

Fascism & The Classroom

George F. McHendry, Jr.

Giving courses has been a major part of my life, in which I have been passionately involved...It takes a lot of preparatory work to get a few minutes of inspiration. I was ready to stop when I saw it was taking more and more preparation to get a more taxing inspiration. And the future's bleak because it's becoming more and more difficult to do research in French universities.

—Gilles Deleuze¹

Z— Infinite

I once happened upon a syllabus that began with the oft-quoted line from Ani DiFranco, “Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right.” That same inscription opens Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*.² I have no knowledge of which preceded which, nonetheless they articulate with one another. Leave it to an American singer/songwriter to produce a lyric turned epigraph that underscores the ways in which resistance can overrun hegemony. I do not mean to say hegemony will always falter, but instead that hegemony has already faltered. By that I mean we are surrounded with tools that hold the potential to become weapons—one of which is our body. Every decision we make is a political one regardless of our level of consciousness. Our bodies are signifying machines that do things in the world. They are propelled forward by a relationship to forces and even when we feign passivity it is a calculation of force and obedience. To obey is a profoundly political move—to exert your will is also a profoundly political move. This essay is tied to the belief that life could be otherwise and the very operation of force and will, doubly bound to each other,

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¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 139.

² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), v.

has the potential to reterritorialize the immanent moments of life or to allow us to radically escape from the ruts that restrict our every move. In this way of always already being a political body capable of action, the escape comes from a willingness to be vulnerable—that is being capable of being *affected* immanently, of being open to becoming.

Y—Diversity

The rhetoric I am after is a materialist rhetoric figured as a sense of desiring-production whose only *telos* is to flow and pool. This radically rejects subjectivity and identity politics, and connects to multiplicity and possibilities in every aspect of its conception.³ I conceive of such a rhetoric as immanent, but to claim that it rejects subjectivity and identity politics does not mean that identity is erased. Mary S. Strine once, exasperated at my colleagues and I dithering around with facetious definitions of cultural studies, reminded us that identity is what is at stake in cultural studies. Her insistence on identity is paradoxical given my own strife with identity politics. As such, seeking a conception of identity outside of identity politics is not a facile matter. However, such a stance requires a recognition that identity is, in a sense, an articulation of desire(s), body/bodies, and discourse that is never singular, fixed, or final but is instead always in process. Such a conception decenters the self—who am I if my identity is only an articulation within my own body and with other bodies? To decenter the self is a radical move in the context of western individualism and the imperatives of capitalism. To say, however, that there is no fixed identity does not mean one cannot play at identity as a means of militant political action, especially when one teaches courses that have erupted out of political struggles based in the search for liberation in identity politics. Gender & Communication and Intercultural Communication fulfill diversity education requirements at my university and do good work to introduce students to the problematics of communication across differences. However, to their core these courses exist because of the specificity of differences—race and gender most apparently. In the worst sense students could be left to wallow in white male guilt pretending to produce liberation through education. I resist such notions, not because racism and sexism do not exist but precisely because they exist and the production of guilt as an affective state in diversity education seems to yield few outcomes and seems by now to be theoretically incongruous with the thinking of Foucault and Deleuze. Resisting the (re)production of guilt based on fixed notions of identity comes from my desire to disengage with identity politics as the genesis of cultural study.

³ This conception of rhetoric is crucial to my current research folding the work of critical rhetoric and the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari together.

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X—Narcissism

My initial strife with identity politics was selfish. I was in a graduate seminar surrounded and outnumbered by bodies whose intellectual allegiances articulated with a brilliant form of second-wave feminism. My body was a signifying machine and it was signifying a central nexus that appeared to be a transection of all of the political struggles they sought to undermine—White, Male, Heterosexual.⁴ I felt my role was to play the dupe, to let my body signify the punch lines of all of their political barbs. I refused—I clung to class, took reactionary and vulgar Marxist positions to resist having the signifying machine I call a body come to be a (re)presentation of their political struggle. In the end we were all wrong. I desired an essential class identity that could provide an out from their accusations. They desired an essential womanhood. What we had was a set of desires but there was no identity in any fixed sense—it would be years before I could even begin to conceptualize a sort of fluid dynamics of identity. I could, of course, still be wrong. After all, whenever I would respond to their accusations of my patriarchal reign with screeds on resistance, class, and hegemony the instructor would remark, “So sayeth the white man.” He was a white man. So sayeth the white man.

W—Whiteness

In many ways this fluid sense of identity reads my body as a signifying machine. It was a sign that was incapable of signifyin(g).⁵ However, as we move further along a Deleuzian line of flight one commits the same fallacy of identity politics if one sees a body as a rigid and organized singularity just as one talks about a subject as a proper noun. Mary Douglas argues, “For us sacred things and places are to be protected from defilement.”⁶ Part of the moralism of racial segregation was the concern for the body as a sacred site—Tavia Nyong’o’s *The Amalgamation Waltz* traces the controversial politics of miscegenation as based in the need to keep the white bourgeois body pure.⁷ However, when we decouple the body as a solid boundary that must reject certain desires and taboos, we embark on an altogether different political project. We can make a

⁴ And yet even today, for many this set of signifiers is all that my body need to signify. Or at the least it is the primary set of signifiers and all others fall to a secondary order to these cultural constructs of identity.

⁵ Henry Louis Gates Jr., “The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifyin(g): Rhetorical Difference and the Orders of Meaning.” In Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (eds.), *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 1551-1581.

⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1984), 7.

⁷ Tavia Nyong’o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 87.

body without organs—we can make a body without organization: “Nonlinear. Discontinuous. Collage-like. An assemblage. As is already more than self-evident.”⁸ When we remove a privileged subject and a privileged body we begin to open up a number of articulations that empower the body as a tool (a strategy, a calculus of the powerful,⁹ a hegemonic and privileged body) or as a weapon (a tactic, a calculus of the weak,¹⁰ a use of force in the gaps of hegemony) and of course many other things. This is a powerful move since, as Spinoza observed, “We do not know what the body can do...”¹¹ When I begin to follow this line of flight for too long, my colleagues (especially those invested in identity politics) accuse me of losing touch with reality. I always dream of responding with Nietzsche’s lament “No artist tolerates reality.”¹² I never do. He was a white man. So sayeth the white man.

V—Multiplicity

Whenever resistive politics are brought up in seminars or in the courses I teach we always return to the question: “What can we do?” Without identity politics many feel powerless. My undergraduates often articulate a sense of powerlessness; the problems are too big for their bodies. What is needed is a strong heteronym—perhaps I am just playing on the need for hetero-anything. Kevin Jackson’s *Invisible Forms* is a book about literary forms written in literary forms, his entry on heteronyms begins with an epigraph from Mark—“My name is Legion, for we are many.”¹³ We say the body as if it is singular and our helplessness is drawn from internalizing an Oedipal lack that assures us our singular body is never enough. If we face our multiplicity there is so much we can do:

The human body is understood by Spinoza to be a complex individual, made up of a number of other bodies. Its identity can never be viewed as a final or finished product as in the case of the Cartesian automaton, since it is a body that is in constant interchange with its environment. Spinoza understands the body as a nexus of variable interconnections, a multiplicity. The human body

⁸ David Markson *Readers Block* qtd in David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 21.

⁹ Michele de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans Steven Rendall. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xviii-xxiv.

¹⁰ Michele de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xviii-xxiv.

¹¹ Giles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. trans Robert Hurley (New York: City Lights Book, 1988), 17.

¹² David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, 141.

¹³ Kevin Jackson, *Invisible Forms: A Guide to Literary Curiosities* (Oxford: Macmillan, 1999), 38.

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is radically open to its surroundings and can be composed, recomposed and decomposed by other bodies.¹⁴

There is a multiplicity of things that can be done by recognizing the precise power configurations that flow through our everyday lives. Is it enough to tell my students that they do not know what their body can do?

U—Becoming

“I spoke to them of the early Florentines, and they slept as though no crime had ever stained the ravines of their mountain home.’ Oscar Wilde, on his lecture to the miners of Leadville.”¹⁵

T—Style

I have been pushing at form and style for a while here and perhaps it is time for some metacommunication. I am borrowing or playing with an intertwining of forms and style from two books: *Invisible Forms* and *Reality Hunger*.¹⁶ Beyond the claim that form matters, dammit, *Invisible Forms* is a treasure trove of literary curiosities. *Reality Hunger* is an evocative essay organized by a multiplicity of numbered entries (as opposed to normative chapters) that intermingle David Shields’ *original* ideas with a *bricolage* of un-cited appropriated quotations. I intertwine these styles as both lament and critique. I do this to add a performative edge to the writing itself—but to be clear; this is not performance as mimesis and is not a way of faking. In its stead, I am borrowing from them to find ways of following lines of flight that emerge from the theoretical conversations that interest me and traverse immanent situations that occupy everyday life. This is a first attempt to put my theory where my bodies are. It may fail—but nonetheless here we are.

S/Z

In graduate school an instructor once told me to look in the footnotes of a particular essay of his. He grinned, “That’s where the good stuff is.” Little did I know it was in the footnotes that he used one of his colleague’s recent research as an exemplar of the failings of identity politics. He was the same instructor who would remark, “So Sayeth the white man.” So sayeth the white man.

In many ways teaching has become a sort of footnote to the scholarly life. We are scholars who happen to teach—social activists who spend their weeks toiling in the classroom away from the real world. We bid our students adieu

¹⁴ Moira Gatens, “Through a Spinozist Lens: Ethology, Difference, Power.” In Paul Patton, *Deleuze: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 165.

¹⁵ “Lectures: A Lecture,” Kevin Jackson, *Invisible Forms* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 197.

¹⁶ Kevin Jackson, *Invisible Forms: A Guide to Literary Curiosities* and David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

and descend the ivory tower to the *real* world to get to the real work. What counts as activism? How much change must a researcher produce? By what metrics does one claim to be an activist? Must one do more than take a break from a conference to march on a picket line for an hour? I am playing, perhaps too much here, but I want to ask seriously about the ways in which we are able to alter the flows of power that surround our bodies and our bodies of research. For me teaching is a form of activism that needs to be informed by the theoretical orientations that direct my scholarly output. Teaching is a form of activism. When we teach we have (student) bodies that could articulate with the ideas we (re)present. During an invited talk D. Soyini Madison once remarked, “The greatest activism in the world is being a great teacher.” That is no small claim for such an acclaimed activist scholar. So I take teaching seriously, and that means doing more than reading the slides the textbook company gave me while I knit (I saw this repeatedly while walking past a classroom on campus a year ago). My objection here is not that knitting and teaching are mutually exclusive—in fact, knitting circles have a long history of being places of rich pedagogical exchange outside of systems of learning dominated by patriarchy—but that in this instance the students, the content, and the instructor were all operating on different planes of experience.¹⁷ For me, teaching must have a sordid affair with the theory that grounds my research, my theoretical commitments must erupt into my teaching. To invoke Barthes’ *S/Z*, theory is Sarrasine and teaching is La Zambinella.¹⁸ There is a risk here, “of becoming too moved...” of being castrated for Barthes.¹⁹ If I get enthralled with La Zambinella I may lose my hold on Sarrasine. Theory and teaching become a kind of type of force that demands dominance and submission over my very will.

What does it mean that we are at risk of becoming too moved? It is recognition of the real danger that comes from activating the will to power. The will to power, as conceptualized by Nietzsche and resuscitated in Deleuze’s *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, is “the element from which we derive both the quantitative difference of related forces and the quality that devolves into each force in this

¹⁷ It is worth noting that one reviewer objected to this empirical example for discounting knitting because it is a gendered activity. One possible implication of this critique is to assume the instructor was female despite no disclosure on my part of the sex or gender of the instructor in the example. These are precisely the limitations of identity politics I am attempting to illustrate. The reminder that activities such as knitting cannot be discounted at face value is useful, but they should also not be necessarily gendered as an *a priori* assumption; to do so reifies the types of politics that (re)inscribe the very social conditions I desire to perform otherwise. This example represents a classic double bind, requiring a calling forth of identity in the example and in demanding that identity therefore always already negates alternative radical politics.

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, 88.

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relation.”²⁰ Our will is configured and bound to the forces of domination and we *activate* or *reactivate* the will to power when we leave ourselves vulnerable to being touched in moments of immanence. Deleuze writes, “It follows that will to power is manifested as a capacity for being affected.”²¹ These relations with forces are never singular, for “There are even several becomings of forces that can struggle against one another.”²² This is the ability to be *affected*, to be moved, to be changed by the relationship of forces that may leave you otherwise. If we live immanently there is the possibility for that level of being *affected* all the time. Such a mode of living affectively offers a possible escape to the oppressive nature of power and fascism.

It was Foucault who wrote in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus* that the volume offered the “art of living counter to all forms of fascism.”²³ If I locate my desires as scholar and teacher to find the articulations among rhetoric, bodies, performance, Deleuze & Guattari, and my students, then insofar as there is any imperative in Deleuze and Guattari’s work it is moving against fascism. Yet, education as organized in the university is often a fascist endeavor and it is rarely ever truly democratic—I cannot begin to imagine what such a project looks like. My struggle, daily as a body in front of a room of bodies in front of me, is to resist such a will to power, especially when students desire their own oppression in the name of getting their degree. I fail at this goal daily, but I make an effort that centers around interrogating hegemonic forces (including my own body) and by encouraging multiple articulations of the structures of feeling that come to light in the course of our conversations. At the end of the day I am often unsure what they learned or what I feel, but most days I know we feel, we communicate, and we communicate about communicating. Is this enough? So asketh the white man?

A—Fascism

Teaching can avoid producing the fascist in the classroom by attempting to make use of a multiplicity of tactics. However, the default mode of education in its entire top down machinations is to reproduce fascism as a mode of instruction that forces privileged knowledge on vulnerable bodies. If that is a dominant mode of instruction how can we proceed? How can we overcome the sadness? By calling it what it is, an admission without guilt, I am a fascist. I inherited this thing, it’s a machine, please help me tear it down. How do I get over the profound sadness I feel every time I finish teaching? It is not that it is

²⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*. trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 50.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 62.

²² Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 63.

²³ Michel Foucault “Preface.” In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. trans Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Penguin, 1977), xii.

not rewarding, but I can never feel like I have done enough. In part this sadness is produced by the need to leave, I am rarely sad while teaching. In those moments spent talking and listening with my students there is an immense kind of *affect*. Yet, that plane of immanence can be hard to achieve and is always foiled by the incessant ticking of a clock I cannot control. The plane ceases when discourses of domination force a kind of transcendent thought. A student once asked me during office hours “Have you heard of Heavenly Father, I received the Truth from Him.” He was so damn sure, but more than anything he desired me to be sure with him. On days when I feel particularly frustrated as an instructor I see the look of disappointment on his face when I politely took the copy of *The Book of Mormon* he gave me and expressed my skepticism towards organized religion. Teaching has become a set of heteronyms: desire and oppression, sadism and masochism.

B—Process

Education is a communicative process. Education is a cultural and a material process. In *Keywords* Raymond Williams argues “**Culture** is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.”²⁴ I was once in a graduate seminar on media theory discussing the definition of culture when one of the more rebellious faculty members sauntered into the seminar and when the instructor inquired why he was there his reply was simple, “I have a PhD in Cultural Studies and cannot define culture, so I want to hear your answer.”²⁵ We were there for almost three hours and there was no answer.

In *Marxism and Literature* Williams argues that an iteration of culture is that of a “noun of process.”²⁶ Long before we saw culture as a fixed object/subject of study it was recognized as a dynamic process full of complexity and struggle. Even in the oppressive regimes of civilizing there was a process at work—the great failing of course was that those doing the civilizing saw their own culture as a fixed natural entity.²⁷ I am affected by Williams’ pronouncement that “The complexity of the concept of ‘culture’ is then remarkable.”²⁸ Complexity, process, and fluidity means that cultures are always spaces of contested desires, of domination and resistance, of sadism and masochism. Nowhere are these contestations clearer than when one participates in the culture of the classroom as an instructor—especially when one makes the decision to teach queer theory in a deep red state where a majority of the population refuses to recognize a form of sexuality other than heterosexuality. Complexity, indeed!

²⁴ Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87.

²⁵ This professor is Dr. Marc Leverette, who was employed at Colorado State University during my M.A. work there.

²⁶ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 13.

²⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 14.

²⁸ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 17.

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For Williams language and literature are two of the conjoined processes that make up the complexity of communication. Whenever we strife in seminars about what do we do to resist the neo-liberal order and casually throw teaching under the bus I think we make a profound error—if teaching is a communicative process related to culture and we accept communication as a material practice then teaching constructs a material reality that has the potential to convince instructors and their students that it could be different. Williams’ pronouncements are clear here: “Moreover, this language is material: the ‘agitated layers of air, sounds’ which are produced by the physical body.”²⁹ More than that, we can conceive of “language as activity,” when one uses language one is doing and making culture in the world.³⁰ This meaning is important—society and social structures do not precede language and language does not precede society and social structures. Also, humans do not precede any of these, they all come into being at the same time and so they are co-constituted with one another. Identity is also co-constructed at this place: simultaneously and in totality. Williams is describing language as a material thing. When language does things, it does things to material reality.³¹ As such materiality, communication, and culture share a consubstantial origin.

In sum, culture and communication are what facilitates us as instructors. We also make identity, after all I am asked to teach courses born of the identity politics project in the academy (Comm and Gender, Intercultural Comm). These are not facile exercises; they are material practices in which identity is at stake. Thus the hegemonic processes unfold in a dense political field where the classroom is a hegemonic space, the syllabus is a hegemonic space, and so on. It is here that I try, and fail, to take up resistive modes of teaching to work counter-hegemonically—all the while knowing such a project has no end other than exhaustion and that things could always be otherwise.

C—Lectures

“Hegemony is...” This sentence begins the first serious lecture of almost any course I teach. I could say this much more succinctly—Hegemony is! Students, though, are rarely satisfied with such a claim; they desire a definition and I oblige. They write in their notebooks my definition of hegemony and how it relates to the production of culture. I am literally practicing what I preach; they are performing hegemonic structures as they hang on every word in my definition. It may be on the exam after all; it will be on the exam after all. Hegemony is, for Williams, related to a “whole social process” that precedes and exceeds anything we do in the classroom. However, I invoke hegemony because it escapes the trap of determinism by allowing for the construction of

²⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 29.

³⁰ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 31.

³¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 29.

alternative hegemonic structures.³² This sense of hegemony allows for “practical connections of many different forms of struggle, including those not easily recognizable as and indeed not primarily ‘political’ and ‘economic.’”³³ When I teach this concept I always use the same examples—this class, my body, your bodies, we are all participants in the structures of domination and there are always gaps in power and culture that can be resisted and renegotiated.

Often I say, “This class could always be different.” I remind them at least once a week that there are more of them than there are of me. I cannot stop the resistance if it were to form. I secretly hope it comes, but it never does. I always submit grades on time—even when they protest their grades they submit to the meaning of the grades. I have failed them all. Failure is, of course, relative and propositional. I do not seek their liberation, but their ability to open themselves to being affected in the classroom. We can never do this enough, but this need not be a sign of failure. With how numb we act in our everyday lives to feel something in the way the will to power describes is an escape from the bitter drug of everyday life.

D— /

Intercultural Communication as Material Resistance is the subtitle I want to give my course. I work hard to undercut so many of the fictions and expectations of such a course. It is not a course in guilt (though they may feel guilty at times). It is not a course that catalogues objectively a few cultures so they leave as experts in *American* culture. I encourage them to speak and write in first person active voices that are honest about their own cultural participation and affective experiences. Some do, many do not. There are moments where we create small undercurrents, a form of counter-hegemony that ought to be held in place just long enough to upset the centers of our cultural experiences before they release back into the cultural milieu. They read a few essays each semester on Slash or / fiction. These fan-produced stories imagine male leads of pop-culture media texts as homosexual lovers. The examples I work them through focus on stories of Kirk and Spock from *Star Trek* as erotic lovers. Students are shocked by it. In the past I have shown students an S&M themed video that recuts scenes from the show with gay pornography set to the *Nine Inch Nails* song “Closer” (The refrain begins “I wanna fuck you like an animal I wanna feel you from the inside”). Students assumed that such fiction is the product of “gay culture” whatever that phrase means. Yet, as Constance Penley argues these stories are often the products of Midwestern heterosexual housewives.³⁴

³² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 110.

³³ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 110-111.

³⁴ Constance Penley, *Nasa/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America* (New York: Verso, 1997), 100-125.

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This conversation undermines many of their expectations. Recently it led to an intense forty-minute conversation on how housework and housewives are valued and devalued culturally. We talked about why this form of fiction offers contact with the taboo, the ‘other,’ in ways not available to these women. A day later a student emailed me to register her disgust for the readings—but she also said it was the first time she really thought about the politics of her role at home. She shared her attempt to buy a new car, only to be told that because of the way her husband filed their taxes she had no credit history and would need him to let her get the car. Her disgust was paired with anger and a desire for political change. I offer this exchange not to pat myself on the back, but to illustrate that this conversation, the politics of her home, and the culture of our classroom produces material effects that matter. “The greatest activism in the world is being a great teacher.” I make no claim of being a great teacher, but there are desires that drive me in the classroom—perhaps we could replace great with immanent here. I desire to be an immanent teacher.

The risk is, of course, that these pockets of resistance I seek to create can become hegemonic themselves. This always happens. Thus, I try and always return to the claim that “This class could always be different.” I mean that, but I am also afraid of that. I am afraid I do not know how to teach a group that is radically open to being affected and working to undo my own power. Mostly, I am afraid of opening myself fully to being vulnerable—I worry about the danger, I worry about not being the same, and I am afraid that whatever trip we may take, will require me to disinvest in the systems of thought and action I have spent a decade learning/speaking/writing/doing.

E—Vulnerable

Structures of Feeling. This concept is tough to define; ironic given that it about bodies, desires, and affect. Joshua Gunn’s definition is precise, though Lacanian; structures of feeling are “an entire web of communal productions during a specific moment.”³⁵ For Williams, structures of feelings can only be approximated, as opposed to being fully articulated. They form along the connectives of discourses and bodies and are “here, now, alive, active, ‘subjective’.”³⁶ That is to say, they are “social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations.”³⁷ These modes of affect help navigate and negotiate the common sense of hegemony and allow us to make emotional sense of the world around us. A repeating structure of feeling I actively seek to engender is that of vulnerability. Thinking about the way my students in Communication and Social Responsibility reacted to reading Leonard C.

³⁵ Joshua Gunn, “Mourning Speech: Haunting and the Spectral Voices of Nine-Eleven.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2004): 94.

³⁶ M Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128.

³⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133.

Hawes' "Double Binds as Structures in Dominance and of Feelings," I come back to the usefulness of producing a vulnerable environment for dialogue about social issues to occur. Hawes argues, "A much less conventional transformative practice is telling the truth about the structures of feeling produced and reproduced by doubly bound dialogues."³⁸ There is a sense in which teaching can often become a double-bind, especially when it charts a queer trajectory to disrupt and decenter normative expectations and modes of understanding, especially when doing so is thought of as a material practice of resistance. In producing a feeling of vulnerability that pervades the class, often (though not always) students give voice to their sexism, their racism, their classism, their sexuality in ways that are self-reflexive and told in active first-persona ways that articulate a sense of self without wholly defining the other they fear/are. As a result, on multiple occasions students have come out of the closet publically and privately to me or to the class, they have articulated practices of culture and gender that are troubling for them and me, and they even express the limits of their faith and beliefs in ways they could never admit to their bishop or parents. At times this willingness to speak may be wholly unrelated to my teaching, as an instructor I need to shut up, witness, and listen, to be a vulnerable body, to destabilize their assumptions of my identity. I am vulnerable because when I teach white privilege or patriarchy my body is my example. I call the class what it is—a hegemonic discourse that always already has gaps in its social order. When I do these things well we fill the gaps of hegemony with discordant discourse that has the material affect of moving, even for an instant, what seemed like iconoclastic boundaries moments before. This is the power of a structure of feeling. Perhaps I am not doing anything at all, "so sayeth the white man."

F—Militancy

For me working toward an immanent sense of teaching is a kind of becoming-militant. More than anything, it is a form of happy militancy that deals in the material world and has material effects. Many who decry teaching as a site (or only a site) of academic activism charge that so few people go to college that it is already a sort of elitist system. They are right. Our classrooms are outgrowths of racist, classist, and gendered hegemonic forces that privilege some bodies over too many others. The fault in their logic is that they imagine some place in society for activism where those fault lines do not exist. If the desire is to become an activist in a non-hegemonic space then we have not been paying attention to Gramsci or Foucault. Teaching can be a form of militant activism as long as it works constantly to undo it self. The *jouissance* of

³⁸ Leonard C. Hawes, "Double Binds as Structures in Dominance and of Feelings." In Rob Anderson, Leslie A. Baxter, and Kenneth N. Cissna, *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 182.

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coming undone is an erotic-aesthetic moment of glad militancy and should be elaborated upon throughout culture, but especially in our classrooms. Do I always do this? No. Can I force these structures of feeling and affective states? No. However, I can fold my theoretical commitments into my teaching in a way that has material effects beyond reading and thinking about complex ideas and figuring my students as dupes who could not understand it anyway.

G—Bodies

It is not until now, towards the end of this work that I lay out, with some precision, the vulnerable affective state that I find is most capable of becoming-active on an immanent plane in the classroom. I want to start with the figuration of bodies drawing on Deleuze in the middle of Spinoza.³⁹ As Pierre Macherey claims, “Deleuze’s expressionist reading of Spinoza, then, forces the text out of itself by introducing minimal dislocations needed to get it moving.”⁴⁰ We must get out of the ruts that produce repetitive understandings of our own limits. We must take on with haste a recognition that “We do not know what the body can do...”⁴¹ That is not to say our body is capable of feats of super-human strength or that it can overcome the lethal diagnosis of decades of abuse from our toxic addictions—though perhaps that, too.⁴² It is to suggest, however, that the hegemonic force and discursive chains that define what our bodies mean is a dreadfully limiting system. What our body, and what bodies—various and multiple—can do in conjunction with one another can produce a sensation wholly *other* to the systems of intelligibility we are most invested in. In his essay on Deleuze and Spinoza, Pierre Macherey presents a central critique of Freud by Deleuze, “Freud altogether fails to understand the ‘minor’ forms of affectivity seen in sadistic and masochistic relations, and the specific differences fundamental to each.” It is this sense of becoming-minor

³⁹ This was often a key evocative phrase that both Deleuze and Guattari use to mark a kind of philosophical intervention that is neither Deleuze nor Spinoza etc... They are interrupting a work in a way that returns to the original but does so in a way that does not *faithfully/truly/really* recreate the original—it is slightly off center a monstrous offspring. To wit: “What got me by during that period was conceiving of the history of philosophy as a kind of ass-fuck, or, what amounts to the same thing, an immaculate conception. I imagined myself approaching an author from behind and giving him a child that would indeed be his but would nonetheless be monstrous.” Gilles Deleuze qtd in Brian Massumi, “Translator’s Forward.” In Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), x.

⁴⁰ Pierre Macherey, “The Encounter with Spinoza.” In Paul Patton, *Deleuze: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 149.

⁴¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 17.

⁴² Phaedra Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 56.

where one can escape from the (re)production of domination that subdues one's body and disciplines the self in a way that produces narcissistic forms of fascism and cruelty. There are ways to take lines of flight out of modes of domination that construct other ways of becoming on a plane of immanence. It is hard to resist the urge to return to structuralism both in the classroom and intellectually, especially to the structure of early Barthes, who offers a feeling of a guarantee to explain in rational terms the most irrational forms of cruelty humanity can produce. We must press on with an always already unstable politics that works against the false relief of rationality, "Reason is only a concept, and a very impoverished concept for defining the plane and the movements that pass through it."⁴³ We must reject the investments we believe are most sacred—morality, the family as Freud reduces it to Mommy, Daddy, and Me, and the social pressure that tells us at every turn what our body can do. In doing so we arrive at an ethics of life that can situate our bodies on a plane of immanence. Moira Gatens describes such a turn, with regard to Deleuze and Spinoza:

If we understand rule-based morality as one which addresses itself to molar subjects, then ethology may be understood as offering an ethics of the molecular—a micropolitics concerned with the 'in-between' of subjects, with that which passes between them and manifests the range of possible becomings.⁴⁴

If we set out to feel our way through these possible becomings we can produce radical and provocative structures of feeling and give our body a different sensory field. This cannot be done for us, Gatens claims, "Spinoza argues that each individual seeks out that which it imagines or thinks will increase its power of preserving itself."⁴⁵ When we unhinge this imagination from the vested systems of family and morality and make our bodies vulnerable to being *affected* we arrive at the will to power that Deleuze found so provocative in the work of Nietzsche.

H—Will

I have already touched on various connotations of the will to power, but I want to elaborate on this phrase because it is the very heart of the kind of vulnerability I desire as a structure of feeling in my classroom. This is not mere aesthetic desire, but a deep willingness to be touched and moved in ways that get my body and my student's bodies moving again. At its best, this process is nothing short of a kind of becoming, at its worst it falls back to feigned emotionality, reaction, rejection, and a closing of the heart. More than anything

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 43.

⁴⁴ Moira Gatens, "Through a Spinozist Lens: Ethology, Difference, Power," 167.

⁴⁵ Moira Gatens, "Through a Spinozist Lens: Ethology, Difference, Power," 179.

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the question cannot be *What do I want?* As if there was an object (or we could say course objective) that can be reached, held, and then we can rest. Communication is a process; it is less a fixed thing, than an ever-ongoing communicating in all of our nonlinear discursive stuttering. Deleuze is clear, “We must not be deceived by the expression: what the will wants. What a will wants is not an object, an objective or an end. Ends and objects, even motives, are still symptoms. What a will wants, depending on its quality, is to affirm its difference or to deny what differs.”⁴⁶ We are left then with a will that desires but to tack on an *ad-hoc* objective is to arrest the very motion needed to find lines of flight out of reproducing the fascist order.

Will and force are related concepts that offer a provocative understanding of the abundance of desires that push our bodies into motion. “The will to power here reveals its nature as the principle of the synthesis of forces.”⁴⁷ If we understand force as a flow of power through and among bodies we can see that force has two distinct modes, “Forces are said to be dominant or dominated depending on their difference in quality.”⁴⁸ Moreover, “What defines the body is this relation between dominant and dominated forces.”⁴⁹ We are able to deal with and alter the relationship among a multiplicity of forces through the will. The will and force are related, but “Inseparable does not mean identical. The will to power cannot be separated from force without falling back into metaphysical abstraction...Force is what can, will to power is what wills.”⁵⁰ It is the will to power that allows us movements out of fascism but there is a toll that can be taken on this line of flight.

I—Affect

The will to power is the capacity to be affected. Not in some kind of facile playing at emotionality or pretending to care to get a grade or good evaluations but a sort of necessary affective labor that touches and changes the very assumptions about who you are. In a kind of analogy I have always been taken with Bobby Kennedy’s description of love as an ethic—“What it really all adds up to is love—not love as it is described with such facility in popular magazines, but the kind of love that is affection and respect, order and encouragement, and support.”⁵¹ This kind of being moved is the sort of being affected that both Nietzsche and Deleuze are taken with. Deleuze writes, “The will to power alone is the one that wills, it does not let itself be delegated or alienated to

⁴⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 78.

⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 50.

⁴⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 53.

⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 40.

⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 50.

⁵¹ Qtd in Edward M. Kennedy “Address at the Public Memorial Service for Robert F. Kennedy,” June 8, 1968, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ekennedy-tributetorfk.html> (accessed December 14, 2010).

another subject, even to force.”⁵² The will to power is our only means of putting our body in connection with force, “Thus it is always through the will to power that one force prevails over others and dominates or commands them.”⁵³ The will to power is a way of distributing the sensible and material relations to power that flows through our everyday experiences.

∞—Eternal Return

I have been quoting Deleuze and referencing Nietzsche at length so I want to return to the fascism of the classroom with some force here. To ask my students to give themselves over to becoming-vulnerable and to make myself vulnerable is a structure of feeling that enables us together to be *affected* immanently. That means, we are obligated to deal with the very pressing and present concerns of contemporary culture and of the needs of those of us sharing that time. It demands a mental exhaustion that my students often object to after the fact—“Why is this class so intense?” However, when a student makes a provisional claim about their sexuality and we have bodies that reject that declaration, bodies that celebrate it, bodies that encourage it, we must deal immediately with the courage of a will to power that claims a right to be present in the classroom. Yet, this space and will need not be traditional modes of identification in identity politics. Teaching queer theory can be as disruptive to gay identities as to heteronormative identities. Also, when a student speaks up to declare their beliefs about God and the Church, those who reject their views can also be open to being affected by them.

Classrooms are profound spaces of identity construction, especially in the provisional sense of identity. What the bodies mean becomes less relevant the more I follow this line of flight. What they do as signifying machines is always up for interpretation, construction, and reconstruction. In seeking a becoming based in the will to power, the capacity to be affected, I try and let my courses chart their own paths through content in ways that serve many interests, mine included. I am still troubled by the default back to the fascist in the classroom, but it does not measure a lack of success but a need to remember that communication, education, and culture is a process—one that for me is a kind of becoming-minor.

“As a preamble to their performances, traditional storytellers in Majorica would say ‘It was and it was not so.’”⁵⁴

“So: no more masters, no more masterpieces. What I want (instead of God the novelist) is a self-portrait in a convex mirror.”⁵⁵

⁵² Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 49.

⁵³ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, 51.

⁵⁴ Roman Jakobsen, “Linguistics and Poetics” in *The Discourse Reader*, eds Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland. Qtd in David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, 69.

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—Coda

Infinite Diversity,
Narcissism,
Whiteness,
Multiplicity Becoming Style,
S/Z,
Fascism Process,
Lectures,
/Vulnerable Militancy,
Bodies Will Affect,
Eternal-Return

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⁵⁵ David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, 150.

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