Megan Boler, Feeling Power:
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CHAPTER EIGHT

A PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT

Witnessing and the Politics of Anger and Fear

> *What we commonly mean by "understand" coincides with "simplify":*
> *without a profound simplification the world around us would be an infi-*
> *nite, undefined tangle that would defy our ability to orient ourselves and*
> *decide upon our actions. In short, we are compelled to reduce the know-*
> *able to a schema.*
> >   —Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*[1]

> *For Descartes, there are only two possibilities: absolute certainty or episte-*
> *mological chaos; that is, purity or corruption. ... When the universe*
> *becomes unmanageable, human beings become absolutists. We create a*
> *world without ambiguity in order to escape, as Dewey puts it, "from the*
> *vicissitudes of experience", to impose order on what is experienced as with-*
> *out organic order of its own.*
> >   — Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity*[2]

> *In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from*
> *a conformism that is about to overpower it.*
> >   — Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*[3]

INTRODUCTION

WHAT WE ARE faced with in the course of the most ordinary lifetime is terri-
fying. The desire to order chaos through simplified schemas, to ward off the
felt dangers of ambiguity, seems perhaps more "human" a characteristic
than any other. The educator who endeavors to rattle complacent cages, who
attempts to "wrest us anew" from the threat of conformism, undoubtedly
faces the treacherous ghosts of the other's fears and terrors, which in turn
evoke one's own demons. The path of understanding, if it is not to "simpli-
fy," must be tread gently. Yet if one believes in alternatives to the reductive

binaries of good and evil, "purity and corruption," one is challenged to invite the other, with compassion and fortitude, to learn to see things differently, no matter how perilous the course for all involved.

I opened *Feeling Power* with examples of Bob Marley's and Calvin's different forms of resistance to education. In this chapter I explore in greater depth what we stand to gain from learning to "see differently." Exemplifying a refusal to see things differently, we will recall, in the *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoon Calvin hands back to his mother a book that she had given him and he had read. Calvin says, "It really made me see things differently. It's given me a lot to think about." Walking away, Calvin says, "It's complicating my life. Don't get me any more." Calvin represents one of those whom Maxine Greene notes when she comments, "relatively few people are . . . courageous enough actually to 'see'" (1988: 131). What helps us to develop, collectively, the courage to see things differently?

I outline a pedagogy of discomfort to foreground the question, What do we — educators and students — stand to gain by engaging in the discomforting process of questioning cherished beliefs and assumptions? I begin by defining a pedagogy of discomfort as both an invitation to inquiry as well as a call to action. As inquiry, a pedagogy of discomfort emphasizes "collective witnessing" as opposed to individualized self-reflection. I distinguish *witnessing* from *spectating* as one entrée into a collectivized engagement in learning to see differently. A central focus of my discussion is the emotions that often arise in the process of examining cherished beliefs and assumptions. I address defensive anger, fear of change, and fears of losing our personal and cultural identities. An ethical aim of a pedagogy of discomfort is willingly to inhabit a more ambiguous and flexible sense of self. My hope is that we are able to extend our ethical language and sense of possibilities beyond a reductive model of "guilt vs. innocence."

In this chapter I focus on how the dominant culture has taught us to view differences of race and sexual orientation. I choose these examples because in my teaching experience it is consistently questions of race and sexuality that are the most "discomforting" to educators and to students. I want to understand how *collectively* it is possible to step into this murky minefield and come out as allies and without severe injury to any party.

A PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT AS CRITICAL INQUIRY

A PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT begins by inviting educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs,

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and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others. Within this culture of inquiry and flexibility, a central focus is to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see.

This inquiry is a collective, not an individualized, process. As Greene notes, searching for freedom

> never occurs in a vacuum. Freedom cannot be conceived apart from a matrix of social, economic, cultural, and psychological conditions. It is within the matrix that selves take shape or are created through choice of action in the changing situations of life. The degree and quality of whatever freedom is achieved are functions of the perspectives available, and the reflectiveness on the choices made. (1988: 80)

In addition to being a collective process, this inquiry requires that educators and students learn to notice how one's sense of self and perspectives are shifting and contingent.

The call for "critical inquiry" in the liberal tradition is easily subsumed within the hollow invocations of values of dialogue, democracy, and rationality. Deeply rooted in Western conceptions of liberal individualism,[4] this common rhetoric threatens to reduce genuine inquiry to an individualized process with no collective accountability. Instead we are challenged to distinguish collective witnessing, for example, from the familiar notions of critical inquiry. I explore one version of educational individualism: the *risks of self-reflection.*[5]

The Risks of Self-Reflection

Self-reflection, like passive empathy, runs the risk of reducing historical complexities to an overly tidy package that ignores our mutual responsibility to one another. Empathy, as I argued in the previous chapter, often works through reducing the other to a mirror-identification of oneself, a means of rendering the discomforting other familiar and non threatening. In the example discussed in the previous chapter, students experienced a deceptive "ah-hah!" moment while reading Art Spiegelman's *MAUS*: "Now I know what it feels like to be the son of a Holocaust survivor/to be a survivor of the Nazi regime!" The simple identifications and passive empathy produced through this "confessional reading" assures no actual change. "Testimonial reading," I argued, carries with it a responsibility for the "forces raging within us"[6] — we are asked to turn the gaze equally upon our own historical moment and upon ourselves.

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The Socratic admonition to "know thyself" may not lead to self-transformation. Like passive empathy, self-reflection in and of itself may result in no measurable change or good to others or oneself. The familiar call for critical self-reflection can easily be reduced to a form of solipsism, a kind of "new age," liberal navel-gazing. Upon self-reflection I may tell you, "I feel defensively angry when you suggest that I examine my privilege; this is how I feel when I think about racism/sexism/homophobia. It's too scary and hard and I don't want to change." This statement appears to take responsibility but in fact changes nothing, other than perhaps permitting the well-meaning white liberal to "feel better" having provided a self-critique. Thus "self-critique" easily functions as a form of "confession."

In contrast to the admonition to "know thyself," collective witnessing is always understood in relation to others, and in relation to personal and cultural histories and material conditions. To honor these complexities requires learning to develop *genealogies* of one's positionalities and emotional resistances. As Barbara Houston notes, "whatever pedagogy we use has to be one that directs us to something larger and other than ourselves and constantly and effectively reminds us that we are *more* than what is currently under scrutiny."[7] In order to achieve a vision beyond the isolated self, I am guided by Minnie Bruce Pratt's suggestions of "what we stand to gain" from this process of scrutiny. Put in slightly different terms she notes that "[t]o understand the complexity of another's existence is not to deny the complexity of our own" (1984: 18).

The demand for a genealogy of one's experience resonates with Joan Scott's argument regarding the evidence of experience. "When the evidence offered is the evidence of 'experience,' the claim for referentiality is further buttressed — what could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through? It is precisely this kind of appeal to experience as uncontestable evidence and as an original point of explanation . . . that weakens the critical thrust of histories of difference" (1991: 777). However, as I have argued throughout *Feeling Power*, to believe we need to choose between *either* experience *or* history reflects the embedded binary oppositions of Western thought and not a necessary either/or choice.

To avoid an oversimplified version of self-reflection or an uncontestable invocation of "experience," pedagogical strategies must push beyond the usual Western conceptions of the liberal individual. Instead, the process of "becoming" may be understood as an undertaking that is both

(1) collective: "who we feel ourselves to be," how we see ourselves and want to see ourselves, is inextricably intertwined with others. To evidence this I examine how our identities, frail and precarious, are bound up with "popular history,"

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with self-images, investments, and beliefs reiterated through the mass media, school textbooks, and dominant cultural values.

(2) flexible: leading to a willingness to reconsider and undergo possible transformation of our self-identity in relation to others and to history.

Any rigid belief is potentially "miseducative," and I do not exempt my own beliefs from this inquiry. Indeed one of the enriching and fulfilling aspects of being an educator, which is simultaneously difficult and painful, is that on a daily basis students may challenge me to question my own aims, ideas, and assumptions. I frequently encounter my own defensive anger and fears. Like Calvin, I am often tempted to dismiss views that I don't want to hear. Listening is fraught with emotional landmines. An ethical pedagogy would seem to require listening with equal attention to all views and perspectives. But some perspectives, particularly those I feel are reiterated throughout the dominant culture in harmful ways, are difficult, even dangerous, for me to hear.[8] I perpetually reevaluate and struggle to develop a pedagogy that calls on each of us to be responsible, and particularly calls for me to be extremely sensitive in how I pose my invitation to discomfort. Shifting views and questioning assumptions likely encounters emotional vicissitudes, such as defensive anger and fears. A pedagogy of discomfort, then, aims to invite students and educators to examine how our modes of seeing have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture of the historical moment.

A PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT AS A CALL TO ACTION

A PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT calls not only for inquiry but also, at critical junctures, for action — action hopefully catalyzed as a result of learning to bear witness. Just as self-reflection and passive empathy do not assure any change, so the safe project of inquiry represents only the first step of a transformative journey.

I anticipate the reader who believes that a call to action lies beyond the appropriate bounds of education. From the starting premises of *Feeling Power* I have argued that education always involves a political or social agenda. A pedagogy of discomfort is not a demand to take one particular road of action. The purpose is not to enforce a particular political agenda, or to evaluate students on what agenda they choose to carry out, if any. Further, given the "constraints" of educational settings, we may not always see or know what actions follow from a pedagogy of discomfort. But ethically speaking,

the telos of inquiry does not provide sufficient response to a system of differ-
ential privileges built upon arbitrary social hierarchies.

EMOTIONAL SELECTIVITY AND LEARNING TO SEE

IN AN ASTUTE DESCRIPTION of the interrelationship between habit,
sense of self, and what we do and do not wish to see or feel, John Dewey writes:

> Habit reaches . . . down into the very structure of the self; it signifies a building
> up and solidifying of certain desires; an increased sensitiveness and responsive-
> ness . . . or an impaired capacity to attend to and think about certain things.
> Habit covers . . . the very makeup of desire, intent, choice, disposition which
> gives an act its voluntary quality. (quoted in Garrison 1997: 139)

Some philosophers call this emotional selectivity, "patterns of moral
salience." Like Aristotle, John Dewey analyzed "selective emphasis" and
argued for the ethical importance of seeing the "whole context."9

With Aristotle and Dewey, I emphasize the ways in which our emotional
selectivity is shaped in particular political ways. If they did not think some
degree of indoctrination inevitable, they should have.10 I cannot imagine an
education that is in any way uncontestable or neutral. One's learned emo-
tional selectivity inevitably reflects the effects of specific cultural agendas.

Aristotle's ideas regarding the "habituation of character" as part of educa-
tion entails bringing "the child to more critical discriminations. . . . What is
required is a shifting of beliefs and perspectives through the guidance of an
outside instructor" (Sherman 1989: 172). This is not a one-time event of
shifting vision, but rather a "continuous and consistent instruction which
will allow for the formation of patterns and trends in what the child notices
and sees" (ibid.). The ability to see one's own foibles requires, according to
Aristotle, dialogue and audience (Sherman 1989: 27).

I call this emotional selectivity *inscribed habits of (in)attention.* Aristotle
and Dewey both stressed the importance of attending to our emotional selec-
tivity as part of learning to choose "right actions," to "habituate character"
towards a good.11 The extraordinarily challenging question, never to be com-
fortably resolved, is who decides what counts as the "good"? What gives the
"outside instructor" the authority to tell a child or student that their vision is
"too selective," their emotions not properly habituated?

Some will argue that this conundrum is simply a "moral loggerheads": It
is my view against yours, and on what basis can we possibly claim that one

view is better than another, or that any action or transformation is required? Often it is at this juncture that educational philosophies retreat to rhetoric of pluralism, freedom of belief and speech, dialogue, and democracy. While these invocations are comforting and sometimes useful practices, the history of the Western world confirms that these democratic practices by no means assure justice, freedom, or a world free from violence. Once we examine the particulars, we may discover that we need more nuanced ways to speak about justice and injustice: *an historicized ethics*. A pedagogy of discomfort invites students to leave the familiar shores of learned beliefs and habits, and swim further out into the "foreign" and risky depths of the sea of ethical and moral differences.

WHAT WE STAND TO GAIN

IN HER ESSAY "Identity: Skin/Blood/Heart," Minnie Bruce Pratt (1984) addresses those born into privilege and asks, Why and when does a person willingly undertake change, especially if one is materially and ideologically safe and comfortable? What does one stand to gain from questioning one's cherished beliefs and changing fundamental ways of thinking?[12]

Pratt offers a unique example of a historicized analysis of "consciousness" and emotions. She examines her experience through different genealogical lenses: She maps her learned ways of seeing; her family history; her own particular investments and disinvestments; and the emotions that motivate her to change and which also make change discomforting and something to be resisted.

Pratt offers three answers to "what we gain" by setting on the frightening path of change. Each of her answers addresses *structures of feeling* (Williams 1977): the ways in which ideologies reflect emotional investments that by and large remain unexamined during our lifetimes, because they have been insidiously woven into the everyday fabric of common sense.

The first gain Pratt lists evidences how epistemology, emotions, and ethics are intertwined:

> I learn a way of looking at the world that is more accurate, complex, multi-layered, multi-dimensioned, more truthful. . . . I gain truth when I expand my constricted eye, an eye that has only let in what I have been taught to see. But there have been other constructions: the clutch of fear around my heart . . . kin to a terror that has been in my birth culture for years, for centuries: the terror of a people who have set themselves apart and above, who have wronged others, and

feel they are about to be found out and punished. (1984: 17)

Pratt's second gain might be seen as a method that enables us to move beyond fear. What is required is the willingness to be "at the edge between fear and outside, on the edge of my skin, listening, asking what new thing will I hear, will I see, will I let myself feel. . . . I try to say to myself: To acknowledge the complexity of another's existence is not to deny my own" (18).

The third gain, she argues, is the relief afforded through the opportunity to move beyond the pain inherent to "separation" and distance from others. It is "painful," she states, "to keep understanding this separation within myself and the world. Sometimes this pain feels only like despair: yet I have felt it also to be another kind of pain, where the need to be with [others . . . breaks] through the shell around me . . . where with understanding and change, the loneliness won't be necessary" (1984: 19). As Houston summarizes, "At the heart of Pratt's discussion of each of the rewards or gains we might attain is her conviction that it is only when we are willing to recognize our fear, and how our fear is integral to why and how we have learned to separate ourselves from others, that we can achieve these rewards."[13]

Pratt emphasizes how what we learn *not* to see is shaped by fear, and how learning to see differently requires a willingness to live with new fears — what I call learning to inhabit a morally ambiguous self. As we learn to see differently, she encourages, we may actually gain relief from the pain of separateness.

I have used Pratt's work as an invitation to students for many years, at several universities, and I find that her narrative is an exceptionally powerful catalyst for many students. Here is an example from a graduate student in one of my seminars:

> [Pratt] made me think of my own life, and how I "view the world with my lenses." I want to have the knowledge and understanding to see the complexity and patterns of life. I want to be able to understand the layering of circles. . . . I feel the same way as Pratt, that when I begin to feel as if I had gained some truth, I discover that it is only partially the truth, or even a lie. I am confused by the contradictions from what I was brought up believing and what I am now starting to learn.

To explore what we stand to gain requires, then, a pedagogy that emphasizes the interrelationships of how we see as well as the emotional selectivity that shapes what and how we see.

TOWARD AN HISTORICIZED ETHICS

TO DEVELOP AN historicized ethics depends upon recognizing the selectivity of one's vision and emotional attention. As one learns to recognize patterns of emotional selectivity, one also learns to recognize when one "spectates" vs. when one "bears witness." I have chosen to focus on examples of how issues of racism and homophobia spark especially challenging forms of discomfort. Given my underlying premise that education is never a neutral activity, but is inevitably political and never disinterested, I feel compelled to explore territories that evoke some of the most challenging investments and resistances. Readers may feel "imposed" upon, may feel that my suggestions are extreme, "too political," and represent unfair calls to action. I suggest that, even in our engagement here between text and reader, we are experiencing a pedagogy of discomfort. And I remind again that a call to action is not a demand or requirement, but an invitation. Given my definition of education as always an ethical undertaking, any pedagogy or curricula potentially evokes resistance, fear, and anger.

Racism and homophobia in our culture manifest in similar forms of bias, institutionalized discrimination, and marginalization. Concretely, racism and homophobia are effective insofar as they successfully deny access, publicly shame and humiliate, and subject individuals and communities to violence. However, they are also significantly different in their historical origins, trajectories, and contemporary manifestations. Arguably, questions of race are viewed as appropriate curriculum topics and pedagogical concerns, but this was not always the case. The gains that have been made, specifically within education and in the wider cultural climate with respect to discourses about racism, didn't happen "naturally." It is not the case that white supremacists decided racism was a terrible injustice and decided to work to change it. Neither do oppressions right themselves "naturally." The change in curricula over the last two decades, and the change in school climates since 1954, is part of a long, and ongoing, historical struggle against racist injustice, a struggle that is by no means over.[14]

Lesbian and gay rights and equity issues are arguably more volatile in contemporary classrooms than is race. At present, "lesbian and gay pride/ history month" is not celebrated in many public schools. Debates over how and when and what to teach about sexuality, from middle to high schools, are fraught with controversy and contested — contraception and abortion are most often not discussed, along with resounding silences, or condemnation, of lesbian and gay lifestyle. Although most university classrooms do not face the same forms of censure, college-age students' sexuality also renders these issues difficult. For those becoming teachers, these questions are a

Pandora's box. Sexuality, from abortion to sexual preference, is pervasively viewed as a "private" matter. Race, gender, and social class, on the other hand, have come to be viewed as viable topics for public educational discussion.

All of these issues of oppression are frequently dealt with by silence and omission, and sexuality issues perhaps more so. Silence and omission are by no means neutral. One of the central manifestations of racism, sexism, and homophobia is "erasure": omissions and silences that often stem from ignorance and not necessarily from intentional desires to hurt or oppress.

SPECTATING VS. WITNESSING

SPECTATING SIGNIFIES learned and chosen modes of visual omission and erasure. To spectate, to be a voyeur, takes many forms: pleasurable Hollywood experience, "cinematic diversion", "carries" us into the narrative, and rather than critically analyze the images we permit ourselves easy identification with dominant representations of good and evil. Spectating permits a gaping distance between self and other. A photo printed in *Life* magazine of a black man who had been lynched exemplifies an example of spectating with potentially more severe consequences than Hollywood. In her use of this image, artist Pat Ward Williams writes, "WHO took this picture?" and "Can you be BLACK and look at this?" The "reappropriation" of this photograph juxtaposed with Williams's questions scrawled beneath the photo powerfully shatters students' assumption of the objectivity of photojournalism. Students recognize the unspoken ethical question embedded in spectating: Why didn't that photographer *do* something? We can then ask: Who is permitted the luxury of spectating; and what is the cost to others when we choose the comfortable safety of distance?

Spectating thus signifies a privilege: allowing oneself to inhabit a position of distance and separation, to remain in the "anonymous" spectating crowd and abdicate any possible responsibility. By contrast, in an essay titled "Can I Be BLACK and Look at This?" author Elizabeth Alexander offers a genealogy of witnessing, specific to the black male African-American watching the televised beating of Rodney King. To witness this event is but one example of how "black bodies in pain" have been made available for "[d]aily consumption [as] an American national spectacle for centuries" (1995: 82).¹⁵ Alexander argues that the "white-authored national narrative deliberately contradicts the histories our [black] bodies know" (1995: 84).

Alexander's example of the historically shaped, collective bodily memo-

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ries through which "her people" witness violence against black bodies, suggests that members of the dominant culture necessarily "see" these images very differently. In learning to see, one is challenged to disrupt the oversimplifications of "popular history." Rigorously learning the "untold" histories enables a recognition of how truths have been constructed in relation to particular silences.

The spectating or witnessing subject comes to recognize him/herself in relation to dominant cultural representation and to "popular history." The quote from Primo Levi with which I opened speaks to the simplification of popular history. Levi writes further,

> perhaps for reasons that go back to our origins as social animals, the need to divide the field into 'we' and 'they' is so strong that this pattern, this bipartition — friend/enemy — prevails over all others. Popular history, and also the history taught in schools, is influenced by this Manichean tendency, which shuns half-tints and complexities: it is prone to reduce the river of human occurrences to conflicts. (1988, 36–7)

Historiographer Jacques Barzun (1950) also identifies this phenomenon of "shunned complexities," and decries what he terms "popular history." Popular history is the "history which lives in the minds of men," its primary sources school textbooks and mass media. The risks of popular history include that it is (1) discontinuous, and represents historical events as singularities decontextualized from their complex, ongoing processes; (2) "reductive" and oversimplifying; and (3) inevitably partisan, reflecting specific national interests.

Through an examination of popular histories one can trace how and which fears are systematically learned, reiterated, and perpetuated through a constant barrage of images and connotations, increasingly through *visual* symbols and representations.[16] The mass media plays with our dominant cultural constructions of feelings and symbols on a daily basis.[17] Glancing at the newspaper today, I find the president's trip to Africa billed as necessary to demystify "the deep dark Africa." In Western cultures, steeped in long histories of colonization and slavery, fear of the "other" functions as a powerful social symbol and spur to the national psyche.[18] Fear of the other, fear of difference, need not be a racist fear. *Xenophobia* describes a more generalized fear of difference. But the media representations of what the dominant culture needs to fear (1) reflects the *dominant culture's* fears;[19] (2) fuels stereotypes regarding what "we" need to fear.[20]

The aim of discomfort is for each person, myself included, to explore beliefs and values; to examine when visual "habits" and emotional selectivity

have become rigid and immune to flexibility; and to identify when and how our habits harm ourselves and others.[21] Responding to Alexander's point that, upon watching the Rodney King beating and trial, "sympathetic white colleagues . . . exempt themselves from the category of oppressor . . . by saying they too were nauseated. . . ." (Alexander, 1995: 85), one of my students corroborates, "I myself often fall into the trap of being defensive and trying to separate myself from the situation."

Another example of spectating is reflected in students' reaction to an independently produced tape by Not Channel Zero on the Los Angeles rebellion. Some of the white students in my seminar express that they are more deeply disturbed by the frequently-televised images of the truck driver being beaten than by the beating of Rodney King. They state that they view the beating of the truck-driver as entirely "unprovoked" and the victim entirely "innocent." I urge them to explore what they mean by "unprovoked" and "innocent." One could argue, I point out, that the beating of Rodney King is more unjust because it is condoned by the state and police force, and represents a long history of the accepted, everyday occurrence of police brutality. The point here is not to rank injustices but to ask, as a teacher, how we can unsettle learned modes of spectating and witnessing. (For example I may ask my students: Is it possible that the truck driver's image was repeatedly aired in the dominant mass media in part to erase or distract from police brutality?)

Witnessing, in contrast to spectating, is a process in which we do not have the luxury of seeing a static truth or fixed certainty. As a medium of perception, witnessing is a dynamic process, and cannot capture meaning as conclusion (Felman 1992: 5). Rather than falling into easy identification, as a witness we undertake our historical responsibilities and co-implication: What are the forces that bring about this "crisis?" As discussed at length in the previous chapter, we can recognize ourselves as a "battleground for forces raging," and by attending to these forces we may "properly carry out our task" (Laub 1992: 68).[22]

By tracing genealogies of particular emotional investments one can come to recognize the emotional selectivity that I call inscribed habits of (in)attention. This approach can be applied to our listening habits, to how we see ourselves and our attachments to personal and cultural identities, and to how we view representations of difference—for example, in film, video, and popular culture, and how we "read" our own experiences.

However, the invitation to question cherished beliefs is not one all students readily accept. A number of my white students' responses explicitly stated they felt "angry and confused and blamed." One student writes, "I felt that Pratt's approach and her tone are full of blame. To be honest, I felt as

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though she was pointing a finger at me." Another writes, "Our culture is one of blame-placing, so it is very difficult to hold up a mirror to anyone without them feeling like they are being accused."

These students' comments reflect the discomfort encountered when attempting to inhabit a morally ambiguous self. It is easier to retreat to defensive anger, or fall into the "guilt" side of the binary trap. This brings us to another central risk of a pedagogy of discomfort: the reductive model of "innocence vs. guilt." I make a brief segueway to outline the risks and moral reductiveness of either/or thinking.

AVOIDING THE BINARY TRAP OF INNOCENCE AND GUILT

EVEN THE MOST inviting approach to mapping genealogies of one's emotions, in relation to historical legacies of privilege and injustice, often puts one in the no-win trap of "guilt vs. innocence." A model of binary morality severely constrains educational possibilities. Many educators express their frustration that, as they teach social issues such as histories of racism, they encounter white students' unproductive guilt. On the one hand, the student who assumes the "guilty" position often stops participating in discussion, feels blamed, possible defensively angry, and may refuse to engage in further complex self-reflection or critical inquiry. At the same time, guilt cannot be done away with altogether. Not all actions are acceptable or ethical. The challenge within educational environments is to create a space for honest and collective self-reflection and inquiry rather than closing off discussion. At the same time, such inquiry needs to avoid letting ourselves "off the hook" from responsibilities and ethical complexities.

This moral binary reflects the shortcoming of ethical discourses. Ethical language is impoverished by the pitfalls of Western binary, either/or thinking.[23] How can one maintain processes of moral and ethical evaluation, while also pushing ethical evaluative systems beyond reductive versions of good and evil?

Spectating vs. witnessing provides a useful tool for learning how positionalities shift and slip in complex, unpredictable, and precarious ways. Through learning to see how and when one spectates or bears witness it becomes possible, at least provisionally, to inhabit a more ambiguous sense of self not reduced to either guilt or innocence. In this process one acknowledges profound interconnections with others, and how emotions, beliefs, and actions are collaboratively co-implicated.[24] Beyond good and evil lies the

possibility, at least in educational transactions, to inhabit an ambiguous sense of self, and this may be deeply discomforting.

A pedagogy of discomfort does not intentionally seek to provoke, or to cause anger or fear. However, as educators and students engage in a collective self-reflection and develop accountability for how we see ourselves, and as we question cherished beliefs, we are likely to encounter such emotions as fear and anger — as well as joy, passion, new hopes and a sense of possibility—in Garrison's words, a "rhythm of loss and reintegration" (1997: 49). Again I emphasize "educators and students" because a pedagogy of discomfort is a mutual transaction.[25] The educator's own beliefs and assumptions are by no means immune to the process of questioning and "shattering." Similarly, it is important that the educator explore what it means to "share" the students' vulnerability and suffering.

Aristotelian and other cognitive accounts of emotions permit one to trace the "phenomenology" of a particularly reaction. To respond in anger does not "mean" the same thing in every circumstance. The reasons for the anger, its etiology, differs and these differences matter. In educational settings, a historicized ethics offers a more complex lens than that offered by the reductive model of innocence vs. guilt. I turn now to explore the phenomenon of anger.

ARISTOTLE'S MORAL ANGER

ANGER IS UNDERSTOOD as a "moral" emotion, one of the ways we measure transgression and injustices. Yet the moral evaluation that anger provides does not issue from the "feel" of anger — increased heartbeat, adrenaline, the "sweet pleasure and rush." No, in fact the sensations of anger are indistinguishable from other possible emotions: arousal, excitement. The distinctions between emotions, and between different shades or types of one emotion such as anger, are not located simply in the feel but rather in the social values, cultural rules, linguistic framing, self-reflective introspection, and an emotion's relation to perception and belief.[26]

This view is often traced to Aristotle, whose analyses of emotions have been widely adopted by feminists and others.[27] Aristotle offers a cognitivist theory of emotion which understands emotions not simply as a feeling or sensation, but rather as intricately intertwined with beliefs and reasons: emotions are about something. The significance of the cognitivist theory of emotions is that we can distinguish the different reasons or kinds of an emotion only through an analysis of the social context.

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In a frequently-quoted maxim Aristotle asserts: "anyone one who does not get angry when there is reason to be angry, or does not get angry in the right way at the right time and with the right people, is a dolt." Anger is bound up with a perception or a belief that I have been slighted; and if I do not respond to this slight with anger, I am a dolt.

Aristotle's particular anger, "orge," he defines as a response to a sense of being slighted, a slighting of men's "sense of importance, their dignity, respect and honor . . . and anger arousing slight strikes at, and may well harm, their moral core. It is shaming" (Stocker 1996: 267). On Aristotle's view, anger is the appropriate reaction to feeling shamed when one perceives that one's honor and dignity have been slighted.

Aristotle's maxim seems right: He is describing those instances in which, for example, we have been wrongly accused — and, in such instances, it is preferable that the accused respond to such disrespect with anger, rather than internalize a sense of inferiority. It seems true that in any case in which we feel slighted, we are likely to respond with the feeling of anger: a sense of righteousness and outrage, of having been offended or shamed. We feel angry in cases where we have been wrongly accused. We may also feel outrage on behalf of injustice done to others (though this version of anger is debated extensively within philosophical analyses of Aristotle's conception). Finally, we may feel anger when someone suggests that we bear responsibility in a given situation. Think for example if we complain to a friend about how our beloved has treated us poorly. If our friend suggests that we too may have behaved poorly, we may react with defensive anger: "How dare you suggest I have some responsibility when they are the one at fault!" This is an example where we want or need to protect a particular image of ourselves as good or innocent. Likewise, to suggest that white privilege is unjust, or that by virtue of growing up in our culture we are all "racists," may well encounter defensive anger.

But I want to inquire: Does Aristotle's definition adequately describe all of the different instances of anger? Or, might it be helpful to distinguish different kinds of anger that may represent different forms of moral evaluation?

Philosophers have critiqued Aristotle's account of anger. To begin with, as several contemporary philosophers persuasively demonstrate, Aristotle was referring to a *man's* anger — and not to *any* man's anger, at that: not to a male slave's or a woman's anger. Aristotle's analyses must then be understood as describing the reasons why an *ancient Greek man* should feel angry. Accordingly, in his analysis of Aristotelian anger philosopher Michael Stocker does not invoke "all people" but insistently uses the phase "*Aristotle's man* feels slighted when," etc. In a landmark essay titled "Anger and Insubordination," philosopher Elizabeth Spelman (1989) demonstrates

how women's anger has been controlled to maintain women's subordinate status.[28]

Once power relations muddy the waters, evaluating a person's perception of feeling slighted becomes exceptionally complex. One's sense of "dignity," respect and honor is not an objectively measurable fact. Social status is by no means a fixed given, but rather a shifting relation intricately bound up with the hierarchies of one's particular society and culture. One's sense of importance and honor vary tremendously, depending as well on one's internalized values, self-perception, and sense of self-worth.[29] Calvin's "refusal," for example, may represent less an instance of Aristotle's man's wounded honor and more an instance of defensive anger.

At the level of *feeling*, Aristotle's definition of anger as a response to being shamed, to being slighted, accurately describes any angry reaction. However, the phenomenological description of the reasons for our anger matters, and makes a difference to the ethical implications of the situation. Instances where I am simply wrongly accused, and am not culpable in any way, are quite different than cases where in fact I may be partially culpable but do not wish to recognize my implication.

Thus I wish to explore how defensive anger differs from Aristotle's anger, insofar as it is a defense against a felt threat to our precarious identities. I characterize this as "moral" vs. "defensive" anger. After searching high and low for other philosophers who make this distinction, I have thus far found only one instance, described in a 1997 book titled *Emotional Literacy: Keeping Your Heart*, subtitled "How to Educate Your Emotions and Let Them Educate You," by philosopher Francis Seeburger.[30]

In a chapter titled "The Ethics of Anger," Seeburger introduces an example from his local church, in which a three-day discussion/workshop centered on the screening of a video about the experience of several gay people. He describes the video as including the gay people's "expressions of anger" about injustice they had suffered. The context set for the discussion by the bishop was "not to judge anyone's emotions as right or wrong." Seeburger then describes one audience member's angry reaction: "He was angry because what the interviewees had said implied that he . . . was himself bigoted, intolerant, prejudiced, and ignorant. . . . He was, by implication, being called all of those things simply because of the view he held about homosexuality — the view, namely, that homosexuality was a sin condemned repeatedly in the Bible" (1997: 35–6).

Seeburger analyzes the different forms of anger that were expressed, questioning the context suggested by the Bishop that "no emotion was to be judged right or wrong." Seeburger distinguishes, to my surprise, a distinction precisely between the two forms of anger I had recognized in my stu-

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dents: what he calls the "anger of indignation" vs. "the anger of defensive-ness." "The anger of indignation is what I feel when I perceive something as an *injustice*, either against myself or some other person. . . . The anger of defensiveness, in contrast, is what I feel when I perceive myself or some other person with whom I . . . have a personal connection to be threatened by something" (44). He goes on to describe the source of the defensive anger as part of the "'fight' half of the 'flight or fight' response triggered by fear. It masks fear, in effect. . ." (45) He analyses the sensitive "ego" that feels threat-ened, and states that the angry reaction to gay interviewees "added to the injustice originally perpetrated against them because it denied them the right to protest against that initial perceived injustice" (1997: 46). In this way, he states, "victims are made to accept blame for their own victimization" (47).[31] Seeburger concludes, "what's wrong in the case of the anger of the oppressors is precisely the anger that the oppressors feel. . . . Instead, they should feel guilt — a guilt inviting them to cease acting oppressively. . . . Their anger tells the oppressors that what's wrong is in themselves. It is they who need changing, not the world" (49).

Defensive anger can be interpreted as a protection of beliefs, a protection of one's precarious sense of identity. To challenge a student's (or educator's) cherished assumptions may be felt as a threat to their very identity. This reac-tion of anger should be interpreted not so much as a righteous objection to one's honor, but more as a defense of one's investments in the values of the dominant culture. To respond in defensive anger is to defend one's stake (whether or not one consciously acknowledges that stake). So although this defensive anger may *feel* like Aristotle's Greek man's anger, may *feel* like a response to being shamed, with more nuanced reflection one may come to recognize defensive anger as the protection of precarious identities.

Although Seeburger's analysis resonates with my own analysis of the dif-ferent instances of anger considered within the actual context of power rela-tions, the question of the philosophical viability of this distinction remains. Seeburger's conviction regarding the viability of the distinction between defensive and indignant anger may seem implausible to some. First, actual felt experiences of anger are not distinguishable in this way. Second, one could argue that every instance of anger is in some sense justified on the same grounds. Anger, in every case, is a sense of being offended or wronged. On this view, even if I express blatant homophobia I have a right to my moral conviction, and your challenge to the "rightness" of my beliefs is just cause for my angry reaction.

Finally, even if we accept a distinction between different reasons for anger, we face the thorny dilemma: Who gets to decide what counts as appro-priate anger, and what is rather a defensive masking of one's fear and guilt?[32]

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Seeburger implies that there are clear-cut cases in which one should feel guilty. But as I argued earlier, I am wary of falling into the either/or trap of guilt and innocence, especially in educational spaces dedicated to critical inquiry and transformative possibilities.[33] The question of who gets to decide, and how educational inquiry can cultivate this evaluation as part of collective witnessing, poses a genuine challenge.

There are no easy answers to these dilemmas. But it is possible to trace different phenomenologies of anger which offer insight into one's personal and cultural histories. Such emotional genealogies also make visible what we have and have not learned, or chosen, to see. Rather than view this as a "moral loggerheads," a pedagogy of discomfort invites students and educators to engage in collective self-reflection regarding the reasons for our emotions.

Assuming, at least provisionally, that the distinction between defensive and moral anger is plausible, I turn now to examine the fears that underlie defensive anger, fears that go hand-in-hand with the fragility of identity.

DEFENSIVE ANGER AND FEAR

Two key features seem to underlie defensive anger: fear as a response to change, and a fear of loss. Fear of loss may be a fear of losing personal or cultural identities, or a literal, material loss.[34] In most cases of fear, it is often easier to react angrily rather than feel one's vulnerability. Hurt is a painful and passive, even victimized, emotion; anger can feel much more "bitter-sweet." As Toni Morrison writes, "anger is better. There's a sense of being in anger, an awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging" (quoted in Culley 1985: 216). Fear is not usually analyzed as a moral emotion, but more often categorized as an instinctual and "universal" response of flight or fight. Two classic philosophical depictions of fear as motives for action are: fleeing from a bear; or, the mother fighting to protect her child when she fears it will be harmed. Both cases of fear are categorized as survival instincts.[35]

Of course, in daily life one rarely encounters bears and only some have occasion to protect biological progeny. In most cases of fear, one must examine other sources. What one is taught to fear will vary considerably depending on family, culture, and religion. Idiosyncratic personality differences also play a role. Having grown up in poverty, I may not be afraid of running out of money as I have learned that I will survive in spite of this lack; while another who grew up in similar circumstance may live in fear of returning to that poverty.

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In Dewey's analysis of educational contexts, adult habits are systematical-ly taught to children and in fact are intended to shore up the culturally famil-iar and safe. As a result, natural curiosity and impulses become increasingly rigid.

> Habit reaches . . . down into the very structure of the self; it signifies a building up and solidifying of certain desires; an increased sensitiveness and responsive-ness . . . or an impaired capacity to attend to and think about certain things. Habit covers . . . the very makeup of desire, intent, choice, disposition which gives an act its voluntary quality. (quoted in Garrison 1997:139)

To "break" these habits that constitute the "very structure of the self" neces-sarily faces one with fears of loss, both felt losses (of personal and cultural identities) and literal losses. "Loss is our human lot. . . . The rhythm of expan-sive growth [is] a way of learning to cope with the paradoxical relation between expansive growth and loss" (48–9). Dewey states that "adults have given training rather than education" (1932: 92). He argues that "fixed pat-terns of adult habits of thought and affection" lead to "an impatient, prema-ture mechanization of impulsive activity. . . . The combined effects of love of power, timidity in the face of the novel and a self-admiring complacency has been too strong" to allow young people to "reorganize potentialities" (ibid.). Alice Miller (1983) defines "poisonous pedagogy" as the systematic ways we teach young people *not to notice* the cruelties and injustices inflicted upon them, a point which resonates with Dewey's analysis of rigidities and flexibil-ities in education. As with poisonous pedagogy, Dewey notes that "The younger generation has hardly even knocked frankly at the door of adult cus-toms, much less been invited in to rectify through better education the bru-talities and inequities established in adult habits" (1932: 92).[36]

Dewey speaks of "moral habits" instilled in part through a "maximum of emotional empressement and adamantine hold with a minimum of under-standing" (94). "These habitudes," he continues, "deeply ingrained before thought is awake and even before the day of experiences which can later be recalled, govern conscious later thought. They are usually deepest and most unget-at-able just where critical thought is most needed — in morals, reli-gion and politics" (ibid.). Consistent with Dewey, Greene (1973, 1988) argues throughout her work that educators are challenged to discover creative means of disturbing the most familiar habits and assumptions.

In educational contexts, "felt" and "literal" losses frequently manifest as resistance to change. The entrenched character of our (emotional, habitual) investments Dewey calls "personal 'hang-overs'" (ibid.), as "survivals." This speaks to the emotional vicissitudes encountered in a pedagogy of discom-

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fort. While an educator may see herself as simply urging critical inquiry, the other may feel this call as profoundly threatening to their very survival.

An educator's invitation to transformative action and change may well be perceived either as a threat of felt or literal loss. For example, I use the video *It's Elementary* (Chasnoff, 1996) to evidence how lesbian and gay issues can be incorporated into elementary and middle school curricula. This tape documents several public schools where teachers both heterosexual and gay have courageously introduced curriculum addressing lesbian and gay issues.

Some of the students who view this tape express their resistance to taking any risks (not just regarding sex education) in terms of fear of parental reprisal and losing their jobs. Here the loss is overt and visible as a potentially literal loss. But the fears are not always literal; jobs may or may not be lost. Further, these issues are volatile even in educational contexts where the call to action is not about creating curricula but simply evaluating beliefs.[37] In these instances, the call to inquiry and action touches on the deepest core of social and moral and religious values. These fears also reflect the felt loss of an individual's personal identity and the dominant culture's customary fueling of deeply religious, and culturally-specific, "moral panic."[38]

It is important to note that moral panics regarding lesbian and gay lifestyle in education are not always traceable to religious beliefs. For example, holding Christian beliefs does not necessarily lead to resisting such curricula. Students' responses in this class varied; one student wrote about the strength of her Christian beliefs as entirely compatible with her desire to create an inclusive curriculum that addressed lesbian and gay issues. Another student told the class of attending a public event featuring "a proud mother of a lesbian daughter," and reported the impact on him when this speaker said that her interpretation of the Bible was not that gay people should be ostracized but rather embraced with love. The volatility of these issues in our class was remarkable, a heated and contested debate. Students did not seem hesitant to express their resistances and fears, and the tone of exchange reflected impassioned anger from all sides. Regardless of the source of one's beliefs, the call to examine questions of sexuality evokes strong fears and defensive anger.

The precariousness and frailty of identity confirms the myriad ways in which subjectivity exists in complex relation to others. This phenomenon has been explored by numerous philosophers for many decades: Hegel's analysis of the relation of master/slave; Sartre's articulation of self in relation to the other's gaze; psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin's description of the "bonds of love"; or Virginia Woolf 's witty analysis of how men's anger at women can be traced to his vulnerability: That in fact he is not so much angry

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as afraid, and afraid because his sense of superiority rests on woman's assigned inferiority.39

A great deal more could be said regarding the fragility of identities— think simply of the fact that the identity associated with white privilege, for example, is an identity based not on individually earned merit but rather on an arbitrary social status. Despite the power of the dominant cultural hierarchy, white privilege may be felt as a precarious identity, for on some level the white person recognizes their privileged identity as having little to do with one's actual accomplishments and actions.40

In sum, cultural identities and "selves" are founded on vastly frail identities. National identities rest upon complex fictions and investments; students' identities are invested as well in the dominant paradigm. Students and educators may feel a sense of threat to our precarious identities as we learn to bear witness. Witnessing involves recognizing moral relations not simply as a "perspectival" difference — "we all see things differently" — but rather, that how we see or choose not to see has ethical implications and may even cause others to suffer.

The impact of how student resistance to learning to see differently affected one of the students in the class is evident in this e-mail. The letter was sent to me by a student who had participated in a collaborative presentation to our class. This student was one of a collaborative group of four students who had presented a possible "curricula unit" for use with high school-age students, addressing issues ranging from abortion, lesbian and gay issues, and racism in science. Admittedly, I particularly appreciated this letter because the student, having stood in front of our class in essence in my role as the teacher, expressed some of my own feelings. Part of the student's letter to me reads,

While we were presenting I saw people shaking their heads as if the things that we were suggesting could never be done, and we were ridiculous to suggest that abortion or homosexuality even be taught in the classroom. I have seen this happen during class on other occasions also and I often leave frustrated because no one even wants to consider bringing up difficult issues in their own classrooms. This is something that I would like to be able to do and after class yesterday I was very discouraged. . . . No one would say anything against teaching African-American history and culture even if they did have a problem with it. . . . I am trying to take this as a learning experience about the difficulty that people face when they try to teach something different. I was wondering what you thought about the class reaction on this occasion and others and I was hoping you could offer some suggestions on better ways to teach this material, because after yesterday it did not seem like our plan would be accepted by other teachers or administration. I just wish they would listen and consider options.

The issue of students' resistance to teaching "sensitive" curricula requires enormous sensitivity on my part. I am not in the same boat as they are: My job is not necessarily "threatened" in the same way as theirs may be. However, as an educator committed to social justice, as are many of my students, I find myself in a bind. What are my choices about how to approach the volatile question of sexuality? Do I "omit and erase," choose not to address the question at all in my work in educational foundations? Do I raise the issue, and say, "I realize how difficult this is for you, and that you fear losing your jobs, so never mind — don't think about incorporating this?" Or do I raise these issues and create a space in which we can examine the risks, the call to action, the needs of lesbian and gay youth, as well as children raised in lesbian and gay families; do we debate how we might offer students information about abortion? To raise the issues seems the only ethical path to me. I cannot demand that they choose to address these issues when they go into their classrooms. But, as part of the pedagogy of discomfort, I can hope that they examine their emotional investments and beliefs, evaluate how the actions that follow from their beliefs and strong feelings may affect others, and as a result, become able to evaluate their teaching philosophy and understand when and why other teachers choose different curricula.

Expressions of anger and resistance to change may well be justified — students may be angry at me for suggesting they take a risk that I don't share; they may be angry at me if they feel I am implying they are "hypocritical" by not teaching lesbian and gay issues, when they otherwise express "tolerant" values. But their defensive anger may also reflect fears that have to do with fear of loss that is not material — and one might argue, if we accept a distinction between moral and defensive anger, the latter kind of fear is not about a loss of justice. The question of homosexuality is deeply threatening to all who identify as heterosexual in a culture that thrives on homophobia as a way of shoring up heterosexuality.[41] In short, even identities that are shaped by dominant cultural values are precarious. Thus I would argue that in many instances, whether one faces a felt or material loss, the right thing to do is risk one's own comfort for the sake of others' freedom. However, it cannot be up to the educator, for example, to push a particular path of action.

A SPACE BETWEEN BINARIES
Learning to Inhabit Ambiguous Selves

A PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT is about bodies, about particulars, about the "real" material world we live in. Beliefs are "embodied habits," disposi-

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tions to act in a certain way in a given context. Such a view is by now familiar especially through the work of feminist epistemologies, and through concepts such as "situated knowledge."[42] Those who are seeking transcendental rules, a science of morality, or even prescriptions may not be satisfied with this insistence on historical, embodied specificity. The insistence on the importance of the particulars need not lead to moral relativism, or to an infinite "deconstruction" that only "shatters" habits without replacing them. The recognition of our ethical dilemmas as "intrinsically paradoxical," the recognition that contradictory beliefs and desires may coexist, provides creative spaces to inhabit.

However, living with ambiguity is discomforting: In Bordo's words, "[w]hen the universe becomes unmanageable, human beings become absolutists. We create a world without ambiguity in order to escape, as Dewey puts it, 'from the vicissitudes of experience'" (1987: 17). To tolerate ambiguity is as challenging as finding alternatives to the Cartesian binary of "purity and corruption." How are we to decide which "good" habits are to replace the old? Genuine ethical dilemmas arise: What about the student whose worldview and relation to their community is perhaps so shattered that the pieces don't fall back into comfortable harmony?

Two positive approaches provide some "comfort," a means of offering stability in this rough terrain. Minnie Bruce Pratt emphasizes "what we, together, stand to gain." Just as this is not a question of someone having to be a "loser," to question the familiar may lead to greater sense of connection, a fuller sense of meaning, and in the end a greater sense of "comfort" with who we have "chosen" to be and how we act in our lives. Second, the conceptual tool of learning to bear witness to ourselves allows a breathing space. Rather than feel immersed in a torn, excavated, gutted sense of self we can undertake discomfort as an approach: an approach to how we see. Through the capacity to shift our positionality and modes of seeing, we can allow ourselves to inhabit the "old, familiar" spaces and begin our process of inquiry by noticing where we are presently situated.

Throughout *Feeling Power* I have argued that the ethical project of education requires better accounts of the emotional vicissitudes that infuse the classroom. At present, our ethical language and modes of discussion are impoverished by such reductive binary positions as simple "guilt" vs. "innocence" — only one of us can be right. If just one of us isn't right, we are trapped in moral relativism. Before jumping to that response, I suggest we develop a more complex ethical language that recognizes the ambiguous complexity of ethical interrelations. To raise the specter of racism does not mean for the white person that "guilt" is the permanent or only option. A pedagogy of discomfort offers an entrée to learn to in-habit positions and

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identities that are ambiguous. Once engaged in the discomfort of ambiguity, it is possible to explore the emotional dimensions and investments—angers and fears, and the histories in which these are rooted. We can explore how our identities are precariously constructed in relation to one another, so that to suggest change may feel like a threat to our survival. At minimum, one might offer a responsible accountability for how these emotional investments shape one's actions, and evaluate how one's actions affect others. Learning to live with ambiguity, discomfort, and uncertainty is a worthy educational ideal.

"WHAT NOW?": The Call to Action

AS STUDENTS BECOME willing to learn to see differently, they frequently raise the question: "What now?" Numerous times students have expressed that their critical inquiry has brought them to a crossroads of determining for themselves what kinds of action make sense for them to take given their own ethical vision. For example, some tell me how they intervene in conversations with their peers, and take risks by expressing alternative perspectives. Others describe how they will choose to reformulate their curricula and pedagogies.

One student responds to Alexander(1995), "We are obligated not simply to see what goes on in the world, but to witness — to cry out against that which is wrong." The student continues, "I loved how she included Williams's spreading of the guilt from the subjects of the *Life* photograph to the person holding the camera. Similarly, the responsibility for the L.A. riots rests with anyone who watched the videotape and was not outraged, and with all of us who were outraged and still haven't done anything about it." Another student responds by asking: "What do people do with their history of horror? What does it mean to bear witness in the act of watching a retelling? Why [do] such images need to be remembered? I would like to answer [these] questions: 'We cannot repeat the same mistake.'" This student's desire not to repeat the same mistake echoes Walter Benjamin's hope that each generation attempt to "wrest tradition away from . . . conformism" (1969: 255).

These examples reflect students' willingness to examine what they are and are not able to hear, when and why they are able to bear witness vs. when and why they choose the comfortable distance of spectating. Their comments reflect that they have elected a path that considers the complexity of ethical relations, in which they are aware of how we are taught to "see" in his-

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torically specific ways. Further, a number of students described in clear terms what path of action they were choosing as a result of learning to see differently.

THE ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE EDUCATOR

Those who engage a pedagogy of discomfort need to clarify for themselves and for the students their own ethical responsibilities.

- It matters a great deal how the educator invites students to engage in collective witnessing. It may be that an educator needs to "share" the suffering and vulnerability, to explicitly discuss the pedagogies and one's own emotional challenges. How we speak, how we listen, when and how we "confront" one another matters a great deal. To further understand a pedagogy of discomfort, we need analyses of the "politics of listening."[43] One fear I have is that we don't, systematically, learn to listen very well to one another. Thus we risk creating pain within the pedagogical process, layered on top of what is already a difficult and vulnerable enterprise. The best antiracist and antisexist work I have studied and seen in action is not about confrontation but rather a mutual exploration.

- It must be made clear to students that they are not being graded or evaluated on whether or how they choose to "transform," or whether they undertake "radical" pedagogies of their own. This is not to deny that every educator has particular investments and hopes, and may be disappointed when students "refuse" or "dismiss." My minimal hope is that students examine their values, and analyze how they came to hold those values. If, following such collective self-reflection, they assert: "I am not changing," my work may be done: I have encouraged them to come to an understanding of their educational philosophy. At minimum they may be in a position to explain their rationale, and to understand the other ethical positions of others and the possible harmful effects of their own choices on others. (It is of course extremely difficult to estimate when and how someone may have undergone this kind of self-reflection.) But at a certain point, out of a pragmatic and ethical respect — as well as a concern for the resilience of the educator — one must recognize that the revolution (however envisioned) will not be accomplished by educators per se. The goal is greater clarity of our emotional investments and the ability to account historically for our values and their effects of others.

- Finally, as distance education increasingly replaces the physical classroom, how do our ethical resonsibilities change in the absence of face-to-face

interaction? How can emotions inform a pedagogy of discomfort as we experience each other through computer-mediated communication, and in virtually disembodied ways?[44]

A pedagogy of discomfort does not assert one right ideology or resolution. Rather, it is a mode of inquiry and invitation that emphasizes a historicized ethics and testimonial witnessing. But this is to delve into the most challenging vicissitudes of human fears. As Primo Levi notes, in the process of "understanding" we desire to "simplify." To inhabit an ambiguous self requires courage.

I have tried to show that Aristotle's ancient Greek man's anger, and the righteous response to a perceived slight and shaming, do not adequately describe the complexities of the fears of change encountered within educational transactions. To conceive of angry resistance to change as simply a justified "moral" response is to subscribe to a culture built on binaries of good and evil, either/or: There can be only one winner, one truth. The first sign of the success of a pedagogy of discomfort is, quite simply, the ability to recognize what it is that one doesn't want to know, and how one has developed emotional investments to protect oneself from this knowing. This process may require facing the "tragic loss" inherent to educational inquiry; facing demons and a precarious sense of self. But in so doing one gains a new sense of interconnection with others. Ideally, a pedagogy of discomfort represents an engaged and mutual exchange, a historicized exploration of emotional investments. Through education we invite one another to risk "living at the edge of our skin," where we find the greatest hope of revisioning ourselves.

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1 1989: 36.
2 1987: 17.
3 1955/1969: 255.
4 See Chapter 1 and 2.
5 Granted, a perhaps insurmountable challenge is that within educational settings one may never be able to evaluate whether another person has thoroughly interrogated their own cherished beliefs and values.
6 See Laub (1992) discussed in previous chapter.
7 From a written response (April 1998) to an earlier draft of this essay.
8 See Garrison (1996) for an insightful discussion of the dangers and promises of listening in relation to the philosophies of Dewey and Gadamer.
9 "Purposeful selective interests, arising out of need, care, and concern, develop the intuition and continue to determine the context of later thought" (Garrison 1997: 109).
10 I refer the readers to Ross (1964) and to a close reading of Dewey (1932) for exam-

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ple, to discern the philosophies of education as involving social and political agen-das.

[11] See Ross (1964) for a classic analysis of Aristotle's political vision of education. For Aristotle, unlike Dewey, education was explicitly designed to serve the explicit and even absolute interests of the state while Dewey sees education of individuals to be pluralist democrats.

[12] These questions are widely addressed by social theorists, from Fanon (1967) to Freire (1973). In *White Women, Race Matters*, Ruth Frankenberg discusses the prevalence of "fear" as a part of the "social geography" of white women's racism. Frankenberg concludes her brief discussion of this fear stating that is crucial to ask what "'interrupts' or changes white people's fear of people of color: for those who are not afraid, what made, or makes, the difference? I do not know the answer to this question, but I register it here as an important one for us as white women to address" (1993: 61).

[13] From correspondence, April 1998.

[14] Sociology of education details the ongoing challenges of issues of racism, sexism, social class divisions, and homophobia in schools. See for example Fine and Weis (1993); Fine et al (1997); Williams (1991).

[15] By taking us through a recounting of historical representations of the black body in pain, and how black writers have documented the experiences of witnessing these, Alexander makes a case for how witnessing is not only an "experienced bodily trau-ma" but a "collective cultural trauma. . . come to reside in the flesh as forms of memory reactivated and articulated at moments of collective" witnessing (1995: 84).

[16] In cultural and media studies see for example Fiske (1987, 1989); Buckingham and Sefton-Greene (1994); Hebdige (1979).

[17] I refer to the fact that, within dominant cultural institutions where white privilege is at stake, encouraging fear of black men helps to justify a whole raft of exclusions and penalizations that maintain social stratifications. Yet this is not always an intentionally supremacist act on the part of news publishers; it is not always easy to place "individualized" intention of malicious intent. Racism is institutionalized: for example, individual journalists are writing a story at deadline regarding home-less shelters. They need visual footage for the last minute deadline; archival footage available happens to show black people at a shelter. The journalist's story is about the fact that homelessness and poverty affect both white and black persons. But under time pressure the journalist uses the misleading footage; and, perhaps thinks to themselves, "after all there are black people in shelters." However, this partially "innocent," partially "racist" decision then perpetuates the false image of black people as the only ones populating homeless shelters.

[18] See Fanon (1967); West (1992); Memmi (1965); Bhabha (1992); Hall (1994); Patricia Williams (1991).

[19] A particularly powerful example of this is the coverage of the Los Angeles Rebellion. View any of the TV news coverage and it is blatantly apparent that the camera and "point of view" are located behind the eyes of the white middle-class person, who is situated outside of the geographical area where the riots occurred. Two articles in the *Washington Post* on the anniversary of these events in 1998 por-trayed a disturbing and lengthy defense of the beating of Rodney King: January 25, 1998, A1; January 26, 1998, A1. See also Not Channel Zero's Independent video production on the L.A. rebellion titled "The Nation Erupts."

[20] By "need to fear" I refer, for example, to particular fears fueled by the dominant cul-ture. There are fears evoked to stimulate the economy (fear of scarcity, the Protestant work ethic, shame, etc.); to maintain white supremacy (fear of the "black" other, the "yellow" peril, the "immigrant alien"); and to perpetuate male privilege (fear of women challenging male power, girls' success in school threaten-

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ing boys' success). These fears have been analyzed from numerous perspectives; within feminist studies, for example, psychoanalysis has been used to explore men's fear of women; in postcolonial studies, relations of race and colonizer/colonized are often studies through discourses of nationalism and social imagination. One valuable analysis of young people's fears surrounding gender reform is explored in Kenway and Willis (1997).

21 These questions present long-standing dilemmas: How are we to judge when our habits harm others and ourselves? How are we to know when we are complying with subjugation? When is one acting against our own best interest or others best interests?

22 See discussion in previous chapter.

23 Primo Levi explores powerful examples of historicizing ethics in his analysis of the experience of Holocaust survivors (1989).

24 On the interrelationship of subjective positions, see for example Bartky (1990); Benjamin (1988); Fanon (1967); Memmi (1965); Sartre (1956); Levinas (1989).

25 Garrison writes, "Teachers are moral artists. They, too, have their potentials actualized by the students and by the creative activities in which they engage . . . " (1997: 45)

26 For a discussion of how our "Sociocultural narratives reinterpret our own experience to us," see Garrison 1997: 139 ff.

27 See Chapter 1 and Chapter 5.

28 I describe Spelman's account of anger in greater detail in Chapter 1.

29 See Fanon (1967) on language and identity in colonized subjectivities.

30 This text is a combination of lay person's philosophy, drawing on Aristotle and Spelman, as well as different philosophies of religion and the author's experiences in what might be called "self-help" movements.

31 This analysis resonated with Campbell's analysis of bitterness; see Chapter 1 and Chapter 5.

32 However, it is interesting to note that the Aristotelian and Dewey conceptions of practical wisdom and the habituation of right character do indeed see some emotions as "better" than others; not all emotions are equally appropriate. For fuller discussion see Sherman (1989,1997); Nussbaum (1995); Garrison (1997); Stocker (1996); Ross (1964).

33 Given more time, I would attempt to argue that in outlining an historicized ethics, we will need to account for differentials in anger and guilt: not all forms of anger are "moral" in the same sense. Affirmative action presents such a case: affirmative action functions to "correct" historical justice; it does not function as a transcendental principle of how to treat all people at all times. I would strongly advocate for these kinds of historical ethics, but, once one acknowledges the question, "Who gets to decide what counts as moral?", one runs the risk of the tables being turned. However, one could argue that, given the myth of equal opportunity, marginalized persons have little left lose so it's worth the risk.

34 Defensive anger may also be channeled into dismissal, pure and simple. Such dismissal is well-described by Rene Arcilla's characterization of the "misanthrope," whose "mood and conduct swings from rude righteousness to stony withdrawal to unguarded naiveté. . . . whatever state he is in, he does not want to learn anymore. He refuses to listen, he says again and again, because he does not respect either the worth of what you are teaching or your worthiness to teach" (1995: 346).

35 In the second case, the act of altruism perpetually fascinates philosophers, as it appears the only predictable altruism in our society. In most cultures altruism is tied to the mother through discourses regarding her natural maternal instincts. I find it troubling that motherhood is persistently naturalized through this discourse of altruism, and that the only altruism or apparently "unselfish" acts we can find in Western culture are those of biological "mothers." It is in part because of

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the pervasiveness of this discourse that discourses regarding care as a model for ethics and teaching disturbs me and seems at times too fraught with cultural connotations to extend beyond those connotations.

[36] One hopes that in the nearly eighty years since Dewey wrote this, that the younger generation has been invited to "rectify the brutalities and inequities." In any event it is certainly true that radical social movements have transformed education, though whether pastoral power continues to appropriate and subvert the radical tendencies is an open question.

[37] For excellent discussions of different curricula and pedagogies addressing sexual orientation, see Linda Garber (Ed.) *Tilting the Tower* (1994).

[38] Like Larry Grossberg's example of an "affective epidemic," the charged issues that magnetize around an issue such as lesbian and gay lifestyle are woven so deeply into the cultural fabric that their causes are invisible and slippery. Affective epidemics "most important function is to proliferate wildly so that, like a moral panic, once an affective epidemic is put into place, it is seen everywhere, displacing every other possible investment" (Grossberg 1992: 284).

[39] See *A Room of One's Own* (1937). Woolf's analysis of her own anger, and her ensuing analysis of the subtext of anger and vulnerability she discovers in the misogynist writing of Professors during her famous library visit, offering an exemplary example of tracing the genealogy of an emotion.

[40] Given this sense of the fragility of white supremacy, perhaps one can begin to make sense of the intensity of the violently defensive anger characteristic of backlash against affirmative action.

[41] See Friend (1993) for an argument that homophobia is a key source of sexism.

[42] Haraway (1990).

[43] For analyses related to politics of listening, see for example Garrison (1996); Levinas (1989); Martin (1998); Irigaray (1996); Miller (1983).

[44] My next research project explores how the shift from face-to-face to computer-mediated education shapes how we teach about diversity and gender on-line.