization and authorial listening are affective organizers of a queer/cuir poetics. Sharing Deborah Britzman's (1995) concerns about the study of limits as a problem of thinkability, the point at which thinking stops, I think that both absurdness and staggering foster theoretical and pedagogical operations of cultural displacement and writing deviation, not to make an archive of oddities, but as an analytical procedure and affective methodology of conceptual and bodily dislocation to work on the limits of what is unthinkable; the intolerable, the unhearable or the (un)known.

Following the directions of Sedgwick (1994), who asserted that queerness must be distorted and diverted from previous uses, we might think the dark side of queerness (Sedgwick, 1993), always derogatory and negative, as a gesture that continues to connote perversion and illegitimacy, in order to design experimental educational adventures that bring tension into the complexities of skin, language, affections and state. In this sense, the complexities of queer lives, which include sex workers, BDSM (bondage, domination, submission, sadomasochism) practitioners, non-monogamous relationships, porn actresses and actors, among many other non-normative practices that involve the administration of sex, cannot

remain subsumed to the moral cleansing of queerness in the educational field, usually reduced to the visibility and recognition of LGTTBIQ+ identities and to the emotional grammars of conjugality that the homonormative *status quo* currently validates as appropriate or desirable.

If queer/cuir pedagogy is to represent a way of knowing, rather than a particular knowledge, I would like to recall Halberstam's words regarding the possibility of thinking that alternatives can emerge from "the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 2). As part of that negative realm, the absurd appears as something irrational, incoherent, crazy, non-sensical, illogical, deranged, inadmissible, all adjectives that have crossed our LGTTBIQ+, racialized, precarious and functionally diverse lives. But rather than focusing on episodes, narratives or situations that are absurd, this is about reviewing the conditions to make the heteronormalization of educational knowledge absurd, removing it from the expected track to see how it spills out into the wanderings of other senses, shaking the dualistic logics of school thinking guided by non-contradiction and egalitarian fantasies of harmonic and peaceful relationships, to be able to displace, at that point, their micro-dynamics of power. The potentiality of the absurd as a practice of thought, from the estrangement and piercing of common sense, needs to be placed at the heart of a queer pedagogy.

Questions as a mode of (un)knowing can interrupt the normality of discourse when addressing the limits of thought—where it stops, what it cannot bear to know, what it must cancel to think the way it does. When unusual questions are made and when words are used improperly, semiotic and political collisions take place that surprise, fascinate, distort and break the routine of thinking and force us to cross the thresholds of theoretical and erotic imagination, where education strokes conceptual permeability, deliberate vulnerability, unexpected combinations and improvisation processes.

The absurd that takes the form of a question³ appears as a possibility of destabilizing the axioms that imprison us in unequivocal, excluding and universal ways of thinking, such as positivity, productivity, the politics of assertiveness, progress, narratives of success, the rhetoric of hope and the imperialism of happiness, all of them comprising a heteronormative affective economy.

Questions that look not only into (im)possible identities, but also into the conditions that make the thought about other ways of living our bodies impossible. Questions on ignorance as a way of understanding and

practicing a certain heterosexualizing, racist and ableist form of knowledge. On the basis of that impertinent performance in-cited by Britzman, her “concern with whether pedagogical relations can allow more room to maneuver in thinking the unthought of education” (Britzman, 1995, p. 155), the provocative invitation is about unlearning the heterosexualized ways of thinking, looking, feeling and questioning, producing crackling frictions between the intimate and the public as a way of sexual (dis)organization, rather than teaching an inventory of fixed and stable identities. Consequently, a queer/quir pedagogy suspects and destroys the hopes spurred by liberal individualism, associated with the representational inclusion of LGTTBIQ+ identities in the curricula as an alleged subversion strategy against heteronormativity, since it does not disorganize the normative structures of power.

Both the absurd and the stagger can create gestures of inadequacy to power, methodologies of a pedagogy that does not *exist*, but that occurs in the micro-politics of each event, and that is neither universally nor definitively articulated. A poetics of (un)learning, with practices of (un)knowing that reject both the form and content of traditional canons, making room for versatile possibilities that lead to unlimited forms of speculation, to ways of thinking that are not related to rigor and order, to divergent aesthetics for spatial organization, to forms of political commitment different from those enshrined by the liberal imagination (Halberstam, 2011).

WRITING AS PEDAGOGICAL SENSITIVITY, STAGGERING AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL TASK

I would like to emphasize a central issue in this combination of frictions and fictions, of absurdness and stagger: how they relate to the language and modes of writing in a queer/quir pedagogy. Because, as Haraway (2004) reminds us, words operate as catalogues for possibilities of existence. Every word is always a turning point in life, so the question about language has to do with the (im)possible ways of living that shape the present.

How can we try a non-binary writing that asserts the critical texture of the educational experience, its narrative and performative density, without flattening and smoothing its unevenness, roughness and irregularities, that is able to contain the temperature of the conflict inherent to all knowledge,

the emotional arc, visceral questioning, radical exposure and initial desolation it usually causes? How can we attempt an educational thinking that is carried out in the praxis of writing itself, attentive to the power of naming and the exhaustion of the ways of enunciating? Which modalities of work allow us to estrange neoliberal pedagogical language, with its technicalities, lack of commitment and individualization? How do the writing proposals we make to our students attempt to de-instrumentalize scholarly uses of language that slaughter its poetic vocation by treating it with impunity as a communication tool? How can we look for the artifices of language in order to show the contradictions, difficulties, ambiguities, complexities and the fortuitousness of an educational scene, in the construction of gender and in the objection of difference? How can we displace the practice of writing as mere representation, explanation, illustration or reflection of feelings or thoughts, and tense it as a field of experimentation and an indication of disidentification? How do I get involved as an educator in writing, among words, among the multiple ways of doing with other bodies, in order to activate the production of disruptive imaginaries?

There is no tangible neutrality in a system of written production, because that narrative texture seeks to touch someone with the text, to connect, wrap, dissolve, isolate, establishing complicities with ways of doing, material stories, visual disputes, temporal disjunctions, contexts of production or affective economies. Our educational experiences are complex and vary in their affective tones and emotional dispositions, where failures, tensions, contradictions, misunderstandings, obscurities and inadequacies unfold and are often subjugated to a narrative that is too clean and transparent, under the regulatory ideal of positivity that feeds the reproduction of appeased images and scarred speeches of our work as educators. Following Irit Rogoff (2003), we could think of how “the dynamics of loss, resignation, displacement and being without” begin to matter in our pedagogical writings, like an epistemological stagger that requires another tactical sensitivity in its ways of producing knowledge.

Emphasizing the ways of writing means precisely to disturb the regimes of bodily inscription, a constant struggle with the authoritarianism of ways of knowing, their colonial emotional policy and their epistemic violence, which have forged our relationship with the literary. The bureaucratization of writing impoverishes the deployment of an educational sensitivity that is able to discuss and alter the order of the sensitive, and it censors the creativity and initiative of educators and students, and compromises communication into a formulaic prose that condemns inventiveness to death.

Consequently, writing is a political practice, as it disorganizes power by configuring the worlds of the (un)utterable, the (un)thinkable and the (un)affectable.

Staggering is a minimal exercise, both optical and haptic, aiming to disrupt the normative textual economy of school and academic institutions, reclaiming the inventive condition of a practice that combines a process of conceptualizing experience, pedagogical imagination and a practical sensitivity, by working on the limits of our intelligibility and our obediences. It is a task of subjective detachment and tearing of educational lexicons, in order to avoid being suffocated by the sensitive imperatives of the cult to heroic optimism, to affirmative thoughts and positive affects, which challenge all negativity through the textual and sexual purification and sanitation of the production of pedagogical thinking.

Thus, writing as a practice of thinking outlines an unruly policy and an aesthetic that disagrees with the neutralization of educational experiences under a standardized semiotic register and a conventional textual format that legalizes the uniformity of speech, as a kind of soporific modulation of language. It means trying to open writing to an undisciplined porosity, watching out in the unknown the possibility of the emergence of other voices, bodies, experiences, knowledges, which makes institutionalized inequality falter and, thus, undermines its power to name and silence, disturbing its readability. Writings of the stagger that intervene in the writing economies of education as a laboratory of thought and affectivity, redefining the organization and structure of the certainties we feel we possess as educators, prefiguring the conditions of what may be thought and what can happen.

The writings of the stagger aim for a way of (un)doing the hegemonies of knowledge that we have learned and that have formed us, an exercise of affective countermemory against the grain of cruel optimism⁴ (Berlant, 2011). Cruel optimism sustains positive thinking as an explanatory force of the social order, which insists on looking at the good side of things at all costs and, in turn, antagonizes positive images of popular representation and LGTTBIQ+ policies that only focus on political recognition and acceptance, silencing the oppressive reality for many of our wayward subjectivities.

If the ways of doing are politics of knowledge, and politics of knowledge involve ways of writing, exploring other languages from the implication of our own abject bodies, non-heteronormative identities and perverse desires involves a reflective and plastic experimentation to design

differential ways of producing knowledge, rather than the normative programming under the already known disciplinary logic that dismisses the more complex and discordant plots of educational intervention.

DISINTEGRATING THE EYES OF HATRED, UNDOING THE BOUNDARIES OF SKIN

If resistance or, on the contrary, submission to control is decided in the course of each attempt, we must activate our perception during those micro-political interactions that occur below the macropolitical game, where possibilities that make a fruitful combination of politics and poetics are reopened (or shut). Estranging pedagogical languages is part of the political and educational work yet to experience, as “an encouragement for the radical critique of pleasures and their epistemological elisions that seek to expand pedagogical language as an erotic activity and provide spaces to explore erotic freedom, our own fantasies and desires, the negotiation of power” (flores, 2018c).

I would like to suggest a dis-identitarian turn in a significant part of the work on queer pedagogy that often reveals and denounces the lack of queer spaces, the violence against queer subjects, the invisibility of LGTTBIQ+ identities and representations, as an irreducible and paradoxical tension that runs across an educational practice that involves inhabiting different scales of action. These oscillate between the recognition of identities turned uninhabitable, and a sexual grammar interfering with their demands for codification under strict parameters of legibility, rejecting any opacity and overflows. A queer/cuir pedagogy also needs to estrange its modes of saying, doing and feeling, an imaginative labor of suspending ourselves in other ways of thinking and living in which, perhaps, writing is interrogating, educating is thinking, reading is feeling and activating is creating. Because in order to break the consensus of fear and obedience, writing pacts need to be broken (flores, 2018a).

This goes beyond writing about what the school and/or educators fail to do, what is missing, what cannot be done—that will be done by the states and the market corporations that seek to privatize education. Neither is it about putting forward a proposal that claims to say what is or what should be; instead, it is about promoting a thought and creating an opportunity to write about what is being done, establishing an anti-epic, minuscule and ecstatic gesture, in a context such as educational spaces, where

there is strong coercive pressure. It is about making queer/quir pedagogy a bodily practice of writing, which locates those productive shadows, those hidden fissures, where things do happen (to us) and stimulate other practices and sensitivities as relational potentiality and an area of poetic-educational constitution open to collective composition.

For many of us who live under the eyes of hatred and the imminent annihilation in the hands of white, heteronormative, capitalist, ableist, ageist and colonial laws, the fictions of the absurd and the writings of the stagger conform an urgency for living. And they are, more fundamentally, questions open to the queer/quir dislocation of our educational practices that understand knowledge as a shivering together (flores, 2018b) by disintegrating the boundaries between the intimate and the public, between the pedagogical and the political, and between school and ways of life, making our skin a porous and fragile ground for radical imagination.

NOTES

1. Translation: Gabriela Rumacho.
2. Dahbar (2020a, 2020b), generously made available by the author.
3. A good practice may consist in connecting strange concepts that tend to be detached from each other, such as “moaning” and “education”, which I used for a presentation at a university. The text begins with a number of questions, such as: “How can we link moaning with pedagogy? What kind of relation is built between a term that seems to come from intimacy with another signifier that seems to belong to the public sphere? Does this act presuppose that pedagogy is empty of moaning? Or is it responsible for silencing and privatizing moans, or in any case, certain moans produced by certain bodies and identities that are socially undesirable? (...) What educational fantasies and sexual panics are generated by a term that gets sticky with body fluids, with ways of fucking, with sexual pleasure, with the adventure of the unknown? Isn’t there a pedagogy of moaning? Are there moans that do not matter? Are there racialized moans? Don’t we learn to moan through porn technologies, moral discipline, school catechisms, divine punishments and family mandates?” flores, val (2019) *Llenar la pedagogía de gemidos. Posibles preguntas para encarnar una práctica educativa queer*. Universidad de Quilmes (in press).
4. In her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant addresses the critical aspects of certain optimistic feelings associated with the idea of progress, taking into account the affective dimension of politics. In this regard, Cecilia Macón mentions: “Berlant extensively unfolds the notion that the preserva-

tion of the fantasy of progress, mainly that of upward social mobility, constitutes a particular affection: the cruel optimism, a kind of ideological procedure dedicated to keeping people attached to lives that, actually, do not make them happy” (2013, pp. 21–22).

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