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Susan Mains and Meredith Redlin

(Re) Presenting Power

disClosure interviews Jane Flax

Jane Flax was invited to present two lectures at the University of Kentucky as the UK Committee for Social Theory Distinguished Speaker for Fall 1996. Her lectures addressed the intersections of gender, sexuality and race and efforts to define subjectivity. Building on her work in psychoanalysis, Flax explored the various ways in which efforts to categorize identities as acceptable or threatening have had significant influence in discussions of race and power, acutely illustrated in representations of the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas sexual harassment hearings. In addition, she analyzed the importance of dominant media representations in efforts to create an exclusionary historical narrative of the appropriate "US citizen," and the inherent contradictions within such discourses.

Combining ongoing research in social theory and psychoanalysis with a longstanding exploration of the practical implications of power and identity in psychotherapy, Jane Flax works both as a practicing therapist and as a Professor of Political Science at Howard University. She is the author of *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (1990) and *Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics and Philosophy* (1993). In this interview Flax explores these ideas further in a provocative discussion that examines the ways in which Anita Hill was "raced" and situated within broader debates about identity in the US, the (re)creation of "borderline" subjectivities, and the contested terrain between various theoretical perspectives on gender and race.

Jane Flax is a Professor of Political Science at Howard University.

Susan Mains (geography) and Meredith Redlin (sociology) are members of the disClosure editorial collective and are graduate students at the University of Kentucky.

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placing Anita Hill

disClosure: We were thinking of starting by talking about Anita Hill's "place." In your manuscript, you state that she did not place herself as a victim. While I think that was certainly true, to me it was also really clear that she was placing herself very firmly in the discourse of the hearing committee. She was doing the woman's role in that discourse. As Thomas was de-racing himself—as a heroic individual—it seemed to me that she was de-racing herself with a "good woman" posture—"I wouldn't have come forward, I didn't want to ruin him." And yet, we come to the same conclusion—that she wasn't allowed to define herself in the same way that Thomas did. Do you think discourses have roles for both men and women? Is any discourse a process of exclusion of other voices, rather than an inclusion of different positions?

Jane Flax: It's both. In discourse, even excluding somebody is giving them a position. You always have a position, and of course you can occupy several positions simultaneously. But I don't think she was consciously taking on the role of this reluctant tease. I think she was struggling with the problem that black women have: they're accused of undercutting and castrating black men, and I think she was trying very hard not to look like she had gone after Clarence Thomas. This is different than positioning herself as the victim of the committee, because she took responsibility for answering the questions once they were asked. I think what she was trying to do was to say, "I didn't come after this guy, I didn't set out to undermine him or destroy him." They asked her a bunch of questions along the way about whether she was trying to "bring him down." Some of the more conservative senators kept trying to position her as a kind of castrating, vengeful black woman. I think she was very aware of that—some of the later witnesses talk about it, in fact one of Thomas' witnesses talks about how she's now doing the 'traditional thing'—sort of standing behind her man, undercutting him and so on. I think that's more what she's enacting, not that the committee was forcing her to do something, she was admitting that she hadn't taken the initiative as a way to sidestep that.

dC: So there was a raced discourse that she was participating in at the same time?

JF: Oh, definitely. She was very aware of it. I don't see how she could not...

dC: Oh sure, I wasn't talking about personal consciousness, but of strategic presentation.

JF: Oh yeah, strategically she would definitely want to avoid that appearance.

dC: Do you think, in that context of multiplicity, there could be an op-

portunity to overcome some of the binaries that are set up in terms of gender and race? Offering different ways of addressing the different issues that have come up? How that idea of multiplicity can be used, for example, for political activism—how it can be formulated in a setting like this in ways that it can be more constructive?

JF: I think it would be very hard in a setting of something like this committee. It's a situation in which you're not in power. It's such an unequal relationship, it has such a heavy weight of formal institutional structure. Probably Senate hearings are not a form you can play around a lot in, and I don't think that they're the kind of place that offer an opportunity for activism. Things around them might, which in this case it certainly did. It generated a lot of discussion external from the committee hearings, but I think you also have to take into account the particular context. Some contexts are more amenable than others.

dC: Did you see many coalitions outside this discussion coming together across race and gender lines, dealing with issues of sexual harassment, or race?

JF: I think probably the most important thing that happened was that it was really energizing for black women. It was a watershed in publicly appropriating a kind of political agency. That seems to me the most important thing that happened—it was a real marker that white feminists couldn't get the race part of it, and you couldn't depend on black men or the black male leadership to really be loyal to black women. There's such an asymmetry in the loyalty—which has always been the case—but it was just done in such a public way. Subsequent to the hearings there have been lots of conferences among black women, and several collections of essays. There is more of a public acknowledgement of these gender tensions inter-racially that have to be dealt with.

dC: Can you see some of those gender tensions in the reception of Pat Hill Collins' work, for example? I have often heard Pat Hill Collins critiqued as anti-male—which I didn't see, but these critiques have come from some black males. Publicly, Anita Hill preceded Collins book, I think...?

JF: I think there are two levels. On one level, there is the issue of who gets to speak for the race, which is implicitly black men. So, whenever there's talk of feminist consciousness, at the level at which men want to control the discourse about the race, any feminist writing would create difficulty. But, I think there's another level at which the "standpoint" theories are far less threatening than ones that really deal with gender tensions. Because you can always say, "Well, so this is a standpoint, and there are certain perspectives that you have and that I have and they can be kept separate." The problem I have with Pat Hill Collins' approach is that it's still working within binaries, as if the way in which

black women construct the world doesn't have anything to do with how they are constructed by black men, and white men. I have the same problem with her work as I do with all standpoint theory—it's not really interrelational.

dC: We've been having this discussion, however, that not all standpoint theory is the same thing. When we look at what Dorothy Smith does, and what Pat Hill Collins does, both are formed in different ways. While I don't know if I agree with that, do you see a difference in the various standpoint theories, or are they all reducible to the same approach?

JF: They're all basically reducible to the same thing, which is that we have a set of experiences—historical and contemporary—that generate a certain kind of knowledge. That's the logical structure of a standpoint theory, there might be wiggles of some sort, but that's what it basically comes down to.

dC: Tying in to this, we were talking about multiplicity particularly in comparison to standpoint theory, the latter having previously been used more directly to create political activism in feminist theory. How do you see multiplicity and coalitions playing out in the future, in terms of bringing together multiple agendas? How does that actually translate into political action, can you expand on that?

JF: Yes, I don't know. There's a wonderful article in the most recent *Feminist Studies* by Bonnie Thornton Dill and another person, about what would actually be involved in political action. It seems to me that people are starting to think about that, but I sort of have Foucault's point of view—that in my life as an intellectual I don't have any particular privileged position in relationship to what's going to happen politically. So other than thinking broadly along the lines of how you construct coalitions in which differences become the points at which people engage each other, I have no idea how it would play out beyond that point. I really don't.

borderline subjectivities

dC: I suppose the idea of multiplicity and coalitions overlaps with the concept of nodal points—as points of common ground... which also ties in, I think, to your discussion of borderline subjectivities. You were talking about the fragmentation of borderline subjectivities, and it made me think about the way in which immigrants to the US have been viewed as threatening and "marginal." These ideas of "borders" seem to be running parallel, especially when you were talking about Anita Hill being depicted as threatening, not just to Clarence Thomas, but to US society more generally. Could expand on these ideas?

JF: There has been a long history in American political life of needing

some kind of outside "other" to blame. There were periods in the 20s when there was also the same kind of hysteria about immigration, so I think it's a recurring theme. This is tied into the fact that when there's a lot of social change, it becomes evident that there's no kind of stable, homogeneous "American" culture, or "American." When this surfaces people want to get rid of those who are the most recent, or those that are racially marked, or whatever. That seems to me to be what's going on now. Because of all the destabilization in our American political life—with down-scaling and globalization—it's very easy to say, well, if we just get rid of these people who are taking away jobs, who are bringing the enemy inside us, things will go back to a more predictable, stable way that we can control. It's really a boundary thing, because we can re-establish our boundaries, and we can make decisions about what comes in and out. I think it's enacting a lot of anxieties about changes in the global economy through particular people, flows of people, since we can't really control the globalization. And there's a long history available for these kinds of movements.

dC: Others have raised that as well: that there seems to be a kind of focus, particularly in the United States, that ignores the processes of globalization while only looking within the dominant group for ideas and saying this is our problem *here* and we have to get rid of *that*. But it's tied into broader processes, and I suppose though that's connected with the need to maintain a unitary identity...

JF: Sure, it's happening in France, it's happening in Germany, and all over. It's happening in non-western countries. The more things get disrupted, the more boundaries become fluid, and you get this kind of panicked response to it. Look what's happening in Afghanistan. I don't think you need to restrict this to western European countries.

dC: It sounds almost like you're describing a kind of mass psychosis, a predictable one, but still a psychosis. What about the process of using a psychoanalytical approach? Sometimes it seems uncomfortable, because it seems essentialist in a sense—that these fears are simply going to happen with groups of people all the time. On the other hand, there's an invasive sense to using a psychological analysis rather than a political one.

JF: Yes, I don't see why. They're just analytic tools. You're making interpretive arguments, not essentialist arguments. You're not saying it's human nature to do "X"—you're saying here's some kind of weird behavior, how might we explain it? And you can explain it in a multitude of ways. It's really a question of what seems to help make sense out of what people are doing now. You can use concepts like projection, or concepts like maximizing profit, and all of the above. There's the same problem in economic theory, saying it's "natural" for human beings to

seek a profit, or it's "natural" for human beings to want to participate in exchange and market behavior. Any concept can be turned into a statement about human nature, but it doesn't have to be. You can simply say, here's a whole toolbox of analytic concepts, and sometimes some seem to be more powerful than others. What you're analyzing is never adequately described by the tools that you have, and the tools are made up, so you have to keep a kind of double vision all the time. You've made up the tools and you need to examine a specific kind of behavior, and maybe they help explain it, and maybe they don't. That seems to me the most you can claim. I'm very pragmatist in that sense—where does it get you? If it doesn't get you anywhere, then it's not useful.

dC: Either one, then, can be evaluated for an explanatory or expository purpose?

JF: Yes, I don't think you should say that psychoanalysts have a better understanding of human nature, so those explanations are privileged, like the old Marxist idea that in the last instance it comes down to the relations of production. I don't think any of that. That's when you get into trouble—when you make those kinds of claims—as opposed to here's some useful ideas.

dC: To me, that's very clear in your work—you utilize a broad number of ideas. In addition, is there any benefit in labels? In the sense of, for example, me saying, well, I'm a pragmatist feminist. Is there any point in doing that anymore?

JF: The only point in labels anymore, I suppose, is that you orient yourself and other people. But to me that seems to be another version of identity politics, so I'm not sure where it gets you beyond that point.

dC: Do you think there's still a point to identity politics? To claiming some sort of common ground or base? Or do you see it as just maintaining borders?

JF: I don't know. I think maybe identity politics are useful in the sense of intra-group consciousness raising, but it's also very destructive, even within a group. I'm not sure on balance that it's a very useful tool. I'm just not sure what the positive payoff is, especially when you look at what the costs have been. When you look at feminism and try to see what the costs have been in trying to come up with some sort of unitary female ground, it's just been enormous in terms of really disabling relations between white women and women of color. I'm just more aware of the costs.

dC: What about the limitation of analytical tools? You discuss the Enlightenment separation between public and private spaces—when to be a citizen and when to be a "subject." I wondered if you can expand on this, in the sense that subjectivity is not about switching bodies, but about switching space—who's in public and who's in private? Can we

break down the boundaries between public and private?

JF: I think they are intermingled, it's an illusion to think that they're not. It's a process more of pointing out the intermingling that's already there. The kind of fantasy life that goes on in the public, the kind of power relations that go on in the so-called private. I think it's not really a matter of breaking it down, it's not an issue of two different kinds of worlds that have to be brought in contact with each other. It's more a process of dismantling the ways in which it's hard to see all the interactions. And then to think about how you might want to reconstitute it in a way that results in less domination.

dC: I suppose, going back to Anita Hill, that that's what the hearings demonstrated as well. It could be regarded as the intrusion of the private into the public...

JF: Yes, it shows that this stuff operates all the time. It's just that we usually "buy" this public representation of the public sphere, but it's not all that's going on.

dC: Do you think that, in terms of sexuality and the way that black men and women have been represented differently (by white men and women for example), an examination of "public" and "private" spaces illustrates the way that race and gender have been monitored differently? In the sense that the sexuality of black women and men has been monitored, or disciplined much more publicly than white men and, to a lesser extent, white women? I'm thinking of this in relation to Foucault, and the small practices of everyday discipline—the small processes of internalizing things.

JF: Yes, but I think everybody's sexuality is disciplined. Part of creating these fantasies about black people is white people disciplining their own sexuality. It's like saying this is not me, and I can't allow myself to do these things or then I would be like them. I think there's just different modes of discipline. Certainly people have more power to impose their fantasies on other people—that's where the difference comes it seems to me—not at the level of who has more freedom, but at the level of who has more power.

dC: Can you lay out for us "biopower"? In your manuscript for your upcoming book, which discusses the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings, you talk about how this case is not a discourse solely of judicial power, but that a biopower discourse overrules the judicial power? Is biopower a discourse around biological beings what exactly do you mean by biopower?

JF: Well, biopower has to do with all the ways in which a social subject is constructed. So it has to do with all sorts of practices about what constitutes health or illness, what constitutes normality, it has to do with ways of organizing social space, it has to do with education. All of

those things are elements of biopower.

dC: So biopower is always inclusive of social indicators—I mean for example, class is always operative in biopower...?

JF: Oh yes, class is very much about how people dress, what kind of food people eat, what kinds of games they play, and how they spend their nonwork time. There are definitely class dimensions to it as well. What kind of expectations people have about relationships, what expectations they have in relation to education—some kids receive more encouragement to be independent or more rule-bound. There are vast subtle ways in which people are prepared for social positions. And all of those have to do with biopower—that's my understanding of what it's about. It doesn't have anything to do with the juridical. It's not about laws and formal political institutions.

dC: It's about other forms of constraint.

JF: Yes, but it's not just constraint, that's what's so important about Foucault's ideas. Every society has to produce subjects that fit it, so it's very productive, it's very generative, and it isn't something that's imposed from without, but it's something that we do. It's not helpful to think about it just in terms of constraint, because you're producing yourself. There are so many different forces that you can put together and play with, and push back at, and reorganize. That resistance is noted, and then there's counterresistance. That's why I like his idea of capillary power, it's much more accurate to think of the heart and the blood coursing through and getting replenished and finding ways around little obstructions in the veins and so on. That's a much more useful model. It's not the Weberian notion of getting someone to do something that they wouldn't do otherwise, because there are things in it for all of us there. It's partly the fact that everybody's stuck with the problem of balancing out what's in it for you versus what it costs. The difference lies in the realization that some people have more power to get more of what they want and suffer less of the costs. That's it—and that's important, who has that kind of power, who has more power to dictate certain problems that everyone has to deal with. That's a very important form of power. It doesn't mean everyone's just situated the same by any means. You might have more leverage in one sphere, or more leverage in another sphere. That's also how it's different from a class analysis. It doesn't mean that you have some definitive position from which you can understand every other power relation in the society.

dC: Are there concepts we can use—like the organic intellectual—that still work if we accept Foucault's position of the intellectual as one who interprets and offers, but doesn't prescribe? And how does this fit in with Gramsci's concept, where the intellectual must live there too?

JF: Yes, I've always had trouble with Gramsci's idea. In a funny way it doesn't take seriously his own position, which is that if you become an intellectual there are fundamental gaps between you and people who aren't. And you really have to take that into account and work with it. I think that there's a way in which he wanted to deny it, and have this romanticized view of what happens when these languages get into your head, and these ways of orienting yourself to the world—you can't erase that. It really changes how you talk and think, and, to my mind, it's better to acknowledge that than to pretend it's not there. I think that's part of why those strategies have never worked very well, because people can just see it. It's much better if you're up front, than to act as if it weren't true.

dC: Is there any part of that in Rorty's discussion of the conversation?

JF: No, because I think he says, "Here I am, this philosopher who has all these languages, and I'm going to put forth certain ideas..." He doesn't deny his position, or where he's coming from, and he says none of this may be useful to ordinary lives—everything I do may be of interest to a hundred people in the world, which is just fine. Why as an intellectual would you have more to offer humans than any other practice? If you think of intellectual work as just a form of social practice, why should it be any more useful than your local massage therapist? I think it's a very different concept of intellectual work and the rest of the world. Intellectual work might have given you certain tools, but it also disables you in a way. I think that's part of what Foucault was very aware of—there's no practice that doesn't have a cost and a blindness.

dC: In some ways, the idea of the intellectual has been reified as someone having privileged knowledge and who can look down from above and tell how everyone's going to behave...How has that tied into changes in psychoanalysis more generally? I'm curious about how it affects this perception of human relations.

JF: Psychoanalysis is sort of the opposite of that idea. Once you begin to think of the concept of the unconscious, and that everyone has an unconscious, ... well, that's one reason why a lot of philosophers are quite hostile to it. Once Freud, from 1920 on, started looking at the mind in a more complex, process kind of way, where parts of the ego are unconscious, and parts of the superego participate with the id to undermine the ego, then you couldn't really have a notion of abstract reason and that kind of distance. There are all these things going on that are outside of your conscious awareness. Freud states that you have to distinguish between mind and consciousness. Once you do that, then it's really not possible to have an idea of abstract reasoning.

dC: That makes me think of Benjamin, in "Life and Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," where people are trying to get closer to

things through the process of mechanical reproduction. Do you see ties between that example and looking at race, or looking at gender from certain dominant perspectives which have used more control as a way of reducing the distance? For example, travel writers try to reduce the distance in order to understand the exotic, or to have control over the images to reduce the distance in perspectives....?

JF: Well, I think the point of the images is to increase distance—to make the other very exotic. Part of the control, is to make the other in no way implicated in the self. Making the other exotic is a way of saying that's really not me.

dC: More specifically, I found your discussion of women's sexuality as contested terrain, particularly their bodies, very intriguing, especially in relation to the differences between white and black women's bodies as property. This came into my mind when I was thinking of Mexican immigrant women in particular, and the split between the purity of the body and the body being out of control. Do you have any specific examples of sexuality and the body and why it's become contested terrain?

JF: I think it always has been. I think that's part of what Linda Gordon shows in her histories of reproduction, that there's been an ongoing struggle everywhere over who controls women's bodies in reproduction, and women's sexuality. You can think about this not just in relation to abortion, but also in relation to genital mutilation. I think that women's bodies have always been a site of gender struggle, it just manifests itself in different ways. I think that is one radical feminist insight which seems to have held up—part of the construction of masculinity has to do with women's bodies as property. Power over bodies, whether it's in the form of slavery or of gender relations, is a very important form of power. I guess you can look at immigration that way—as control over how many bodies flow in and out—a population control of sorts. I think there are specific things that have to do with reproduction and sexuality that are highly gendered.

dC: That's a good point. When I was in California, one of the first things they tried to take away from immigrant women was prenatal health care. It makes sense in that context, because it is very much an attempt to discipline boundaries in certain ways, to draw a line and say here's the boundary and we have to draw it *here* or *these* people will challenge even more.

JF: Right, or you look at welfare policy and the idea that if you're a minor you are going to have to live with your parents if you have a kid, or you're not going to get additional welfare for more kids. There are so many ways in which part of it is about who gets the right to have babies, or what social supports there are for different people to have ba-

bies.

dC: I suppose it's also tied into the different perceptions of parenting and motherhood as well...

Who's an "appropriate" mother, and in what context...

JF: Sure.

theorizing identity and power

dC: To change the subject here, there are theoretical approaches that I want to see if I can defend...one is liberalism, even though it has been depicted as completely and utterly unusable in that it is tied to Enlightenment discourses. There's a lot of pragmatic philosophical perspectives that very much mirror some of your work, even though they are also obviously rooted in liberalism. For example, Mead's tripartite self—the I, Me and Generalized Other—or Dewey's "moment of innovation," rather than a utilitarian perspective. Do we have to dispense with liberalism, or is there a way in which, it too, can be multiple, and can be used as a tool for analysis in the ways which you suggest?

JF: Well, I don't know how you could make broad monolithic statements like that, there are so many different forms of liberalism. Again, I think it's more helpful to think of tools, or ideas, rather than whole bunches of things. I think that there are things that are useful, in Dewey or pragmatism, but there's also a downside. Where I would disagree with Rorty is that it doesn't leave space for really irreconcilable differences, and what happens when those occur? It's not very good at dealing with or accounting for asymmetries of power. It presupposes in a way, where you need to go, which is towards having *more* symmetries of power. Pragmatism might work pretty well if there weren't structural inequalities, but I'm not sure it works very well to get rid of structural inequalities. Also, it doesn't work very well in incorporating a premise of irreconcilable conflict, and what will happen in that context. There are things that can't be negotiated through conversation. People have ways of life that are really irreconcilable. How, then, do you take public responsibility for favoring one mode of life over another? Those are real problems within pragmatism, and I don't see how they're resolvable.

dC: So that's the point where the liberalism of pragmatism shows through then, the inability to "equalize the playing field"?

JF: It also lacks a tragic dimension, which to me is very much a part of politics. That knowledge that things don't always work out, that resources aren't always sufficient, that people really disagree and have investments and feel like their life is being assaulted—that's a lot of what politics is about—people having these very intense investments in certain things such that they're not willing to give them up. So, they're

going to go for enough power to impose what matters to them on the rest of the world. Then, if you don't like that, you just have to get enough power to impose back. I don't see any reason for that to go away. People are very complex.

dC: The other perspective would be in the radical feminist position—critiques of radical feminism are often reduced to “MacKinnon equals victimology.” You've already talked about how some of the concepts of radical feminism can be used—the body as contested terrain—but even sticking specifically with MacKinnon—I'm thinking of her work with the pornography ordinance—could she be using the position of victim as a way to amass more power?

JF: I don't think it's a way to amass more power, but I think that it's paradoxical because it doesn't allow all sorts of things like fantasy. It's such an “imprint” model—there's this thing out there that means X to me, so it must mean X to you and you will behave in these ways. It doesn't allow for the varieties of fantasy and meaning that people might make of it, not to mention the problematic of connecting images to behavior. It seems to me that it doesn't allow for female sexuality in any kind of resistant form. She says pretty consistently all the way through that female sexuality is constituted by becoming objects for men. And that's something that I think is intensely wrong, I mean, how do you account for lesbians?—which would seem to be a problem. To my mind, it also reduces sexuality to just genital sexuality, as if there are no other forms of erotic pleasure or aesthetic pleasure. It reminds me of a kind of Puritan perspective.

dC: Yes, I feel that more about Dworkin's work than MacKinnon's—of course, they work together—Dworkin introduces the concept of the “virgin” or the unimprinted sexuality as the goal we are trying to get to...

JF: Right, and there's no such thing. You have your erotic experiences going through language and images...

dC: But there is some point of imposition. Of course, that's how Anita Hill couldn't get out of her position as a sexual being in that particular structure.

JF: Yes, that's exactly it—in that *particular* structure. But it's not like that was her entire life. Who knows what she does with her lovers, or what fantasies she has, or if she goes out and grows flowers and has a great time? Those are all true, that's what you have to keep in mind. Of course there are areas that make you subject to all sorts of awful exercises of domination, but that's not the whole story. I don't think that's the whole story for anybody. You have to try to give a full account. First of all, politically, it's just stupid, it turns people off—nobody wants to look at themselves that way, or very few people do.

dC: How useful is Butler's idea of gender as performance and the idea sexuality becoming much more fluid?

JF: I think that's a very useful idea, because it gets to the idea of enacting as opposed to being, which is a very important way to move. It puts us in the double position of actually doing these things, and also being constrained in what we can imagine doing. It indicates that double sidedness, which is really important.

dC: When writing about fluidity, though—I love your work and others who speak of fluidity, movement and flows—when I try to write about it, I find it kind of gelling up in front of me, things become solid while I'm *trying* to be fluid! Do you have any advice?

JF: I think that's just a function of language, and it's something that you have to think about at a stylistic level. You have to find various ways to work around it, but that gelling is just one of the ways that language works.

dC: That's true, when we're trained in a certain way—a beginning, a middle and an end, you *must* have an end—it's quite difficult to break out of that. You feel like there should be a certain progression, even if you want to leave spaces open...

JF: And you also don't want to lose your reader. You want to include ways of giving your reader hooks or ways to orient herself, which is also really important and I don't think a lot of people think about that. There's no reason for things to be impenetrable or obscure—especially, if you think or plot in a way that addresses what the reader needs to know to make sense of this. Because, if you think of yourself as a writer, it's not just a narcissistic way to display something, presumably you also want the reader to enter into your world, and to provide modes of access into that. I think one of the bad things about academic education is that it separates the literary process and the thinking process, it's not very helpful for producing good writing.

dC: And there's such a difference across disciplines, an almost unwritten norm...

JF: Oh yeah, only certain kinds of voices are allowed. That's what I like about what the critical race people are doing, they're breaking down those normative styles, and using different kinds of voices, and playing with forms—like Derrick Bell and his stories, Patricia Williams... I think that's really important.

dC: We're both in the social sciences...

JF: Social science has that awful disembodied voice! It's really...

dC: I've become acutely aware of that at conferences, there's restrictions on what's “flowery” rather than “science.” But it's difficult because of the forms of legitimacy, some people stay in the accepted ways of writing because otherwise it's not accepted.

JF: Yes, people can't recognize it.

dC: It also seems that you can end up with equally rigidified "alternatives"—if you're going to do a narrative, you're going to write it like this, this many quotes, et cetera. But I suppose that's how validity is created, but that process of repetition sometimes interferes with what we have to say. To turn to another issue, when talking about fluidity, and drawing on the necessary historical information, it seems that you end up with some degree of determinism in some theoretical positions. But there are things that do indeed seem to fit into direct cause. Thomas' nomination in many ways is seen as a direct result of the rejection of Bork, and as a very deliberate "race ploy" in that sense—who can we nominate that would really complicate this procedure for the Democratic senators, how about this black man?

JF: Right, but I think that's a good example because, of course, people have intentions and motivations, but they often aren't determinative.

dC: They're always partial...

JF: Yes, and they don't control the outcome necessarily. The end exceeds whatever you set out to have happen. The more power you have the more you might be able to get to your intention, but I think that part of what politics is about is such enormous uncertainty and contingency and multiple forces that enter into play. Sure, X person had Y intention, but it doesn't mean that that's the way that the event turned out, or even that it's the best way to understand what the premises of that event are... I mean, it's part of the context that you have to take into account—what did people think they were doing, what did they hope to accomplish? Of course that's an important aspect to it, but at the same time you can't just tell the story from that point of view, and, clearly in relation to Thomas—look what happened. All sorts of stuff got set off that I'm sure Bush never wanted brought forward.

dC: It's a very good example, in a way, of how things don't work...

JF: Right, you come up with this fool-proof strategy, and you end up in this gigantic mess! You end up exposing a lot more than you ever wanted.

dC: I just went to see *A Perfect Candidate*¹

JF: Yes, that's really good...

dC: And I couldn't help thinking, how did they ever let themselves be filmed? But I suppose they didn't see it.

JF: Sure, I'm sure he [Oliver North's campaign manager] didn't see himself the way that you might have seen him on the screen, and probably if he saw that film he wouldn't see himself the way that you do.

dC: It's a great film for seeing numerous different political images, and the ways they try to keep them under control...

JF: Right, right.

dC: Yeah, and during the Hill-Thomas hearings, the senators never seemed to understand a different perspective on the "rabidness" of their own actions. Even now, Specter still doesn't seem to understand the reactions to this...

JF: No, not even now. One of the things about having power is you never have to see yourself in the way that other people see you. You don't have to see yourself in those multiple ways.

dC: Is there any chance of double vision, then, for those in power?

JF: Not unless it's made in their interest.

dC: And that's when you talk about creating uncomfotability—for example, it doesn't feel good for me to just be taking my white privilege anymore.

JF: Right, there has to be something which makes it not work. And it won't be spontaneous, why should it be? Why should it be?

endnotes

1. A documentary film about Oliver North's unsuccessful campaign for U.S. Senate during the 1994 elections.

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