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# "I Can't Relate": Refusing Identification Demands in Teaching and Learning

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Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.

> George W. Bush, 2001

Reading is the sole means by which we slip, involuntarily, often helplessly, into another's skin, another's voice, another's soul.

> Joyce Carol Oates

Identification, that's how it starts. And ends with being rounded up, experimented on and eliminated.

> Erik Lehnsherr in *X-Men: First Class*, qtd. by Nelson 81

A sampling of anonymous student mid-semester evaluations of a recent course I taught entitled

"Queer Critique" represent a particular strain of student dispositions toward the course:

- "I feel like I can't participate because I don't know anything about stuff like this."

- "This class definitely gives people a broader understanding of a different world, but I
  don't think I really belong in that world. I don't feel as if I fit in with the people here and
  it's kind of hard to make connections to the reading because I don't see it pertaining to me
  very much."

- "because I am heterosexual and don't have an interest in the same sex, and have never
  experienced that lifestyle I feel a little outnumbered."

However, my goal in this article is not to excoriate students for a lack of empathy or failure of

imagination in their apparent inability to sufficiently "relate" to diverse texts, experiences, and

human subjects, but rather to question the received wisdom of the relatability imperative that has

been passed down to us from colleagues, scholars in literature and composition pedagogy,

education theorists, psychologists, child development specialists, and others—students can

hardly be blamed for having internalized these imperatives so well.

These assumptions about identification and whose duty it is to facilitate it are of course

embedded in the larger context of neoliberal capitalist democracy and the cultural productions

that encapsulate and disseminate its lures, demands, and interdictions. The *Los Angeles Weekly*'s

unhappy review of the 2013 horror film *Haunt* succinctly traces the lay incarnation of this

relatability commonplace in popular culture: the critic complains, "The frustration here comes

from the filmmakers' inability to present characters with dimension, so that we might come to

identify with them and their fears" (Wigon 43-44).  Identification, it seems, is the prerequisite for

sympathy, engagement, and pleasure (even if that pleasure is tinctured by fear), and its achievement is an irreducible mark of aesthetic (and other) accomplishment. The academic tradition of this relatability imperative has particularly strong roots in humanities pedagogy, especially in the diverse histories of various tropes of reader identification in English studies. Blakey Vermeule, Wayne Booth, and others remind us that in the academic study of literature, there has long been an admonition against an overly immersive identification with the text that precludes the critical distance that is supposed to be the mark of a serious critic or scholar (Vermeule x, 16, 248; Booth 352-54).[1] But as Teresa de Lauretis points out, identification demands continue to be made of readers of fiction texts of all kinds (as evidenced by the unexceptionality of the *Haunt* review):

> The ability of language and images to refer to the phenomenal world is still operative in works of fiction, however compromised or even residual: of course we know that it's only a story, it's only a movie, but just the same . . . The unnegotiable demands of most readers, viewers, or listeners to identify and to *identify with*—to make sense of what's happening, to know who's who in the diegesis, to find some incitement to fantasy or some versions of oneself in the mirror of the text, be it only the ego's sense of mastery over the object-text—are the normative requirements with which fiction is expected to comply. (244)

Here de Lauretis captures the logical absurdity of readers' demands for points of identification in texts that are avowedly fictitious, but also hints at the psychological needs that such identifications are seen to meet, a hypothesis I shall return to at the end of this article.[2] In formal educational settings, these demands have been seamlessly assimilated by teachers, teacher

educators, and educational theorists. Injunctions to teachers to help students relate to or identify with topics, authors, and texts seem so axiomatic that their received wisdom usually goes unquestioned—they are so taken-for-granted that they are not seen as needing explanation or justification. For instance, in her 1990 book length study of six secondary school English teachers, *The Making of a Teacher: Teacher Knowledge and Teacher Education*, Pamela Grossman assumes throughout that good teaching invites students to "identify" with the material under discussion. In literature classes this inevitably translates into making material familiar for students and having students think of ways in which they are like the characters or ways in which the material relates to their own lives.[3] In 1993, compositionist Kurt Spellmeyer succinctly encapsulated the perceived value in this apparatus of identification in his optimistic assertion that

> reading and writing as we now practice them preserve a mode of interaction "outlawed" almost everywhere. In my view, the most fitting synonym for this outlawed mode would have to be "identification": reading and writing, if they do nothing more, preserve a far older way of knowing based on a unique form of exchange, a ritual exchange of worlds and roles by means of which I "become" you and you "become" me. (ix)

This is the unstated commonplace that many of us use to justify our teaching, reading, and writing: texts transport you to other worlds, where through empathetic identification you can be moved to stand in others' shoes and expand your capacity for human understanding and compassion. Composition teachers are especially urged to help students make "connections" to assigned and other texts of all kinds as part of the recent push in composition studies to attend to reading pedagogy.[4] If, following the new axiom, fluent reading is the gateway to effective

writing, then students must (with or without assistance) be able to find a way into the reading text if they are to engage with and respond to it successfully. Often students are encouraged to draw on experiences "similar" to those represented in the text as a pre-reading strategy designed to facilitate this access. Frederick Peter's 2005 article, "The Power of Student Stories: Connections that Enhance Learning," demonstrates the continuing resilience of the axiom articulated by Spellmeyer, albeit played out in more roundabout teleologies today. This piece, passed around institutes of teaching and learning (or whatever the local name for the comparable faculty professional development program might be) at universities across the US (including my own) exemplifies the ideology of identification that is propagated by theorists in education (fittingly, Peter references Lee Shulman, one of the most cited pedagogical content knowledge theorists in English language arts). Peter explains how he begins his course on African-American history by asking students to tell a story about a recent moment when race mattered in their lives. Begin with students' prior experiences, so the theory goes, and build on those experiences to make connections to new material in the course. Although identification here is somewhat oblique, its epistemological trace remains the raison d'être of the pedagogical practice. Even scholars like AnaLouise Keating and Faye Halpern, whose pedagogies are scrupulously attentive to critiques of identification, end up advocating some form of readerly identification for their students, Keating arguing for the importance of seeing connections between past and present, and between different cultural traditions in order to promote a "transformational multiculturalism" in the classroom (and beyond), and Halpern similarly insisting that "'Reading to identify' provides us with the affect and certainty that we need to carry through our political impulses" (568).

Keating's and Halpern's work explicitly gesture toward some of the politically progressive cathexis that identification is commonly seen to accomplish in terms of fostering compassion, empathy, and understanding across various differences and divides. But identification may also serve a useful function when its trajectory aims to multiply sameness rather than bridge difference: it can empower marginalized subjects when we see images and people who are in some way connected to or like ourselves represented in cultural texts. Chimamande Adichie's now famous TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," for instance, addresses the importance of books about Africans for African children. Adichie argues that African children are alienated from their own cultures and identities and senses of self when the only literary representations they have access to depict alien worlds and alien characters (with whom these children nevertheless might feel compelled to attempt to identify). Parallely, David Kirkland's work has focused on the need for young black men in the US to read texts that connect to their own literacy experiences in order for them to understand themselves and succeed academically (see Johnson, Kirkland). Eve Sedgwick (see *Tendencies* 4), Leslie Feinberg, and others, have also dramatized and argued for the crucial and even life-saving importance of queer representation for queer people of all ages—these representations can reassure queer readers that we aren't "alone," show us that we aren't an aberration, and give us a sense of a possible life. Identification also matters outside texts. Research in the US has shown how important teachers of color are to the success of students of color (e.g., Aparicio, Murray and Jenkins-Scott). Students of color might see these teachers as role models and figures of identification. The teachers, in turn, are likely able to better understand the needs of these students, given the still polarized racial landscape of the US in the 21st Century (which is not to say that all  students of

color will identify with teachers of color, or to deny the reality of "cross-identification").[5] The lived experience of identifications always already given and the material political consequences of identification and disidentification have been horrifically enacted amidst various crises around racism and police brutality in the current political moment in the US: in Ferguson, for instance, where a predominantly white police force and white city council were callously unresponsive to the needs of a predominantly black community, calls for a police force and elected politicians that better represented the community demographics have pointedly articulated the causal chain between representation and identification—it's no coincidence that many white police officers don't have many black citizens' interests at heart. In the academy, the denotative political web of these relatability injunctions translates identification for marginalized students as the antidote to elite educational institutions and gatekeeping pedagogical practices that invite into their inner circles only those already ensconced inside canonical inner circles.

Identification can play a role in the politics of access for all students—I have already discussed the ways in which teachers are enjoined to assign texts that students can relate to or to help students relate to seemingly obscure texts so that they may gain access to academic institutions, apparatuses, and discourses. And "good" students quickly figure out how to "identify" with almost any text that's thrown at them.

I don't deny, then, that identification can serve as a powerful heuristic for marginalized subjects, and I'm sympathetic to the scholars I have cited above who see identification procedurals as desirable because they allow for empathy and hospitability. As my opening excerpts from student evaluations suggest, I'm painfully aware of the possibilities of disavowal, paternalism, and exoticism in an insistence on alterity. After all, slavery, colonialism, and other

racist programs and practices (not to mention humanity's treatment of non-human animals[6]) were and continue to be imagined and justified in part precisely because of a vision of irreducible Otherness, a failure to see a shared humanity/animality—Darren Wilson's conjuring of Michael Brown as a "demon."[7]

However, even given—in fact, because of—these concessions, I want to ask: Can we only understand something or someone that/who is the same as us, or that we perceive to be the same as us (applicable equally to identification across difference and identification as empowerment)? Is it true that our egos by definition can only recognize others in relation to the self (a platitude of psychoanalytic theory, to which I shall return toward the end of this article)? Is it possible to recognize Otherness for what it is? Can we find interest or pleasure in something that we find alien or that we don't identify with? Why should one have to be able to "relate" to something in order to learn about or from it, in order to find it of interest and value? Isn't there also value in experiencing and recognizing something as completely alien? What options are available other than being "with us" or "with the terrorists"? And, to more pointedly intercept the pedagogical impetuses and effects of these questions of ontology and affiliation, what are the costs of making "relatability" a sine qua non of teaching, learning, and pleasure? Part of the problem is precisely that identification is seen as necessary and valuable. If the Other remains unfathomable, because of our emphasis on the value of relatability, students (those from dominant culture, and others, too), unsurprisingly, often reject what cannot be assimilated/incorporated/coopted/domesticated as unworthy, or at least as unworthy of their attention. And lack of identificatory possibilities (a fault that is always attributed to the object of study or to the creator of the representation under scrutiny, never to the subject attempting to

identify), then becomes the means by which one forecloses self-reflection (as my student Queer Critique evaluations demonstrate only too well)—failure at identification seldom leads the subject to question in any meaningful way why they don't or can't identify, what about their own subjectivity prevents identification or reacts against the potential for identification, or why the failure to identify leads to the demonization of the Other (or, at least, to the demonization of a particular representation of the Other).

While disavowal and expulsion certainly are pedagogically, ethically, and politically problematic, their embracive converse is no less troublesome. I'm sure that teachers reading this article are familiar with the converse strain of response to the one I invoked in my opening paragraph: students praising readings (including other students' papers), characters, or people to which or with whom they can "relate"; or students reading culturally alien texts with the purpose of "identifying" with them in some way. The pitfalls of the identificatory readings, impetuses, and conclusions that activate the opposite impetus of disavowal, especially when dominant subject are the ones doing the identifying, are many. These readings teach students that everything does (and should) revolve around them. They fly in the face of decades of work in poststructuralism, feminism, postcolonial studies, and queer studies by encouraging students to believe that all human beings are fundamentally "the same"—if you just look hard enough or write well enough, you'll find/create those universal values. Often what this means, of course, is that the metropolitan hegemonic subject becomes the universal subject. In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh Minh-ha witheringly describes the processes in conventional anthropology by which white male ethnographers construct their very partial experience as objective and universal, and by which their accounts are constructed as universal by others: "he claims to be

the spokesperson for the entire human race—never hesitating to speak about and for a vague

entity named *man* whose putative universality no longer fools anyone" (49).[8] Closer to home for

the pedagogical interests of *CEA Forum* readers, perhaps, recent political, institutional, and

scholarly critique of standardized tests like the SAT have focused on how supposedly neutral

measures of "intelligence" actually function as citizenship, race, and class gatekeepers in the

ways in which test questions and their "correct" answers may assume test-takers' knowledge of

and identification with experiences, knowledge bases, and dispositions that are class-,

nationality-, and race-specific (see, e.g., Jencks and Phillips). In these disciplinary and

disciplining apparatuses, the comfortable/comforting delusion of identification and sameness for

some, denies, ignores, misunderstands, or rewrites difference in order to facilitate identification.

The Other is domesticated in order to make sense or to reproduce the identifier's ideologies—

"the will to annihilate the Other through a false incorporation" (Trinh, *Woman* 66). I have

regularly watched my students develop fairly strenuous contortions of misreading in order to

make texts from other cultures conform to their assumptions about these cultures and to their

own values, and in order to render characters from these texts more palatable to themselves and

their putative communities of identity. For example, I have found my US students working on

Iranian director Samira Makhmalbaf's film *The Apple* repeatedly constructing the film as

demonstrating an official culture of sexism in Iran, despite the fact that the patriarchal

protagonist who imprisons his daughters in his home is depicted as a social outcast and that a

female Iranian government official forces him to free his daughters—these students'

preconceived (socially- and media-induced) assumptions about Iran override the details of the

film's plot. The students are eager to identify with the filmmaker and her feminist agenda, and

can only imagine doing so in opposition to the Iranian state. Here the impetus toward

identification obscures a careful reading of the text at hand in the service of allowing the

identifier to expand the reach of their own worldview.[9]

The domestication of the Other is not innocent, since its imperialist apparatus usually

evinces conscious or unconscious efforts at physical or psychical domination and control, or

justifications for such domination and control. In a pointed disagreement with Peter Singer's

justification of involuntary euthanasia of humans based on a judgment about other people's

capacity for pain or pleasure, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson points to the inescapable flaw of

projection: "Reasoning from my own suffering or pleasure to another's operates by extending

likeness, but it does not account for differences. It does not protect minority rights and cultural

differences in pluralistic societies" (81).[10] So while identification-based projection might be

presented (and even sincerely thought of) as benign, even generous, its evisceration of the

Other's otherness can, in fact, be genocidal.

Other kinds of mastery—over texts and readers—are also implicated in identification

imperatives. Nancy DeJoy has written specifically and critically of how writers are supposed to

submit to identification imperatives and promote identification in their readers, and how these

processes are embedded in composition pedagogy. Noting the role that identification is expected

to play in bridging the self/other divide (here self/other is writer/audience), DeJoy laments that

"identification has claimed an overarching hold on translations of rhetorical activity that position

mastery (over) as the end of writing" (171).[11]

What is to be done? Can we find interest or pleasure in or learn from something that we

find alien or that we don't identify with? Theories of identification and related topics suggest that

the answer to this question is not simple. I have already alluded to some of the work on this issue by cultural critics and scholars in English studies. But relevant scholarship also includes psychoanalytic theories of identification, film theorists and cultural studies scholars such as Michele Aaron, Anne Friedberg, and Diana Fuss (the latter two working in the psychoanalytic tradition), and work by rhetoricians such as Steven Mailloux and Diane Davis (the latter via psychoanalysis, Burke, Levinas, and Derrida), as well as the literary scholarship I've discussed by Blakey Vermeule, Wayne Booth, Michael Warner, AnaLouise Keating, and Faye Halpern, and work by compositionists and education theorists like Kurt Spellmeyer, Pam Grossman, LuMing Mao, and Frederick Peter. In addition, elaborations of structures of disidentification and cross-identification by queer theorists such as Eve Sedgwick, Teresa de Lauretis, Charles E. Morris III and K. J. Rawson, and José Esteban Muñoz have complicated commonplace ideas about what constitutes and characterizes identification. Some of the scholars listed above and others see identification as inevitable (e.g., Fuss, Friedberg), some as desirable, some as politically efficacious (for instance, Fuss cites Crimp and Harlow), some as imperialist (Chow, Summer, and Fanon are discussed by Fuss), and some as a mixed bag of risk and reward.

In *Identification Papers*, Fuss explains that for psychoanalysis, "identification is the detour through the other that defines the self" (2), an argument that Diane Davis also makes via Levinas. Fuss articulates a central problematic in psychoanalysis that resonates with the post-colonial critique of identification: "How can the other be brought into the domain of the knowable without annihilating the other *as other*—as precisely that which cannot be known?" (4, Fuss's emphasis). Davis points out that Burke, following Aristotle, argues that rhetoric's function is persuasive, and that identification is the condition of possibility of persuasion (19-

20), a rather paralyzing master narrative for rhetoricians critical of identification imperatives. However, a politically fecund potential in identification might be traced to and from its founding impetus as "incorporating the spectral remains of the dearly-departed love object" (Fuss 1, invoking Freud and Lacan), and its characteristic ambivalence (Fuss 2, 34; Davis, Chapter 1), a potent oscillation that is worked with relish by Sedgwick. First, the incorporation, however partial, of the now absent love object might be seen as a counter-movement to the abjection of the Other, a mechanism that enables an opening of the self, and even a protocol for the self-reflection that I have found lacking in reflex classroom movements to and away from identification. It (re)ignites love. Second, identification's formative production of the ambivalent self together with the ambivalent process of subject formation itself might also offer a reparative counter-narrative to the teleologies of loss usually associated with this ambivalence.

Sedgwick points out that identification always also involves disavowal (*Epistemology* 61). I identify with this because it's not that or because I don't identify with that. So identification is also a kind of disidentification, and vice versa (a thesis dramatized by José Muñoz). Identification is often not simple, unidirectional, or teleological. Sedgwick also writes about cross-identification, the many ways in which people make unexpected identifications, identify with those they are not "supposed to," or those who are their "opposites" (see, e.g., *Tendencies* 7). More recently, Sedgwick has explicated the unexpected ways in which shame both interrupts identification and makes identity (*Touching* 36). All of these necessary identificatory demurrals point toward the possibility of deploying identification orthogonally, and even harnessing identification against itself. If identification is inevitable, or, at least, if its habitus makes it obstinate to detection and expellation, and given the generative political

potential of its invocation across disparate identities, these vacillations around identification might be useful to elaborate for a strategically peripatetic progressive pedagogy. We cannot ethically simply refuse to engage with or respond to the Other at all, in order to avoid the pitfalls of such engagement. Davis sees Levinas as articulating an obligation to engagement: "What does Levinas end up showing, after all, if not that the ethical relation *is* the experience of an underivable rhetorical imperative, an obligation to respond to the other?" (Davis 65, Davis' emphasis). And Linda Alcoff glosses disengagement's delusion of purity in discussing the question of dominant voices (sometimes unintentionally) appropriating others' voices and experiences: "But a retreat from speaking for [others] will not result in an increase in receptive listening in all cases; it may result merely in a retreat into a narcissistic yuppie lifestyle in which a privileged person takes no responsibility whatsoever for her society" (17).[12] However, I am not ready to share Davis' view (implicit also, perhaps, in the arguments of Keating and Halpern discussed above) that responding to the Other is so important a function of human sociality and political connectivity that the responding is more important than the content of the response (73)—that any response is valuable, no matter its substance. I'm not yet ready to give in to identification, even an identification with elasticity. To the extent that disidentifications and cross-identifications mark the ego's resilience in projecting, gratifying, and expanding the self, even these torsed configurations of identification allow for the egocentrism that I'd like to try keeping at bay, at least in the strategic interim. So I want to insist on the necessity of imagining the possibility of  holding identification in suspension and thinking through ways—whether there are any or not—of imagining, reading, and writing with, about, and against texts and subjects differently. In a poignant mediation on Buddhism in the face of her fatal illness, Sedgwick

discusses her refusal to offer a vulgar answer to people who want to know if she believes in reincarnation: "At least at present, I can't see what sense it would make either to believe or disbelieve such an account [of rebirth]. The most and least I can say is that exposure to it, including less slapstick versions, has rearranged the landscape of consciousness that surrounds, for me, issues of dying. Specifically, the landscape has become a lot more spacious" (*Touching* 178). How might we generate (more) spaciousness—capaciousness—in the landscapes of teaching and learning?

Given both the possibilities of identification's inevitability (and taking into account the degrees to which we might wish to qualify and complicate "identification") and its deferral, I conclude with some questions, provocations, and possibilities that I hope can propel us into thinking critically and productively through the implications of and alternatives to identification-based models of pedagogy and learning, and also the implications of the alternatives:

- First, taking up the psychoanalytic claims on identification: Can we only understand something that is the same as us? Is identification with the other essential to the constitution of the self? If so, can the self be realized in relation to the other without the cannibalizing incorporation of the other? If not, and given that the self does not precede identification of/with the other, might this cannibalization operate in a way that constitutes the self as a hybrid cosmopolitan subject? If it does not effect such a subject formation (the ethnocentrism of most US Americans indicates that this seems to be the case), is this because the others who co-constitute the subject's formation are not sufficiently diverse (this would be an argument for early childhood multicultural and transnational immersion)? If the new multicultural subject did claim their apotheosis,

wouldn't they signal the death of difference?—each culturally specific subject is incorporated into a universal hybrid subject who is the same as every other subject, ironically erasing the very difference that this project insists on maintaining. Would this kind of exchange begin to remedy (or provide the means to remedying) the power imbalances between self and other? Given these power imbalances, do all parties benefit equally from the identificatory exchange that constitutes the self?[13]

- In his argument with Diane Davis about an episode of *Star Trek*, Steven Mailloux insists that "otherness is always ethnocentrically interpreted in an act of hermeneutic appropriation from within the interpreter's home culture" ("Enactment" 26; see also Mailloux's "Making Comparisons"). I would not want to imply that we should or can apprehend the Other objectively, without imposing our own values onto our readings and constructions—this would be to resurrect the very humanism that I am critiquing. So, second, moving along the axis of imperialism, and given that we cannot not read ethnocentrically, what would it mean to see difference as difference? If we recognize that difference is inevitably identified in relation to the self, how can we describe it without marginalizing the Other? And if we can learn and teach interest and pleasure rather than anxiety or mastery in difference, how would that pleasure avoid colonizing or marginalizing exoticizations and fetishizations or at least think through the possibilities of reciprocity in exoticization and fetishization?[14] The 2015 fracas over Rachel Dolezal's construction of herself as African-American suggests that one place to begin might be with the self—a self-scrutiny that preempts the fetishization of the other's otherness (a self-scrutiny that Dolezal seems to have studiously avoided). But, as Alcoff hints at

above, doesn't one then fall into the very ethnocentric abyss of self-absorption that a pedagogical engagement with the other is supposed to counter? Might a disidentification that works to simultaneously assert difference and constitute the self productively worry the problematic opposition of appropriation and indifference?

- Third, then, and especially pedagogically, and as pedagogy is always situated geographically and politically, what would it mean to read and write in(to) the space of (critical) difference? It could mean that students from dominant groups would ask questions of texts of all kinds, but especially texts from other cultures (both within and outside the classroom), would look for difference and focus on identifying what they find unfathomable or alien and why.[15] For students from marginalized groups (I realize these categories are not stable), it could offer the opportunity to question expected routes of identification and assumptions of homogeneity and solidarity. All students could be invited to follow Trinh's example of "speaking nearby" (rather than for or about) in her revolutionary documentary film about Senegalese women, *Reassemblage*, or Sedgwick's advocacy of "beside" as a nondualistic preposition that inspires "a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, learning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations" (*Touching* 8). These coextensive methodologies, like the chronicling of difficulty that Salvatori and Donahue advocate in their championing of the pleasures of difficulty, would self-reflexively adumbrate  processes of reading and meaning-making, but with attentiveness to the reciprocity of "alongsideness" that provides the reading context in the first place, rather than wallowing in an inward-focused solipsism.

Recursive gaps, reading (and writing) without closure. For all student readers and composers, refusals and reconfigurations of identification could also mean giving up conventional paradigms of (thesis-driven) textual or topic mastery,[16] and instead actively seeking to produce fissures in expression, understanding, subjectivity, and subject formation, recognizing radical incommensurability not as the place where learning begins but as its desired destination.[17]

## Notes

[1] See Michael Warner for further discussion of the history and construction of "critical reading" (and of the subject positions "critical reading" is supposed to constitute), as Warner terms the reading disposition and regimen ordained by college English Departments (with corollary injunctions against "identification" and other forms of "uncritical reading"). Warner also mentions Eve Sedgwick's interrogation of the now conventional academic suspicion of "uncritical reading" in her essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You" (Warner 16-18). However, Booth, Warner, and Sedgwick here are referencing a slightly different concept from the kind of "identification" I am discussing, indicating readers who supposedly "identify" with a text to the extent that they do not critically interrogate it sufficiently, rather than readers who "relate" to texts by seeing textual characters and events as similar to their own experiences and values.

[2] Because de Lauretis equates these literary protocols with normativity, she argues that they are inimical to queerness. Similarly, Sedgwick and Muñoz see disidentification as characteristic of queerness—more on disidentification at the end of this article.

[3] For instances in her discussion where Grossman cites—with approval, but without explanation of why she approves—such practices, see pp. 31, 48, 59, 68, 83, 85, 91 of her text.

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[4] For discussion of the renewed attention to reading in composition pedagogy, see Carillo; Barnard, *Upsetting* 49-53.

[5] See Achinstein and Ogawa 4-5 for a summary of this research in relation to K-12 education.

[6] See the last chapter ("P.S. on Humanism") of Davis' *Inessential Solidarity* for a discussion of the human/animal opposition via a critique of Levinas. See DeMello for a basic overview of the contemporary field of critical animal studies.

[7] See Mao for further discussion of negotiating between the equally problematic poles of commonality through ethnocentric imposition and radical disidentification.

[8] For further discussion of pretensions to objectivity and universality in various disciplines, see Barnard, *Upsetting* Chapters 5 and 7.

[9] For further discussion of problematics around US students reading non-Western texts, see Barnard, "Difficulties."

[10] See Alexander and Rhodes for further discussion of the ways in which difference gets domesticated, specifically in the composition classroom.

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[11] For further discussion of critiques of models of reading and writing as mastery, especially in literature and composition theory and pedagogy, see Barnard, *Upsetting* Chapter 6; Barnard, "Gloria Anzaldúa's Queer Mestisaje." Sally Miller Gearhart famously attacked persuasion itself as a patriarchal mode of violent agonism in "The Womanization of Rhetoric." (See also Susan Jarratt's response to Gearhart in "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict.")

[12] For further discussion of the problematics implicated in speaking for/about/with/alongside others, see Barnard, *Upsettin*g Chapter 5.

[13] For some relevant critiques of liberal multiculturalism that depoliticizes difference, see Burras, Dev, Gómez-Peña.

[14] I thank Aneil Rallin for urging me to complicate reductive conceptualizations of exoticization, and I don't mean to pathologize all fetishization, but rather to emphasize here particular fetishistic imbrications in colonialist epistemologies.

[15] Too often students and/or faculty choose the easy way out and seek routes of reading and writing that are accessible or comfortable over those that might be obtuse or enigmatic. For a bracing defense of difficulty and a program for encouraging students to work with difficult texts, see Salvatori and Donahue. See Sweeney and McBride for a recent discussion of working on difficult reading with students in the context of Salvatori and Donahue's work on "difficulty."

[16] See Banks for one recent critique of the conventional essay form.

[17] I thank Aneil Rallin and Jenifer Fennell for feedback on and conversation about the ideas and texts discussed in this essay.

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