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Lauren Berlant

for Phyllis Jones and Bill Readings, in memoriam

Feminism and the Institutions of Intimacy*

I want to open up some questions here, about the contradictory expectations and obligations politically engaged faculty face in the contemporary American academy. In contrast to the constant shaming rhetoric issuing from the public sphere, which claims to expose the scandalously easy and self-indulgent lives of professors, I want to assert that mass stress from institutional saturation afflicts faculty across diverse institutional settings. One source of this stress is the current downsizing by universities, which obligates faculty members to meet ever greater demands for pedagogical, administrative, financial, and intellectual productivity. Another source is quite different: what I will call the intimacy expectation that accompanies much politically engaged work in the academy, both among colleagues and in pedagogical contexts. I want to talk about what it means that there is so little public discussion, among faculty and among faculty and students, about what the limits are to the charismatic mentorship model of pedagogical practice, which focuses on what one individual can do for another one, even when this model is reimagined in the name of collective intellectual and political ambition: This model tends to decredentialize students and make faculty seem falsely magical. Finally, I want to talk about the complex relations between these different scenes of labor, stress, and value. Recognizing that some of these problems emerge from the relative freedoms university teachers have to shape their professional lives, I do not want it to seem that this essay is merely a professional/queer/feminist complaint about the pressures of managing privilege: Although complaining is a valuable way of publicizing and making a larger landscape for understanding the confusing contradictions and important ephemera of everyday life. I would like to tell the following story, to underscore why I think

*This chapter was originally commissioned as an essay to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of women's studies at Cornell. I especially thank Anna-Marie Smith and E. Ann Kaplan for their thoughtful engagement with its contents.

thinking about pedagogy, intimacy, and institutional exploitation is so important, especially for faculty whose professional work in universities is central to sustaining their political practice and optimism.

I went to Oberlin between 1975 and 1979. It was a time when many feminist teachers were just starting there, teachers who were not trained as feminists in graduate school but who were, nonetheless, busy reinventing pedagogy and disciplinary knowledge for themselves and their students, of which I was lucky to be one. The English department had a few wonderful and smart women, and one in particular became very important to me, not least because she was the first feminist teacher I had in college, and also because, along with being smart, she was one of those Oberlin 1970s feminists who made academic "safe space" seem possible. She looked at you warmly and sincerely when she talked to you, holding on to your arm as she did it, to make you feel included in the insider talk and utopian scene we were developing. I did not work closely with her academically (because she could not afford irony at that moment of personal and intellectual risk taking, whereas I needed it to survive), but I did learn immensely from her about pedagogy. It was from her that I learned that the classroom was not ideally a place for professors to dramatize the excellence of their own minds, but a space in which hard thinking could be generated collectively. She had many ideas about how such collectivity or alliance might be forged, and to this day I still work in the tradition and with the techniques I learned with her. Without abjecting her own knowledge, she respected where her students entered history.

During my time at Oberlin I taught courses in the Experimental College, a credit-generating, student-run institution, all of which concerned women and popular culture in the United States. My teacher and I worked together on the course's initial shape, and talked it through often over the years. When I was a senior, I and my course co-teacher invited her over to eat some probably very bad food, and we talked about our lives, our futures, and the things that sustained our optimism. On this subject, she described to us her increasing sadness and desperation, saying something like: Now I feel inadequate at every moment; I want to be attentive to kids like you, a good teacher in my classes, present for my colleagues, my husband, my children, my community, my activism. She said, I want to write theory, and not only can I barely finish a sentence, but I have trouble thinking a clear thought. I remember saying to her, Why don't you think of perfection as a kind of long term project, and in the meantime just do the best you can? She said, That would be accepting failure, wouldn't it? Sometime late in the next year, she called me in Ithaca, where I was in graduate school. She asked how I was, and I told her, at great length: I was struggling terribly, partly because I felt stupid all the time, as usual, and partly because at that time there was very little feminism for graduate students in the English department, and I felt constantly inadequate and exposed as unserious for my lack of disinterestedness. We talked about this for awhile, and then she reported that she had stopped teaching and in fact had had a nervous breakdown. She said she couldn't face the classroom any longer. Shortly thereafter, she killed herself.

There are many reasons someone would do something like this. Certainly, I don't know the whole story. But to those of us in the academic community whom she had taught and taught with and talked to, it seemed clear that she had suffered terribly from the notion that a good feminist fails if she cannot attend constantly to the nurturing/facilitating project in every domain of her commitment. It seemed clear to us that the conditions of ever-expanding volunteer obligation that politically engaged academics inhabit, which tend to induce precarious lives, are structural in ways about which we have not yet produced satisfactory eloquence. It is to begin redressing these lacks that this chapter is also dedicated.

Whose Fantasy Is This?

The opening shots of the film *Go Fish* (dir. Rose Troche, 1994) take place in a women's studies class whose subject is lesbian history. Kia, the teacher, is asking the class to name some famous lesbians. The students offer a wide range of choices: serious ones and frivolous ones and ones that attack self-righteous heterosexuals, from Sappho and Angela Davis to Peppermint Patty, Mary Lou Retton, Agnes Morehead, and Marilyn Quayle. Someone asks the teacher why they are making the list. Kia, who is the film's key to all wisdom, tells her students that the lives of lesbians have been hidden lives, and that "the meaning and power of history" lies not just in excavating these suppressed knowledges, but in taking on the responsibility to know history differently, and thus to make history, to change its course.

The scene then cuts to someone's apartment. A young white woman named Max is writing in her journal about a lesbian life she has not yet had. To imagine her life she constructs a love plot. In her journal, on the sound-track, and on the screen she tells the story of the imaginary day an unnamed

"you" and she were supposed to meet and fall in love, only a fat man interposed his body in the space where contact was supposed to have happened and love was supposed to begin. The tragedy of the loss Max experiences by not having a love plot with "you" to sustain her leads her to a defensive and joyous crescendo of self-naming, where she says the phrase "My Name is Max," over and over, in the absence of the other's voice speaking her name in the magical affirmation of love.

The camera then cuts to two anxious women waking up in bed. These are older women, women of color, sleeping in very white sheets. We discover that the women's studies teacher, Kia, is also Max's roommate, and we hear that she has overslept her class after a long night of sex with her lover Evie. Kia is an African-American, lesbian feminist from the 1970s and Evie is younger, Chicana, and a nurse. Max finds Kia's "lesson plan" for her and as the teacher rushes out of the house to her waiting class, Max stops her and says, "You're going to meet me at the café at five to read my paper, right?" At five Kia and Max meet to discuss her paper. But mainly they talk about their sexual lives, and play a game of naming who in the café is sexually attractive and who is not, and the student teases the teacher for using archaic 1970s-style terms for vagina like "honey pot." The teacher gets a little mad, but says "You know I can't stay mad at you for long." Max closes the conference by asking Kia to "facilitate," not her intellectual life, but her desire to be in a couple "by helping me meet babes." It is a long office hour but we never actually see them discuss what Max wrote in her paper. As the film goes on the teacher is seen constantly engaging in erotic discourse, gossip, and sexual play with her own girlfriend and her student friends. She also finds a girlfriend for Max, a girl named Ely. The teacher has fabulous taste. The girls walk off into the sunset.

Go Fish is a really sweet movie, but I could not help thinking as I watched it: Whose fantasy is this? Then I thought about Mary Louise Pratt's assertion, in her essay "Linguistic Utopias," that when it comes to theorizing pedagogy there is almost always no voice of the student. Pratt argues that even when politically engaged teaching is examined, there is only the voice of the teacher, the perspective of the teacher that dominates discussions about power and knowledge in the classroom (Pratt, 51–52). I have long been haunted by this assertion, and it has changed and helped to make more explicit and self-threatening the kinds of discussions about power and knowledge styles I have with my own students.

But while I was watching *Go Fish,* I must admit a bit of resentment crept into the space of sentimentality, nostalgia, and principle that usually sustains me through my fear of failing to be a worthy feminist teacher. This

feeling registered contrary impulses: First, I was thinking, this movie is a student's fantasy, a teacher never would have written this film. For Max and her friends the academic queer/feminist project holds a promise of a teacher who is infinitely patient, available, and confident of her knowledge, an intellectual and sexual role model who uses her long office hours therapeutically to help students develop subjectivity and self-esteem—to solve personal problems, find love, and get laid, for example. In short, there is no voice of the teacher here, no different life history, no struggle or anxiety, no question of boundaries or recognition of difference, no unshared aspiration, no aversion at the heart of what might also truly be a scene of pedagogical and political intimacy. There is no professorial relation to materialist politics either, no evidence of a commitment to thinking about the nonsubjective domains of social transformation feminist/queer work has also been known to address. If there had been, the film would have no doubt registered it as the queer/feminist project's failure to be there *for the students.*

On the other hand, because I am a feminist from the much maligned and yet still utopianized 1970s I remember how exciting it was to enter as a student this scene of politics, fantasy, and intimacy. Then, the alliances feminism promised to make seemed destined to produce collaboration and cohabitation across different identities and different kinds of privilege and struggle. Central to this promise was a new and exciting complexity among teachers and students, which merged inventing new knowledge with making unprecedented political and erotic demands on each other and on the practical world. It involved thinking that a new literacy about power would make relations of domination both less painful and less entrenched. It cast the academy as a miniature world where hierarchies of authority and entitlement might be refunctioned and even put to the productive use of subalterns in and outside of school. It proposed that new relations between knowledge, authority, and desire would not only affirm but create new general possibilities for identity and society. Central to this social transformation would be a revolution in the scene of teaching, turning it into a public, collective, and politically accountable practice.

This was the aspiration to include academia in the project of making an American feminist public sphere: I would like to tell a story about some things that have happened to this cluster of desires and practices, that is, to provide a preliminary anatomy of intimacy that will characterize some of the complex and incoherent demands that have come to saturate our professional time and labor, if we are women, or feminists, or queers, or teachers committed to counterhegemonic teaching and research in the contemporary American academy.

The word "our" here deserves some special preliminary attention. Not only all knowledge but all teaching is local, and any anecdotal evidence I might have will always derive both from particular institutional cultures and more random encounters with circulating anecdotes, including things I have read in journals and books. All of these bits of knowledge no doubt operate according to specific norms about what constitutes the kinds of virtuoso competence feminist and other politically engaged teachers are supposed to have. I have attended and taught at private or semiprivate institutions: Oberlin, Cornell, the University of Chicago. It is said that at private universities the students frequently see themselves, through their parents, as buying a kind of intimate access to professors that they assume they would not get at state-run institutions. I have not had this experience of imperious student demand—quite the opposite. For queer/feminist teachers generally, I suspect a much more insecure desire by students for professorial cultivation/therapy/solidarity overwrites the élite expectation of faculty attention. The relation between these two scenes of pedagogy—the elite and the sentimental—will be explored in the next section. In any case, I will take as given that across different scenes of politically engaged academic life, especially those organized around corporealized and sexualized kinds of identity movements—African-American, Hispanic, gay and lesbian, or women's studies—the phrase "virtuoso competence" ought to, but does not, seem like an oxymoron; that students and feminist teachers labor under vastly unrealistic, stress-creating, and nonetheless important, utopian expectations about what it is possible to generate in a university, especially in the face of the bureaucratic violence of work and the vulnerabilities of having ideas; that it is important to create some contexts for understanding the ever-proliferating obligations and desires feminist and queer academics face.

I am more broadly interested in what happens when people see their relations to an institution as vital to their self-understanding, their selfhood, their identities, and their hold on narratives of history and possibilities of the future. This condition of institutional identification has become especially acute where politically engaged knowledge projects in the academy are concerned, since between the right-wing turn of American public culture and the increasing instability and narrowing of hiring opportunities in universities even the activist space for radical work seems to have become more "academic." For many the classroom and writing are now the *only* places for political work and for experiencing collective engagement in thinking about futures and bringing about change.

But these and other pressures tend to lead to overdependence on the

institution, an overidentification with its individualist standards of professional value, and, in the women's studies context, unrealistic expectations about what kinds of safety, support, sustenance, and affection institutions and people in institutions can provide. Anyone who has observed the Jane Gallop sexual harassment case,[1] for example, has witnessed a terrible mess of courage, code-crossing, and confusion about the relation between institution and affective intention where women's studies practice is concerned. The ambiguity of professionally mediated intellectual closeness, especially in the tutelary context of feminist/lesbian/queer identifications, was further exacerbated by the centrality of psychoanalytic theory and the erotics of transference to Gallop's particular pedagogical practice. Yet the rapid shifts among scenes of teaching theory, feminist feeling, hetero- and homoerotic discourse and practice, feminist public culture, and actual corporeal sex acts in this story reveal, if nothing else, that the pedagogical complexities of identification, mediation, responsibility, and privilege are importantly different from the conventional love talk of couples and the therapeutic talk of psychoanalysis. They operate according to different rules, and have different conventional ways of disavowing what protects and motivates those with authority. On the other hand, they reproduce intimate knowledge as dependent on a scene of intersubjectivity, frequently blocking out or minimizing the ways the material conditions of knowledge production affect what counts as trustworthy explanation, argument, and evidence. And if teaching is like psychoanalysis in the ways transference opens up unsettling scenes of knowing, it is most like love when it shares love's debilitating fetish of implicitness, an ideal of transparent intersubjectivity that turns the complexities of contract into seeming necessities of life. This brief triangulation of intimacy forms tells us that when the concept of pedagogy is *dominated* by the tableau of charismatic teacher/desiring student, it relies on euphemizing or denying altogether the routinized aspects of its institutional situation. The false figure of intersubjectivity woven into the ethics of proper academic subject formation always threatens to depoliticize queer/feminist work. But subject formation is only apparently personal.

The eroticization of the discourse of pedagogy in feminist and queer contexts constantly elicits complex scenes of hetero-feminist erotophobia (i.e., teaching between women should nurture feeling but should *not* involve desire) and queer sex literalism (same-sex pedagogy always involves specifically sexual and sexually specific desire). But this mania for the intersubjective has also diverted the development of more wideranging and still pertinent discussions of the material conditions of feminist praxis in the

academy, in ways I think damaging both to teachers and to students. This is the concern of section three. It will be my task throughout this essay to think about what it has meant that academic feminism has made public spheres around a desire to change knowledge, make subjects, and institutionalize feeling. I will organize my discussion around two paradigms: in the first, the individual student/teacher encounter as the modal scene of academic practice; second, its antithesis, the ever-expanding complex of activities that saturates the time of workers in the knowledge factory at all levels of the bureaucracy.

The Sentimental Mission of Feminist Teaching

One of the striking things about academic life is the way its institutional spaces and relations of professional labor support the production of intimate publics. That is, they become public contexts of collective life on which people come to rely for sustaining their identities, their opinions, and their relations to power, as well as their fantasies, rages, and desires. Usually without realizing it, workers invest in these scenes anxieties and needs for mirroring one normally associates with the institutions of privacy and domestic intimacy (Negt and Kluge, 32–38). But because most intimate publics are generated in institutions that seem merely instrumental to people's survival, they tend not to experience their own institution-based intensity as something emanating from *themselves,* their needs and desires.

Since there is nothing natural or inevitable about this expectation that work, even professional work, will provide anything but material self-sustenance, we can assume that there is something peculiar (although not unique) about the way academia generates expectations for some of the people who labor in it that they will gain sustainable identities through it; we can also assume that there is something peculiar about the way the institution generates amnesias about what it cannot do. In this section I would like to describe some aspects of these expectations and amnesias. As throughout this chapter, I will shuttle between explanations that are not women's studies–specific and those that are.

In 1967 Christopher Jencks and David Riesman published *The Academic Revolution,* which tells an ambivalent story of the modern American university. They begin by referring to a myth about the experience of being a university student, a conceit that still saturates the sentimental educational rhetoric about the identity-forming, citizen-building, or ethical function of education currently coming from both the right and liberals in the American public sphere. "Among the many myths that afflict contemporary

thinking about American colleges, none is more persistent than the one that maintains that in the good old days, when colleges were small, faculty and students had intimate personal contacts on a day-to-day basis" (Jencks and Riesman, 35). They suggest that the romantic pedagogical tradition, the tradition of the *Émile,* became institutionalized mainly as an ideal of Enlightenment pedagogy. In this scenario, tutors and teachers not only impart true knowledge to their students, but in so doing make a world possible for them, a world where their sensibility and ambition might merge in a lifelong sentimental education. We might say that no one any longer believes this ideologeme. Yet, as many have argued, the possibility that one will experience the charismatic authority of the virtuoso teacher still frames and organizes the hopes and aspirations of many students, especially those who see in school the possibility of finding and securing a true self (Johnson et al., 1982).

Of course, this particular expectation is traditionally that of members of an educated elite, where questions of what constitutes survival, and survival's relation to the good life, expose the class determinations of personhood. Only when practical survival is a given can the subject stop drowning in the contingencies of the present tense: Only once a future seems assured can the pedagogic gaze be turned toward developing the soul's capacity to possess its authentic and fulfilled identity. We can see the power of the elite mytheme in novels like Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), where it is not knowledge but the teacher's aura itself that becomes a wedge into new possible worlds and affects for her female students. Or in the film *Dead Poets Society* (dir. Peter Weir, 1989), where male students struggling to become authentic in the face of narrow patriarchal notions of personal value overidentify with the pithy passionate pseudo-philosophy of their English teacher.

What the parents in the film want is for their sons to affirm the patriarchal value of the fathers and the older brothers who have also excelled at the Helton school and gone on to become worthy professionals. But this unironic and uncynical film has a powerful desire to revitalize the empty forms of "tradition, honor, discipline, excellence," the fathers offer through the school: "Seize the day, boys," the teacher, Jack Keating, opines, "make your lives extraordinary." By this he means that they should cultivate the excesses of their language, sensibility, interiority, and instinct. They should aspire to be Walt Whitman, without the homosexuality. Then afterwards, if they want, they can still go on to join the normative professions.

Played out here intergenerationally is a contradiction within capitalist subjectivity already well-described by Jürgen Habermas and Herbert

Marcuse. On the one hand, subjects groomed for identifying with privilege and the virtue of its meritocratic institutions assume the universal, generic, or "free" subjectivity of the self-possessed individual. On the other hand, there is a constantly expressed desire for each person to receive, during his education, the imprimatur of his own uniqueness. (English teachers seem to have a premium on this pedagogic function.) The gift of distinctive personhood teachers give to students ideally enables a relation to a special and true inner self that cannot be altered by later adult declension. It is this interior self the student can honor with nostalgic narrative and tributes of money when he is a rich alumnus. It might be noted that both *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *Dead Poets Society* actually represent secondary school education and not college. But it could be argued that they represent the dominant emblem of what liberal education can do to make citizens and persons out of the uncongealed people whose youthful incorporation of noninstrumental knowledge is sometimes the only experience of world-shaking optimism they ever have.

Jencks and Riesman say that the story the film tells of a struggle between parents and teachers on the one side and students on the other has been much more typical of the academy at large: "Colleges have always been institutions," they write, "through which the old attempt to impose their values and attitudes in the young. They therefore take over from parents the tension-filled and affect-laden tasks of socialization" (Jencks and Riesman, 35). But after the First World War, the American university began to convert from a machine for the entitled elite to a meritocracy. This meant that in the early and mid-century, the generational conflict that constantly characterizes education became challenged by a view of the university as the key to opportunity in an increasingly corporate society, especially for the American working classes and the petty bourgeoisie. Meanwhile the ideology of identity formation as a goal of higher education remained, even intensifying as a utopian force, as meritocratic value and corporate success became more closely linked, and as, paradoxically, educated men began to worry that capitalist routines would make them lose their souls if they neglected to cultivate them in college.

In the 1960s, while *The Academic Revolution* was being written, American college students were staging a mass action dedicated to, among other things, closing the gap between the educational myths of self-discovery I have described and the increasingly factory-like atmosphere of higher education, which included a widening distance between research-oriented faculty and the students they teach. Knowledge seemed stale, "irrelevant"; teaching seemed, mainly, impersonal. Then, what a dean at my university

has recently called "fads in the humanities," fads like African-American, Hispanic, women's, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual studies, were demanded and invented.

This is to say that feminist/countercultural work in the university was imagined paradoxically: in a moment of disbelief in institutions and in the notion of a meritocracy this was also a moment of faith in the kinds of personal values and critical social knowledge radical teaching and institutional activity could ratify. The promise was that the counterknowledge and donated activity of feminists would create a new meritocracy, somehow without the violence of hierarchy, fear of difference, and disciplinary defensiveness that frequently serve as a bar to recognition of subaltern talents, knowledge, language, and experience. It would change knowledge, change the world, create new norms of expertise, and reimagine the practice of authority. This was at once a radical claim but also reflected a belief that the intentions of good people could radically modify institutional power/knowledge relations while also training students to wield authority and compete with each other in the public sphere.

As any reader of feminist pedagogy books—with a few exceptions such as Valerie Walkerdine's *Schoolgirl Fictions*—will see, central to the feminist project was a feminist version of the nostalgic rhetoric of the charismatic teacher. Slightly more collaborative than the traditional patriarchal forms, the feminist discourse about teaching has almost entirely been concerned with the responsibility of the teacher to have and to yield—but not entirely—her charismatic authority. The teacher's very talent—her imputed intimacy with theoretical and practical knowledge, her capacity to contain and rework the world in language and other forms of knowledge and activism, the resources she has committed to merging everyday life with political desire—is posed as the student's central resource, a relay between a real world of injury and a possible world of dignity.

On the other hand, this very iconization of the teacher's power to make things possible leads constantly and incoherently to puzzlement, exhaustion, and feelings of domination, isolation, and abandonment for students and teachers both. I include teachers, for this tableau is not just the student's desire. Deep in the ambitions and socialization of the feminist teacher as well is the promise of women's studies to make learning personal, socially transformative, and generationally supportive. This desire still inspires workers in the university system to make themselves vulnerable to the impossible higher expectations about institutionally and intellectually mediated personal relations that are hardwired into the feminist pedagogical project. It motivates taking on kinds of therapeutic and mentoring

functions that are way beyond our expertise; it motivates us to overidentify with students' happiness or unhappiness as the source of our value; it motivates the ways we shield students from experiencing the various kinds of ambivalence we have toward being called to personhood in this way.

In this regard, and in addition to the paradoxically anticorporate/promeritocratic tendencies of post-1968 counterhegemonic work in the university, another context for the thinking about the intimacy and identity expectation of women's studies must be posed: This is the history of sentimental educational reform, beginning at the turn of the century, which saw a pedagogy on behalf of degraded victim cultures to be one of education's vital contributions. For one effect of the student struggle to influence the value of university knowledge norms has been to construct counterhegemonic teaching as a scene of vulnerability/rescue for students, and indeed the language of the soul-damaging effects of bad knowledge has been a crucial trumping card for counterhegemonic forces to get universities to institutionalize previously excluded knowledges and perspectives. Laura Wexler's brilliant work on Native Americans at the Hampton Institute discloses how fully the education of American women has been saturated by a rescue or what Gayatri Spivak has called a baby-sitting mission (Spivak, 391): Historically, working class girls, both white and of color were seen to need training for uplift. Uplift included the cultivation of the soul, and sometimes had vocational ambitions, but mainly aimed to dimensionalize the woman's capacity to occupy homes and reproduce sentimental ideology in a family's and a society's everyday life. The paradigms of educational reform, writes Wexler, extended the privatizing domestic ideologies of sentimental fiction to educational institutions. "Successful appeal to the bipartite structure of (1) impoverishment of the sense of history and (2) purely sentimental remediation" became virtually the only promises women's education for the female nonelite could make (Wexler, 184).

Central to the sentimental scene here, too, was the teacher/female student tableau. It is not just that the subaltern female student was trained to abject herself to the charismatic mistress, but that she was trained to think that her education would simultaneously help her to hone an authentic self-identity and to operate successfully in the normative culture of the American public sphere. Again, these contradictions are not personal and evil, but structural conditions of education in modern liberal culture. It should not be hard to make the link between Wexler's late nineteenth century case and the scene of feminist pedagogy today. It is in the mytheme of pseudo-intersubjectivity that marks both teacher and student expectations of what education can do; it is in the saturation of the way knowledge

is represented with the hybrid image of the vulnerable student and the knowing teacher, attending, uplifting, and sustaining each victim of culture to make a better world. As Eve Sedgwick has written, "*Identification with/as* has a distinctive resonance for women in the oppressively tidy dovetailing between old ideologies of women's traditional 'selflessness' and a new one of feminist commitment that seems to begin with a self but is legitimated only by wilfully obscuring most of its boundaries" (Sedgwick 1990, 62). There are not only personal consequences for the masks that conceal the impossible contradictions of liberation teaching as identity formation. This is also a structure of what Paolo Friere calls the "false generosity of the oppressor" (Friere, 142), and what Frantz Fanon has described, in a quite different context, as the contradictions of the native intellectual, who still finds value in the kinds of "intellectual and cultural capital" that marked the toxic world of the colonial bureaucratic and political regime whose violences radical pedagogy seeks to redress (Fanon, 150).

I do not mean to say that the pedagogical collapse of identification into identities is simply an error. After all, the solicitation of identities in a gay and lesbian, feminist, or queer studies context is one of its most powerful pedagogical opportunities. It enables students to imagine themselves as uninevitable, and helps them to cultivate the experimental knowledge and eloquent ideolects they need to imagine future public contexts that might provide less alienated relations to their self-understanding.

But to solicit students to imagine different relations between acts and bodies and possible futures does not call us to solicit them to the safety of a new identity form, one that we can provide. The question here is whether we, as teachers and students, *aspire to* reproducing even the best versions of those scenes of identity and domination, or whether, in our pedagogy and our sense of the public conditions of self-definition and practice, we want to focus on more broadly imagining and creating the conditions for the yet unformed coalitions and unlived worlds into which we might want to translate ourselves (see Berlant and Warner).

The Flexible Professor

I have been describing relations of practice and identification whose institutional and class genealogies have powerfully influenced the fantasy norms and practical expectations of feminist and other counterhegemonic workers in the contemporary American academy. Very little of this activity would be registered in our appointment books: For the work of activist knowledge and identification mainly takes place in the temporal field measured neither

by clock nor the calendar—or at least this is what the ideal emblem of these relations, the monadic pedagogical scene, would have us convey.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity,* David Harvey provides another lexicon for describing the contemporary conditions of labor and competence, focusing on the notion of flexibility. Flexibility, writes Harvey, describes the incitement to be available for constant retraining, restructuring, and mobility that characterizes the institutions of labor, capital, and culture in the contemporary United States: Thus the title of this section. Insofar as contemporary humanists contest dominant ideologies through their personal and discursive pedagogy, and insofar as they do it under increasingly diffused and stressful institutional conditions, they inhabit the deceptive and erratic temporalities that register the uneven developments and impossible demands on labor in the contemporary capitalist context. "To begin with," writes Harvey, "the flexible motion of capital emphasizes the new, the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent in modern life," in response to which the ideological apparatuses of the official public sphere emphasize "traditional ethics, family values, the solidity of domestic space as opposed to the contingencies of time" (Harvey, 171).

You might recognize in Harvey's assessment a characterization of postmodernity that often appears as utopian wish: Like the concepts hysteria and *difference* of the 1970s, flexibility and improvisation are now offered as forces for generating better worlds. Emily Martin's book *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture—From the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* registers, among other things, a specifically feminist and feminine valorization of these qualities: "Feminists, of very different persuasions, are . . . enamored of the quality of flexibility, given its many valences. Depending on whether one is gaining flexibility as a necessity of surviving while being powerless or as an adjunct of developing new, less repressive forms of interaction, flexibility seems to be the key." (Martin, 157).

In the service economy of everyday life in the academy, the dynamic forces of flexibility and creative specialization have become hardwired into professional practice. Yet the motives for this incorporation of capitalist contrivance into academic life vary according to many different and conflicting scenes of activity and value. Flexibility appears as a theoretical virtue; as an ethical and radical necessity of feminist and counterhegemonic world building; and as an administrative demand by panicking administrators. Additionally, it has become common to read, on the business page, in advertising, and in postmodern social theory, that cutting-edge contemporary subjectivity is also "flexible," improvisatory, experimental. In this context of description, once again structural forces, pressures, and effects reappear as expressions of individual identity and desire (Rouse, 389–392). Here are some examples of how new forms of flexible professional subjectivity have been generated to respond to the taxonimizing practices and incitements to speed up of the contemporary American academy.

1. In the previous sections I have shuttled wildly between women's studies–specific scenes of explanation, scenes related to other dissident knowledge projects in the academy, and academia in general. These alternations express ongoing and globally complex negotiations among nationalisms, feminisms, sex radical movements, class insurgencies, and decolonization movements. It requires feminism constantly to unlearn its originary impulse, to taxonomize its explanations of the world through sexual difference alone. But it is also an institutional reality. Gender, sexual, ethnic, racial, and religious studies and subcultures are constantly made to compete against each other in university hierarchies of value. Harvey describes the way the ethnic food model of multiculturalism screens out the complex relations of power and exploitation that really do violence in the global system. It suggests that the university's willingness to support internal bureaucracies that reflect popular public knowledge movements is instrumental in its claim to be modern, to be a player in creating workers and citizens for a global or multicultural future from the materials of the present tense (Berlant 1994, 131).

In addition, this rivalry for resources has intellectually and politically debilitating effects on the ways aspirations for social change are imagined and worked through. For one thing, the incitement to interdisciplinarity and increasingly comparative work requires us constantly to be developing unfamiliar knowledge and working outside of our areas of training and expertise. This is a good effect (keeping professors closer to experiencing in public the vulnerability of not knowing), but interdisciplinarity is not something that can be achieved by will, with the new knowledge a merely additive supplement to traditional disciplinary training. Interdisciplinarity undoes that training and defamiliarizes traditional objects of knowledge and norms of evidence and argument. At a time when minority studies workers from different disciplines and departments could be helping to retrain each other, there is a danger of becoming more intellectually separate, reflecting the economic organization of knowledge. We need to think more creatively about what institutionalization means (infighting among less-established disciplines for meagre economic and spatial resources; impediments to producing points of comparison and alliance). Most importantly, it requires that we refuse the pressure to compete for privileged minority status. For the real challenges facing us institutionally include challenging and countering the world of established disciplines whose op-

pressive and violently partial forms of order produced the counterhegemonic formalism of minority knowledge in the first place.

2. Whatever political and intellectual challenges the multiplication of dissident departments raise, they also raise very serious challenges to our capacity to actually do the work we are politically committed to. I am on committees in gender, African American, and cinema studies in my own university, along with English, my home department. This does not mean I work one-quarter of the time in each of these departments, but that I am accountable to students and faculty in each of them, even if my courses are distributed throughout the system. In this proliferation of tasks, which are both pedagogical and bureaucratic, I have increasingly more full-time jobs, and the institutional conditions of my own work are far better than most. For one thing, this is not a temporary job; second, the teaching load is light; third, the students are wonderful, and make the activity of teaching itself continually interesting and eventful. But the fact is, for me and for many of us, the competing scenes of our "voluntary" activity not only intensify political conflicts but effectively siphon off physical energy and political energy into bureaucratic self-maintenance, and multiply the scenes in which we experience our inadequacy to the political and pedagogical impulses that motivated us in the first place.

3. A proliferating multiplicity of interdisciplinary affiliations is also exhausting, especially given the intimacy expectations I described above—concerns that, you may note, have dropped out of the picture here altogether. But these material conditions of professional existence, which are both bureaucratic and political, make it ever more difficult to fulfill some of the most important counterhegemonic principles we have. Jencks and Riesman argue that, as universities become both more corporatized and more linked to the demands and legitimating standards of capital, research has become overvalued compared to teaching. But it is not merely a research versus teaching, nor a private versus professional life dichotomy that fragments time and personhood for feminist professionals, including students. In addition to the very different demands on forms of institutional legitimation that students in different movements make on teachers and curricula, we must factor in the intensifying institutional exploitation within the university system itself.

4. Meanwhile, for faculty at institutions that still give tenure to the people who teach there, measurable stacks of professional publications have become necessary to job maintenance and the sustenance of salaries, and bizarre, carefully measured teaching evaluations have become more widely used within the disciplinary panopticon that measures academic "productivity." But as university life becomes more bureaucratically structured, as the unstable economy outside the university makes universities find ways to cut costs and increase pedagogical output, teaching has become more and more ad hoc and time consuming for the workers in the professorial "temp" culture who now join clerical workers, maintenance workers, and others vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the increasingly fragile economy. As corporate downsizing and the technocratic ideology of citizen as flexible worker persist, this condition will only worsen, and its toll on faculty and students will be greater. Politically committed students can already tell that the nervous system of higher education is out of whack, and the demand has increased for faculty not only to provide exclusive intimate intellectual, political, and emotional mentoring, but to help in negotiating an increasingly unstable economy while also engendering the defeat of the kinds of racism, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia, and labor exploitation that are increasingly arising in these economic bad times. In the forced flexibility of this moment, these pedagogical tasks become more crucial and somehow less possible. The a priori unboundedness of the academic life, which is evidence of its privileged, less alienated status, turns for many into a service economy whose attractions and exploitations are all bound up with each other.

Coda: As though they knew what it was like to be me in my family, my teachers, and the world of school and work they sustained, made my life possible. I do not know whether I expected it, or demanded it, or even whether they knew what they were doing, or whether I deserved it. But my relation to school has always been that the everyday time of it was like an alternate world in which it would be safe, potentially, to have the courage to invent new things out of what is available long before activism or pedagogy or experimental and critical thinking became some of the names I could give to what I wanted to do. So, in defense of my own will to become possible, I mean not to pathologize the impulse to believe that school and teachers can hold open a space of possibility that might not be identical with them. What I have meant to do here is to open up some questions about how the teacher/student monad and all the fantasy of rescue and identity it organizes screens out other kinds of complex and impersonal labor that teachers do to survive in their jobs; and to suggest that the absence of a discourse about this has not only burned out so many politically engaged teachers but created confusions between faculty and students, confusions about how to think about the intimacy of learning and the limits to what individuals can do for each other, even in the context of the world-building project women's studies has for so long and so courageously willed into being. This relative silence has also enabled universities to exploit the labor of its most committed and often most untenured faculty in disgraceful ways.

I tell this story because the image of the university as a therapeutic culture for U.S. society and the primary "home" for politically engaged intellectual work and intellectuals in the United States has been a debilitating condition for thinking about what kinds of challenges to norms of knowledge, of expertise, of political fantasy, even of intimacy, might be generated by critical thinkers. Remanding this situation involves seriously challenging the taxonomies that falsely represent linked kinds of social forces and knowledges, both within the academy and in the public sphere. It involves thinking about teaching as a public act and knowledge as a form of social organizing, both within the academy and in the social sphere.

It involves thinking about teaching as a public act and knowledge, as a form of social organizing, both in the traditional humanist sense—teaching as a vehicle for subject and citizen formation—and in a more political one, whose social effects cannot be predicted. It involves teaching students to learn, once again, the limits of faculty magic and the necessity of making demands on knowledge and on history that go beyond the horizon of possibility their teachers can represent to them. It involves seeing knowledge as radically transitional. Through these modes of practice the ways we already talk about the uneven developments of capitalism, culture, nationality, sexuality, race, publics, and politics can be used to supplement and to destabilize the identity-machine that has dominated the women's studies imagination of what teaching should really be about. Resisting what Sedgwick calls "that particular ethical pressure" to turn identifications between teachers and students into identities, I have tried here to reimagine the contexts for pedagogy in a way that engenders images of activist work and intellectual practice distinct from the styles and practices into which we faculty have improvised ourselves. And attempting to resist the impulse to conceal the misery, disappointment, and rawness that happens in the face of the overidentifications within and overvaluation of the machinery of academic feminism, I have tried to demonstrate the need for rigorous thinking about scenes of feminist feeling, since its utopian and practical pedagogical work has really just begun.

Notes

1. This case involves accusations of sexual harassment against Gallop by one of her graduate students. Gallop is a feminist psychoanalytic theorist who foregrounds the erotic environment of knowledge/power relations in (her) pedagogical practice. She is writing a book on the pedagogical, political, and institutional consequences of her experience as an emblem of sexual scandal: For a preliminary description, see Ron Grossman, "Object Lessons," *Chicago Tribune* (April 4, 1994): 5, 1:2.

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