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Accounting for My Teacher's Body: What Can I Teach/What Can We Learn?

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Abstract:

The ideals of democratic education most often rely on a logic of identity that, as Adorno has argued, denies and represses difference. Iris Young observes that this repression relies on “an opposition between public and private dimensions of human life, which corresponds to an opposition between reason on the one hand, and the body, affectivity, and desire on the other (1987; 63). This paper examines the private/public dualisms that construct the female teacher's body in the space of schooling. In particular, the paper looks at student evaluations at the end of term to discuss how the female teacher's competence is constructed through discourses of the body. Using Foucault, the study focuses on the ways discourses assumed to be private (the body) become part of the public space in order to evaluate intellectual competency. In this manner, the rational discursive space of the classroom is maintained through confusing the conformity of the body with the efficiency of the mind. This paper works toward a pedagogical stance that opens up dialogue with and through this female teacher's body. Through drawing attention to how the body performs through (non) conformity, the paper hopes to not only to deconstruct power/body relations but to offer a means to disrupt them.

Key words: body, space, place, pedagogy, power, authenticity, performance

I let events themselves become the questions. The occurrence of out-of-place phenomena leads people to question behavior and define what is and what is not appropriate for a setting. (Cresswell, 1996)

Scene 1, January 2002

It's a week after the semester has ended and grades have been turned in. I look in my mailbox and see a stack of papers: my student evaluations from the Fall. I hesitate, take a deep breath and reach for the papers. The evaluations from my 200 person large lecture Social Impact of Information technologies class were the usual range from loving the class (and me) to a strong dislike of the class, and of me. In the midst of these responses were several comments that, after 13 years of teaching, shocked me: "This professor is in poor health and should not be teaching." "The University should not allow her to teach; she is too sick." "This professor is too thin to teach." I now recall that during the final class when students were filling out evaluations, several students sitting together had been eyeing me closely and discussing something. At the time I assumed they were upset about a grade, but now I recognized what they were discussing. They were evaluating my competence as a teacher and found my body lacking. I was reeling. Who I was as a professional was evaluated on the basis not of what I did but on how I appeared. My competence could be read on and through my body.

Instead of dismissing the students' evaluations as ridiculous, my immediate response is to look for bases of comparison within my department and across my 15 plus years of teaching. What are the bodily "teaching" criteria that I am lacking? My colleagues who have been extremely overweight (male and female), or underweight (male) or obviously sick and suffering have not aroused hostility or comments about their teaching ability based on their supposed health. I have missed only two classes due to sickness in my (at that time) 10 year history at my current institution, so it cannot be my absence or fragility in the classroom that incites their comments.

Scene 2, September 2002

The summer is not over yet. Over 95 degrees outside and even hotter in my interracial communication classroom as the late afternoon sun bakes the third floor of the brick building. I am teaching about the social construction of race, about the history of racial construction in the United States. I am wearing a long sleeved blouse over a tank top. I am determined not to uncover my arms and risk the stares that might result. Result in what? Deflection of student attention away from what I am saying to who is saying it. . . To risk the profound failure of me, of my body to be the white, middle class, able-bodied, teacher--to be invisible; to go without comment onto the task of teaching. Yet, I am sweating profusely and feel as though I cannot breathe. I take off the blouse and proceed to teach about the social consequences of marking bodies.

In the ensuing years and after repeated commentsⁱ linking my teaching competence to my body, I have tried and failed to “mold” my body into a competent teacher. I have changed my criteria for my own competence based on standards external to the content I know, the relations I form with my students, the discussions and challenges we pose, debate and all learn from. In evaluating my effectiveness as a teacher, I have learned not to look for expressions of satisfaction or discontent with how I approach the subject areas, for students who have learned the content and enjoyed the experience, who have applied the subject matter to their own lives. Instead, I have learned to watch what I wear, to gauge my appearance through their eyes; when evaluations come without comments on my appearance, I feel as though I have done a good job. I am dependent on their assessment of me as a professional, which means that my body cannot, must not, be visible.

My ideology is theirs, as is the larger culture we share. Indeed, as Alexander (1999) notes the classroom is a site for the cultural reproduction and performance of (especially) gender and racial identities. My pedagogy is my body is my culture. Disappointed in the equation, I have decided to explore this relationship further. While I admit to having searched for causes (the roots of my “problem”) in psychologies, pathologies, events, etc. I find that finding a cause or establishing blame for myself or my students does little to alter the conditions of our understandings of pedagogies or even the pedagogies of our bodies. And so I ask, *What (else) can my body teach? What can it learn?* Whether we want it/them to or not, our bodies perform. They are marked and evaluated in the categories and positions created by our society: male, female, ugly, nondescript,

beautiful, fat, skinny, Asian, Black, other--a mixture of identities whose performance is always both marked and unremarkable. We may choose to mark or mar our bodies through tattooing, deliberate scarring, piercing, etc. But other “choices” are read on our bodies: too fat, too skinny, butch, all carry assumptions about (lack of) bodily control and thus a lack of competence.

As teachers, we might assume our competence to be rooted in how we teach and how we help others to learn and yet our bodies also reflect the power and desire of the dominant culture. Our race, our size, our physical ability (and less visible signs of class or sexuality) are dimensions of cultural performance both attached to and often separated from our teaching: e.g., “she’s a good teacher, even though she’s Latina.” Additionally, and mirroring the representations of females in general the female teacher is fetishized in popular culture as both the highly sexed object of adolescent male desire and the asexual mother figure totally divorced from sexual appetites or bodily desires.

The irony, for me, is that one of the reasons I chose this profession in my early twenties is that I wanted to be valued for my mind and not evaluated on my appearance. I wanted to cloak myself in the garb of academia—where the outline and fleshly desires of my body would be carefully hidden. Still, the privileges inherited in this choice must not go unremarked; choosing to be invisible is part of white skin privilege. As McLaren (2000) observes,

Whiteness constitutes and demarcates ideas, feelings, knowledge, social practices, cultural formations, and systems of intelligibility . . . Whiteness is also a refusal to

acknowledge how white people are implicated in certain relations of privilege and relations of domination and subordination. (p. 149)

And, of course, that privilege extends to the doors that were opened to me that allowed me to obtain and retain my current position. Nonetheless, whiteness, as dynamics of power and desire (McLaren, 1997) does not operate everywhere equally, but instead intersects with other identity categories, structural histories and the situational use of power.

In this paper, I explore the politics and philosophy of the “authentic” white female bodyⁱⁱ and specifically of embodiment as a located, performative practice in teaching. As I consider myself to be part of the culture which levels its critique at my body as (in)competent, I see my role in this culture and in this paper as to provide a basis both for critique and change. Turner (1988) discusses this role in terms of “performative reflexivity”—a role which observes how things are and imagines/performs how things might be different. From a pedagogical perspective I question how drawing attention to the spaces in which bodily performance is read as (in) authentic or (in) competent might help students come to an understanding of the boundaries of their own culture and the limitations of such a framework.

Recognizing that concern with the body as the site of experience covers most of the philosophy of the last century and a half, I will limit my focus to cultural notions of authenticity, competence and performance as they are both coupled with and separated from the body—either calling attention to the body as signifier of (competent or incompetent) authenticity or in locating authenticity elsewhere (i.e. in cultural norms and

ideals or norms-as-ideals). Authenticity is intimately tied to the body and to communication. Authentic communication is that which can be directly connected to the “real” body, to that which is observable. Thus communication is both coupled with the body and is uncoupled through its reflection on/of/from the body.

Locating my Body in/of Autoethnography

I use autoethnography as a path to think through issues around space, place, embodiment and the tensions/overlaps of public and private spaces that pervade cultural notions of teacher competence or professionalism. Alexander (1999), citing Britzman, notes that teachers enter the classroom equipped with institutional biographies which locate themselves and their students within the narratives that sustain the structure of the school. Implicit in these narratives are images of the teacher, “images which sustain and cloak the very structure which produces them” (p. 311). I use the failures of my own body to replicate these images as a jumping off point to focus in particular on the female teacher’s body, and even more so on the white, professional, able-bodied body as naturalized and on the places where other bodies toil and struggle (some more than others) for visibility.

Autoethnography is, quite simply, the use of autobiography as a site of theory, to illuminate the potentials of theory and methodology to illustrate the complexities of experience. Alexander notes that, “autobiography, like theory, is a process of recreating, re-viewing and making sense of the biographic past” (309). The combination of theory and autobiography allows for both the centering and displacement of the self arguably not found, nor allowed, in other forms of ethnographic or interpretive/critical research.

Nonetheless, Visweswaran (1994) notes that in autoethnography "in situating an individual within a particular community, the local and specific are broached in ways we might well term ethnographic" (8). Autoethnography here points to the complexities of bodily position in performance, and especially to performing in classroom spaces.

My purpose is to historicize and locate (in time and space) the teacher's body, as well as to discuss the moral and ethical implication/obligation of the (female, professional) body to perform competently with/in the space of the classroom. My use of autoethnographic method is not purely narcissistic, although it *is* selfish. And yet, my (white, female, middle class, able-bodied) body is not simply read and thus offers and is offered up as a site for theoretical study and pedagogical intervention.

I start with the notion that my body fails first and foremost because it points to the limits and excesses of the cultural ideal—a rip in the ideological seam of the spectacle (DeBord, 1983). I/my body refuses to perform normally both as a woman and as a professional. This malfunction incites anger and wrath more so than concern because I have made visible the gaps in spectacular culture: the place where images cease to perform as they should. My body calls attention to what goes unrecognized and unmarked in the spectacular: the intersection of power and knowledge signaled in the ideal. My failure is particularly telling in that it points to cultural boundaries of embodiment—the impossibility of the idealized body/mind duality. Other bodies (bodies that are othered) are evaluated as body or as mind, but not as both. They are always already (in)visible. The Black, Latina, gay, disabled body never can signify the dominant cultural "self" and thus performs embodiment always in relation to "other". The

connection of ideal mind to ideal body is thus never disrupted in the process of signification.

Given these sets of relations through which power and knowledge produce competence and authenticity in some bodies and not others, it is perhaps most important not to ask what *caused* my evaluations or my concern over my state of un/dress in the classroom, but to examine the sets of power relations that give rise to the possibilities for such connections. In what follows I first offer a brief sketch of the body in Western thought, the politicization of the body as production in Marx, as a site of governance in Foucault and the site of power for feminist thought. I look at the possibilities for competent performances given the range of bodily representations available to female teachers. I then turn to feminist critical geography to discuss the politics of place and space and the performances of female teaching bodies therein. I discuss the rupture of public private spaces and the control over the most intimate of private spaces where deviant bodies are concerned. Finally, I uncouple the body from identity through the notions of performativity and the performances to which white, female, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle classed teachers are held “accountable” in an effort toward new pedagogies of the body.

The Body in time

The Body in western thought. To problematize the teacher’s body it is necessary to take a brief trip through Enlightenment to understand the foundations of the central dualities that linger in our commonsense notions of identity and the authenticity of experience; in other words, reality as we think we know it. Philosophy, from the

Enlightenment onward, posed a moral body that was autonomous, individual, and capable of reasoning not through but separate from the physical body. Thus mind, through Kant, Descartes, among many others, could be separated from body and from nature. Moreover, an *ideal* self, a moral and virtuous self, was achievable only through control of the impulsive, unreasonable “nature” of the body and of those bodies not capable of reason. At the same time, the discounting of the senses for the science of the mind placed a premium on the ability of reason through which one could distance the natural body from the reasoning mind.

The positioning of the body as historical and political was, among Western philosophers, first noted in Marx’ work which posited the body of the proletariat as classed, although not gendered, and thus the body naturalized for work. Foucault is often credited with establishing the philosophical foundations for understanding the ways in which bodies are disciplined, controlled, or surveilled. Nonetheless, where Foucault positioned the body in terms of sexuality and self-surveillance, feminists have long understood that the matter of bodies, or matters of bodies, are the core sites of power. In the Victorian era and through the American revolution, women wrote of the ways in which their gender was confined to the domestic sphere, bound, tied and trapped through notions of proper feminine manners, fashion or work and excluded from matters of education and politics.

Parallel to the rising awareness of spatial differentiation of gender were the formation of technologies of visualization which changed the relationship between corporeality and the known world. Changing the dimensions of visualization changed the knower/seer as

well as the known/seen. While much of the writing on early visual technologies such as the *camera obscura* focus on this splitting of the self into a disembodied “mind’s eye”, these theoretical histories (e.g. Crary, 1992; Merchant, 1980) fail to acknowledge the “presence of a rationalizing singular observer who judges and polices the truth” (Nast & Kobayashi, 1996, 85). The observer controls what is seen and thus changes the relationship between self (interior spaces) and other (exterior spaces) and, perhaps more importantly, what counts in the visualization of spaces and bodies. Linking visualization to objectification to consumption, Nast and Kobayashi (1996) observe that, “the *epistemic* framework of objectivism is equivalent to, and thus sustained by, normative material positionings through which we are ‘named’, experience and give meaning to the world” (p. 87). As objectivism undergirds scientific understandings of truth, so too are morality and authenticity linked to corporeality and visibility.

The basis of morality both in and not in the body is important, as it naturalizes the development of the visual as the grounds for the moral. As the authorial gaze, the “I” becomes the “eye”, through the inspecting gaze of the self internalizing the objective gaze of the other (see, e.g., Berger & Luckman, 1967. Mulvey, 1975). Thus, what is seen is experienced not of the “self” but of the other. Although these feminists/critical theorists do not discuss race or class, for instance, these intersect in important ways in their arguments, even as their continued invisibility is highly problematic.

Feminists, using Foucault’s concept of the gaze have drawn attention to the ways in which women are objectified/judged through the authorial gaze. Power, following Foucault, works through self-surveillance and correction. The gaze does not emanate from

above (as in some centralized power) but in and through the gaze of the other, “An inspecting gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that. . . each individual thus exercis[es] this surveillance over, and against, [her]self” (c.f. Bordo, 1993, 27). Following the feminist argument that women’s bodies are completely controlled by the gaze of men, Bordo further argues that, “in our culture, not one part of a woman’s body is left untouched, unaltered” (21). Control over women’s bodies renders them objects as well of ethical and moral dependency, for autonomy of the mind is intimately connected to autonomy over one’s body. I discuss this somewhat controversial notion in more depth later in the paper, but for now it is important to note the location of autonomy as situated in the (white, male, classed, able-bodied) gaze.

When teaching my students about the interrelationship between culture and identity I often ask them to write a list of words that come to mind that best describe who they are. I ask students which descriptors come immediately to mind and we discuss the importance attached to descriptors of race, gender, sexuality, etc. by members of dominant and marginalized cultural groups. The visibility or invisibility of bodies seems intimately tied to the importance attached to these identity terms, as is the degree to which descriptions are self-determined or are the result of attributions of others. Regardless, our self- and other descriptions are always culturally determined. Those aspects of body that we acknowledge and the terms through which we “size them up” also connect academic/scientific knowledge and “common sense” knowledge about the

relationship between competence of mind and competence of body (e.g. “sound mind, sound body”).

My own use of descriptors and spatial terms of course reflects and refracts the terms of my students and of the reader—for how else could we comprehend what a woman, what a teacher is or does or how she might fail to measure up in her appearance? Who am I-- or who do I think I am? I am thin. I have the bad posture of the typical academic, in part from hunching over books and computers for many years but also from a lifetime of trying to make myself appear on the same level as those around me. I have sharp angular body of a man--not the voluptuous curves of a mature, child bearing and rearing woman. Not small boned or petite, I suppose to others I look as though my body needs more on it to feel comfortable in my own flesh. Nonetheless, and although this is the body I know, have known for these many years, I do not believe that my body holds some essential truth about my character or competence—my capacity for being (a teacher, a professional, a woman) seems to lie in the cultural effectiveness of my doing.

Bordo (1993) discusses two ways representations of culturally appropriate bodies are effective in providing criteria for *natural* or *normal* gender, (and here I add sexuality, race, class, etc.). Representations, she notes, *homogenize*, in that they remove all aspects of difference that might complicate notions of appropriateness. Body size, shape, race/ethnicity and sexuality are defined as normal according to the invisible standards of the dominant culture. Differences are allowable within boundaries of the exotic; the exceptions are also defined in terms of their distance and lack of threat to the norm. Bordo notes as well that representations *normalize*; that is, they establish criteria for what

is acceptable or even common, unremarkable. These normalities appear as natural when in fact they are created to differentiate the center from those who are marginal, those who don't conform. Nonetheless, representations are not stable and the representation of the weak slender female body can as easily be used one moment to depict femininity and the next to depict the powerful, if asexual, female executive. Bordo notes that it is to the contextualization of these images that feminists must direct their attention if they are to adequately theorize power sited through the body.

My body has been both a sight and a site: in the former, a representation of some abnormality of the female form and with the latter, a location for the battles over control and author-ity over my fleshly appearance. In the classroom, what began in my early years as a teacher as the worry that students (males especially) take me to be more than the sum of my bodily parts, has translated later into much the same concern. The difference now is that accepted spectacle (attractive teacher) has morphed into the unaccepted spectacle as I have lost weight and gained years. In the classroom, I have inhabited my body as an alien might take on a human form (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers?*). I have carefully tried to display the appropriate form, the acceptable image in an attempt to hide my own excesses—too emotional, too sensitive, too vulnerable—too much of me exposed to the world.

Theorizing the movement from subjectivity to objectivity through surveillance and through the gaze, however, offers a rather uncomplicated picture of the cultural complexities of embodied experience. Certainly, we experience ourselves in the world as both agents and acted upon, and such movements can be simultaneous, informed through

our interactions with others and creatively negotiated in a manner that always redistributes power.

In a different vein, however, we might ask about whose body was Bordo (above) writing? Are there bodies exempt from the scrutiny of dominant culture? If so, how are they made invisible? Bordo might be criticized here for assuming the visibility reflected on the bodies of white, middle class women. Are there women who for whom the gaze is so irrelevant that they might escape its power? If so, and without recognition are they/can they be authentic and competent women in the dominant (US) culture? How/are they held accountable to these invisible standards? Another factor that locate female bodies as (in)visible in U.S. dominant culture left unaddressed in the previous argument is their construction in spaces marked as public, private, institutional, domestic, foreign, national, etc.

The space of the Body

Representing and historicizing bodies limits the possibilities of a strictly poststructuralist reading. While it is important to deconstruct representations, feminist geographers are careful to point to the limits of semiotic readings bounded strictly to correspondence between subject/objects and the words that define them. Instead, if we locate representations of the female teacher's body as constructed within the institutional structures of school and family, we see the tension between the private and public contexts in which the female body has been located. Importantly, the history of competent white female bodies has located them in private spaces, invisible beyond the limits of the home and thus unrecognizable as part of a productive political and economic

(labor) force. As McClintock (1995) notes, work for “respectable” women in Victorian society, was to be hidden, unremarkable, done by invisible others. “Working” women were prostitutes or slaves whose very visibility in public space rendered them deviant and incompetent. Their bodies made visible the limits of proper Victorian society.

In postwar, industrial society, private space as an ideal type was constructed as “the domestic, the embodied, the natural, the family, property, ‘the shadowy interior of the household’, personal life, intimacy, sexuality, . . . care, a haven, unwaged labour, reproduction and immanence.” In a similar manner, public space as an ideal type has been constructed as “the domain of the disembodied, the abstract, the cultural, rationality, critical public discourse, citizenship, civil society, justice, the marketplace, waged labour, production, the polls, the state, action, militarism, heroism and transcendence” (Duncan, 1996, 128).

The work and bodies of “proper” 19th and early 20th century women were to be hidden, a part of private space which was both apolitical and subject to political control, hidden through their lack of autonomy and perceived dependence, and yet visible as a result of “warranted” intrusion and surveillance. Duncan makes the distinction between men who “move between public and private spaces with more legitimacy and safety. . . and less burdened by responsibilities as caregivers of children and the elderly than most women” (1996, 129). In the United States, as women during the Second World War were prodded into and then excluded from the public space of the workforce, their boundaries (and their bodies) needed to be reconfigured for the purposes of (pseudo)waged labor.

This ambivalent movement took place in the 1950’s as women were increasingly allowed

into those public spaces defined as semi-domestic, or caregiving spaces, notably through involvement with young children (elementary teaching) or the sick or elderly (hospital nurses). It was into this milieu that the (white, middle class, heterosexual) female teacher's body was re-placed.

Duncan links the concept of public space with autonomy and private space with dependence. Importantly, and following from these spatial connections, autonomy is connected to mobility, and thus implies both independence and choice or agency/action. Free moving, free thinking individuals are capable of acting on their own behalf and, in acting in and through their worlds, of ordering and defining them for others presumed less capable of doing so. Squires (c/f Duncan, 1993) notes this distinction in arguing for a redefinition of private spaces:

[T]here are very strong grounds for articulating a specifically embedded and embodied conception of privacy as a means of conferring autonomy. For the body can be viewed as one of the core territories of the self: control over one's body is crucial to the maintenance of a sense of self and hence the ability to openly interact with others. To have control over one's own bodily integrity (to regulate access to it) and to have this integrity recognized, is a minimal precondition for free and equal social interaction. (134)

While such a distinction may be oversimplistic for our purposes here, it points to the need to make such differentiations for purposes of control (over minds and bodies) and definition. It also points to the complexities of embodiment in spaces that were

traditionally considered public and thus out of bounds for women and others excluded as “authentic” citizens.

Thus, we find that female teachers’ entry into the classroom was accompanied by standards for dress and morality that were not necessary for males in the same profession. Many teacher dress codes in the United States (Kahn, 2006) and Canada (Llewellyn, 2006) in the 19th and early 20th centuries prohibited female teachers from teaching while pregnant, or, ironically on the other end of the gender spectrum, from wearing pants. More recent school dress codes still explicitly address women, or more specifically, the female teacher, as sexual. Skirts, shirts, blouses, shoes, and piercings should be conservative, for instance, women should not wear skirts more than a few inches above the knee, or should not wear low cut or see through blouses. Dress codes aimed at men—if they appear at all—prohibit them from appearing too feminine (although not too sexy). For instance, one Texas school district prohibits men from wearing earrings in one ear and most prohibit wearing earrings in both ears (see Kahn, 2006). These standards for governing the teacher’s body were seen as imperative for women if they were to teach the countries’ youth—presenting a contradiction of sorts between the traditional view of educators as neutral vessels for imparting knowledge and the view that female teachers (as with all women) were to be defined first and foremost as sexual bodies.

Walkerline (1991) has discussed the role of female teachers as nurturers, replacing the role of the mother in elementary schooling while marking the contiguous private spaces of the home and family. In this manner, female teachers provide an important function for socializing young citizens into the institutions of society, training

students to discipline their bodies toward the training of the mind, to distinguish cultural performances appropriate for public and private spaces, and most importantly to link authenticity with the moral, the good and the true.

While policy continues to maintain distinctly gendered spaces for teacher's bodies, feminist theory has moved from equating gender with public and private spaces to a feminist spatiality [that] embraces . . . a politics of place (its localization in spaces created, strengthened, defended, augmented, and transformed by women). In this admittedly stylized rendering, feminism is not about the category "woman" or identity per se, but about subjects and places. It is a politics of becoming in place (Gibson-Graham, 2006, xxi).

Feminist critical pedagogues (e.g. Gallop, 1995, Ellsworth, 1992) also take into account the body as the discursive manifestation of desire, pleasure, and power in the classroom. Student and teacher bodies, for feminist critical pedagogues, are explicitly connected to power and resistance, control and hegemonic oppression. Knowledge in schools is explicitly connected to the mind; bodies are to be disciplined in these spaces in order to properly train the mind. In spite of, or perhaps because of, this discipline, desires that link minds and bodies, and that yearn to move beyond the boundaries of acceptable learning always threaten to rise to the surface and threaten the fragile balance of institutional control. Desire can imply both power and resistance; we view desire as the unlimited potential and possibility of our bodies and/or we can feel limited by labels and perceptions of our body's competence and authenticity. Likewise, we can desire to learn

or to become educated and also desire the knowledges that our education has rendered invisible.

Reclaiming ethical spaces of and for becoming

At this point it is reasonable to ask, what might be sites of intervention with which to challenge the cultural boundaries of students' interpretations of my bodily (in)competence? What are the options for understanding the connections between knowledgeable bodies and bodies of knowledge? Are there places where educators can make links between what is experienced in and through the body and what is known, and yet challenge the claim of authenticity embedded in the knowledge of competent cultural performance? These disjunctive gaps and moments reveal the operations of power that promote the need for the performance of cultural authenticity in some moments and places (e.g. among those who share a minority cultural identity) and the oppression of the spectacle of authenticity in others.

Citing the pervasive dualisms of the mind/body split, Bordo (1993) questions the assumptions that the corrective to thinking the body is through feeling it. She asks, can “we ever know the body or encounter the body--not only the bodies of others, but our own bodies—directly and simply. Rather, it seems, the body that we experience and conceptualize is always mediated by constructs, associations, images of a cultural nature” (p. 35)

From a performance standpoint, Butler articulates a similar argument:

Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieved its effect through naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a

culturally sustained temporal duration. . . .The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. . . .What we take to be an ‘internal feature’ of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts” (1999, xv)

In this manner, a performative approach to understanding the (my) female teacher’s body both locates and de-couples the body from essentials of gender, race, class, etc. as universal power positions. Instead, as I teach, my body performs *in situ* and can only be re-constructed through iterative acts which are sedimented in linguistic, institutional and cultural spaces as meaningful. As Carillo-Rowe and Licona (2005) observe, “We may not be the "same" person in different geographical contexts; what an "identity" means may shift from place to place, and the communities that define us are apt to shift over time” (p. 12). A performative reading of the teacher’s body, located in spaces that assign her meaning, offers a place for pedagogical intervention that through opening up possibilities for making meaning that have, for students, personal revelatory potential.

Scene 3 Intervention? April 2004

The following takes place after my intercultural communication class has completed the exercise discussed above in which we list several words we use to describe ourselves.

Standing in front of the 30 bodies in my intercultural communication class, I contemplate whether to begin a dialogue about the cultural terms for bodies that includes my own. As we go around the room discussing identity terms, I focus on those that are absent, rather than those that are repeated over and over again (e.g. female, friend,

sister, caring, etc.). Notably, I don't hear my white students describe themselves in racial terms and I don't hear any of the students describe the size of their bodies, although the latter is often a descriptor used both to describe their emotional as well as physical state of being. While I usually spend the majority of class time focusing on the absence of racial descriptors, this time I also question why size is not on their list. "I hear you all discussing yourselves in these terms; "I feel fat today" or "I look so big in those pants" or "she looks anorexic." At this comment I pause and ask several questions: "Why do you think these ways of describing ourselves are so common?" "What do you think these descriptions say about our culture—especially as compared to other cultures you may be aware of?" and "Why was size not included on your list here but part of everyday conversation about our bodies?"

In asking these questions I hope to provoke a conversation about the emotional attachment to terms about the body, and about the moral and cultural dimensions of this attachment. I wish to differentiate the moral concern with bodies from an ethical concern with the locations from which we position our own and others bodies—here the moral concern implies a value judgment (good or bad sizes which reflect good or bad people) rather than an ethical concern for the limitations on our thinking and learning that such a judgment implies. I speak more to ethics below but for now suffice to note the differentiation between the terms.

Conclusion: The pedagogy of the teacher's body

In engaging in an (always partial) deconstruction and contextualization of the/my white, middle class, able-bodied teacher's body I pose the possibility for an ethical

intervention into meaning-making with regard to recognition, authenticity, and assumptions regarding choice, control, and competence. While recognition of the limits of culture is often part of our discussions in the classroom, we rarely engage our own bodies as points, disjunctures or intersections of power. We rarely ask, what do our bodies teach us and what do we know in and through our bodies?

Beyond the cultural and ethical implications of my line of questioning, the decision to intervene in the discourses and dynamics of power that circle around bodies in the classroom involves an intervention into the spaces of the classroom. In the spirit of a “politics of becoming in place” cited above, I use the space of the classroom—where the logic of mind is often privileged over the materiality of the body, as a position from which to initiate a discussion of bodies in performance, as teacher and students in the *here and now*.

Along these lines, I want to build a pedagogy starting from Gibson-Graham’s (2006) notion that,

If politics is a process of transformation instituted by taking decisions in an undecidable terrain, ethics is the continuing exercising in the face of a need to decide, of a choice to be/act/think a certain way. Ethics involves the embodied practices that bring principles into action. Through self-awareness and transforming practices of the self that gradually become modes of subjectivation, the ethical subject is brought into being (c/f Foucault, 1985, 28 in Gibson-Graham, 2006, xxviii).

A pedagogy of the body calls attention to what is rarely present in educational spaces: the body and our thinking about our bodies. For my teacher's body these questions serve both political and ethical purposes and are simultaneously personal and political, private and public, about difference, privilege, culture and mostly, power.

Expressing a philosophy of the body and space similar to the feminist spatial politics outlined above, Bahktin (1993) suggests that for a body to be authentic it must be answerable; that is, not mere fictive visibility but with a necessary obligation to living. This opens up possibilities for a philosophy of performance, body and authenticity that refuses semiotic readings; rather, visibility is bound up with participatory action: the body is always "answerable" in its authenticity. Fenske (2004) observes that,

the body makes us aware of our ethical and aesthetic obligations to that which we perceive and to those with whom we interact. It connects us to the event of being and refuses us any alibis. It is, consequently, only through a specific awareness of the obligations and responsibilities of the body's materiality that an action or performance becomes answerable. (12)

If I do accept the response-ability of my body to its constructed positions as subject/object, and if I do accept the postmodern notion of the "webs of discourse" through which both my students and I weave our bodily intentions and understandings, then I can, perhaps, make use of time I spend in my teacher's body. Both Grumet and hooks challenge us to put our bodies "out there" as pedagogy. According to Grumet, "My body throws a horizon around my imagination. . . it tethers my imagination to a set of possibilities which, although it is protean, is not limitless" (2003; 253). And hooks,

acknowledging the risks for marginalized bodies, asks teachers to “work in the classroom, and [to] work with the limits of the body, work both within and against those limits” (1994; 138).

Still, the answerability of the body is not immediately ethical or competent. “Events are not ethical simply because they are embodied; they are ethical when both the body and its sense are united in action dialogically” (Fenske, 2004, p. 12). Specifically, for students thinking about the relationships among culture, representation, performance, authenticity and the body, the notion of participation in living and performative culture/cultural performance invokes the *liability* of representation without participation. Quite simply, we want to control how we are seen—figuratively and literally, the ocular represents the basis of the ethical, moral, competent, professional self.

Pervasive and yet elusive in feminist theory and research on the body and the body in teaching are questions of morality and authenticity--questions which underlie all epistemological assumptions about human beings and action. While morality is implicitly positioned in feminist work as constructed through the terms on which knowing and being known are based, an important issue remains as to the responsibility and indeed the response-ability of the female teacher’s body.

Dialectics of the body such as autonomy and dependence are enfolded in a politics of recognition that are meaningful in ethical and moral terms of authenticity. A performative approach to the body that enacts responsibility for living, participation in social life, and is thus iterative culturally promotes the possibility for new ethical and moral modalities—those that are not entrenched in the fictive visualities of imaginary

aesthetics but are those ground in the complexities of bodily (living) performance. Bordo (1993) observes that the female body is both construction and resource. For feminist teachers, putting both into play to recognize and challenge the cultural performance of recognition, of naming and evaluating pedagogy in terms of (bodily) competencies is one move toward intervention.

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Endnotes

ⁱ I received similar evaluations (although only one or two) the fall semester of 2001, the fall semester of 2002 and the fall semester of 2003. The 2001 class was lecture; the others were smaller, with 30-35 students.

ⁱⁱ While there are resonances with the experiences of non-conforming and marginalized male bodies, my analysis is focused on the experiences and representations of women.