'68, or Something

Lauren Berlant

> To describe this feeling as "nostalgia" is about as adequate as to characterize the body's hunger, before dinner, as a "nostalgia for food."
> —FREDRIC JAMESON, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

1. "Something Must Be Returned to Us"[1]

In 1992 a few women colleagues and I separated from a progressive faculty group we had been in for a number of years in order to write a memo to the group. Our fantasy had been that this committee, the Committee on Critical Practice (at the University of Chicago), might become our home away from home, departmentally and disciplinarily speaking. Our memo expressed frustration that the group had not seen fit to engage seriously the different meanings of progressiveness that operate in the different domains in which we practice as intellectuals, political agents, teachers, and ordinary actors in the world. The committee had been founded on the wish such an analogy expresses: that to be politically

Like this essay, these notes cast writing as a collaborative space. The '68 project derived from four conversations: with Nick Dirks and Sherry Ortner on the legacies of '68; with Robyn Weigman on women's studies and the nostalgic discourse of "home"; with Chris Newfield on the prospects for intellectuals in the wake of public sphere contention over political correctness in the U.S.; and with Geoff Eley on the theory and geopolitics of utopia/failure. I have been also lucky to have ongoing discussions with Arjun Appadurai, Bill Readings, Kamala Visweswaran, Michael Warner, and the gender studies divas of note 2.

1. Talking Heads, "Give Me Back My Name," *Little Creatures,* Sire 25305,1985.

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on the left means that disciplinarily, pedagogically, and institutionally radical aspirations drive us as well. (I refuse to put the words *radical, progressive,* and *left* in quotes; I think you know what I mean by that refusal.) What bonded the women who wrote together was that the latter two categories—teaching and professional/institutional relations of power, knowledge, and expertise—were underwhelming concerns for our colleagues, for the most part. We began our memo: "For us the main disappointment of CCP has come in its failure to inhabit a space of concrete utopian imagining."[2]

I loved every minute of writing this memo, it was so (*collectively*) *personal.* It was truly joint *authorship.* It was a moment where *feminism* seemed entirely integrated as a political concern with other aspirations for social change (even) less fully supported, at the moment, by movement politics. We knew that some colleagues would find our insistence on institutional practices hopelessly naive; I remember imagining hearing their eyeballs creak as they rolled in sarcastic fatigue while reading. Two weeks after we circulated the document, during which time none of us heard any response from our colleagues, two close friends from the committee called me to say, "This was the worst memo we have ever read. You are so '68. We have gone through all this already, and watched its failures once, and we're not going through it again." One of them threatened to resign. I believe there was also a chastising sentence about taking "the moral high ground." Another friend reported to me, "You're being characterized all over as '68, a real flower child."

What does it mean to be accused of being '68 in the 1990s? What nuclear button does the word *utopian* push? Why does pressure on the politics of professionalism elicit such rage and contempt? How is it that a narrative of failure has come to frame that "revolution" with a black edge, an edge that has become a bar to reimagining a radical relation of politics and professional life? What, if anything, does this anxiety have to do with the increasing institutional authority of feminism, and with the additional pressures of queer politics and multiculturalism, on the value of knowledge production, intellectual identity, pedagogy, and criticism? This essay is written in favor of refusing to learn the lessons of history, of refusing to relinquish utopian practice, of refusing the apparently inevitable

2. I thank my colleagues Leora Auslander, Norma Field, Elizabeth Helsinger, and Martha Ward for permission to quote our work.

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movement from tragedy to farce that has marked so much of the analysis of social movements generated post '68.[3] I mean to place '68 in a scene of collaborations and aspirations for thinking, describing, and theorizing social change in a present tense, but a present tense different from what we can now imagine for pragmatic, possible, or useful politics.

Two other kinds of worry mark this effort to think "from '68." One is concerned with the current pressures on intellectuals and identity politicians in the U.S. to adopt a "professional" voice of expertise in some putative public sphere. I am worrying that the drive to make legitimate a progressive politics in America will force the academic left into accepting the rationalizing lingua franca of professionalism over the urges and improvisations of political creativity. I would take such an event to be, among other things, a victory of the New Right's parodic, grotesque diatribes against both the identity subcultures that threaten the historically dominant classes of the United States and their academic refractions in identity politics and theory.

As though in response to the right, there has been a drive to return to "the basics": the "love" of literature, undergraduate teaching, and jargon-free professional language (a phrase that might require oxymoron marks, should such a diacritic exist).[4] In this reactive context, identification as a professional or "public" intellectual would also seem, the way nationality has seemed, to liberate one from being fixed negatively in an identity.[5] I am worried that, as the popular media attend more closely to the products of academic life, we will become more careful to adopt and even to desire the pose of the ethically communicative replicant, the cyborg functionary—not the one Joanna Cassidy plays in *Blade Runner,* all exotic, powerful, and sensually available in her see-through raincoat, crashing through windows while fleeing some wooden man with a gun, but the bureaucratically and affectively good daughter played by Sean Young, who lives her exploitation by technologies of memory, capital, race, and heterosexuality without being destroyed by their contradictions. Which are many . . .

. . . I digress. This is an essay about the political risks of becoming

3. I adapt this observation from the more general critique of modern national historiographies in Nicholas B. Dirks, "History as a Sign of the Modern," *Public Culture* 2 (Spring 1990): 25–32.

4. For example, Bruce Robbins cites a column by Elaine Marks, president of the Modern Language Association, in which the central problematic is loving literature in an age of politics. See Robbins, "Literature, Localism, and Love" (paper delivered at the Disorderly Disciplines conference, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Oct. 1993), and Jonathan Culler, "'Lace, Lance, and Pair'" (paper delivered at the Presidential Forum of the Modern Language Association, Toronto, Dec. 1993).

5. For more serendipitously aligned thought on the subject of identity politics and the New Right, see Kobena Mercer, "'1968': Periodizing Postmodern Politics and Identity," in *Cultural Studies,* ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York, 1992), pp. 424–49.

minor—or "'68"—by embracing utopian logics and tonal disruptions of theoretical, descriptive, and analytic norms in and outside of the academy.[6] The stakes are double: one, to confront not only the challenge of description, practice, and political imagination we have come to represent as the burden of "the new cultural politics of difference";[7] but also, two, to confront, in the mode of a powerful ambivalence, the centrality of waste, failure, loss, pain, and chagrin to the project of inciting transformation itself. Apart from providing a basis for the paternalistic virtue dominant cultures claim when dissident movements fold,[8] what does it mean for a movement, a politics, a social theory to fail? How might political breakdown work as something other than a blot, or a botched job?

The risk of taking on a politics of hegemony without dominance is big, but the risks of politics should be big and require courage, especially when the activists imagining change are working and writing, the way they always do, in areas beyond their expertise.[9] A "minor" politics of critical life would therefore make both leadership and participation in subaltern and dominant public spheres difficult. For the writer/teacher/activist would no longer own a "representative" status. It also risks the loss of whatever cultural capital a decorous intellectual, writer, or speaker might gain speaking for "diversity" or "difference" from within the legitimating forms of a dominant culture. It tactically confuses the terms in which a minor, sub-, or microculture would achieve self-identity or solidarity in the face of pressures to remain intelligible to the norms that designate what a legitimate public interest is.[10] It risks making a potential

6. The discourse on minor politics and identity in this section predicts the later discussion of Deleuze and Guattari (see note 22). My reading of this essay has been illuminated by the anthology *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse,* ed. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd (New York, 1990).

7. Cornel West, "The New Cultural Politics of Difference," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures,* ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 19–36.

8. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York, 1987), pp. 197–221.

9. Ranajit Guha's exploration of the contradictions of liberal/postcolonial logics of authority describes the ways that, at least in India, state and other forms of social power establish themselves by asserting modes of domination as forms of hegemony, with all the tacit implications of "consent" that the condition of being hegemonic requires, at least in the important realms of self-representation. By inverting the terms I mean to emphasize the contrast between this aim to hold power through the veil of some historically grounded simulacrum of consent and the aim Deleuze and Guattari set forth, which is to imagine cultural and political legitimacy without the ambition to reproduce a total world of nation-state sublimity. See Ranajit Guha, "Dominance without Hegemony and Its Historiography," in *Subaltern Studies,* ed. Guha, 6 vols. (New York, 1982–89), 6:210–309.

10. These kinds of questions about the problems of translation that arise in the movements of expertise and self-representation between sub- and dominant cultures tend to be elided even in the best work on identity politics and the public sphere. See Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," and Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere,* ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), pp. 109–142, 377–401. In con-

constituency apathetic at moments when we want to solicit identifications, alliances, and transformational acts and imagination. It risks boring people. I want to argue, nonetheless, for occupying history on the ground of discourses of possibility and contestatory experimentation, seen here as modes of *practical* politics.

How do we retain a sense of historical significance for thinking the possibilities of any important, broadscale change, especially when the global political context is one of defensiveness, atomization, violent cultural and economic domination, and retreat? And how do we secure the importance of transformation, radical openness, and departures from the past for our languages and practices of politics in a time when revolutionary projects are so widely and effectively dismissed? You might see my citation of '68 as the opposite of a departure from older models of change. But this was not an intertext I sought. It is as though I have woken into a dream to find myself being dressed (in an intertextile), or dressed down, in public. Hence this is not an essay *about* "'68." I take the ill-fitting mantle of '68 to stand here for something like the risk of political embarrassment, of embracing undercooked transitional thought about the possibilities and politics of futurity itself.

This essay has another immediate context, too, from within American academic feminism, which is one place where I live. By *academic,* I do not mean "irrelevant," as in the "merely academic," but a variety of institutional, professional, pedagogical, analytic, and activist contexts. My opening anecdote might suggest that it is women, women writing together, feminists, who remain at home in the contradictions of professional and political identity. I don't mean to say this specific thing, although anecdote is argument and feminism still does vitalize a powerful "radical relationality" between political and conceptual activity.[11] But it was in a rush of exasperation after five years of silent and explicit struggle that we withdrew from speech and took up writing. We had felt not at home in traditional disciplines, so we sought alternative political and intellectual spaces in the university; when this act failed, we sought another, developing a gender studies program; we acted within a highly conventional understanding of universities as extended families, of departments as ideal "homes," and mistook the memo as a genre of political intervention, like an eighteenth-century broadside. Just as our colleagues' repudiation of radical professional activity was tainted with the fear of the farce of a second failed revolution, so too our need to remake the university as *heimlich* must also be captioned: "Something Is Wrong with This Picture."

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trast, see the volume *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video,* ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle, 1991), and Chicago Cultural Studies Group, "Critical Multiculturalism," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Spring 1992): 530–55.

11. I take this phrase from R. Radhakrishnan, "Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity," in *Nationalisms and Sexualities,* ed. Andrew Parker et al. (New York, 1992), p. 81.

Indeed, it cannot be said too strongly: the image of the university as a "home" for intellectual work and intellectuals in the U.S. has been a debilitating condition for thinking about what kinds of challenges to norms of knowledge critical thinkers might generate—what kinds of media, what kinds of histories, what kinds of voice, what kinds of organizing, what kinds of questions about culture and politics might be brought forth (although a friend's description of his department as a dysfunctional family seems, somehow, more accurate). As academic feminism continues its institutionalization and its generations of experts become prominent in a public sphere within which feminism is unevenly an important and a trivial irritant, we find ourselves rather caught in two related liberal fantasies: that the best knowledge we produce should find a home, one we share, in both an activist public and a university, and that ethical feminist knowledge will be safe for, will not do harm to, anyone who encounters it.[12]

Feminists are still made violently minor in institutional, public sphere, and everyday life contexts. We are considered less rigorous, more sentimental, more "tribal," more merely subcultural and subnational, more merely lesbian, sexually pathological, or just *sexual* than others whose vital relation to their work seems, nonetheless, to be less personally motivated. We are made to seem stuck structurally in a self-reproductive and narcissistic project ("women's" studies, "gender" studies) that reduces the complexity of the world and produces flimsy knowledge. We engender anxiety because the deconstruction of the public and private that marks every feminist movement has also made everyday work life feel less "free" and less fun for those who thought of the university place as a home space writ large, a hallowed hall safe from the rigors of capital populated by a genetically and ideologically homogeneous, family-style group.[13] Seeking a haven for our many differences in the university, feminists have made universities less *heimlich* for others.

Yet questions of *academic* feminism's horizons of radical possibility—outside of constructing *identifications*—remain for the most part tacit or underdescribed in academic criticism.[14] There are some good reasons for

12. Any rethinking of this question will start with Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?" in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies,* ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), pp. 191–212.

13. I have been instructed on these points by Spivak, "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia," *In Other Worlds,* pp. 103–17.

14. To gauge the reasons for and effects of the emphasis on identification as feminist action, see bell hooks [Gloria Watkins], *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, 1984); Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,* ed. Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (Bloomington, Ind., 1991), pp. 1–47; Caren Kaplan, "Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminism," in *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography,* ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 115–38; Lata Mani, "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception," *Feminist Review,* no. 35 (Summer 1990):

this. American academic feminism operates out of fear, I believe, of repeating the definitional exclusions, violences, and imaginative lapses of feminism since '68, of repeating American/white feminism's imperialist, racist, heterosexist, class-biased, culture-bound, and overoptimistic parochialism.[15] These fears drove feminist cultural studies during the seventies and eighties to transform the horizon of reference and the object of feminist work.

Academic feminism moved from paying attention to the generic individual woman to redescribing gender within geopolitically diverse conditions of women's experience, exploitation, expertise, and exorbitance. It began to develop points of comparison along the axes of sexuality, nationality, class, and race that provide a kind of sloppy intelligibility to the female-gendered bodies that cross them. It cultivated importantly nonoptimistic relations to global capitalist forms, to national identities, to liberal promises for universal suffrage. I refer here to important well-known work by bell hooks, Chandra Mohanty, Denise Riley, Gayatri Spivak, Caren Kaplan, Ruth Frankenberg, and Lata Mani, among others.[16]

This kind of committed work does not simply transform "woman" into a point of comparison between incommensurate and contradictory global systems of gendered signification. By foregrounding the problem of the example in the construction of critical and pedagogical authority, they also avoid the simplifying incitement to "represent" woman as a point of comparison for a variety of hyphenated othernesses that can be strung onto each other. As one friend has commented to me, "Some femi-

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24–41;Kamala Visweswaran, "Defining Feminist Ethnography," *Inscriptions,* no. 3/4 (1988): 27–46; and Lauren Berlant, "The Female Complaint," *Social Text,* no. 19/20 (Fall 1988): 237–59.

15. See, for example, the good analyses of feminism's history of exclusionary violences and contradictions in Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis, 1989); hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, 1984) and *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, 1989); and Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality,* ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston, 1984), pp. 73–100.

16. This list of names, many of which were cited in notes 14 and 15, stands in for a larger cluster of materialist feminist work in the humanities and social sciences that posits transformations in the organization of knowledge and norms of critical expression to be central to counterhegemonic identity politics in the age of national capitalisms, national racisms, homophobias, misogynies, transnational class exploitation, and so on. See also hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, 1990) and *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, 1992); Barbara Harlow, *Barred: Women, Writing, and Political Detention* (Minneapolis, 1993); Kaplan, "Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse," in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse,* pp. 357–68; Denise Riley, *"Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (Minneapolis, 1988); and Ruth Frankenberg and Mani, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality,' and the Politics of Location," *Cultural Studies* 7 (May 1993): 292–310.

nists are more minor than others."[17] This truth expresses an ongoing and globally complex negotiation among nationalisms, feminisms, sex radical movements, class insurgencies, and decolonization movements. It requires feminism constantly to be unlearning its originary impulse to structure its explanations of the world according to the taxonomy of sexual difference alone. But it is also a reminder of an institutional reality. Gender, ethnic, racial, religious, and gay and lesbian studies and subcultures are constantly made to compete against each other in university hierarchies of value. This rivalry for resources has intellectually and politically debilitating effects on the ways aspirations for social change are imagined and worked through. It requires the various minority studies workers and departments to think more creatively about what institutionalization means (the balkanization of resources; impediments to producing points of comparison and alliance), and, most importantly, to refuse the pressure to compete for privileged minority status. For the real challenges facing us institutionally are to challenge the world of established disciplines whose oppressive and violently partial forms of order produced the counterhegemonic formalism of minority knowledge in the first place.

In this complicated scene of academic/activist feminist politics we are faced with an impossible and crucial task of constructing a comparative notation of women's, and of feminism's, "minority." The scale such a project demands will inevitably involve struggles to redefine the terms and frames of knowledge, expertise, and praxis. In the process, we must be committed to producing risky theories/fantasies—and failing. And yet what we find instead is a growing demand for a feminist home space. Recent developments in feminist legal theory have joined older commitments of women's studies to produce, as feminists, "safe spaces" in the classroom, departments, journals, and the world.[18] Feminist scholars all over the disciplines have come to demand the redefinition of harmful language and injurious speech to include the "ordinary" pain of being gendered itself; feminist pedagogy theorists frequently see their classes as ideal disorder-free zones.[19] I am worried—to continue my list of wor-

17. Visweswaran, private communication. Words fail to describe my gratitude for Kamala's excellent collegiality. Her insightful appraisal of this paper's many faults both improved it immensely, and not enough.

18. As is often the case, the intellectual and political move to rethink the politics of gender in public is strongly aligned with race theory. See Mari J. Matsuda et al., *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment* (Boulder, Colo., 1993). For a summary of the feminist harmful speech/harmful knowledge argument, see Nadine Strossen, "Legal Scholars Who Would Limit Free Speech," *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* 7 July 1993, pp. B1–B2.

19. See, for example, the way the tension plays out in *Gendered Subjects,* ed. Margo Culley and Catherine Portuges (Boston, 1985); Donald Morton and Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *Theory/Pedagogy/Politics: Texts for Change* (Urbana, Ill., 1991); Ellen Rooney, "Discipline and

ries—that, under the urgency of an important concern not to create and reproduce even more pain for women, feminists will increasingly identify with an expanding fear of unsettling knowledges. I would have thought that a feminist pedagogy would want to cultivate the crises that all important new knowledge generates and would ask students in return to push back, to question the prospects and possibilities of feminism itself for responding to the very questions it raises. But embracing "ordinary language" and "safe knowledge" as things good in themselves will distract us from engaging the impossible, ambitious, and always failing activity that Marx describes enigmatically as "the poetry of the future."[20]

I seek to affirm the importance of imagining a left/feminism that refuses to lose its impulse toward a revolutionary utopian *historicity.* To begin to imagine what scene of politics this kind of critical commitment to failing/utopia would entail, I would like to tell some stories about encounters with some sublime violences of contemporary social life, encounters whose sublimity creates, simultaneously, scenes of terrible failure and courageous impulses of revolutionary futurity. Poaching from many texts—from, among others, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon,* Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven,* Carolyn Kay Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman,* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "What Is a Minor Literature?"—I will speak about being intensively minor, about producing and representing local, national, and transnational particularity, about radically redressing bodies, affect, and authority, about writing criticism, about reinventing the forms of history in the intimate sensations and memories of childhood, envy, exile, and political trauma.[21]

It will, in places, look like I am writing literary criticism. But like all the home space fantasies in this essay, this is no utopian form. I am trying to show some ways that *writing,* in the sense of *écriture* or transcultural production, has created a space of possibility into which historical agents might translate themselves. Whereas in sequels to this essay I develop other archival materials,[22] I seek here to examine minor, intensive writ-

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Vanish: Feminism, the Resistance to Theory, and the Politics of Cultural Studies," *Differences* 2 (Fall 1990): 14–28; Joan E. Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, *(En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists in Academe* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1991); and Patti Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York, 1991).

20. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* as quoted in Terry Eagleton, "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment," in Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis, 1990), p. 27, a suggestive meditation on Marx's enigma.

21. See Michelle Cliff, *No Telephone to Heaven* (New York, 1989), hereafter abbreviated *NT;* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "What Is a Minor Literature?" trans. Dana Polan, in *Out There,* pp. 59–69, hereafter abbreviated "ML"; Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York, 1977), hereafter abbreviated *SS;* and Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1987), hereafter abbreviated *L.*

22. See Berlant, "'68; or, The Revolution of Little Queers," in *Feminism beside Itself,* ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Weigman (forthcoming). Further sequels are pending.

ing, writing that has understood and exploited the necessary circumlocutions commentary must travel in its always inadequate response to the questions about power it faces. The aim of criticism in this light is not redemptive. It is not to perform retrospective hallowing responses to events, or to texts about events. Trying, and failing, it keeps the event open, animating, and vital. The aim is then for criticism to generate its objects, to construct unexpected scenes out of the materials it makes available. Although this essay proceeds in segments and sections, I see it more as I would read a triptych, or graffiti. I will read these questions of criticism and identity from locations in 1963, 1979, 1989, and 1994. And above all, I will argue the necessity for preserving, against all shame, a demanding question of revolution itself, a question about utopia that keeps pushing its way through a field of failed aspirations, like a student at the back of the room who gets suddenly, violently, tired of being invisible.

2. *Food for Thought*

First, a little reading about what goes down in history. Deleuze and Guattari's commentary on relations of domination and cultural production in "What Is a Minor Literature?" represents the political situation of nationally minor or "marginal" peoples, but not in the analytic languages of identity politics or political economy. Rather, it asks how the sensual locations of political marginality might provide an unpredicted energy for reconfiguring power, identity, and collective knowledge. When they imagine its use, *minor* also means "intensive," for the minor archive involves an intensive engagement with nationality in which underdeveloped languages and oppressed sounds counter the aspirations to saturate life that characterize national consciousness ("ML," p. 68). In this they are aligned with the project of revitalizing a traditional, pre-Marxian mode of radical social analysis that Steedman advocates:

> Its notable feature . . . was that its rhetoric allowed the tracing of misery, evil and unfairness to a *political* source, that is, to the manipulation by others of rights, privileges and money, rather than attributing such perception to a shared consciousness of exploitation. It was a coherent device both for understanding the ordering of the world in a particular way, and for achieving that understanding without direct *experience* of exploitation. [*L,* p. 119]

Steedman argues that a radicalized vision of society has long provided a way of explaining not only the structural conditions for class-consciousness but also the "states of unfulfilled desire" and envy that accompany the enraged alienation from cultural value that defines the experience of dominated populations (*L,* p. 123).

"What Is a Minor Literature?" answers its own titular question in three ways. First, a minor literature is a corpus that registers a minority culture's linguistic displacement from a majority culture's authority over the "real." Linguistic distance might involve the invention of vernaculars or palpable silences, or a hypersensuality of the body or language—perhaps graffiti would be an apt example of this quality of the minor. Second, a minor literature registers and collapses historical or diachronic narrative time into a lyric, disruptive, present tense, a new temporality in which minor individuals experience their activity in the sheer sharpness of their dislocation from traditional referentiality. Think about, for example, the way lost histories, amnesia, and archival violence are central to stories of minor cultures. Third, a minor literature produces a new understanding of authorship and of the relation of the primary to the secondary text. In this context, where everything is political, transcendent originality is inconceivable because the grounds of power that make transcendence even an imaginary possibility for a ruling class do not exist for a minor culture. Minor authors experience their authorship in the state of dissolved boundaries between themselves and the publics from within which they speak; thus their texts may be understood to be collaborative, ongoing sites of cultural production. Additionally, criticism from a minor culture is also a performance of collaborative authorship, for the commentary the minor critic produces is central to the terms with which a people comes to experience itself as itself and as historic, in history.

But minor peoples also experience the banality of power from within the majority life world and feel that "a whole other story," their story, "is vibrating within" "the cramped space" of cultural domination ("ML," p. 59). Minor citizens live within the paper, synthetic metalanguages of national, racial, class, and gender hegemony—the language of law, of medicine, of nation, of fundamentalisms, and of commodity culture, say—and they also get the crumbs of their legitimation there. Thus although they are displaced persons in exile from collective narrative control over the language that renders their own story, and although they may be caught in the impossibility of even imagining an "indigenous" language and political community (except in the vernacular sense: *indigenus,* born in a country; *vernaculus,* native, from *verna,* a home-born slave), minor authors have, they are burdened on their very bodies with, historical consciousness that becomes the material whose force can most powerfully split the screen memory of pseudoconsensual national "cultures" into fragments of revelatory data and revolutionary knowledge.

Hence the difference between major and minor cultures is lived, from within the minoritized group, as a paradox. The relation involves objective bonds of domination; it also involves a vastly moveable "cultural" boundary. These two experiences of minor culture explain the ambivalence it generates from the majoritarian perspective, for while the fact of marginal culture itself seems tautologically to confirm the stability

of social hierarchy, minor culture also figures as a kind of irreducible waste, a set of jumbled signs and practices with respect to which a dominating power can never fully establish itself as the referent or the pure cultural dominant (see "ML," pp. 62–64). We have all seen how dominated exotic microcultures have produced what appears to be confectionery on which major cultures have sought to suck, as though the meat and potatoes of power left them starved for something else, something other: *more.*

This is what I love about the story "What Is a Minor Literature?" tells about revolution. We can see it developed in two examples. I have suggested that Deleuze and Guattari see the minor culture's political displacement as a disruption on the body. This is evident especially in a competitive relation of speaking to eating. "Rich or poor," they write, "each language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth. The mouth, tongue, and teeth find their primitive territoriality in food. . . . To speak, and above all to write, is to fast" ("ML," p. 62). In other words, the exile of the minor culture from legitimation finds its property either in the body or in the language that takes up the space a homeland otherwise might.

Second, "What Is a Minor Literature?" shows how minority reveals itself in distinct linguistic modalities. *"Language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits."* Deleuze and Guattari describe the vehicular, vernacular, referential, and mythic modalities of mass national language ("ML," p. 65). In the vast sorrow of forced expatriation, and with great perverse pleasure, the minor author's act of reterritorialization, of claiming imaginary property, may be flashingly, movingly experienced in language. There are many ways this can happen. In one version, although you cannot claim the privileged lushness of your minoritized body, it emerges in a sensuality toward the body and of the language itself, which blurs barriers through lush intensity, sometimes through counterallegory. In the other modality, you write the sparest, nonmetaphorical *writing* possible, seeking "to bring language slowly and progressively to the desert. To use syntax in order to cry, to give syntax to the cry" ("ML," p. 67). (Here the category "food" becomes entirely theoretical, unassimilable. Is it possible for a surviving culture to live on what it produces textually amidst the dominant cultural voracity that appropriates the meat, leaves the carcass, seeks the sweets? Of course, this translation of dominated populations into a thing called minor culture and the assimilation of relations of dominance to a leitmotif of food exchange is "merely heuristic.")

Deleuze and Guattari are writing, of course, about Kafka, who, as a "Czech Jew [writing] in German," exemplifies the process by which national state and official languages can be divested of their domination ("ML," p. 61). Writing as though a stranger in his own language and refusing the kind of salvation narrative that equates the endurance of

minor culture with the salvation of the nation at large, Kafka's practice faces down what immigrants and nationals the world over face: dominating, jingoistic, or technocratic national jargons (see "ML," pp. 61, 66). There "is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor," because only a postnational culture can secure the grounds of unconstrained social life toward which minor cultures restlessly drive ("ML," p. 67).

Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the need to imagine the impossible—an exoteric freedom, without the old legitimations that made the nation and its identities intelligible. Remaining foreign to a hegemonic imaginary—with its dream of a linguistic ethnoutopia, the privilege of uncontested generalizing and control over reference—requires remaining outside of the dream of enforcing a new master tongue, for eating or writing, or singing.[23] The politics of minor culture must occupy and transform the resolutely sensual, must generate passages composed in the registers of displacement and excess, the spare and the lush. Thus minor literatures are literally unsettled, they represent unsettlement, and their expression creates an unsettling wedge. It is this crossing over, suspended in flight between splendor and a hyperrealist refusal of allegory's excesses, which assures their productive and their deadening failures and embarrassments.

Minor existence requires facing down a dominant culture's aspiration that one's own collective minor self be little more than food for thought, stuff available for the economic and the symbolic reproduction of the national culture machine. On the other hand, the products of minor lushness and lack can be made to jam the machine and animate more private economies. This is where Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* provides crucial evidence of ways subaltern or minor *writing* have functioned. Two contexts of domination engage Steedman: British state-supported class imperialism and official national historiographies. Subaltern studies has shown us how intimately colegitimated national history writing and national power are; Steedman shows how even socialist thinkers have generated a collective lack of respect for the explanatory *data* of minor culture, continuing to produce working-class experience as merely an archaic formation in the modern life of bourgeois national culture.

Steedman's remarkable analysis focuses on children and the working class, not simply because they are equivalent sites of minor identity, but because the reproduction of abjection and lush, displaced longing by minor citizens takes place in a younger generation's performance of paren-

23. An important gloss on the text of minor language and fields of national domination can be found in Mary Louise Pratt, "Linguistic Utopias," in *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature,* ed. Nigel Fabb et al. (Manchester, 1987), pp. 48–66.

tal aspiration. She thinks about what kinds of fantasies and longings children and "infantalized" national classes use to explain their relations to, expectations of, and desires for, self-extension in a world that is marked "not for you." How do minor cultures actually speak? Steedman argues that fairy tales are the intense explanatory devices children use to register their emplacement, powerlessness, and transformative fantasy; she designates powerful aspirations to commodity ownership as the working class's scene of fantasy, a scene of punctures and sutures manufactured to bind them to an otherwise remote, Oz-like *patria*.

Steedman describes some fantastic techniques of displacement. For adults, wishing for fabric to make a "modern" skirt or fetishizing natural foods that might make the physical body feel as powerful as the female class body does not siphon off the energy of rage and envy that might create revolutions instead of conservative politics; for children, fairy tale fantasies of violence to parents screen out the scenes of their social humiliation. Each of these modes of expressing longing and terror registers the always unsuccessful pressure to accommodate the feeling of failure to be major, to be adult, to be public, to have no shame—those freedoms that constitute the forms of pleasure and safety that adult, national, and capitalist cultures promise. When she reads the politics of minor language it is no longer a mere marker of class and national origin but an archive of gestures that participate in, produce, and explain the ordinary violent taxonomies of social life that include but are not limited to an engagement with the scene of national culture. One of her aims is to show the costs of national identification, which is also identification with a world of middle-class cultural values, for the child and the working classes. Spoken to as children by state authorities and represented by the culture industry of a nostalgic national bourgeoisie, these less-civilized citizens become the essentialized signs of English innocence and depth. Thus to become adult, modern, full citizens, they must disavow the conditions of their historical experience. And in compensation the national culture projects its own anxieties about uniqueness and community into dramas of its own "people's" Otherness. Thus, the "national culture industries" of England endow the infantilized classes with the bare minimum facticity of a national character that always threatens to be lost.[24] And perhaps this is the function of minorities in the production of national nostalgia (for, say, rural authenticity, the purity of suffering in a working or underclass, or women's "hidden" injuries): the persistent spectacle of a minor culture's suffering allows ineffectually preemptive

24. For a history and critical engagement with the mass cultural construction and the annulment of "working-class culture" in Britain, see Geoff Eley on *Distant Voices/Still Lives:* "The Family is a Dangerous Place: Memory, Gender, and the Image of the Working Class," in *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of the Past,* ed. Robert Rosenstone (forthcoming).

collective mourning for massive and ordinary systemic failures of the nation, failures of imagination and action to which national subjects seem patriotically addicted.

3. 1963: A Holocaust of Little Girls

"Today there is a story which should have caused the sun to eclipse the earth—something . . . something in the heavens should have objected" (*NT,* p. 100). What is this story? "Four little colored girls had been blown out of a church" (*SS,* p. 173); "September 16, 1963. . . . In thick dark letters, stark: SUNDAY SCHOOL BOMBED—next line, smaller print: FOUR CHILDREN DEAD. . . . 'Addie Mae Collins, 14; Denise McNair, 11; Carole Robertson, 14; Cynthia Wesley, 14'" (*NT,* pp. 100–101). Is *that* the story?

> Every night now Guitar was seeing little scraps of Sunday dresses—white and purple, powder blue, pink and white, lace and voile, velvet and silk, cotton and satin, eyelet and grosgrain. . . . The bits of Sunday dresses that he saw did not fly; they hung in the air quietly, like the whole notes in the last measure of an Easter hymn. [*SS,* p. 173]

This, a personal vision of tattered fabric; next, what fractured icons newspaper readers might have seen: "A stained-glass window. Fragments of images dangle from its leaden boundaries. The face of Jesus is ruined. Dark space where the bomb has torn it off. His hands and crook intact. The legend of the window—willing workers—half there, half absent" (*NT,* p. 100). And, in another less visual but no less formulaic medium, Martin Luther King preaches, witnessing:

> These children—unoffending; innocent and beautiful—were the victims of one of the most vicious, heinous crimes ever perpetrated against humanity.
>
> Yet they died nobly. They are the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity. So they have something to say to us in their death. They have something to say to every minister of the gospel who has remained silent behind the safe security of stained-glass windows. They have something to say to every politician who has fed his constituents the stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism. They have something to say to a federal government that has compromised with the undemocratic practices of southern dixiecrats and the blatant hypocrisy of right-wing northern Republicans. They have something to say to every Negro who passively accepts the evil system of segregation . . . to each of us, black and white alike, that we must substitute courage for caution. . . .

> Their death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly to make the American dream a reality.[25]

Perhaps I am not telling this story successfully, nor rendering fully what the pictures of death "say." But who has? How to narrate? As King says, the story of the little girls says so much "something" that no commentary can fully gloss the heat of the meanings its violence generates. It is this fact about the sublimity of power's effects—that commentary will inevitably fail at comprehensiveness—that provides the historical, theoretical, and political urgency to generate some cunning radical creativity.

On 16 September 1963, four African American girls, named above, wearing white dresses and white shoes, were talking in the girls' room of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. There to help lead a service, they were killed by a bomb protesting the organized civil rights resistance to white racism in Birmingham/Alabama/USA. In 1977, Toni Morrison organized the political and narrative climax of *Song of Solomon* around this event; a decade later, in 1987, Michelle Cliff marked a moment in the political education of her character Clare Savage by registering Savage's response to this event. "Something in the heavens should have objected," she thinks; "something," King says, that should have been heard by every American. *Something* here stands for the irreducible violent sublimity of American racism in 1963, 1977, 1987, and beyond; *something,* a word that holds the place for a demand to produce something like a language—entire novels, songs, lyrics, histories, letters, criticism—which in this instance might attest to the random encounter of systemic racial violence with individuals who happen to be somewhere, at some time, doing, then suddenly not doing, some "thing." Always crucially after the fact, these texts take the "fact" back, so they create a decolonized history of the "something" that *didn't* happen,[26] the thing to be specified, endlessly, just beyond what seems possible. The task of a dissident history.

Yet in the "national memory" 1963's most famous racial event, 1963's memorable political moment, is not the holocaust of little girls, this minor flurry of death. It is that singular, now iconic contraction Americans call "the" March on Washington, which took place 28 August 1963. Taylor Branch argues that in 1963 "the" march fused with "the" massacre of little girls to take on "mythological clarity."[27] The mythic proportions of (im)personal violence and mass testimonial resistance in these texts recommemorates the revolutionary racial counterpolitics of citizenship in

25. Martin Luther King, "Eulogy for the Martyred Children" (1963), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco, 1986), p. 221.

26. See Dirks, "History as a Sign of the Modern," p. 30.

27. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963* (New York, 1988), p. 892.

1963. That's one part of the story. Another is, of course, the obliteration of the story of the little girls in the blaze of monumentality that marks "the" national memory of the march and of Martin Luther King's speech at the march. Americans call this speech "I Have a Dream."[28] The "dream," too, has been sanctified by violent death.

King, only figuratively a prophet, could not have commented there on the future violence to the little girls whose eulogy he would later say. But his speech at the march predicts that among the outcomes of successful nonviolence and "creative suffering" the civil rights movement practiced had to be the future ordinary happiness of "little black boys and black girls," here functioning literally and as figures for all "God's children" in America ("D," pp. 219, 220). "As long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity," the United States is no "'sweet land of liberty'" but the worst thing, a cold desert, providing no consoling, tropic warmth, just a national allegory no longer meaningful ("D," pp. 218, 219).

Thus when King tropes on "My Country 'tis of Thee" in "I Have a Dream" he insists he sings it "with new meaning" ("D," p. 219). The new meaning he gives it, on behalf of the child-citizens whose futures depend on the realization of an actually existing racial and economic democracy in the United States, insists on making the spirit of the old wish the song expresses the letter of the law the nation must now adopt and enforce. It is constituted by a forced reduction of allegory into the *real* political time of a national culture where the law meets everyday experience. His tactic here is to make literal and practical the utopian foundations of the nation. Let freedom *actually* ring, this minute, in the time it takes for the voices of the marchers to ring through the air(waves). First, usurp the temporality of national language; then, decolonize national space; alongside, speak and write.

A few months later, King's commentary on the little girls focuses not on the need to seize the law right now but on the political need to misread and to reallegorize death and suffering—but not in a simple way; rather, on behalf of creating at least a prosthetic future where a real scene of justice might take the place held, here, by the word *something*. He speaks of the deaths as a speech act made collectively by the girls; they have something to say to us, the survivors. What would it take to "make the American dream a reality"? It would take understanding that something must be done, that passive resistance and passive acceptance are entire universes of passivity apart. However, the children's deaths do not, in King's rendition, produce one redemptive national allegory. Each subject-position—the minister, the African American, the parent of a murdered child, a member of the congregation, a liberal or racist politi-

28. King, "I Have a Dream" (1963), *A Testament of Hope,* pp. 217–20; hereafter abbreviated "D."

cian—has to find and to hear its own allegorical supplement, its own specific gloss on the something that remains unsaid in the eulogy, undone in the nation. Saying, hearing, doing, writing: these relations of practice entirely break down the dichotomy between rhetoric and activism that so hampers a simply mass-mediated political imaginary. It is the purpose of the eulogy to force its stipulated audiences into *creating* the critical allegories that will translate the little girls in a way that unsettles the certainties of privilege, identity, language, and world that complacent (or ambitious) citizens possess. King makes the demand to define *something* a matter of the pedagogy of conscience, a gesture of political translation that radically reconfigures relations among persons, populations, and the laws that govern them.

For Morrison and Cliff, too, allegory is the ground of departure but absolutely not the utopian or inevitable means for producing a national memory of a nation that does not yet exist. Yet, as King suggests, it produces a confrontation in the present tense with the violence and waste of national life so that the present tense might not merely be a ground for the end of history/utopia. Allegory is the scene of excess in which we live the failure of official/dominant archives, policies, and argots to grant the diverse conditions in which bodily practices, transcultural encounters, and national histories have met, meet, and might meet again, in the future. It is, indeed, an inheritance promising totality that needs to be split, to be simultaneously embraced and overcome. Therefore its spaces of anomaly open up the possibility for experiencing *change*. The kind of change I imagine these texts generating here signals, not an invention of an authentic language of identity in a postideological world, but rather a commitment to the ongoing fight to *redistort* a whole range of nationally and globally organized scenes of power, in part as a gesture toward not passively dying from fury at the not-random-enough violence of the world that terrorizes, that marks you personally and collectively, as a member of a designated "population." As Spivak says, "we learn the inscription of identity letter by letter."[29] These novels tell different histories of the letter's violences/opportunities; the redescriptive and redemptive activity of fiction/politics no longer appears dismissable, or assimilable, as mere rhetoric.[30] Morrison stays within the modernist project, occupying the plural allegories of minority history; Cliff tries to write beyond the nation, beyond the desert, beyond what history can bear to imagine.

Song of Solomon takes on the task of minor literatures and their his-

29. Spivak, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer 1992): 790.

30. I take the deployment of allegory in these novels as scenes, in the Freudian sense, of departure/disavowal/misrecognition and identification with inherited models of privacy, locality, political facticity, and maps of world history. In this sense they occupy and I think quite surmount the breach/bridge of allegorical national politics currently debated by Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York, 1992), and Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington, Ind., 1992).

toric registers of collective rhetorical struggle in ways Deleuze and Guattari might have predicted. Cast against the proprieties of the bourgeois table, it is a book full of stark, fierce, theory-driven politics and, also, a book tumbling over with sweet, milky, fruity reimaginations of the world, as though the garden in the biblical "Song of Solomon" had reemerged as the collective archive of African American cultural politics in the 1960s. A new historicity is generated in the novel's recoding of the relation between political and genealogical definitions of African American culture, for the book cuts across a politics of radical violence and the promise of taste sensations passed down to the present tense through, among other things, character names: Sugarman, Sugargirl, Sweet. My concern here is to trace the techniques of historical narration in each of these allegorical modes—modes of politics and of promise—and to see what Morrison makes of the violences, failures, and yet successful transformations wrought in the horizon of identity that Milkman and Guitar's uneasy and dangerous collaboration begets.

In *Song of Solomon,* Morrison's allegorically named "Guitar Banes" belongs to a revolutionary group called Seven Days. The mission of Seven Days is to enact a black politics of *lex talionis* (eye for eye, life for life) against the racist rage for death that marks ordinary life in the United States. In apposition to the logic of Guitar's/Seven Days' radical collective countermemory and counterpraxis, the novel chronicles the bourgeois historical aspirations of "Milkman Dead," the hero whose attempt to commandeer his own life story organizes the novel. In the course of the narrative, Milkman pursues a practical and symbolic regrounding in African American citizenship and culture by making a journey through the family genealogy "back," as it were, since he has never been there or imagined himself as having come from there, to "the South."[31] *Song of Solomon* thus reads the state of race in America through a dialect(ic) that traverses Milkman's collective/personal identity politics and the revolutionary, biblical logic of revenge encoded in Guitar's allegorical group name (Seven Days, in which the Earth was created; seven members, each of whom is responsible for countering the violence that happens on "his" day, in either a simple inversion of the logic of creation or else, as I would argue, a mode of *creation* that counters the hierarchies of a racist culture that does not count black deaths as attenuations of the nation).

We can see in the passage above that Guitar experiences the holocaust of the little girls as a rending of the fabric of black life in general. He sees ghosts of fabric, not the specifically dead bodies. The tactility and the specificity of the fabric that haunts him at night evokes the rose petals that fall on the sidewalk in the novel's opening scene, where a hieroglyph

31. On the ideology and imaginary of the African American south-north migration in Morrison's work, see Susan Willis, *Specifying: Black Women Writing the American Experience* (Madison, Wis., 1987).

of spectacular death—the death of modernism, of Icarus/Daedalus figured in the flying suicide of a black man, Mr. Robert Smith—contracts into itself the birth of Milkman (induced by the trauma of the suicide, as seen by his mother) and the coming of Pilate, his aunt. Pilate's magical being—with no belly button, she has only a fictive relation to the bodies and blood of other humans—produces the song she sings, "Sugarman Don't Fly Away," that links the politically motivated death of the insurance man, the privileged birth of the Milkman, the nationalist politics of Seven Days's men, and the lost, sweet, violent history of black America. Rose petals, fabric swatches, allegorical song, magical women—all are survivors of (patriarchal, national) violence. Guitar elsewhere argues that the death of a black American is not solitary but condenses the death of seven generations, and therefore the narrative he helps produce chronicles multiple holocausts. It is Guitar's purpose to remake into practical/utopian politics the frozen image, this rigor mortis; fragments of fabric hang in the air "like whole notes in the last measures of an Easter hymn."

The redemption of the Easter image of the martyred girls in *Song of Solomon* depends, somehow, on Guitar's decision to avenge the little girls by killing Milkman, for Milkman has taken another route, through capitalism, property, and inherited, stolen wealth, to imagining his "people's" survival in the United States (though he would never think history politically, and thus his "people" are in some distant elastic relation to the humiliated citizenry Guitar kills for). Milkman unravels the allegory of, not the whole notes of the Easter hymn, but the nonsense of a folk song that tells the story of his and his "people's" life. It is a song of diaspora, departure, not "home." Its chorus is:

> O Solomon don't leave me here
> Cotton balls to choke me
> O Solomon don't leave me here
> Bukra's arms to yoke me
>
> Solomon done fly, Solomon done gone
> Solomon cut across the sky, Solomon gone home. [*SS*, p. 303]

In different versions of this song, Solomon is also pronounced thus: Sugarman, Shalimar, Shalleemone. Like a student agitated at the sudden disclosure of new knowledges that will happily, painfully unsettle the way he handles the world, Milkman is unbelievably stimulated by the project of decoding and inhabiting this allegory, which he gradually discovers to be about *him,* his *patria,* the history of his *body,* and about the possibility that families do not hyperstabilize identity (as his property-obsessed father had wished were true) but precisely shift the terms of identity around constantly, forcing the name and the knowledge it organizes always to migrate and to become unfamiliar, in the present tenses of history, generation after generation.

In contrast, Guitar is neither textualist, nor philologist, nor anthropologist; he cares nothing about the history of internal migration, translation, and colonization that becomes the other African American history that circulates through the minor spaces of the novel. To him, "that's what all human relationships boiled down to: Would you save my life? or would you take it?. . . Would you save my life or would you take it? Guitar was exceptional. To both questions he could answer yes" (*SS,* p. 331). It is important to see how fully the brutal political explicitness of this question wins the novel's narrative from the one it early obsesses on, the incestuous necrophilic identifications of Milkman, his mother Ruth, and her father that threatened to take the Dead family out of history in the way I, and its name, have just described. The novel ends not remembering crises of identity and propriety in the bourgeois black family; it closes repeating Guitar's question. Yet this time, Milkman is the exceptional one, and the undead one, having taken Guitar's lesson:

> "You want my life?. . . You need it? Here." Without wiping away the tears, taking a deep breath, or even bending his knees—he leaped. As fleet and bright as a lodestar he wheeled toward Guitar and it did not matter which one of them would give up his ghost in the killing arms of his brother. For now he knew what Shalimar knew: If you surrendered to the air, you could *ride* it. [*SS,* p. 337]

There is a lot left unsaid here about the politics of *these* freedom riders, and of the need Morrison signals, in and beyond 1963, for African Americans to have a knowing and undefensive relation to the multiple histories that might still generate startling changes. A "lodestar" guides those who know how to surrender to its light, the poetry of the future. Morrison leaves *Song of Solomon* refusing to censure the two independently failed encounters with the impossible losses of history. The space shuttle between the not-opposite but apposite African American historicities in the novel therefore reoccupies '63 not in the way of postmodern flatness or modernist psychology but through an accumulation of anomalous languages. It provides a source of generative agency that allows the novel to unsettle its own tacit present tenses. It suggests a prolegomenon to all future African American politics. No longer based on the rough hierarchies wrought by the paternalistic censorship and criticism that Guitar and Milkman's father use to order the world but rather on the suspension of these modes of discipline to reconceive what might be brought into the kinds of explanation and praxis that get called and deployed as *politics* itself, despite the threat of its apparent nonutility. Who is to say, in advance, what tactics will work to create a wedge that opens up the seemingly certain violences of hegemony production in social life in a way beyond accommodation? I take the rupture of the novel's own habits of causality, in this angel of historylike moment of closure, to be a performative critical pedagogy on the subject of failure/utopia framed by unresolv-

able questions, sweet gifts of life, petty and devastating sacrifices, and also a brutally fixed gaze on the geopolitics and the tattered fabric that amount to the personal effects of racism and capitalism in the United States.

To the strains of the *Song of Solomon* we heed the making narrative of lessons unlearned in at least two present tenses (1963 and 1977) that have not yet confronted the different ways "something" sensual and political about the actual American world pulses almost supernaturally to be known; and it is fitting that the other chronicle of the little girls we have found, in Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven,* opens with a pedagogic performance during a high school current events class in New York City. There we find Clare Savage reading aloud from the newspaper. She sits in front of her class and like a conscientious student waits for "something" to happen after she and her peers learn of the bloodbath, but no: "There was no rush of air in the room. No explosion" (*NT,* p. 101). *Something* important about knowledge, history, and revolution is revealed privately to Clare, though: that no allegory of a world in which natural justice naturally avenges catastrophe will do to explain *this* world of nations; that learning of the thing itself does not beget justice either. What a student must do is to produce acts of willful reading, restless acts of glossing, framing, slanting, and making ever more explicit questions about what counts as evidence, explanation, action, and transformation. These epistemologies of violence become foundational for the revolutionary praxis that Clare develops. She dissolves the knowledge-practice hierarchy in order to usurp the privilege of forcing *something* through into consciousness and corporeality, once something else—in the heavens and the nation—refuses to happen. As we shall see, this "something" is not the unvarnished truth of the unmediated real but rather something else riskily underdefined. The word that stands in for the pressure on *something* here is *need.* The next day, 17 June 1963, Clare sees the picture

> she needed to see. A girl in a coffin, open. Girl, coffin, platform, all draped in a fine white cotton, like a delicate mosquito netting protecting her from the tiny marauders of a tropical night. A curtain to protect onlookers from the damage. The veiled girl identified in the caption as "one of the victims of Sunday's bombing." . . . She cut the picture from the paper and put it in a celluloid pocket in her wallet—to glance at even when they buried the President. [*NT,* pp. 101–2]

This passage executes a brutally ironic action of veiling and revelation. In contrast to Branch's history, which links the holocaust of little girls to the March on Washington, Cliff links it to the other most analogous national scene of death in 1963, John F. Kennedy's assassination, which carries with it its own always intensifying visual fascination and memorial

power. Clare chooses to affiliate herself with the other atrocious scene of violence fully authorized by a specular economy, and this one, too, allots to the picture of the unidentified dead black female child the entry into public—or white, national—consciousness of her precise value, here the value of the always already wounded and mourned for "infantalized," eroticized black body. On the one hand, the nameless little girl reminds us of a patrician "lady" visiting the tropics, her virtue and body protected from mosquitoes and other locals by a white veil; on the other hand, surely she too is a mosquito just barely irritating the subcutaneous layers of consciousness that give whiteness its precarious hold on prerogative. The picture, thus framed, serves Clare's "need." But for what?

When Clare's father, Boy Savage, catches her looking at the picture of the veiled dead girl instead of at "American history in the making," at Kennedy's death, he takes the picture from her and destroys it, telling her "not to judge this country" (*NT,* p. 102). Boy knows immediately that the aversion of Clare's gaze constitutes a full-bodied political choice, one that includes the deauthorization of the official United States as the index of her barely developed utopian political imaginary. Thus his admonition is belated; Clare has already memorized the picture, and indeed she has already begun constructing an archive of radical practices that include breaking the idol of utopian nationality for a much more destabilized, transitional vision of what politics must do.

For Boy Savage's generation of immigrants to the U.S., the lure of capital makes countermemory or even resentment at racism and labor exploitation taboo, and many of the island immigrants we see manage to repress such *ressentiment* as they climb the ladder of success from crushingly menial to slightly less menial labor, in a precarious economy without safety nets that pits the fortunes of one minority culture against the imputed failures of others. For Clare's mother Kitty, however, taboo topoi generate new allegory that Clare inherits. Kitty Savage takes on the main burden for originating the minor language of a yet-unnamed and unfounded "mother country" whose ethnogenealogy in the novel is complex and whose allegories inhabit many registers. The daughter learns from the mother about what it means to repudiate conventionally indexed aspirations to the "good life," instead risking unsafety and death to regenerate collective life and history in the unclear way of revolutionary instinct we have been pursuing here under the sign of a politics of "something."[32]

Kitty's story, briefly, is that she comes with Boy and Clare to the United States in 1960 to find a "better life" and steps into a cadence of racist violence in which survival entails a two-step of silent absence and

32. Here Cliff demonstrates what Ahmad insists on, that the easy substitution of "nationality" and "collective life" is pernicious and must analytically and politically be resisted. See Ahmad, *In Theory,* pp. 106–10.

vocal passing. Kitty cannot racially pass, though Boy can and does. She cannot and will not, eventually erupting in the semiotic excesses we have come to see as insurgent signs of rupture and creativity in the domains of minor cultures. First, under the pressure of staying true to her natal body and consciousness, Kitty makes long trips through New York to find the "shops from *home*" that make the food she must eat to live (*NT,* p. 64):

> Kitty mastered the route by subway and returned with mangoes, yams, cho-cho, saltfish, plantains, callaloo, goat-meat, and Jamaican curry to rub it with. She came home with these things laden in her arms, as if to say, Family, this is for you. In these shops she broke her silence, here she felt most the loss of home, of voice, even as she brushed the loose dirt off the yam-skin, . . . resisting a desire to rub the sharp stickiness into her nostrils and around her mouth. [*NT,* p. 65]

The second way Kitty breaks her silence for survival and entailment's sake moves, as we might have predicted, from the sensuality of *food* and other haunting postcolonial dreams she has, to surreptitious, enraged *writing*. Kitty works in a dry cleaners and places in each package of cleaning a little letter to the customer that contains some "philosophy of laundry" (*NT,* p. 73). At the bottom of each communiqué Kitty writes the signature of the fictive author, a Jane Darwell-like Mrs. White, whose linkage of love and the sanitary aims to render every laundry-linked housewife a domestic goddess. Kitty feels strongly Mrs. White's iconicity as "such an American image," representing an American ideology of sacred, protected, clean, white domesticity (*NT,* p. 73). One day, following a fierce impulse, Kitty "drew a balloon from the upturned mouth of the benign lady and printed within: EVER TRY CLEANSING YOUR MIND OF HATRED? THINK OF IT" (*NT,* p. 78). Kitty becomes obsessed by writing and dispensing these chilling scripts:

> WE CAN CLEAN YOUR CLOTHES BUT NOT YOUR HEART.
> AMERICA IS CRUEL. CONSIDER KINDNESS FOR A CHANGE.
> WHITE PEOPLE CAN BE BLACK-HEARTED.
> THE LIFE YOU LIVE WILL BE VISITED ON YOUR CHILDREN.
> MARCUS GARVEY WAS RIGHT. [*NT,* p. 81]

The final straw: "It was time to end her nonsense once and for all. Once and for all. She took a stack of letterheads and colored in the pink face of Mrs. White. She drew a balloon next to each dark face. HELLO. MRS. WHITE IS DEAD. MY NAME IS MRS. BLACK. I KILLED HER." Sending "her furious Aunt Jemima into the world" has unexpected consequences (*NT,* p. 83): the two African American women who work with

Kitty are fired for doing what Kitty did, for the boss's hatred of "that kind" and his exoticization of a woman from the islands make him simply incapable of hearing, speaking to, and specifying actual human beings different from himself. This event, signifying Kitty's failure to educate even one person about racism, causes her to abandon Boy, Clare, and America and to return to Jamaica, where she dies—but not before sending Clare the important communication that resonates with all about the burden of little girls that has come before: "'I am glad you are studying. . . . I hope you . . . make *something* of yourself, and *someday* help your people'" (*NT,* p. 103; my emphasis).

"Something" to "someday." Clare finds the material for her second generation engagement with national/tribal peoples in a variety of places, all riddled with the specific historical hybridities that mark the postimperial West. One locus of ancestry is found in the official national allegories that have marked the sentimentality of imperial politics. In particular, the novel links its impulse toward utopian praxis to the notion England so fully promoted of itself as "mother-country" (*NT,* pp. 109–11). Cliff/Clare rewrites this in the language of embittering oedipalization, showing how still, long after the high imperial moment has passed, Jamaica and other postimperial sites must nonetheless continue to play the game of domination/castration beneath the caretaking skirt of the motherland (scenes of castration and sodomy are central to the novel's exhaustion of patriarchal national politics as a source of emancipatory federation). The first act of the novel is the castration, rape, and pillaging of an old colonial family; the last event is the guerilla-led disruption of a U.S. financed film about the Maroon insurrection of 1738 in a blazing counterholocaust directed this time not against the state but against the publicity apparatus that, together with the paternalistic forms of economic, touristic, and military "help" poor islands like Jamaica receive as the price of entering the world system at all, ensures the repetition of violence and counterviolence as national effigies of Jamaica. "JAMAICA, A WORLD OF CULTURE WITHOUT BOUNDARIES," read the ads that call tourists to the island (*NT,* p. 6). The boundaries that do not exist, even in the era of decolonization, are sexual, familial, economic, archival; the ideology of the mother country is the ruse used to veil and distract from the scenes of (non)penetration through which colonial domination was managed in Jamaica and elsewhere.

Renouncing dominant corporeal schemas is impossible, as Fanon so dramatically says, without a total making raw of the body. This book shows that even intuitive revolutionary insurgence must visibly scorch the skin, the land, and the archive through word deeds and body deeds. Clearly, fetishizing newspaper pictures of death as Clare does might lead to more amnesiac distortion: the holocaust as done deal, pictures memorializing the completeness of the event, its thinkability. But Clare sees the picture of the dead veiled little girl as posing Guitar/Milkman's futile

question: "Would you save my life or would you take it?" and she experiences rage, revolutionary rage, that the question is always posed after the fact of someone *else's* death.

Clare Savage's life over the long term links living out 1963 with occupying the death-filled spaces of New York, London, Vietnam and, finally, with taking over the homeland, Kingston, Jamaica, emptied and wasted by colonial powers and by redistributing violence into the scene of the world that has made banal and forgettable those events, and there are so many, that ought to have produced *something*—an historic change, somewhere registered as an epistemological, corporeal, and political sublime. She becomes thus committed to usurping the privileged deployment of death from imperial and postimperial world powers. First, she leaves the United States for London to study the classics, and to fall in love with a Vietnam veteran (their love and their dissolution both terribly haunted by Western history's ghosts). The philosophy of assimilation Clare's father professes in the U.S. then becomes the practice of guerilla camouflage in Jamaica, where classic, imperial, and mass cultural renditions of colonial death encounter other revolutionary species and genealogies of the undead, zombies, spirits, shades, and traces that mark the land waiting to work and be worked on behalf of reclaiming Jamaica.[33]

There is thus a long contextualizing history to tell—elsewhere—of *No Telephone to Heaven,* about the way it closes off nothing but the already exhausted futures we call the present tense that the novel traces from a transnational late 1950s through the globalized late 1980s in Jamaica, as refracted in the code of imperial racist culture England and the United States enact as matters of domestic and foreign policy. These relations between the conventional registers of history (Vietnam, civil rights, the failed socialism of Michael Manley and the failed Maroon rebellion against empire in late eighteenth-century Jamaica) and the personal genealogies of characters leaving home as fast as they can find it become generated by the scene of revolutionary allegory marked by the wasted bodies of the four Birmingham girls. As Clare joins the revolutionary guerilla group that drives the truck labelled "No Telephone to Heaven," she evokes the almost meaningless picture of the girl and turns her need and her mourning into action: "I know only that the loss, the forgetting . . . of resistance . . . of tenderness . . . is a terrible thing. Look, I want to restore something to these children. . . . And of course you are right: what good is imagination . . . whatever the imagery available to it . . . to

33. This is where we can link up this discussion of allegory, nationality, anomaly, contradiction, death, and the uncanny generative possibilities of "something" with Slavoj Žižek's discussion of intimacy, trauma, and the Symbolic orders of democracy in "You Only Die Twice," *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York, 1989), pp. 131–50. Both Milkman Dead/Guitar Banes and Clare Savage reimagine themselves, in their allegorical texts, as manifestations of the "sublime body between two deaths" (ibid., p. 134), and stage their risky, failed overcoming as crucial to keeping revolutionary, life-giving activity alive, though "dead."

a dying child?" (*NT,* p. 196). Yet the "nation" that will be transformed by the textuality of the child-dedicated counterviolence is not only the geopolitical discursive idea of a nation the novel imagines. Alongside, the United States, Great Britain, and Europe continue to reign as the modernist master referents for political futurity.

In *No Telephone to Heaven* as in *Song of Solomon* the truth of pan-African history—that not slavery but a profound dialectic between diasporic loss and memorial accumulation constitutes the ongoing Middle Passage from which is generated African American identity—[34]counters powerfully the identity logics of America and the other nations whose imperial histories shift around the same constellation in that "heaven" of empire where so many things do and "something" so often does not happen, where atrocity is processed by the post facto *unidentification* or stripping away of the name of the victim, who is reduced to and remembered as a representative identity, a shadow behind a veil.[35] In these texts America is just one more nation whose global activities and internal violences try and fail to organize what characters and "we" can imagine about how agency and futurity can be articulated under the pressures of a pulsating present. This present is of course founded through anachronism, through an archive that ranges from the classics of Western form Clare studies in London to a U.S. financed made-for-television period piece about the Maroon rebellion, to the centrality of *Gone with the Wind* as a *documentary* about race, gender, rank, and fantasy in the United States (its obscene epigraph, "As God is my witness, I'm never going to be hungry again" might tacitly represent here the documentary truth about the melodrama of beset whiteness that marks U.S. nationality, and there is a story to be told that links it ironically with the refusal to die the death by starvation of political *irrelevance* that minor cultures so often endure; finally, *Gone with the Wind*'s intense focus on making the land and language *work* for survival after this one moment of political annihilation predicts the tactical centrality of the "ruinate" Cliff focuses on, the growth of lush

34. The Middle Passage slaves endured to reach the United States figures prominently in contemporary African American writing, to unsettle the narrative origin story about how African American identity derives from slavery, a story told often to wipe out the prehistory of black modernity. Books like Morrison's *Beloved: A Novel* (New York, 1987), and (clearly) Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (New York, 1990), as well as criticism like Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (*Diacritics* 17 [Summer 1987]: 67–80), feature this ultrageopolitical transition to signal the important impossibility of reclamation, rescue, and recuperation to any national narrative. But the Middle Passage's importance to diasporic thinking is, in a sense, as powerfully attested to in the casual aura of its use in *No Telephone to Heaven.* Speaking of Kitty and Boy as they drive through the treacherous South to the only slightly less treacherous North: "They were shipmates, as surely as the slaves who crossed the Middle Passage together. . . . This was a huge, a difficult country and each was outside of it" (*NT,* p. 60).

35. On a contemporary instance of corporeal trauma and the production of a collective minority unconscious, see Elizabeth Alexander, "'Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?' Reading the Rodney King Video(s)" (unpublished manuscript).

barbaric forest over the decorous groves that have come to symbolize and civilize Jamaica for colonizers and tourists—so "ruined" is the island by the revolutionaries that the novel opens acknowledging its glossary, forcing foreign readers to enter the text/island from the back, as it were). Yet for all of its multinational and syncretic intertextuality, the end of *No Telephone to Heaven* evokes "The Wasteland" and *Ulysses,* modernist transnational novel and epic. Ending with *shantih* (peace, in another language) and *yes* (a vernacular performance, yet emptied of political reference), these texts imagine the separation of aesthetics from national history's jagged edges yet affirm the intelligibility of whatever surviving culture remains. Cliff's ending too performs an affirmative ripping apart of time from Jamaica, *but in order to occupy the space* that is not yet or ever a ground of "culture." A good-enough mother country in *No Telephone to Heaven* is not a place to return to but an aspiration unimaginable, readable only, and barely that, in the shards of empire and the scraps of failed resistances, revolutions, the lush/spare broken spaces of death that condense/displace the history of all the worlds in which tourism has circulated the pleasures of power, including the world of mass culture, here all summarily vanquished by a constellation of unreadable, broken ex-allegories. Clare's revisionary maternalism, her drive to debanalize the wounded icon/dead child in the newspaper by producing lush ongoing revolutionary/utopian tactics remains, thus, nothing more nor less than a promise: "Captive people have a need for song" (*NT,* p. 87).

> O je t'adore, O je t'adore, O je t'adore
> Poor-me-one, poor-me-one, poor-me-one
> Tres-tontos-son, tres-tontos-son, tres-tontos-son
> Kitty-woo, kitty-woo, kitty-woo
>
> .....
> She remembered language.
> Then it was gone.
>
> cutacoo, cutacoo, cutacoo
> coo, cu, cu, coo
>
> .....
> Day broke. [*NT,* p. 208]

In the end, Cliff refuses to be caught in the both/and discursive logic of minor cultures. Trying to imagine a language that undoes itself, turning its own words into barely referential phonemes, she takes on the risk of failed communication and failed allegory, breaks the day after a revolutionary act with an aubade. But this morning/mourning song performs a violent refusal to write further, a refusal to risk affirming that the island is actually living, when we can see how it has been reduced to a confection

cultivated and consumed by touristic and imperial drives toward yet more extravagant scenes of pleasure.

Such a suspension of the will-to-knowledge that accompanies the accommodations made between imperial and colonized cultures (this is where, perhaps, the disjunction between the African American and the Caribbean cases is most visible: the possibility of boundary, the sense of *place* usurped) is graphed onto the body of Harry/Harriet, Clare's gay cross-dressing friend. Harry/Harriet is the postcolonial pedagogue who takes over the maternal muse function in the education of Clare into revolutionary personhood—s/he tells Clare to read C.L.R. James, for example, and to return home to join the struggle against postimperial touristic evacuation of Jamaica. More important, it is s/he, refusing the allegory of gender on her/his body, who leads Clare to the praxis that dedramatizes the minor pleasures Jamaica offers. It is not only that they deconstruct tourist mentalities left and right, though the novel takes much time for pleasure in that. It is that Harry/Harriet's autobiography provides the terms that undo or counter the evacuation of identity we have witnessed in the processing of minor persons into semiotic substances for use by dominant cultures—an activity we witnessed, for example, in the newspaper's erasure of names from the little girls of Birmingham whose deaths initiated this process of political upheaval.

Harry/Harriet tells Clare of his rape by a white British officer. He glosses the text of his rape thus:

> "Darling, I know it is hard to listen to all this; it is hard to tell. I have been tempted in my life to think *symbol*—that what he did to me is but a symbol for what they did to all of us, always bearing in mind that some of us, many of us, also do it to each other. But that's not right. I only suffered what my mother suffered—no more, no less. Not symbol, not allegory, not something in a story or a dialogue by Plato. No, man, I am merely a person who felt the overgrown cock of a big whiteman pierce the asshole of a lickle Black bwai—there it is. That is all there is to it." [*NT,* pp. 129–30]

Harry/Harriet bears the burden of registering the transformation of geopolitics in *No Telephone to Heaven,* and as David Roman has argued, thus places an asterisk on the text's apparent ambition to destroy the instrumental availability of minority bodies for majority pleasures.[36] Her/His point in this passage, though, is to refuse her/his symbolization in the fields of empire, in two ways. One is in the mode of brutal self-description, a refusal of the consolations of rhetoric; the other is in the profoundly antiformalist regime of bodily practices s/he takes on. First, a cross-dresser who refuses to bury the "cross" in a smooth field of repre-

36. David Roman, "Tropical Fruit: Latino Gay Males in Three Resistance Novels of the Americas" (paper delivered at the American Studies Association, San Diego, 6 Nov. 1992).

sentation (her/his introduction in the novel: "Harry/Harriet puts on a bikini—bra stretched across his hairy, delicately mounded chest, panties cradling his cock and balls—and starts to dance to 'Hey, Jude'" [*NT*, p. 21]), s/he finally adopts Harriet and kills Harry, putting off the actual operation until the "revolution" ("But, you know, darling, castration ain't de main t'ing . . . not a-tall, a-tall" [*NT*, p. 168]).[37]

Coupling the diachronic interactivity of Clare and the dead mothers who inspire her to do *something* for other little girls, her "people," and the synchronic antisymbolic praxis of Harry/Harriet, who lives the sexual revolution of the sixties at every moment of her/his circulation in the metropole of Kingston, Cliff swells the stream of the many political anachronisms, uneven developments, and simply vulgar interventions that will undermine the course, the canon, the curriculum, and the customs of history. She comes to echo the anachronistic historiography of the book's epigraph, from Derek Walcott's "Laventille": *"We left / somewhere a life we never found, / customs and gods that are not born again."* Nineteen sixty-three stands, therefore, as the intertextual catalyst that changes the terms of global/national/local necessity. By speaking slowly, deliberately, deferring "communication" and "persuasion"; by defacing the visual regime that brings "life" to Jamaica by including it in the world system of exotic violence and friendly capital; by countering regimes of death with more death; finally, by refusing the consolations of allegory, *No Telephone to Heaven* attempts and fails to represent the "something" that did not happen by executing a fantasy of postimperial, world cultural system failure, after which "something" else can be felt if not figured but only after the "break"—of the day, of history, and of the novel.

Coda: The Kiss and the Hit

I knew a child once, who was less than three. Her parents were anthropologists. They showed me how their daughter forced them to bless each bite of food she took. She would pick it up, and make them kiss it, and then she would eat it and the kiss they put on it. I was skeptical, thinking that it must have been an invented tradition, something the family formulated as a "product" of the child's, so that it could continue to give birth to the child by being symbolically eaten by her (the kiss being the vehicle for the incorporation of the family into the child, a kind of everyday life DNA), and so that it could tell the child later this story, about how much she loved and trusted her family and found them magical.

37. Harry/Harriet, modern queer, is the most modern instance of a genealogy of feminized subjects whose bodies bear the visible burden of pornographic sensationalism apparently necessary to produce the universal, disembodied promises of Enlightenment-style nationalities. For a summary of this process, see Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago, 1991), pp. 19–56, 135–50.

The child, in any case, did delight in her ritual and in the happiness it produced for her interlocutors. When for the first time I was chosen to kiss a cookie, I remember, I felt, well, chosen.

Why do I tell you this now, after these magical narratives of failed and partial histories? Partly to open a space of memory for what this essay has not had the capacity to imagine: some remaining horizons of critical historicity whose force in disrupting notions of practical/utopian politics, of failure/success, were crucial though understated contexts for this paper.

One of these is the scene of pedagogy, troped in the young girl's coming to see that a first act of magical thinking (around food, as around political trauma) might become a safe home for repetition, solicitation, domination, and testing, leading to a public-sphere-making reimagination of the world: Will you come through for me, kiss my cookie? A sequel to this essay will engage some problems of feminist pedagogy around the question of how identification and identity frame the scene of power and its politics, especially in graduate education that takes place between feminist/women (sometimes queer, or lesbian) teachers and their feminist/female (sometimes queer, or lesbian) students.[38] Just as the fantasy of almost contractual equality glosses the scene of magical eating, so too feminists have long hoped that collaborative work with and among students would break down degrading hierarchy, would make the scene of transmission of knowledge more of a kiss than, say, the hit on the back of the neck children of my mother's generation received if they did not eat their (goddamn) dinners.

But it has become clear to me, and to my students (alas), that more must be said, first, about the relation between the "kiss" and the "hit" in the transmission of feminist knowledges and support intergenerationally and, second, about why the humanities fight structurally against "collaboration" in its resolute embrace of authorship as a site of origin for critical texts, an embrace that sets the scene of professional value and expertise in fundamental and fundamentally constraining ways.

Second, the question of utopia/failure, played out in countless scenes (sometimes simultaneous) of gratitude and betrayal between teachers and students in feminist academic communities, emerges in another venue as well. This has to do with the banalization of "politics" into an intellectual/activist split that has made the white left seem, well, mainly aspiring to generate individual star expert talking heads compared to the rapid expansion of queer and multiculturally identified bodies into publics of their own, publics that have become important grounds for emergent cultures of radical expertise that have not given up their sixties-like rages, affects, polemics, nonsense. Witness the variety of "experts" (wearing

38. The sequel will be written with Elizabeth Freeman. I happily or sheepishly inserted the parenthetical sexual categories at her request/demand.

their various styles, skins, and fabrics) brought into the public eye around Bill Clinton's meeting with the "gay and lesbian community" before the Gay and Lesbian March on Washington in April 1993. I have tried to show how "'68" denotes, in the U.S., an event whose history is still unfolding, still cluttering the way with little piles of waste and inspiration; its banalized legacy in the postpolitical rages of professionalism and in the feminist, progressive, and right-wing contest to administer political correctness must be understood as well as a desire to frame the moment of '68 as no longer historical, as *finished,* and therefore failed.[39] PC, a slur, must be understood as a mode of etiquette. To which I say, in a way I hope made resonant by all that has passed between us in this investigation of the sublime productivities of political failure, "something" unspeakable.

39. I use this managerial language deliberately to emphasize the bureaucratic impulse behind the taxonomizing chaos generated by identity politics and its ugly imaginary friend, "political correctness." I learned this from Christopher Newfield, "What Was Political Correctness? Race, the Right, and Managerial Democracy in the Humanities," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Winter 1993): 308–36.