

## So. You Want to Queer Your Pedagogy...

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When I say pedagogy what I mean is *how* we teach and learn. When radical educators talk about teaching and learning, we're probably annoyed that we don't have a word in the English language that doesn't flatten the circulating of knowledge into one-dimensional roles. And when the circulating of knowledge is liberated from the realm of textbooks, standardized tests, worksheets and other insipid schoolishness designed to keep young people from experiencing aliveness, I'm probably thinking: "oh thank the Lorde<sup>1</sup> someone queered that." People liberating themselves from anti-erotic learning: this is Queer Pedagogy.

Of course, all radical education is queer: we are queering the word "education," queering who is doing the teaching and who is doing the learning, queering "school" as we build ecoversities out of our homes and on the land, queering our bodies as we relate differently with ourselves and heal from the too small boxes they tried to fit us in, queering society as we build collective knowledges together outside of colonial institutions. A queer pedagogy names that flowing knowledges between our bodies is erotic. It names attraction as the organizing principle behind the desire to learn and to learn-with. We are drawn towards exchanging life through our bodies in learning exchanges with other bodies: human bodies, bodies of water, bodies as territories, territories as bodies, cellular and celestial bodies, body politics. The way we learn is queer on purpose.

Radical education is of course also anti-colonial. For many of us, it is a part of healing colonial trauma which requires of us nothing short of systemic and structural redistribution of resources and within that a complete reconceptualization of Earth and the living world from resource to relation. Leaders like Akilah Richards<sup>2</sup> illuminate that when we deschool, what's at stake is our liberation. Radical education creates the conditions in which everyone in our communities can be free and healing as we lay seeds of a new paradigm organized not by the necropolitical system that has already foreclosed our future but instead by ancient-futurisms that are calling us in our dreams to come get a taste.

In the spirit of braiding more strands of this unfolding love story between the free-flowing knowledges of queerness and decolonization, I have curated an inexhaustive assemblage of queer and anti-colonial pedagogical praxes that seem to want similar things. I call them desires because I think they live in the bellies of these two culture-spirits and because they are not stable or unanimous enough to be "qualities" (besides, queerness rejects the idea of a queer essence). Other queer people will disagree with me and what they know, too, is queer pedagogy. I don't claim to tell the Truth, I am humbly sharing what I am able to perceive from my corner of this collective body.

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<sup>1</sup> (Audre)

<sup>2</sup> See *Raising Free People*

That's not to delegitimize what follows. I've learned these queer pedagogical frames because I live queerly with other queer people, and we spend a lot of our time designing intimate place-times in which we can be expansive mystical erotic lightbeings outside of lackluster ahem I mean oppressive social norms. What we know about radical education is what we've taught ourselves about ecologies of care when we've needed them to survive. But even though we live here, we don't own this corner of fabulosity - so whether you're queer in the sheets or queer in the streets... even if you're hetero as they come and you only have one gay friend who just passive-aggressively sent you this article because they think you need it honey - *anyone and everyone can queer and decolonize how they teach and learn*. It is my hope that these desires can travel farther beyond the limitations of queerness as an identity and the queer bodies that bear it in order to reach towards decolonial learning in deeply joyful collaboration.

*A note: the questions accompanying the desires are designed for self- or collective participatory research. You can use them as journal prompts or for come-to-Jesus conversations, put one under your pillow and dream with it, mail them back to me, or burn them in a spell. You can use them if you don't resonate with the word 'queer.' Use them if queerness isn't a safe enough word to say out loud in your community. Queer the questions. You know, do you.*

## **Ten Desires of Queer & Decolonial Pedagogy**

1. **Center the Erotic.** Let us remember queers constitute an identity category so named by the 'deviant' ways we touch (or don't) other bodies with our bodies. Allow me to remind you that were we to be free to love, perhaps we would just be neighbors, children, lovers, humxns who could belong without everyone freaking out about our genitals and what we do with them. But nevertheless in the process of showing up for radical love, we find our erotic power. Erotic power is never power over - it is the agency to go to the limits of our aliveness. Knowing this power, queer pedagogy does not seek to make institutions of learning more accessible to us - we are more interested in making our learning inaccessible to those institutions in which Eros has no business being.

- ★ *What most nourishes the flourishing of my erotic power?*
- ★ *What am I learning that is too sacred, too erotic, too alive to be institutionalized, and how can I create home there?*
- ★ *Have you read Audre Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic* recently?*

2. **Resist Norms.** Because norms are for suckers. Just kidding, isn't it nice when you don't have to fight for ontologic space? Resisting norms, to me, is about naming the power hoarding that happens when some people's comfort comes at the expense of other people's rights to exist. When "comfort over" is normalized, queerness postures in solidarity with all who occupy the margins to unceasingly draw attention to the wisdom at the edges of normal. We know that a system without anyone or anything to queer it will stop evolving and standardize itself to death. Queering norms helps keep a healthy system flowing. You're welcome.

- ★ *How is my project reproducing norms that marginalize others? Does my comfort cost another person's place in this community?*
- ★ *Who might be making the space that they require to exist in this group and how can that be shared work?*
- ★ *What are the feedback loops in place that keep our system queering itself?*

**3. Restore Our Sense of Belonging.** The work it takes to inhabit a queer body is work that serves the reconnection to the land that modernity and colonialism have ripped away from so many of us. We feel the resonances of this privatization and territorialization of the land also on the landscapes of our bodies, betraying allegiance to our assigned gender citizenship and instead declaring belonging to the body itself. We question how 'ownership' of the living land transposes into a culture of normalized possessiveness in partnership, where we would be objects to each other before belonging to ourselves. Culturally, BIPOC queer and two-spirit folk on Turtle Island are leading the collective work of landback and reparations and many queers with settler ancestry are also doing their work towards shared visions of Black liberation and indigenous sovereignty. We are remembering and repairing connections to the cultures across the globe where indigenous and pre-colonial trans and non-binary people belong in community, often serving in roles as shamans and healers and people who can perceive the world from more than one perspective - people who can perceive the numinous.

- ★ *How am I defending and regenerating the territories of my body and the land?*
- ★ *Do I have a secure attachment to the Earth? What could help me develop one?*
- ★ *Which elements of our group's culture help us feel belonging to ourselves, each other and our lands?*

**4. Non-linear\*\*\* Kinship.** This world is not to be navigated alone. So when we're denied formal and sanctioned relationships through state and religion, we make our own. Despite the intentional and systematic erasure of the lineages of queer ancestry, we have extensive legacies of making queer kin across time and geography: Ball culture out of NYC and the Kinnar/Aravani community in India take in discarded queer kids off the streets and make matriarchal families. Radical faeries create sanctuary where queers of all ages can love freely in well-loved gardens and forests. When we can't or don't want to birth them, we name plants and pets and projects as our babies and love them as such. In all ways, queer family is for being intimately anti-capitalist. We find siblings amongst the more-than-human world, all of us existing outside of the confines of anthropocentric constructions of gender. We claim as our birthright all queer ancestors and transcestors as our kin, living out dreams unattainable in their lifetimes.

- ★ *Who can I extend kinship towards who needs love and shelter in my community?*
- ★ *How do queer kinships create anti-capitalist possibilities in the wider web of our community?*
- ★ *Who amongst the more-than-humxn-world do I feel kinship with? How can I be in more intimate & symbiotic relation with them?*

**5. Be “Sites of Permanent Becoming”<sup>3</sup>** This point is about the posture of the queer cultural body as unfixed, unstable, living and co-evolving alongside all that it shapes and is shaped by. Within Western school culture in which we are educated to be as passive as possible, making space for ourselves and other subalterns requires us to be cultural actors, designers and shapers - to be in a constant state of creative flow and co-evolution. The willingness to be ever-becoming audaciously seeks the cycle of life *and* death and evades the stagnation of those who are satisfied. \*\*\*Each generation makes more space for the next and it's humbling to live out the imaginings of our queer ancestors and to imagine on behalf of our queer descendents.

- ★ *What legacies of culture creators do we claim/claim us?*
- ★ *How are we co-evolving with/in our cultural and biological ecosystems?*
- ★ *Are our efforts to create stable and sustainable organizations and networks coupled with practices of undoing, composting, iterating, evolving?*

**6. Multi-Subjectivity as Creative Source.** Tía Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us that to embody multi-subjectivity is to actively refuse to be split. We are *nos/otras* - both us and others, queer *and*. Intersectionality, border crossing, and assemblage are all strategies of embracing multi-subjectivity and in places that aren't designed for us; queers exist where we make space for ourselves. We also exist in the cracks of the cultural norms and their built environments. There's a unique genius we've acquired through navigating the liminality between these simultaneous realities. And still, we are neo-colonial subjects sliced apart by the borders of empire longing for wholeness. We make use of this creative tension through remaking ourselves constantly from out of the cracks, re-membering ourselves as we put our pieces together in ever-changing ways.

- ★ *How do we make space for complexity and coherence?*
- ★ *When have I experienced the feeling of living outside of a world built for me\*\*\*cracks\*\* and what did I learn from that place?*
- ★ *Do I carry wisdom of how to design space for people in my community? Where can I move up or move back and let those who know best lead?*

**7. Ask “What Else is Possible?”** To queer anything you must believe that you can have more than they ever told you was possible. Like the zapatistas, we too imagine a world in which there can be many worlds, beyond what presently seems possible. The world is literally on fire and the queers are still dreaming a future in which we all have beauty, safety, and love. And amazing fashion, abundant plant medicine, cats, brunch, hours of ‘processing,’ etc.etc. I love how queers both take the “what else” question seriously as a foundational framework of our lives and also how it often shows up as “thank you, next” vibes. Asking what else is possible is

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<sup>3</sup> A partial definition from Annamarie Jagose, see *Queer Theory: An Introduction*

a way to move when the limits of gender definition are simultaneously threatening and utterly boring.

- ★ *What lies beyond what we were told was possible?*
- ★ *How can our co-learning create more access to wellbeing within us, between us, and amongst our wider eco-social webs?*
- ★ *How can we nurture the queer imagination that knows the terrible and still imagines the beautiful?*

8. **Evade Intelligibility.** We deploy the strategy of unknowability to disturb the intention of surveillance apparatus to dissect and catalogue everything about us into packaged identities. We aim to keep them wondering: Know how to surveil us? Control our bodies? Commodify what we create and sell it back to us? It is through observing the extreme defensiveness of hegemonic institutions that we recognize that the power of our transgressive love threatens the nation state, and we act accordingly. Our existence threatens this empire and we are targeted, so we make our identities, genders, sexualities, families and communities in fluid ways - we make ourselves moving targets to protect ourselves and who we love.

- ★ *What role does love play in how we organize ourselves and what if it transgresses the structures that hold us?*
- ★ *How is our work unintelligible to the mainstream, and how might that protect us?*
- ★ *Who in our community carries wisdom of being stealth? Of being flamboyant beyond recognition? Of being one who couldn't possibly be understood?*

9. **Heal the Binary.** Humxn brains create binaries when something traumatic triggers a biochemical response that turns off the pre-frontal cortex and delimits our ability to perceive reality. Binaries are the results of our brains shrinking complexity into either/or, black/white, ones and zeros, men or women, gay or straight. Queerness is who we become when we feel safe enough to be authentic. As we decolonize ourselves and begin to heal the personal and collective sex and gender traumas of patriarchy, softening some of that cultural tightness around gender will have the effect of creating more possibilities for living together. Other perceived binaries will relax. The phenomenon of people loving each other is going to be less threatening. There is going to be more space for us to be our complex selves. And the world is going to get much queerer.

- ★ *What are my personal investments in the gender binary? How could queering binaries support a more authentic expression of myself?*
- ★ *Have we built our social infrastructure on the assumption of binaries, gender or otherwise?*
- ★ *How is our divestment from binaries in conversation with efforts to eliminate intimate & gender-based violence in our community?*

10. **Enact Desire.** The system adapts too quickly to our resistance for us to really win the *fight* for justice. We would do better to engage in acts of creation out of a politics of desire in the face of such pervasive destruction. Black feminists taught me that, including Audre Lorde, adrienne marie brown, bell hooks, Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, Alexis Pauline Gumbs. In a world that depends on its citizenry having disciplined bodies, we are anchored not by obedience but rather by attraction. Where everything is designed to keep us from learning about intimate life, we follow the pleasure of transgressing what we've been given permission to do and who to be, where our teachers are sex work and kink, therapy and mutual aid. We believe in the prophetic practice of doing whatever makes being together feel good, that our clearest desires are the foundations of the world to come.

- ★ *Where are we “fighting the system” and how could we posture towards what we long for?*
- ★ *How can I be in deeper connection with and be an expression of my deepest desires?*
- ★ *How would we act if we believed that our clearest desires are prophecies?*

Go forth and queer everything.