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Story-telling for Social Change

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ABSTRACT *As strategies for social change, feminist activities in the area of law and popular education both rely on the oppressed telling stories of their daily lives. Story-telling in these contexts represents different perceptions of reality that are intended as an opposition to established knowledge. Focusing primarily on popular education, the author describes how the uncritical reliance on stories has led to the failure in the classroom to acknowledge the risks taken by various oppressed groups when they attempt to critically reflect and build coalitions. Furthermore, stories have not in fact always been empowering. Without mechanisms to critique the stories, mixed sex, mixed race groups have been unable to identify political strategies and to determine effective political action. In order to speak and to listen across our various subject positions, and ultimately to act, the author argues that critical pedagogy has to pay attention to how we know, hence the context in which we tell and hear stories.*

Her (story) remains irreducibly foreign to Him. The man can't hear it the way she means it. He sees her as victim, as unfortunate object of hazard. 'her mind is confused,' he concludes. She views herself as the teller, the un-making subject... the moving force of the story. (Trinh, 1989a, p. 149)

For many of us who would describe ourselves as teaching for social change, story-telling has been at the heart of our pedagogy. In the context of social change story-telling refers to an opposition to established knowledge, to Foucault's suppressed knowledge, to the experience of the world that is not admitted into dominant knowledge paradigms. I have found story-telling to be central to strategies for social change in two apparently different sites: law and education. In law, there is now lively debate on "outsider jurisprudence", Mari Matsuda's useful phrase for "jurisprudence derived from considering stories from the bottom" (Matsuda, 1987, p. 2322). Story-telling is less new to critical educational theorists and practitioners but the emphasis in critical pedagogy on voices silenced through traditional education is now being met with calls to interrogate

more closely the construction of subjectivity. That is, the complex ways in which relations of domination are sustained, lived and resisted call for a more careful examination of how we come to know what we know as well as how we work for a more just world across our various ways of knowing.

When we depend on story-telling either to reach each other across differences or to resist patriarchal and racist constructs, we must overcome at least one difficulty: the difference in position between the teller and the listener, between telling the tale and hearing it. Story-telling is all about subjectivity: often uncritically "understood as sentimental, personal and individual horizon as opposed to objective, universal, societal, limitless horizon; often attributed to women, the other of man, and natives, the other of the west" (Trinh, 1989b, p. 373). When, for instance, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, a quasi-governmental organisation, collects the stories of immigrant women with a view to their publication, one suspects that it is the sentimental, personal and the individual that is being sought after. To what uses will these stories be put? Will someone else take them and theorise from them? Will they serve to reassure everyone that Canada really is diverse, full of folklore? Who will control how they are used? Will immigrant women tell a particular kind of story in a forum they do not control? Such dilemmas are evident wherever story-telling is used.

In this article, I propose to situate my introductory comments in the context of story-telling in law, leaving the central part of the paper for a consideration of story-telling and critical pedagogy. I want to suggest, from the perspective of a popular educator who also works in academe doing legal research, that there are land mines strewn across the path wherever story-telling is used, that it should never be used uncritically and that its potential as a tool for social change is remarkable provided we pay attention to the moral vision that underpins how we hear and take up the stories of oppressed groups.

Story-telling in Law

Law relies on a positivist conception of knowledge. That is, there is a straight line between the knower and the known. In law, judges and juries discover the truth from the array of information put before them. There is only one objective truth and it is empirically provable. Reason features prominently and emotion is ruthlessly banished. The rule of law is "the consistent application of prior stated rules", a process theoretically uninformed by politics or ethics (Massaro, 1989, p. 2099). Story-telling in law, then, is an intellectual movement that is "a rebellion against abstractions" (p. 2099). Its purpose is to interrogate the space between the knower and the thing known; its function is one of putting the context back into law. Scheppele (1989) writes of the conceptual scheme of the observer that stands between him or her and the event. Story-telling is a theoretical attention to narrative, to the nature and consequences of this conceptual scheme. Concretely, it is an interrogation of how courts come to convert information into fact, how judges, juries and lawyers come to 'objectively' know the truth: "Those whose stories are believed have the power to create fact" (Scheppele, 1989, p. 2079).

Legal rules and conventions suppress the stories of outsider groups. The fiction of objectivity, for example, obscures that key players in the legal system have tended to share a conceptual scheme. Thus judges who do not see the harm of rape or of racist speech are considered to be simply interpreting what is before

them. They are not seen to possess norms and values that derive directly from their social location and that are sustained by such practices as considering individuals outside of their social contexts. Stories of members of marginalised groups must therefore "reveal things about the world that we *ought* to know" (Delgado, 1990, p. 95). They are "a means of obtaining the knowledge we need to create a just legal structure" (Matsuda, 1989, p. 2326). Matsuda argues forcefully that "those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen" (Matsuda, 1987, p. 324). Stories, in the context of law, bring feeling back and they tend to work from experiential understanding. (Massaro, 1989, p. 2105). How this happens in a court-room is clear from feminist jurisprudence.

Feminists working in law describe for the court's benefit the nature of women's oppression and then make an argument that policies and practices that perpetuate that oppression ought to be declared illegal. (In Canada, section 15, the equality rights section of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is usually invoked in support.) The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), formed in 1985, is one of the major groups developing and making this argument in Canadian courts (Razack, 1991). The challenge has been to bring into the court-room details about women's daily lives in a forum constructed to negate or silence such realities. For instance, Western law functions on the basis of liberalism where the individual is thought to be an autonomous, rational self, essentially unconnected to other selves and dedicated to pursuing his or her own interests. To present an individual in her community, and further, to describe that community as LEAF has done as "the disadvantaged, the disempowered, the marginalized" is to pose a fundamental challenge to legal discourse. The individual in her community is less empirically provable, and courts are inordinately fond of empirical proof.

Feminists working in law theorise on the nature of the challenge they pose to law's 'truth'. Robin West, for instance, sees the process as one of telling women's stories. Thus feminism applied to law consists of flooding "the market with our own stories until we get one simple point across: men's narrative story and phenomenology is not women's story and phenomenology" (West, 1988, p. 70). An example of this kind of flooding is the defence mounted by the Federation of Women Teachers of Ontario when they found themselves in court defending their right to exist as a women-only teachers' union. The Federation argued that women were and are an oppressed group and that in this specific context, a mixed sex union would only perpetuate that oppression. The men teachers' federation who supported the challenge to the Federation's right to exist as an all-female institution maintained that women teachers are equal in every way to men teachers; a mixed sex union would serve all teachers best. Whereas the side arguing for a mixed union only felt obliged to point to the collective agreement as proof of equality between men and women, the Federation enlisted the aid of over 20 women, experts in women's history, women's studies, women's unions etc. to flood the court with information about the past and daily lives of women in general and women teachers in particular. For instance, Dale Spender was asked to testify on her research that men dominate in mixed sex groupings. Joy Parr, a Canadian historian, gave evidence that historically Canadian women have had to fight to protect their rights. Management studies testified that 'the routines of inequality' blocked women's advancement. Principals, for instance, had to have

training in curriculum studies, which one could only get after school, a time when most women shouldered family responsibilities. At times, the tale became highly subjective, as when Sylvia Gold, then president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women testified that she felt that the Federation had directly influenced the creation of women leaders. At other times, details about women came into the court-room in full scientific dress. Margrit Eichler, a sociology professor, quantified inequality for the court's benefit and then measured the Federation by 20 indices of inequality. Her conclusion: the Federation advanced women's interests.

For feminists working in law, story-telling has always been particularly seductive; women's stories have not been told. Until recently, there has been little concern with the difficulties that arise from an uncritical use of stories. There are two features of story-telling in law that bear mentioning. First, how are the stories going to be received? Can the Man hear it the way she means it? This is particularly evident in the court-room when the story has to do with violence against women, a story that heavily implicates men. A second problem is that one cannot be ambiguous or contradictory when playing this kind of game in a court of law, given the power of law's positivism. The stories are being told to make a particular point and they are being heard in a particular way. It will not be possible to squeeze all the realities of daily life into this framework; some realities are distorted to the point of their being unrecognisable. Canadian Native women in prisons, for instance, are currently wondering if their stories of oppression are 'translatable' for the court's benefit.

Indeed, story-telling as a methodology in the context of law can lead very quickly into dichotomies and generalisations that make it difficult to describe the intersections of race, class, gender and disability. Is the search for facts, Carrie Menkel Meadow, a feminist lawyer asks, "a feminine search for context and the search for legal principles a masculine search for certainty and abstract rules?" (Menkel Meadow, 1985, p. 49). Gender, uncontaminated by race, class, disability or sexual orientation is the prism through which daily life is viewed and differences among women fit awkwardly into the story. When gender is constructed in its pure form, i.e. uncontaminated by race or class or culture, Norma Alarcon has pointed out, the woman thus imagined names herself; her culture, race or class do not name her. Thus, ironically, she remains the old, autonomous liberal self, only female; another abstraction (Alarcon, 1990, p. 357).

Concerns about the "coercive power of stories" (Scheppele, 1989, p. 2077) and thus about how they are used and the uses to which they are put have troubled legal scholars working on race critiques of law. Toni Massaro, for instance, has reflected on the consequences of an unproblematic call for stories and context, identifying one important difficulty: in the end, law has to privilege one story over another. A judge has to choose and it is not so much his understanding that is required as certain actions. Furthermore, given the fact that most judges continue to come from dominant groups, they are unlikely to be able to empathise with marginalised groups. In any event, in the area of discrimination, for instance, Massaro points out, empathy is not the ultimate goal. It is not enough to try to find ways to communicate to the judge that discrimination is hurtful. It is equally necessary to convince him or her that an action is morally wrong and requires legal sanction. Massaro suggests that how we hear different stories is therefore dependent on the moral code with which we function (Massaro, 1989,

2127). While we experience many unpleasant things, only some are considered both morally reprehensible and 'actionable' in law. Justice is all about drawing the boundaries between wrong and right.

Mari Matsuda's work on legal sanctions for racist speech provides a careful reflection on how we might evaluate the stories of victims from the basis of what we as a society consider to be morally wrong. Arguing that a "legal response to racist speech is a statement that victims of racism are valued members of our polity" (Matsuda, 1989, p. 2322), Matsuda grapples with the complexities of how we decide whose perspectives to take into account in determining the kinds of racist speech that require legal sanction. She notes, for instance, that the typical reaction of oppressed groups to an incident of racist propaganda is alarm and calls for redress whereas the typical reaction of dominant groups is denial and dismissal of the incident as a harmless prank (Matsuda, 1989, p. 2327). Denial of the impact of this form of racism helps to sustain the view that censorship of racist hate messages is a greater harm than the harm of the messages themselves. If we listened to the voices of those harmed by racist propaganda, however, basic principles would emerge that help us to assess the context in which racist speech occurs. Victims of racism make clear that racism must be fought on all levels and that their lives would be improved by an explicit legal condemnation of racist speech.

One immediate criticism of the position that we ought to listen to the voices of the oppressed in determining what is and is not just is, as Matsuda herself observes, the sorting out of who is oppressed and who is not. Anticipating such critics, Matsuda directs us to examine such social indicators as wealth, mobility, comfort, health, and survival which tell us which groups have status. She allows for the fact that oppressed groups participate in each other's oppression but claims that racist speech from a member of a historically subjugated group is not to be judged as harshly as racist speech from a member of a dominant group. The former's racism "is tied to the structural domination of another group" (Matsuda, 1989, p. 2362). A member of a historically subjugated group forfeits this privilege when she allies herself to the dominant group (Matsuda, 1989, p. 2364). Clearly, deciding which voices to privilege in law is enormously complicated and relies not only on our being able to thread our way through historical domination but also on the clarity of our moral vision. The alternatives, however, are to ignore the voices of marginalised groups or to accept them uncritically. This latter option would leave us with no way of evaluating the difference between Zionism and generic white supremacy, to use Matsuda's example. We would have no guidelines for assessing the context in which stories originate.

Story-telling in Critical Pedagogy

In traditional educational theory, the existing arrangement of society is taken as given and schools "are seen as the means of rationally distributing individuals in what is conceived as a basically just society" (Weiler, 1988, p. 5). In contrast, (and like outsider jurisprudence), critical educational theory recognises, as Henry Giroux, has put it, that "ideology has to be conceived as both source and effect of social and institutional practices as they operate within a society that is characterised by relations of domination, a society in which men and women are basically unfree in both objective and subjective terms" (Giroux, cited in Weiler, 1988,

p. 22). Thus a radical or critical pedagogy is one that resists the reproduction of the *status quo* by uncovering relations of domination and opening up spaces for voices suppressed in traditional education. How critical educators do so is once again through the methodology of story-telling. Individuals who develop critical thinking can challenge oppressive practices; the critical educator thus "takes as central the inner histories and experiences of the students themselves", seeking to foster critical reflection of everyday experience (Weiler, 1988, pp. 22-23).

As in outsider jurisprudence, story-telling for social change in an educational setting is more complicated than the phrase would indicate. In her work on how the school covertly regulates the production of self-regulating, autonomous individuals, Valerie Walkerdine stresses that those who are most targeted in the school system, the poor, the working class and ethnic minorities, also resist and engage differently with the systems of domination in which they are enmeshed. As Walkerdine put it, "the constitution of subjectivity is not all of one piece without seams and ruptures" (Walkerdine, 1985, p. 204). The voices of the oppressed are not simply left out of the system. Rather, the school regulates what a child is and children of outsider groups (and all girls) respond in a number of contradictory ways. The critical educator has to understand how "particular children live those multiple positionings". For example, she writes:

How might a girl's [socially produced] docility in school produce both losses and gains? She might be denied in the status of 'active learner' and yet at the same time be enabled to maintain another site of power, for example by taking the position of mother. Yet she must experience pain and anxiety if the contradiction between those positions is not recognized and understood as an effect of the pathologising process [i.e. where masculinity is the norm]. What, too, if that pathology operates in relation to different and contradictory assumptions of the normal? How then are the resultant splittings lived? (Walkerdine, 1988, pp. 228-229)

The double strategy which Walkerdine recommends, "one which recognises and examines the effects of normative models, whilst producing the possibility of other accounts and other sites of identification," (1985, p. 238) is an important reminder of the multiple and contradictory nature of subjectivity, hence of the complexities of working with the stories of outsiders to resist domination.

While critical educational theorists like Walkerdine begin here, popular education theorists and practitioners often fail to theorise multiple and contradictory subjectivities. Paulo Freire's (1970) pioneering work on the fostering of critical consciousness in oppressed groups continues to be applied relatively straightforwardly in North America, for instance, in ways that stop short of interrogating the category oppressed for the North American as opposed to the Latin American context in which Freire's work originated. In Freire's work, as Charles Paine writes, a pedagogy that is radical, whether in the popular education or in the academic classroom, "must help students transcend culturally imposed consciousness, allowing them to exit their circular, self-enclosed, and self-perpetuating 'uncritical immersion in the *status quo*'" (Paine, 1989, p. 558). Popular education, grounded in this theoretical approach, writes one practitioner,

stresses dialogue, group learning, and valuing the participants' experience as the foundation for further learning and knowledge. The educator is considered a facilitator of a collective educational process, some-

one who is able to question critically different perceptions of reality and custom, and to contribute to the formulation of *new knowledge* that addresses the problems of poor communities and the actions those communities want to undertake (Magendzo, 1990, p. 50, emphasis added)

Ironically, popular educators have been slow to critically reflect on their own practices. Ricardo Zuniga (1988), in an article called *La Gestion Amphibie* laments the lack of critical reflection on the part of popular educators and attributes it to an us/them mentality. For instance, the funders (the state) are thought to be the bad guys, thus placing emphasis on the unity and internal solidarity of those who receive funding. It then becomes difficult to critically evaluate the project (other than in carefully constructed reports to the funding agency). Zuniga identifies the tendencies that exacerbate dichotomous thinking and make it difficult to deal with contradiction. The popular educator embodies contradiction, he argues: "he [sic] is responsible for training in a context where only self-training is acknowledged; he does not want to control and he is conscious of the distance between him and his 'clients', 'collaborators' or 'students'. The problems with appropriate terminology well illustrate the contradictions" (Zuniga, 1988, p. 158). The only palliative, Zuniga argues, that is available for this anguish is the reassurance of being on the right side, the alternative to the *status quo*.

If you are on the good side, then you define yourself by reliance on '*le savoir populaire*', popular knowledge, and not '*le savoir bourgeois*'; a firm rejection of empiricism, positivism and science and a warm embrace of emotions, stories, narratives, nature, spontaneity (Zuniga, 1988, p. 162). Stories cannot really be critiqued in this framework; they are unproblematically conceived of as suppressed knowledge. There is an assumption that the living voices (and sometimes the written texts) of the oppressed express a truth that will win out. There is little room for questioning that voice or text as the transmitter of authentic 'human' experience (Greene & Khan, 1985, p. 25). Here the authentic voice rests on a conception of the self as unitary and coherent. Language is seen as simply representing reality rather than constructing it. (Zuniga, however, is only objecting to the oppositional thinking and not to the view of language and voice as straightforwardly representational of reality. Thus, he ends up arguing for more rationality and less emotion.)

Feminists have long warned of the ultimate dangers of dichotomising. With poetic eloquence, Gloria Anzaldúa writes:

But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank shouting questions, challenging patriarchal white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed... (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78).

To heal the split, we have to think about our way of life. "The massive uprooting of dualistic thinking" (p. 80) which Anzaldúa and many other feminists have long called for requires new ways of knowing. Yet, the narratives or stories, of which Zuniga complains, are frequently advanced by feminists as *the* way to challenge patriarchal dichotomies, in spite of the fact that they are primarily described as everything patriarchal knowledge is not. Thus, Bettina Aptheker concludes her book *Tapestries of Life* with this suggestion:

The point is that more than one thing is true for us at the same time. A masculinist process, however, at least as it has been institutionalized in Western society, accentuates the combative, the oppositional, the either/or dichotomies, the 'right' and 'wrong'. What I have been about throughout this book is showing that the dailiness of women's lives structures a different way of knowing and a different way of thinking. The process that comes from this way of knowing has to be at the centre of a woman's politics, and it has to be at the centre of a woman's scholarship. This is why I have been drawn to the poetry and to the stories: because they are layered, because more than one truth is represented, because there is ambiguity and paradox. When we work together in coalitions, or on the job, or in academic settings, or in the community, we have to allow for this ambiguity and paradox, respect each other, our cultures, our integrity, our dignity. (Aptheker, 1989, p. 254).

In critical educational and feminist theory, what are being sought, then, are ways to come to terms with the contradictions of everyday life, contradictions that reveal themselves in the stories of the oppressed and in which are located the seeds for critical consciousness. How does this project take shape in the classroom?

'In the Field'

There is high demand for stories in the classroom—both the traditional academic classroom and the one in which I teach human rights activists at an annual summer college. There, Aptheker's "respect for each other", acceptance of tolerance and ambiguity etc., frustrate me however, in the same way that Elizabeth Ellsworth felt frustrated by the fine sounding phrases of critical pedagogy in her influential article 'Why doesn't this feel empowering?' (1989). Stories intended to serve as an opposition to patriarchal discourse have *not* always felt empowering. This is due, in large part, to two tendencies: our failure to recognise the multiple nature of subjectivity and hence the complex ways we construct meaning, and a failure to develop an ethical vision [1] based on our differences. In the effort to untangle how we are constructed we have sometimes failed to define what it is about the world that we want to change and why.

Ellsworth noted specifically that in mixed sex, mixed race classroom on racism, students enter with "investments of privilege and struggle already made in favour of some ethical and political positions concerning racism and against other positions" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 301). The strategies of empowerment, dialogue and voice do not in fact work as neatly as they are supposed to because there is no unity among the oppressed and because our various histories are not left at the

door when we enter a classroom to critically reflect. Her students were unable to 'hear' each other. The operative mode was rationality and the stories of various groups had to be justified and explicated using the very tools that held these stories to be inadmissible. (Here the parallel to feminists working in law is obvious. The rules of the legal game structure the tale in such a way that only some parts of it can be told or what is told is unrecognisably transformed by the fancy scientific dress.) Going beyond Aptheker's unproblematic call for a tolerance of ambiguity, Ellsworth suggests that we respect the diversity of voices, of stories as it were, that we recognise that the voices are "valid—but not without response" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 305). In other words, the stories must be *critiqued* and she has a number of concrete suggestions for doing so which I would like to address in order to look for a way out of a return to rationality or to an uncritical reliance on stories.

Ellsworth recommends that we work hard at building trust, hence the importance of building in opportunities for social interaction (we do this at the summer college by making the programme a residential programme); that we stress the need to learn about the realities of others without relying on them to inform us; that we name the inequalities *in* the classroom and devise ground rules for communication, (for this we used Uma Narayan's (1988) article 'Working across differences'); that we consider strategies such as encouraging affinity groups between those who are most likely to share the same forms of oppression; and that we consciously offer such groups the time to coalesce so that individuals can speak from within groups. All of these recommended pedagogical practices come out of her central piece of advice which is that we critically examine what we share and don't share. We work from the basis that we all have only partial knowledge, that we come from different subject positions. Most important of all, no one is off the hook since we can all claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else. These suggestions, which I do practise, do not save me from some of the 'ethical dilemmas' that arise frequently at the summer college, although perhaps I could have minimised their impact had I paid closer attention to the ground rules above.

Two incidents from the most recent summer college in human rights illustrate some of the difficulties with a critical use of story-telling. The summer college in human rights, held at the University of Ottawa but sponsored by the non-governmental Human Rights Research and Education Centre, brings together 60 human rights activists who work for social change within an organised group. Thus there are members of groups of women with disabilities, various anti-racist groups, the Assembly of First Nations, lawyers for human rights in South Africa, etc. Although it frequently happens that individuals from dominant groups work for organisations on behalf of the oppressed, the majority of students can fit, in one way or another, into the 'disadvantaged groups'. The first incident illustrates the unreasonably high demand for story-telling from those in dominant positions. Here I take some responsibility. The curriculum is designed to encourage story-telling and the pedagogical practices emphasise the need to make a space for different voices and in fact to forge a politics of alliances based on this sharing of daily experiences. One participant in my group, a white disabled woman, frustrated by the silence of a black woman from South Africa when South Africa was being discussed, directly confronted her with a firm 'Why don't you tell us your experiences?' Realising the harshness of what was said, another participant, also

disabled but male, repeated the request more gently. Instantly, the trust and sharing of the class, built over 5 days, dissolved in a puff of smoke. The black participant, thus confronted with a request to tell her story, defended her right to silence and then left the room in tears. In the chaos of what then ensued, it became clear that the sentence, so simply expressed by a white woman, innocently inviting a woman of colour to share her experiences of racism, recalled for every person of colour in the room (seven out of 20) that this was not in fact a safe learning environment. For me, the instructor and a woman of colour, I tried hard to retain my composure. Later, distressed to the point of tears by the 'loss of control' in 'my' classroom, and not consoled by the learning value of the event, I wondered how it was that I could have been so powerfully affected in spite of many years' experience of just this type of situation. I recall trying clumsily to explain to a colleague that *we* (people of colour) are always being asked to tell our stories for *your* (white people) benefit, which you can't *hear* because of the benefit you derive from hearing them. Suddenly, the world was still white after all and the pedagogy that insisted that the oppressed can come together to critically reflect and share stories seemed a sham.

Let me leave this story for a while and tell another that occurred in the same context but among all three classes of the summer college. This story illustrates for me the sheer difficulty of understanding across differences and the need for some ethical guidelines for *listening*. The session in question took place in August 1990. On the day that the Federal Government of Canada, at Quebec's request, decided to send in the army to try to end the stand off between Mohawks and the Quebec provincial police (*Sûreté Québec*), the students of the summer college decided to abandon the curriculum and take action. This after all was the basis of the education for social change they had come to get. In the very heated discussions that followed as to the most appropriate actions to be taken, the only two Native participants (not, however, of the Mohawk nation) assumed a leadership role, again in keeping with the principles of the college that struggles for social change must be led by the groups in question. They both endorsed a march on Parliament Hill to protest armed intervention and made a passionate plea (in the form of stories of their lives as Native women) that we all accept this as the only course of action. As in Elizabeth Ellsworth's class, we, the non-Natives in the room then began to process the story we had heard. Some of us then required the two women to defend their position using the master's tools since we felt that the army was in fact an improvement over the *Sûreté Québec*, a police force well-known for its racism. In fact, we argued, the Assembly of First Nations who represented Native groups, themselves agreed this was so although they deplored, as we did, armed intervention. The situation soon led to tears (from the Native women), recriminations (from some of the francophone participants who felt that sympathy for the Mohawks came easily for anglophones whose daily lives were not touched by the crisis as were the lives of francophone inhabitants of Quebec), sheer astonishment at the depth of emotion we had observed, and to our general confusion and failure to find a way out of this ethical dilemma. In a different way, the situation was repeated when a native woman from an altogether different reserve (Akwasasne) came to speak against the Warrior societies of the Mohawks, while a Native leader later spoke in their defence. We had to employ the tools of rationality to choose between stories and to determine political action. The brilliant suggestion of Uma Narayan, that we grant epistemic privilege

to the oppressed, falls apart when the subject positions are so confused. Unless we want to fall into the trap of demanding that the oppressed speak in a unified voice before we will believe them, we are still left with the difficult task of negotiating our way through our various ways of knowing and towards political action.

Both these incidents led me to reflect on classroom ethics, indeed on ethics in general, in mixed sex and mixed race groupings where there is a commitment to social change. First, I agree with Zuniga and Ellsworth: we do shy away from critical reflection of the practices of those on the 'good' side. Ironically, our analytical and pedagogical tools seem to discourage internal critique by calling for respect for different voices with insufficient attention paid to the contexts of both the teller and the listener. Second, the risks taken in the course of critical reflection are never equally shared. This is almost a truism yet we have not been careful to devise a pedagogy that would accommodate it or a political practice that would not sacrifice diversity, again I think because the game of good guy/bad guy discourages it. What would a pedagogy that recognised the inequalities of risk-taking entail? We know more about what it would not entail, for instance Ellsworth's comments that acting as though the classroom is a safe place does not make it safe.

From feminists and practitioners of critical pedagogy alike has come the suggestion that caring is as important as critical pedagogy. For instance, Meth-child Hart warned of an overemphasis on cognitive processes (Hart, 1990, p. 135). We cannot absolutely know what is required in what instances. Is the best we can do to remain open and to care? There are, however, boundaries to our caring which have to be worked out when deciding how far we will commit ourselves to action. Furthermore, these boundaries are hard to discern across cultures and caring sometimes gets in the way. Lynet Uttal (1989), writing of her experience of the differences between Anglo-feminist groups and those of women of colour, notes that in Anglo-feminist groups, the emphasis on providing care and support leads to passive listening of diverse voices. There is seldom any heated discussion or disagreement; those who fail to fit in simply leave the group. She describes the "blank looks of supportive listening" and the absence of critical engagement with the ideas proposed (Uttal, 1989, p. 318).

Richard Brosio reminds us that our professions notwithstanding, education is not the leading route to social change (Brosio, 1990, p. 75). Perhaps we ought not to have the expectation that a pedagogy can be devised that will help us to transcend the dichotomies and the bind of partial knowledge. Iris Young wisely notes that "too often people in groups working for social change take mutual friendship to be a goal of the group. Such a desire for community often channels energy away from the political goals of the group" (Young, 1990, p. 235). I interpret this to mean that we often forget that community has to be struggled for, which I think Ellsworth very forcefully demonstrates by her critical analysis of her course on racism. What might assist us to promote that struggle?

If there is no automatic friendship, good will or community, where do we begin? The answer is of course already an axiom among us: we begin with critical thinking and critical pedagogy. But where critical pedagogy has traditionally begun is not far enough below the surface. We have to begin with how we know, giving this more attention than we have traditionally done. Epistemology, perhaps without using the word, has to enter into our pedagogy and our political

categories. It is not an auspicious beginning to build on the feminist insight that women appear to know differently to men because the universalising tendency of the category 'woman' has been every bit as destructive as the universal category 'oppressed' has been in critical pedagogy.

Carolyn Steedman (1986) well illustrates the point that how we know what we know is central to our political practice because it helps us to locate the inconsistencies, the cracks we might then use to empower ourselves. Commenting on the fact that all women learn about patriarchy in the family, whether by the father's absence or presence, she remarks:

What is a distinction though, and one that offers some hope, is the difference between learning of this system from a father's display of its social basis, and learning of it from a relatively unimportant and powerless man (as in the case of her working-class father), who cannot present the case for patriarchy embodied in his own person. (Steedman, 1986, p. 79)

Our different subject positions, borne out in how we know, tell and hear stories, are ignored at our peril. Maria Lugones describes the dilemmas that confront her as a Chicana woman in an intellectual context that is predominantly white, when invited to tell her stories. White/Anglo women, she writes, "can see themselves as simply human or simply women. I can bring you to your senses *con el tono de mi voz*, with the sound of my—to you—alien voice." (Lugones, 1989, p. 49). This at any rate is the assumption behind story-telling. For the woman of colour, however, the situation is altogether more difficult:

So the central and painful questions for me in this encounter become questions of speech? *En qué voz* with which voice, *anclada en qué lugar* anchored in which place, *para qué y porqué* why and to what purpose, do I trust myself to you... *o acaso juego un juego de cat and mouse* for your entertainment... *o por el mio?* I ask these questions out loud because they need to be asked.

If we are sensitive to this difference which Lugones brilliantly demonstrates, and we heed Ellsworth's practical advice on this score, that is that we problematise what the limits of our knowing are, based on our different subject positions, I think we end up realising that story-telling serves various groups differently and that it should never be employed uncritically in mixed groups.

Trinh Minh-ha's work is a courageous attempt to delineate modes of story-telling, to explore the complex interplay between the subject positions of the tellers and the listeners. "There is more than one way to relate the story of specialness", she observes, and stories can perpetuate domination. For instance, specialness can serve the dominant groups as entertainment, as "that voice of difference likely to bring us *what we can't have* and to divert us from the monotony of sameness" (Trinh, 1989a, p. 88).

Eager not to disappoint, I try my best to offer my benefactors and benefactresses what they most anxiously yearn for: the possibility of a difference, yet a difference or otherwise that will not go so far as to question the foundations of their beings and makings. (p. 88)

As a listener, one can be drawn into such a process very easily. I have seen students literally feeding off the tears of stories from the Third World, basking in

the sense of having visited another country so easily and feeling no compulsion to explore their own complicity in the oppression of others.

The problems of voice and identity are packed with internal dilemmas not only for the listeners but also the tellers of the tale. Often women of colour are asked to tell their stories while others will do the theorising and the writing up. Yet the chance to speak, to enter your reality on the record, as it were, is as irresistible as it is problematic. What kind of tale will I choose to tell, and in what voice? Trinh Minh-ha asks, "how do you inscribe difference without bursting into a series of euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your own kind? Without indulging in a marketable romanticism or in a naive whining about your condition?" (Trinh, 1989a, p. 28). There are penalties for choosing the wrong voice at the wrong time, for telling an inappropriate tale. Far better, one might conclude, as the black woman from South Africa did, to keep silent. I found myself exploring, at the summer college, this right to silence and offer in this regard another of Trinh's observations: "Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored" (Trinh, 1989b, p. 373). As an educator, however, I find the idea of silence extremely unsettling, reminding me of my own compelling interest in encouraging the telling of stories.

In story-telling, then, while asking ourselves what we can know and not know is important, particularly in terms of listening to others and then deciding how to act in a particular situation, I think there is a more basic task at hand. This is the task of calling into question knowledge and being of both the teller and the listener, and struggling for ways to take this out of the realm of abstraction and into political action. "What we do toward the texts of the oppressed is very much dependent upon where we are", writes Gayatri Spivak (Spivak, 1990, p. 57), echoing a Quebecois proverb that '*on pense ou on a les pieds*'. Again I turn to Trinh Minh-ha who has illuminated for me most clearly why neither rationality nor emotional sharing will suffice. Trinh suggests we consider breaking the dichotomy mind/body, reason/emotion as is done in Asian martial arts for instance, by adding a third category, 'instinctual immediacy', by which I think is meant subject position or point of departure. Here, instinct does not stand opposed to reason; it requires us to relate to the world with immediacy, to allow "each part of the body to become infused with consciousness". Instinct requires us to reactivate the "radical calling into question in every undertaking, of everything that one takes for granted" (Trinh, 1989a, p. 40). Give up, in other words, the quest for knowledge, that is to definitively know, either through the heart or the mind. Instead, question one's point of departure at every turn so that strategies (such as replacing rationality with emotions) do not become end points in themselves (Trinh, 1989a, p. 43).

Trinh Minh-ha is optimistic about her proposal to engage in the ground clearing activity of radically calling into question:

The questions that arise continue to provoke answers, but none will dominate as long as the ground-clearing activity is at work. Can knowledge circulate without a position of mastery? Can it be conveyed without the exercise of power? No, because there is no end to understanding power relations which are rooted deep in the social nexus—not merely added to society nor easily locatable so that we can just radically do away with them. Yes, however, because in-between grounds always exist, and cracks and interstices are like gaps of fresh air that keep on being

suppressed because they tend to render more visible the failures operating in every system. Perhaps mastery need not coincide with power (Trinh, 1989a, p. 41).

The *mestiza* consciousness described by Gloria Anzaldua in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) requires ground-clearing activity. The future belongs to the *mestizas*, Anzaldua writes, "because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—*la mestiza* creates a new consciousness" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 80). Anzaldua makes concrete the tolerance for ambiguity called for by Bettina Aptheker when she situates it in the radical calling into question of all our subject positions. The first step of the *mestiza* is to take inventory: to ask critically, "Just what did she inherit from her ancestors?" (p. 82).

Pedagogically, then, ground clearing activity is my suggestion for reshaping education for social change. In one way this is not any different from the axiom to continually critically reflect. What it refers to, however, is reflecting critically on how we hear, how we speak, to the choices we make about which voice to use, when, and, most important of all, developing pedagogical practices that enable us to pose these questions and use the various answers to guide those concrete moral choices we are constantly being called upon to make.

Concretely, I envision a more complex mapping of our differences than we have ever tried before. In the case of the summer college, for instance, it will mean that more space is cleared in the curriculum for exploration from our various subject positions. Colonisation from within and without will become a major theme and not just in terms of what colonisation means for Third World peoples but also how it constitutes the colonisers themselves. The project at hand is Spivak's "unlearning privilege" (Spivak, 1990, p. 30) so that "not only does one become able to listen to that other constituency, but one learns to speak in such a way that one will be taken seriously by that other constituency" (Spivak, 1990, p. 42). In the past, it seemed such an enormous task to enter into the classroom some of the realities of various oppressed groups that it did not seem possible to concentrate on how we are 'processing' this information differently based on our respective subject positions. In effect, were I to redesign my pedagogical approach in the summer college, I would want to pay more attention to how we know rather than primarily to what we know. It seems simple enough but the complex ways of telling stories act as a reminder that the task is anything but simple.

In law, maintaining a similar vigilance about how we know what we know requires that we pay attention to "the interpretative structures we use to reconstruct events." (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 404). As feminists, for instance, we will need to devise alternatives for telling about the lives of women of colour that transcend the narrative about the white woman or the one about the black man. Since the stories of women of colour fit into neither, telling them will require attention to multiplicities, contradictions and relations of power embedded in interpretive structures.

To conclude, I endorse Trinh's passionate plea for a movement away from defining and boxing ourselves into one subject identity:

You and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of

the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what I am not. The differences made *between* entities comprehended as absolute presences—hence the notion of *pure origin* and *true self*—are an outgrowth of a dualistic system of thought peculiar to the Occident... (Trinh, 1989a, p. 90)

Without absolutes, no true self, no pure origin, it becomes all the more imperative to pay attention to how our multiple identities are constructed and played out at any one time in any one context. The white disabled student might then have not asked for the stories of the black South African; she might have focused on critically examining her own need to hear those stories (to what end?) Similarly, we would not have been paralysed by guilt upon hearing Native women call for a particular form of action which did not meet our rational criteria. We might instead have asked what was affecting our comprehension of events (as indeed they might have asked themselves). In the same way, feminists who go to court might question their choice of narrative strategies *before* they go to court. More secure in our respective commitments to probing beneath the surface of what we know, to how we know, alliances might then be possible between white, heterosexual, able-bodied and middle-class women and women on the margins. In the court-room as in the classroom, ours "is a responsibility to trace the other in self" (Spivak, 1990, p. 47), a task that must become central to our practice.

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NOTE

- [1] I have used the word ethical to describe a collective reflection on the moral values we each hold. An ethical vision informs our politics in the sense that it is a shared sense of what is right and wrong.

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Including the Personal and the Professional: researching women in educational leadership

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Introduction

In 1973, when Harry Wolcott wrote *The Man in the Principal's Office*, women were seriously underrepresented in positions of senior educational leadership. It was very likely that it was indeed a man in the principal's office. In New Zealand some 17 years later little had changed with only 17% of secondary and 20% of primary principals being women. This situation has continued despite women being the majority of teachers in both primary and secondary schools and despite women being more successful than men in winning senior positions when they do apply for them (Slyfield, 1991). This leaves little room for doubt as to the fact of women's underrepresentation in positions of educational leadership in New Zealand. However this situation is not peculiar to education but reflects the position of women throughout all sectors of the New Zealand work-force (National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, 1990).

This underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions has prompted many feminist researchers to try to identify the reasons for this uneven distribution. They have examined the organisational structuring of schools, the experiences of women in schools, the blocks to women's promotion and the theory and practice of educational leadership (Donn, 1986, 1987; Slyfield, 1991; Malcolm, 1978; Shakeshaft, 1987; Neville, 1988; Court, 1989; Thomson, 1988; Strachan, 1991). These, and other, researchers unfolded a number of interrelating factors which included, amongst others: promotion and organisational systems that favoured men and disadvantaged women, 'accepted' styles of leadership that had little relevance for women; the different ways women chose to order their lives, both personally and professionally, that didn't 'fit' the traditional career path; 'gatekeeper' attitudes that discouraged women from applying for promo-