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SENSATIONAL HARASSMENT

The other day I was sorting through my emails and reached one titled "Here's My Pic:-)" with the message (already displayed on my screen): "Are you Mickey D from the chatroom? If so here's my naked pic. If not, sorry, just delete this. <http://www.expressmailservice.com/megahardcore/cassie.html> Love Cassandra Party Naked 1-767-445-2750." As it happens, I'm not Mickey D and I haven't been to a chatroom and I'm getting irate at the number of lurid suggestions that come up in my inbox, or the pornographic pictures that turn up on the shared departmental laser printer. (As a nursing mother I have difficulty imagining how male fantasy can harbour such desires for breasts exaggerated to the point of bursting!) It seems that the landscape of sexual harassment is shifting in ways that might never have been imagined, despite all the legislation now in place. And what of feminists who are accused of sexual harassment? What kind of a feminist would be accused of sexual harassment?

This is exactly the question with which Jane Gallop begins her book, *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, after explaining that the tabloid headline title is intended to underline the sensationalism attached to such a story. Gallop is known for the ways in which she makes her private life public, the way she theorises from life practices, the way she 'thinks through her body.' This is a theoretical practice designed to disrupt the traditional mind-body split characteristic of the head-work of universities and knowledge production. The cover of her 1988 book, *Thinking Through the Body*, exemplifies her project: it is a photograph of Gallop giving birth at the exact time at which her baby is both in and out of her body, the head caught framed in the middle of her body. Gallop explains in her introduction to that book that this transitory moment performs the undoing of the mind-body dichotomy, as it insists on rendering such an intimate bodily moment part of a public academic and theoretical discourse.

I'm very attracted to this methodology of knowledge production and I love the way Gallop writes. I wonder if these two can be separated? The way I'm seduced by such writing is sometimes at odds with what's being said, though. I also love the way Helen Garner writes, but am very uncomfortable with many of her questions and conclusions about sex and power in *The First Stone*. I think it's the passionate engagement that this writing demands that attracts me, a passionate intellectual engagement. When I was reading *The First Stone*, I was impelled to write in the margins to respond to the issues Garner raised, and many, many women acted on this response and posted their letters to her.

It's not surprising, then, that Gallop begins her reconstruction of this sexual harassment case with her personal academic history: of the historical moment of 1970–71 in which she learnt about feminism and learnt about sexual pleasure at university; of how sexual desire and pedagogical pleasure were an inextricable part of what she calls a "double transformation" attributed to feminism: that "feminism will always name the force that freed me to desire and to learn" (6). This is a powerful argument that contributes to the philosophies of feminist pedagogy. Part of Gallop's argument, however, is that what it means to be a feminist teaching has now changed, as has the environment of women's liberation which "turned her on" intellectually and sexually. Whereas in the 1970s feminist teachers and students were exploring and producing knowledge together with some degree of equality due to the very novelty of the ideas and publications, in the 1990s "we function as feminist authorities, trying to get our students to understand a feminism we have long known" (20). This is a position that "seems to betray the very principles of feminist teaching" (21) Gallop argues, a contradiction which students recognise—including her complainants when they allegedly collapse "sexual harassment (the criminal charge) and authoritarianism (a complaint about teaching style)" (21). Gallop goes on to examine the film *Disclosure* as a point at which sexual harassment enters the public imagination in its move from news to novel and film. This is important intellectual inquiry, as are her discussions of the originating feminist arguments that named sexual harassment as discrimination against women; differences between sex and power; institutional politics of universities and feminism; and again and again, the relations between learning and desire and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

Gallop's version of her particular harassment allegation is as follows: at the end of a social evening at a conference, one of her graduate students (with whom she had enjoyed an intimate relationship and who was to give a paper on the erotics of pedagogy the next day using Gallop's work on the topic) kissed her goodbye. Instead of the usual brief peck, this kiss became an extended tongue kiss:

The kiss was brazen and public—and thus particularly appropriate for a conference distinguished by its intellectual and sexual daring. This was a performance tailor-made for the First Annual Graduate Student Gay and Lesbian Conference, whose title, after all, was "Flaunting It." (92)

Gallop says she mistakenly imagined herself to be back in 1971, reliving the excitement and liberation of women's dances and public displays of women's sexuality. But isn't this what we accuse the older generation of masters and bosses of forgetting—that it's no longer 1971 and "that" sort of behaviour is no

longer acceptable? Gallop stresses the consensual relations of the event. Two years later, however, she has complaints filed against her by this and another woman student, not for kissing (even though Gallop makes this the focal point of the issue, as do newspapers' stories), but for sexual harassment of other varieties as well as discrimination and abuse of power. Gallop is investigated. The investigators find no cause to believe that she has sexually harassed anyone, but it is decided that she has violated a university policy which forbids consensual relations between student and teacher. This decision angers Gallop, effectively positioning her with fellow Americans Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfield and Naomi Wolf to condemn what they see as draconian measures prohibiting sexual relations at America's colleges. Gallop's argument is more convincingly feminist though:

Prohibition of consensual teacher-student relations is based on the assumption that when a student says yes she really means no. I cannot help but think that this proceeds from the same logic according to which when a woman says no she really means yes ... [What both] have in common is precisely a refusal to credit women's desires. Common to both is the assumption that women do not know what we want, that someone else, in a position of greater knowledge and power, knows better. (38-39)

This all makes sense, but how can Gallop assume that she knows what her students want, even at a conference with their *intellectual* passions aroused? And if she argues that feminist teachers now occupy different positions of authority in relation to students now, surely she has thought through the possible repercussions of flaunting that position or of students flirting with that authority? Many of Gallop's arguments I find engaging and provocatively thoughtful but, despite her account of the various students and teachers with whom she has had consensual relations which have actually enhanced the teacher-learner dynamics, I remain sceptical of the assuredness with which she can make these assertions. It reminds me of Blanche D'Alpuget's essay about how her childhood experience of sex with an older male judge was an important and positive event in the formation of her sexuality. I wouldn't want it to happen to me or my child. And neither would I test those boundaries of pedagogical relations. But I didn't experience the heady seventies of women's liberation either, instead coming to academic feminism in the late eighties when I was in my late twenties. I recognise the buzz of learning, but it didn't coincide with my sexual awakening.

Feminist responses to Gallop's text have been divided. Writing a review essay in *Signs* on academic memoir, Nancy Miller champions Gallop's text as, an account of the drives and needs behind pedagogic performance ... the complexity of desires not so easily policed ... What kind of a community are we becoming, when a student—for

whatever reasons—two years later turns a kiss she shared in (consensually or so it seemed to Gallop and others at the time) into a case, a case for the annals of sexual harassment? (987)

Miller sounds a little like Garner here: "What sort of people could these be? (18). In a review titled "When power corrupts," Ann J. Lane, on the other hand, does not agree with Gallop's position, deploring the differential in power: that this is a professor kissing a student and assessing her grades, something Gallop seems reluctant to recognise in the final outcome. Lane characterises Gallop and her work as an ultimately self-serving performance: "Jane Gallop, well-known, widely-published, controversial feminist theorist ... seized the moment to address the general issues posed by the relationship—amorous, erotic, sexual, pedagogical—between student and teacher. Gallop likes her pedagogical style to be outrageous and shocking" (8-9).

Lane links Gallop's work to that phenomenon called "sexy teaching," something we're all being encouraged to link in to by supervisors and managers of the increasingly corporatised environment of tertiary teaching. "Make your subjects sound sexy," lecturers have been instructed, to seduce students into buying them. Because sex sells, as Jane Gallop also knows. And so does her story. An edition of Australian mag, HQ, edited by Kathy Bail, included a six page story on Gallop and her book. As well as *The Women's Review of Books* and *Signs* mentioned above, there have been articles and letters about the case in *Lingua Franca*, *Playboy*, London's *Daily Telegraph*, the online magazine *Salon*, the *New York Review of Books*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (which reputedly set up a web site to discuss the book) as well as newspapers around the US and now *LiNQ!*

It's not easy to avoid making comparisons to Helen Garner's book, *The First Stone*, and maybe there is much in common. Helen Garner is also a product of seventies women's liberation, and her book repeatedly remonstrates the complainants' actions in taking the matter to the police, in a similar manner to Gallop's disbelief that her students could take the matter to the authorities. With uncanny similarity, Gallop's stated pedagogical desire to "get us to that place where learning begins to dance" (20) is almost repeated by Garner when she writes that,

The erotic will always dance between people who teach and learn, and our attempts to manage its shocking charge are often flat-footed, literal, destructive, rigid with fear and the need to control. For good or ill, Eros is always two steps ahead of us. (161)

Who wants to be described as rigid with fear and needing to control? It sounds like Demi Moore's character in *Disclosure* again.

Like Gallop's, Garner's story also sold and public debate blazed. In her introduction to *Bodyjamming: Sexual harassment, feminism, and public life* (1997), Jenna Mead documents that public debate, positioning her book of 13 essays, stories, cartoons, interviews and testimonials as part of that discussion. But a curious debate it is. While Mead claims to seek a language "with which to call reason, tolerance and debate into the public arena ... a language in which to describe how you and I are different from each other without one of us having to become a monster" (39-40), there is much that is monstrous in this book. The coup for this book is that "xx" (an alias for one of the complainants) wrote a piece for it, the voice that Garner could never induce to sing for her. I'm sympathetic to the concerns of this book, but the form in which it decides to "debate" is disappointing. I found myself cringing at times—not from the shrill women's voices which I would champion any time of day, but from the self-satisfying tone of condemnation and the obvious personal divisions which this debate insists upon among Australian feminists. I found Braidotti's retrospective account of Garner's teaching days in a Melbourne migrant school a particularly self-congratulatory re-telling of another story to fit the current representation of Garner as unruly, misbehaving feminist. This is not intellectual inquiry. It's revenge. I'd rather read Garner and Gallop any day.

Gallop writes in the last paragraph of her book, "I'm hoping to produce a sensation ... where knowledge and pleasure, sex and thought play off and enhance each other. When I kissed my student at a conference, I was trying to produce just such a spectacle. But I failed to make myself understood. By writing this book, I thought I'd give it another shot" (101). Garner, on the other hand, says she found it "unnerving, being attacked in public ... I find so many versions of me reflected back in the media and other places that I go, that I don't know who or where I am anymore" (in Mercer 23). While Gallop's sensational career becomes more spectacular, Garner is demonised in Mead's book. I don't want to characterise Garner as a victim of "public life," but I am interested in the national differences these debates are taking on, and the uses of institutional power that affect their production and reception. There seems to be a lot more at stake here than the topic of sexual harassment, and I don't think we've heard the last of it.

Works Cited

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